

**ACTIVITY:** Shark Cage Diving

**CASE:** GSAF 2016.09.00

**DATE:** September 2016

**LOCATION:** The incident took place in the Pacific Ocean off Guadalupe Island, Mexico.

**SUPPORT BOAT:** *Nautilus Explorer*

## BACKGROUND

**ENVIRONMENT:** Guadalupe Island is a top destination for white shark encounters with underwater visibility ranging from 125 to 150 feet. This small volcanic island is located 241 kilometres (150 miles) off the west coast of Mexico's Baja California Peninsula and some 400 kilometres southwest of the city of Ensenada in the state of Baja California.

**DEPTH OF WATER:** 35 feet

**TIME:** 15h30

**NARRATIVE:** In a report of the 2nd annual Blue Water Travel Guadalupe trip report, Katie Yonker related the following:

“The dive started off like any other. We descended down to about 35 feet and within minutes there were a few sharks circling the cages. There were several people in the surface cages looking on, and no wrangling was happening at the time. Katie B. joined Yann on the upper level of the cage (known as the balcony) and David and I remained below. Less than half way through the dive a female shark approximately 13 - 15 feet long approached Yann and he pushed her away from the cage. A few seconds later, the shark bit the air hose that supplies air from the surface to the divers in the cage, creating an explosion of air bubbles. Yann noticed an immediate loss of air flowing to his regulator, so he descended a few feet down to turn on the one-way valve from the surface supply hose so that the hookah system would not lose pressure. This was done so quickly that neither David, Katie B., nor I experienced a loss of air. While Yann was turning on the valve, the shark swam vertically down into the balcony of the cage, made a sharp turn, and swam right through the bars of the cage. She thrashed around for several seconds and in the process got further lodged into the bars of the cage.

“After about 30 seconds, Katie B. was able to descend down the ladder to the lower part of the cage to join David and me. We stood, gripping the cage in an attempt to stay upright while the cage circled back and forth and at one point was at a 45-degree angle due to the shark's thrashing. Yann's regulator had been knocked out of his mouth by the shark, so he



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*A photo of the shark after she bit the air supply, right before getting stuck in the cage.*



retreated to the surface to catch a breath of air and to tell the crew to bring up the cage. I turned on my GoPro just in time to capture the largest shark we had seen, Air Demon AKA “Big Mama,” swimming vertically within a few feet of our cage only seconds after Yann had exited the cage and ascended to the surface. Yann descended back down to the cage, with only the air in his lungs – no hookah, to help us exit the cage and make it safely to the boat.

“Katie B. was first to go up the ladder and make it to the boat. I motioned for David to go next, but he took my camera and pointed at my weight belt, reminding me to remove it before exiting the cage. After removing my weights and retrieving my camera, I quickly started rising to the top of the cage. As I neared the top of the balcony, it was nearly impossible to see anything because the shark was



blocking much of the exit and visibility was limited by all the air bubbles and blood in the water. When I reached the surface I was disoriented, but Yann, standing on the outside of the cage, grabbed me to make sure I hung on and was facing the right direction. I could see the boat, but had no idea how I would get around the shark. I heard someone yell to me to go around the tail, but on the first attempt the shark flicked her tail and I was shoved back to where I started. Divemaster Miles threw me a life ring from the boat and Yann pushed me down to help me swim under the tail. Within seconds Miles “pulled me onto the boat, and not too long after David was onboard as well. The crew wasted no time trying to get the shark dislodged from the cage. After a few failed attempts, they tied a rope around her tail, lowered the cage back into the water, and tried to pull her out backwards. Her gills were pressed against the cage bars, so divemaster Peter went into the cage and pressed on her gills, which freed the shark and she swam away.”

**SPECIES:** The incident involved a white shark. “Encounters such as this are often sensationalized as man-eating shark attacks. To be clear, this was in no way a shark attack. It was a shark enticed by the scent of tuna, not humans. I suspect (and hope) that this incident prompts some changes in the operations, mainly to the design of the cages so that this cannot happen again. I am generally against any type of shark feeding or ways in which humans interfere with normal animal behavior. Guadalupe is a unique exception. Without chum bags, the chance of seeing sharks would be very low. It’s incredibly unfortunate that rare accidents such as this happen, I am a firm believer that more good than harm comes from providing people an opportunity to observe great whites in their habitat. It contributes to a greater understanding that although these animals possess unparalleled strength and power, they are curious, yet very cautious. They are investigative, but discerning. They will look you in the eye, and swim the other direction. With this greater understanding comes the possibility to change the public’s negative perception of great whites and dissolve their reputation of being ferocious man-eaters.” ... *Katie Yonker*

**SOURCE:** Blue Water Travel Guadalupe 2016 Trip Report  
<http://www.bluewaterdivetravel.com/guadalupe-2016-trip-report>