

**ACTIVITY:** Swimming  
**CASE:** GSAF 1886.01.01 / SA-0017  
**DATE:** Friday January 1, 1886  
**LOCATION:** The accident took place in the Indian Ocean north of the mouth of the Groot River, Western Cape Province, South Africa.

**NAME:** Dr. James Woolby

**BACKGROUND**

**MOON PHASE:** New Moon, January 5, 1886



**NARRATIVE:** On December 30, 1885, Dr. Woolby and Robert Bromley arrived at Bloukrans from Plettenburg Bay and intended to continue on to Storms River the next day. A very heavy rain the following morning prevented them from leaving.

Next day, after they missed the postcart, the two men joined some friends, Mr. J. Cooper, James Rawbone and William Newgate, on the beach north of the Groot River Mouth close to a rocky headland where cliffs rise perpendicularly from the water. At noon, Rawbone and Woolby walked along the shore towards the headland and went for a swim.

The men were not strong swimmers and after 15 minutes they were swept seawards by the strong current. Rawbone was able to reach the beach without help, and Bromley attempted to rescue the doctor.

At the inquest, held January 16, 1886 in Knysna, Cooper testified that as Bromley was swimming to Woolby, he saw him in a breaker, "his head was hanging down and his hand appeared to be moving as if clutching at something." When Bromley was less than 30 metres away, Woolby disappeared.

Bromley immediately sent a mounted messenger to Field Cornet George Derbyshire and informed him of the mishap. Woolby's body was not recovered but at the inquest Derbyshire testified that the day after the incident "a portion about two feet long (60 cm) of what I believed to be human entrails, the bowels of a man", washed ashore on the beach.

**INJURY:** It is probable that Dr. James Woolby drowned and his body was scavenged by a shark(s).

**SOURCE:** Proceedings of an inquest held before F. E. Allman, Resident Magistrate, Court Room Knysna, this 16th day of January 1886, touching the Death of Dr. James B. Woolby, who was accidentally drowned whilst bathing at Groot River Mouth on the 1st of January (manuscript in the Cape Archives, Cape Town, South Africa).