

ACTIVITY: Bathing

CASE: [GSAF 1906.01.20](#) / SA-032

DATE: Saturday January 20, 1906

LOCATION: The incident took place in the Indian Ocean at Battery Beach, four kilometres north of the entrance to Durban Harbour. Durban is located in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. *29°50,3'S, 31°02,2'E*

NAME: Ramdayal

DESCRIPTION: He was a 30-year-old Indian male and was employed as a lamplighter by the Durban Corporation.

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: The sky was overcast and it was beginning to rain. January, in KwaZulu-Natal, is characterized by hot changeable weather and high temperatures with occasional thunderstorms in the late afternoon.

MOON PHASE: Third Quarter, January 17, 1906. New Moon, January 24, 1906.

SEA CONDITIONS: High tide was at 11h48.

ENVIRONMENT: Ramdayal and his companions had just finished washing two horses: one of the horses was on the beach but it is not known if the other horse was in the water.

“At the time of the occurrence,” according to the press, “the Caretaker of the Beach, who has recently been appointed by the Corporation, was perambulating the seafront, but was unaware of the bathing of the Indians.”

Sharks were frequently seen in the surf, however, and the press reported, “a principal reason (the sharks) come so close inshore is the absence of shipping in the anchorage. When the mail-boats and other vessels used to lie there for days at a time, the refuse that was thrown overboard not merely supplied the brutes with food, but attracted other fish to the neighbourhood, which in their turn fell victims to the voracity of the sharks. Now that this food supply has been cut off, the sharks are tempted nearer the shore to pick up anything in the way of food that may be drifted out, and have thus been brought within range of the unfortunate bathers who have recently lost their lives by terrible injuries inflicted upon them.”

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: Unknown

DEPTH: One metre

TIME: 12h00

NARRATIVE: Ramdayal had washed the horses “with three of his countrymen, named Gagadini, Bhulei, and Paichaigh, and with a little boy”, according to the January 22, 1906 edition of the *Natal Mercury*. Ramdayal was a short distance from the beach when he was heard to shout, “A fish is biting me; a fish is biting me!” Gagadini ran to help him. As the shark was dragging Ramdayal seawards, Gagadini, “undeterred by the danger of his exploit, gripped the arms of Ramdayal, and sought to pull him to shore. A tug-of-war ensued, in which Gagadini was worsted, and found that he was also being carried into the sea by the monster”. Another companion came to the rescue and the two men brought Ramdayal to shore.

INJURY: Ramdayal was still alive when brought to shore. “A lion's attack could not have been more terrible,” said Dr Bonner. “The hip joints were right out of the sockets, the flesh

was lacerated and the muscles torn through to the bone, while great lumps of flesh had been torn from the left leg, where marks of the shark's teeth were discernible."

FIRST AID: The press report states that Ramdayal, "looked himself over, and, seeing the mangled state he was in, eventually remarked: "I think I will die". The injured man was then conveyed on an ambulance to the mortuary, where he died a quarter of an hour later, Drs Bonner and Crozier being in attendance."

SPECIES INVOLVED: Witnesses estimated the shark was 1,83 to 2,74 metres in length. The shark was not seen in the area after the attack but two days later a 2,29-metre shark was caught off Back Beach that had shreds of cloth in its teeth. The shark was a female and her jaws measured 45,7 cm in diameter. Mr J.C. Shram placed the shark on slabs of ice in a structure next to the concert ground and charged admission to all who wished to view the shark.

COMMENT: By taking the victim directly to the morgue, the ambulance attendants involved in this case displayed efficiency, but little compassion. Today's emergency care personnel have learned that reassuring a patient may contribute to his or her recovery.

In the weeks that followed, there were numerous suggestions from the public including a protective enclosure for bathers, a bounty of 3d per head for a shark paid to fishermen, and employing two sailors to harpoon sharks off Durban.

Late January 1906 was an uneasy time in Natal. In 1843, Natal was proclaimed a British Colony and soon large sugar plantations were established. Unable to recruit Zulu laborers, plantation owners looked to India. During the next five decades 150,000 indentured Indians arrived, as well as numerous free "passenger Indians. On January 1, 1906, a poll tax of £3 was introduced in Natal on Indian residents over 18 years of age (excluding indentured servants). On February 8, 1906, a Natal Police detachment was attacked after they arrested three men for participating in an armed gathering, a protest against the poll tax. The attack marked the beginning of what is popularly called the Bhambatha Rebellion (also known as The Natal Rebellion of 1906) which led to the formation of the Union of South Africa.

SOURCES: Fairbridge Index, page 355 (Cape Archives); Star, January 20, 1906; Natal Mercury, January 22, 23 & 24, 1906; Natal Advertiser

