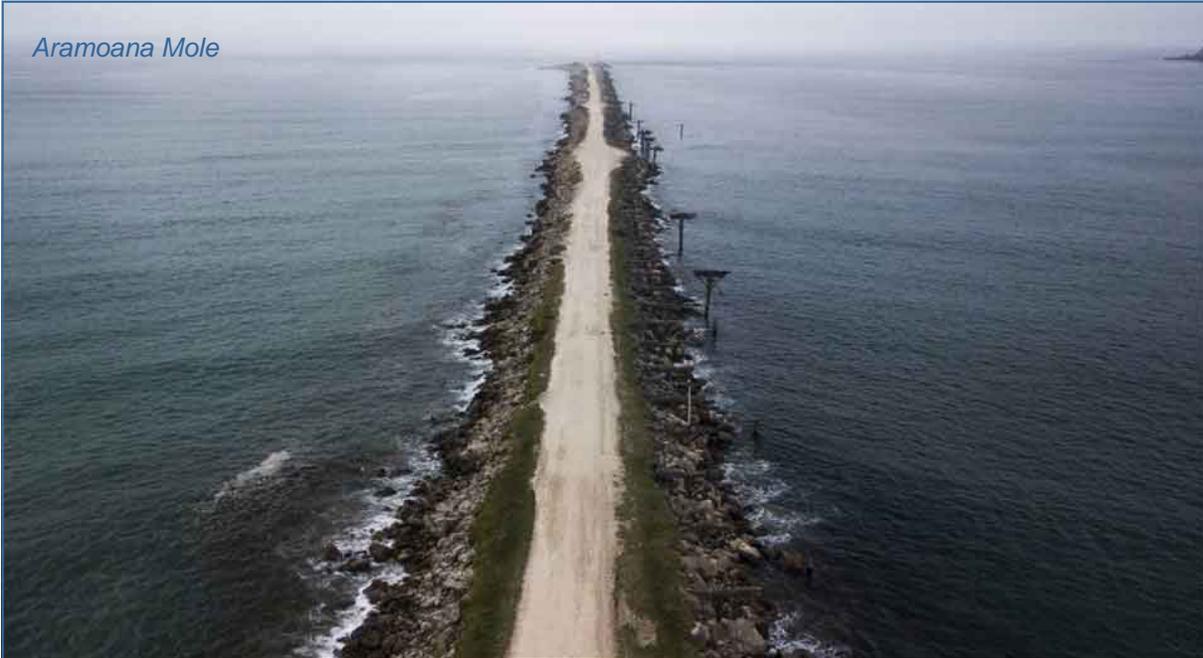


Aramoana Mole



**ACTIVITY:** Spearfishing

**CASE:** [GSAF 1968.09.15](#)

**DATE:** Sunday September 15, 1968

**LOCATION:** The accident took place at the Aramoana Mole at the Otago Harbour Entrance, South Island, New Zealand.

**NAME:** Graham John Hitt

**DESCRIPTION:** He was a 23-year-old male from Dunedin, a technical officer with the Geological Survey Department, a part-time student at Otago University, and a member of the Southern Sea Divers Club. He was an experienced spearfisherman and had competed in the New Zealand championships. He was wearing a wetsuit.



## BACKGROUND

**MOON PHASE:** Third Quarter, September 15, 1968

**ENVIRONMENT:** The mole is a one-kilometre-long man-made rock wall. It was a favorite fishing spot with members of the Southern Sea Divers Club and regarded as a good training ground. The divers were about two-thirds of the way along the mole when the accident took place. After his brother's death, Errol Hitt found out a fishing company was regularly dumping fish waste into the sea near where the incident unfolded. "That attracted the shark," he said.

**DISTANCE FROM SHORE:** The divers were 50 yards from the mole on the harbour side.

**DEPTH OF WATER:** The depths along the mole range from seven to 22 metres, but the incident took place at the surface.

**TIME:** 10h15

**NARRATIVE:** Graham Hitt was spearfishing with four other club members (Bruce Edward Skinner, Colin Stuart Wilson, John Stanley Kirkman, Norman Churchill) when the dorsal in of a large shark broke the surface of the water. The shark circled one member of the group and then charged Hitt. One of the divers was just about to climb the rocks out of the water when he heard Hitt's cry for help, jumped back in and swam with the others to assist him. As the rescuers brought Hitt ashore, the shark circled them. The diver died seconds after he reached shore.

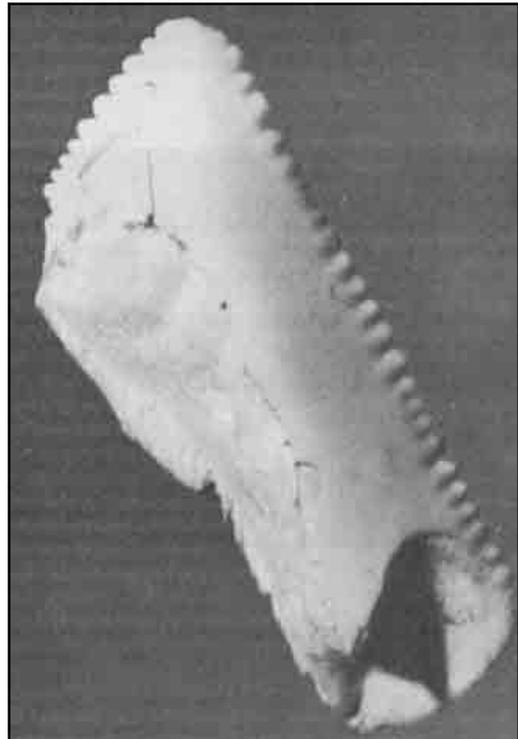
**INJURY:** Fatal. His left leg was bitten and his femoral artery was severed.

**SPECIES INVOLVED:** The accident involved a 4.25 metre [14'] white shark. A tooth fragment of the shark was recovered from the diver's leg. The New Zealand Press Association from Christchurch reported that three 12-foot sharks were sighted between Sumner and Taylors Mistake later the same afternoon by the pilot of a Canterbury Aero Club plane. Police were informed and surfers were warned and left the water. About a year before this incident, a 15-foot white shark was caught and drowned in fishing nets in the area.

**NOTE:** This was the third shark-related fatality on the Otago coast since February 1964. Both previous incidents involved lifesavers; the first was GSAF 1964.02.05, and the second was GSAF 1967.03.09

**CASE INVESTIGATOR:** Richard D. Weeks, GSAF

**SOURCES:** Otago Daily Times, front page, Monday September 16, 1968; Otago Daily Times, page 3, Tuesday September 17, 1968, et al.



*The white shark tooth fragment recovered from Hitt's wounds.*

