

ACTIVITY: Free diving for abalone

CASE: [GSAF 1998.06.28](#)

DATE: Sunday June 28, 1998

LOCATION: The attack took place off South Neptune Island, South Australia.

35°14'S 136°07'E

NAME: Doug Chesher

DESCRIPTION: The diver was a 26-year-old male from Port Lincoln. Doug Chesher Sr. and his sons, Doug and Tommy, recently opened The Fresh Fish Place, a fish processing factory in Port Lincoln, and the three men also owned the support boat.

SUPPORT BOAT: The support boat was a shark-netting boat, the *Aquataur*.

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: At 08h00 the air temperature at South Neptune Island was 14°C (57.2°F), and no rain was recorded. The wind was southwest at 25 km/h, humidity was 90%, and the barometric pressure was 1009.9 hPa.

MOON PHASE: New Moon, June 24, 1998

SEA CONDITIONS: Unknown.

ENVIRONMENT: The South Neptune Islands, barren rocky outcrops, sit on a shelf 70 kilometres south-south east from Port Lincoln. The depth of water on the eastern side of the islands is 40 metres, dropping steeply to more than 95 metres on the southern and western side of the islands. The island group consists of two islands forming a rough crescent broken in half by a channel running from the south west to the north east. A large headland, which supports a major New Zealand fur seal colony as well as the endangered Australian sea lion, sits west of the southern island, separated by a small channel approximately four metres wide. The large numbers of sea mammals support a large population of white sharks. Rodney Fox describes the area where the attack took place as “the best shark restaurant in the ocean. It’s one of the worst places you would ever want to go diving because it’s got 15,000 sea lions diving around there.” Port Lincoln’s white shark tour operators said that several white sharks had been seen in the area in the weeks preceding the incident.

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: Three metres

TIME: 14h00

NARRATIVE: It is not known if Doug Chesher was submerged or on the surface when he initially encountered the shark. His dive buddy, Neil Jenkins, was just metres away when he was bitten. Jenkins dragged him to shore and then ran for assistance to the only house on the small island.

INJURY: Fatal. At autopsy, the main areas of injury involved the left thigh and lower leg, which displayed characteristic teeth marks of a white shark, extensive soft tissue damage, and incised wounds of the femoral artery and vein. There was also soft tissue trauma to the



South Neptune Islands

left wrist, with transection of the radial artery and vein. Bony injury was minimal, and no shark teeth were recovered. Death resulted from exsanguination.

This type of injury is in keeping with predator attack from underneath or behind, with the most severe injuries involving one leg. Less severe injuries to the arms may have occurred during the ensuing struggle. Reconstruction of the damaged limb by sewing together skin, soft tissue, and muscle bundles revealed that no soft tissue was missing and gave a clearer picture of the pattern of teeth marks, direction of the attack, and species of predator.

FIRST AID: Shortly after reaching shore the diver died as result of blood loss from extensive injuries. Emergency Service personnel from Port Lincoln arrived by helicopter to investigate the man's death and brought the victim's companion, who was suffering from shock, back to Port Lincoln. Afterwards, the Chesher's body was taken to Adelaide for an autopsy.

SPECIES INVOLVED: The attack involved a white shark, *Carcharodon carcharias*, about four metres total length.

SOURCES: *The Advertiser*, June 29, 1998 edition;
<http://www.amjforensicmedicine.com/pt/re/ajfmp/abstract.00000433-200009000-00008.htm;jsessionid=Ft1SxvQQQ2shmGrZ27Vsvt41mpY0jRK2sbnsZNK6fJtB9LQKp8c8!-1455700262!-949856145!8091!-1>, *et al*



Photograph: AMSA

South Neptune Islands

COMMENT: White sharks have been involved in ten fatalities in South Australian waters:

1. In March 1926 a swimmer, Primrose White, was taken by a shark off Brighton.
2. December 9, 1962 spearfisherman Geoffrey Corner (16) of Elizabeth East was killed by a shark off Normersville / Caracalinga Head, south of Adelaide. [ASAF 262]
3. In 1971 fisherman Leslie Harris (52) died of heart failure after a shark "leapt from the water and attacked him in his boat" off Port Patterson, south of Port Augusta. Mr. Harris' brother-in-law witnessed the incident.
4. On January 9, 1974 Scuba diver Terence Manuel (25) was collecting abalone when a shark tore off his right leg off Streaky Bay on the west coast. [ASAF 302]

5. February 1975, Wade Shippard (12) was taken by a white shark while swimming at Penong on the Far West coast.
6. On March 3, 1985, mother of four Shirley Durdin (33) was killed by a white shark while snorkelling at Wiseman's Beach in Louth Bay / Peake Bay, just north of Port Lincoln. [ASAF 325]
7. On September 18, 1987, Scuba diver Terrance Gibson (47) was taken by a shark while diving for scallops in waters off Merino Rocks, Adelaide. [ASAF 342]
8. On March 9, 1989, surfer Mathew Foale (27) died after being bitten by a shark at Waitpinga Beach, near Victor Harbor, Encounter Bay. [ASAF 432]
9. On September 8, 1991, Scuba diver Jonathon Lee (19) was killed by a shark during a University of Adelaide Skindiving Club expedition off Snapper Point, Aldinga Beach, near Adelaide. [ASAF 472]
10. In addition, there have been other non-fatal accidents involving white sharks in South Australia:

On January 22, 1936, swimmer Raymond Bennett was bitten by a white shark at West Beach, Adelaide. [ASAF 127]

On March 12, 1961, spearfisherman Brian Rogers was bitten by a white shark at Aldinga Beach. [ASAF 247]

On December 8, 1963, spearfisherman Rodney Fox was bitten by a white shark at Aldinga Beach. [ASAF 267]

On December 1, 1983 Scuba diver Neil Williams was bitten by a white shark at South Neptune Island. [ASAF 344]

On August 25, 1992 surfer Jason Bates was bitten by a white shark at Lipson Cove, Tumby Bay. [ASAF 481]

CASE INVESTIGATORS: Stan Waterman and Phil Kemp, Shark Research Institute

The Advertiser

Monday, June 29, 1998

Metropolitan edition

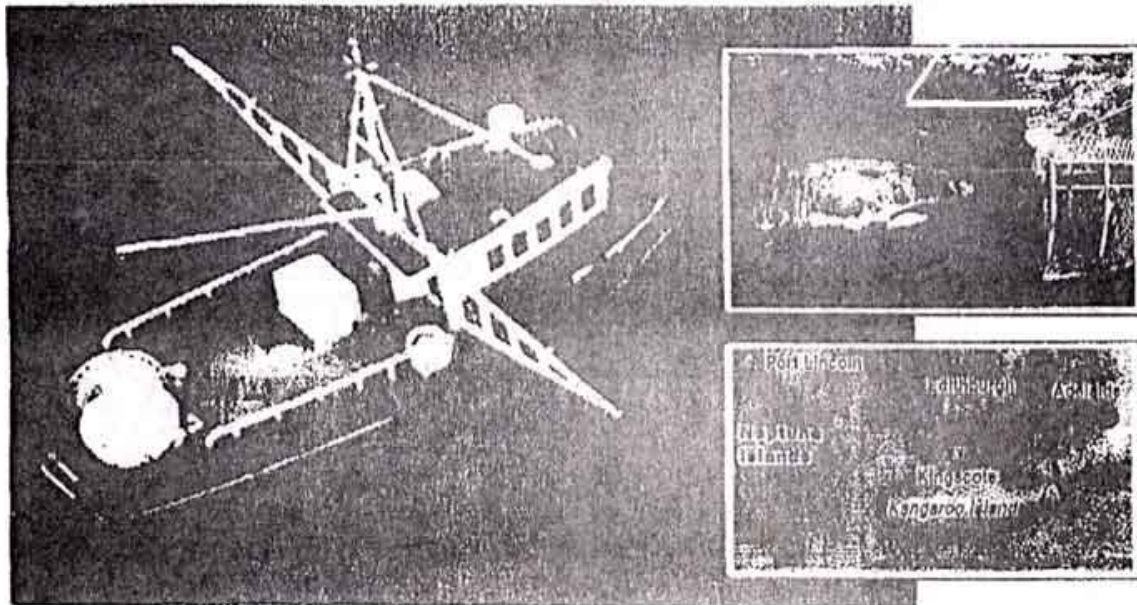
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Death dive



DEATH SCENE: The boat used by the two men. Inset, a shark filmed off South Neptune Island, and the island's location. (Main photo: National News News)

Shark kills man searching for abalone

By HUW MORGAN

AN impromptu dive for abalone ended in tragedy yesterday when a 25-year-old man was mauled to death by a white pointer shark off South Neptune Island, south of Port Lincoln.

His friend watched helplessly just metres away as the shark attacked.

The men were in an area later described by shark expert Rodney Fox as "the best shark restaurant in the ocean".

"It's one of the worst places you would ever want to go diving because it's got 15,000 sea lions living around there," he said.

Located 40km south of Port Lincoln, the islands are barren, rocky outcrops which are home to thousands of sea lions - the natural food of the white pointer shark.

Police said yesterday's attack occurred about 3pm when the men went free-diving for abalone off the island.

Both men were from the professional shark netting boat, the

Aquasur, which had sailed to a cove.

They were the only men on the vessel, which is owned by a Port Lincoln businessman.

It is believed the victim was just a short distance from the rocky shore when he was attacked.

Bleeding profusely, he was dragged back to shore by his partner who ran to the only house on the small island for help.

However, the man died of blood loss from the massive injuries just a short time later.

After the alarm was raised a rescue helicopter took police and State Emergency Service personnel from Port Lincoln to the island to investigate the man's death.

Late last night, the helicopter brought the man's companion - who was suffering shock - back to Port Lincoln, before the dead man's body was taken to Adelaide for an autopsy.

Port Lincoln tour boat operators said several great white sharks at least 5m long had been seen in the area over the past few

weeks. The great white shark is now a protected species, after laws prohibiting the killing of the creatures in South Australian waters came into effect at the beginning of this year.

Each year an average of 20 people are killed in shark attacks throughout the world.

Ten people have been killed by sharks in SA since the first reported fatal attack in 1928.

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Survivor of white pointer attack says island is shark hot spot

'Worst place' to go diving

By MUW MORGAN
SOUTH Australia's foremost expert on white pointer sharks said he believed anyone who went diving off South Neptune Island without a shark cage "was mad".

Mr Rodney Fox, who survived an attack by a white pointer in 1963, said the area in which the fisherman was taken was widely recognised as a shark hot spot because of the number of sea lions living on the island.

"It's one of the worst places you would ever want to go diving because it's got 15,000 sea lions living around there," Mr Fox said.

"There is more chance of bumping into a sick or hungry shark there than anywhere.

"It's one of the worst places I would ever want to go diving.

"We have soon more great white sharks around the South Neptune there than any other place in southern Australia.

"To dive there is certainly very risky."

Mr Fox, of Glenelg, said the sharks in the area were mainly white pointers and bronze



Rodney Fox whalers which went to the island in search of food.

"Of all the islands along the southern coast of Australia, I doubt if there is any other island which has as many sea lions as the South Neptune," he said.

"Any white sharks would call in there more frequently than anywhere else."

Mr Fox said sharks around the island were common.

"I have seen all sizes of sharks from about 1.5m up to 6m," he said.

"The majority are great white

- none of the other sharks use the sea lions as a source of food.

"Only the great whites," Mr Fox said. Australia averaged about one death a year from shark attack.

"When you hear of a shark attack, it makes your stomach turn over," he said.

"I have no idea why anyone would be diving down there in the winter, unless they were looking for abalone."

South Neptune Island is popular with charter boats operating out of Port Lincoln which take groups of recreational divers and documentary-makers to the area to film the sharks.

The charter boats use dive cages made of 2.5cm-thick perspex for unimpeded filming and viewing of great whites.

Mr Fox, 37, who now operates a white pointer museum at Glenelg, needed 450 stitches to repair his wounds after the attack on Aldinga.

He was attacked while spearfishing and still bears the scars from his encounter.



SCARRED: Mr Fox needed 450 stitches to repair his wounds after being attacked by a white pointer shark on Aldinga in 1963.

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10 killed in South Australian waters

SHARK attacks have claimed the lives of 10 people in South Australian waters.

While many people have been maimed, the chances of survival are low because of the nature of the wounds inflicted.

Shock and severe blood loss usually claim the lives of any survivors pulled from the water.

The previous fatal attacks were:

March, 1926: Schoolmaster Milne was taken by a shark off Brighton in SA's first recorded shark attack.

December, 1927: Geoffrey Oakes, 16, of Elizabeth East, was killed by a shark in waters off Normansville, south of Adelaide.

1931: Fisherman Louis Harris, 37, died of heart failure after a shark "leapt from the water" and attacked him in his boat off Port Paterason, south of Port Augusta. Mr Harris' brother-in-law saw the attack.

1934: Terence Mansel, 26, died after a shark tore off his right leg in waters off Alreahy Bay, on the west coast.

February, 1935: Twelve-year-old Wade Shippard was taken by a white pointer shark while swimming at Yennong, on the Far West coast.

March, 1945: Mother-of-four Shirley Durbin, 33, was killed by a 6m white pointer shark



Jonathon Lee

December, 1962: Geoffrey Oakes, 16, of Elizabeth East, was killed by a shark in waters off Normansville, south of Adelaide.

1971: Fisherman Louis Harris, 37, died of heart failure after a

shark "leapt from the water" and attacked him in his boat off Port Paterason, south of Port Augusta. Mr Harris' brother-in-law saw the attack.

1934: Terence Mansel, 26, died after a shark tore off his right leg in waters off Alreahy Bay, on the west coast.

February, 1935: Twelve-year-old Wade Shippard was taken by a white pointer shark while swimming at Yennong, on the Far West coast.

March, 1945: Mother-of-four Shirley Durbin, 33, was killed by a 6m white pointer shark

while snorkelling in Louth Bay, just north of Port Lincoln.

September, 1987: Scuba diver Terry Gibson, 47, was taken by a shark while diving for scallops in waters off Marino Rocks.

March, 1988: Matt Foote, 27, died after being attacked by a shark while surfing at Wallpapers, near Victor Harbor.

September, 1991: Scuba diver Jonathon Lee, 19, was killed by a shark during a University of Adelaide skin-diving Club expedition off Snapper Point, near Aldinga.

Shark kills man diving for abalone

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There are three main areas in the world's oceans where white pointer sharks thrive - California, South Africa's east coast and in the waters of Port Lincoln through to the west coast of South Australia.

In each location the conditions are perfect for breeding, with a plentiful supply of food and ideal water temperatures.

SA's big sharks have proved a lure for many of the big names of the sporting and entertainment industry. Quaker Oats



HOMESTEAD: The house where the victim's friend sought help.