

ACTIVITY: Swimming

CASE: GSAF ND.0106 /SA-044

DATE: Unknown

LOCATION: The attack took place at Murray Bay, Robben Island, South Africa.

NAME: Unknown

DESCRIPTION: He was a “mental patient”.



BACKGROUND

ENVIRONMENT: Robben Island is a small, low sandy island 12 kilometres from Cape Town at the entrance to Table Bay. Mental patients were sent to the island as early as the mid-1700s. When the British took the Cape they continued to use it as prison and lunatic asylum. The island first became a leper settlement some time before the mid-1800s, and mental patients were again sent there.

NARRATIVE: Lawrence Green mentions this incident as the island’s only shark fatality. The man was swimming when “the fin of a man-eater was seen approaching him. They sent a boat to the rescue, but it was too late and the body was not recovered.”

INJURY: Presumed fatal

NOTE: Green also reports: “Dr. Wynn’s dinghy was charged by a shark at this period, and four teeth were left in the planking. The doctor beached his boat with four planks stove in.”

SPECIES: Not identified, but the most likely candidate in that area is a white shark.

SOURCE: Lawrence Green (1962, reprint), *A Decent Fellow Doesn’t Work*, Cape Town: Howard Timmins (Pty) Ltd, page 225

COMMENT: The late Lawrence Green was interested in the phenomenon of shark attack and recorded several incidents. He remains one of South Africa’s best-loved non-fiction writers; his tales are colorful, but each was meticulously researched. Although he did not date this accident, the account rings true.