



Kylie gives a reassuring thumb-up just before heading to the operating room in Vava'u's main hospital a few hours after the attack. Kim is just happy to still have her with us.

# SHARK ATTACK!

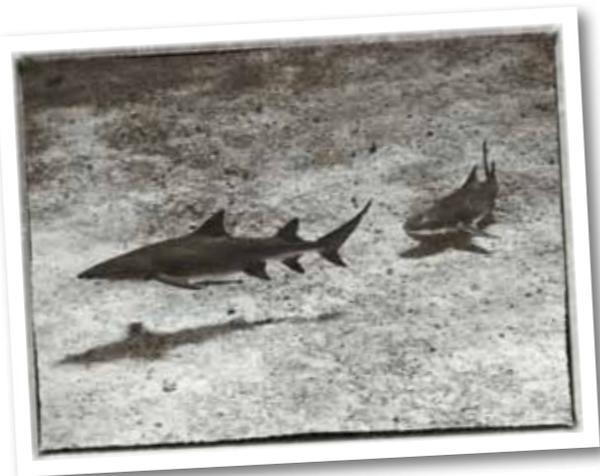
Paradise one day, survival the next. Don recounts that day last month, when his crewmember Kylie Maguire survived a shark attack in Tonga

I heard the shout, "Help! Help!" and jumped up. I was sitting in a grass hut looking out over white sand, through to turquoise blue waters and ICE anchored close in. I thought it was someone in the surrounding resort gardens, so jumped out and shouted, "Where are you?" "Help, Help" came the voice again from offshore and I saw Kim 250m out, paddling our two-person kayak hard, direct for the beach. I could not see Kylie. I turned my handheld VHF on and called them. Kylie came back, "I've been bitten by a shark!"

Sometimes you just have to laugh. When you least expect it, the unexpected can jump up and hit you in the face. Often I will tell

the crew, with a glint in my eye, "there is no such thing as paradise." On those occasions everything will be perfect, except say for one little annoying thing. Maybe it is mosquitos, or salt spray, or even mud up to your elbows. But you laugh it off and get on with life.

A few days ago in paradise our resident mermaid onboard ICE, 29yo Kylie Maguire, free-diver, professional photographer, scuba diver, surfer and passionate conservationist was attacked by a shark! It was not little, nor simply annoying and certainly I was not laughing.



Two 3m whalers Kylie photographed a few weeks before the attack.

We are now five months into our six-month season in the friendly isles of Tonga, chasing wrecks and the lost maritime history of this amazing place (see [www.bluetreasure.me](http://www.bluetreasure.me)). We all swim, snorkel and dive a lot, surf when it is up and see reef sharks on a regular basis. We also swim with whales. We are here because we love the ocean and everything in it. Often we talk about what to do "if" confronted by, or even attacked by a "normal" shark other than reef sharks, which are very common, more like fish and seen on nearly every dive. We also see "other" sharks.

## DAY TO REMEMBER

That day on the beach I screamed to those around who also heard the cries, "It's a Shark attack!", so they were aware of the urgency. The island's aluminum tender was already being launched. I headed to the beach destination of the kayak, with Kim still paddling strong, wondering how long Kylie had been in the kayak and curious about how calm she was on the radio.

I confirmed to the tender as it sped past, that it was a shark bite and to NOT remove her from the kayak, fearing more blood loss or trauma from shock. Amit (another ICE crew) was chest-deep in the water, waiting. The tender reached it about a minute before Amit, but stood by as advised, with Kim going for it. Kylie was still conscious and talking but not moving her legs. She had not looked at the injury.

As soon as the kayak was in shallow water, I was able to check Kylie. She was conscious and talking. I didn't know what to expect but felt it must be a non-life-threatening injury, possibly small, because of Kylie's radio response, but at my first sight of the wound it appeared quite the reverse. There was major trauma to the area around her buttocks and inner thighs. I immediately investigated for major blood loss, hoping the femoral artery had not been cut!

Fortunately there was no flowing blood from the substantial skin and fatty tissue lacerations. I did not try to move her, as she had the weight of her good leg on top of the wound and it may be restricting the blood flow. The lower part of her leg was also pressured by being jammed into the inflatable floor and side tubes. Her colour



Top: Paradise! Our [www.bluetreasure.me](http://www.bluetreasure.me) base camp in Vava'u, Treasure Island Resort, with the high-speed resort boat and aluminium tender pulled-up on the beach. This is the most beautiful Island I have ever seen anywhere in the world and a great whale-swim base! Above: Kylie Maguire, our "mermaid on ICE" is a competent free diver, here diving in Swallows Cave a week before the shark attack. She lives for the ocean and wants to save all sharks from fin-fishing practices. (Photo © [www.stevefraser.org](http://www.stevefraser.org))

was okay and breathing appeared normal and she gave a faint smile, so I didn't see any sign of imminent collapse. I knew the kayak floor was watertight and would hold any blood loss, so carefully checked for blood but there was very little. Two doctors holidaying at the resort, one an Emergency Response specialist, the other a pediatrician then arrived and I handed Kylie to their capable hands. They were total champions!

## EMERGENCY EVACUATION

As the doctors took over and having seen the wound, I told everyone we will need emergency evacuation and efforts were started to prepare the Resort's high-speed boat that was on a mooring. We needed to notify

the hospital and police in Neiafu 10 miles away, for them to be on standby. I asked for phone numbers, which were being chased up, but to save time decided to call Neiafu Port Control on VHF at around 1735hrs. No response. I decided to call a mayday, as although Kylie appeared stable for the moment, I considered this a very serious if not potentially life-threatening situation.

Mike Smith from Yacht Help Tonga on the main island of Vava'u immediately responded. I advised the situation requesting they contact the hospital and police and that we may be leaving Eueiki Island shortly, as soon as Kylie's condition was assessed and stabilised.

Mark, the resort owner, then advised which beach on the next



KYLIE DID NOT SEE THE SHARK UNTIL IT HIT HARD AND SHE KICKED AND FOUGHT IT OFF, THEN SWAM AND LEAPT STRAIGHT INTO THE BACK OF THE KAYAK...

Tonga is one of only a few places in the world where you can swim with whales. It is bordering on a "spiritual" experience... awesome!

island of Pangaimotu she would be headed for. The ambulance should make for that spot. Mike had everything under control very efficiently and would also make his way to the beach in his private vehicle as backup.

The doctors on the beach could use items from *ICE*'s comprehensive first aid equipment, so I returned to the boat, recovered the kits and sent them ashore while I remained onboard to recover our oxygen bottles and delivery set. Before I could get them out the doctors decided on immediate evacuation and departed around 1750hrs with Kylie, still in the kayak, now onboard the resort boat, the doctors in attendance.

### BLOOD DONOR

I continued relaying radio advice from *ICE* to Mike regarding the rendezvous and updating ETAs etc. I notified and began updating Kylie's parents in Australia and asked for her blood group. I departed in *ICE* for town. On the way Kylie's parents confirmed her blood group, which I relayed to the hospital. Other yachts

were on standby to offer blood.

Mike and the ambulance arrived just as Kylie hit the rendezvous beach and an efficient transfer took place around 1825hrs. Kylie was still conscious and remained so throughout. She arrived at the hospital around 1850hrs.

At around 2030hrs, I made it to the hospital after mooring *ICE*. At 2115hrs the hospital surgeon requested B+ blood, so I sent out a call on the cruisers network VHF Channel 26 and we checked blood groups with friends at the hospital. We had a few responses and shortly after, Angelina from the yacht *La Fiesta* agreed to be donor and headed to the hospital.

Kylie went to the operating theatre at 2230 hours and emerged two hours later sedated. The local surgeon and support team of five reported that the main wound on her buttock had been cleaned and stitched, but the other had no skin to stitch. She would be in hospital for up to a month. He stressed that she was very lucky, which we all knew. It had been a long day.

### INTER-ISLAND SWIM

This adventure began at around 1600hrs, when Kylie and Kim Hands set off from *ICE* — then anchored at Eueiki Island (Treasure Island Resort) — for Pau Island, one mile to the east. Kylie was paddling the two-person kayak and Kim was swimming. Kim is a 30yo dive master and marine biologist working for an international whale shark research center (see [www.whaleshark.org.au](http://www.whaleshark.org.au)) in Australia. She is also a marathon swimmer in preparation for an upcoming event and was visiting *ICE* for a few weeks, this outing was a training swim for Kim. The kayak is a quality inflatable and they had taken water and the handheld VHF radio with them.

They completed the trip to Pau Island in quick time and I monitored their arrival from *ICE* with binoculars. Shortly thereafter I went ashore on Eueiki Island for a meeting and took my VHF with me. At around 1700hrs I turned my radio off as we made a conference phone call to associates in Tonga's capital Nuku'alofa. My radio was still

turned off at around 1520hrs when we heard the faint shout for help?

Before setting off from Pau for the return swim they both discussed the risk profile, specifically in relation to sharks. Kylie felt a bit uneasy (she was going to swim). They both agreed that they were in the sharks' environment, but it was what they do so they would continue with the planned one-mile swim home as the risk was acceptable. This time Kylie swam, some 2 to 3m off the kayak's starboard quarter while Kim paddled.

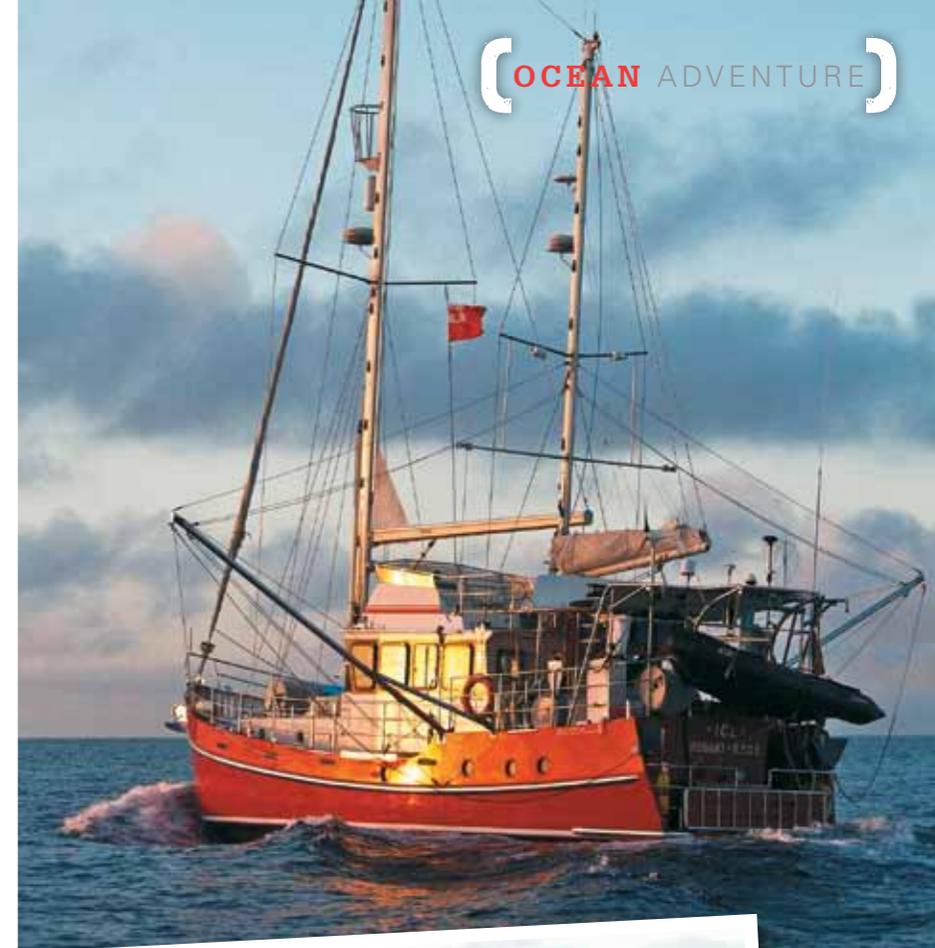
### SHARK STRIKES

They had cleared the outer reef areas and were now swimming out over deep, blue water about 700m from Pau Island. Kylie did not see the shark until it hit hard and she kicked and fought it off, then swam and leapt straight into the back of the kayak, losing her fin in the process. She did not look at the injury but told Kim, who could not see it either but started paddling hard.

Kylie didn't move but tried to call *ICE* on the VHF. The Neiafu Port Control heard her calls and asked if she needed help. She replied no she was okay, but had been bitten by a shark and was trying to call *ICE*. Another yacht then replied and asked Kylie to confirm she was okay and did not require assistance. Kylie forcefully advised, "No, I am okay. I am in a kayak and just want *ICE*." Meanwhile, she kept calling the boat and was in the kayak for about 10 minutes before we became aware of her shout for help.

As the shark released her and turned its head was less than 60cm from Kylie's. She thinks the shark was more than 3m in length but not certain of the type, other than NOT a reef shark. It may have been a bull shark? The doctors estimated the teeth to be about 25mm across, with a bite height top-to-bottom of around 40 to 45cm, and requiring some 80 stitches in all to both wounds!

Two days later, despite the Tongan medical team doing a great job, it was obvious the second wound needed specialist help. I immediately started the process for a medivac to Australia. Less than 24 hours later, a two-person CareFlight medical team and two pilots took off from Sydney via Noumea and Fiji to Vava'u. Should be a two-week stint in hospital.



Top: *ICE* headed into Neiafu, Vava'u, at speed to meet-up with Kylie. After a lifetime at sea and thousands of dives all over the world, this was a first! I was happy this happened so close to a hospital. Above: The CareFlight team — our new angels — carefully loading Kylie onto the plane for the flight home. This was a great reason to believe in travel insurance!

### WHY?

Why did the shark attack? Who knows but it is humpback whale season here, with many new calves being born. The underwater "visual profile" of the blue/grey kayak at about 4m long, with the forward paddler hitting the water alternately each side and then Kylie with her BIG free-diving fins off the right back side of the kayak, could well look like an injured whale calf to a shark. It could appear as if it is struggling and separated from its mother and escort, possibly already having been injured by other sharks.

In that situation, a shark needs

to move fast and while this is pure speculation it may be plausible? Maybe it was just a shark attack. There is nothing about this incident that should alter the way cruisers and snorkelers dive coral reefs or anybody goes whale swimming in Tonga. This was over "deep blue" with no bottom.

This year in Western Australia there have been five fatal shark attacks. Kylie may not laugh this attack off but she will get on with her life and be back in the water quicker than you can imagine. She still loves sharks! So do we. This place really is paradise, hey! 🌴