

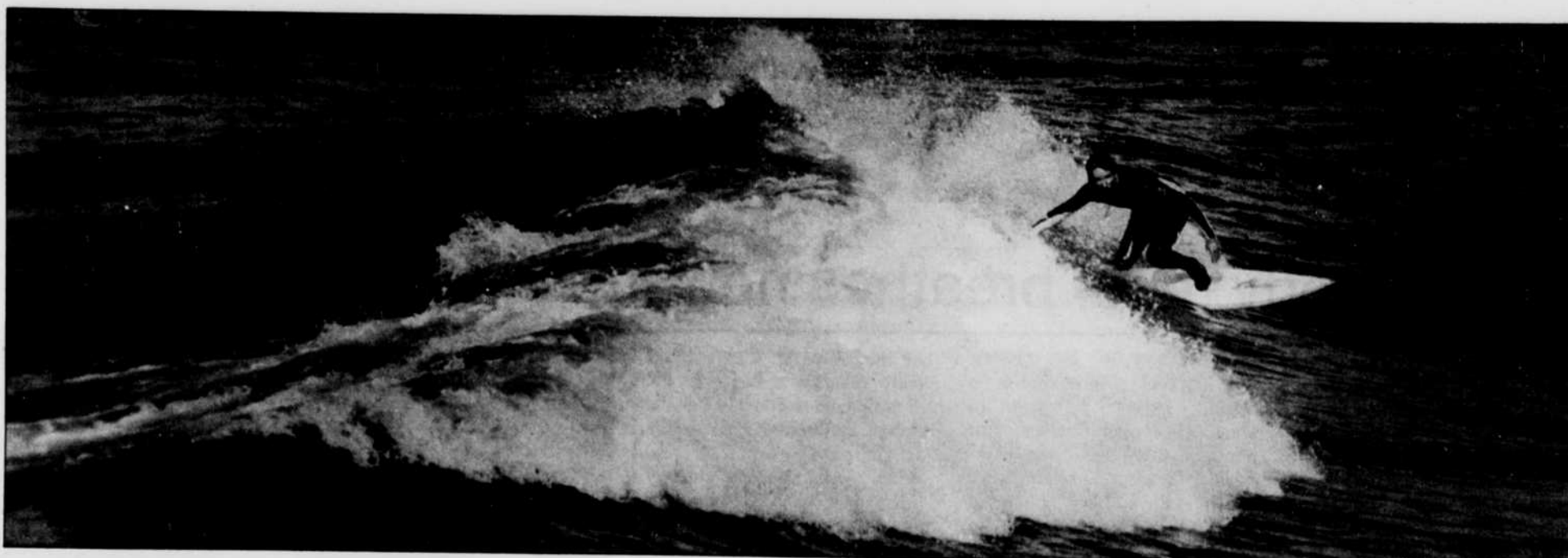


Photo by John Giustina

while in Oregon it is common to find one spot every 50 miles.

For some, the Oregon Coast is just too rugged a place to paddle out on a board from.

"To be a surfer in Oregon is like being in the wilderness," Edwards says. "You have logs and riptides. You have the cold to deal with. I have Californians who come up here and won't surf because of no life guards and because of the radical conditions."

There is also danger from another source — the great white shark.

Last summer, Pinkney saw a friend attacked by one in the South Jetty area near Florence. The shark came up and bit the surfer's board and in the process brushed Pinkney's buddy. And a few years ago his cousin was involved in a similar incident on the north coast.

"I think everybody thinks about it. But statistically since 1976, there's been only five attacks," Edwards says.

In 1979, a great white shark bit a surfer near Haystack Rock at Cannon Beach. The man suffered a gash from below the left shoulder blade to the flank.

A year later, a great white bit another surfer on the coast, which left the man with mangled legs. Fortunately, he managed to

paddle to shore.

In August, 1983, Randy Weldon of Salem was unhurt after a great white shark bit into his surfboard off Cape Kiwanda near Pacific City. "It felt like a football player hit me and threw me in the water," he said at the time. According to the surfer, the shark was 10- to 12-foot long.

And in October 1984, surfer Bob Rice encountered a 12-foot great white shark again off Pacific City. According to newspaper accounts at the time, Rice experienced "terror, sheer terror" when his 6-foot board crumbled under the bites of the shark's 12- to 15-inch-wide jaws. Rice was tossed off the surfboard, but the shark took off, and he was able to paddle to shore unharmed.

Experts at the time estimated the shark to be 12-to 15-foot long and about 1,200 pounds.

Weeks earlier, a shark was suspected in the disappearance of a Lebanon man who vanished while swimming close to shore near the same spot.

One explanation for shark attacks on surfers is that the shape of a board is similar to that of a harbor seal on its back when viewed from the depths of the sea by the shark.

According to Edwards, fall is

the time of the year to watch out for sharks. Salmon are running up coastal rivers and seals are feeding off them, he says. It is an environment ripe for an attack by a great white shark.

Still, Edwards believes the danger of a shark attacking a surfer has been overplayed.

"There's a much greater chance of getting in a car accident on the way to the coast than there is of getting attacked by a great white," he says. "In reality, I've gotten thousands of waves on the coast and I haven't yet gotten a shark."

Dangers aside, surfing in Oregon remains a peaceful, solitary experience for those with the fortitude to paddle out from solid ground. There is very little hype in Oregon like that found elsewhere — the only competition is the annual Cowabunga Longboard Surf Classic held at Otter Rock in the summer. With the exception of a slight influx of new surfers, surfing in the state is similar to what it was a decade or more ago.

"Surfing gives me perspective," Edwards says. "No matter how many problems you have, you come back humble. Very little ego can exist when you're on an 8-foot wave."

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