

See how an Alaska paddleboarder escaped a close encounter with a humpback whale

July 21 2023, by Mark Thiessen



In this photo provided by Brian Williams, a whale approaches his father, Kevin Williams, while he was paddleboarding in Prince William Sound near Whittier, Alaska, on July 13, 2023. Williams survived the close encounter with a humpback whale, not even getting wet during a tense few seconds caught on camera by friends and family as a whale surfaced near him. (Brian Williams

An Alaska man on a paddleboard escaped a close encounter with a humpback whale, not even getting wet during a tense few seconds caught on camera by friends and family as the giant creature surfaced right in front of him then glided under his board.

"It's just so massive. You're puny against this whale," Kevin Williams of Anchorage said Thursday, a week after his adventure with an adult [humpback whale](#) in Prince William Sound. Adult females can weigh up to 70,000 pounds (31,700 kilograms) and average about 49 [feet](#) (15 meters) in length, according to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Males are a little smaller.

Williams said anyone who claims they wouldn't be afraid in that situation is crazy.

"If you have a whale that doesn't know you were there and is that close, that's not a good situation," he said. One flick of the animal's fin "or anything it does could be the end of my life."

Williams, his son Brian and a couple other friends were paddleboarding or kayaking in the sound just off Whittier, located about 60 miles (100 kilometers) southeast of Anchorage.

They had seen the whale in the fjord, which is about 2 miles (3 kilometers) wide. Williams said he was slower than his friends, who were about 200 feet (60 meters) ahead of him.

The whale began to approach his [friends](#), but they were close to the shoreline so he figured the whale would run out of room and reverse course. He thought he was in the safest spot since he was trailing the group.

The whale went underwater for about 45 seconds, longer than he had

noticed it dive before.



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"And it surfaced right in front of me, coming towards me," Williams said. "Whoa! I love to see [whales](#) up close, but I'm on a paddleboard."

As the whale slipped below the [water](#) again and turned on its side, he could see the white of its belly slowly gliding underneath, about 3 feet (1

meter) under the [surface](#).

The whale's pectoral fin was sticking a few feet out of the water, and Williams feared the creature might flip over as it swam below him, or he might topple off the board and land on its stomach.

"If I fell down, you know, my feet could have easily been on that whale—tickling that whale or whatever," he said.

To steady himself in case the fin hit, he braced his knees together, kneeled, then lowered himself on all fours.

As the whale passed under him "there was hardly any turbulence, and I didn't get wet," he said, adding that it's rare for people to get hurt by whales.

Still, the experience won't keep Williams off the water. He plans another paddleboarding trip later Thursday.

"I'll never stop, and this is once in a lifetime," he said.

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