



## The Search For Steve Fossett

### Updates:

**Nov 4, 2008 - 9:43 pm**

#### **DNA confirms bones belong to Steve Fossett**

Today is a happy ending to a truly sad story. It was confirmed over the weekend through DNA testing of long bones discovered ~500 m from the crash site that were recovered last Thursday. This puts to rest the mystery of a great adventurer's disappearance for good. While the finality of this sinks in, I am happy that there is closure to this story. Steve led a life that was admirable in many ways. One of the greatest lessons I learned from his life was to persevere towards your goal, and not to let failure or obstacles stand in your way. With his multiple attempts to circumnavigate the globe in a balloon, it is clear that failure was not an insurmountable obstacle in the pursuit of one's dreams. I hope that Steve's legacy lives on and that it continues to have a positive influence on adventure and exploration.

**Oct 9, 2008 - 7:18 am**

#### **Steve Fossett's Wreckage Found**

I'm definitely very excited to be able to write this. It has been a little over a week from the positive identification of Fossett's wreckage near Minneret Lake, Mammoth Lakes California. As predicted and expected, it was a hiker who actually found the critical clue to locating his wreckage. The wreckage did not appear burned, was scattered at the treeline around 10,000 feet, and covered an area greater than a football field with debris, with the engine block sitting nearly 100 m from the fuselage. Despite there being nothing more than a sliver of bone to indicate that Steve was in the aircraft when it hit the mountain, this discovery puts the mystery to rest for me as a full winter and animals would make finding remains challenging. The best part is that this should put the conspiracy theories and associated garbage to rest for good. Steve Fossett deserves to be remembered as the adventurer and pioneer that he was, not a cop-out who couldn't face adversity as several individuals tried to paint him.

So what are my thoughts on this, and how does it relate to our search? Well, I'm definitely not surprised that he was found in the Sierra Nevadas. That was our premise going down, that he did fly the 395 Hwy as he had stated prior to leaving the ranch, and that he was sight seeing in the beautiful alpine meadows when he probably ran into difficult winds, or the aircraft was too underpowered to clear the peak that he struck.

Where was he relative to us you ask? About 70km south. Our initial search plan was to be split between the Sweetwater area and Yosemite, as we had obtained permission to search both. I had considered the Mammoth area, but was intrigued by the mystery cell-phone photo taken in Yosemite by a female hiker who was annoyed by a low flying plane. Ultimately, the plan was to spend 3 days in each location. However following the tip we received during our acclimatization day on Monday in the Bodie Hills, we refocused our efforts on the northern valleys, which ended up eating into our remaining time and then it became impractical to go to Yosemite.

In the Yosemite region, Keith and I had discussed visiting the area around Amelia Earhart peak, as well as the south trending valleys in Touloumine meadows. Although I don't expect that we would have made it to



## Adventure Science

where the wreckage was found, we would have been within at least 10 km, which would have been pretty exciting...but, we weren't.

This whole process has been very interesting. I remember an early phone call that I had with another search group, and when I mentioned that my search area would be in the Sierra's around Mono Lake this individual told me flat out that "I was wrong...he's not there, we know where he is and are getting very close to finding him". Ummmm, okay. Turns out they were dead wrong too, and searching well east of the Sierras on the edge of Whisky Flats.

The greatest difficulty I had in this whole process, was obviously determining the search area and trying to narrow it down to promising areas. This meant discounting the experts, and much of the existing data, which appeared to me as conflicting and therefore unreliable, but still better than nothing. The radar tracks through Powell Canyon, Whisky Flats, and south of Hawthorne were intriguing, but could have been made by anyone. The eye witness cowboy who had seen the plane hundreds of times before claimed he saw the plane fly east towards Mud Springs around 11 am...yet the radar track were around 10 am. Which was it? Neither in my opinion, so I focused on some other information...namely that Fossett said he was flying the 395 Hwy towards Bishop, that he grew up climbing mountains in the Sierra Nevadas and obviously loved the region, the scenery is spectacular, and that he's flown gliders in that area many times and is likely quite familiar with the terrain. Of all the tips (after interviewing the Mammoth Lakes patrolman), the most intriguing to me was the cell-phone photo which was shown to a park ranger, discounted by him/her, and ultimately erased from the phone. So, with this information I put together my search swath: high elevation terrain, off the beaten path, well forested, and scenic. Those were my main criteria. The start point was Mt. Patterson, and the end point was just south of Mammoth Lakes. Although I didn't make my ultimate decision until I arrived in Bridgeport base camp, I decided that it made sense to start in the north and move south...methodically. That is why we didn't jump to Yosemite immediately. I do remember talking with Keith though, and him being excited about Amelia Earhart peak and Simmon's peak (which I quickly read as Simon's peak) and said this is fate...we have to go there! Guess we should have.

Following Fossett's discovery, many people told me that they were sorry that the team had been scooped or that someone else found him etc. Trust me, there is no need to be sorry. I am extremely happy that he has been found and that his family and friends have closure, and don't have to deal with speculation that he faked his death. That must have been a terrible ordeal for them. Ultimately, this search was not about my team, or anyone else's team finding him and basking in the glory. Of course it would have been satisfying if our efforts did payoff, or those of another team, but the goal here was to provide closure on a mystery involving a personal hero. That was it. I felt that my team had something to offer that was unique and positive, and that is what we set out to do. Search terrain that had not been searched due to its ruggedness and inaccessibility. In regards to Robert Hyman and Lew Toulmin's well organized search that ran in August/Sept, I can say that we worked together to share information and apply our research and resources to solving the mystery. Based on both team's searches, I think that many positive elements can be extracted and used for future search and rescue efforts to hopefully to save lives.

I'm sure I'll have a few final thoughts, but I'm very pleased that the wreckage has been found, and my hat goes off to Mr. Morrow who found the id cards and led to the resolution of this mystery. Well done. Rest in peace Steve.

**Aug 7, 2008 - 9:05 pm**

### Search Summary

Well, it's been several weeks since my team and I finished our search and I've had some time to reflect on the expedition. I've also had some time to think about the recent suggestions from the British insurance investigator that Steve Fossett faked his death, and is living abroad. Before I discuss my thoughts on the



## Adventure Science

search, I should just say now more than ever, after seeing the terrain with my own eyes, I believe that Steve Fossett did crash. He was a man of impeccable character by all accounts and I find it very difficult to believe that he would arrange his disappearance in this manner.

My feelings about the search are definitely mixed. I am very proud of my team for covering the terrain that we did with a high probability of detection. Our work has produced detailed data which I have and will provide to other teams/individuals interested in searching. The expedition also reaffirmed that there are still places near heavily populated areas that the outside world has forgotten about. This was clear to me as we found native artifacts, old and untouched mining structures and shafts, and travelled through terrain where the only trails were made by deer and bear. We were in a very isolated area and when we left our support vehicle each day were entirely self-reliant.

Many people have asked me since my return, “Will I continue to search”? The short answer is “yes”, although I do not know when I get back. I am continuing to collaborate with individuals that are interested in finding Steve and there is the potential to work together in the future. I am pleased with our search method though and would definitely look to employ the same techniques (with minor refinement) in the future as I believe it can produce excellent results.

The team has also completed the final phase of medical testing upon their return to Canada, and I will be posting the results of the study (which looked at daily energy requirements for each athlete) online in the next month or so. In addition, I will be posting a photo gallery with some of my favorite images taken during the expedition.

To conclude, I firmly believe that Steve Fossett’s plane wreckage will be discovered in the wilderness eventually and I encourage other searchers to get involved...it is a huge area to be covered. Just be safe and be prepared, because the search area is rugged and very dangerous. It is definitely not a place for the inexperienced.

**Jul 21, 2008 - 4:15 pm**

### **Day 6 and Search Summary**

Day 6 was spent on more of a reconnaissance hike through the Cottonwood Creek Canyon on the northern slope of Mt. Grant as we were following up on a lead from a top aircraft crash expert. The initial plan was to drive to a specific lat/long coordinate and search the slopes for several miles around that point. This idea was foiled though when we arrived to find the road gated. Instead we ended up trekking in and scanning the terrain as we went. The canyon is definitely an interesting area with mixtures of bare rocky and craggy slopes with moderately forested upper slopes in places. We also saw several large herds of mountain sheep and Greg Francek caught a deadly wasp (for his son’s insect collection. This day was the hottest by far, with the temperature reaching 42 degrees Celsius. Due to our time constraints, we did not travel far from the main road through the canyon, but did collect video footage of the area which may be of use for future search efforts.

By 3 pm on Saturday afternoon, our search had officially come to a close without locating Steve Fossett’s airplane. This was obviously disappointing for me, but the team and I knew that we were up against tough odds considering the expert searching that had preceded us. Ultimately we know that we were able to add new information to the search, and our effort can rule out specific areas from future searches.

Being on the ground though in this area, one gets a true sense of how vast and rugged it truly is, and why it is not unfathomable that an airplane flown by one of the greatest pilots of our time could not only crash, but vanish. In my opinion this is a mystery that will be solved by putting people on the ground. If enough back



## Adventure Science

country hikers, athletes, or hunters travel the more remote and difficult to reach areas I think that the wreck will be found.

Overall I am proud of what the team accomplished during the week, and although we did not find the wreck, we have thoroughly covered over 100 km<sup>2</sup>, and perhaps have provided inspiration for other adventure athletes with similar skills to offer to use these skills to help others through SAR or similar groups. The team learned much during the week and we were able to hone our searching skills and become very efficient by the end.

Will we return to continue searching? Possibly. None of us like to quit or lose so time will tell. We will share our search information with others though, and provide maps of the areas we searched so to avoid duplication for any future search efforts. Collaboration and cooperation are important to this overall process and we will ensure that it happens on our end.

Thank you for following the search expedition, and thank you to those who took time to write encouraging emails and to provide helpful information.

**Jul 18, 2008 - 7:48 pm**

### **Day 5 Summary**

Day 5 felt like the hottest day of them all. We recorded a mid-day temperature of 35 degrees Celcius, but the dryness of the air made us all drink litre upon litre of water. Today was also a very interesting day as it was the final day of the formal search, and we found the most debris yet today.

We all woke early as usual, but had to take a bit longer to depart because we downloaded all of our heart rate and elevation data from our Suunto watches. When I have a chance to view it all it will be really cool to compare heart rate to elevation for all of the athletes. It will also be very useful to Dr. Tarnopolsky and his team as they analyse our fitness data when we return.

We searched the Sonora Canyon today and surrounding area. This region is full of old mine shafts and ruined mining buildings. Consequently, there is lots of metal debris in the area, which kept us very busy while searching. We did not find any aircraft wreckage however.

Today was a challenging day too as the effort of the previous 4 days seemed to catch up with the team and we really had to work hard to keep the pace high. All members of the team are in good spirits, healthy, but busy tearing down camp in preparation for an early departure from the area.

We are planning to travel towards the Flying M ranch to get a sense of where Steve Fossett's last flight originated.

My thoughts on the week is that we covered an incredible amount of terrain and all of the team worked very hard and suffered extremes each day. Despite all of this, they were all ready to go early each morning and approached each day with enthusiasm and professionalism. I am very proud of this team and the effort that they have put into this.

### **Day 5**

#### **Search Base**



## Adventure Science

Local forecast: High 31C Sunny with light winds this afternoon. There will be no clouds to give the guys a break with the temperature today.

The teams deployed at 08:15.

With the input of some local knowledge the search will again be northeast of Bridgeport and expanding the area to cover two more canyons to the east of the primary grid. Simon was playing his head banger music this morning to get that extra motivation and drive for the search today. There was some thievery of leftover pizza this morning and the culprit left a note and a cucumber for the owner in the empty pizza box. All done in good humour and well received. The athletes were in high spirits as they left for the search area.

**Jul 17, 2008 - 8:02 pm**

### Day 4 Summary

Today was an interesting day. We finished off the northern edge of the terrain along Hwy 128. We basically travelled all the deep canyons and slopes along the edge, obviously focusing on the most wooded sections. It was very difficult travelling up steep and loose scree slopes, as well as through very dense alder thickets along the creek bed. Most of us got sliced and diced by the thornes in these creek beds, but nothing that would slow us down.

Today was probably the hottest day yet, and we could really feel the dry air as we burned through our water. Derek recorded 40 degrees celcius on his Suunto watch. Most of us finished over 4 litres during 8.5 hours of searching. The feet were definitely sore by the end of the day and Gary is winning the blister contest, with some big nasty ones to his credit.

We worked well as a team today and covered some great area. As with all previous days, we found interesting debris, although nothing as exciting as the airplane door that we found yesterday and reported to the county sheriff's office. Silver helium balloons seem to be a common item to find. We had a helicopter follow our search area earlier in the day and witnessed first hand some of the light aircraft that fly the 128 corridor, with some of the planes actually flying below us!

I am pleased about the difficult terrain that we have covered so far, but still hopeful that we will find the wreckage. The team is still focused and looking forward to another 2 days of searching.

The team went into Bridgeport tonight for a team dinner, which we all thoroughly enjoyed.

So we are down to the final days now and still motivated and ready to push ourselves despite the sore feet, cut legs, and general fatigue that catches up with you after 5 days of difficult trekking.

**Jul 17, 2008 - 7:32 am**

### DAY 4

#### Search Base

Local weather: high 30C sunny in the morning partly cloudy in the afternoon.

The teams deployed at 08:30



## Adventure Science

Today the search will be northeast of Bridgeport California. This will be a continuation of Tuesday's search. The athlete's spirits are high and they are ready to get out there and search.

**Jul 16, 2008 - 9:11 pm**

### Day 3 Summary

Day 3 took us above 10,000 ft and we spent most of the day between 9,000 – 10,500 ft. Overall, the weather was great. Morning was cold, but it definitely warmed through the day. We began our search near the old mining town of Belfort, at 10,200 ft and moved north from there. The goal was to search Ferris Canyon in detail, and scour the steep slopes and the alder-choked river bottom. Access to this region was difficult and required a careful traverse of some glacial terrain to the first vegetated area. The team divided to cover the canyon, and put 2 near the creek bed, and 2 on each slope.

After the punishment our feet took yesterday, today was a bit easier as there was not as much brutal side sloping, although the stinging nettles, and dense alders took their toll on most members of the team. The greatest danger in the canyon, as we found out was the loose scree, which caused every member to take at least one fall. There were no injuries beyond cuts and bruises.

Because of the steep and loose terrain, we covered less terrain than the previous two days, but today's area was very isolated and off the beaten track, which is exactly what we are after.

Overall, everyone is still in good spirits and hopeful that we will discover the wreckage. Feet are still in good shape for most of us, although Gary had some nasty blisters (they didn't slow him down though), so we will be able to maintain a fast pace tomorrow, as we head back to continue searching areas near Day 1 and Day 2 search locations.

**Jul 16, 2008 - 11:24 am**

### DAY 3 Update

#### Search Base

The teams have crested Wheeler Peak (11631 feet) and are proceeding to the first search area. Rover One reports heavy inter-team radio communications as they now see the area first hand and are deciding how to space the athletes. The athletes are in good shape and high spirits.

#### Video on Youtube

For anyone who wasn't able to view the video before, we have just added it to youtube. The format is more widely supported, and it should be easier to share with your friends online.

If you haven't seen it yet, you really shouldn't miss it! Check it out on the video page or on Youtube.

**Jul 16, 2008 - 8:56 am**

### DAY 3

#### Search Base



## Adventure Science

Today's forecast: High 28C partly cloudy with isolated showers and thunderstorms.

The teams deployed at 08:30 (later time due to 4X4 road to deployment area)

The search area today will be in the Mount Patterson area at an elevation of 10,500 feet. The teams will be working together so they can cover a larger area. Search base was a beehive of activity last night preparing for today's search. Extra food and water stores were taken and we added more inter-team communication equipment. Today will be a challenge for the athletes considering the altitude and terrain. The debriefing last night was extensive with the guys asking good questions and interacting amongst themselves.

The athletes are gelling into a very competent search and rescue team.

We just confirmed radio communications with Rover One, which will relay to the team. With a distance of over 25 km and being on the other side of the mountain range we did not know if search base would have radio contact.

**Jul 15, 2008 - 6:42 pm**

### Day 2 Summary

Day 2 was an interesting day. We began the day with very high hopes as we felt that the prospective search area had great potential. It was another early morning and 7 am departure with a longer drive into the search area, and a road run to access the entrance of the large ravine, Masonic Gulch. The ravine is a very deep north trending scar with a very densely forested stream bottom, which made for slow and painful going, as there were dense patches of thorny plants that we had to battle through. In addition to the thorns, the valley walls were extremely steep and cliffy, which compounded the difficulty of the search by forcing the team members to travel on this off-camber terrain. Several members developed some blisters today, but nothing that can't be treated tonight.

Following the Masonic Gulch, the team focused on an area near the Liberty Mine that was very thick with poplar trees. This area was around 7900 feet and was physically challenging.

The team has seen and found some interesting objects during the two days. Yesterday team members discovered a snow mobile windscreen well off the trail, but items like canteens, metal and pvc tubing, and a other scrap metal were found, so we're feeling very good about our coverage of the areas we search.

Animal sightings today included a black bear, and a close encounter with a rattle snake by Greg Marshall, who was thankfully not bitten. He also declined our requests for him to try and get a picture of it!

It was a hard day, and tomorrow the plan is to move to higher elevations on the flank of Mt. Patterson. This will no doubt be challenging terrain, but that is the goal here, so we're all looking forward to a change of scenery.

**Jul 15, 2008 - 2:22 pm**

### Day 2 update

#### Search Base

The teams have rendezvoused with Rover One (forward communication relay and support vehicle) to replenish their water supplies and eat the fantastic peanut butter wraps that Tyler made last night. We were



## Adventure Science

able to have cold drinks for them this time. The clouds are starting to come back and a breeze has kicked up, this should help with the heat. I just check the horizon to the south and there is no indication of the thunderstorms coming in. I have been following them via SPOT today and it looks like they are making good time taking the terrain into account

The athletes are in great shape and will continue for another 2.5 hours.

**Jul 15, 2008 - 8:20 am**

### Day 2

#### Search Base

Local weather forecast: High 28C, Partly cloudy with isolated showers and thunderstorms

Here are the teams for today:

Team Alpha: Jim, Gary and Paul. Team Bravo: Simon, Greg M. and Derek.

The teams deployed at 07:30.

During the morning leg of the search both teams will be working together. This afternoon the two Teams will split to cover both sides of a ridge. The search today will again be northeast of Bridgeport California. The search area will cover steep canyons with heavy vegetation and 20 to 30 foot Pinyon pine trees. All the athletes were in good spirits this morning and ready for another day of searching.

#### For the Media

We are setting up a contact email address [keith@adventurescience.ca](mailto:keith@adventurescience.ca)

Our email access is painfully slow, we will reply as quickly as possible.

### Day 1 Search Summary

Day 1 of the search has come and nearly gone. We awoke to a cool but clear morning, most of us rising by 545 AM. A hearty breakfast was followed by the team making final preparations to gear and food for the day before loading into the support vehicles and being shuttled to the first search area. Unfortunately our 6th member Greg Marshall was stranded in Denver due to a flight cancellation and only arrived in the afternoon. Paul Trebilcock's bags have still not arrived so he spent today in borrowed clothing. After a quick drive to the search area, we were ready to begin searching by 740 AM. After putting a nail through the side wall of one of our support vehicles though, the drive to the search start was a nervous one on the rocky 4x4 road.

Although no wreckage was found today, the day was one where we covered ~20 km and moved through some sizeable ravines and valleys with moderate to heavy tree cover. Overall the weather cooperated although water is in short supply, several of the team members went without water for nearly 2 hours prior to making it to our resupply location at 2 pm. Thankfully though, cloud cover and a light afternoon rain prevented any heat injuries or serious dehydration problem.

Search wrapped today at 530 pm with the team feeling strong but tired from the big effort today. Return to base camp was a good one as Keith and Tyler had created a pasta feast that we all enjoyed.





## Adventure Science

Following a debriefing of the day and a planning session for tomorrow, the team is currently enjoying some relaxation before going to bed in preparation for another early day tomorrow.

Thank you to all who have emailed support, we all appreciate it. We pumped and ready to go hard again tomorrow. Hopefully we have another good weather day!

**Jul 14, 2008 - 10:40 am**

**Day 1**

### **Search Base**

Team Bravo has completed the first leg of their search area and rendezvoused with Rover One (forward communication relay and support vehicle) at 11:00 local time. Team Alpha reports rough terrain, all searchers in good shape and continuing to search their assigned area.

**Jul 14, 2008 - 7:52 am**

**Day 1**

### **Search Base**

The teams were deployed at 07:30 local time. Today's search area is northeast of Bridgeport California. The local forecast for today is a high of 29C with a 20% chance of rain.

**Jul 13, 2008 - 3:22 pm**

Scouting completed for day.

With the team mostly assembled (still 2 members arriving this evening), we headed out into the Sweetwater range to scout areas identified as having potential. Very rugged terrain for most of it, the team did some mountain running to stretch the legs a bit and get used to the terrain prior to starting tomorrow...altitude was up to 3000 m.

Weather was good, nice breeze kept the heat down. 10 min of rain was also a bonus.

Team is very excited about beginning. We have also received many positive emails wishing us luck...thank you for your good karma...they team appreciates it greatly.

This will be challenging, but the athletes are ready.