

Plane carrying 3 Canadians missing in Antarctica

January 24 2013, by Nick Perry

Bad weather has forced rescuers to wait until Friday to try to reach a small plane believed to have crashed in an Antarctic mountain range while carrying three Canadians between scientific research stations on the continent.

The plane was flying from a U.S. station near the South Pole to an Italian research base in Terra Nova Bay. Its emergency locator started transmitting about 10 p.m. Wednesday in the Queen Alexandra mountain range about 450 kilometers (280 miles) north of the pole, halfway to its intended destination. Authorities presume it crashed.

The locator continued to transmit Thursday and rescue crews spent some five hours circling above the site in a DC3 plane. However, heavy cloud and hurricane-force winds prevented rescuers from seeing the plane or attempting a helicopter landing.

The Calgary Sun newspaper identified the pilot as Bob Heath from the Northwest Territories, an experienced pilot in both the Antarctic and Arctic. The pilot's wife, Lucy Heath, told the newspaper that she'd been called by airline officials and told "Bob's plane was down, and they were trying to reach it." She said she was just waiting for more news: "I'm so worried."

On the online networking site LinkedIn, Heath writes that he typically spends this time of year coaching and mentoring other pilots to upgrade their skills in polar regions.

Authorities from New Zealand, Canada, the U.S. and Italy will try again Friday to find the propeller-driven de Havilland Twin Otter plane. It was carrying survival equipment including tents and food, according to New Zealand Search and Rescue Mission Coordinator John Ashby.

"[Weather conditions](#) are extremely challenging," Ashby said in a statement Thursday.

He said winds had reached 90 knots (104 miles per hour) and heavy snow was predicted. Several planes and helicopters were standing by in Antarctica, waiting until conditions improved so they could travel to the site.

Ashby said similarly [bad weather](#) is predicted through Friday morning but that rescue teams will be ready to leave at short notice if there is any break in the conditions. He said the DC3 has returned to base for the night.

The missing plane is owned and operated by Kenn Borek Air Ltd., a Canadian firm based in Calgary that charters aircraft to the U.S. Antarctic program. In a release, the National Science Foundation said the [plane](#) was flying in support of the Italian Antarctic program.

Antarctica has no permanent residents, but several thousand people live there in the Southern Hemisphere summer as a number of countries send scientists and other staff to research stations. The U.S. runs the largest program, with about 850 staff at its McMurdo Station and another 200 at its Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station, where the Canadians' flight originated.

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