

MH370 wreckage hunter won't give up until mystery solved

September 24 2016, by Rod McGuirk



In this Sept. 12, 2016 photo, Blaine Gibson speaks to the media during an interview about his on-going quest to find the missing Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 in Canberra, Australia. Gibson is the first person searching for the plane who's actually found any trace of it and says he won't quit gathering clues until the mystery is solved. (AP Photo/Rod McGuirk)

The fedora, the bomber jacket and the consuming quest invite

comparisons to Indiana Jones. Blaine Gibson, though, hasn't matched the film hero's triumph in finding the legendary chest containing the stone tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments.

Not that he didn't try. "The Ark of the Covenant, I did not find it. However, I do believe that it's in Ethiopia somewhere," Gibson told AP recently.

The amateur sleuth has had far greater success finding clues from a modern mystery: the disappearance of Malaysia Airlines Flight 370.

He is the first person searching for the plane who's actually found any trace of it and says he won't quit gathering clues until the mystery is solved.

"Travel is what I do, but I always love travel with a purpose, and solving the mystery of Malaysia 370 is a purpose ... until I or someone else finds out what happened to the plane and those on board," he said while in the Australian capital of Canberra to visit the headquarters for the official plane search.

The Boeing 777 carrying 227 passengers and 12 crew members is thought to have plunged into the southern Indian Ocean after inexplicably flying far off course during a flight from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, to Beijing, on March 8, 2014.

The first reports that Gibson had found a possible part of the plane met with skepticism. Other pieces of suspected [debris](#) have been stumbled upon by chance. But how could one private citizen succeed in finding a piece of the plane where a multi-government, multimillion-dollar search had failed? Answer: There is no official search being conducted, beyond that of the 120,000 square kilometers (46,000 square miles) of seabed southwest of Australia calculated to be the crash site.



This Sept. 16, 2016 photo provided by Blaine Gibson shows him holding a piece of aircraft debris on a beach in Madagascar. Gibson is the first person searching for the plane who's actually found any trace of it and says he won't quit gathering clues until the mystery is solved. (Blaine Gibson via AP)

But the triangular panel stenciled "no step" that Gibson found on Feb. 27 has been confirmed as almost certainly a horizontal stabilizer from a Flight 370 wing.

Gibson said he found himself in Mozambique partly because oceanographers had told him that debris might wash up on its beaches and partly because he had never visited the country. (The 58-year-old born in California has been to 177 countries in a quest to visit them all).

Getting to know relatives of the missing has ended any chance of him conceding defeat in his search.

"It was good management, but it was also a lot of luck," Gibson said. "What you don't see before that were the number of beaches that I combed in Reunion, in Mauritius in other parts of the world and found nothing."

Gibson has since recovered another 13 pieces of potential debris in Madagascar, with the help of locals he has befriended who now search for him. He and victims' relatives have been frustrated by Malaysia's hesitance to collect the debris and potential personal effects and analyze them for clues.

Gibson hand-delivered five pieces of debris on Sept. 12 when he and relatives of Flight 370 victims met in Canberra with officials of the Australian Transport Safety Bureau, which is conducting the deep-sea sonar search on Malaysia's behalf.

Warren Truss, a former deputy prime minister who oversaw the search until retiring from politics in February, expects more of Gibson's finds will be confirmed. "He has certainly made a constructive contribution to the search," said Truss.



This Sept. 17, 2016 photo provided by Blaine Gibson shows him holding a piece of aircraft debris on a beach in Madagascar. Gibson is the first person searching for the plane who's actually found any trace of it and says he won't quit gathering clues until the mystery is solved. (Blaine Gibson via AP)

Australian oceanographer David Griffin, one of two Gibson credits with pointing him the right direction, found the American to be frustrated that search responsibilities fell between cracks of coordinating agencies.

"He sees that one man can just go and get on with the job. I think it's terrific that somebody who has the ability and resources to do that just gets on with it," Griffin said.

Gibson has also been a volunteer archaeologist in Belize and Guatemala investigating the fate of the Mayan civilization. His old friend Peter Davenport said he was not surprised that the adventurer would immerse

himself so completely in the aviation mystery.

Davenport, who is director of the National UFO Reporting Center based in Washington state, said he once got Gibson interested in the Tunguska event: a large explosion near the Stony Tunguska River in Siberia that flattened a vast area of forest in 1908.

"Next thing I know, he's there trying to befriend people who knew something about it and trying to get to the heart of the mystery, which is still a mystery in my opinion. It was not a meteor, clearly," Davenport said.

(Gibson concludes the explosion was caused by a meteor that vaporized in the atmosphere).

Davenport said his friend of more than two decades had the capability to solve mysteries as well as the desire.



In this Sept. 12, 2016 photo, Blaine Gibson speaks to the media during an interview about his ongoing quest to find the missing Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 in Canberra, Australia. Gibson is the first person searching for the plane who's actually found any trace of it and says he won't quit gathering clues until the mystery is solved. (AP Photo/Rod McGuirk)

"He is very engaging, he gets along with people very well, he's non-confrontational, I would say, and these are all qualities that I think evoke in people a desire to work with him and to help him," Davenport said.

Gibson said he has always worked to fund travel and selling his deceased parents' home in Carmel, California, for more than \$1 million in 2014 will keep him in the hunt for Flight 370.

But he and victims' families wish governments would coordinate efforts to collect debris washing up on the western shores of the Indian Ocean. Studying the debris could explain the crash and drift modeling could better indicate where the main wreckage lies.

The underwater search is due to end around December if it finds nothing or fresh clues fail to pinpoint a crash site.

Gibson is not sure where he will search next, but the Seychelles and Comoros Islands are options unexplored.

He did not have a preferred theory of what happened, and warned against the public accepting a popular theory that Captain Zaharie Ahmad Shah stole the plane.

"People jump to that conclusion simply because there's no other explanation, it's easy to pin it on the pilot who is not around to defend himself, write the mystery off and the search off forever: that is not acceptable," he said.

He said the missing plane was a world problem that more nations needed to work to solve. "We need to know that if we get on a plane, we're not just going to disappear," he added.

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