

Mt. Charleston Hike, June 22, 1996

Preliminary information, subject to change. See web site for final info: <http://www.ufomind.com/area51>

On June 22, 1996, we'll be hiking Mt. Charleston near Las Vegas in search of an aircraft crash site. Anyone is welcome to come, but the hike is expected to be **strenuous** and is only appropriate for accomplished hikers. You must contact us if you plan to join this hike.

Just before noon, on November 17, 1955, a C-54 transport slammed into the snowy side of Mt. Charleston, north of Las Vegas, killing all 14 aboard. Now, some 41 years later, we're going to see if we can find the site of this tragedy. "Why?", you may ask.

The answer is Area 51, of course. For this wasn't just any transport, it was headed to Groom Lake (or Watertown Strip as it was also known in those days). And the personnel aboard weren't just random military personnel. They were a mixture of military staffers and civilian subcontractors, engineers and technicians, enroute from Burbank (location of Lockheed's Skunkworks), to work on the secret U-2 program at Groom Lake. The first U-2 test flight had taken place only three months earlier. The crash was front page news for several days in the Las Vegas papers (and the LA Times), and sparked much speculation about this "secret" flight. There were a lot of conflicting reports as to just who the craft belonged to, and where it was headed. Today we know.

The crash site is located at the 11,500' level, at the very top of a ridge, just a short distance south of Charleston Peak. They almost made it over. The hiking trail to the peak passes within a few hundred yards of the crash site, which should make access relatively easy.

This hike, although on a trail, will be very difficult due to the length and elevation gain involved. The trailhead is near the end of Highway 157 in Kyle Canyon at an elevation of about 7,600'. With the crash site at 11,500', a 3,800' climb will be required (As a point of reference, the Tikaboo hike is less than 1,000'). Distance to the crash site along the trail will be approximately 6.5 miles. This is NOT a trip for an inexperienced hiker.

Be aware that this hike is one of exploration. We have not been here before and don't know what to expect. We don't know exactly where the crash site is, although we have some news photos that show the location pretty well. It's possible we may not find it. We do not know how much debris will remain, but there should be enough to locate the site.

For anyone wanting to continue to the peak, it should be about another 1/2 mile and another 400' of climb. Charleston Peak has an elevation of 11,918'.

It will be a long trip. Estimated time to the site is about 4 hours. Allowing for about an hour at the site, and another 2-3 hours down, the total time should be no less than 7-8 hours. Enough food and water must be brought to accommodate this period. Water is particularly important, as there are no sources along the route and it will be very dry at that altitude.

Weather is another concern. At this elevation, anything can happen. It can be calm and warm, and then an hour later be hailing. You must be prepared for all weather contingencies, especially cold and rain.

Finally, consider the altitude involved. At this height some individuals will likely experience symptoms of mild altitude sickness: Headache, nausea and disorientation.

Doesn't it sound like a fun trip with all those nasty disclaimers??

To reach the trailhead, take Highway 95 north, about 16 miles from its intersection with I-15 in Las Vegas. Turn west on Highway 157, Kyle Canyon Road. The road climbs high into the mountains, and the community of Mt. Charleston is reached. About 19 miles from Highway 95, near the end of 157, turn left onto State Route 39 and proceed to its end. Keep an eye out for the trailhead parking area. The trail we will be using is the Charleston Peak Trail, South Loop trail.

There is another trail that goes to Mt. Charleston called the North Loop trail. Do NOT mistakenly take the North Loop trail! It will also go to the crash site, but it is longer and you'll have to go over the peak to get to the site. The trailhead for the North Loop trail is on the opposite side of Kyle Canyon from the South Loop trail.

For anyone interested in acquiring maps of the area showing the trail, the USGS 7-1/2 minute maps are Charleston Peak and also Griffith Peak. The Toiyabe National Forest also has a map showing the trail, although in less detail than the USGS quad. It's the "Las Vegas Ranger District" map.

For further info, contact tmahood@netcom.com

Area51 Research Center