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New UK Peak District Aircrash Mystery

From: **David Clarke** <David.Clarke@rim.co.uk>
 Date: Wed, 14 Jul 1999 13:53:04 +0100
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 Subject: New UK Peak District Aircrash Mystery

Post redirected from
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A FRESH "mystery aircrash" scenario unfolded today as police and search and rescue teams scoured the Peak District Moors after reports of a plane disaster.

Two helicopters, more than one hundred Mountain Rescue Team staff, police and dog teams spent more than six hours searching moors after two people reported hearing a plane in trouble on Tuesday (July 13, 1999).

One of the witnesses - an airline pilot - reported hearing what he thought was a light aircraft in difficulties and another heard an bang like an explosion in the air at 5pm.

They said the mystery aircraft appeared to be travelling from Chapel across the High Peaks eastwards towards Mam Tor mountain and the Hope Valley during heavy cloud.

Search and rescue teams from Edale, Buxton and Kinder searched the 2,000 foot ridge of Mam Tor and Hollins Cross in driving rain with sniffer dogs in the early hours.

Checks were carried out with glider clubs in the area, and with Manchester airport which reported no planes missing or distress calls received. The search was called off in the early hours of Wednesday morning after more than 25 square miles of moor had been searched without finding any trace of the aircraft.

Today police and Mountain Rescue leaders added the mystery to their growing file of mystery aircrash reports from the same region of the Peak District. At one stage during the search Manchester Airport alerted the RAF's Distress and Diversion Cell at West Drayton Command Centre who used their sophisticated equipment to search for radio signals.

Air Traffic Controllers at Manchester said they had not received any distress calls or picked up anything unusual on radar.

But a senior ATC admitted the reports came from a region within a short distance of the approach to Ringway's terminal 214 above Whaley Bridge. A spokesman said the radar tapes for the period had been retained and a decision was to be taken whether to reconstruct the incident on radar.

"We received a report from Derbyshire police that a member of the public had reported an aircraft accident and we passed details to the RAF West Drayton," he said.

"The Distress and Diversion Cell have a number of facilities

available to them including the ability to locate missing aircraft and are the body responsible for following up reports of this kind."

But Peak District Mountain Rescue Team Leader Mike France - who co-ordinated the search operation - revealed the Hope Valley region lay on a radar "blackspot" for Manchester.

He said: "We received several reports via the police describing an aircraft in difficulties and we had to take it seriously because these were independent witnesses.

"If there had have been a light plane downed on the moors we could have had been two and 20 casualties so we brought in more than one hundred volunteers to search.

"At one stage we had both the Derbyshire and South Yorkshire Police helicopters airborne but the weather was so bad most of the search had to be done from the ground.

"The search went on for more than six hours but we found nothing and there were no reports of missing aircraft.

"We remain on standby to go out again if any other evidence comes to hand, for example if a private pilot comes forward and says it was his plane."

A spokesman for Buxton Police said the report was just the latest of a series of sightings of phantom planes from the Hope Valley-Derwent Dams area.

"We receive three or four of these kinds of sightings every year, including sightings of a phantom bomber in the Derwent Dams area.

"We have to respond to each one individually and on its own merits. Usually if it is a light plane which has crashed it can be located relatively quickly.

"But in this case we have carried out a fairly comprehensive search and are fairly satisfied that nothing has crashed.

"The witnesses were sincere in their reports but we have drawn a blank. "It could have been anything, including a light plane whose engine misfired, or a bang caused by a thunderclap or an explosion in a quarry as the weather conditions were right for that last night."

A Manchester Airport spokesman said: "Pilots of light civil aircraft do not have to file a flight plan if on and individual flight in unrestricted airspace.

"There are many private airstrips in use and there is nothing to stop a pilot taking off and landing without informing air traffic control.

"Unless they enter controlled airspace they would not need to notify us and it is quite possible this explains what has happened."

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