

Plane that flew over the Grand Canyon is still missing

March 23, 2011 By [Maria DiCosola](#) [Leave a Comment](#)

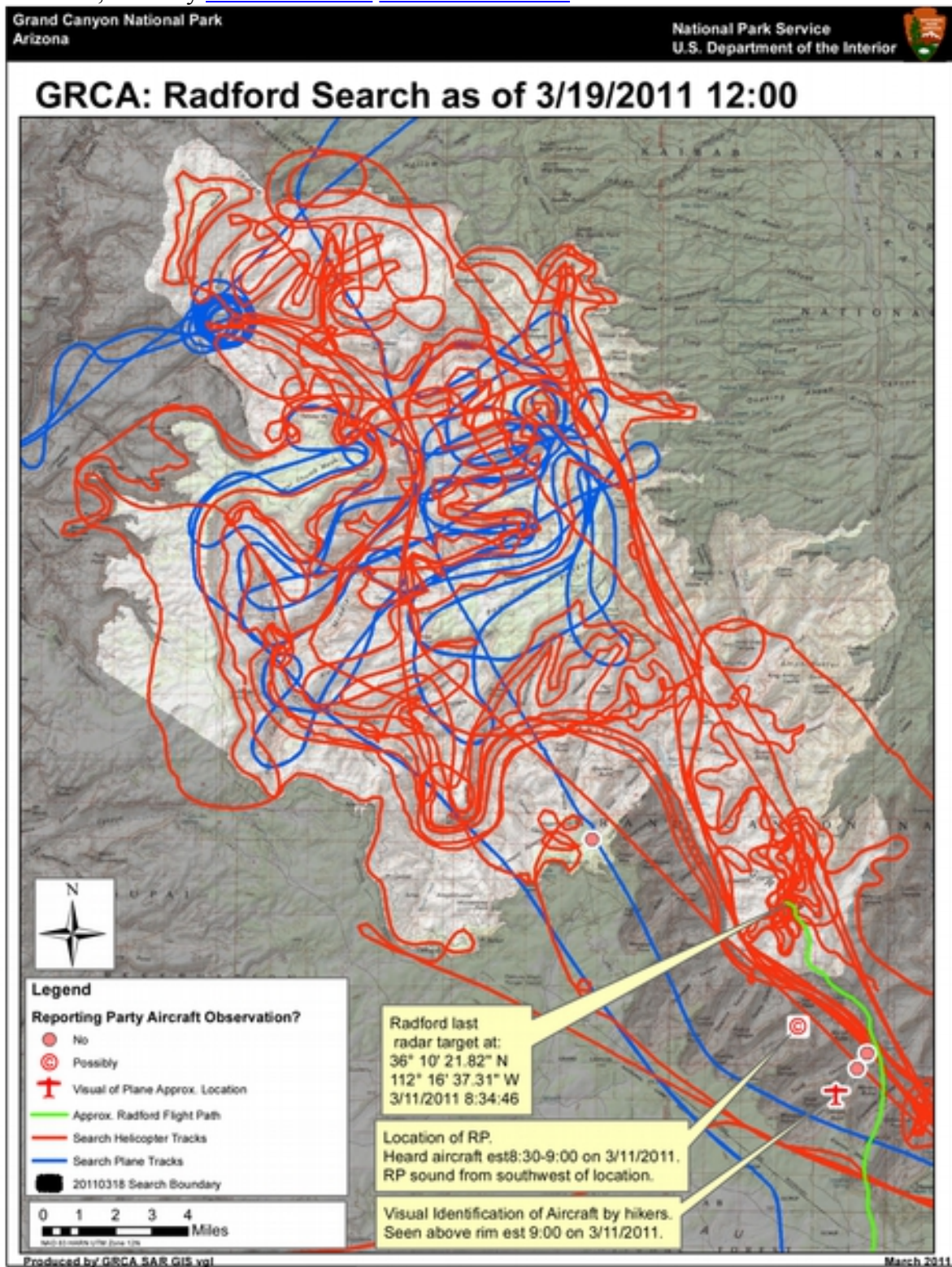


Photo courtesy of: Grand Canyon National Park

There is still no sign of a missing man who disappeared over the Grand Canyon National Park in his self-constructed plane on March 14.

According to a National Park Service (NPS) press release, the Coconino County Sheriff's Department (CCSD) determined that Joseph Radford, 47, of Glendale took off in his RV6 Kit Built, cherry red airplane from Grand Canyon Airport on March 11.

Now, over a week after Radford's disappearance, the NPS continues to search the area in which they believe he went missing — the northwest side of the park. However, Shannan Marcak, public affairs specialist for Grand Canyon National Park, said hazardous weather conditions brought the search to a temporary halt over the weekend.

"Weather for the last 36 hours hasn't been extremely cooperative for aerial search operations," Marcak said.

After a week of no results, the park is now focusing on finding people who either saw or heard anything that may allow them to alter their search area. Marcak said they have been trying to contact backpackers and river trip groups who may have been in the area at the approximate time Radford's plane went missing. According to a press release, multiple hikers have confirmed there was a plane flying in the general area and time where the emergency locator transmitter pinpointed the plane. One hiker even mentioned seeing a red plane — the color of Radford's aircraft. While NPS has been able to talk to a few hikers, Marcak said most of the people they are interested in contacting are just now getting out of the canyon.

"The focus of investigation is critically important to us right now because we need to figure out if there is anywhere else we can — or should — be looking that we don't know about," Marcak said.

It took several days for the police and the NPS to associate Radford's disappearance with the vanishing plane.

While it has been confirmed Radford was seen with his plane at Grand Canyon Airport the morning of March 11, no one thought anything of it at the time.

On March 13, a pilot detected an activated emergency locator transmitter — a tracking system that follows aircrafts, boats and people in distress through an international satellite system. But still, the missing plane was not linked to Radford because he was not reported missing until the following day when CCSD received a missing person report for him and notified NPS of the claim.

Once the connections were made, a more extensive search immediately started.

NPS sent planes and helicopters to search high and low over the northwest side of the park, touching base with various areas including the Scorpion, Fossil and Dragon Corridors, as well as Scorpion Ridge, with no success.

NPS is continuing to search for the missing plane as weather abides.

[Rafters discover aircraft wreckage, bones in Grand Canyon](#)

By Associated Press

May 27, 2015 | 9:34am

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. — A group of river rafters in search of old mining equipment on a hike at the Grand Canyon came across something unexpected during a recent trip: the wreckage of a small aircraft with bones scattered nearby.

John Weisheit was with several people who discovered the wreckage earlier this month as they ventured from a seldom-used campsite off the Colorado River. A technical team reached the site, about 30 miles northwest of Grand Canyon Village, over the weekend and removed the reddish aircraft that stuck between two boulders and naturally concealed.

“It was so smashed, so compressed that it was really hard to find an actual skeleton, but then we did notice vertebrae in the cockpit,” Weisheit told The Associated Press on Tuesday.

The size and color of the aircraft match one that missing at the park in 2011, Grand Canyon National Park spokeswoman Emily Davis said.

That cherry red RV-6 homebuilt plane was piloted by Joseph Radford of Glendale. Helicopters flew 2,000 air miles in a 600 square-mile area looking for Radford and his plane after an emergency locator signal was detected at the park but never found any visual signs of a crash site. The Civil Air Patrol helped search, and the National Park Service asked hikers and river runners to be on the lookout.

Davis said the park is awaiting word from the Coconino County Medical Examiner’s Office on exact identification of the remains but that could take several months. The National Transportation Safety Board will investigate the cause of the crash.

The NTSB listed the cause of Radford's crash as undetermined in a late 2011 report that indicated he likely crashed intentionally. The report, based on interviews with the Glendale Police Department and Radford's family and friends, said he had an argument with his wife the morning of March 11, 2011 and later told a girlfriend that he had a plan to kill himself. Radford turned off his radio signal about a minute after taking off from the airport in Tusayan, the report said.

A few days after his plane was reported missing, the girlfriend received a package with a letter that referred to Radford in the past tense, the NTSB said.

Tens of thousands of people each year float by Emerald Camp where Weisheit and his group stayed the night on May 8, knowing a more popular site downriver was full. Weisheit said he was curious to find out if there was any equipment in the area from old mines so he proposed a difficult loop hike up large boulders and openings in the cliff. Someone else in the group spotted the wreckage and called the others over.

Weisheit said the engine block and cockpit were smashed in a huge heap of metal, and the tail and fuselage were scattered in about a hundred pieces. The motor was largely intact, he said.

"It was obvious he wasn't trying to do a safe landing," he said. "Whatever it was, it either was deliberate or he ran out of gas and lost control."

The group spent about a half-hour looking over the site, finding work gloves and an aluminum clipboard that it then stashed under a rock to keep it dry in the rain, Weisheit said. Four days later, the group stopped a National Park Service group on a research trip on the river and told of the discovery.

"It was really sad," Weisheit said. "We were compelled to think about the family and we thought it would be in their best interest to know the wreckage was found and maybe it could provide some closure."



Photo of the Radford plane, N650RV

Lew Toulmin and the Missing Aircraft Search Team worked extensively on the Radford case, undertaking interviews and reviewing evidence, in close cooperation with Federal and county authorities. As in many such cases, the plane wreckage was very hard to see from the air or even close up, was in a line from the last recorded radar hit, and was found by chance by a hiker.