

# MH370: Seabed images to support inch-by-inch plane search

September 27 2014, by Nancy Owano



## Chronology of last known minutes of flight MH370

While a team of experts' main goal is to locate the missing Malaysian Airlines Flight MH370 that disappeared in March, their search has turned up seabed details that reveal extinct volcanoes and 1,400-meter depressions for the first time, said Richard Westcott, BBC Transport Correspondent, on Friday.

"Until now there were better maps of Mars than of this bit of the sea floor," he commented. The [search](#) involves the bottom of the southern Indian Ocean. A series of brief electronic "hellos" between the plane and a satellite led them to stake out this area as a priority site. The next phase of the hunt calls for two or three deep-sea vehicles to be deployed for an inch-by-inch seabed search, said the report. "The deep sea search vehicles have sonar that can pick out odd lumps, cameras that can double

check if that lump is wreckage or just a rock and an electronic nose that can smell aviation fuel in the water, even if it is heavily diluted," said Westcott.

The lead in this hunt for the missing plane is the Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB), Australia's national transport safety investigator. The challenge is apparent in the fact that the "hellos" do not provide an exact location, explained Westcott, just a rough idea. The priority area, he said, is an area roughly the size of Croatia. The ATSB, in its updated release last month in response to the question, How long will the current underwater search take, said it is expected that the underwater search of a defined 60,000 square kilometer zone will take up to 12 months to complete, although weather conditions could affect that duration.

"At the request of the Malaysian Government, Australia is leading the search for missing Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370. All the available data indicates the aircraft entered the sea close to a long but narrow arc of the southern Indian Ocean." said the ATSB. Notably, the ATSB's search involves seabed mapping and underwater search. Geoscience Australia is providing its expertise and support to the bureau. To that end, a bathymetric survey was initiated—bathymetric referring to bathymetry, the study and mapping of sea floor topography. With few marine surveys ever taken in the area, the survey goal was to deliver a map that charts contours, depths and hardness of the ocean floor. Previously, coarse maps of the sea floor in this area were from satellites indicating only ocean depth but not a detailed shape of the [sea floor](#) supporting safer navigation. Making sonar maps is vital, said the BBC, to ensure the team does not crash its deep-water vehicles into ridges and volcanoes.

**More information:** [www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-29378953](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-29378953)

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