

Ocean Infinity's Search for MH370 Ends



Ocean Infinity, a technology company specialising in collecting high-resolution seabed data, has announced that its current search for the wreckage of Malaysian Airlines Flight MH370 is shortly coming to an end. The aircraft disappeared en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing on 8 March 2014 with 239 people on board.

In January of this year, the Malaysian government agreed to pay Ocean Infinity as much as US\$70 million, provided that the company would solve what has become modern aviation's biggest mystery. During the course of its operation, Ocean Infinity searched and collected high-quality data from over 112,000 square kilometres of seabed in the southern Indian Ocean, overcoming both challenging conditions and terrain with its deep-sea survey vessel *Seabed Constructor*. The total area covered, in a little over three months of operational days, is far in excess of the initial 25,000 square kilometre target and almost the same area as the previous search achieved in 2.5 years. Unfortunately, the search has been without success.

Autonomous Underwater Vehicles

During the search, Ocean Infinity used eight autonomous underwater vehicles (AUVs) capable of operating in water depths from 5 metres to 6,000 metres. The AUVs were not tethered to the offshore vessel during operations. The ability to operate untethered, independent missions allowed the AUVs to go deeper and collect higher-quality data, which made this technology ideal for the search. The AUVs were equipped with a multitude of advanced subsea surveying technology, such as sidescan sonar, multibeam echosounders, sub-bottom profilers, HD cameras, conductivity/temperature/depth sensors, self-compensating magnetometers, synthetic aperture sonar and a turbidity sensor.



Area where Ocean Infinity surveyed the southern Indian Ocean (Courtesy: CGTN, Source ATSB)

Most efficient large subsea search

Oliver Plunkett, Ocean Infinity's CEO, stated: "I would firstly like to extend the thoughts of everyone at Ocean Infinity to the families of those who have lost loved ones on MH370. Part of our motivation for renewing the search was to try to provide some answers to those affected. It is therefore with a heavy heart that we end our current search without having achieved that aim. We are most grateful to the Government of Malaysia for entertaining our offer and affording us the opportunity to recommence the search. The commitment that the new government in Malaysia has made to prioritising finding MH370 was very good to hear. We want to thank the team onboard *Seabed Constructor* who have worked tirelessly and all the many companies, organisations and individuals whose support, guidance and advice were invaluable. The staff at the ATSB whose dedication to finding the plane has been unwavering deserve our particular gratitude. Whilst clearly the outcome so far is extremely disappointing, as a company we are truly proud of what we have achieved both in terms of the quality of data we've produced and the speed with which we covered such a vast area. There simply has not been a subsea search on this scale carried out as efficiently or as effectively ever before. We sincerely hope that we will be able to again offer our services in the search for MH370 in future."

In July 2015, a large piece of debris washed ashore on Reunion, an island east of Madagascar in the Indian Ocean, but information about the plane's last hours is still scarce. As a result, experts are struggling to arrive at a definitive conclusion. Did MH370 remain under the pilot's command, or did it crash out of control into the sea?

The decision to engage Ocean Infinity came after Australia, China and Malaysia ended a fruitless US\$160 million search across a 120,000-square-kilometre area in the Indian Ocean last year. Ocean Infinity's endeavours are now coming to a close, and Malaysia's government says it has no plans to begin any new searches.



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