

Aircraft Crash Sites in the Sandia Mountains

A Presentation By Sam Beard
To Friends of the Sandia Mountains

August 3, 2021

Information and photographs from David Holmes,
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Pauline Ho, Rich Buss, Bob Lowder, and Tom Hoehn

Crash Sites in Sandia Mountains

Map by Cliff Giles



Piper Cub High Wing Monoplane



Small Plane

- Crash date unknown
- Lower Bear Canyon in foothills
- Elevation 6930 feet
- Found by Dan Benton and Sam Beard on their hike to the A-17 crash site in upper Bear Canyon
- Only tubular steel cabin frame at site
- May have been Piper Cub-type aircraft

Cabin Frame of Small Plane in Lower Bear Canyon



The frame is welded steel tubes.



Taylor Cub



Taylor Cub

- Crashed on July 18, 1937
- East Mesa 200 yards north of US-66
- On W side of mountain near foothills
- Two young student pilots were killed.
- Location of site is unknown.

Northrop A-17 Nomad



Northrop A-17 Nomad

- U. S. Army Air Corps
- Crashed on Nov. 17, 1941
- Upper Bear Canyon on W side of mtn.
- Elevation 7750 feet
- Two fatalities
- Much of plane is still there.
- Engine in creek 100-200 feet N of plane

A-17 Engine in Creek



A-17 Wing with Air Brake Panel with Holes



A-17 Parts



Memorial Medallion on Tree at Site



Douglas C-47 (C-117A) Skytrooper



Douglas C-47 (C-117A) Skytrooper

- Nov. 16, 1944
- Near Osha Spring Trail at N end of mountain
- S of Placitas and W of NM-165
- Elevation 8105 feet
- Wichita, Kan. to Los Angeles with airplane parts
- 15 passengers; 5 survived; 2 walked to Placitas 3 days after crash.
- Small pile of debris. 1 engine 250 ft down mtn.
- Parts were salvaged in WWII

One Engine is 250 feet downhill from debris pile. Other engine is missing.



JRF-5 Grumman Goose (G21) Seaplane



JRF-5 Grumman Goose (G21) Seaplane

- U. S. Navy
- Crashed on July 7, 1952
- S of Cienega Canyon Tr. on E side of mtn
- Elevation 8780 feet
- Five fatalities
- Most of plane is still at site.
- One engine has been removed.
- Note large white star on side of fuselage.

Parts of Goose Painted Yellow so That Future Searchers Would Recognize It As Old Crash



Additional Goose Parts



More Parts at Site. Note Large White Star on Piece of Fuselage Side



Nose of Plane with Cleat Used to Tie Plane to Dock



Martin 404 2-Engine Passenger Plane



Air-Britain Photographic Images Collection

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TWA Flight 260 Martin 404 Passenger Plane

- Crashed on Feb. 19, 1955
- TWA Canyon below Kiwanis Cabin
- Elevation 8550 feet
- Tramway cables pass over the crash site.
- 16 fatalities – Crew and passengers
- Compass error caused pilot to fly too far E of flight path over Rio Grande Valley

One of the Martin 404 Engines



Propeller and Hub



Number on the Plane Exterior



When Tram was built, parts were moved under cliffs so tram customers would not be disturbed by debris



Now, Tram operators point out debris so that passengers can see it, if someone requests it.



Medallion on Tree at TWA Crash Site



Piper PA23 Aztec



Piper PA23 Aztec

- Crashed on Dec. 2, 1961
- Just N of South Peak 60 ft W of S Crest Tr
- Elevation 9570 feet
- 4 fatalities. Pilots from CA flying to Tulsa, OK, for advanced flying lessons.
- Flying 10-mile wide airway through Tijeras Canyon at 9500 feet. Plane off course to N and hit near S Peak at 9570 feet.

Douglas C-47 (C-117A) Skytrooper



Douglas C-47 (C-117A) Skytrooper

- Crashed on April 26, 1963.
- Elevation 6083 feet
- Diamond Tail Ranch. Near NE corner of Sandia Ranger Dist., 3.1 mi. fm NM-165, 2.8 mi. N of La Madera Fire Station
- 9 Fatalities. Right wing separated in bad weather.
- Denver to LA. USAF proficiency flight.
- Parts were salvaged, and area bulldozed.

Piper PA24 Comanche



Piper PA24 Comanche

- Crashed on July 12, 1964
- 0.4 mile N of CCC Trail near S end of mtn
- Elevation 8280 feet
- Four fatalities
- Adverse weather conditions
- Most of plane is still at site

PA24 Debris at Site



Larger Pieces of PA24



USAF Martin RB-57F Canberra



Martin RB-57F Canberra

- U. S. Air Force
- Crashed on Nov. 7, 1966
- 500 ft S of 10,400-ft sign on Crest Highway.
- Elevation 10,420 feet
- Two fatalities
- Controller radioed “Clear of Crest.” Pilot thought that meant past the Crest and started descending. Impact at about 10,420 ft. Crest top is 10,678 ft.
- Only very small pieces of plane at site in one-half acre clearing due to forest fire started at impact.

Cessna 210



Cessna 210

- Crashed on Feb. 7, 1967
- Cliffs E of Three Gun Trail at S end of mtn
- Elevation 8320 feet
- Two fatalities
- Two men flying body of woman to Oklahoma for burial
- Very little debris at site

Piper PA-23



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Piper PA-23

- Crashed on Feb. 26, 1975
- High on W mountainside S of Pino Canyon
- Two fatalities
- Student pilot practicing instrument flying with instructor. Tried to turn away from mtn before impact.
- As part of mtn rescue org., I was first one at site.
- Bodies taken out down Cienega Can. Trail the next day.
- Only very small pieces of plane remain at site.

Debris at Piper PA-23 crash site



Mooney M20E



Mooney M20E

- Crashed on Aug. 11, 1977
- 0.6 mile WNW of Tree Spring Trailhead
- Elevation 9065 feet
- Two fatalities
- Very little debris at site

Debris at Crash Site



Cessna 172M Skyhawk



Cessna 172M

- Crashed on Aug. 6, 1989
- Flew into cliff near Whiskey Peak N of Tram Tower 2.
- One fatality
- Pilot suicide
- Wreckage is inaccessible.

Robinson R22 Helicopter



Robinson R22 Helicopter

- R22 helicopter crashed on Jan. 22, 1995
- 0.65 mile SW of Tunnel Spring TH
- Elevation 6750 feet
- Two people on board survived
- Plan was to repair helicopter

Cessna P210N Centurion



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Cessna P210N Centurion

- Crashed on Jan. 20, 1999
- Quarter mile N of Pino Tr. on mtn. W side
- Elevation 7500 feet
- Three fatalities. Golfers flying from Arizona to Kansas. Volunteers collected small pieces for USFS before families & friends visited site.
- Instrument failure in clouds. Spinning plane caused one wing to come off. Vertical impact into pinon tree.
- We found wing, and it was removed by helicopter.
- Only small pieces of plane at site

Cessna P210N Crash Site



Plane Impacted into Pinon Tree and Only Stump Remained



**We Found Wing in Bottom of Adjacent Canyon.
Wing is Small White Object at Bottom of Picture**



Stan Booker with Wing in Gambel Oak



Helicopter Brought Wing to Elena Gallegos Picnic Area



Beech 58 Baron



Beech 58 Baron

- Crashed on June 16, 2007
- W mtn side N of Needle and SE of N Peak
- Elevation 9750 feet
- One fatality
- Auto-pilot probably set too low.
- Cut off tops of trees just before impact.
- Fuselage, right wing, right engine, & tail intact after impact
- Wreckage removed by helicopter in 2009.
- Only small pieces of plane remain at site.

Debris Piles at Beech 58 Baron Crash Site



Beech Baron Vertical and Horizontal Stabilizers



Right Wing of Beech 58 Baron with White Engine Cowling



Debris near Impact Point



Debris Including Two Propellers



Cessna C182 Skylane



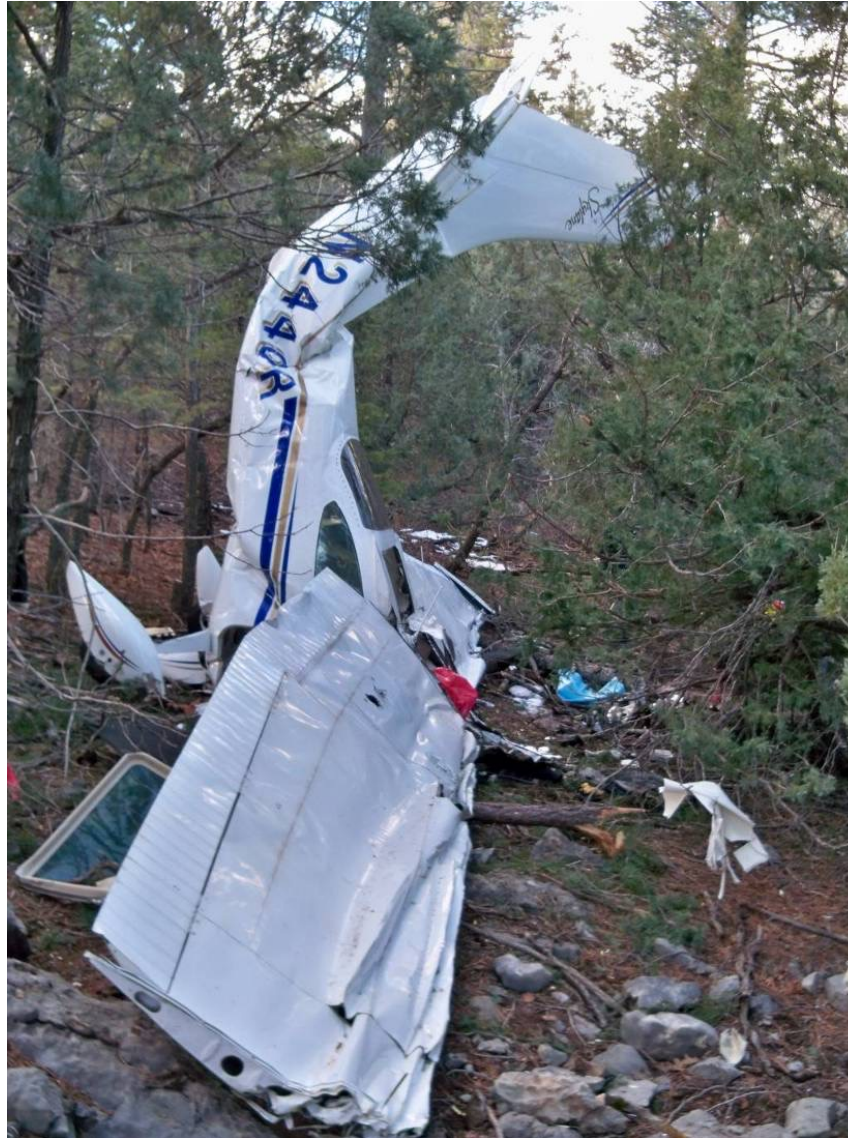
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Cessna C182 Skylane

- Crashed on Nov. 16, 2015
- 0.2 mile SW of 2nd restroom in Cienega PA
- Elevation 7680 feet
- Three fatalities
- Bad weather
- Debris taken by helicopter to truck in Horse Trailer Parking Lot in Picnic Area

Cessna C182 Fuselage in Near-Vertical Position



Cabin and Left Wing. Cabin top cut out to remove bodies. Note dent in front edge of wing at tree.



Helicopter Removing Cabin and Wing

Cabin and Wing Are Upside Down



Helicopter Removing Other Parts in Sling



Crash Sites in Sandia Mountains

Map by Cliff Giles



NTSB Listing for All Plane Crashes in Sandia Mountains since 1982

Sam Beard 12-13-15

- (First number is Event ID and Accident No. is given after word Accident.)
- **Cessna near Cienega Picnic Area**
- * 20151117X72052 | Accident | CEN16FA042 | 11/16/2015 | Sandia Park, NM | United States | 35.000000 | -106.000000 | | Fatal(3) | Destroyed | Airplane | N2440R | Cessna | 182G | No | 1 | Reciprocating | Part 91: General Aviation | | Personal | | 3 | | | IMC | | Preliminary | 11/30/2015 |
- **Beech 58 near North Peak**
- *20070628X00826 | Accident | DEN07FA100 | 06/16/2007 | Placitas, NM | United States | 35.219167 | -106.450833 | | Fatal(1) |
- Destroyed | | N6750R | Beech | 58 | No | 2 | Reciprocating | | Personal | | 1 | | | VMC | CRUISE | Probable Cause | 12/20/2007 |
- **Cessna P210N in Pino Canyon**
- * 20001204X00046 | Accident | DEN99FA034 | 01/20/1999 | ALBUQUERQUE, NM | United States | | | Fatal(3) | Destroyed | | N79NL | Cessna | P210N | No | 1 | Reciprocating | | Personal | | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | VMC | CRUISE | Probable Cause | 08/03/2000 |
- **Cessna 172M near Whiskey Peak North of Tram Tower No. 2**
- * 20001213X29090 | Accident | DEN89FA184 | 08/06/1989 | ALBUQUERQUE, NM | United States | | | Fatal(1) | Destroyed | | N64263 | CESSNA | 172M | No | 1 | Reciprocating | | Personal | | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | VMC | OTHER | Probable Cause | 07/09/1990 |

Airplane Crash Sites in Sandia Mountains

Sam Beard, July 20, 2021

Some information from **Sandia Mountain Event Summary** by David Holmes. This list includes information from Mike Coltrin, Cliff Giles, and Tom Hoehn. Crashes are listed in chronological order. Bold item number and name mean that I have not been to the crash site.

1. Small plane crash (date unknown) in Bear Canyon just east of Albuquerque Academy property. It may have been a “Piper Cub-type” of aircraft. Only welded tubular steel cabin frame is at the site. N 35 8.724, W 106 26.916, elevation 6,930 ft

2. Taylor Cub 2-seated tandem crash on East Mesa on 7/18/37, 200 yards north of US-66 near the Sandia foothills. Two young student pilots were killed.

3. Northrop A-17 attack bomber crash Nov. 17, 1941 in upper Bear Canyon. Engine in creek north of plane. N 35 8.821 (8°49.3”), W 106 25.724 (25°43.44), elevation 7,750 feet. Fuselage burned and melted. Other parts of plane are still at site. A lieutenant and sergeant died in the crash. Engine is 100-200 feet north of the plane partially buried in streambed.

4. C-47 (C-117A) plane crash on Nov. 16, 1944, south of Placitas and west of NM-165. N 35 15.349, W 106 25.547 at elevation of 8105 feet. Pile of debris here and down the hillside. Tom Hoehn’s geocache is at N35 15.409 W 106 25.531 at approximately elevation of 8080 feet. Dan Benton says that Jim Koehler wrote a book about this crash and the people involved, but when I asked Jim for a list of his books, he did not mention this book. Plane was flying from Wichita, Kansas, to Los Angeles carrying airplane parts. Five of 12 people survived. A couple of days after the crash, two people hiked to Placitas for help. Most of the plane was salvaged for aluminum during or after WWII.

The engine is about 250 feet downhill from the pile of debris at the above coordinates. The engine is at N35 15.356, W106 25.497 (WGS84), elevation 7994 ft. Data from visit by Pauline Ho and Rich Buss visit in Oct. 2016.

5. Navy WWII JRF-5 Grumman Goose (G21) seaplane crash on 7/7/52 0.3 mile S of Cienega Canyon Trail at 8750 feet. N 35 9.861 (9°51.66”), W 106 24.302 (24°18.12”). Flight from Wichita Falls to Kirtland AFB. All 5 people killed. Much of plane is still there. One engine has been removed.

6. TWA Flight 260, Martin 404 crash Feb 19, 1955 in TWA Canyon. Compass error probably caused pilot to fly in clouds too far east of route to Santa Fe. Fatalities – 16 total, passengers and crew. N 35 11.737 (11°44.22”), W 106 26.547 (26°32.82”), elevation 8,550'. Site is just north of the Sandia Peak Tramway cables. Wreckage is still at the site.

7. Piper PA23 Aztec twin engine plane crash on 12/2/61 just north of South Peak, 50-75 feet west of South Crest Trail. N 35 7.593, W 106 25.618, elevation 9,570 ft. Four California pilots were flying to Texas to attend Ross Aviation School for advanced pilot trail, and all were killed.

8. Douglas C-47 (117A) crashed on 4/26/63 at elevation 6083 feet on Diamond Tail Ranch at NE corner of Sandia Ranger District. Site is 3.1 miles E of NM-165 and 2.8 miles N of La Madera Fire Station, 7

miles NE of Placitas. Nine fatalities. No survivors. Bad weather. Right wing separated. Denver to LA USAF proficiency flight. Parts salvaged and area bulldozed. N 35.2895 W 106.3545.

9. Piper Comanche PA24 plane crash July 12, 1964 0.4 mile north of CCC Trail. Much of plane is still there. 4 fatalities. N 35 6.463 (6°27.8"), W 106 24.760 (24°45.6"), elevation 8,280 feet. Pilot continued VFR into adverse weather conditions with rain and low ceiling.

10. RB-57F USAF plane crashed up the mountain S of the 10,400-ft sign on the Crest Highway on 11/7/66. The 1/3-acre clearing from the fire is only 500 feet from the above sign. N 35 12.543 (12°32.6"), W 106 26.673 (26°40.37") Elevation 10,416 feet. Top of mountain is 10,678 feet. Only small pieces of plane are still at the crash site. Two fatalities. Pilot may have understood controller to say the plane had passed the mountain top, and the pilot began descent too early.

11. Cessna 210 crashed on 2/7/67 east of Three Gun Spring Trail at S end of Sandia Mountains. N 35 5.846, W 106 25.945, elevation 8,320'. Two fatalities.

12. Piper PA-23 2-engine plane crashed on Feb. 26, 1975, high on west mountainside just S of Pino Canyon in oak brush. Only a few small pieces are still there. Instructor was with student "under the hood" practicing instrument flying. Bodies were taken out down Cienega Canyon Trail on east side of mountain the next day by Albuquerque Mountain Rescue Council members. N 35.164, W 106.418, elevation 10,085 feet. (Coordinates and elevation are estimated.)

13. Mooney M20E plane crashed on August 11, 1977. 0.6 mile WNW of Tree Spring Trailhead. N 35.193, W 106.416, elevation 9065 ft. Very little debris at site. 2 fatalities.

14. Cessna 172M plane crash near Whiskey Peak N of Tram Tower 2 at 9000-ft on 8/6/89. Pilot suicide.

15. Robinson R22 Helicopter crashed on 1/22/95, ¼ mile W of Canon Agua Sarca and 1-1/2 mile S of NM 165 about 0.65 mile SW of Tunnel Spring Trailhead near Placitas. N 35.285, W 106.447, elevation 6750 ft. Coordinates and elevation are estimated. Two on board. No fatalities. Plan was to repair helicopter.

16. Cessna P210N plane crash Jan. 20, 1999 north of Pino Trail at elevation of 7500 feet, N 35 10.249, W 106 26.439. Only very small pieces are still at the site just north of the stream in Pino Canyon. Plane was flying three golfers from Arizona to Wichita, Kansas. Vacuum and instrument failures in clouds. Plane was spinning down, and forces caused wing to fall off. Plane came almost straight down into 10-inch pinyon tree. A friend and I found the wing and reported the location to the NTSB. Salvage contractor from Arizona removed the wing with a helicopter and loaded it on his pickup. At request of USFS, FOSM volunteers removed small pieces before visit to site by family and friends from Wichita a few months after the crash.

17. Beech 58 Baron two-engine plane crash N of Needle and SE of North Peak on 6-16-07 approximately 300 feet below ridgeline. Only a few small pieces are still there. N 35 13.988 (13°59.28"), W 106 27.397 (27°23.82"). Elevation 9750 feet (NTSB data). Probably auto pilot was set too low. Flew straight into mountain where it clipped off the tops of conifer trees. One fatality. Wreckage removed by helicopter in 2009.

18. Cessna C182 crash 0.17 mile SW of second restroom in Cienega Canyon Picnic Area on 11-16-15. Wichita Falls, TX, to Las Vegas, NV. Three fatalities. WGS 84, N 35 09.958, W 106 23.050. Elevation 7681 feet. Plane was flying slowly in clouds, and left wing hit a fir tree. Plane was damaged but was still in one piece and came to rest in near-vertical orientation. Plane wreckage was later removed by helicopter and taken to truck in horse trailer parking lot.