

# *In Search of Amelia's Electra*

The Nikumaroro Hypothesis and the Taraia Object Expedition

Board of Trustees, October 10, 2025





*Dr. Rick Pettigrew,  
Archeology Legacy  
Institute, Feb. 7, 2025*



Re: Amelia Earhart's Electra aircraft -- we might have found it



rpettigrew@aol.com

To ● Schultz, Steven R; ● Rosa, Julie L

Cc ○ Crossley, William A; ○ Watson, Katey; ○ Taylor Ruth Bates



You replied to this message on 2/9/2025 12:25 PM.

----- **External Email:** Use caution with attachments, links, or sharing data -----

Thanks very much, Steve!

I will look forward to our conversation. Please let me know when is a good time for you. I am in PST.

Have a nice weekend.

Rick

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# ***The Purdue-Amelia Connection***

- 1934: Waldorf-Astoria conference
- A shared vision
- President Elliott's offer
  - Counsel women students
  - Advise fledgling aeronautical engineering program



Earhart and Purdue president Edward Elliott, holding a model Electra



# Amelia at Purdue



Courtesy Purdue University Libraries, Archives and Special Collections



Courtesy Purdue University Libraries, Archives and Special Collections



She would have 20 young women gathered to speak with her, and she would sit down on the floor with them and just talk. As a reporter in the 1970s, I had the opportunity to interview some of these women, and they all said that the experience changed their lives."

JOHN NORBERG,  
historian and author of "Wings of Their  
Dreams: Purdue in Flight"



- Summer 1935: a 50% increase first-year women enrollment before ever setting foot on campus





# *Purdue Research Foundation's Role*



- Lockheed Electra 10E – The “Flying Laboratory”
- PRF’s Amelia Earhart Fund for Aeronautical Research



# Amelia Earhart and Fred Noonan's 1937 World Flight Attempt



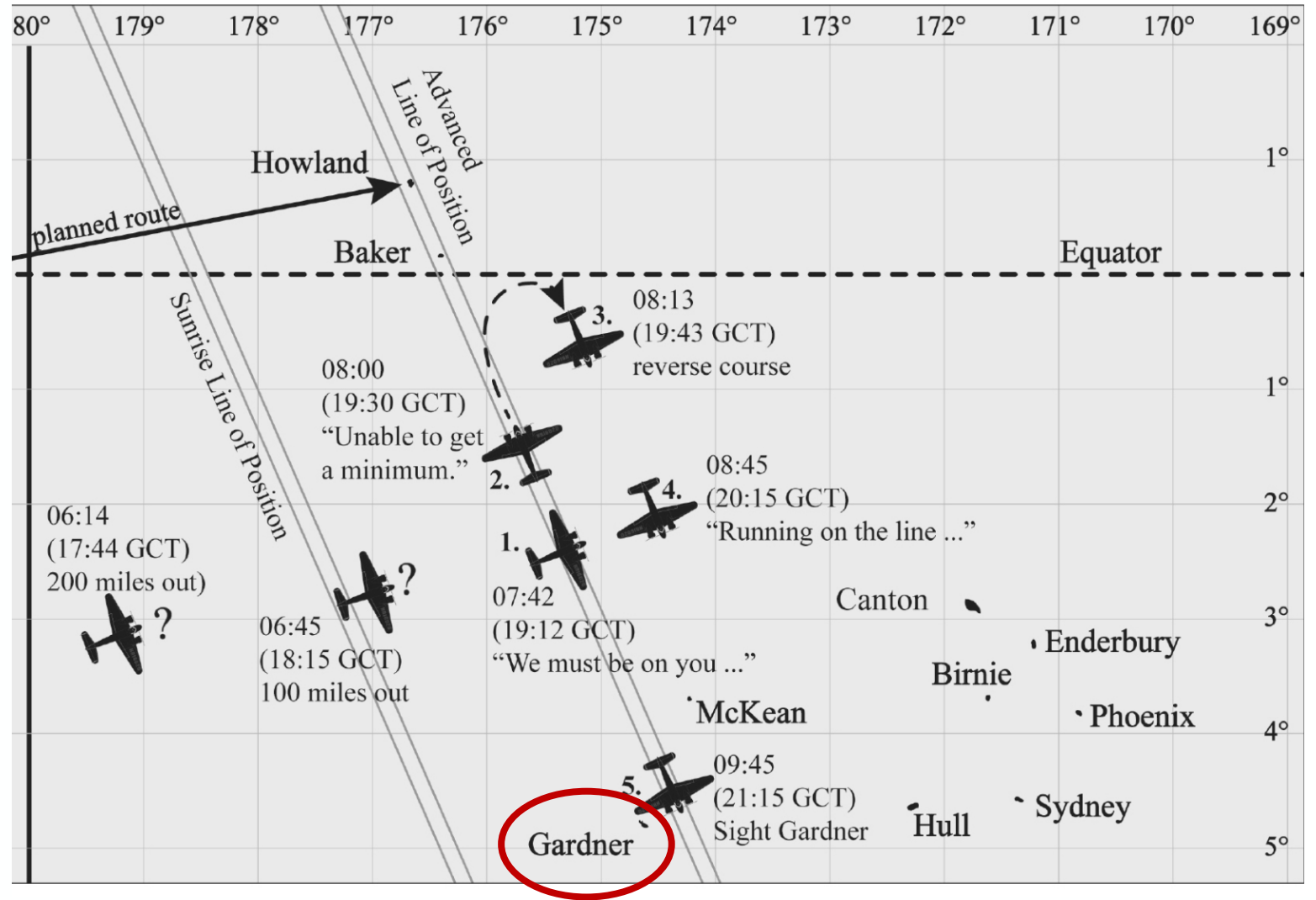






# ***“We are on the line 157 337.”***

- Use of “terminator” calculation at sunrise (line between day and night)
- Moves across face of earth at predictable rate, 90° to sun
- Sun rose at 67 degrees
- Luck: line of position roughly perpendicular to current course





# *Salvation?*

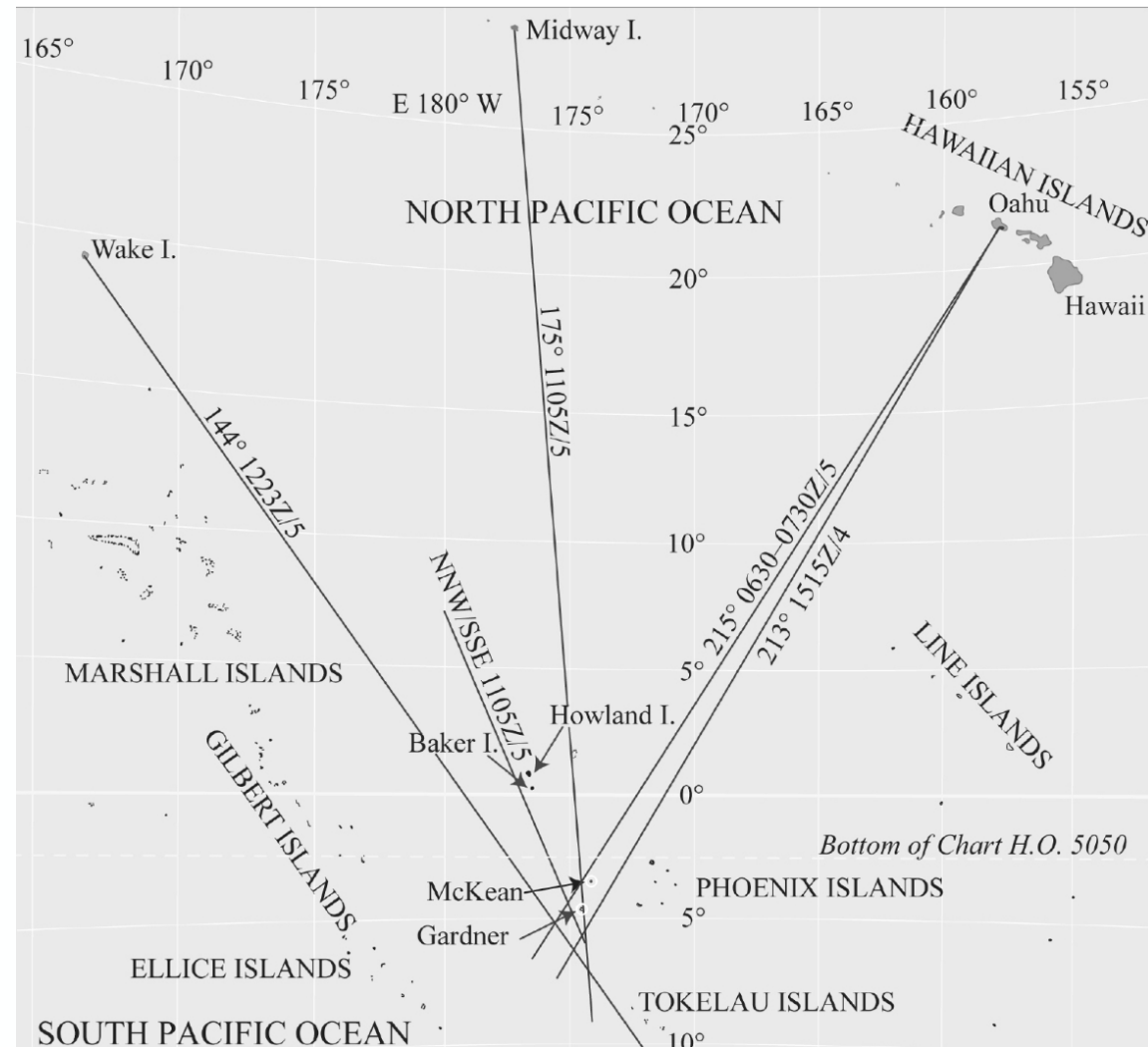
“Ship is on a reef south of the equator.” – heard on short wave radio in Rock Springs, Wyoming in days after disappearance.





# *US Navy, Coast Guard and Pan Am Radio Bearings*

“Two Eight One North  
Howland call KHAQQ”





## *Finding Evidence*

- 1938 – New Zealand airstrip assessment
- 1938-1945 – Phoenix Island Settlement Scheme (British Commissioner Gerald Gallagher)
- 1988-present TIGHAR (Ric Gillespie)





## ***Eyewitness account (2003)***

- Emily Sikuli
- Daughter of skilled laborer for Phoenix Island Settlement Scheme
- Recounts clear recollection of plane debris on reef





# ***Osteological Evidence***

- 1940 discovery of bones
- 2018 reassessment

*(Washington Post, 3/7/18)*

**The Washington Post**  
*Democracy Dies in Darkness*

Jantz compared the lengths of the bones to Earhart's measurements, using her height, weight, body build, limb lengths and proportions, based on photographs and information found on her pilot's and driver's licenses. His findings revealed that Earhart's bones were "more similar to the Nikumaroro bones than 99 [percent] of individuals in a large reference sample."



## *Brass eyelet*

Woman's blucher oxford  
with brass eyelets and  
replacement heel (mfg'd  
in US in mid-1930s)





## *1930's medicine vial*

“uca Pharmacy”

(Amelia lived in Toluca  
Lakes, CA)





# *Taraia Object*



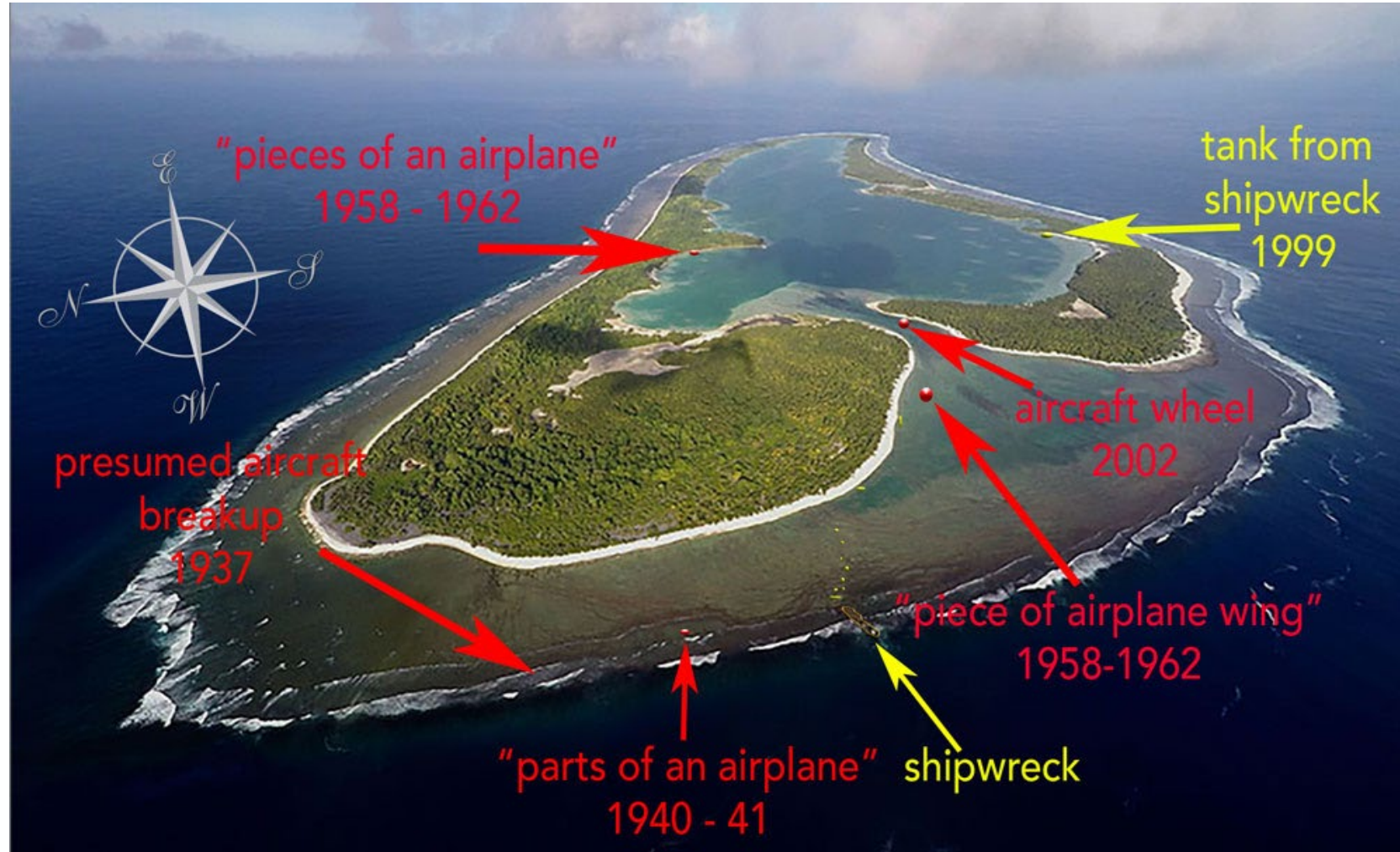






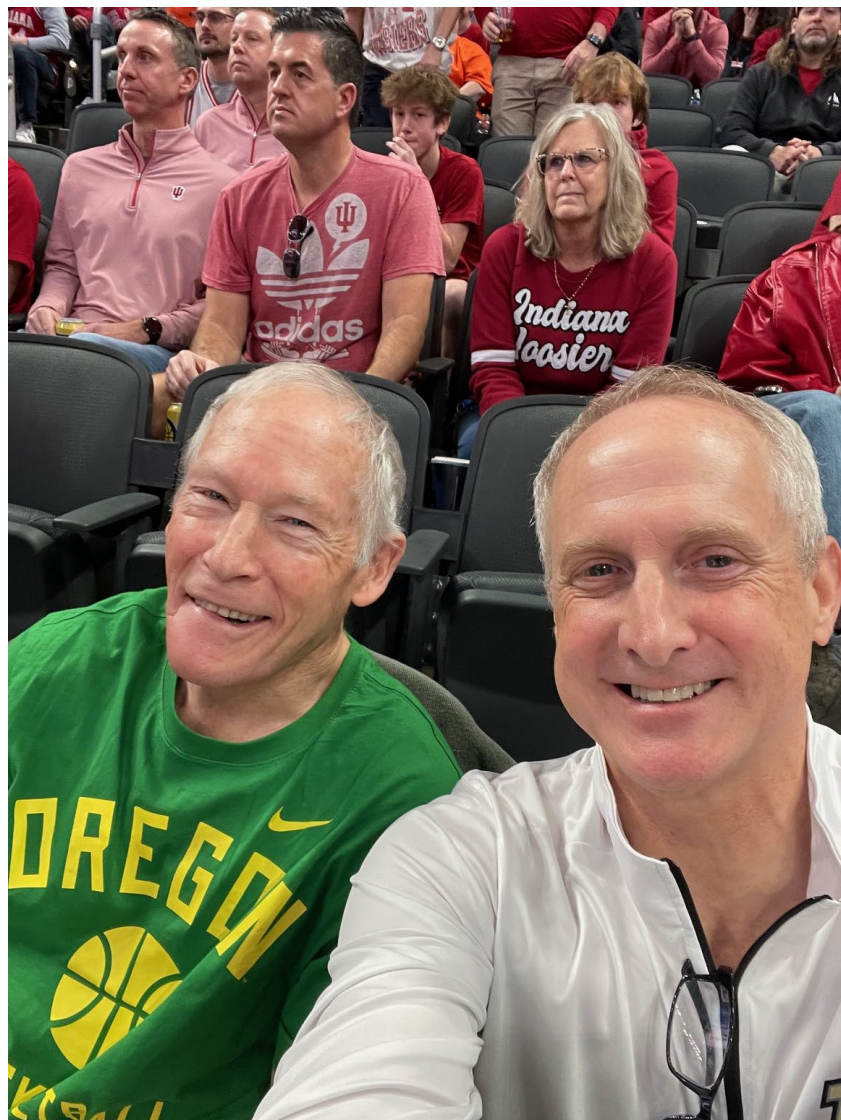
# *Taraia Object Project*

*How did the Electra become the Taraia Object?*



Reported objects on Nikumaroro, from TIGHAR image, 2016









## MV WINDWARD



## MV INDIES SURVEYOR







***Nikumaroro Island***

Seven Site







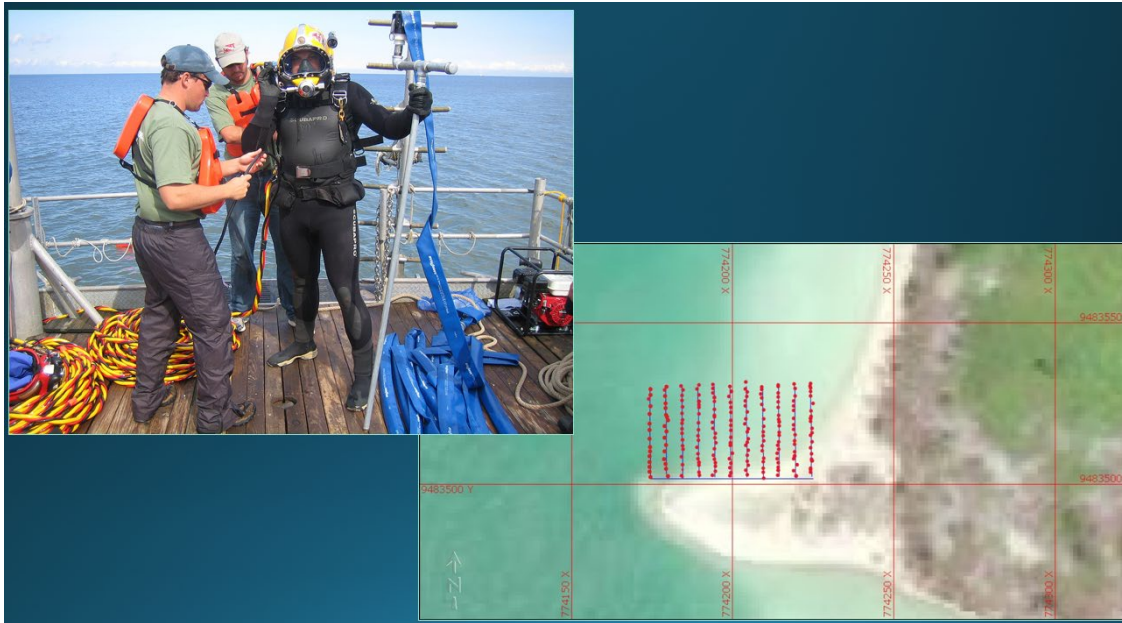
## ***Phase I Remote Sensing***

- Magnetometer Survey
- Side-scan Sonar Survey
- Sub-bottom Profiler Survey

## ***Phase II Target Identification***

- Establish Baseline (50 m)
- Hydro-probe to test burial depth of object
- Dredge operations





## Sub-Bottom Profiler Survey

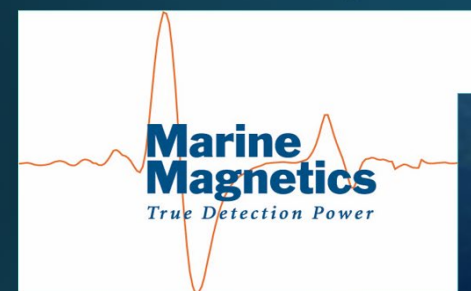


## Dredge Operations



In shallow water, all excavations are done with a water dredge that control the direction of the exhaust across the bottom through a hose

## Magnetometer Survey



### Explorer



3.8 kgs, soaking wet. Explorer is the world's smallest and lightest high sensitivity magnetometer.



# Site Recordation

- Record all exposed features
- Video/photograph site
- All dredged sediment to be bagged and screened at surface





 WATCH  


U.S. NEWS

# Researchers announce new effort to find Amelia Earhart's plane


Purdue University, which helped fund her historic 1937 flight, said it will send a team to a remote island in the South Pacific this fall.



PURDUE UNIVERSITY STATEMENT



**“IF WE DON’T GO THERE AND SEE FOR OURSELVES, THE WORLD WILL NEVER KNOW.”**





**TODAY EXCLUSIVE** NEW EFFORT TO LOCATE AMELIA EARTHART'S PLANE 





July 2<sup>nd</sup> announcement was the **largest single-day earned media announcement** in Purdue history, surpassing the April 8, 2025 Total Solar Eclipse.

July 2: **2,740 media placements**  
Potential Reach: **3.5 billion**  
To date: **4,850 media placements (and counting)**





# *Lives strong in our canon of Victories and Heroes . . .*









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