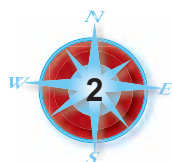


Stranger Than Fiction?





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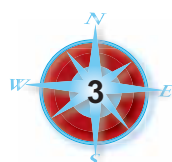
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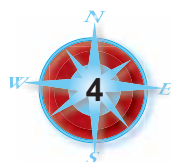
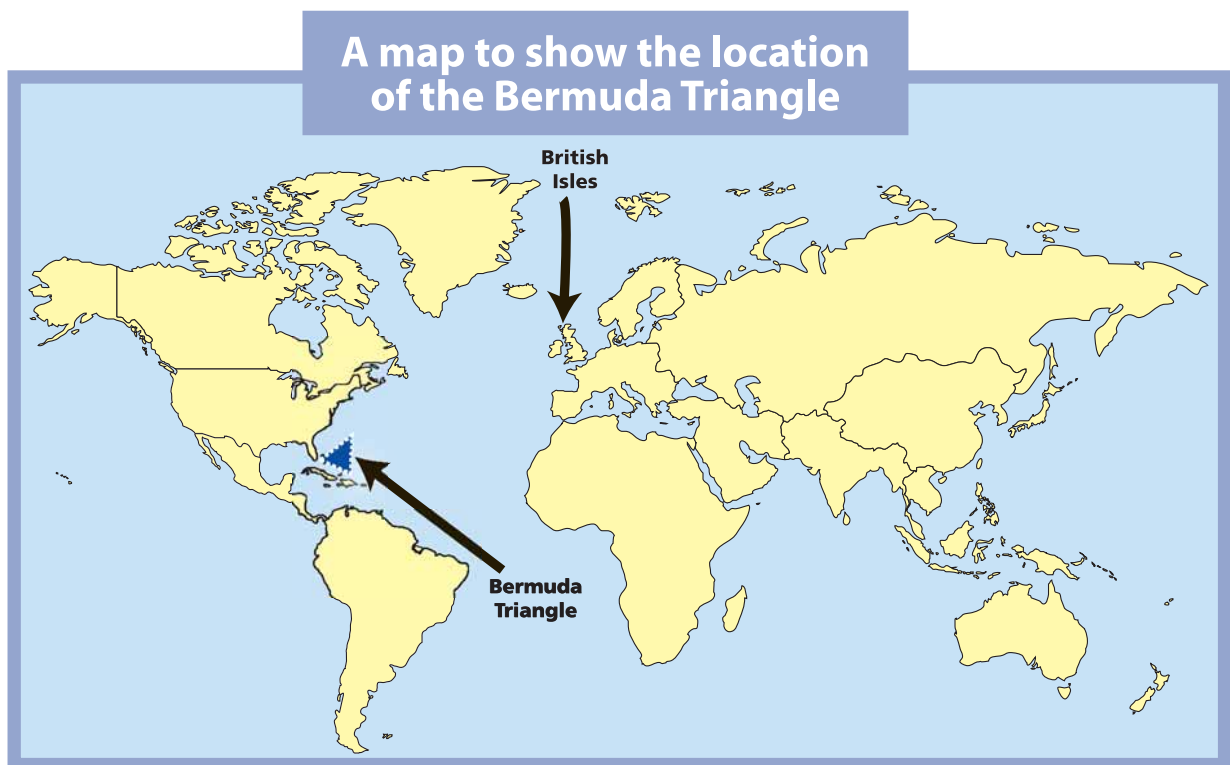
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The Bermuda Triangle

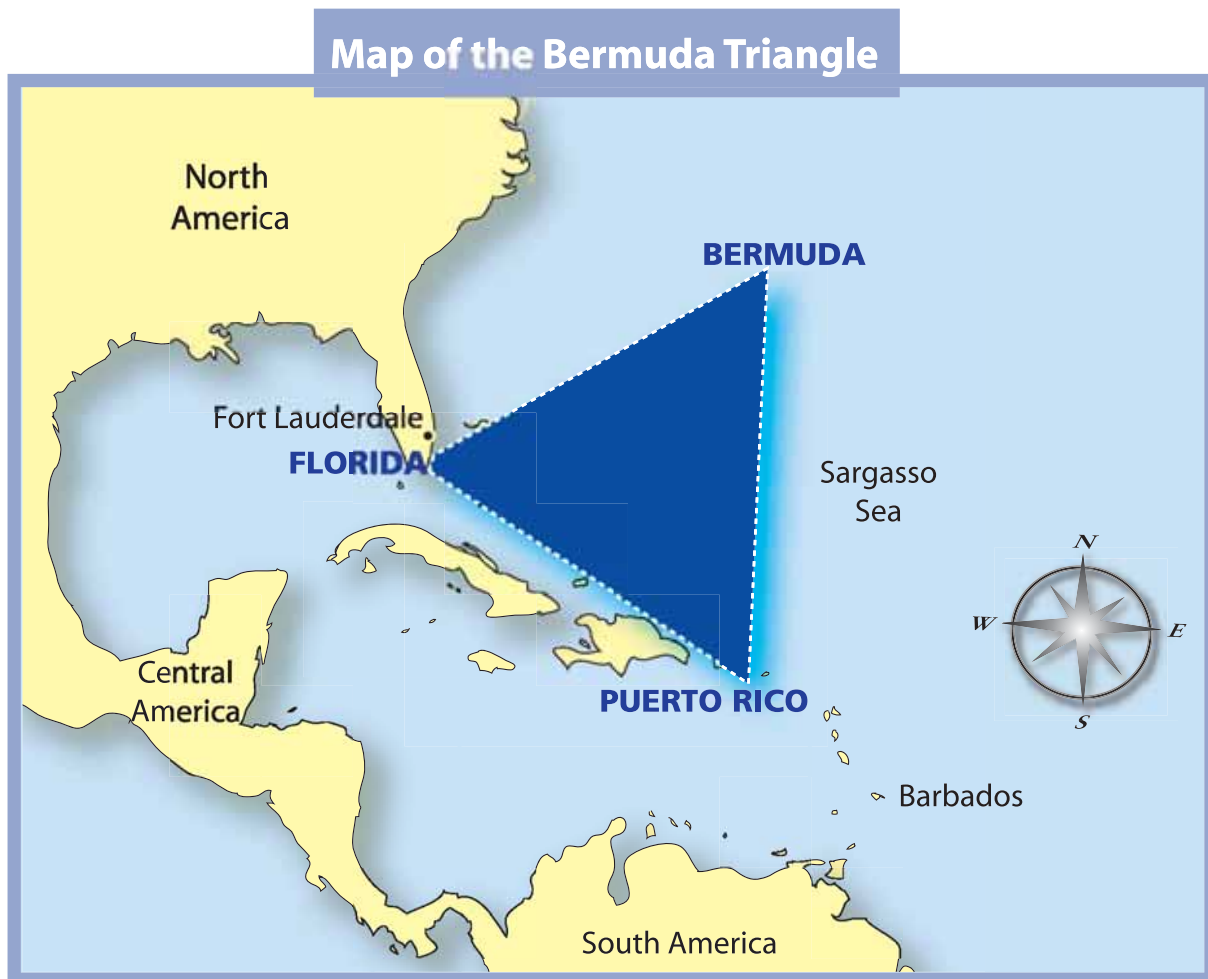
Have you ever lost anything and been convinced that it has mysteriously vanished? Usually, you find out that there was a perfectly good explanation for how it was lost and there was nothing mysterious happening at all.

However, some planes and boats have vanished from a place called the Bermuda Triangle and, although a few have escaped or been found again, many seem to be lost forever. Their stories seem unbelievable – but sometimes the truth is stranger than fiction.



Bermuda is a collection of very small islands on the North American side of the Atlantic Ocean.

The heart of the Bermuda Triangle lies between Bermuda, Florida and Puerto Rico (these are the three points of the triangle), but its eerie effects seem to stretch across the Sargasso Sea and as far as Barbados.

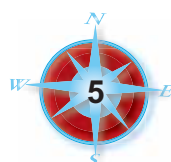


Sailors have feared the Sargasso Sea for centuries. The sea takes its name from a strange red seaweed, called Sargassum, that covers its surface.

Sailors used to terrify their fellow seamen by telling tales of a ships' graveyard within the Sargasso Sea. Trapped by the seaweed and the lack of wind, ships were said to sail on for centuries – never to escape.

Over the next pages you will read about two strange events which happened in the Bermuda Triangle. These events might sound like fiction, but they are true stories – unlike the stories that some people tell about the Bermuda Triangle. These are full of rumours of ships and planes being attacked by giant squid or being sucked up into space. Those stories might be more exciting, but they're not very likely.

See what you think...



The lucky escape of the *Good News*

Have you ever been caught in a freak storm or seen snow in summer? The weather can play very strange tricks and this is what happened to the tug-boat you are going to read about. Captain Donald Henry set off on a voyage in the Spring of 1966 and had to sail through the Bermuda Triangle. Here he tells us of the strange happenings during the voyage.

We were three days into a voyage from Puerto Rico to Fort Lauderdale, Florida when it happened. We were on board the *Good News*, a 50-metre tug-boat, and we were towing a cargo barge using a strong line.

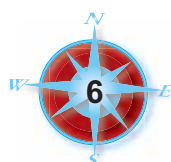


I hadn't been expecting any problems and was surprised to be called to the control area, which we call the bridge, by one of my officers. He was looking at the controls and dials around him – they seemed to flicker and die.

“What’s wrong?” I demanded.

The officer looked flustered. “The controls just started going crazy,” he explained. “Now we’ve lost power on all the electrical equipment. I don’t understand... it’s like the power is being drained away by something!”

My first thoughts were for the safety of the cargo barge we were pulling. I looked outside – and couldn’t believe what I saw.

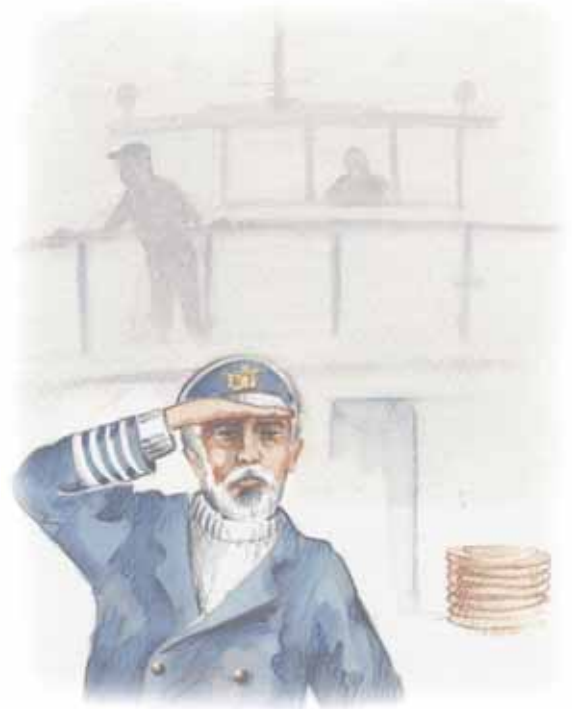


A few moments ago it had been a perfectly clear day, but now the sky and sea seemed to blur into a milky, yellow haze. I could no longer make out the line of the horizon.

“What is it?” asked the officer.

“Full ahead!” I ordered. “Let’s get moving.” The men around me were becoming agitated and looking worried – I could see fear in their eyes.

The tug’s engines groaned as they were slammed onto maximum power, but we did not move forwards. Up on deck, I could see why. Behind us thick, glowing fog covered the cargo barge almost hiding it from view. But there was no other fog anywhere else on the sea!



Where the fog touched the surface of the ocean, the water was choppy and rough, but I could not understand what was causing it. I began to worry, not just for the barge, but for my own ship.

I felt that somehow the fog was holding the barge, like a spider’s web holds a fly, and was refusing to let go. Worse, it was pulling us back towards it.

“Keep her on full power!” I shouted. I knew we had to get away, and soon.

But we seemed to be locked in a battle with the extraordinary fog. No sooner had the tug’s engines pushed us forwards, than the fog pulled us back again....

Minutes passed but the tug-of-war went on. I felt the *Good News* begin to creak under the strain. The legend of the Bermuda Triangle flashed through my mind. Were we about to become its latest victims?

Then, with one final, mighty effort from its engines, the *Good News* lurched forwards. Behind us the cargo barge slipped out of the fog at last but, as we continued our journey to Fort Lauderdale, I noticed that everyone was unusually quiet. I suppose we were all thinking about the tales of ships that had sailed into eerie fogs, never to be seen again.

We all knew we were lucky to be alive.



Flight 19 is in trouble

In the last sixty years planes have disappeared from the sky whilst flying over the Bermuda Triangle. There have been reports that compasses, which are used for finding directions, and equipment on the planes have stopped working for no reason. What could be happening?

In December 1945, Flight 19 – a group of five aeroplanes – flew over the Bermuda Triangle. They soon found they were in trouble and contacted the Naval Air Station in Fort Lauderdale to try to get help.

Here is what happened.

“Sir, you’d better come over to the control tower!” shouted the young officer. “Flight 19 is in trouble!”

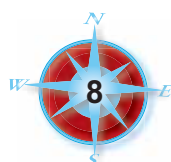
Lieutenant Kingston followed the officer towards the control tower of the Naval Air Station. Inside, he found the radio operator frantically trying to make contact with Flight 19.

“This is an emergency. We seem to be off course,” crackled a voice over the radio.

It was Charles Taylor, the leader of Flight 19.

Lieutenant Kingston couldn’t understand it. The five planes had taken off on a training mission earlier that day. The weather was good and it was a routine practice mission that had gone without a hitch. Then, on the flight back to the base, the pilots reported that their instruments were going crazy.

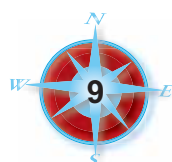
Flight 19 was in real danger.



In the cockpit of his plane, the flight leader – Charles Taylor – was scared. He scanned the horizon. Just minutes ago his compass had begun spinning in circles. It was difficult to work out where they were any more, or where they should be heading. Nothing looked familiar. He couldn't understand what was happening.

“Everything is wrong. Strange. We can't be sure of our direction,” Taylor reported to the base. “Even the ocean doesn't look like it should.”

Taylor strained to see if there was any sign of land ahead, but he could see none. He looked for the red ball of the setting sun. If he could find it, they could set their course by it and head back to the base. But there was nothing – no sun, no land... nothing.



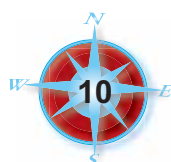
Alarm was setting in among the staff in the control tower. How could the five planes become so lost when they were only three hundred kilometres from base? Even worse, the radio signals were growing weaker and weaker, as if the planes were flying the wrong way. Most of their messages were crackling over the radio or being lost.



The control tower was full of people now, all anxious about their friends in the air. Suddenly, the radio burst into life once more.

“We are completely lost,” said the voice of Taylor. “We’re going to...”. Then there was silence, a complete and chilling silence.

“Come in, Flight 19. Respond please,” begged the radio operator. But there was no answer.

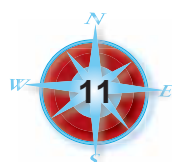
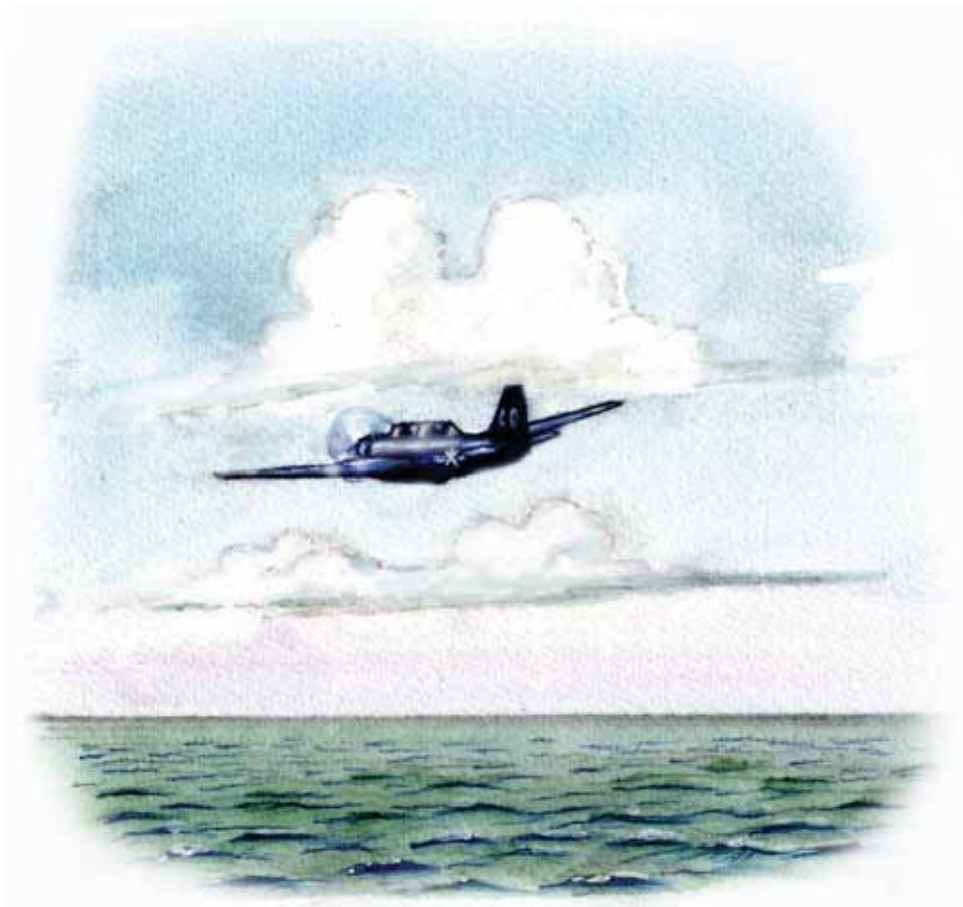


“Start an air-sea search immediately,” ordered Lieutenant Kingston. “I want the entire area searched. Let’s find those men!”

Nearly one hundred ships and planes took part in the search. But no trace of Flight 19 was found anywhere – not one life jacket or wreckage of any kind.

But that wasn’t the end of the mystery. One of the aircraft that had been sent out as part of the search team failed to return to its base. The aircraft with thirteen men on board was never seen again. It vanished just like the planes it was searching for.

There have always been rumours of a final radio signal heard long after the planes vanished. The letters ‘FT... FT’ were repeated several times, two hours after the planes would have run out of fuel. FT was the code sign of Flight 19. The signal seemed to come out from nowhere and to echo away into the night.



A natural explanation

Some people do not believe there is anything strange about the Bermuda Triangle. They suggest other reasons for some of the disappearances.

Stormy weather

There are many sudden storms in this area. Storms may include strong winds, heavy rain, thunder and even hail. Violent thunderstorms can occur at sea with little warning and be over very quickly. They can stir up giant waves and dangerous seas, which come from all directions. Ships or planes may head into a mild thunderstorm and find that it suddenly becomes incredibly intense. These storms can be devastating.



Waterspouts

These are tornadoes at sea that pull water from the ocean surface thousands of feet into the sky. A waterspout can last from two to twenty minutes and can vary in size – sometimes they are hundreds of metres wide. Witnesses say that waterspouts make hissing and sucking noises as they move and that they can travel at up to 130 kilometres per hour. "They could wreck almost anything," said an expert on ocean conditions.



Sudden fog

In this area there is one of the deepest parts of the ocean in the world. Near the southern tip of the Triangle lies the Puerto Rico Trench. The seabed here plunges nearly 8,500 metres. Where the seabed rises towards the surface, especially near the coastline of the USA, cold water is pushed upwards and meets warm, moist air. This can create sudden dense fogs.



Powerful currents

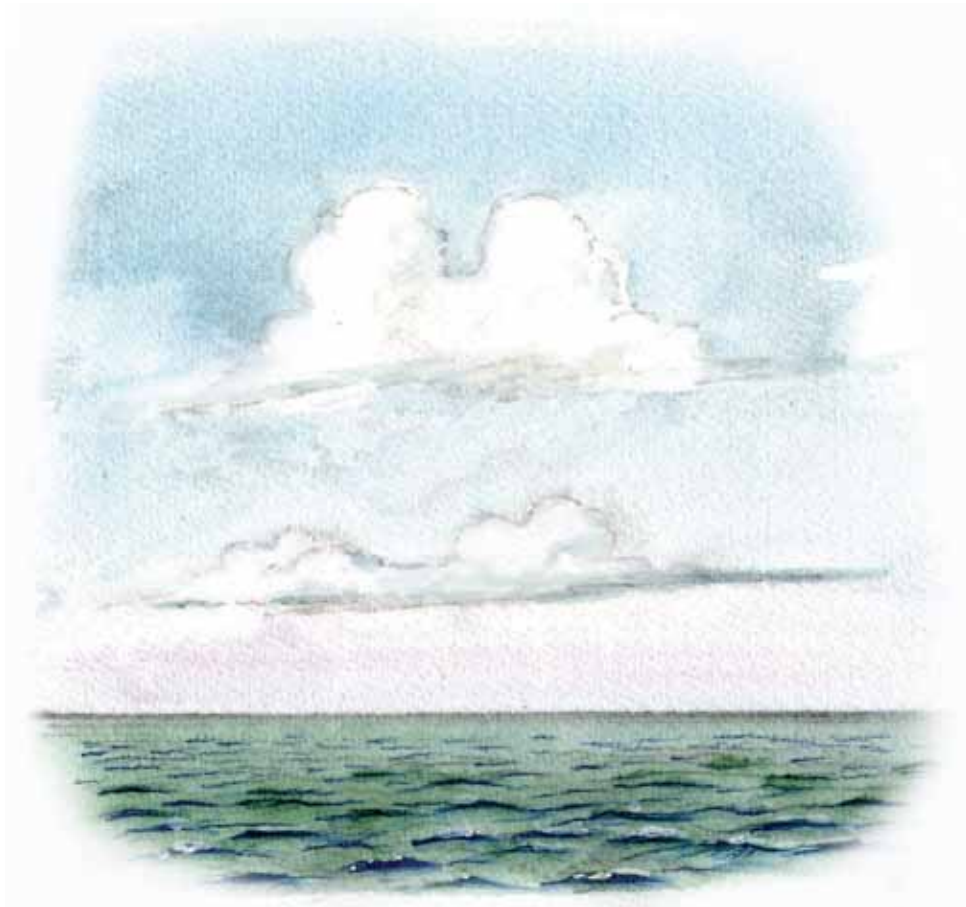
The Gulf Stream, a very strong ocean current, flows through this part of the ocean. Any wreckage would be quickly swept away. A ship or plane that sank just a few kilometres from the coast would soon be lost in very deep water, making it almost impossible to find.

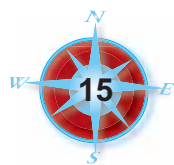


What *really* happened?

People have always wanted explanations about the ships and planes that have vanished in the Bermuda Triangle. The disappearance of Flight 19 and the strange fog that the *Good News* had to escape may have been a result of the weather. Or, of course, it may have been human error. People make mistakes – many experts believe that Flight 19 simply flew in the wrong direction: out to sea rather than back to land. Or it may have been that the equipment on the tug and in the planes was faulty.

What do *you* think?





Acknowledgements: 'Stranger Than Fiction?' adapted from *Bermuda Triangle* by Andrew Donkin

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