

The last seconds

1 APPROACHING FROM THE SOUTH, American Flight 1420 touches down 11:51 p.m. Tuesday during a thunderstorm. It skids off the rain-slickened runway twice, first to its right and then (skid marks) to its left. Out of control, it veers across a taxiway and toward the Arkansas River.

PHOTOS BY
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4 THE AIRPLANE'S FIRST CONTACT with the steel stanchions supporting the walkway comes at midfuselage, directly in front of the wings. The collision rips off the left wing and breaks the plane's body in two.

5 IN TWO PIECES, the plane stops about 50 yards from the river's edge, lying in the muck between the river and the embankment.

WHEEL MARKS
BEGIN HERE

2 ABOUT 450 FEET PAST THE END OF THE RUNWAY, skewing to its right, the airplane clips one end of a row of approach lights anchored in steel, but the plane sustains little damage.

3 THE PLANE THEN SAILS OVER a sloping 25-foot rock embankment, crushing a chain-link fence and tearing through a galvanized-steel walkway that extends into the river. The ruptured walkway rakes the left side of the airplane from the cockpit to the rear of the first-class cabin.

APPROACH
LIGHTS
HIT

WHEEL MARKS END

PLANE PLOWS ACROSS FENCE

AREA OF WALKWAY
DESTROYED IN CRASH

25-
FOOT
DROP-
OFF

PLANE

Arkansas River

FLIGHT 1420

