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## [NG Weekend Reflects on Tim Samaras' Life, Explorations as Storm Chaser](#)



Posted by [Gina Cook](#) in [NG Weekend Radio Show](#) on June 3, 2013

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Tim Samaras aims his high resolution camera at lightning, in hopes of catching that moment when a lightning bolt hits the ground, before returning back to the sky. (Carsten Peter / National Geographic)

The death of Tim Samaras, famous storm chaser and National Geographic grantee, is saddening and surprising as *National Geographic Weekend* interviewed Samaras just hours before he [died on Friday chasing a tornado in Oklahoma](#).

Tim visited the show regularly over the years, including on our very first show.

In August 2007, Samaras was a guest on *NG Weekend's* very first show where he explained to host Boyd Matson why he craved the challenge and excitement of capturing tornadoes on camera.

“Certainly everyone’s got their own definitions of good – mine is actually finding the tornado, which is an extremely difficult task,” Samaras said.

Perhaps one of Samaras’s most difficult tasks, however, was his years-long [quest to capture the moment in time when lightning strikes the ground](#) – an ambitious assignment, considering it is nearly impossible to predict where lightning will strike.

Samaras teamed with National Geographic to build a massive, high resolution camera that takes more than one million frames per second, which was the fastest in the world. He told us in March 2008 how he was able move the innovative, yet gargantuan, camera when pursuing the perfect shot.

“Moving a 1600-pound camera around, trying to get it aimed for a place to look is going to be very challenging,” Samaras said. “I actually take the camera and we actually shoot through mirrors and what I do, I just move the mirror with a couple little motors so I can remotely point the camera without having to go out there and push the 1600-pound camera side-to-side or up and down.”

In recent weeks, Samaras was traveling throughout Tornado Alley capturing video and photographs for National Geographic.

Boyd Matson interviewed Samaras just hours before he died as the storm chaser was on his way from Kansas to Oklahoma. At one point, Boyd asked Tim how he knows the fast-moving storms won't turn his way.

“Well, when you're out looking for these things, because they're so fleeting and unpredictable, there's always that chance,” Samaras said. “But I've been chasing these things for almost 30 years now. And not that I know exactly where they're headed and what they're doing, I feel reasonably comfortable getting up close and personal so that we can collect measurements of these tornadoes.”

Samaras also spoke of how his research, while dangerous, is important in light of recent tornadoes like the one in Moore, Oklahoma.

“We are still trying to understand why some thunderstorms break tornadoes and others don't. And that's actually part of our research mission, is to help measure and define some of those very very small variables that kind of give those hints as to which storm may produce tornadoes. And if we better understand these hints, then we are able to send out better warning products that includes longer lead time so people can take appropriate action and head for cover,” Samaras said.

Samaras's last interview will air on *National Geographic Weekend* this Sunday, June 9.

Keywords: [lightning](#), [Oklahoma](#), [research](#), [Storm Chaser](#), [storms](#), [Tim Samaras](#), [Tornado Alley](#), [tornadoes](#)

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