

# AVVENTURE TODAY

Saturday, July 29, 2012

The Official Daily Newspaper of the AirVenture Oshkosh

www.airventure.org

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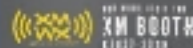
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## weather:

<b>THE SKY</b>		<b>80°</b>	7:00AM-7:00PM 7:00PM-8:00PM 8:00PM-9:00PM
<b>THE GROUND</b>		<b>62°</b>	7:00AM-7:00PM 7:00PM-8:00PM 8:00PM-9:00PM
<b>THE HORIZON</b>		<b>82°</b>	7:00AM-7:00PM 7:00PM-8:00PM 8:00PM-9:00PM



## Aloft overnight and interstate:

A cluster pilot's journey pg. 3

# Trappe flies 11.5 hours to Michigan in cluster balloon



PHOTO BY MARIANO ROSALES

People pitch in to fill balloons with helium for Jonathan R. Trappe's cluster balloon.

BY BARBARA A. SCHMITZ

If you couldn't see Jonathan R. Trappe's aircraft flying over Oshkosh Thursday night, you must be colorblind. That's the only way you could miss his aircraft—a cluster balloon that is a federally registered aircraft with an airworthiness certificate.

The *Spirit Cluster* lifted off EAA's Pioneer Airport at about 8:10 p.m. CDT Thursday, joining only the Goodyear blimp, which was circling it in the sky.

Trappe, EAA 879217, flew east over Lake Winnebago, then southeast, crossing Lake Michigan into Michigan.

He continued flying southeast, flying near Kalamazoo, and then started flying south-southwest, before landing safely in a pea field near Mendon, Michigan, at 9:43 a.m. EDT Friday. He had been in the air about 11-1/2 hours, and at times, had flown up to 34 mph at 14,000 feet.

Throughout his trip, Trappe was suspended in a harness and equipped with water ballast, an oxygen system, hand-held aircraft radio, transponder, and more. He flew by using the ballast to adjust his altitude to find the winds that he wanted.

Trappe said it was breathtaking and humbling to fly over Lake Michigan at night. "It's like a fresh-water sea, with a pure pool below you. With a three-quarters moon, it reflected beautiful below."

At times the balloons blocked out the moon, and when they moved the bright light shining suddenly in the complete darkness was almost startling, he said.

## Over two lakes to another state...

The flight went well, with only minor problems. For one, the regulator on the oxygen bottle got stuck, and Trappe said he had to jam it open.

The only other problem was the cold; temperatures dipped to about 30°F.

He and his crew, however, had planned for an overnight flight since the weather forecast looked promising.

Still, Trappe said it's difficult to put on

additional layers on clothing with all the gear he carries and while in a harness. "Just try putting a pair of pants on when you're in a harness," he said, laughing.

Trappe's crew followed him on the ground, but had to detour around Lake Michigan to get to the western shores of Michigan and then to his landing site. His crew helped him pack up all the gear, and by 2 p.m. EDT Friday, they were heading back to Oshkosh.

Trappe said they may stop and sleep for a few hours—both he and his crew hadn't slept since Wednesday night—but he said he would be back in time for Saturday's presentation.

His AirVenture flight Thursday actually started later than originally planned after the FAA refused the 6 p.m. launch time first agreed on due to anticipated air traffic.

Minutes after the airport closed for the night at 8 p.m., however, the 51 brightly colored balloons carrying Trappe below could be seen rising above the trees into the darkening sky.

## Labor-intensive pre-flight...

A few hours before, Trappe and his crew taught nearly two dozen volunteers how to properly fill the balloons, which vary in size from about 5.5 feet to about 8.5 feet.

Stationed in front of the EAA Air Academy, the volunteers then spent about the next two hours inflating the huge blue, green, red, yellow and white balloons with dozens and dozens of bottles of helium.

A long line was stretched out on the ground with hooks every four or five feet. One by one, the volunteers filled balloons with helium, and then hooked them to themselves as they walked the balloon to the line and attached it to the rope.

Light winds made the balloons bob up and down and a small crowd gathered around the perimeter to watch.

From time to time, Trappe walked over to the groups and chatted, answering their questions.

"I really want to say what a honor and a pleasure it was flying over Oshkosh," he said Friday.



PHOTO BY AMY GESCH

Jonathan R. Trappe departs Pioneer Airport via his cluster balloon and waves farewell.

"I intentionally went out low, so low that I can tell you about the condition of the gutters on the Air Academy. But I wanted to be low over the AirVenture grounds so I could talk to people.

"While it was exciting to cross such a large body of water, it meant much more for a homebuilder and an EAA member to be part of something like this." AVT

## Can you really fly, using only helium balloons?

Jonathan R. Trappe will bring some of his helium balloons for a hands-on presentation at KidVenture on Saturday. His presentation goes from 12:30-1:15 p.m.

# AIRVENTURE TODAY

The official daily newspaper of EAA AirVenture Oshkosh • Vol. 11, No. 7

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*AirVenture Today* is published by EAA during EAA AirVenture Oshkosh 2010, July 25-Aug. 1. It is distributed free on the convention grounds as well as other locations in Oshkosh and surrounding communities. Stories and photos are copyrighted 2010 by *AirVenture Today* and EAA. Reproduction by any means is prohibited without written consent.