

CONTENTS

VOL.44 NO.6 DECEMBER 2013

NEWS	4
REVIEWS	6
LETTERS	8
AIRSHIP NEWS	35
NEW BALLOONS	36
IT HAPPENED TO ME	39
EVENTS	40
REGIONAL ROUNDUP	42
CLUB DETAILS	46
CLASSIFIEDS	47
CONTACT DETAILS	50

FEATURES

RIGHT ROYAL RACE	10
A bunch of Queen's Cup reports	
WELL, BLOW ME DOWN	21
Jonathan Trappe finds himself very alone	
NATIONAL PRIDE	24
Stephanie Bareford keeps it in the family	
SHAPING UP	26
Albuquerque delights	
ROOTS ROLLOVER	28
More weekends to enjoy!	
MOUNTAIN KINGDOM	30
Summer spectacular in Tyrol	
THE BALLOONISTS' BARD	32
Pure theatre at the Woman's Meet	

ACROSS THE WATER: Our Nationals in France. Story p24
 PHOTO: © MARC PIHET (MARCPIHET.COM)



PHOTO: PAUL CYR

21



10

PHOTO: ROBIN MACEY



26



PHOTO: PHILIP JONES

28



PHOTO: STEVE O'BOYLE

30

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MIND YOUR LANGUAGE

Most pilots have held their RT licence for years, having passed a written and practical test. Now, when your balloon licence is reissued (remember? By April 2015), you will need to have obtained an English Language Proficiency (ELP) certificate. Your RT licence, old or new, will be invalid without one.

To get it, you will have to chat to a UK balloon examiner for a few minutes, complete a form and send it to David Court, the BBAC's training officer.

There is no charge from either the examiner or the BBAC, although it has been suggested you buy your friendly examiner a drink – presumably to check you can say "Would tha' like a pint, lad" in reasonable English.

Any questions, contact David Court, Phil Dunnington or Ian Chadwick.

Wind shift

There have been changes to the Ballooning Forecast spot winds following feedback from balloonists. The validity times for the winter schedule have changed from 06.00Z and 18.00Z to 09.00Z and 15.00Z and this lasts until March 14. Further changes are under review.

His story, written from the remote spot he ended up in – Blow Me Down Park in Canada's wild Newfoundland – is in this issue.

But after the flight, he did return to his starting point, Caribou in Maine, to tell his volunteers just how the adventure panned out.

He told how he almost jettisoned his computer when he mistook its safety cord for one holding a ballast bag and how he made up his mind to land in Newfoundland to avoid having to call for an emergency rescue at sea.

He described how the complex weather conditions and multiple cloud layers meant that once he rose above cloud, solar heating would accelerate his ascent, just when he wanted to level out.

"It's not the easiest aircraft to fly, but it's also not the most practical – have you seen a picture of this thing?" he asked his laughing audience.

He used 66 of his 166 bags of ballast during the 12-hour flight. "I either had to make it to landfall on Newfoundland," he said. "Or I had to put down in the sea. And the problem with that, one, it's the Atlantic and, two, I can't recover myself.

"So that means I have to rely on search and rescue and I was loathe to do that."

The full story of the flight is told by Jonathan on page 21.



Very funny: Jonathan Trappe near his landing spot in Newfoundland

PHOTO: ART GRIFFIN

Landing out

In September, Jonathan Trappe took off from Maine, on the eastern seaboard of the United States, intending to fly a cluster balloon across the Atlantic.

He had spent years dreaming of and preparing for this flight. His previous cluster flights, also planned to the nth degree (don't try this at home, folks) include successful crossings of the Channel and the Alps.

Those of us who met him when he made his Channel crossing in 2010 from Challock Gliding Club in Kent know that he is incredibly meticulous in his preparations.

He plots the lift, capacity and arrangement of his balloons as well as all the met preparations, and carefully considers every possible eventuality. In this way he makes a risky venture as safe as it can be. That's not to say there's no danger. As we all know, balloons are at the mercy of the weather and even with the best predictions, things can go suddenly very wrong.

However, Jonathan was prepared for disaster, using a boat as a gondola and having all the emergency gear not only for ditching in the ocean, but also for survival in a wilderness.



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A noble failure

Jonathan Trappe's attempted Atlantic crossing by cluster balloon ended safely, not in France as hoped, but in Newfoundland. Here, he shares the adventure



PHOTOS: PAUL CYR

Tremendous, beautiful, magnificent failure! What a night in foggy Caribou, what a team on the field, what adventure, writ large. What friendship, camaraderie, and love.

Nobody has ever flown this type of balloon system further, and nobody has ever failed with a system like this as well as I did in the sky these past days.

Nobody has built a cluster of balloons this large, and launched them, as we did, into manned flight so beautifully. The balloons, the colours, the lights of the Soucie Memorial Ball Field shining down through the mist. Were you there? Do you remember? Will you remember it forever? I will.

Inflation: Perfect. Uncommon. Spectacular. All of these things for the people of the county, the people of Maine, the balloonists and team that came together on the field and assembled this aircraft.

I went into the night with tremendous, non-trivial fear. Years: I had worked towards this for years, and put all of my energy, focus, money, and love into this flight. Then, a storm came in, so fierce, so terrible. I sent out a confident email, saying we would be ready, and everybody should go to the airfield – then the sky dropped, my stomach failed, and I broke down with the sky falling on all of us.

Storm so bad that it triggered tornado warnings. And I'm supposed to inflate

balloons a couple hours later – hundreds of them, building a system taller than a church steeple.

And then she cleared. The sky cleared. The people of Caribou came. As the great city manager Austin Bless said, the people of Caribou will not let you down. They did not let me down. We built the aircraft together, and floated her into the quiet sky.

Launch: A gorgeous calm on the Soucie field. A gorgeous moment. My loved ones there. My greatest ballooning friends there with me. A hero of this country, the legendary Colonel Joe Kittinger, on the field, with his hand on his heart as the our national anthem plays. I touch the hand of Col Kittinger and ask that he release me; he tells me I am living my dream. The music, our country's national anthem, comes to a crescendo. I let go of one bag; I drop her to the ground. I let go of this earth, and I depart.

A slow, dreamy float out. Music below me. Children below me. They call up to me. They wish me well.

Meteorologist: Perfect and clear. Trajectories as he forecast. He read everything perfectly. I would have never had my dream without him. He delivered well. A great man.

Terror: To fail, in such a magnificent way. Now that the data is in, we can see it so clearly. We created that data. Now the data is in, and a 15-year old could read it.

For me, up, so high – 23,000 feet.





PHOTO: PAUL CYR

Down, to the deck – though never in the water. Up, into the gorgeous sky.

I launched wet. The mist condensed on the balloons, and rained down on me. I climbed into the sky. The temperature dropped. My wet hair froze. My clothes froze. The droplets off the balloons started to snow. My balloons created the first snowfall of the year over Caribou – in September. The first snow over Caribou in 2013 was delivered by balloons! I stripped off my clothes. Naked, freezing, so cold. I had to get the wet clothes off. Into the dry clothes, I layered up. There – much better.

Excellent communication with Boston Center on the aircraft radio. Beautiful radar contact. Smooth transition to Moncton Center. International flight! Into Canada. The photographer of the county, Paul Cyr, operating in his element, perfect as he has ever been, taking photos I will treasure forever.

Out: I fly out over the great Gulf of St Lawrence. Freezing the wet balloons. Ascending out above a cloud layer. Heating the balloons in the sun. Oxygen tubes in my nostrils. Fatigue. Simple human fatigue. Aircraft not performing. My aircraft not performing. Not flying the way I need her to.

Using ballast. Burning ballast. Too fast. Too fast, I'm using my ballast. At this rate I will make it to . . . France? No. England? No. Ireland? No, no, no. All no. Too many "no"s. Too fast. The ballast use is too fast.

Newfoundland: I'm making 50 knots. My god, so fast, in the sky. But, the light is failing. The sun has set. And I am over water.

I have the coast of Newfoundland in front of me and fast approaching – but it has been that way for hours. 250 miles over the Gulf of St Lawrence, and I race to land, but not before the sun drops.

Still grey. The sky is grey, and not yet black. But fading fast.

I cannot see where the water ends. I cannot see where the shore starts. All I see are the mountains. No – not mountains – only the tops of them, with their bases secreted far below, down under the cloud layer. Where I would see blueberry fields, or potato fields, or arroyos, or soft hay fields, or grass, instead I see reality: the Newfoundland coast, serious, sharp cliffs.

But the valley is there. The GPS feeds me. I know the valley is there. I make landfall. Over the mountain, in the grey, and cut balloons. Vent helium. Come down. I have made landfall. I am over the mountain. Watch the GPS. Don't use my eyes on the ground – because there is no ground there. Only the grey, the clouds, the mist, the moisture that takes all my eyes can give, and in return gives nothing at all. Use my eyes on the GPS, and observe altitude, rate of climb. No – rate of descent. Get it down. Get it down, before the sky goes black.

I can't make it to Europe. But I can't stay here. If I wait 15 more minutes, it will be dark, and I can't land at night. If I stay up all night, at 50 knots, I will be out to sea before sunrise. Land now, goddamnyouJonathan.

Cut balloons. Descending so fast. Cut a bag of ballast in the mist... and listen. Listen. Listebboom! Bag hit. There must be ground down there. (It is not a conspiracy of cartographers.) Get down. I'm hooking; my track is hooking. Get down, before the black comes. Get down – trees. I see them below me. Some distance yet; some hundreds of feet. Slow the descent! Cut bags.

Prepare to cut more bags. No, no – time for the trees. Cut the balloons. Don't drag through the forest. Cut the balloons! And I do. I stab myself in the heart and let go of

my balloons. Cutting lines, so fast. The scissors in the gondola at my feet, are under something. Instead using the knife – no time to find the safety scissors, with their blunt point that can't cut me. Using the knife, and I'm slashing, and slashing, and I'm down into – treetops.

I've arranged the ballast so it hits first, and acts as shock absorber. It hits first, the camera arm shears off on a tree and I am... I am...

Where am I? Down? Not moving. Up? On top of... something? But I'm down. I feel I am down. But down on what?

Down, in this land, where I write you from now. I write you from the home of a journalist and his wife. Moose stew. Halibut. Baked apples on ice cream. But, we're not to that happy place yet.

Overnight: I cut away all balloons and I'm down on something, and surrounded by trees. Rain is coming. The night is here. I use the sat phone and tell the team I am living. They will relay safe landing and "no-emergency" status to the aviation authorities.

Rain coming: I prepare. I bring up the exposure canopy. I put gear into plastic. In all my preparations, I never bought bug spray. (Lies: I bought three bottles of the strongest – for the inflation team; those bottles are in Caribou. I would pay \$100 for one of them now.) So many mosquitos. What is this place I have landed in? I post a message via the sat messenger to Facebook, trying to let everybody know that I am down.

Rain in the night. I stay dry, in my shelter. I put up the exposure canopy. I put on the cold-weather suit.

Dawn: I am in a bog. That is that – thing – that I am in, that didn't feel like ground, but didn't feel like trees. For the first time in 24 hours, I step out from the gondola. I survey the surroundings. Impassable. This is completely impassable. Completely. No ATV could make this. No tank could make this terrain. No boat. Nothing could get to this spot via ground transport. Impassable.

A remote spot in Newfoundland. There must be a joke in there somewhere.

Sorting: It is the dawn of the day after I flew, and I start to sort the site. My crew works with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to tell them there is no emergency. But they want to come out. Um, okay – but do not initiate a rescue. I don't need rescue. I am working on commercial recovery – where I hire a helicopter for retrieval. That's okay, the

Mounties say. They just want to come say hello. Okay, I'm not opposed to company.

I have 60 litres of water, 38 litres of Gatorade, 65,000 calories of food. I have shelter, sleeping bags, cold weather gear. I have my stove, and could make a coffee. But instead, I start sorting the site. So much gear to sort, in a small space. I hang things on the trees in empty ballast bags. I work to clear an area. I stop and use the sat phone and sat messengers. So many people to inform, with different info.

My dedicated team working and communicating all on my behalf. They make sure that the Canadians know there is no emergency, but that I am there, safe, and working on commercial recovery.

Half a day of this. Sorting. Messaging. Talking. A helicopter appears overhead. It's CBC. CBC want an interview. I mean, they really want an interview.

CBC had been out all morning on ATVs. They could be there still on ATVs; they would never get to my site. There was some sort of arms race among the media types. Some arms race to escalate, in order to get to me first.

Then CBC goes nuclear and rents a helicopter. It comes to me, right overhead. I am on the phone when the helicopter appears, and I tell the Royal Canadian Mounted Police commander on the sat phone that a helicopter is here, and he says: "Well, it is for you."

I hang up, and get on the aircraft radio – the emergency frequency to hail, then quickly to another frequency.

"Are you okay?"

"Yes, yes – I am fine. No risk to life, limb, or vision. There is no emergency. I am fine here. Um... how are you?" They are fine too.

Can we talk? They want to talk to me. Um, okay. There is a landing spot 300 meters

away. Okay, I'll meet you over there.

Wet. Muddy. I slog it through the bog. Sometimes I'm tempted to just leave the damn shoe in the hole this time. But, that mudhole also has my foot. So, I extract both, and take another step. I do this for... a long time. I come to a river. I cross. It washes off the bog mud. Then, back into dense bog, and the mud comes back on, then a hill, then a clearing, and I'm covered in mud – that special bog mud.

As I climb up from that, this young CBC reporter is having the story of her life. Her eyes are wide, and she is excited. Wait, I just flew from Maine to Newfoundland under a cluster of helium balloons, landed in a bog, slept there in the boat, named my mosquito bunkmates, and then slogged through it to talk to her in her helicopter. Shouldn't my eyes be wide, and hers calm and rational?

I give her what she came for – words. The first words from the balloonist. She got the story. She beat the other media guys, who were still out there on ATVs. They may be out there still.

I give her words. Four minutes of them. They will later turn this into dozens of media hits on the nightly news, including many, many "live" shots where the lovely young reporter is standing in a parking lot. "Live" for no apparent reason except to introduce the clip and play a different slice of the same four minutes.

Wind: And they offer me a ride. I am going to hire a helicopter to come get me. But here was a perfectly serviceable helicopter. Okay, I'm in.

Let me grab my passport, laptop (company issued laptop, thank-you-very-much), money, credit cards, wallet, film, cameras. Let me get my GoBag, with all of that. The pilot screws up his face. If I go

back to the gondola and get my life that I have left there, the wind will pick up, and we will all be blown off the land.

I have to choose – right then: go on the helicopter, with nothing on me but bog and wet shoes, or let the helicopter fly away. Okay, let's go.

We go. To a forestry station, where I am greeted by three men and one bear. I think the bear was unrelated. I don't know. I never got the story. Anyway, as soon as I walked by the bear, I was into the arms of the customs and immigration guys. (Metaphorically. Not literally. That would be weird.)

Do I have any goods to declare? Um, I have some food and stuff. And a boat. Have I brought anything into Canada?

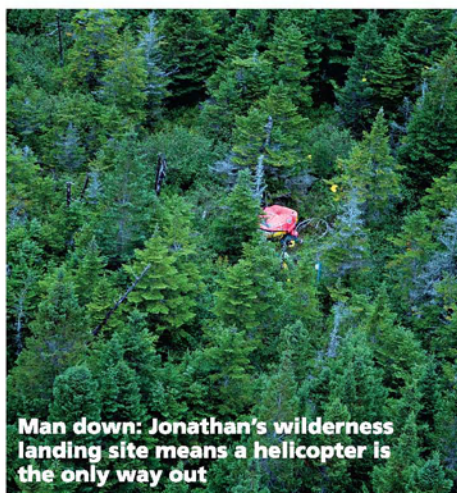
What do you mean, you have no ID. Nothing? Are you....employed? You look kindamessy. Yeah. I am employed. I look messy. I just hiked through a bog to get to a helicopter.

One hour ago, I had water, shelter, food, clothing, and dry feet. Now I am like a refugee. A refugee that smells like bog, and has a highly improbable story of how he came to Canada. My situation degraded dramatically upon encountering that CBC helicopter.

They didn't deport me (though that would have saved me an airline ticket.)

Newfoundlanders: Now is the time for this part of the story. Moose stew Halibut. Baked apples on ice cream. These things, and clean dry clothes, given to a man that has nothing and smells faintly of bog. (Not that faintly, actually.) The hospitality of Newfoundlanders is legendary. They deliver. Art and Carol. They sheltered me when I had nothing at all.

Team: We built something amazing. We will remember this day. We set out for adventure. We found great friends.



Man down: Jonathan's wilderness landing site means a helicopter is the only way out

PHOTOS: ART GRIFFIN

