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A Memorable Summer

For most of us, Summer is the prime flying season and for me, this one brought some great new experiences and memories..

If you're among my Facebook friends or follow me on Twitter (@GlenMoyer1) you'll know that I've embarked on an exploration of my Scot Irish ancestry and am planning a trip to Scotland for next Spring. So was it coincidence that while announcing the Great Midwest Balloonfest in Kansas City that I meet the band The Elders and am introduced to Celtic Rock?! I've become a huge fan and have since enjoyed watching their live shows streamed from their recent tour of Ireland while sitting in front of the same computer where I'm writing this. Celtic Rock! Who knew?

Then as the summer progressed my Facebook page was constantly getting updates from Gary Moore and Doug Gantt about their incredible ten weeks spent ballooning in Taiwan. I was left wondering why wasn't I over there? Doug was kind enough to write a nice article to fill us in on what we missed (page 26)..

The U.S. Nationals are always fun, especially in my home state of Texas and with my longtime friends at the Great Texas Balloon Race hosting. One of the season's most poignant moments came when Paul Petrehn claimed his 3rd National Title and the purple pilot shirts were a nice tribute to our absent colleague Cindy Petrehn.

September saw Jonathan Trappe launch in pursuit of his long held dream of flying a cluster balloon across the Atlantic Ocean. Though the attempt failed, his spirit and tenacity are infectious. He was truly venturing where no one had gone before. In case you haven't noticed there are not a lot of cluster balloonists around - so to embark on such a journey with so little historical data and experiences to call upon - engineering and flying a craft larger than ever before - well, it takes tremendous courage and I admire that.

More recently, Balloon Fiesta, thanks to my colleague Orv Olivier, saw my balloon being flown by the first team from mainland China to ever participate there. I'll be writing more about that in the next issue, but new international friendships were forged to be sure.

Finally, as I alluded to last time in this space, this summer has seen me embark on a lifestyle change in a long overdue effort to get fit and healthy. My earlier vague reference to the picture here changing apparently worried some as I was greeted by inquiries of concern about my health. Rest assured I'm doing fine and early progress has been very good, to wit before and after pictures below. Thanks to all for your expressions of love and support...



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"Hmm, This Doesn't Look Like France!"

A Dreamer's Journey

by Glen Moyer
Photo by Art Griffin

"Landed safe, at an alternate location. Remote. I put the exposure canopy up on the boat. Will stay here for the night."

With the simple text message above cluster balloonist Jonathan Trappe signaled to the world that his childhood dream of crossing the Atlantic under a cluster of helium balloons had come to an end - even if only temporarily. In an interview with BALLOONING months earlier he had said, "Really what it's about is living an interesting life...to have my grandson on my knee and have interesting stories to tell him - that's what it's all about... to live an interesting life." That little boy certainly has a story to look forward to...

Jonathan Trappe had dreamed of floating beneath a cluster of 'toy' balloons since he was a child. On June 7, 2008 Trappe realized his dream for the first time, carried aloft by a cluster of 55 individual helium balloons and his office chair. Just over 5 years later he launched the world's largest cluster of 366 helium balloons and was on his way - he hoped - across the Atlantic Ocean. Upon a successful landing he would have written another page in the history books to which he had already added important footnotes - the first overnight cluster flight, first cluster flight across Lake Michigan, first cluster flight over the Alps, first cluster flight across

the English Channel, first (with Troy Bradley) to fly a house. Now he hoped to follow in the footsteps (flightpaths?) of Ben Abruzzo, Maxie Anderson, Larry Newman, first across the Atlantic by balloon and Joe Kittinger, first solo Atlantic crossing. But dreams, like the balloons that would carry him skyward, have a way of bursting.

Trappe launched his historic quest at about 0800 EDT on Thursday, September 12. Twelve hours later he was safely back in the loving arms of Mother Earth, albeit in a remote wilderness area of Newfoundland - far from his hoped for landing site, lucky, some say, to be alive.

From the beginning there were issues. Once the 'Go' had been given for the painstaking inflation to begin, Mother Nature joined the party in Caribou, Maine arriving in the form of a torrential downpour, soaking the launch site and delaying the start of the time consuming operation. Trappe's message to his crew - "Um, waterproof shoes would be in order. Field is a little...wet. (Like soup is wet.)"

Those who've seen the movie "Spirit of St. Louis" will recognize this next issue. Like Jimmy Stewart, in the role of Charles Lindbergh, Trappe would get no sleep the night before his launch. For Trappe the exhaustion was compounded because he didn't even have the comfort of laying in bed tossing and turning with worry. Instead he had to be on the field all night supervising, no, orchestrating the inflation of the individual cells and then their assembly into small clusters, intermediate clusters and eventually the behemoth he would be flying. And don't forget the myriad of other pre-flight

details that demanded his personal attention - and the media! By the time the actual launch arrived the next morning he had to be running on pure adrenalin. We will never know how that lack of rest might have played out had the flight lasted its anticipated 3 to 6 days! (Jonathan acknowledged this problem in an e-mail exchange following his flight.)

The launch itself was shrouded - in FOG! The moisture of the passing storm and earlier rainfall contributing an eerie air to the proceedings. Despite this, there was Trappe, posed jauntily in his little yellow gondola/lifeboat and, like a NASA Capcom, leading his own 10 second countdown for the amassed media that included live streaming on the Internet. Then he was away, being lifted silently into the clouds and off onto what he and, let's be honest, the rest of us hoped would be the journey of a lifetime. But the silence and solace were soon to be interrupted...

After the excitement of watching Trappe's launch from my home office computer workstation, I settled into a normal routine of work, knowing that I would check-in periodically to one of the tracking sites to view his progress. When word began to reach me later that same day that Trappe had landed I, like everyone else, was shocked. Many of the able balloonists who had been on site for the inflation and launch were, by then, headed home. Fortunately I was able to reach a longtime friend and colleague, accomplished hot air and gas pilot Kevin Knapp who also just happened to be on duty in Trappe's Control Center. My conversation with Kevin Knapp led to my writing this for my other media outlet/employer, www.aero-news.net...

According to Knapp, the cluster balloon was never able to achieve a stable float altitude and developed a severe yo-yo effect --- rapid descents with the aircraft hitting the surface of the water, followed by rapid ascents to altitudes as high as 21,000 feet or more. Trappe was unable to gain a steady hand on the errant balloon cluster, which at 3,000 cubic meters of volume, was the largest in the world.

Flight service expressed real concern over the inability to control the aircraft as they watched it repeatedly descend below their radar and then reappear climbing rapidly. Trappe and his team obviously had the same concern and with Newfoundland representing 'land's end' before venturing out over the Atlantic, the decision was made to terminate the attempt.

Knapp tells ANN that Trappe was able to execute a landing after darkness had fallen and in low visibility. In fact, he says Trappe is uncertain if he is on the ground or possibly in trees, but he is down and safe. Trappe noted on his own Facebook page that he planned to spend the night in his gondola/lifeboat and had lowered the exposure cover. Knapp said it was raining in the area and storms were expected overnight, however the weather trajectories for winds aloft showed that in a perfect world Trappe could have reached Ireland in 94 hours.

Trappe in other public reports has denied his aircraft ever hit the water and stresses there was never any emergency. Even when faced with being down in the wilds of Newfoundland he had shelter, food and communications and was quick to inform the various rescue services that he was 'down and safe.'

While the flight ended far short of its goal it was a magnificent attempt, not unlike Apollo 13 which has been called 'a successful failure' because they did not land on the moon. And he did make history. This was the world's largest cluster balloon built and flown to date and the flight achieved the longest distance ever for a cluster balloon - 466 miles. The flight also served up some amazing photographic images which we share on the following pages thanks to Jonathan and photographers Art Griffin and Paul Cyr.

Of the adventure, Trappe writes on his own website...

We had a tremendous, magnificent, beautiful flight when, on Sep-

tember 12th, 2013, I made a trans-Atlantic attempt using the largest cluster of balloons ever assembled in the history of flight. I covered more distance than any other flight of its kind; no one has ever flown this type of aircraft this far. The world became our team for one day as we reached tremendous heights, and unparalleled distances. I flew hundreds of miles and crossed the great Gulf of St. Lawrence. During that water crossing, I re-ran my ballast calculations based on actual ballast usage in the first 12 hours of flight, and compared that to the time I would be in the sky; all calculations told me I would make it so far-- 1,500 miles -- which means I would have to ditch mid-ocean. I could fly for so far... and then be forced to ditch into the water. Instead of ditching at sea, I crossed the 318 miles of the Gulf of St. Lawrence and I landed on the final piece of solid ground before the deep: the fearsome, but also welcoming, province of Newfoundland & Labrador.

Perhaps more importantly, Trappe also writes, "We dream of going further. We dream of going again. We dream of the great Atlantic Ocean. Hope springs eternal."

Can a cluster balloon cross the Atlantic? Trappe insists that it can. Others are not so sure. On page 22 we reprint with permission an analysis of Trappe's flight by Troy Bradley, himself a world record holding gas and hot air pilot, one of a handful who has piloted a balloon across the Atlantic, and Trappe's instructor pilot. This is in no way intended to be critical of Jonathan Trappe and the opinions expressed are solely those of Bradley. By reprinting this article we hope to shed greater light on the intricacies of cluster ballooning, especially on such an enormous scale, while also contributing to a greater appreciation of the journey undertaken by Trappe to live out his dream.



"It's not the destination I set out for, but it's kind of the way with real adventure — adventure isn't what you planned on, it's what you find, and that's what we have today."



Photo © Paul Cyr



Photo © Paul Cyr



