

## Ballooning history timeline

This selection of events is taken from the long history of lighter-than-air flight from its beginnings in 1783 when Pilatre de Rozier and the Marquis d'Arlandes became the first humans to fly in the balloon made by the Montgolfier brothers.

It serves to record the progress made by aeronauts and manufacturers as knowledge, experience, ambition and technology grew over the many years.

Balloons and Airships have evolved continuously since their early beginnings and continue doing so to this day. This list will grow as inventors and aviators choose lighter-than-air craft to pursue their dreams and goals.

### 4 June 1783

The Montgolfier brothers, Joseph & Etienne inflated and launched their new invention, a hot-air balloon. It made a ten-minute flight from the marketplace in their hometown of Annonay, France. This was in front of an invited audience of local gentry. The event is celebrated annually in Annonay using a replica envelope. The Event is known as 'Le Reconstitution'.

It is worth a visit. Everyone dresses as if from 1783.

### 19 September 1783

A sheep, a rooster and a duck, became the first living things to fly in a balloon. Joseph & Etienne Montgolfier built the balloon from varnished taffeta. 57 feet (17.4metres) high and 47 feet (14.33metres) in diameter. The heat to make it rise was provided by 50lbs (22.7 kgs) straw, and 5lbs (2.27kgs) of shredded wool. The flight took place at Versailles, France, in front of the King Louis XVI, his Queen-Marie Antoinette and thousands of spectators. The balloon flew for just over 2 miles (3.22kilometres), and all the animals landed safely.

### 21 November 1783

The brothers, Joseph & Etienne Montgolfier built a balloon designed to carry people. Jean-François Pilatre de Rozier (a physicist) and François Laurent, Marquis d'Arlandes, were the first human pilots on an untethered flight. They took off from the garden of the Château La Muette in the Bois de Boulogne, Paris, and flew for 25 minutes before managing to land about 6.2miles (10 Kilometres) away both unharmed. They managed to reach a height of 2953 feet (900 metres).

### 1 December 1783

The first manned gas balloon by Jacques Alexander Charles and Nicholas Louis Robert Charles. Charliere No.2 was 13420cubic feet (380cubic metres), and made from varnished silk and filled with hydrogen. They launched it in Le jardin des Tuileries, Paris at 13:45hrs. The flight lasted 2.5 hours and covered a distance of 25 miles(40.2kms) they landed at Nesle-La-Vallee. Upon landing, Robert stepped out of the basket, which caused the balloon to rise again, this time to about 9000 feet. (2743metres) Jacques later landed safely. Today, in France, gas balloons are known as Charlieres and hot air balloons are known as Montgolfiers.

25 August 1784

James Tytler, took off from Edinburgh in 'The Grand Edinburgh Fire Balloon' being the first flight in the United Kingdom with a hot air envelope although this first attempt was hardly a 'flight'. Two days later, however, Tytler did indeed achieve a flight of about half a mile (0.80 kilometre) rising to a height of 350 feet (106.7metres).

15 September 1784

September 15th, 1784 An Italian, Vincenzo Lunardi, made the first balloon flight in England. The 18,000 cubic foot (510 cubic metres) balloon flew from the Artillery grounds at Moorfields and landed first at North Mimms, Hertfordshire, then, after jettisoning some weight, flew on to land in Long Mead, near Ware. His passengers included a dog, a cat and a pigeon (in a cage).

4 October 1784

James Sadler was known as 'the father of English ballooning'. He made his first balloon ascent from his hometown of Oxford on 4th October, 1784. He set off from Christ Church Meadows, Oxford, reaching over three quarters of a mile high. Once at that height he flew for half an hour before landing 6 miles (9.6kms) away in Woodeaton.

7 January 1785

Jean Pierre Blanchard and Dr. John Jeffries became the first aeronauts to fly across the English Channel.

An account of the time tells us that the men were wearing frock coats, dimity waistcoats, nankeen britches, white silk stockings and shoes festooned with black silk ribbons. Their hats were covered with japan (silk) to which were fixed cockades from which arose a small ostrich feather.

Jefferies wrote his account in his 1786 book *A Narrative of Two Aerial Voyages*, and there are many sources where we can read the story - including the part where our plucky pilots were perilously close to the sea and started to throw overboard excess baggage, including their trousers!

The '*Dover Historian*' describes the event here.

15 June 1785

The first Roziere flight - and the first air fatalities. Jean-Francois Pilatre de Rozier and co-pilot Pierre Romain (the builder of the balloon) attempted to fly from France to England. The hybrid principle of a Roziere balloon was devised by Jean-Francois Pilatre de Rozier for use in an attempt to cross the English Channel on 15 Jun 1785. Unfortunately the combination of hydrogen and a naked flame used to heat the lower portion of the balloon was disastrous, and both were killed when the balloon caught fire.

8 November 1836

Pilot Charles Green, co-pilots Robert Holland, Thomas Monck-Mason made the first flight over 600kms in a gas balloon. In balloon Royal Vauxhall, inflated with coal gas, they flew from London to Weiburg, Nassau, Germany, They used a trailrope to slow their approach. The distance was 608kms (378 miles) and it took 18hrs.

24 September 1852

French engineer, Henri Giffard, flies the 1st powered, manned airship. Powered by a steam engine and propeller, the airship flies at about 5-mph and covers 17 miles (27.4kilometres) from Paris to Trappes, France. The craft marks the beginning of the practical airship.

17 April 1857

Thaddeus Lowe made his first balloon ascent - albeit tethered - in New York City. His first free flight was in 1858 from Ottawa Canada. He reportedly made more than 3000 ascents in his lifetime. He was apprenticed as a shoemaker in 1847, a travelling magician 1850-55, became a professional balloonist & balloon maker 1858-62, a semi-pro Meteorologist 1860-61. He was the inventor & developer of mechanical refrigeration 1866-84 and perfected production of Water-Gas 1872. He became a land developer 1890-1910 and a railway developer 1893-1903. Source: Who is Who in Ballooning.

5 September 1862

On 5 September 1862, the meteorologist James Glaisher (1809-1903) and balloonist Henry Tracey Coxwell (1819-1900) ascended from Wolverhampton in their gas balloon. Losing control, they rose to an estimates 35,000 feet (10,668 metres), by far the greatest height then reached by gas balloon. Glaisher fainted due to a lack of oxygen, and Coxwell lost the use of his hands. He managed to pull the gas valve-cord with his teeth to bring them down to a safe altitude.

13 January 1871

The 58th balloon escaped the Siege of Paris. Balloon 'Le Monge'. Pilot Raoul, and 2 passengers. Landed at Chateauroux, flight of 260km. Also that night, the 59th balloon flew from Paris during the Siege. Balloon 'Le General-Faidherbe'. Pilot Van Seymoutier, one passenger and 5 dogs! Landed Nr Sainte-Foy-La-Grande, a flight of 354.18miles (570 km) in 10 hrs 30 mins.

11 July 1897

Swedish pilot Salomon August Andree, with co-pilots Nils Stringberg and Knut Fraenkel set off on the first manned Arctic Flight in a 4800 cubic foot (136cubic metres) gas balloon. They launched from Danskön, Svalbard and were never seen again. In 1930, remains of the expedition were found 295 miles (475 kilometres) from the launch field. Source: The Andrée Diaries.

19 October 1901

Albert Santos Dumont from Brazil was awarded the Deutsch Prize of 125,000 francs for flying a gas airship, from the Aero club in Paris, around the Eiffel Tower and back again in 30minutes.

### 30 September 1906

James Gordon Bennett, founded the Gordon Bennett Balloon Trophy Race with a simple aim: to fly as far away as possible from the start line. The first race saw a group of Hydrogen gas balloons launch from Paris on 30th September 1906.

American Frank Lahm won by landing in Yorkshire 402 miles (647 km) and British entry Charles Rolls came 3rd landing near the Wash after 286 miles (461 km).

### 20 May 1908

Henry Spencer, son of Charles Green Spencer and father of aeronauts Ena Louise Spencer & Percival Frederick Spencer, made and flew the first airship from London. He was a professional balloon maker with Gaudron until 1914. His only recorded balloon flight was 12 Aug. 1909 in England (from the Halifax Zoo grounds), he descended by parachute. He allegedly flew in the 1922 Gordon Bennett Balloon Race but it has never been substantiated. Source: Who is Who in Ballooning.

### 30 May 1908

The first British-held international balloon race began at Hurlingham Private Members Club in Fulham, England.

"Thirty one balloons entered and the two joint winners ( Mr. Pollock in '*Valkyrie*' and Mr. Brewer in '*Lotus*') both claim to have landed within a mile of the winning post at Burchett's Green Inn near Maidenhead.

Some difficulty arose in regard to awarding third prize, as third, fourth, fifth and sixth balloons all descended in Waltham St. Lawrence about equal distance from the winning post."

### 7 August 1910

Willows built his first airship, the Willows No.1, in 1905 when he was 19. It was first flown from East Moors, Cardiff on 5 August 1905, the flight lasting 85 minutes. This was soon followed by an improved Willows No. 2, in which he landed outside Cardiff City Hall on 4 June 1910 then in August he flew it from Cardiff to London - an epic journey of 140 miles(225kms)in 10 hours, the longest cross-country flight in Britain at that time.

No. 2 was re-built as No. 3 which he named the City of Cardiff before he flew it from London to Paris in 1910. This was the first airship crossing of the English Channel at night and the first from England to France.

26 July 1911

Dolly Shepherd took off in her hot air balloon, at the Pickering Gala. She struck a tree branch on her ascent, it stuck in her clothing.

The gala was held in the Avenue Field, next to Pickering Castle. Dolly Shepherd would tour the country transporting her balloon to events with four horses and a wagon. The balloon was inflated with hot air after building a bonfire close to it. When the balloon rose Dolly hung onto a trapeze below. When it was high enough she would pull a rip cord in order to make the balloon collapse. She would then open a parachute and float back down to the ground. Dolly earned a place in the record books when she came to the rescue of another parachutist in mid-air in 1908. She managed to hoist the girl, who was in trouble, under her canopy at about 11,000 feet (3353metres) and the two descended together.

29 August 1929

First round the world flight by Hugo Eckener piloting the Graf Zeppelin in 4 stages. The Graf Zeppelin is a rigid airship, Type Zeppelin LZ127. The flight left Lakehurst USA on August 7th, circumnavigated the globe stopping at Friedrichshafen, Germany, then on to Tokyo, Japan, from there to Los Angeles, USA and finally arriving back at Lakehurst USA on 29th August. The distance is the total ground distance and was 20,375 miles (32,790 kilometres). Duration is airborne times of the four flights and was 288hours, 11mins.

6 May 1937

The Hindenburg, a large German passenger carrying rigid airship, caught fire and was destroyed in less than one minute while attempting to dock in Lakehurst, New Jersey. Of the 97 persons on board 35 were killed. Such ships had exemplary safety records until the spectacular demise of this famous airship. After that the use of such airships began to wane. Other disasters with hydrogen filled airships caused them to gradually be phased out. After the Hindenburg disaster helium-filled military ships were about the only airships to fly. Hydrogen was considered too dangerous.

27 September 1937

Josef Emmer, of Vienna, Made an attempt on the altitude record for hot air balloons with his huge "Marek-Emmer II. He was assisted by Bruno Marek who did not, however, also make the ascent.

On October 7, 1935, they flew the Marek-Emmer II, a hot-air balloon with a capacity of 63,600 cubic feet (1801 cubic metres). Powered by a pressurised petrol burner it reached new heights and 'captivated spectators'.

12 December 1958

Arnold Eiloart, Timothy Eiloart, Colin Mudie and Rosemary Mudie attempted to cross the Atlantic east to west from Tenerife, Canary Isles 12 December 1958. They were flying 'Small World' a homemade hydrogen balloon. They ditched after 1,200 miles (1931kilometres) on 15 December, but they then rowed and sailed the balloon gondola the rest of the way to Barbados.

16 November 1959

First stratospheric jump of program EXCELSIOR. As part of EXCELSIOR an U.S. Air Force program, which was designed to test whether pilots could survive high-altitude bailouts, in November 16, 1959 Captain Joseph W. Kittinger Jr was sent in a stratospheric balloon launched from New Mexico, to an altitude of 76,400 feet where he jumped to test a new automatic parachute device developed by Francis Baupre. However, the stabilizer parachute was deployed too soon, catching Kittinger around the neck and causing him to spin at 120 revolutions per minute. This caused Kittinger to lose consciousness, but his life was saved by his main parachute which opened automatically at a height of 10,000 feet.

On August 16, 1960, Kittinger made the final high-altitude jump at 102,800 feet (31,300 m). Towing a small drogue parachute for initial stabilization, he fell for 4 minutes and 36 seconds, reaching a maximum speed of 614 miles per hour (988 km/h) before opening his parachute at 18,000 feet (5,500 m). Incurring yet another equipment malfunction, the pressurization for his right glove malfunctioned during the ascent and his right hand swelled to twice its normal size, but he rode the balloon up to 102,800 feet before stepping off.

22 October 1960

It was on Oct. 22, 1960, on a farm in Bruning, Neb., that Mr. Ed Yost strapped himself into a lawn chair, placed his feet on a dowel dangling from ropes, ignited the propane tanks to heat air that had been pumped by fan into the balloon, and lifted off. The flight lasted 25 minutes, reached 500 feet (152 metres) and covered three miles (nearly five kilometres).

25 March 1963

First Channel crossing by hot air balloon was made by Edward Yost, and Don Piccard, both from the US. They flew from Rye in Kent England to Dunkirk in France in 3hrs17mins. They flew a Raven balloon, 'Channel Champ'.

4 February 1967

The first channel crossing in a balloon carrying 5 people. JAMBO, a gas balloon was flown from Rye in Sussex to Berck Plage in France. Christine Turnbull as student pilot (her 5th flight), Gerry Turnbull as examiner, Malcolm Brighton, and passengers Mr and Mrs Doddy Hay flew for 3hours 45mins. The safety boat following was crewed by Giles Camplin and Mike Davies. Although the British authorities were helpful, the French authorities were not so good and curtailed the fliers movements for 3 days until the intervention of Charles Dollfus, Club Vice President of France and General Cuffaut, director of the Aero Club de France, who made effective protestations to the local French authorities.

10 July 1967

The second Bristol Belle flight from Weston on the Green and this time she flew for 5 miles (8kilometres) and the British press went wild.

11 June 1971

British pilot Sheila Scott makes the first flight by a light plane from equator to equator via the North Pole. Flying in a Piper Aztec D, she covers 34,000 miles (54,718 km). Sheila Scott and Anthony Smith co-founded the British Balloon & Airship Club in 1965.

22 August 1972

British pilots Don Cameron & Mark Yarry in G-AZUW, 'Cumulonimbus', a Cameron A-140, completed the first crossing of Swiss Alps by hot air balloon. They took off from Zermatt in Switzerland and flew over Mount Rosa to land in Biella Italy, a distance of 22.36miles (36kms).

The balloon was then the largest built by Cameron Balloons and was supplied with a double burner .

4 January 1973

Don Cameron & Teddy Hall in G-BAMK Cameron D-96, made the first public flight of a hot air airship near Newbury, Berkshire at the Icicle Meet.

2 May 1973

Barnes claimed the record for the first flight in an aircraft powered only by solar energy. This "Solar Firefly" was a 200,000-cubic-foot tetrahedron balloon, although Dominic Michaelis, a British architect and inventor of many solar utilities is recorded as having owned the first pure solar balloon in Europe ( G-BAVU). "But Dominic didn't have the nerve to fly his solar balloon," said Nott, who flew Dominic's solar balloon across the English Channel in 1981 ( using the burner occasionally). Barnes also became the first commercial hot-air balloonist in the United States by flying for KSTP-TV with a big banner.

16 June 1979

Hans-Peter Strelzyk, with co-pilot Gunter Wetzel escaped from East Germany flying a home made hot air balloon. Hans-Peter's passengers were his wife and 2 children, and Gunter's wife and 2 children. They took off from Oberlemnitz in East Germany, and successfully flew over the border to S.Lichtenberg in West Germany. A flight which might have only last 28minutes and for a distance of 10miles (16kilometres), but it was their break for freedom into the West.

9 September 1979

On the weekend of the 7th-9th September 1979, a small gathering of like-minded balloonists came together to celebrate what was to become the first ever Bristol International Balloon Fiesta. Organised by the British Junior Chamber of Commerce and Shipping, the Fiesta was held at the popular ballooning location, Ashton Court. Spectators witnessed a mass ascent of all 27 balloons attending the Fiesta and marvelled at the many other flights made throughout the weekend. Most balloons came from the West Country, while others came from Ireland, Luxembourg and West Germany.

12 November 1981

Ben Abruzzo, with crew Rocky Aoki, Ron Clark and Larry Newman, flying a Raven experimental balloon, reg N4003A, achieved a record distance flight of 5208miles (8382km), flying from Nagashima in Japan to Covello, California, USA. It was the first Pacific crossing by gas balloon.

6 October 1984

Ian Jones was the first winner of the Great British Long Jump. This a long distance race for hot air balloons in the UK, and the idea was first put forward by Robin Batchelor, and Anthony Smith agreed to be the judge. Ian had flown 136 miles (219kms) in a Cameron Viva 77.

The current best flight was made by David Bareford in 2020 with 338 miles (544kms).

16 May 1986

Ian Ashpole of Ross-on-Wye, performed a trapeze act suspended from a hot-air balloon over St Neots. The Alka Seltzer balloon ascended to 16,420 feet (5005metres)for this event.

Listen to his recording on the Oral History part of this website.

3 July 1987

Per Lindstrand & Richard Branson became the first pilots to fly across the Atlantic Ocean in a hot-air balloon G-USUK, a Colt 813 They took off from Sugar Loaf in Maine, USA on 2nd July, and ditched in the Irish Sea (after briefly touching down near Limavady, Northern Ireland) 3 Jul 87.

17 January 1991

Per Lindstrand & Richard Branson landed in Yellowknife, Canada having completed the first Trans-Pacific crossing by hot-air balloon. They took off from Miyakonojo, Japan on January 15th flying G-OWWF, "Pacific Flyer", Thunder and Colt 2500A Hot air balloon. They broke 3 records with the flight: the first hot air balloon across the Pacific; the fastest manned balloon flight; the longest manned balloon flight.

21 October 1991

The first flight of a hot air balloons over Mount Everest. The pilot of hot air balloon, Star Flyer II was Englishman Andy Elson, and the co-pilot was Eric Jones. The pilot of hot air balloon, Star Flyer I was Australian, Chris Dewhurst, and the co-pilot was British adventurer, Leo Dickinson. They flew 20miles (32kms) in 1 hour 20minutes having taken off from Gokyo, Nepal. Listen to Andy Elsan's story on the oral histories on this website.

16 September 1992

The first TransAtlantic balloon Race from Bangor, Maine, USA. The competitors were; Wim Verstraeten & Bertrand Piccard flying G-BUFA Cameron R-77 who landed in Northern Spain, Erich Krafft & Jochen Maas flying G-BUFB Cameron R-77 unfortunately landed mid Atlantic so didn't reach Europe, Don Cameron & Rob Bayly flying G-BUFC Cameron R-77 landed in Figuera da Foz, Portugal, Evert Louwman & Gerhard Hoogslageflying G-BUFD Cameron R-77 landed in the seaa of Lands End UK, and Richard Abruzzo & Troy Bradley -G-BUFE Cameron R-77 landed in Morocco (outside the competition area).

25 September 1994

Japanese pilot Sabu Ichiyoshi, with co-pilots Maco Oiwa, Masao Masuda, Susumu Tatsumi and Kennji Komura, made the first successful hot air balloon flight from South Korea to Japan. They launched in Pusan, South Korea at 09:07 JST and landed in Yamaguchi, Japan at 13:19 JST. A journey of 125 miles (201 kilometres) taking 4 hours and 12 minutes.

1 March 1999

Hot air balloon pilots Bertrand Piccard of Switzerland and Brian Jones of Great Britain took off on an historic, non-stop, 20-day flight during which they circumnavigated the globe in just 15 days. By the time they landed on 21 March, they had set a total of seven new world records, including Distance, Duration and Altitude across all balloon types and sizes (Absolute category).

Four of these records – for distance and duration in two ballooning classes – still stand today. On completing the flight, Jones told the jubilant, Geneva-based mission control team: "The first thing I'll do is phone my wife, and then, like the good Englishman I am, I'll have a cup of tea."

Piccard, 41 at the time, added that he felt an "invisible hand" had guided their "fantastic voyage".

Bertrand and co pilot Brian Jones, took off from Chateau d'Oex in Switzerland.

4 July 2002

American adventurer, Steve Fossett in a Cameron R-550 "Bud Light Spirit of Freedom" flew the first Solo Flight around the world in a balloon. He took off from Northam airport, West Australia, and landed at the Blue Hills, Queensland, Australia. The distance was 20626 miles (33195.1km) and the time was 320 hours 33 min.

26 November 2005

Dr. Vijaypat Singhania set the world altitude record for highest hot air balloon flight, reaching 68,986 ft (21,027 metres). He took off from downtown Mumbai, India, and landed 150 miles (240 km) south in Panchale, breaking the previous record of 64997 ft (19811 metres ) set by Per Lindstrand in 1988.

23 July 2016

Fedor Konyukhov became the fourth person to successfully circumnavigate the world in a balloon and the second to do it solo. He completed his 33,000-kilometer (20,506-mile) journey in just over 11 days launching and landing in western Australia.

The *Morton* balloon, manufactured by the U.K.-based Cameron Balloons Ltd., is likely the most advanced Rozière ever constructed. In total the balloon is 197 feet (60 meters) tall, and boasts a volume of 15,500 cubic meters. Its starting weight was 10 tons, though the *Morton* was down to four tons by the time it landed.

Konyukhov lived in a carbon-fiber gondola, roughly six feet (two meters) wide and six feet (two meters) tall, which could double as an autonomous life boat in the event of a water landing. During the trip, he often had to crawl outside the capsule to manage hardware, especially during malfunctions. Inside the capsule were supplies, including first-aid supplies, high-calorie food rations, water (two liters per day), and oxygen. There was also a bunk bed and navigation and communication equipment that allowed him to communicate with a team of scientists and engineers who ultimately helped Konyukhov chart his successful course.

7 February 2017

Two Russian pilots Fedor Konyukhov and Ivan Menyaylo flew for 55hours 9 minutes in an AX15 hot air balloon to claim the world duration record.

The balloon was AX12 ( 10,000 cubic metres) and carried 5,000 litres of propane fuel ( approximately 3,000 kilogrammes).

11 October 2020

The 2020 Long Jump competition was won by David Bareford and Jona White with a flight of 338 miles ( 544 kilometres) in 9 hours 50 minutes.

Launch site in Kelloholm, Dumfries & Galloway and landed in Ipplepen, South Devon.

This is the furthest distance achieved in the history of the competition since its inception in 1984 with the simple challenge to fly as far as possible within the British Isles during the month of October. This month was chosen as most likely to make a safe flight all day with no thermals from the typical lower temperatures.

[Read the pilots' report here \(with pictures\).](#)