

# Balloonist sets records, fails to circle globe

SULTANPUR, India (AP) — Steve Fossett's silver balloon drifted down in a field of mustard and wheat and the applause of hundreds of villagers — none of whom could communicate with the Chicago adventurer.

It took a villager an hour's walk on rain-ravaged roads to bring back a policeman who could speak English. Then Fossett was taken off to a nearby town, a curry dinner and bed — having failed to fly non-stop around the world, but setting new records for distance and endurance in a balloon.

**"I had a little rough landing but the only problem I have is that I am way behind in sleeping."**

Steve Fossett  
Balloonist

"As I prepared to land, I saw hundreds of people. I did not know what to expect. But they were lovely people. They all cheered me," Fossett said in an interview late Monday, appearing relaxed and jovial in running shoes, gray slacks and several days' growth of beard.

The 52-year-old securities trader set off in his Solo Spirit from St. Louis last week. After running out of fuel, he landed Monday at Piparpur, about 370 miles southeast of New Delhi, the capital.

He was later brought to nearby Sultanpur to eat and sleep.

"I had a little rough landing but the only problem I have is that I am way behind in sleeping," Fossett said. He said he had only two hours of sleep a day.

He traveled 9,000 miles and floated in the air for six days, two hours and 54 minutes, according to Fossett's ground crew in Chicago.

Fossett said he struggled to keep his balloon over the Ganges River valley, which he considered

a safe place to land.

"Thunderstorms came and I was real worried because my balloon could have been pushed toward the Himalayas in Nepal and that would have been very difficult," he said.

The fuel problem that robbed him of a round-the-world feat remained unexplained. He had lifted off with an ample supply—700 gallons of propane fuel in tanks.

"I have to have a closer look why it didn't work," he said in the interview at the police chief's house in Sultanpur.

Fossett burned up extra fuel waiting for Libya to give him clearance to fly over, spokesman Bo Kemper said, but that alone didn't explain the fuel shortfall.

Fossett planned to return to his landing site Tuesday to begin preparing to get his balloon back to the United States. The Smithsonian Institution wants to display the gondola at the Air and Space Museum in Washington.

Fossett had hoped to become the first hot air balloonist to travel around the world without stopping, but had to settle for breaking his own record for the longest distance traveled in a balloon and another record for staying aloft longer than any other balloonist.

He also claimed an altitude record, but could not immediately say what height he reached or what the previous record was.

Fossett matched a six-day, 16-minute balloon endurance mark about 11:30 a.m., then hovered at 500 to 1,000 feet, drifting with the winds for more than an hour.

He eclipsed by several thousand miles his own world distance ballooning record, 5,435 miles traveled on a 1995 flight from South Korea to Canada.

Fossett conceded from the start that his chances of making it around the world were slim.

Unlike other balloonists who had set out this month to try to float around the world, Fossett was flying solo, in an unpressurized cabin capped by a Plexiglas bubble.

He endured bitter cold in his cramped cabin. For long stretches, temperatures hovered near zero while



AP/Wide World Photos

he was flying too high for his heaters to work properly.

Fossett had said he picked midwinter for the trip because of brisk winds and fewer thunderstorms.

The high point of his adventure was crossing the Atlantic Ocean, he said.

"It is very tricky because weather conditions can make you go in circles. I was relieved when I crossed the Atlantic."

Fossett failed his first round-the-world attempt a year ago, landing in a field in northeastern Canada.

On Jan. 8, British tycoon Richard Branson's balloon, Global Challenger, was forced down by equipment problems in the North African desert 19 hours after lifting off from Marrakech, Morocco, with three crew members.

Four days later, Swiss psychiatrist Bertrand Piccard and his crew ditched in the Mediterranean after kerosene fumes filled their cockpit. They lasted six hours.

## NAACP

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admissions or scholarships.

Last year the A&M NAACP held a protest in the Plaza of the Memorial Student Center; participants wore all black.

Wheatfall said the '90's movement is objection to Hopwood decision, the removal of affirmative action, Proposition 209 in California.

"There's always a cause to have an active voice," Wheatfall said. "There is a cause for college students to fight for their education."

The NAACP faces obstacles while trying to fight for individual's rights.

Two of the obstacles are the white males controlling the isolation and the "red tape called the administration," Wheatfall said. The lack of empowerment and decisiveness of minorities are other obstacles, he said.

Wheatfall said at A&M, tradition can prohibit the NAACP from achieving its goals.

Tradition is found in every sect of society, he said, and it is important to continue traditions, but they can also alienate some groups.

"Whenever those traditions infringe exceedingly on the rights of another group, it is time to alter those traditions," Wheatfall said.

A&M has many small innuendoes of racism, he said. One of the more prominent examples is the display of a Confederate flag.

Wheatfall said the NAACP wants groups to care about the offended parties feel, and then try to include them in traditions.

At the last state NAACP conference in October, the A&M chapter was recognized as the largest chapter in Texas with 65 members.

Wheatfall said one of his goals, as president, is to increase membership in the A&M chapter and the state.

"There is power in numbers," Wheatfall said. "One voice may be heard, but a thousand voices will definitely be heard."

Herbert said the NAACP's reputation is one of the reasons she decided to join the group.

"I joined the NAACP because it seemed like a dignified organization to be a member of," she said. "I wanted to be part of an organization on-campus that will respond."

## FIRE

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The A&M Critical Incident Response Team contacted parents and notified the students' professors of the situation, so they could help replace textbooks.

Bill Thomas, director of the American Red Cross in Brazos County, said his biggest concern at the scene was to take care of the residents who had been evacuated, and to handle their immediate needs.

Thomas said most of the students remained calm and quiet, and carried themselves in a subdued manner.

"It was a traumatic experience," Thomas said. "They didn't know the extent of the damages into their apartments."

Mies said he wants to stress to students the importance of keeping their fire detectors in working condition. The fire detector in the



Dave House, THE BATTALION

A wreath and candles were placed near the unit that burned at Kensington Place Apartments on Saturday.

burned apartment was found in the closet with the batteries removed.

"In that building, we found three other detectors with the batteries removed," Mies said.

Gail Armstrong, manager of Kensington Place Apartments, said the residents have helped solve problems in the aftermath of the fire.

"Everyone just pulled together like one big family," Armstrong said. "It's really pulled everyone closer together."

## INAUGURATION

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"May [King's] dream finally come true for all of us," Graham prayed.

Prior to the oaths, Virginian Eagle Scout David Morales led the Pledge of Allegiance, and the Children of the Gospel Mass Choir sang "Let's Build a Bridge Across America."

Clinton took the podium as his wife and daughter looked on, and Chief Justice William Rehnquist administered the oath of office, initiating the final presidency of the 20th century.

Proclaiming in "a moment that will define our course and character for decades to come," Clinton addressed the nation with a theme of unity.

He reiterated that government should "do more, not less," to grant all Americans the opportunity to build better lives.

"Today, we can declare that gov-

ernment is not the problem, and government is not the solution ... Our Founders understood that," Clinton said.

The President said for the country to successfully enter the 21st Century, Americans must unite.

"The divide of race has been America's constant curse ... We shall overcome (it)," he said.

Clinton then outlined his new vision of government. He included such things as the information superhighway being made available to all, an improvement in school standards, the gradual transfer of the underclass to the middle class and creating a planet free from nuclear, chemical and biological weapons.

He also stressed the importance of a balanced budget, health-care reform, a clean environment and an overhaul of special interest-oriented policies.

The President said the American people did not re-elect a Democratic President and a Republi-

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