

Angel Fire 2017

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We are off on our annual flying event in Angel Fire, NM. It is a 3-day balloon rally held in the Angel Fire valley of Northern New Mexico. Angel Fire is always 10 to 15 degrees cooler than Albuquerque this time of year. And believe me we need a break from the heat as Albuquerque is predicted to break one hundred while we are gone.



We connected up the trailer, assured the running lights were working, packed our stuff and drove off. The dashboard on the truck says the left turn/stop light on the trailer is not working. How does this truck know that? As I remember to get that bulb out is a pain-in-the-butt.

The drive is not a difficult drive but does take about three hours. We take I-25 to Santa Fe and take the NM-599 bypass and then pass through Espanola. We then continue towards Taos, NM and on the outskirts of Taos we turn East on NM-68, do a couple of traffic circles, and continue for 28 minutes (20 miles) to Angel Fire. I had heard that there was some road work between Taos and Angel Fire with stop and go traffic.

I have encountered road work (if you live in NM, it is always there) but this was the craziest road

work I have encountered. They had laid oil on the road and then spread a coating of 1/4 to one-half-inch rock over the oil and then ran a heavy roller over that and then asked us to drive on it. It was so noisy and rocks bouncing everywhere. The last five miles or so stretch of road was slow driving with lots of stop and go encounters. About 4 miles from Angel Fire the truck began to gently slide, and the anti-skid warning indicators shown on the dashboard show some abnormalities with the truck's systems. Ah great, that makes me nervous. About two miles from Angel Fire, we started hearing a squeaking sound as we drove like something rubbing somewhere in the truck or the trailer. Oh, Crap what is that. As we entered Angel Fire the sounds stopped so we must have picked up a rock somewhere in the engine or wheel compartment. Thank God, we made it, and all is well.

We checked in the visitor's center and receive our keys to the condo we are staying for three nights. It sure is great to see our balloonist friends.

Our assigned condo overlooked the ski slopes and as "House Menders" Diana and I immediately make note of things that need to be fixed. The lighting is in need of updating as it's next to impossible to have light to do necessary things. Oh well we are here to fly the balloon.



We unpack, disconnect the trailer and head for the reception. Everyone is there and it is so much

fun chatting with our ballooning friends. They remind us to set our aircraft radios to the Common Traffic Advisory Frequency (CTAF) 122.8 and announce to "Traffic" if we are approaching the airport air space so that everyone knows where everyone else is, especially the airplanes.

As we prepared to go to sleep Diana noticed a bat flying around the condo. She got on top of the bunkbeds with a bag and attempted to catch the bat. It flew downstairs and landed on the cupboard. She was able to capture the bat and put it outside. My hero...



Breezy Rider in the Center of the picture

Friday morning, we have to be on the launch field by 6 AM for a scheduled launch at 7 AM. It is so exciting to be flying. The launch field has many gopher holes, so we caution everyone to watch their step. We are briefed on the rules and regulations of the area, and we are given the go to fly. Wait, I have four crew members, Tom, Diana, Sam, and Andrea. I, Tom, am off to convince some unsuspecting people want to help us fly the balloon. A couple of people blew me off and then I saw a couple and their friend. Eric, Susan, and Sheri. They could not today but they could tomorrow. I said OK, see you tomorrow. We started to assemble the balloon and then Eric, Susan, and Sheri, they were going to help tomorrow, came over and said they had had breakfast and could help us today and tomorrow. Thanks Eric, Susan, and Sheri.



We are launching. The weather is perfect as the winds are light and variable.



Balloons are everywhere...



The navigation was fantastic. I could go wherever I wanted to go in the valley. It was delightful and enjoyable. I want to do this every day. I had along as a passenger Sheri. As I was landing after 1/2-hour flight I told her to brace, and I landed, and she was still braced and I said we had landed already. A very gentle landing I must say.

I handed the balloon off to Sam and he took Eric on another one-half-hour flight landing not too far from where we took off from.



Keith Lutz flying overhead



Sam's wife's balloon "Levity" ready to fly.



After flying we gave all three of the crew the ceremony as Sheri would fly with us on Saturday morning.



Sam telling the story of ballooning. Every pilot tells the story differently.





Notice the "Evil One" Diana pouring water as the initiation into ballooning. We do not pour champagne as that is wasteful and we would rather drink the champagne.

After all the ceremony we headed for propane. We fueled and the propane provider mentioned our consumption was twenty-three gallons and most others were around sixteen gallons. Humm.... What does that mean? We flew for an hour as did most people. We were at 9,000 feet so that would cause us to use more fuel but that should be everyone using the same amount of fuel. It stuck that in the back of my mind and hoped it had no real meaning. We did a lot of up/down travelling to find the winds that we wanted and that will use more fuel compared to level flight but that is also normal.

We spent the afternoon in Red River as the Arts and Crafts Fair. Diana and Andrei did the wine tasting tour and seemed to have an enjoyable time. As I had brought a hat along, I tried it on and somehow it had shrunk, and I looked like an idiot, so I sat in the shade and watched people watching. Nice to just sit for a change.

Saturday morning and it is a beautiful day to fly. We pulled out the balloon and tested everything and then as we were putting it on the top Diana (the Crew Chief) noticed a tear in the top part of

the balloon called the parachute. It was 4" long and well longer than legal to fly so we cancelled and will have to wait till Monday to take it to a repair station in Albuquerque. Now that was hard to take but better to be safe than have an accident. I was so disappointed as we watched the other balloons navigate through the sky. Talking with other pilots there was no end to the reasons the top could have a tear in it. I got tired of listening to the reasons, but they all agreed I should not fly.

We decided to stay for the remaining part of the weekend and watch the evening glow and do some afternoon hiking. We picked the Oeste Vista 2.7-mile hike just across the street from the golf course. My Fit Bit showed we climbed fifty-six flights of stairs and hiked more than 2.8 miles. It was beautiful but a very steep climb. At 9,000 feet it was a tough hike. Below are vistas along the hiking path.



The golf course



Clouds in the horizon







Wheeler Peak





Golf Course



Downtown Angel Fire







Wheeler Peak











The fountain on the golf course



We hiked along the stream towards the end of the hike.

On the third and final day of flying Breezy Rider is grounded due to the tear in the balloon envelope. During the pilot briefing everyone, even the announcer told us how bad they felt that we could not fly. It was a humbling experience. As our dog sitter Madison had mentioned the day before "Everything happens for a reason".

One of the balloonist asked me the evening before if they could borrow one of my poles (uprights) as she had broken one of hers. I said sure as I cannot fly might as well use one of mine. Also, Peter was flying his "Cloud Hopper" (A balloon with only a seat and a fuel tank) and could not fly unless he had instruments, so he borrowed ours. It felt good that two other balloons could fly due to our misfortune. We were then asked to look for Peter and Barbara. They had two balloons to fly so with Diana and I as crew we again helped someone else fly.



Peter flying the ballon (notice there is no basket)



Inflation



The balloon with no basket just a seat and a burner.



Peter and Barbara's balloon













Helping Peter and Barbara gave me a chance to show Diana an Aerostar balloon system. I learned on and owned an Aerostar system and now we have a Cameron system.

A Great weekend. Everyone was safe and we enjoyed the weekend... I am truly blessed to have so many ballooning friends.

As we drove home it dawned on me that our truck had a lot of technology built into it. We were talking to our youngest son David (Steve and Mike are the other two) and the dog sitter Madison was texting us about the dog and we were listening to the XM-radio and Diana was texting a fellow balloonist that we were following about her electrical connection to the trailer had come lose and was dragging.

We are Living and Loving....

Report from AERCO

We had a great flight in Angel Fire last Friday. During the assembly of the balloon for flight on Saturday we found a 4" tear in the parachute (Top of the balloon).

We did not feel it was safe to fly with that tear. When we returned to Albuquerque, we took the balloon to AERCO (Repair Station), and they discovered that the parachute was wearing out. They did a pull test on the fabric and depending on the color some of the panels failed the standard pull test. This would have been found at the annual which is scheduled for early July but since we had an issue they will repair it now, by replacing the entire parachute.

The following were the results of the pull Test.

Pink - failed at 10 lb. pull test.

Red - failed at less than less than 30 lb. pull test.

Yellow - marginal

Blue - passed.

Green - passed.

Orange - failed at less than 30 lb. pull test.

The temperature tabs were normal, so we did not over temp the balloon.

Depending on the color of the fabric the ultraviolet rays are reflected or adsorbed. Thus, the Green and Blue and absorbed less and were fine, the other colors absorbed more and degraded. Once the fabric begins to degrade due to the ultraviolet rays the porosity increases and allows more warm air to pass through the fabric causing even more degradation.

As mentioned above all of this would have been caught during the annual which is scheduled for next month. This is one of the reasons the FAA requires us to have an inspection every year on the balloon.

Sam and I had the option to replace the panels that failed or replace the entire parachute. We elected to go with a complete replacement. The parachute is ordered and will arrive in a week or two and be put in by AERCO.

Of note the tabs will be new on the parachute and AERCO will clean the other side of the tabs so the tabbing issues will be resolved.

On the subject of the additional handles, it is way too expensive to add handles to the basket as there is no support structure in the basket for additional handles. So, we will not be adding handles.

Sam and I first flew the current envelope on May 2, 2005, making the envelope 12 years and the issues with the top of the balloon are normal wear and tear.

So, for a few weeks Breezy Rider will be resting in the repair shop.

**** The End ****