

NAA NEWS

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Briton Claims Harmon Trophy for Ballooning

A 44-year-old British explorer and balloonist, David Hempleman-Adams, has been chosen to receive the National Aeronautic Association's Harmon Aeronaut (Ballooning) Trophy for the Year 2000 for his solo flight to the North Pole in an open-basket Roziere balloon over a six-day period in the summer of last year.

Hempleman-Adams's roundtrip from Spitzbergen Island to the top of the world and back--a distance of 2,451 kilometers (1,523 miles)--captured a number of records, according to the British Balloon and Airship Club (BBAC), foremost of which were: (1) First balloonist to fly alone to the North Pole and (2) Duration record for an Arctic flight. The previous attempt to conquer the North Pole in a balloon occurred in 1897 and ended in tragedy when a three-man Swedish team was forced down over the Arctic after three days in the air. They died trying to walk across the ice to a safe haven.

According to Brian Jones, a member of the team that supported Hempleman-Adams flight, the undertaking "was the most dangerous balloon flight ever attempted and probably the one with the least chance of success... The problem is that I think we made it look too easy. The miracle of not simply getting to the Pole but then of flying a box back to Spitzbergen is incredible.... the enormity of the achievement can only be appreciated by those who understand ballooning."

From launch to touchdown, Hempleman-Adams was aloft for 132 hours--a duration record for a British balloonist--during which time he was only able to sleep about nine hours, due to constantly changing weather and the demands of steering a device that moves entirely at the mercy of the wind. The flight took place between May 28 and June 3, 2000.

In selecting Hempleman-Adams for the Harmon Trophy, the National Aeronautic Association (NAA) honors him for "the most outstanding international achievement in the art and science of ballooning for the year 2000." The award will be presented at the Kodak Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta on October 6, 2001. The Harmon Trophy was created in 1926 by Clifford B. Harmon, a philanthropist with a special interest in aviation.

The Roziere balloon that Hempleman-Adams used for his extraordinary trip is named the Britannic Challenger and measures 25 meters (82 feet) in height and 18 meters (59 feet) in width. Shaped like an ice-cream cone, it is designed with two compartments: an upper static-gas cell and a lower hot-air cell. The pilot uses the lower cell to heat the upper cell when no sunlight is

available to help maintain the upper cell's temperature. The balloon derives most of its lift from the upper cell.

Literally speaking, Hempleman-Adams did not fly to the North Pole; he came within about 21 kilometers (12.9 miles) of True North. But the British Balloon and Airship Club ruled in July of this year that for purposes of establishing a record, Hempleman-Adams reached his destination. Guinness World Records also accepted the claim, saying it is "highly unlikely anyone else will be able to replicate such an achievement."

Hempleman-Adams--who was 43 years old at the time of the flight--is a businessman in England who has spent the past 18 years setting records in ballooning, mountaineering, and polar exploration.

NAA is a non-profit, membership organization devoted to fostering opportunities to participate fully in aviation activities and to promoting public understanding of the importance of aviation and space flight to the United States. If you would like more information on NAA's awards, please check the Web site at www.naa-usa.org.