

A Leap into Autumn

October is the month of the Great British Long Jump when teams of plucky balloonists load their baskets with extra cylinders, warm clothes and sustenance, and take to the skies in an attempt to fly the furthest distance within the British Isles. Allie and Nick Dunnington teamed up to give it a try.



Above: Nick checks the instruments while Allie flies the balloon.



Above: Sharing the flying gives Allie time to put her feet up during the six-hour flight.

All photos © Allie Dunnington

This was the first time that Nick Dunnington and I as a team had taken part in this challenge. And what a brilliant challenge it was! So let me start with saying: "Thank you Robin Batchelor for organising this race every year and hope we can keep it going!"

Being somehow both slight greenhorns, we tried our best to prepare for our flight by sorting warm clothes, instruments, maps, food and drink and most importantly: crew and the weather.

PLOTTING AND PLANNING

Looking at the forecast, Thursday 15th October sounded like it might allow us a good long run starting from the north coast of Lincolnshire and hopefully heading all the way back to Bristol or even further. Winds were supposed to come from the north-east with a faster gradient coming from more easterly directions.

Studying the air charts, we realised that we had to be careful not to get caught heading too close to Birmingham as they are very twitchy about their airspace and it would certainly make our life very difficult. We had prepared a transponder and I studied the usage of it until late at night whilst Nick was in charge of sorting out cylinders. Not too many, preferably the most lightweight such as Titaniums etc, but also not too few. And how best to strap them all in?

EARLY START

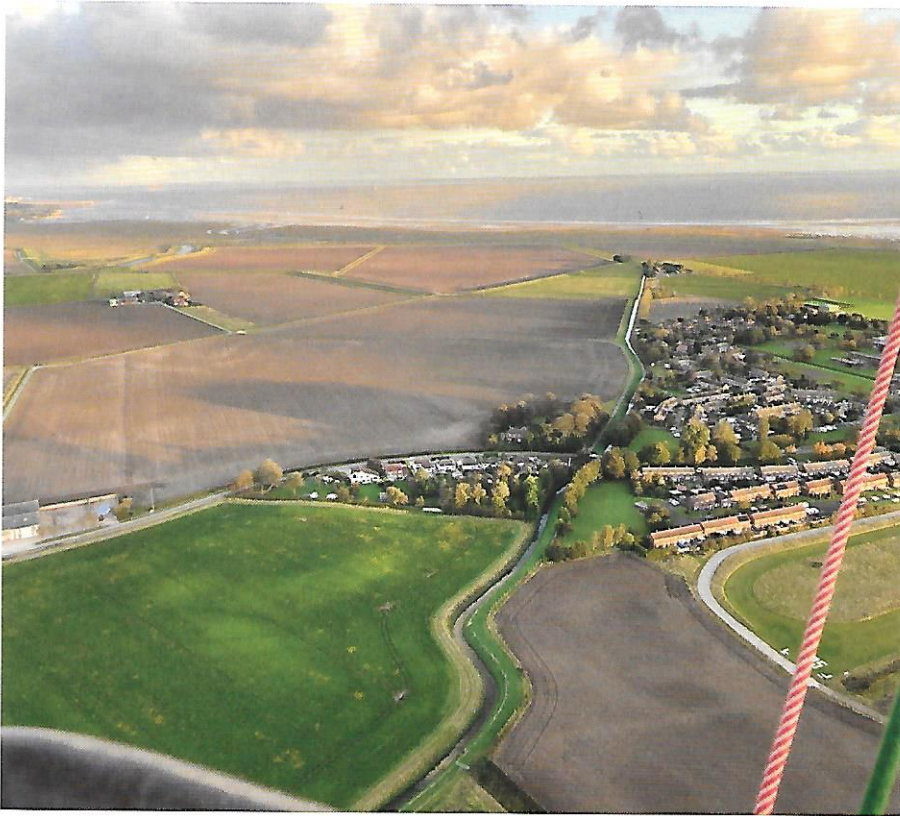
We chose to use our Cameron 140. Great space, great size. With crew sorted, thanks to Steve and Caroline, the plan



Above: The rainbow colours of the Cameron 140 envelope as the burner fires.

was to drive up to North Cotes and leaving Bristol at 02:00. The night was short and the drive turned out to be longer than expected due to motorway lane closures.

As we finally arrived on the strip with the kind permission of the airfield manager we found a quite strong northerly wind blowing slightly across the runway. Donna Nook firing range surrounded



Above: The take-off site is left behind, bottom right, as the balloon soars away from the coast.

launch site, but we had clearance from the Range Officer.

Since there wasn't any shelter, we had to put up with it and prepared the balloon as quickly as we could, hoping to launch with sunrise (07:30). All equipment strapped in, burners checked, I started the inflation, but had to rip out after a

strong gust hit us with violence. Starting again after reassembling everything I managed to get the balloon up and we soon clipped the quick release and shot off! What a relief!

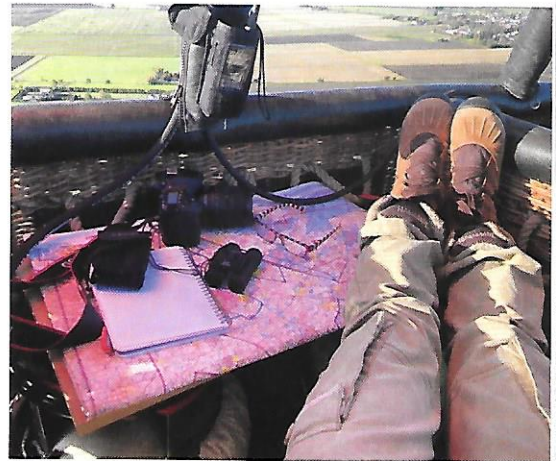
Now the fun part: flying along over the endless wide fields of the Wolds was wonderfully relaxing and after an hour



Above: The evening before the flight, Phil Dunnington checks out the transponder.



Above: Snacks to sustain the pilots – although the port is strictly for imbibing on landing!



Above: Thankful for the spacious basket, Allie puts her feet up again.

hands-on the burner we swapped sides and Nick took over control whilst I studied the air charts and tried to make contact with a military base ahead of us.

The crew, in the meantime, followed on our heels and witnessed many amazed residents who had probably never seen a balloon in this area. Looking back at our take off winds, we know why.

ADMIRING THE VIEW

The sun came out and I really enjoyed just staring out from the basket into this vast flat countryside. Silence. Shadows of nearly barren trees, little water canals, ducks, some hares and deer running over the fields. Time for breakfast and a tiny sip of coffee. One of my biggest worries when we went on our aeroplane/balloon expeditions was the fact that the Beech didn't have a toilet on board and we had long sectors of the Arctic to cross. This flight was posing similar problems. What to do? Having learned my 'ropes' from that trip, I had prepared for my



Above: Nick keeps a tally of their position, speed, altitude and fuel consumption.



Above: Nick and Allie are reunited with their trusty crew, Steve Richards and Caroline Fox.

little plastic Tupperware box and bags. But weirdly enough, not in a total of six-and-a-half hours, did I ever feel the urge despite my coffee and cup soup.

Time literally flew and I couldn't believe how quick another hour, another

swap between me and Nick, was up. Establishing contact with various military stations and coming closer to... we suddenly heard a roaring sound. Then we saw them: two military jets in a dog-fight at around 5,000ft just to the east

of us! Later on during the flight we were sometimes greeted by small private planes coming to say hello and wagging their wings at us.

Navigation and decision-making on how best to plan forward was certainly the biggest challenge: shall we still fly lower and slower, but having a better heading to avoid Birmingham and should be go higher and catch the faster, but more easterly winds? In the end we decided to hold out until we passed Northampton. Unfortunately, by this time, we could see dark skies forming to the north and east of us.

Those clouds went darker and darker and for sure a big rain storm was forming behind us and now to be seen on the radar and mentioned in various TAFs. Argh, decision time: stop and land or risk the weather? We both agreed without too much hesitation albeit a big sad drop in our hearts: it was time to make an precautionary landing as soon as possible!

BUMPY LANDING

Nick being at the controls and both of us scanning the upcoming terrain we finally selected a big field just north of Oxford/Banbury. As the balloon touched down at 12-14kt, Nick quite cleverly didn't immediately use the RDS to deflate the balloon as we wanted to 'bounce' closer to the farm and what looked like a track. This



Above: Nick gives thanks for a safe, if somewhat bumpy, landing.



Above: Nick packs away while awaiting the arrival of the retrieve, while Allie captures the scene for posterity – and the Long Jump report.

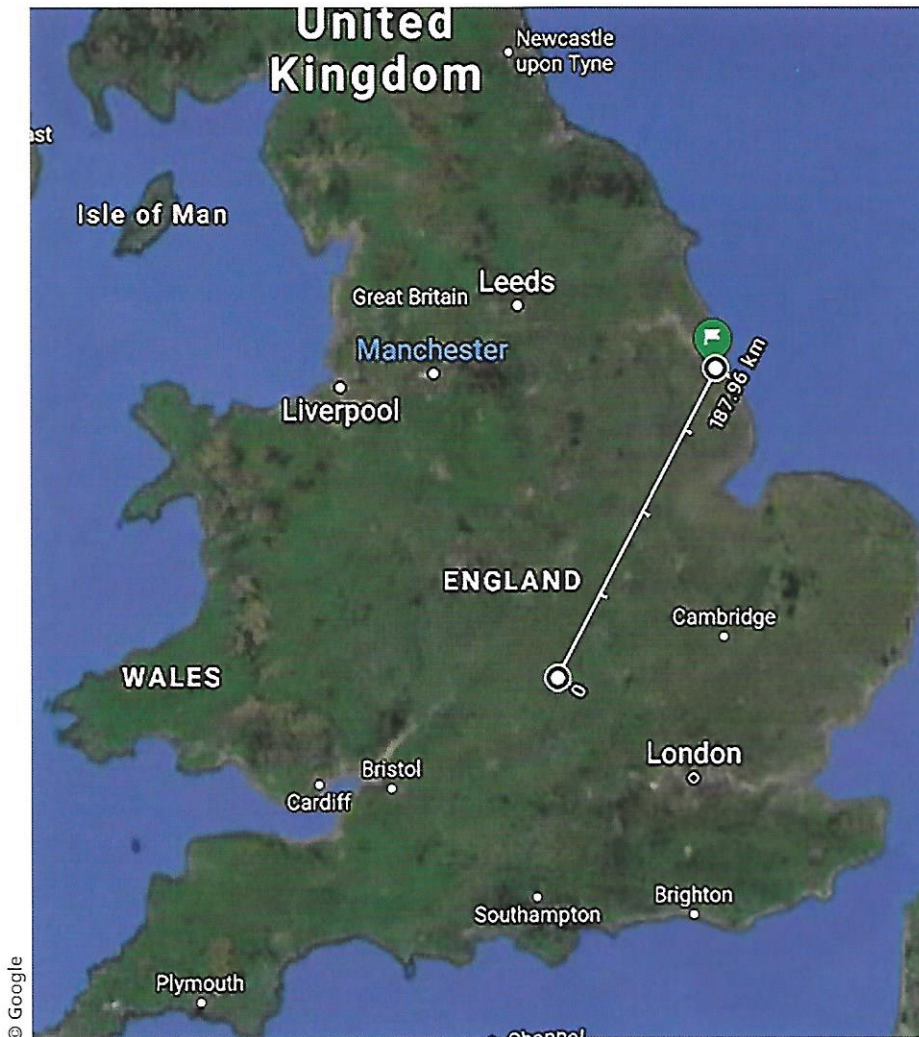


Above: A lengthy Z25 pace drag landing brought the long jumpers down to earth after their epic flight.

NICK & ALLIE DUNNINGTON'S LONG JUMP FLIGHT LOG

TIME	PILOT	WINDS	WEATHER	POSITION	RT/DIGITool	FUEL
7.53	Allie take off (second attempt)	18kt/210 deg/700ft 20kt/207 deg/2,000ft	Fair, Sct clouds	North Cotes		2x 60lt 2x 45 1x 50 alu (take off) 4 x 60 titanium
8.50	Nick	16kt/196 deg/1,000ft			Called RAF Conningsby 120.80 no response	Second tank (60l)
9.20	Breakfast for Allie	19kt/201 deg/500ft		Enter MATZ		3rd cylinder (45l)
9.35		18kt/197 deg/360ft	Nice and sunny, mild	No movements on airfield below		
9.50	Allie fly	17kt/203 deg/500ft		Calling Cottesmore 127.350		Small cylinder 25%
10.03		13kt/173 deg/200ft				4th cylinder (45l)
10.15		15kt/199 deg/700ft			Digitool first bar gone	
10.50	Nick fly	17kt/195 deg/900ft				
11.15				Calling Wittering 119.675 finally successful. Not below 2,500ft.		
11.25		20kt/225 deg/3,180ft	Clouds gradually catching up from the North	Passing Ibruck Reservoir	Requesting to descent	
11.40		20kt/214 deg/1,555ft 18kt/223 deg/1,800ft			Leaving Wittering frequency	
11.50	Allie fly					
12.20		13kt/210 deg/790ft				
12.30		14kt 210 deg/1,300ft				Change tank (60l)
12.50	Nick fly			Passing Northhampton to the West Althorp Estate	Digitool down to three bars	
13.05		15kt/217 deg/2,500ft	Cold under cloud and rain to the East. Dark clouds			
13.40		19kt/206 deg/1,278ft	Getting increasingly worried about rain storm behind and to the East	3km N/E of Banbury calling to check on crew		
13.50		16kt/203deg/1,000ft	Nearing Oxford. Debating whether to call them or land before			
14.07	Nick landing	14kt/225 paces drag over field	Getting very gusty and pitch dark clouds to North and East. Rain to start after 45min post landing... later clearing again on drive to Bristol!	Banbury OX 173 AW. Charlton Road. 52.003814-1.241423		

Regional LRO



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Above: Nick and Allie Dunnington's respectable 118-mile track from the Lincolnshire coast to Banbury in Oxfordshire.

action was successfully accomplished and resulted in 225 steps of 'bump'.

Our fantastic crew were right behind us and didn't take too long to find permission from the landowner to enter the field. Swiftly packing up we searched for a pub to celebrate our adventure, but all the pubs were shut! Thursday afternoon, 15:00. Bad time. Luckily we had plenty of our own stock and found a little park to unpack the picnic and celebratory bottle. As we said our 'cheers', the heavens opened and it started to rain.

During the two-hour drive back to Bristol, though, the skies cleared again and the rest of the evening was gin clear and beautifully calm. A further pint at our favourite 'ballooning' pub by the docks, the Nova Scotia, drowned our slight disappointment of not having been able to fly further. But we all agreed: it was a fabulous experience and a flight not to be forgotten.

So be careful: the Long Jump can be addictive! See you next year!



Above: Cheers! A well-earned glass of bubbly for pilots and crew.

NATIONAL LANDOWNER RELATIONS OFFICER
Edward Lubbock 13 Beverley Rise, Billericay, CM11 2JL
Tel: 01277 651236
Mob: 07990 557593
Email: nro@bbac.org
Maps 26-45, 82-84, 106, 114-115, 123-125, 135-137, 145-148, 154, 157-161, 170, 173-175, 180, 181, 183, 184, 193-196 are under review and may not have an active LRO. Forward queries on above to Edward.

SCOTLAND
Fred Whalley (01577 850319): 51-59
Pete Forster (07775 666544): 63-79

PENNINE
Neil Beckwith (07557 019903): 80, 81, 87, 88, 92, 99, 100, 101, 104-107, 110-113

NORTH WEST
Graeme Church (01254 248813): 85, 86, 89-91, 96-98, 102, 103

EAST MIDLANDS
Andrew Selby (01509 890348): 119 E, 120-122, 129-131, 140 NE, 141 N

WEST MIDLANDS
Martyn Jaynes (01527 542554): 118, 119 W, 127, 128 W, 138, 139, 140 W, 149, 150
Russell Collins (01386 593614): 151

OSWESTRY
Lee Hooper (07710 701229): 116, 117, 126-128

EASTERN
David Stagg (07775 423576): 132, 133
Jo Scott (07538 672099): 134, 143, 144, 154-155, 168, 169

CHILTERN
Ian Crouch (01234 713471): 140 SE, 141 S, 142, 153

3-4-40
Stephen Harris (01635 38135): 164

CINQUE PORTS FLYING CLUB
Michael Spice (07736 509373): 179, 188, 189, 191

SURREY & SUSSEX
Jamie Palmer (01403 700347): 187, 198

MID HANTS
Gary Madelin (07831 494378): 185, 186, 197

WESTERN REGION
Peter Mossman (01600 869186): 162 NW corner
Andrew Holly (01453 511280): 162 N of 95, W of 162
Ian Martin (07860 160060): 162 E of A46 plus 1 overlap, 163, 172 N of M4
Sally Adie (07970 148857): 172 S of M4, N of A4
Phil McCheyne (07802 989511): 172 S of M4, W of 172
Mark Simmons (07789 957185): 173 W, 184 NE of 173
Andy Martin (07836 275248): 182 not inc. 172 overlap
Arthur Street (01404 823735): 190-192, 200-201

BLACK HORSE
Tony Attwood (01296 415156): 165, 166, 176

LONDON
Rowland Benbrook (01708 349981): 167, 168, 177

WALES
No Regional LRO

LANDOWNER RELATIONS SEMINAR CO-ORDINATOR
Wendy Rousell, 2 Briarwood Way, Wollaston, Northants, NN29 7QR
Tel: 01933 663008
Mob: 07973 198279
Email: lrseminars@bbac.org