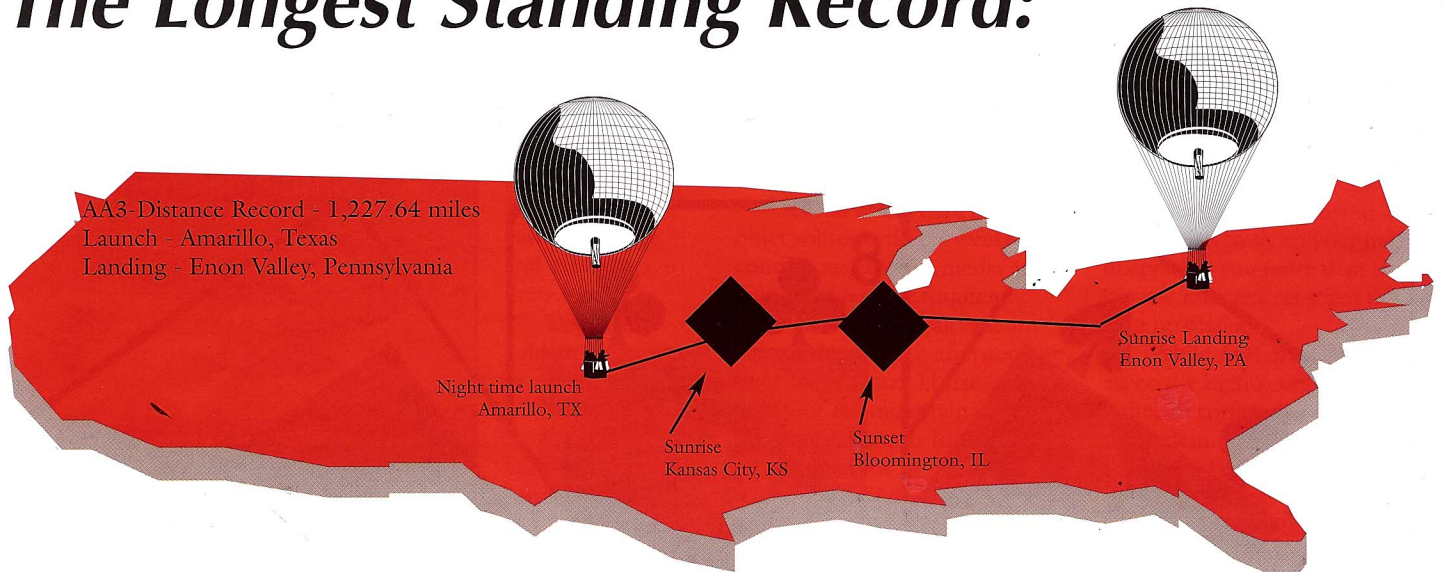


The Longest Standing Record:



Broken!

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Warren Harding was the U.S. President, Douglas Fairbanks and Rudolph Valentino were hot at the box office, the snowmobile was invented, insulin was developed, Charles Lindbergh took his first flight lesson, King Tut's tomb was discovered, Mallory died on Mount Everest, Babe Ruth and Johnny Weissmuller were America's sports heroes, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was officially proclaimed, the Lincoln Memorial was dedicated in Washington, D.C., Germany suffered hyperinflation, Alexander Graham Bell died, Irish revolutionary Michael Collins was assassinated, the BBC was founded, the Woolworth Building was the tallest building in the world, and a Frenchman named George Cormier set a ballooning record. The year was 1922.

As I am often fond of doing, I was glancing through the record books one day when I found it! The oldest aviation

world record still standing, was a balloon record. The record George Cormier set in 1922 was the AA-3 distance record, traveling 499.69 miles. A spectacular flight for that time!

The next logical question was, is it breakable? After some simple lift calculations and weather analysis, it seemed it was in fact a breakable record. Possibly it was just overlooked by others or underestimated by myself. Suddenly it seemed every gas pilot I spoke with had looked at the record at some point in time. In fact, several people said they were looking at it at the same time as I. That was all it took to get me into gear to prepare an attempt!

I began to focus on not just beating the record, but at least doubling it. To my good fortune, I was able to do just that this past January. My feat was not without its trials and tribulations, however. In fact, it became a quest the likes of which I have not experienced in quite some time. The oldest record, you see, was still stand-

ing because it wasn't an easy record to break.

I began seriously working on an attempt in the late summer of 2000. I secured a balloon I helped Nick Saum build back in 1984. We did a test flight in Albuquerque and everything was looking really good.

I had assembled a fairly sophisticated group of people including Ray Bair as my observer and Lou Billones as my meteorologist. We were looking for calm launch conditions, with winds aloft in excess of 45 knots and an anticipated flight duration of 24 hours. I even gave Lou a large window to look for this weather pattern. We could launch anywhere from Amarillo, Texas to Moriarty, New Mexico, to Denver, Colorado.

When the window arrived, we drove to Elizabeth, Colorado, just south of Denver, and prepared for a launch on February 3, 2001. Everything went flawlessly during inflation, launch, and well into the early hours of the evening. But then

things turned. I ended up in snow! I wasn't supposed to be in snow! The added weight on the balloon was causing me to lose altitude and it was clear this record attempt was over.

In the time spent analyzing the situation with Lou, it became clear to me that we were looking for too many different conditions in too wide of an area. Lou characterized his search for the weather window as similar to a RTW attempt! As he said, we were trying to hold on to an angry tiger's tail. Time to rethink.

Now I only wanted the record more. Never before had I made a record attempt launch and not come home with some success. Sure, I might not get everything I was going for, but at least there was usually something in the flight that could be called a success. Not this time.

I wanted to make changes to how we approached this record. First, I started with a new balloon. Though Nick's balloon was an AA-3, it was only 13,000 cubic feet. This

