

# Ballooning Over America's Mountain

The Inspiration for the 2013 Group Adventure Flight  
by Troy Bradley

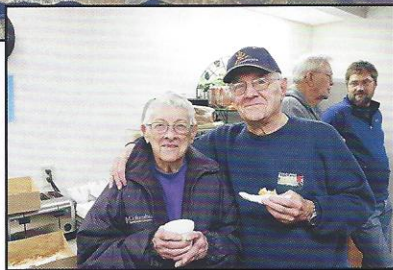
Pikes Peak isn't the highest mountain in the United States, nor even Colorado, but it is arguably the country's most renowned peak. Although it is massive in stature, its accessibility makes it the most visited mountain in North America. Annually, half a million visitors drive, take the train, or hike to the summit.

On February 21, 1977, David Levin, a young pilot with barely 40 hours of flight experience was lured to the iconic nature of the grand peak. Along with his passenger, Outside Magazine Editor Tim Cahill, he made history being the first to soar over the top of Pikes Peak in a balloon.

Immediately following David's success, Dewey Reinhard and Jack Vaeth announced the inaugural America the Beautiful Cup Balloon Race to take place July 4, 1977 in conjunction with the Pike's Peak International Hill Climb. There were a few pilots that rose to the challenge, including Ben Abruzzo and Maxi Anderson. My indoctrination to ballooning over the Peak was, in 1978, crewing for my Grandfather, Jim Dutrow, also known as the "Gold Baron". The flights back then were beyond harrowing, they were downright dangerous. With little more data than the winds aloft forecast and a good eye for direction, these pilots crossed close enough to the Summit House to talk with amazed spectators. Mind you this was in July! The mid-summer heating of the rock surfaces early in the day created an instability most of us would choose to avoid. Their stories of wind shears, turbulence, and rotors would make any pilot shake in their boots. These brave pilots were testing and pushing limits, eventually deciding enough was enough. The America the Beautiful Cup only took place in 1977



Above: Troy Bradley in-flight for this year's crossing.



Right: Bradley's Grandmother Helen Dutrow, 96, with Dewey Reinhard at pilot briefing for the 2013 crossing

and 1978, in September 1979 two balloons made a flight over, and no one has crossed since.

I am no stranger to mountain flying; for nearly 30 years, I have crossed the Sandia Mountains multiple times a year and have participated in many other mountain flying events. Always looking for new scenery, Pikes Peak was something that played in the back of my mind for a long time. I wanted to follow in my Grandfather's footsteps, but in an updated and calculated fashion. My intention was to resurrect the same form of camaraderie and challenge of flying the peak as a group. The conversations began in earnest last summer, and it didn't take long before several pilots expressed an interest in participating. We picked a more suitable time of the year, had better balloon systems, endless meteorological data,

trajectory models, and GPS navigation; tools they didn't even imagine in the late '70s. And yet our crossings this year were a country mile from the peak compared to pilots 30+ years ago. My hats off to those true pioneers of ballooning whose adventures have inspired us all.

36 years, 9 months, and 10 days after the first crossing, David Levin stood with a group of 7 other pilots and crews plotting to do it again. With nearly 4 decades between flights, David's enthusiasm for Pikes Peak hasn't lessened and having finally done it neither has mine. It was an amazing flight with a wonderful group of pilots and crews. Hopefully, we have revived one of the great events in American ballooning history. See you guys next year!

## Pikes Peak flights:

February 21, 1977  
David Levin, Passenger Tim Cahill

July 4, 1977  
(1st America the Beautiful Cup)

Dewey Reinhard, Claire Bennett  
Wayne Woodmancy, Nick Saum  
Don Barz  
Darryl Gunter, Co-Pilot Pat Barz  
Maxie Anderson, Co-Pilot Howard  
Wolfley  
Ben Abruzzo, Co-Pilot Gary McCauley

July 4, 1978  
(2nd America the Beautiful Cup)

Claire Bennett, Don Barz, Darryl  
Gunter, Jim Dutrow  
Maxie Anderson, Co-Pilot Howard  
Wolfley  
Ben Abruzzo, Co-Pilot Gary McCauley

September 1, 1979  
Claire Bennett, Maxie Anderson

November 30, 2013  
Eight balloon teams

