

NZ Hot Air Balloon Record Set

Regular KiwiFlyer readers will likely recall the occasional hot air ballooning article in past issues contributed by Pauline Hickey from Hamilton. Pauline represented New Zealand at the world championships last year and has just recently set an FAI sanctioned record for ballooning in New Zealand. We asked her to share the adventure.



The view downwards from 10,000 feet. To the lower right is the launch point by Hamilton Lake. Photo by Andrée Hickey.

ON Tuesday 2nd April at 7:51am NZDT, I set off from Hamilton Lake in my hot air balloon Sunrise ZK-RYZ to set the NZ Women's Altitude Record for a Hot Air Balloon.

After weeks of planning, watching the weather, and having borrowed a FAI approved 'Logger' to have on board, and with the approved Official Observer present, we were airborne climbing at a rate of 550-700 feet per minute.

Accompanying me as co-pilot was my daughter Andrée who was recording the flight details for altitude, temperature and time, as well as watching our location and taking photos. We could see from coast to coast and beyond. Our view included both the Tasman Sea and Pacific Ocean. To the south we could see the Waikato River for many miles, the Kinleith mill, Lake Taupo, the Central Plateau Mountains and Mount Taranaki. To the north was the Huntly power station and if it hadn't been for the mist and low cloud, Auckland.

Tuesday was chosen for its near perfect weather, clear skies and lack of lateral wind movement.

An early morning phone call to Hamilton Tower confirmed the latest weather and forecast winds aloft, then with wind speed and direction looking good we proceeded to our launch spot of Hamilton Lake. Along the way we made our usual lookout checks for fog that may be developing and thankfully, there was none.



Pauline (left) and Andrée reviewing checklists before the flight. At right, the initial ascent. Alan Cocklin photos.



Looking north, following the Waikato River towards Huntly and beyond. Photo by Andrée Hickey.

The flight for all intents and purposes started out the same as normal, with a phone call to the Tower to seek permission to enter their airspace and to advise our intent to go ahead with the altitude flight. The Controller on this morning was aware of the altitude attempt and had already advised Christchurch that we are going ahead at this time.

I started out reporting to Hamilton Tower and then upon leaving their airspace switched to Christchurch Control for altitudes from 4,500ft up to our requested altitude.

We were operating on an allocated squawk code, with Hamilton and Christchurch control keeping other air traffic away from Sunrise so that we could climb and descend uninterrupted through their airspace. Initial planning had established a required ascent rate of 500-600 feet per minute to achieve a total climb time of about 22 minutes.

Although freezing level was forecast at 11,000 feet, Andrée noticed it starting to get cold around 9,000 feet and it was also very quiet at this altitude. Above 9,500 feet my glasses fogged up with the heat coming from the burner and I needed to look away to clear them. As we approached and passed 10,000 feet I was busy concentrating on the technical aspects of fuel, temperature and altitude. I actually didn't get around to putting my jacket on.



Being so much cooler up there we got more out of the last burn than expected, then waited for the upward momentum to stop and then a minute or two for the balloon to cool off enough to start the descent. While we were waiting Christchurch Control came on the radio – just checking that all was okay.

Having topped out at 11,409 feet we reported to Christchurch Control and started our descent which was planned to be at a rate of 600-800 feet per minute to make our descent in just under 20 minutes. Lateral movement was minimal and we came back in to Hamilton Tower's airspace towards the south of the city in the Tamahere / airport area.

The rest of the flight was spent looking for a good landing place. With the light southerly ground wind we travelled north over the river, the State Highway and over the Matangi area. Our landing was to be on Matangi Road some 40 minutes later where we were greeted by the Official Observer, crew and an excited local family who had been following us for some time. Our landing place was only 7.5 kms away from our launch spot, an achievement in itself.

We celebrated in the traditional way with a champagne breakfast at our regular café.

The only task left to do was to complete the FAI forms for Aerostat Records and send them off.

Although this took longer than the flight itself, it was an interesting exercise completing the pages of questions and copying the extra documents required to be sent away with the official forms which included the very important 'Logger' print out and calibration certificate.

Within 24 hours I had the reply from our FAI Secretary that my paper work was complete and my record claim of 11,409 feet accepted.

Pauline Hickey, Hot Air Balloon Pilot



Lifting off for the record setting flight. Photo by Alan Cocklin.

Congratulations

Congratulations to Pauline and Andrée from KiwiFlyer. Looking straight down from 10,000+ feet is quite an experience. Pauline had already been as high as 8,800 feet solo during flight requirements at the World Champs last year but Andrée's highest flight was previously just 2,500 feet. Pauline says she was delighted that Andrée bravely agreed to share the flight without hesitation. Well done to both of you.

Sunrise Sponsorship Opportunity

By the way, we know that Pauline is looking for a sponsor to help with the costs of operating Sunrise. The balloon can accommodate a promotional banner of approximately 12m x 6m - a flying billboard! If you can help with that, get in touch with us and we'll pass the information on. Email: editor@kiwiflyer.co.nz



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