

Rocky Mountain Balloon Festival

by Jason K. Powers

The 4th annual Rocky Mountain Balloon Festival was held Saturday, August 23rd and Sunday, the 24th, at Chatfield State Park, near Denver, Colorado. More than 56 hot air balloons filled the skies both mornings. The balloons varied all shapes, sizes and colors, from the ReMax balloons, to Smokey the Bear, the Energizer Bunny, and so many more. One cloud hopper balloon, piloted by Russ Buesing, made it up for the festival.

Lift off started around 6:30 a.m. The balloons all lined up in rows, each waiting for their cue to lift off. The red, white and blue balloon, Maxies Morning Majesty, piloted by Dr. Lee Bregitzer, was first to take off Saturday morning while the National Anthem played kicking off the start of the festival. The rest of the balloons, following one by one was quite the site to see.

The Rocky Mountain Balloon Festival is the only hot air balloon festival in the Denver-metro area. This BFA sanctioned event was something for the entire city. Cars lined up double lanes a half a mile back waiting to get into the park, to come see this spectacular site each morning. Saturday night, a few of the balloons braved the winds and had the 'Lights in the Night Balloon Illumination.' The crowds returned again for this nighttime glow.

I was fortunate enough to fly on the Blue Columbine balloon, with 20-year veteran pilot, Alan Luksik. We went up Friday morning for a 45-minute test flight over the park, along with other balloons. Being my first flight, it was quite an amazing treat looking out over the city from 7,400 feet. After the flight, Alan told me a brief history of hot air ballooning, and recited "The Balloonists Prayer," and I was then 'initiated' with champagne toasting. Sunday morning I was able to hitch a ride with Luksik again, for another


beautiful forty-minute ride.

During the festival there was plenty to do for the entire family. NASA had a "Benefits of Space" exhibit throughout the weekend. A huge play area was set up for the children; there were plenty of vendors that varied from freshly squeezed lemonade, to turkey legs, burritos, burgers and more. Other vendors supplied everything from sunglasses to telescopes for sale. Goldsmith, a local band in Denver, rocked the crowd for a few hours on Saturday afternoon. Both days the balloonist played a BFA sanctioned event called, "Duck Catch and Release," which consisted of netting a rubber duck from the lake, while in the balloon, and then flying to one of the two targets down the beach, and dropping it onto the target. They have two chances to score. Balloon-



Jason K. Powers

ist scored by catching the ducks, as well as hitting the targets.

If you missed the Rocky Mountain Balloon Festival, don't worry, you can catch it next year, August 27-29, 2004. Mark your calendars! 



Jason K. Powers



Jason K. Powers