

Bend's Balloon Man Plans a Double Event

Written by H. Bruce Miller
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Bend, Oregon – home of the Pregnant Man, the Clothesline War and the Great Goose Massacre – is about to gain some more notoriety: Kent Couch, [our famous Lawn Chair Balloon Man](#), is going to do it again.

And this time it'll be a twofer.

Couch and his friend John Freis of San Diego are scheduled to take off at 7:30 a.m. Saturday, wind and weather permitting, from Couch's Shell station at the corner of Highway 20 and 27th Street.

Each man will be in a specially adapted lawn chair slung underneath 170 giant helium-filled balloons. If all goes well they'll arrive half a day later at their destination in Dillon, MT.

"We'll have 12 and a half hours of daylight to work with," Couch said. "We have to get down by 8."

Couch has ballooned into the skies three times before. His first attempt, in September 2006, was aborted and Couch had to parachute to land. On the second try, in July 2007, things went better – he ended up near Brothers, 193 miles from Bend. The following year he made it all the way to Cambridge, ID, a flight of 235 miles.

Couch's exploits drew worldwide media attention, earning him appearances on "Good Morning America" and Jay Leno and [his own entry in Wikipedia](#).

Couch used 150 helium balloons on his previous flights; this time he and Freis will have 170 balloons each, which Couch said will provide an extra margin of safety: "I'll have 170 balloons and it only takes 90 [to stay aloft], so I have a lot of room to make mistakes."

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According to Couch's website, Freis was inspired by Couch's 2008 flight to make his own lawn chair balloon voyage. In October 2009 he took off from Borrego Springs, CA and flew 46 miles.

The two men will cruise at altitudes of up to 15,000 feet, so they'll be taking oxygen along. Altitude control will be pretty simple: break balloons to descend, dump water to ascend. As for steering, that's pretty much up to the wind.

Couch said Wednesday that he's a little concerned because "the winds aren't cooperating" right now, but he's hopeful conditions will improve by Saturday.

Meanwhile, although his website warns that "cluster ballooning is inherently risky," Couch isn't worried about the danger. "It's pretty safe, I think," he said. "It's just a lot of fun. It's so peaceful."

To Couch's knowledge, Saturday's flight will mark the first simultaneous voyage by two lawn chair balloonists over the same route. "We're calling it The Great Lawn Chair Balloon Race," he said. "There's no wager, though – it's just for pride, really."

UPDATE: [KBND reports](#) that Couch and Freis took off successfully at about 7 am Saturday.