



23rd National
BALLOONING
Championships
NORTHAM WESTERN AUSTRALIA

**OFFICIAL
PROGRAM 2023**

What's On

in the Shire of Northam

Elevate Festival

When: Saturday 6th May

Where: Henry St Oval, Northam

Cost: Free

Register: @eventbrite.com.au

Details: The Shire of Northam will officially open the 23rd Australian National Ballooning Championships with the Elevate Festival. A family friendly event with live music, entertainment, a variety of food stalls, roving MC and weather permitting, the stunning balloon glow

Hot-Air Balloon Spectator Opportunities

When: 6-13th May

Where: Various locations

Info: www.northamballooningevents.com

Cost: Free

Details: You will be able to see hot air balloons from all over Northam, however, for an up close and personal experience, arrive at the airfield, or check the facebook page, by 6 am to discover the launch point each morning, weather permitting

Hot-Air Balloon Competition – The Key Grab

When: Saturday 13th May

Where: Northam Airfield, Withers St

Info: www.northamballooningevents.com

Cost: Free

Details: The key grab is a spectator friendly, fly-in task centred on the airfield soon after dawn on Saturday. The task, weather permitting, will award prizes to the balloon competitors for flight accuracy

Twilight Markets

When: Friday 12th May, 5pm-8pm

Where: Village Green, Northam

Details: Food trucks, coffee, live music and unique stall offerings during the Ballooning Championships

Northam Heritage Centre

Where: 425 Fitzgerald St, Northam

Cost: Adults \$5 Concession \$3 Child \$2

Details: Call in to learn about the history of Northam, and look around the beautifully preserved railway displays.

History of Ballooning Display

When: Open 7 Days 9am-4pm

Where: Northam Visitor Centre, 2 Grey St

Info: 08 9622 2100 tourist@northam.wa.gov.au

Bilya Koort Boodja: Centre for Nyoongar Culture & Environmental Knowledge

When: Open 7 Days 9am-4pm

Where: Minson Ave, next to Northam Visitor Centre

Contact: 08 9622 2170

Details: This cultural centre offers an innovative insight into Aboriginal culture and the local environment through a fully immersive, interactive storytelling, along with a variety of workshops and exhibitions throughout the year

Morby Cottage

When: Sundays 11am-3pm

Where: Katrine Road, Northam

Cost: Gold coin entry

Details: Visit Northam's first house, home of pioneer John Morrell

Horse Racing at the Northam Race Club

When: Wednesday 10th May

Info: www.northamraceclub.com

Avon Valley Arts Society 2023 Fred Killick Art Award Exhibition

When: 6th - 14th May

Where: Old Girls School, Wellington St, Northam



Shire of Northam
Heritage, Commerce and Lifestyle



23rd National
BALLOONING
Championships

NORTHAM WESTERN AUSTRALIA



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We gratefully acknowledge the generosity and support of our Sponsors. Please take a moment to read their information and advertisements in this program and lend your support to them.



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WALKING ON A DREAM



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- Immerse yourself in Noongar culture on an Aboriginal tour - discover the cultural significance and ancient stories of this region.
- Soak up the sun and relax in one of the world's largest inner-city parks, Kings Park & Botanic Garden / Kaarta Koomba.
- Discover Rottnest Island / Wadjemup, where you'll be greeted by 63 wondrous beaches and the world's happiest animal, the adorable quokka.
- Discover our 'many stories' at WA Museum Boola Bardip, then explore the Perth Cultural Centre.
- Explore Optus Stadium's Halo Rooftop Walk or Matagarup Zip+Climb.
- Watch Mother Nature paint a fiery sunset over the sparkling Indian Ocean at one of Perth's 19 beaches.
- Cycle or walk along the Swan River / Derbarl Yerrigan and experience Perth's unique flora and fauna, or canoe or kayak and become immersed in the beauty of the natural world.
- Feast on the local flavours and feel the indie vibe at one of the many restaurants and cafes in Fremantle / Walyalup, or 'Freo' as it is affectionately known.

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Welcome Message

from Hon Roger Cook MLA, Deputy Premier; Minister For Tourism
and Hon Don Punch MLA, Minister For Regional Development

23rd National Hot Air Ballooning Championships ~ 6-13 May 2023

The McGowan Government is a proud sponsor of the 23rd National Hot Air Ballooning Championships through its Regional Events Program.

The program was devised as a way for the Government to support medium to large events in regional Western Australia to boost tourism, increase community vibrancy and participation, and develop regional areas.

The Regional Events Program also plays an important role in positioning Western Australia as an exciting destination to visit and a great place to live by showcasing and promoting a region's unique and diverse attractions.

Tourism is a key part of the Government's plan to diversify the economy, create jobs and develop business opportunities particularly to help regional economies and communities in Western Australia.

Events play an important role in this plan, with the Government sponsoring a range of sporting, cultural, arts and culinary events across the State, through Tourism Western Australia, to attract visitors, encourage them to stay longer, disperse further and do more while they are here.

We hope everyone enjoys this event and takes the time to explore the Wheatbelt region.



Hon Roger Cook MLA
Deputy Premier
Minister For Tourism



Hon Don Punch MLA
Minister For
Regional Development



**WESTERN
AUSTRALIA**
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visit northam wandju



Located in the picturesque Avon Valley, Northam is the heart of the region.

Whether you choose to soak up the culture at the state-of-the-art Bilya Koort Boodja centre, try a balloon flight to enjoy the scenery, explore the public artwork around Northam, or just enjoy exploring, Northam has something for everyone.

Northam Visitor Centre

2 Grey Street | Open 7 days

(08) 9622 2100 | tourist@northam.wa.gov.au



@visitnortham



Welcome to the National Hot Air Ballooning Championships WA

On behalf of the Shire of Northam, I extend a very warm welcome to everyone visiting our wonderful region for the 2023 National Hot Air Ballooning Championships.

Northam has hosted this event previously in 1981, 1984, 2015 and 2017, reinforcing our Shire as the Hot Air Ballooning Capital of Australia. We hope this year's event will be just as successful as all previous times.

The country around Northam is mainly Nyoongar Boodja. I acknowledge and pay my respects to the traditional owners and custodians, the Ballardong people of the Nyoongar nation. Please treat this environmentally sensitive land with respect.

Northam is a fantastic place to live and visit. While you are here, I encourage you to enjoy our beautiful landscapes from many vantage points, such as Mount Ommaney or Centenary Hill. Enjoy a walk around the river, over the historic, and longest in Australia, pedestrian suspension bridge, spot our white swans and visit the wonderful Bilya Koort Boodja Centre. Enjoy our local shops, cafes and pubs & hotels, and take in our numerous heritage buildings.

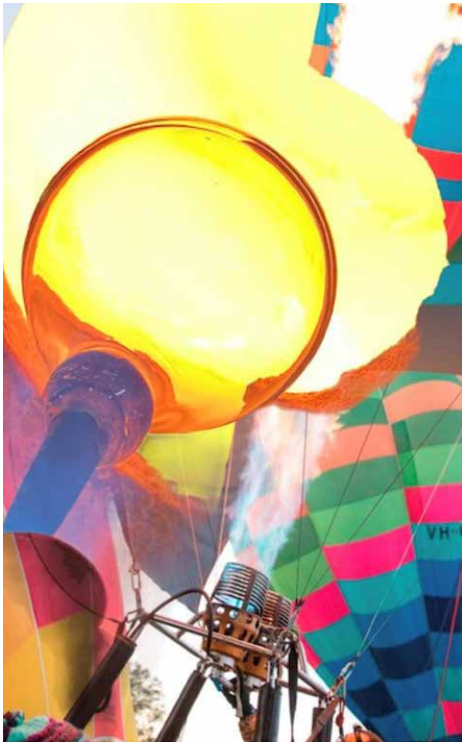
I urge you to be careful, and to travel safely on our roads. Several vantage points are located on roads where the speed limit is 110kph. Great care needs to be taken. I want you to remain safe, both during and after the championships.

Enjoy this great event, and we look forward to welcoming you again in the future, with open arms – perhaps even for the Women's World Hot Air Ballooning Championships in September.

Thank you,

Chris Antonio
President
Shire of Northam





Glass making uses hot gas-fuelled air as the formative agent, kind of like a hot air balloon, but with no elevation!

The 23rd National Ballooning Championship awards were proudly made by local glass artist Pete Reynolds. For commissions or information about glass making workshops, please email hotglassworks@outlook.com or call 0423 306 495.



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About The Championships



Ballooning competitions are not a race; the competition flights (consisting of one or more tasks) require pilots to exercise skill in manoeuvring their balloons over a set course with goals, targets, scoring areas, time and distance limits.

Good results are achieved using the variation of winds at different altitudes to fly in the direction of a goal and accurately approach the target. Balloons do not land on the target. Pilots of the balloons drop markers (small sandbags with streamers attached) onto or as close to the target as they can fly. In addition, each balloon carries an electronic GPS logger which records the position & altitude of the balloon at all times. If no marker is dropped the logger can be used to determine how close the balloon was to the target. Points are awarded for each task, and the balloon with the highest aggregate score wins.

Please do not touch or move the markers, as this may adversely affect the score and results of the pilots.

Some of the tasks are

Judge Declared Goal: The Event Director declares a goal and a measuring team will place a target at this position. The balloons launch from a common launch site and fly to the goal to drop a marker closest to the target.

Pilot Declared Goal: The pilots declare their own individual goals, usually road intersections, before take-off.

Fly In: The pilot selects a launch site at a set minimum distance away from a target nominated by the Director.

This is often combined with a Fly On task: The pilot selects a goal during flight a set minimum and maximum distance from where they drop their previous marker.

Hare & Hounds: A 'hare' balloon will launch from a common launch site, and after a specified period of time, all the other balloons will launch and set off in pursuit. When the 'hare' lands, the pilot of the 'hare' will set out a target and the other balloons will try to fly over the top and drop a marker on the target.

Watership Down: The 'hare' balloon will launch at a declared time and location. The others will launch at a location of their choosing, at a specified minimum distance from the 'hare', and try to follow the 'hare', who will again set out a target after landing.

Hesitation Waltz: The pilots must reach one of a number of alternative goals set by the Director. They will usually choose a preferred goal, and if conditions change, they can select an alternative. The success at one goal is scored.

3D Task: A task may be set in which the pilot must fly to a set position or area in the air, this goal may be several hundred feet above ground. The pilot must fly to this point or area, registering their position on a GPS 'logger'.

The Key Grab: A highly skilled challenge that requires pilots to literally grab a foam key mounted on top of a 10m pole. The key represents the key to a prize. Pilots select a take off point that will allow them to fly over the Northam Airfield, where the prize pole will be located. This fly-in task provides a magnificent spectator event.

Steering a Balloon

There is no mechanism to steer a balloon. The pilots have control of altitude by climbing & descending and will use the wind directions at different altitudes to manoeuvre the balloon. By skilfully moving up and down into these different wind directions, the pilot can catch a wind travelling in the desired direction. A small helium-filled balloon is released before take-off and the pilot monitors the wind directions as it rises.

Balloons take time to react to increases in heat (to rise) or releases of hot air (to descend) so the skill is to judge how long to travel at a certain height, how much heat to add or lose, and how long it will take to get the reaction needed.



Supporting our regional mental health.

We have joined with four organisations to improve the mental health of Western Australian regional communities.

Together, we're aiming to make help easier to access for growers and communities so that we can all look after our mental health.

For more information on our program and services our partners offer, visit our website.



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When to see the Balloons

The team at Northam Ballooning Events Inc., along with the Northam Aero Club and the Shire of Northam, are delighted to once again WELCOME members of the public from locations across WA, who are here to experience the visual spectacle of the massed balloons taking to the air in a colourful and breathtaking display.

Practice flights will take place, weather permitting, at sunrise on **Saturday 6th & Sunday 7th May**.

The competition flights will take place, weather permitting, each morning and afternoon from **Monday 8th to Friday 12th May**. At sunrise on **Saturday 13th May** there will be either an additional competition flight, or the exciting 'key grab' fly-in (see page 7 for competition task information).

Weather & Cancellation

The protected Avon Valley offers the best conditions for ballooning in Western Australia, however balloon flights are always weather dependent; wind speeds in excess of about 10 km/hr on the ground may result in cancellation for safety reasons. Optimum conditions are usually found in the morning, after the cold nights keep the wind conditions still, in the valley.

Where can I see the Balloons?

The balloons do not always launch from the airfield, depending on the wind conditions they may launch from other locations. **You can check our**

facebook page for up-dated daily launch detail, which will be posted after the Pilot Briefing each morning, at approx 6 a.m. and after the Pilot Briefing each afternoon at approx 4.00 p.m. We also recommend that you approach our friendly team of volunteers at the Airfield who will be able recommend how best to view the balloons, but please **DO NOT FOLLOW** the balloons onto **PRIVATE PROPERTY**.

Following the Balloons

We need to remind all our visiting spectator vehicles to follow the **ROAD RULES** of Western Australia, be courteous to other drivers on the road by not holding up traffic whilst looking at balloons, and not blocking any roads or driveways by parking inappropriately.

The balloons will often land on private farming property. Please **DO NOT FOLLOW** any ground crews onto **PRIVATE PROPERTY** or on to any sports ovals or grassed public areas.

Balloon Protocol

If the balloons do launch at the airfield, we ask that you follow a few directions:

- Please do not walk on the balloon fabric
- Please stay behind any safety ropes or barriers, and keep well clear of the balloon inflation fans
- Please keep your children near to YOU at all times
- Please follow the safety instructions of the balloon crew and local volunteer crew

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Meet the Pilots

1



Sean Kavanagh NSW

VH-EXW 'Antic Pants'
Kavanagh EX 60

Sean is a designer and production manager at Kavanagh balloons in Sydney, Australia. He has regularly competed all over the world since 1995 and is the current Australian National Hot Air Ballooning Champion having also won the title back in 2003. Sean has represented Australia at seven World Championships, with a best result of 15th. In 2008 he also set the Australian Altitude record of 37,838 ft in a hot air balloon. When not flying, he can be found kite surfing and enjoying time with his family.

2



Paterson Saunders VIC

VH YHO 'Melbourne'
Kavanagh EX 90

Since attaining his pilot's license as a teenager, Pato Saunders has chased ballooning through many parts of Australia and the world, including jobs and projects in Europe, the Middle East, and South America. He has represented Australia in numerous competitions, including the Junior World Hot Air Ballooning Championships in 2019. Today, Pato flies commercially over Melbourne and the Yarra Valley, and takes pride in instructing the next generation of Australian ballooning pilots.

3



Simon Beare VIC

VH DVY Kubicek 90

Simon is a private and commercial balloonist with 25 years experience in the industry. He has been ground crew for the Australian balloon team on many occasions. At 60+ years he still loves ballooning and that is why he is here in Northam.

4



Peter Clements WA

VH OTR 'Bradley'
Kavanagh C77

The youngest member of the local Clements ballooning dynasty (so far), Peter has been a balloon pilot for more than 20 years. He has also flown in Denmark and Canberra. A family man, Peter enjoys volunteering at his children's sporting activities, and taking the opportunity to fly in the Avon Valley whenever he can. His 'real job' is as an electrical contractor.

5



Harry Fraser VIC

We look forward to the unveiling of the surprise balloon

Harry grew up in a Ballooning family in the beautiful Yarra Valley, so ballooning has always been a big part of his life. He was the youngest commercial pilot in Australia for many years & so far he has obtained over 1100hrs of flying. His most memorable flight being over Mt Kosciuszko with his sister Mia. He now flies commercially for Go Wild Ballooning over the Yarra Valley, Geelong, and occasionally Melbourne.

6



Damian Gilchrist ACT

VH LUF 'Solis'
Cameron superlight 90
Sponsors name "Aeronautics"

Damian first flew hot air balloons for the RAAF in 2009. Since then he has added over 500 hours in balloons across Australia to his 3000 hours experience on the A-4 Skyhawk and other military aircraft. He has competed at Canowindra NSW, Northam and Mudgee NSW National Championships. He lives in Canberra, is married to Donna McKendrey - Crew Chief extraordinaire, and has three adult children who also crew on occasion.

Meet the Pilots

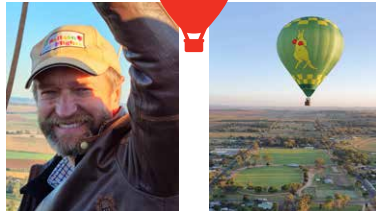
7



Alana Kahl ACT
VH CVX 'Wattle Happen'
Kavanagh EX 60

Alana is a private pilot originally from Queensland and now residing in Canberra. While still relatively new to ballooning, having achieved her licence in 2018, competition was always her focus. Alana also crewed and navigated at the 2017 Junior world championships and the 2018 USA Womens Nationals and is looking forward to flying "Wattle Happen" her Green and Gold racer in her second National event.

8



Anton Kerr NSW
VH RAU 'The Roo'
Kavanagh EX 77

Anton is the Chief Pilot for the family ballooning business in Canowindra NSW. He loves competing, with his best result being 4th in the 2019 National Championships. He represented Australia at the World Championships in Slovenia in 2022. He is flying the boxing Kangaroo, and looks forward to being back in the skies over Northam.

9



Viktor Myazov VIC
VH VFN "Doonyart"
Kavanagh EX 60

Viktor began ballooning in 1997 and his love for aviation and adrenaline does not stop there, he has over 60 B.A.S.E jumps as well as over 1600 parachuting sky dives. In 1998 he made his TV debut in the show "Extreme Sport" working as a reporter, but got back into ballooning in 2002 as President of the Hot Air Balloon Federation of Samara. Viktor looks after all the maintenance at 'Picture This Ballooning' making sure the equipment meets safety standards and is in tip top shape for every flight. In his spare time Viktor enjoys catching up with friends, spending time with his family & singing R&B.

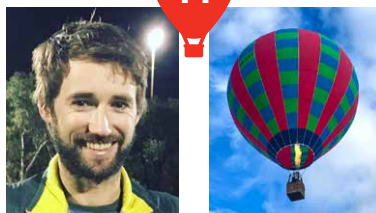
10



Scobie (Chris) Peart VIC
VH XUP 'Up'
Balloon built by Scobie

Scobie won a \$2 raffle for a balloon ride in 1991 and got hooked. He started as a competition official in 1992 and attended many events in Australia and overseas, including 6 world championships, as an official. He commenced flying as a pilot in 2002, and his best competition result to date is 5th place and rookie of the year at 2007 Nationals. Scobie is flying his homebuilt experimental balloon 'UP' at this event.

11



Benjamin Phillips VIC
VH-XYT 'Thambula'
Lovingly built by WA Pilot, Donna

Ben has been flying balloons since 2019, and this will be his first Australian Championships as a pilot. It's not his first National Championships however, because he competed in the 2019 Czech Nationals. Outside of ballooning Ben lives on a small farm on the edge of Melbourne with his family, attempting to grow most of the family's food and breeding chickens that lay unusual coloured eggs. For work, he helps authors turn their words into published books, with a focus on business and thought leader books.

12



Andrew Robertson NSW
VH WUW
'Balloony McBalloonface'
Kavanagh EX60

Andrew (Robbo) started ballooning in the late 1970s at age four. He obtained his private pilot license in 1994 and his instructor and commercial ratings in 1996. Andrew has competed at all Australian National Championships since 1996 (except 2001). He has represented Australia at World Championships in 2006, 2012, 2018 and 2022. Andrew is supported by his super "Team Robbo" consisting of wife Kath and son James. When he is not flying balloons, he is also a keen expedition kayaker, videographer and photographer.

Meet the Pilots

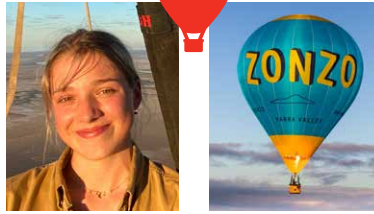
13



Edward Saunders VIC
VH ZUW 'Zoncello'
Kavanagh EX 70

Edward grew up around balloons and has been flying them since age 15. With a passion for aviation and an adventurous family he has flown in a variety of extraordinary locations. He works full time as a commercial balloon pilot in Melbourne with his father and two siblings in the family business. He has competed at ballooning competitions around Australia and the world, and placed 12th in the recent World Championships in Slovenia. He will be flying the newest member of the Zonzo fleet, the yellow Zoncello balloon. So Look out for the flying lemon

14



Scarlett Saunders VIC
VH ZOW 'Zonzo'
Kavanagh EX 60

Scarlett comes from an aviation family and started flying balloons at the age of 15, after being dragged around Australia and the world on her father's ballooning exploits. She holds a commercial balloon pilots licence and flies commercially in Victoria. She has flown her balloon near and far, including flights over the Snowy Mountains, the Warrumbungles and the Gulf of Carpentaria, and a womens Australian record flight to 23,700 ft over Deniliquin NSW. This is Scarlett's first Nationals. So look out for some fun from the little blue ZONZO racer dancing around the sky.

15



Mathew Scaife NSW
VH-85S 'Sea Shepherd'
Kubicek 60

Matthew is a triple Australian Ballooning Champion, winning the Championships in 2014, 2015 and 2017; as well as 2016 Japanese Grand Prix teams event Champion. He regularly competes in events throughout the world, representing Australia on a number of occasions. He is currently 11th in the FAI World pilot rankings.

16



Nicola Scaife NSW
VH-NKS 'Flow'
Kavanagh EX 60

Nicola has been ballooning for 17 years. She started as a retrieve crew and gained her PPL a year later. She flies as a commercial balloon pilot in the Hunter Valley, NSW. Her best achievements so far include winning the Women's World Championship twice in 2014 & 2016, and placing third in 2018. She also placed 9th in the open World Championship in 2018. She is currently ranked 17th on the FAI world ranking and is the highest ranked female pilot. Nicola loves the challenge of competition flying and the community that comes together from all walks of life to enjoy this unique passion.

17



Jared Shore ACT
VH LFS
Kavanagh D 84

Jared and his team have travelled from Canberra ACT, Batemans Bay NSW, Forster NSW and Sydney NSW. This is his 4th time participating at a Nationals event, and 2nd time as pilot in command. Jared says that it's always a great experience ballooning here in the incredible and welcoming town of Northam.

18



Les Springett NSW
VH OTS 'Hot Stuff'
Kavanagh EX 77

Les has been a balloonist since 1979, and a pilot since 1991. He is a keen competing pilot and has represented Australia overseas at the highest level, including a World championship. Les has attended all Australian National Ballooning Championships since 1981. In Northam Les has attended previously as crew, an official, and since 1992 as a competitor.

Meet the Pilots

19



Joel Tetlow WA
VH – TGJ
Kavanagh EX-77

Meet Joel, a third-generation pilot from Northam, Western Australia, who is gearing up for his first ballooning competition. Joel grew up watching his father and grandfather take to the skies, and he's always been fascinated by the sense of freedom and adventure that ballooning provides. Now, with experience under his belt and a passion for flight in his heart, Joel is ready to put his skills to the test against some of the best pilots in the country. Will he soar to new heights and take home the trophy? Only time will tell.

20



Geoff Howe ACT
VH IGH 'Poppy'
Ultramagic 42

Geoff has been flying balloons for 30 years and has flown in all states except QLD. Geoff has many years experience flying balloons commercially in Canberra and also for our very own Windward Balloon Adventures here in Northam.

28



Andrew Clements WA
VH ACU 'Jenna'
Kavanagh D 90

Andrew is a local pilot of 25 years experience. He has flown in three National Championships, and will be dedicating these Championships to Belinda Clements, who he met through ballooning, and who was a driving force in the formation of Northam Ballooning Events.



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Northam Ballooning Events Inc. – Organisers

Committee:

Chairman:	Errol Croft, President Northam Aero Club
Treasurer:	Glen Brayshaw
Secretary:	Margie Putland
Operations Manager:	Gren Putland
Shire of Northam Liaison:	Jo Metcalf
Community Liaison:	Michelle Blackhurst
WA Balloon & Airship Club:	Michael Clements, President
Commercial Ballooning:	Damien Hays
Farmer Liaison:	Brendan Parker
Airfield Logistics:	Matt Bignell
Special Projects:	June Bairstow
Member:	Donna Tasker
Member:	Sue Clements

Other Volunteer Officials

Airfield/ Launch Site Ops:	Mike Vincent Matt Bignell Simon Wooding Isobel Wooding
Target Team:	Alison & Norm Fox Sharon Bray Robyn Stewart June Bairstow Steve Cox Kaitlyn Oliver
Information/Merchandise:	Lena Hinsley Raewyn Mohi

Event Competition Officials



Director Gary Lacey ACT

Gary worked in the field of pharmaceutical research and regulation. He is a commercial balloon pilot and instructor, operating mainly in the ACT. He has attended numerous International Events including as Deputy Director of both Junior and Womens World Championships, and has been Director of the last three Australian National Championships. Gary leads his well-qualified operations team to conduct this Event.



Chief Scorer Steve Ireland ACT

Steve is both a private & commercial balloon pilot. He is the Australian CIA (Committee International D'Aerostation) representative and has officiated at numerous National and International Events, including World Championships. He flies balloons in Canberra, one of them being the famous Sky Whale.



Safety Officer John Wallington ACT

John is a pilot of many and varied achievements. He has been Australian Champion and holder of a number of ballooning records. His skills were put to use in the first across-Australia flight with Dick Smith. He has been a key official at the annual Canberra Balloon Fiesta for many years, and also at the World Championships in Saga Japan in 2016.



Meteorologist Don Whitford VIC

Don is an eminent Meteorologist with a specific interest in sports aviation. He has been the meteorological advisor to varied air sports at both National & International levels for 30 years, with a focus on ballooning. Don has recently retired from the Bureau of Meteorology after 55 years working in aviation and defence weather services.



Operations Manager Gren Putland WA

A Committee and Life Member of the Northam Aero Club, Gren holds a fixed wing Pilot licence, Airship, & Commercial Balloon Pilot licence. He has held ballooning altitude records, and placed 8th at the 1983 World Balloon Championships in Nantes France. Gren has officiated at many balloon events in both Australia and overseas. He and his wife live on their small farming property east of Northam.

Other Competition Officials:

Assistant Scorer	Rhonda Pritchard (ACT)
Target Team OIC:	Ian & Carol Benning (VIC)
Admin:	Ruth Wilson (NSW)
Farmer Liaison:	Brendan Parker, Gerard Sermon, Peter Roe (WA)

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Northam Airfield

Built by the Community for the Community



The 1960's were halcyon days for flying. The Royal Aero Club was expanding and moving from Perth Guildford Airport to Jandakot, interest in flying had spread to rural areas, with Flying Schools at Bunbury & Narrogin, and aerial agriculture was becoming a huge business with large tonnages of fertilizer being spread from the air, this being the only way in many cases with such wet seasons.

At Northam, in 1968, a group of enthusiastic locals headed by Keith Nicholson, and including Bruce Smart, Geoff Way & Adrian Clements, formed a steering committee to find land for an airstrip and flying school. After much ground work, an interim site was identified at Noggojerring on the farming property of Des & Max Smith, who generously leased their paddock, while the search for a permanent site continued. Working bees ensured that a strip was mown, suitable markers placed, windsock installed, large trees removed; and a briefing room, fuel shed and toilet constructed. That original old briefing hut can still be found, adjacent to the current Club Rooms.

The first instructor was David Walker, on loan from Narrogin Flying Club, followed soon after by John Douglas AM, now Chief Flying Instructor at Royal Aero Club of WA. In the first few months of that first year, 20 members took out student licences, 8 went solo, 2 were granted RPPL's, and 150 training hours were flown. Meantime, a permanent site was found, and the property where the Airfield is now located was purchased from Mr Lyall Hurley in 1970 jointly by the then Town & Shire Councils, to be leased back to the Aero Club to foster aviation activities for the benefit of the town and district.

The present club rooms were once the drum stand and offices of the Caltex Depot in Northam (now the Boulevard shopping arcade parking area). Sam Oliver (later club president) was awarded the contract for demolition of the site and recognizing its potential, coordinated the removal and rebuilding at the Airfield. Richard Page made available the enormous windows from his Ford dealership depot, and John Dietrich supplied the suspending ceilings. The Club was fortunate in its membership - plumbers, electricians, builders & building Inspectors being

amongst its number; so the building of brick toilets, making of septic, electric & water connections were all done by members. The last major project to be undertaken was the installation of runway lights; one of the most satisfying, for its life saving use by RFDS & Aerial Ambulance in Emergency - a far cry from filling beer cans with sand & avgas to light the strip!

From its humble beginnings, the Northam Airfield has evolved into a busy regional centre for aviation. The Aero Club continues to have an enthusiastic & active membership, hosting monthly flying competitions & social events, and operating a busy flying school with its own aircraft, and three instructors. The Club now acts as manager of the airfield for the Northam Shire Council, ensuring that facilities are safely maintained for the ever-increasing number of private hangars, as well as substantial businesses that are based here. Northam Air Services is one of the state's most well-respected aircraft engineering companies, servicing aircraft from the wheat-belt & wider rural regions, from Perth metro, and with a regular 'mobile-mechanic' schedule, flying to remote outback customers.

The Airfield is also home to Windward Balloon Adventures, one of Western Australia's premier, and award winning, tourism operators. Also one of Australia's oldest ballooning companies, Windward celebrated 40 years of operations at Northam in 2022, this picturesque part of the Avon Valley providing the ideal conditions to experience the unique joys of hot-air ballooning.

The Airfield and the Aero Club have come a long way from a tiny tin shed at the old Airstrip, but one thing remains a constant, and that is an ongoing commitment to, and active participation in, the community of Northam.



Photograph by Sharon Pedder

Northam

Heart of the Avon Valley and home to ballooning in Western Australia

Balloons were first seen in Northam in the early 1970's, when a group of pilots from Hong Kong came to Western Australia. They were looking for a location away from the controlled airspace over Perth, with plenty of open spaces for ballooning - the small island of Hong Kong not being ideal! In the Avon Valley they discovered a keen group of enthusiasts at the Northam Aero Club willing to assist. As flight crew with Cathay Pacific, their regular route to Perth allowed them to ship balloons to Northam, and a day or two off so they could do some ballooning.

The group of enthusiasts at the Northam Aero Club were in turn instructed in the skills of flying balloons, with a number of locals attaining their British Balloon Pilot Licences – and so being amongst the first balloonists in Australia to gain recognised qualifications, as there was as yet no Australian licensing system.

Northam skies are still to be seen adorned with colourful balloons, with regular flights by both Windward Balloon Adventures, and the enthusiastic members of the WA Balloon & Airship Club.

The Australian Balloon Championships have been held in Northam on four previous occasions, in 1981, 1984, 2015 & 2017. The logistical difficulties of transporting 20-30 balloons & baskets, equipment, pilots, crew and qualified Officials have seen the Championships held on mostly on the east coast - but the enormous success of the 2015 & 2017 Championships in Northam resulted in a chorus of pleas from pilots, crews, sponsors and townsfolk alike, for the event to be held here once again.

We extend a hearty welcome to our visiting teams of pilots & crew from interstate & overseas, and also to the many of you who will be visiting our town to enjoy the opportunity of witnessing the colour of the massed balloons, and to admire the endeavours of some of Australia's most skilled Balloon Pilots.

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Northam Honours its Record Setters

Northam's sheltered location in the Avon Valley, within easy reach of Perth, has seen the town become the home of ballooning in Western Australia. The upper jet stream flowing from west to east across the Australian continent has also made Northam the ideal starting point for numerous National and World ballooning record attempts, by locals and by high profile overseas balloonists. Each and every attempt has had the extensive involvement of local pilots, balloon crew and many other volunteers; assisting with planning, logistics, equipment flight preparation, balloon launch and retrieve operations.

Bernard Park Plinth

In 2018 The Shire of Northam commissioned a plinth mounted with a plaque commemorating the achievements of local and international balloonists, all of which involved the people of Northam.

The plinth can be found in the beautiful surrounds of Bernard Park, on the town side of the Avon River.


Geoff Green

- Hong Kong/British

Geoff introduced ballooning to Northam in the 1970's, having decided that this was the ideal location on the ideal continent, to be the take off point for his record attempts. Geoff's two records of note were the World AX6 Altitude Record, 30,500 ft in 'Charlie' in 1977; and in 1980, along with local Northam pilot **Adrian Clements**, Outright World Distance Record, 690 kms from Northam to Zanthus, east of Kalgoorlie on the trans-Australian railway, in the 'Sultan III' balloon.



Sultan III



Shire of Northam
Heritage, Commerce and Lifestyle

BALLOONING IN NORTHAM

Hot air ballooning came to Northam in April 1977 when members of the Hong Kong Balloon and Airship Club were looking for a location to train their balloon pilots, and also set altitude, distance and duration records for hot air balloons. Northam was chosen as their preferred site because it was within close proximity to Perth, one of their regular flight destinations and offered a sheltered valley perfect for ballooning with open farmland being ideal for safe landings.

Since 1977 there has been a number of significant hot air ballooning records which were achieved at or from Northam.

For detailed information about ballooning in Northam, scan this code or go to www.northam.wa.gov.au and click on the Visit Northam tab.

The Shire of Northam acknowledges the achievement of the hot air ballooning pilots listed below:

Aug 1977	Geoff Green	World altitude AX-6	Charlie O-56
Oct 1978	Sabu Ichiyoshi	Japan altitude, distance	Carthay II O-84
Oct 1978	Ron Taaffe	Australian altitude	Shell O-56
Aug 1982	Ron Taaffe	World altitude, distance, duration	San Miguel airship D-38
Aug 1980	Paul Gianniotis	World distance AX-4	Sprinte O-31
Aug 1980	Paul Gianniotis	Australian duration AX-4	Sprinte O-31
Aug 1980	Gren Putland	Australian altitude AX-4 and AX-5	Sprinte O-31
Sept 1980	Geoff Green	World distance	Sultan III A-140
Aug 1980	Ron Taaffe	Australian distance	Charlie O-56
Sept 1982	Geoff Feltow	Australian duration	San Miguel O-315
June 1994	Michio Kanda	World distance AX10-14	Mambo N-210 D/S
	Chikatsu Kakinuma		
July 1995	Kei-ichi Kojima	World duration AX-5	N-42 D/S
Sept 1995	Maco Owa	World duration AX10-14	Mambo N-210 D/S
Aug 1997	Toshiko Ichiyoshi	World distance, duration, womens AX-6	Wombat N-56
Aug 1997	Maco Owa	World duration AX-6	Wombat N-56
2001	Steve Fossett	World distance	Solo Spirit R-550
June 2002	Steve Fossett	World distance, duration, RTW speed	Spirit of Freedom R-550
July 2016	Fedor Konyukhov	World distance, RTW speed	Morton R-550
April 2019	Yasumi Kurashige	Japan altitude, distance AX-4	Sim Sim

Geoff Tetlow - Northam, Western Australian

Australian distance record 1982, Northam to Pumpkin Hollow (Jurien Bay)

Michio Kanda & Chikatsu Kakinuma - Japan

Base and operations centre were in Northam with a large crew of locals assembled to assist, including then Aero Club President Claude Meunier and his Aerostar for aerial tracking. In 1994 Michio and Chikatsu flew 'Mambo' 2366 kilometres, Mullewa to Broken Hill, setting a new AX10-14 World Distance Record.

Kei-ichi Kojima - Japan

In 1995 Northam locals were recruited to help Kei launch from Dalwallinu, flying his small balloon over Beacon and Wialki, on towards Lake Baladjie; a new World AX5 Duration Record of 9hrs 17min.

Sabu Ichiyoshi - Japan

In 1978 Sabu set Japanese altitude & distance records fly from the Northam Race Club to Shackleton.

Ron Taaffe

- Hong Kong/Australian

Ron set a number of Australian ballooning records from Northam, his most notable achievement in 1982, when he set the World Altitude, Distance and Duration Records in the San Miguel D-38 hot-air airship.

Paul Gianniotis

- Hong Kong/Australian

Paul set an Australian duration record in 1980, and in the same year also set the World AX4 Distance Record of 154.68 kms.

Gren Putland - Northam, Western Australian

Australian altitude record 1980, Northam to Green Hills



Maco Oiwa & Sabu Ichiyoshi

- Japan

In 1995 Northam teams mobilised, and the now-famous 'Mambo' balloon took off from Southern Cross. After a flight of 41 hours 29 minutes, Maco & Sabu landed at Coolardy Station, with a new World AX10-14 Duration Record.

In 1997 the Operations contingent & Northam base were again mobilised. Maco flew solo through the night in 'Wombat' from Southern Cross, landing 15 hours 22 minutes later near Mt Hampton; setting a World AX6 Duration Record.



Above: Mambo and Wombat

Toshiko Ichiyoshi - Japan

In 1997 Maco's wife Tonko launched from Merredin in 'Wombat', flew solo through the night and landed west of Tampus the next morning; a feminine World AX6 Duration Record, 12 hours 15 minutes.



Steve Fossett's 'Spirit of Freedom'

Steve Fossett - USA

Steve Fossett was probably the most well-recognised Aviator to select Northam as a base. Organisation and logistics descended upon Northam on the grandest of scales, with a team of balloon and technical experts from the USA to get his massive 653,216 cu ft Cameron R-550 Roziere balloon airborne. Mission control was located at Washington University in St Louis.

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Steve Fossett's take off

In 2001 Steve had made a very windy failed inflation at Kalgoorlie, and after repairs in Northam & England, relocated to Northam. Hangar, facilities and logistics were at Northam Airfield, and dozens of local crew were recruited from the Aero Club, balloonists, SES, and local businesses.

The successful Solo Round the World flight was launched at Northam on 19 June 2002. Steve lifted off in 'Spirit of Freedom' at 1.37 pm, tracking across Australia, the Pacific Ocean, South America, the South Atlantic Ocean, below southern Africa, across the Indian Ocean, and across Australia again to make landing at Eromanga, QLD on 3 July 2002. Steve Fossett had achieved three world records:

Distance:32,957.44 km, Duration:355 hrs 57 min & Shortest Time Around the World.

Fedor Konyukhov - Russia

Fedor had already achieved many notable feats including: First solo sailboat circumnavigation of Antarctica, crossing the Atlantic Ocean, and the Pacific Ocean, in a row-boat, competing in the Iditarod dog race, dogsled expeditions from North Pole to Canada, and across the Greenland Ice Cap, and the first Russian Mountaineer to complete the 7 Summits Challenge.

In 2016 decided to emulate the flight of Steve Fossett, dedicating his flight to Steve. John Wallington from Canberra (the Safety Officer at these Championships) was engaged to assist in the Northam Flight Ops Centre; and the Northam Team was activated again. Hangar facilities, accommodation, and ground crew were soon in place. Fedor took off from the Northam Airfield on 12 July 2016. He flew solo around the world for 11 days 4 hours & 20 mins, before landing back almost exactly where he started.

In a "billion-to-one chance" quirk of meteorology, after travelling 33,521.4 km around the Earth, Fedor literally flew over his original take-off field, before landing safely near Bonnie Rock a few hours later. A new record for 'Shortest Time Around the World' and World Record for Distance travelled had been set.



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