

# Triumphant Balloonists Plucked From Desert

## Round-the-World Odyssey Comes to an End in Egypt

By Douglas Jehl  
New York Times Service

CAIRO — After a final night soaring across North Africa, the first balloonists to circle the globe touched down early Sunday in the soft sands of southern Egypt — and then spent hours waiting for a ride home.

The landing, about 500 kilometers (300 miles) southwest of Cairo, brought a bumpy end to a record-setting journey that had lasted nearly three weeks.

The balloonists — Bertrand Piccard, a Swiss doctor, and Brian Jones, a British pilot — aboard the huge Breitling Orbiter-3, had hoped to land to near the Pyramids of Giza, but unfavorable winds kept them from that storybook ending.

Instead, they scuttled to a stop in the sands of the Sahara, after two aborted attempts, and then had to gouge holes in their still-inflated balloon to keep it from dragging them further across the desolate desert.

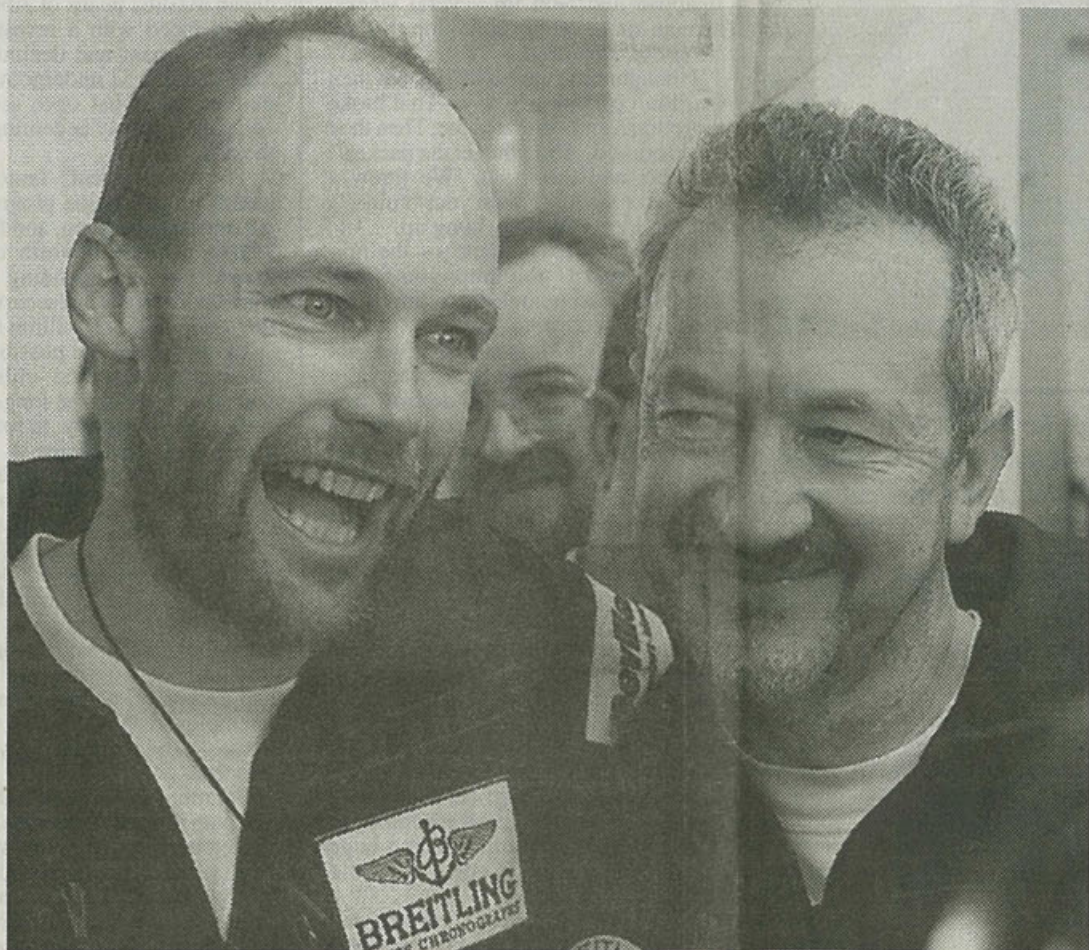
The balloonists landed at about 0600 GMT, but it was more than seven hours before an Egyptian Army helicopter arrived to pluck them from atop a steep plateau.

It was "the most amazing experience," Mr. Jones said of the record-setting journey, which lasted 19 days, 21 hours and 55 minutes.

Mr. Jones told reporters in the oasis town of Dakhla that he and Mr. Piccard had endured the long days cooped up in a tiny capsule as the best of friends. Mr. Jones said the worst thing they had to endure through their journey was the cold.

Mr. Jones and Mr. Piccard had completed the circumnavigation early Saturday morning, floating over Mauritania at 0954 GMT past longitude 9 degrees west. But after a trip that began in Switzerland, and took them across North Africa, Asia, the Pacific Ocean, Central America and the Atlantic, they decided to push on, in search of a soft landing and the romance of the Pyramids, those 5,000-year-old monuments to human perseverance.

It was not clear why it had taken so long for Egyptian helicopters to recover the two men. Their landing was observed by mission controllers aboard a chartered plane, and their exact location was pinpointed by the Global Positioning System.



Desmond Boylan/Reuters

**Bertrand Piccard, left, and Brian Jones celebrating at Dakhla air base Sunday after their Breitling Orbiter-3 balloon landed in the Egyptian desert 480 kilometers southwest of Cairo.**

They touched down at 8 A.M. Egyptian time, after a landing timed to take advantage of a post-dawn lull in winds. But it was not until after 2 P.M. that an Egyptian helicopter arrived on the scene, while plans for a news conference upon their expected arrival in Cairo were postponed and then postponed again.

In Dakhla, where they answered journalists' questions Sunday afternoon, the pair appeared drawn and thin. Asked about the state of their balloon, Mr. Jones — who, like Mr. Piccard, wore a blue flight suit and

was sipping Coke from a wine glass — said, "It's completely deflated, like me, really."

Members of the record-setting team described the landing as having been "a 10 on a scale of 1 to 10," and said that weather conditions had been perfect.

They said that the balloon's fuel supplies had been nearly exhausted and that there had been no question of continuing on for another night.

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