

8/5/2012

BEAUTY AND THE BEST

The sounds came from everywhere, the sounds of wind and fire!. Where? It was at the annual Albuquerque Balloon Festival. We decided to experience it, and traveled there in the Motorhome and parked adjacent to the field. The unusual thing about this event is that you can go right down on the field and walk around as they unload and inflate the balloons.

A strange sight it is, all the various shapes and colors strewn about on the grass like a spilled painter's pallet. A truck or SUV pulls up and disgorges a basket filled with a brightly colored material. The material is rolled away from the basket by the team and unfolded and stretched to full size on the ground. The sounds of small generators starting up and soon the purr of large fans blowing air into the opening of the bag soon spreads across the field. The fabric undulates with the air infusion, and then the roaring propane fueled flame heater ignites and replaces the fan air with hot air which causes the fabric to rise. Soon a balloon is taking shape, struggling to rise skyward. Tethered by ropes held by the team the balloon tilts into the air in position to float upward to the heavens.

All over the field this is happening, all shapes and colors, animals, shapes of all kinds, ready to go. People enter the baskets, the balloon master directs which areas can release their balloons to separate them and reduce collisions, and then the sky is soon filled with hundreds of these floating behemoths. The feeling is awesome, one feels diminutive amidst the throng. The periodic sound of the propane heaters lingers as they slowly catch the wind currents and drift away.

The evening brings about another spectacular event. A night time balloon glow. The same procedures are followed as the daytime ascension, only they do not fly away. They are tethered and just stay on the ground and glow as the fire from the heater shoots into the inside and lights up the balloon's color pattern. A whole field of these glowing balloons is a sight to behold. One can never get enough of the enchanting sights at a Balloon Festival.

The experience led us to our own balloon ride. As an anniversary present to ourselves, we went to Scottsdale, AZ and contracted for our ride. Even though it was only one balloon going thru the same procedures, it was twice as good because we were the ones in the basket. Our pilot was an experienced, licensed contractor of flights and we had no qualms. The flight was every bit what we expected and could have been ten times longer. We floated silently thru the air, listening to people talking on the ground, punctuated only by periodic blasts of the heater to generate more hot air to keep us aloft. We wondered if this was what a bird feels like as it flies about the sky.

Our radio directed pace car was there when we made our soft and gentle landing, and had a table set up with champagne to toast our ride and our anniversary. We also received a certificate documenting our flight. A memory we will never forget.

Dave & Bonnie

(Ps) In lieu of a journal for our current position in Bothel, WA , we elected to use an older adventure we had taken in the 80's to fill in for a mind failure!