



By Russ Pankonin

The Imperial Republican

At 92,000 feet in space, the temperature stands at a freezing -60°F . The earth still exerts gravitational pull. It's a near vacuum. In fact, scientists call that region of the atmosphere "near space" because conditions so closely resemble those in outer space.

A high altitude balloon filled with hydrogen was released Monday afternoon from the front lawn of the school. It rose to 92,000 feet before bursting, sending its payload falling back to earth.

The experiment drew a large crowd of people to witness the launch. It also kicked off an evening of public activities as part of the Imperial SCORE (Science Camps Offer Rewarding Experiences) camp being held this week.

From launch to the descent, all of it was captured on a video camera tethered to the balloon. After the balloon burst, a parachute eventually brought the camera down to earth.

A rescue crew tracked the flight of the balloon with global positioning signals, allowing them to recover the balloon after it landed.

The experiment was coordinated by staff members from the Strategic Air and Space Museum (SASM) in Ashland. The Museum brought a number of displays and equipment to this year's camp.

Mike Sibberson, the museum's science and technology coordinator, said the balloon was recovered in a pasture north of Wauneta, after traveling around 21 miles.

Sibberson said the balloon floated west from the school but a storm system changed wind directions, taking it in an easterly direction. He noted it was an unusual flight path compared to other launches.



He noted the pastures in that area can be particularly rough, with deep canyons. They walked in about 3/10ths of a mile to recover the payload.

He said it was fortunate the payload and tracking transmitter landed near the top of the canyon. Had it gone down in one of the canyons, the signal would have been harder to track.

He said the video captured the storm from above the cloud formations, providing some great learning experiences. The video will be posted to YouTube later this week, he said.

SCORE Camp in 15th year

This year's science camp marks the 15th year the camp has been held in Imperial.

It was first started in 1989 by Marla Smith and Sue Renken. Smith remains as the coordinator of the camp that is now held every other year.

This year's camp drew a total of 313 campers in grades 1-6. Activities are being held at the

school, Champion Lake, the Swinging Bridge Ranch and Open Country Adventures.

Ken Schroeder, deputy director of SASM, said Imperial is to be complimented for efforts to expand learning opportunities for kids.

SCORE reminds kids, parents and grandparents alike that learning can be fun.

Participating in a summer learning camp keeps kids' minds active and engaged, he said. It's an environment where there are no tests or no pressure, which helps build confidence in the camper.

Confidence breeds success and success breeds confidence, Schroeder said.

SASM brought all of its learning experiments, displays and equipment to Imperial for the camp. He said this is the first time his staff has brought everything to one location.

Their exhibits included a space shuttle slide, space shuttle bounce house, a 19-foot earth balloon, a mobile planetarium, a mobile observatory and a multi-axis trainer.

The Imperial Community Foundation underwrote bringing the SASM display to the camp.

The camp continues through the week, wrapping up Friday.