

# Russian balloonist circling globe crosses Australian coast

July 23 2016, by Rod Mcguirk

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In this Tuesday, July 12, 2016 photo released Wednesday, July 20, 2016 by Morton, Russian adventurer Fedor Konyukhov floats at more than 6,000 meters (20,000 feet) above an area close to Northam in Western Australia state in his helium and hot-air balloon as he makes a record attempt to fly solo in a balloon around the world nonstop. Konyukhov, 65, was battling sleep deprivation, freezing temperatures and ice in his oxygen mask as he nears the end of his record attempt to fly solo around the world nonstop, his son said on Wednesday July 20, 2016. (Oscar Konyukhov/Morton via AP)

A 65-year-old Russian adventurer reached the Australian coast on Saturday and was within a few hours of setting a new record for flying solo nonstop around the world, an official said.

Fedor Konyukhov's 56-meter (184-foot) -tall helium and hot-air balloon was descending as it crossed the southwest coast directly over the city of Perth at 95 kilometers (60 miles) per hour and at an altitude of less than 7,000 meters (23,000 feet), support crew member Steve Griffin said.

When he drifts across 117 degrees longitude east of Perth, he will have shaved two days off the record of 13 days and eight hours set by American businessman Steve Fossett in 2002.

Konyukhov hoped to land around 4 p.m. (0800 GMT) along a 500-kilometer (300-mile) sparsely populated expanse between the gold mining town of Kalgoorlie and Northam, the town where his eastward journey began on at 7:33 a.m. on July 12, support crew member John Wellington said.

"It's a bit overcast, but it's not windy which is the most important thing," Wellington said. "It should be a reasonable sort of day to hopefully get him on the ground later this afternoon."

Konyukhov's team say landing the 1.6-metric ton (1.8-ton) balloon could be the most challenging and dangerous part of the journey, with late afternoon the best time. He needs to find an open space free of power lines and buildings and expect to be dragged along the ground for several kilometers (miles) before coming to a halt.



In this Monday, July 11, 2016 photo released Wednesday, July 20, 2016 by Morton, Russian adventurer Fedor Konyukhov stands by his helium and hot-air balloon being inflated before liftoff on his record attempt to fly solo in a balloon around the world nonstop in Northam in Western Australia state. Konyukhov, 65, now flying at more than 6,000 meters (20 feet) above the ground, was battling sleep deprivation, freezing temperatures and ice in his oxygen mask as he nears the end of his record attempt to fly solo around the world nonstop, his son said on Wednesday, July 20, 2016. (Oscar Konyukhov/Morton via AP)

Fossett was forced by strong winds to spend more than a day in the air after setting his own record as the first person to circle the globe in a balloon. His capsule tumbled along the ground for 15 minutes after he landed on a cattle ranch in southwest Queensland state.

The then 58-year-old emerged from the capsule with a bloodied mouth from biting his lip during the rough landing, but was otherwise

unhurt.

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