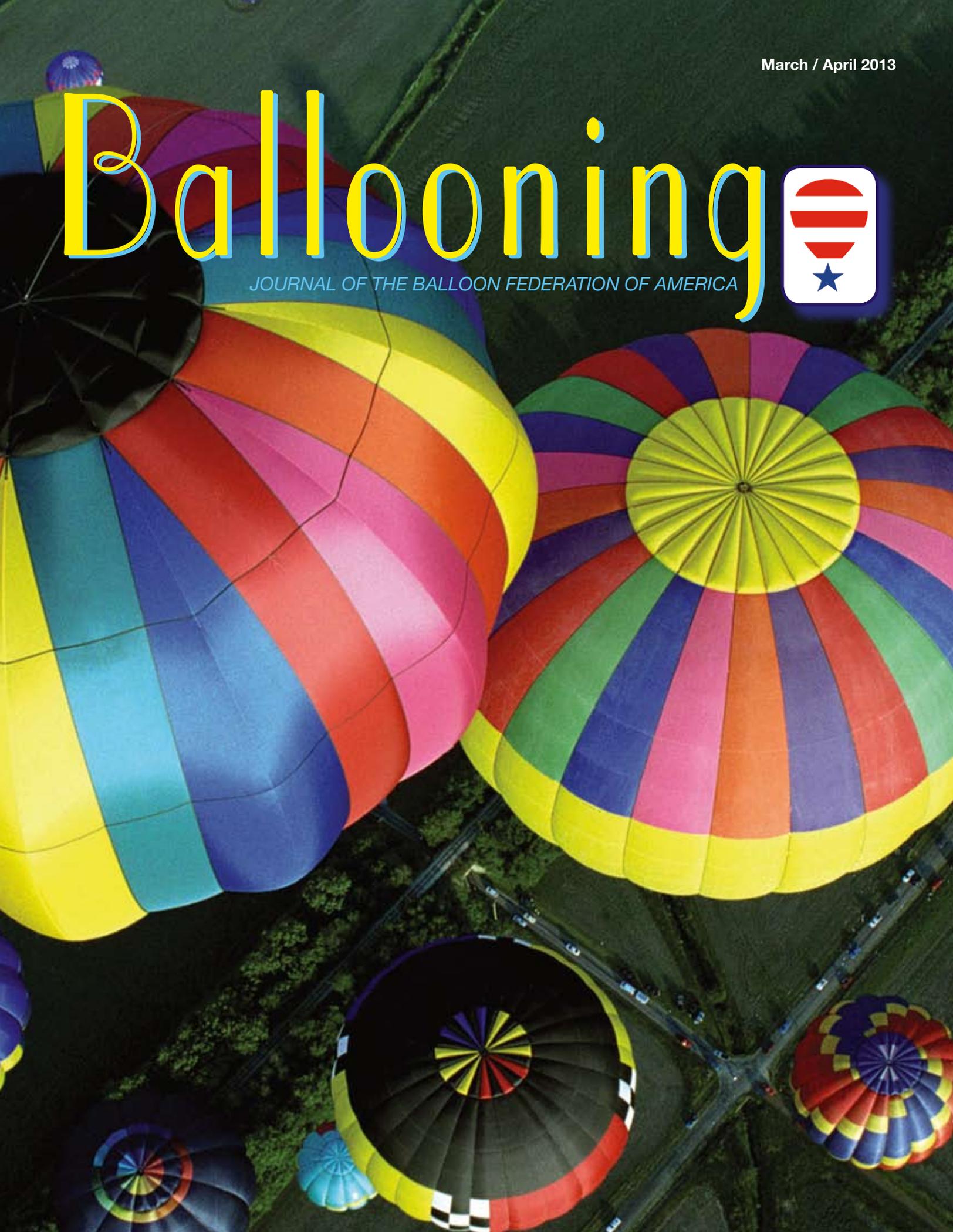


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Europe's "Albuquerque"

A Visitor's Guide to Lorraine Mondial Air Ballons: July 26-August 4, 2013

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Landing spots as far as the eye can reach, the French soil caressed by golden sunrays, one solid balloon family with members from all over the world and over 400 balloons coloring the horizon. Let me introduce you to Albuquerque's European little sister: Lorraine Mondial Air Ballons.

Located in the Northern part of France, just a stone's throw away from Belgium, Luxemburg, The Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland a former military airbase in Chambley-Bussières hosts the biggest balloon event of Europe. It is held every other year and the upcoming event will take place from July 26th till August 4th 2013. In 2011 the

airbase went through a spectacular renovation turning an area with two rusty hangars into a high tech aerodrome called Planet Air.

As long as the weather allows, mass starts take place every morning and evening. As we all know this can be quite exhausting, especially ten days in a row. I'm aware of the fact this sounds cliché, but your heart will be filled with so many beautiful memories that the short nights are definitely worth it. This is an event you should at least have visited once in a lifetime.

Besides ballooning the region in which Mondial Air Ballons is held offers some great attractions for culture and history fanatics. Just some tips from the experienced MAB visitor before we start off

our balloon talk. Metz and Nancy are the biggest cities located in Lorraine, one of the 27 regions of France. Both of them are definitely worth a look. Art Nouveau lovers will be best off in Nancy. A lot of impressive works can be found throughout the whole city, often also at places where you'd expect it the least, hidden in little side streets. The School of Nancy Museum houses Art Nouveau furniture, art works and utensils and therefore creates a clear image of the wealth during the early 1900s. For the ones interested in more pompous architecture Place Stanislas is a must-see. This enormous square is embellished with extravagant fountains, gold-painted rococo railings and a fair amount of Baroque build-

ings. The city of Metz is the capital of Lorraine and provides enough to see for a full day city trip. Over 100 buildings in Metz's city centre are classified as historical monuments. Besides seeing some of the best examples of French culture it's also a great place to let your taste buds get introduced to the French 'cuisine'. A stroll through one of its many parks, a round of shopping in one of its crowded shopping streets or some sightseeing at the enormous gothic Metz Cathedral or futuristic looking modern art museum Centre Pompidou, all tastes are catered for.

The Northern part of France is known for its turbulent past. A fifty minute car drive away from the launch field the city of Verdun can be found. Right here the French and German armies fought against each other in one of the major battles during the First World War, the Battle of Verdun. Also a little more nearby some traces of war history can be found.

The 'Butte de Montsec' is a giant neoclassicist monument on top of an isolated hill in Montsec. It can be spotted practically during every flight. The monument was placed in remembrance of the achievements made by American soldiers around the 1917s in the Lorraine region.

When your partner isn't that much into ballooning you might want to take him or her for a trip to the city of love. Paris is just a 1,5 hours train ride away from Metz. Here you'll definitely make up for all your hours of ballooning talk. On the other hand... this might be ruined by the fact that the first hot air balloon flight took place at the 'Jardin des Tuileries', yes, exactly, in Paris.

Once every two years the hardly inhabited area around the launch field is invaded by balloonists from all over the world. Once there was even a team from South-Korea. I'm not joking when I say they wanted to have my autograph, really!

The Lorraine region offers accommodation for adventurers as well as the more pampered balloon teams. It's possible to stay with a camper or tent on the field right next to the launch area but there are also many camping's surrounding Chambley Planet Air where

you can put up your improvised headquarters. When in need for a proper bed you might want to try a French B&B, usually located at a farmers' place in one of the small picturesque villages. Another option would be a little rental house next to one of the biggest lakes of that area, perfect for teams with children. Be warned, this is where the Belgians set up their camp so bring your ear plugs for a good night sleep or some beer to join their daily recurring barbecue party.

For those wanting an out of the ordinary experience it's possible to stay overnight in a true monastery. It offers far more comfort than one might expect and is only half an hour's drive from the launch field.

Pilots attending Mondial Air Ballons don't come over to France for commercial flights. It's all about having fun and sharing unforgettable experiences with friends. It's a great venue to take your crew members to and to show them your

appreciation during a fun time up in the air all together.

Hardly any big balloons can be seen during this event, and that's exactly what makes the atmosphere so easy going and enjoyable. There is no rush, everything is done the French



Sprawling Chambley airbase serves as host site of this event that features "Fiesta" like mass ascensions while returning visitors to ballooning's homeland.



France is a land of beauty, from its wild flowers, to an open air fruit stand, to stylish French art nouveau!

way. Imagine, after a nice morning flight, warmed by the sun, you put down a picnic cloth next to your balloon and you have a two-hour breakfast with fresh French ‘baguettes’ from the local bakery, the finest selection of cheese and the accompaniment of a bunch of balloon minded friends. Right there at your landing spot. It’s all possible. Just bear in mind not to eat too many mirabelle plums which practically can be found on every corner of the street. They are very tasty, but dangerous in huge amounts, if you know what I mean.

Since 2011 Chambley Airbase proudly owns a high tech refueling area. The station consists out of four units, each with 36 filling hoses. In total 144 tanks can be refueled at the same time and that saves an enormous amount of time in comparison with the situation how it was before. A pleasant improvement!

In contrast to other events there is a lot of landing space available in the area surrounding Planet Air. You can practically land with your eyes closed. This might also be the reason why hardly any accidents happen, even though there are so incredibly many balloons up in the air. Once in a while the wind speed is so low that all balloons keep drifting over the launch field, from west to east and north to south and back.

Another tip, don’t forget your camera! Or, concerning safety, don’t forget your photography-crazy crewmember. These moments are just unforgettable. A blanket of balloons, fabric on fabric like close friends on a picture, apple cheek against apple cheek. Slowly drifting over the runway, sharing a laugh and a big thumb’s up with the pilots in the baskets a few meters away from you. An enormous shadow moving just a few inches over the heads of the lucky photographers on the ground, like an umbrella of colorful balloon fabric with happy waiving little creatures hanging below it. Before I start to get all poetic now let’s rather continue with another topic. You probably got my point.

In case you had some French

language courses it could be useful to repeat your vocabulary list once more. Don’t expect the French being too willing to communicate in English, with few exceptions of course. For years the briefing has been bilingual, yet, twenty sentences of French information equal one short sentence in English. With a little bit of luck it’s a meaningful one. Spoken out with a heavy French accent pilots during the 2011 MAB edition were briefed with the famous words ‘today, we have weather’. Useless. France is not a country for control freaks. As long as you take everything with a smile and a good dose of patience you’ll see that it will be all right in the end.

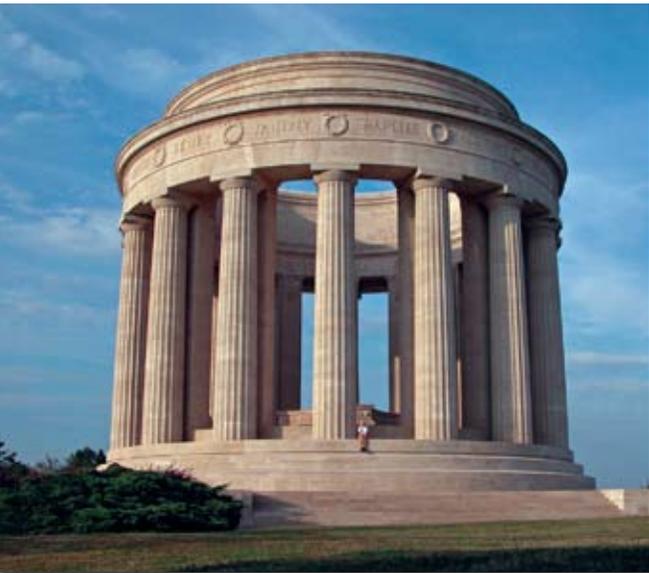
A special feature of Mondial Air Ballons is the line-up. Both sides of the airbase’s runway are packed with balloons all waiting for the sign to lift off simultaneously. The 2011 record of balloons lined up was 343: a new world record!

During the years the organizers added several extra’s to the mass ascents. The French alpha jet formation ‘Partouille de France’ came across in 2003 and in the same year Don Piccard took off with nine cluster balloons tied together.

Furthermore every year some gas balloons give me goose bumps of awesomeness. Every edition exhibitions on aviation can be visited in the old rusty hangars as well as in the high tech newly established ones. Every edition of the event more stands with food and games ensure mainly children’s happiness, or that of your most crazy crewmember still being stuck in his childhood.

We’re all well aware of the fact that ballooning is often connected with a lot of waiting. This is the opportunity to get in touch with balloonists from other continents. There are enough possibilities to exchange pins, to check out each other’s equipment and to share a beer and some strong balloon stories from back home.

However, let’s not forget in the end it’s all about the lovely flights. Should I describe a little more on how wonderful it is to be



For Americans, France is dotted with memorials to both World Wars and the American soldiers who fought and died to set Europe free... this is Butte de Montsec, a WWI memorial.

accompanied by 400 other balloons while flying over typical French little villages, having miles of landing possibilities ahead of you while sharing joy with your friends? No, I won't. This is something you have to experience yourself.

In case you didn't plan your summer holiday yet you might want to register for Europe's biggest balloon event now. More information can be found on the non-commercial fan website www.mondialairballons.com. It also provides the latest news, a wide selection of photo albums and a collection of colorful videos.

It's funny to see myself growing up while watching the pictures of previous editions of Mondial Air Ballons. In 2001, when I was eleven years old, I got introduced to the spectacle. Somewhere at a dark dusty corner of the world wide web I found a picture of that time of myself wearing a huge Breitling Orbiter 3 t-shirt while Brian Jones

is standing next to me in one of the hangars at the airbase. I seriously look like a little boy! The same counts for 2003. I don't think people discovered I'm actually a girl until 2005. Interesting to see how things change in a two-year period, not to mention people getting fat (or slim), grey hair, or in the case of my father, leaving his 80s moustache for what it was by finally shaving it off. Enough about looks, this is not the right magazine to talk about these kind of topics.

In case you won't be able to come by this year you can read about all the ballooning adventures on my personal blog www.airdreams.nl which is updated daily during the course of the event. Looking forward to seeing you in France, please say hi!

