

- ▶ HOME
- ▶ NEWS SUMMARY
- ▶ U.S.
- ▶ POLITICS
- ▶ WORLD
- ▶ Raw News
- ▶ BUSINESS
- ▶ TECHNOLOGY
- ▶ SCIENCE
- ▶ HEALTH&LIVING
- ▶ TRAVEL
- ▶ ESPN SPORTS
- ▶ ENTERTAINMENT
- ▶ WEATHER.com
- ▶ REFERENCE
- ▶ LOCAL
- ▶ ABCNEWS ON TV

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- [Pinochet Arrives in Chile](#)
 - [State Dept. Ups Efforts for War Crimes Arrests](#)
 - [Solo Balloonist Ends World-Record Attempt](#)
 - [General Sentenced for War Crimes](#)
 - [Cuban Diplomat Leaves Canada](#)

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End of the Journey



Fuel Shortage Forces Solo Balloonist to Land in Burma

Renee Uliassi talks to visitors, Feb. 28, 2000, next to push-pins marking the progress of her husband Kevin Uliassi, shown in photos on the map, who today ended his attempt to become the first solo balloonist to make it around the world. (Ted S. Warren/AP Photo)

By Jonathan Lipman
The Associated Press

CHICAGO, March 3 — Kevin Uliassi today ended his attempt to become the first solo balloonist to make it around the world, touching down in Burma after traveling more than 13,000 miles.



Uliassi traveled more than 13,225 miles since launching from a rock quarry near Rockford, Ill., on Feb. 22. (ABCNEWS.com/ Magellan Geographix)

The J. Renee touched down at 5:36 a.m. ET, according to spokesman Scott Lorenz. He said the landing was reported to local authorities and a search and rescue was requested.

Uliassi's condition was not immediately released by mission organizers.

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Tough Choice

Uliassi had faced a tough choice. Because crossing the Atlantic took longer than anticipated — he had to change altitude several times to avoid thunderstorms — Uliassi was unsure whether he had enough fuel and supplies to make it across the Pacific and finish the journey.

“In any long-distance balloon flight there are several points where or a ‘go’ or ‘no-go’ decision has to be made,” Lorenz said late Thursday. “It’s water, water everywhere and it’s several days without any land in sight.”

Uliassi traveled more than 13,225 miles since launching from a rock quarry near Rockford, Ill., on Feb. 22.

Closely watching Uliassi’s progress was adventurer Steve Fossett, who holds the world solo balloon flight record — 14,235 miles — set in 1998. That trip ended when a storm off the Australian coast sent his balloon into the Pacific.

Speaking before the flight ended today, Fossett said Uliassi could be proud of his attempt.

“I would think in Kevin’s case that he has to be very pleased,” Fossett said. “He’s making one of the finest balloon flights ever, and he had not previously made a long balloon flight. It’s outstanding so far.”

Rules of the Game

Last March, Swiss psychiatrist Bertrand Piccard and English balloon instructor Brian Jones became the first to circle the world nonstop in a hot-air balloon, landing safely in Egypt.

To count as an around-the-world flight, a balloon must cross all lines of longitude and must cover at least half the length of the equator, according to the Federation Aeronautique Internationale, the governing body of air sports.

The distance around the globe at the

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equator is 24,902 miles.

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