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Hobbyist Shoots Earth From Edge of Space With Used Camera From eBay

NASA Spends \$450 Million for Shuttle Flights; Robert Harrison Uses Weather Balloons, Duct Tape for \$750

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Man Shoots Pictures From Edge of Space for \$750 Per Flight

Twenty miles high, the air is far too thin to breathe, and the helium balloon expands from a diameter of about three feet to more than 50. Harrison said he built a small housing for the camera with attic insulation to protect it from the high-altitude temperatures of 75 degrees below zero.

How far does the wind carry it? "That depends on the jet stream," he said. "On a good day, 10 to 12 miles. On a bad day, 50 miles."

He chases it by car with a GPS tracker on

This is not a picture from orbit. Robert Harrison shot it with a weather balloon, a used Canon pocket camera he bought on eBay, a GPS locator and some duct tape. (Courtesy Robert Harrison)
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his dashboard.

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No, he has not been reported for launching UFOs, although he does have to get clearance from British air traffic authorities so his balloons will not interfere with any nearby airplanes. He worries that one day the camera will plop down in the North Sea or the English Channel, but so far it has tended to land in farmers' fields.

"The one thing that's quite scary is how thin that blue line of the atmosphere is," he said in a telephone interview. "This is almost a religious thing to say, but this is the only place we know of with air and life. There's not that much air up there. And we all share it."

Of course, every flight ends with an ignominious search for the camera but, Harrison said, he was "gobsmacked" by the pictures it has brought back.

"I know now for a fact," he joked, "that the earth is round."

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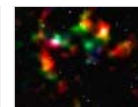
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A picture taken as camera parachuted to the ground.

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