

IT WAS A GIANT GARBAGE BAG ... SORT OF ...

Photos by Jim Irving

"The world's largest" constructed of plastic & masking tape.

by Scott Partridge

A giant garbage bag floating in the sky over south Edmonton, you say? Forty feet across, you say? The city police on duty last Friday morning may be excused for thinking the concerned citizen who first reported this sighting had been clutching the bottle a little too tightly, but then came a similar



and higher...

report from yet another concerned citizen, and a literal flood of calls soon poured in with both the media and the Ministry of Transport getting their share of the flow.

To the great number of people who believe they saw a giant garbage bag in the sky last Friday, you can rest assured. It WAS, more or less, a giant garbage bag you saw. In reality, it was an overly large hot air



and HIGHER!

It broke from its tether to stop traffic, and amuse farmers

balloon constructed out of industrial plastic by a group of students. The unofficial head of the one group responsible for the balloon's existence is John Clifford Bird, a second year mechanical engineering student at the University of Alberta.

Bird says the balloon, a forty-foot cube by design and possibly the largest one of its kind according to the Guinness Book of World Records, was originally tethered to the ground during experiments in a local school yard.

After two successful launches with Bird himself



A Bird with a bird's eye view

suspended beneath the balloon, a member of the ground crew became entangled in one of the harness lines supporting him during the third attempt. The result was that Bird fell, without injury, about thirty feet to the ground and the balloon was set in an unexpected free flight.

The rest is now a small bit of history.

The police caught up with Bird's recovery team on the Calgary Trail just as the balloon began to stop traffic on the highway. With the wind easing it towards the International Airport and the sun's heat keeping

it aloft, its height varying between 250 and ten thousand feet, the M.O.T. developed a more than casual interest in the balloon's progress, for it soon became evident that it would seriously interfere with air traffic in and out of the airport.

The balloon was soon picked up by radar and a number of flights had to be re-routed around the floating cube. With radar and a few light planes continuing to watch it, the balloon headed eastward.

AGT also gave the group's creation a great deal of attention, at this point, worrying that it might come down on power lines, and potentially disrupt service.

As time passed the balloon stubbornly refused the sanctuary afforded by the ground, and continued on for another forty miles, in which time it was briefly chased by the RCMP and shot at by several farmers, none of whom managed to seriously damage it.

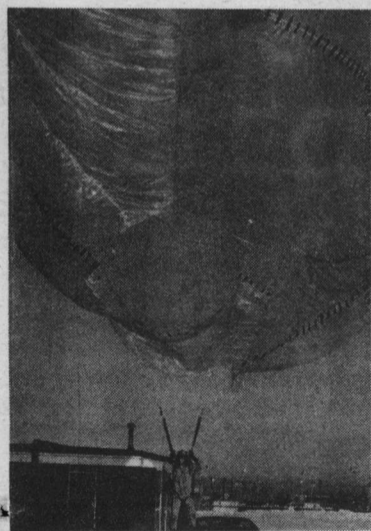
With the sun sinking below the horizon, the recovery team finally retrieved their creation intact as it settled in a snow-covered field about fifty miles from the school yard, almost seven hours after its escape.

The group wishes to publically apologize for any trouble they have caused to other individuals and groups involved in the incident.

Although he does not intend to cease experimentation with the craft, Bird says that future launches will not be undertaken until an improved tethering system is devised.

Bird's closing comment on the whole affair?

"Most amusing."



Takin' him higher...

GWDanoBimsKBTDKDBGTB GHJBodaBC BWG... ?

by Scott Partridge

John Clifford Bird has ballooning in his blood and has been flying for quite some time now.

A second year Mech. Eng. student at the University of Alberta, Bird says his interest in flight and aeronautics began with skydiving, a pastime he has enjoyed for about three years. Prior to that he was invited by NASA to view the launch of the Apollo 13 as a VIP as well as the launch of the Apollo 15, and that of Skylab.

At present, nineteen year old Bird is on the advisory board of the possibly now-defunct Orion magazine, devoted to the

advancement of mankind through spaceflight, published by the possibly now-defunct New Frontiers in Space Organization, devoted to the same cause.

The ballooning in his blood? Well, that's where the story really begins.

Bird has formed his own organization, whose members wish to be known as GWDanoBimsKBTDKDBGTB GHJBodaBC BWGenlrJB, devoted to the advancement of mankind through balloon technology. The group has built and tested a wide variety of hot air balloons, beginning with those you nor-

mally see at birthdays and on New Years Eve, to cube-shaped balloons, ranging from small one-footers to a mammoth forty foot cube. The balloons are all constructed out of industrial plastic, strikingly similar to that used in the manufacture of green plastic garbage bags. Bird says the forty foot cube alone requires more than one hundred and twenty dollars worth of material, with all money coming from the pockets of the members.

Their money has not gone to waste, for Bird and his group have successfully launched the forty foot cube a number of times; the most recent saw Bird

himself carried almost seventy feet off the ground by his creation, which incidentally may prove to be the largest hot-air balloon in the world with a volume of 64,000 cubic feet.

When asked to elaborate on the purpose of his experiments, Bird replied that the balloon furnishes inexpensive transportation requiring minimal amounts of propane to keep it aloft. He is also experimenting with new skydiving techniques and plans to attempt aerial photography in the near future.

And Bird adds, "We wanted to bug people who said it couldn't be done."