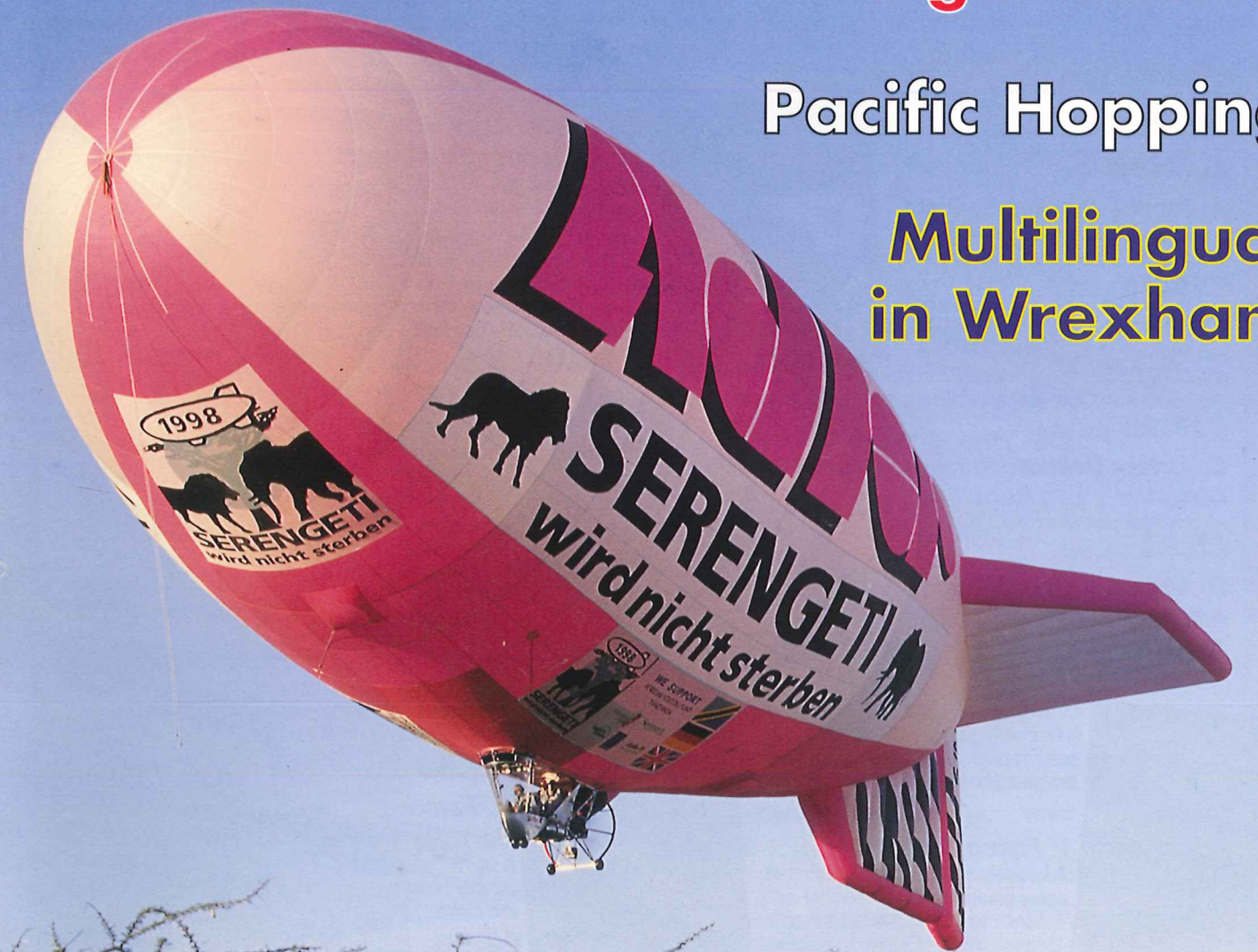


Tiger Horses

Pacific Hopping

**Multilingual
in Wrexham**



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Balloons
& AIRSHIPS

AIRSHIPS OUT OF AFRICA — The Serengeti Airship Expedition

by Karl Ludwig
(Mucky)
Busemeyer



GEFA-FLUG's
managing director is
Karl-Ludwig (Mucky)
Busemeyer who, for
over 35 years, dreamt of
using airships not as
large billboards, but as
camera carriers.

*'...Out of the softening sunset came the airship,
and the manner of its moving was beautiful.
Few inanimate objects attain beauty in the pur-
sue of their courses and yet, to me at least,
the flight of the ship was far lovelier than the
swooping of a bird or the jumping of a horse.
For it seemed to carry with it a calm dignity
and a consciousness of destiny which ranked it
among the wonders of time itself...'
From Even the Birds, 1934.*



One of his dreams was to fly an airship over the Serengeti in the footprints of father and son Grzimek, two famous German zoologists who, in 1958, used a single-engined aeroplane to survey the huge herds of wildebeests and zebras in Tanzania. Alan Root, legendary pioneering balloonist out in Kenya for more than three decades (made famous in Anthony Smith's book *Throw out two hands*) was the main cameraman. The outcome was an Oscar-winning film and the best-selling-book, *Serengeti Shall Not Die*. Mucky's idea was to recreate the old Grzimek project, flying at Grzimek's locations and meeting up with their old comrades, but using an airship instead of a light aeroplane. The result this time would be a TV documentary. Here, then, is his remarkable story.

Since the beginning of this century, Germany has traditionally been the country of airships. Count von Zeppelin, 'the father of airships' is known the world over. Today, aircraft exist with the advantage of speed and a much higher tolerance to weather and this, combined with the vulnerability of slow-moving airships in any offensive role, has meant that, although Zeppelins are being built at Lake Constance in Germany once again, in the last couple of decades there has been little development in airships. There is, however, another airship manufacturing company in Germany which, for some years now, has been successfully building hot-air airships. The company's name is *GEFA-FLUG*, and it lives in the Western-most part of Germany, in Aachen.

GEFA-FLUG has been using hot-air airships for more than 15 years, as camera platforms for archaeological and environmental survey projects (universities and environmental organisations like WWF, NABU, DMT, and Greenpeace) and has filmed wildlife in more than a dozen countries. Airships have advantages over the ordinary aircraft and helicopter. They can fly very slowly and hover over a given spot but, unlike a helicopter, not disturb the surface underneath. However, this type of airship is very weather-dependent, similar to a hot-air balloon.

Discussions between myself and Bernd Wilting, a German TV producer, started in autumn 1995. Bernd was enthusiastic about the project, and contacted various German TV-stations. I concentrated on the funding aspect, presenting the project to the Adler fashion company. Adler (which means 'eagle' in German) has been *GEFA-FLUG*'s main airship sponsor since 1991. They signed up immediately, in return for all the PR rights. The first reconnaissance visit to Tanzania took place in March 1997 to find out about wind and weather, and to contact

Background picture: Sailing down the huge herd, only a few feet above them – the sight of thousands of wildebeests was fantastic.



Heading out to Lake Ndutu aboard the airship.



From left to right; Alan Root, Mucky and Nigel, one of Alan's pilots, discuss the weather situation.



It was breeding time, as well as migration time in the Serengeti, and these tiger horses didn't seem to mind our approach at all...

various people who had been involved with the 50s expeditions. One of them was Dr Markus Borner, now looking after the Frankfurt Zoological Society Grzimek Foundation. The other one was Alan Root. Both were excited about the concept, and provided many useful hints and the names of authorities and organisations that needed to be contacted.

After a year-long struggle with the Tanzanian authorities, and with the

exceptional support of Serengeti Balloon Safaris (Tony Pascoe and Mike Toogood were sometimes more therapists than advisers to us in our long struggle with the authorities) based in London and Arusha, everything was organised – including air-transportation. It took some figuring to get the beastly airship gondola through the freight door of the Dutch KLM BAC111 which flies into Kilimanjaro airport but, finally, we succeeded, with only 13mm to spare! The expedition diary simply says: 'We were all very delighted when the aircraft's door closed behind the gondola.'

27.01 – Flight from Amsterdam to Arusha: 'Jambo Africa'

Landing at Kilimanjaro Airport at 21.00 after a long and bumpy flight from Amsterdam (we had to fasten seatbelts 35,000ft over the Sahara!) we met up with part of our team, including Mr Greyson, the prime minister's PR officer in the Arusha and Serengeti area, and Peter Lindström from Hoopoe, our Arusha-based expedition company. Peter reports that the weather has been completely different from how it should be at this time of the year, due to the El Niño effect. It has been raining for more than four months now. It is by far the worst weather pattern since 1961! He is quite doubtful as to whether we can reach the Ngorongoro conservation area due to flooded roads and collapsed bridges. Even crocodiles had drowned!

28.01 – Searching for a butane adaptor

The good news is that Tanzanian customs released the airship, the bad news is that all our adaptors to refill our tanks from Tanzanian household cylinders are of the wrong type. This is at least the tenth project where this has happened and it is always very frustrating, especially as we had spent a lot of time sorting adaptors out before we left. There's always an excuse; this time it was the introduction of a brand new Portuguese type, but during our



Taking off from our cosy camp in Ndutu.



The team picture. Four Germans and four Tanzanians, all eight of them great guys.

reconnaissance trip we had seen good old UK-style cylinders. Eventually we found one, but it was not really built to let high quantities of butane through and it took hours before all six tanks were full. We had no more success with the CO₂ regulator which, although being brand new and locally bought, did not fit the Tanzanian cylinders, but some finely engineered 'German tools' soon got both parts fitting! We had never pressurised butane with CO₂ and all the bubbling in the cylinder seemed a bit strange – but without doubt, the burners seem to be as powerful as they are at home...

29.01 – A black cloud over Arusha Airfield

The day before we had arranged a special permit to use the Arusha airfield for a test flight (if necessary before sunrise, when nobody was in the tower!) but unfortunately it was raining like hell this morning, so we took our time to arrange final details in Arusha and got there in our Mercedes ten-tonner early in the afternoon to unload our equipment. Getting the fully

loaded 350kg gondola down was quite dramatic; the 200kg envelope slid off easily. We had plenty of time to explain all bits and pieces to our four Tanzanian crew. All of them were technicians, so everything went smoothly.

An hour later we had run up the engine, tested the burners, and were ready to cold-inflate. On arrival there had been a few friendly cumulus clouds in the area, and the wind was a steady five knot north-easterly. As they got closer to the airfield, they became larger and larger; the wind died off completely, and suddenly they turned from white to grey and the one above us turned black, the wind picking up to 15 knots from the Southwest. We decided to stop inflating the airship but once we had packed up everything, the wind dropped out. No cloud, no rain and no daylight...

30.01/31.01 – We visit Dr Hall

We left Arusha at 09.00 to visit an American eye surgeon, Royce Hall, living in the mountains of Monduli, 60km away. Monduli is a little Maasai village where he had built up a little clinic from his own

funds. Mike Toogood and Tony Pascoe from Serengeti Balloons are good friends with Royce and told us to visit his place. We had been told that the roads were in a bad condition. Bad?! The road to Dr Hall's was beyond description. The clinic is situated on top of the mountain, where we did not dare to take the truck, so we left it and went on in the two Land Rovers. It was early afternoon before we arrived!

The area was picturesque, but the weather was not. A steady 25 knot wind! Our airship carried banners to promote Royce's clinic, and the idea was to create some positive PR for him back in Germany. We had already collected some money at home, along with an eye mirror. Royce even closed his clinic to join us and the German TV team, but the weather was against us for the next two days...

01.02 – When roads turn into rivers

Up at five, quick breakfast and off. We didn't know that it would take such a long time getting from Monduli to the Ngorongoro crater. We'd heard that the roads were still very bad on the radio. From Royce Hall's place to Ngorongoro is just over 100km, but the journey took over twelve hours. Luckily we did not get stuck, but others did and that amounted to the same thing. For the first time in my life I saw two wheel-drive mini-buses equipped with snow chains in an attempt to keep going through the mud!

After a quick lunch on the road, Fred, our Tanzanian driver, decided to leave our truck and the second Land Rover to reach the Ngorongoro Gate on their own and the rest of us go on ahead to try and convince them to leave it open (the rangers closed it at 18.00) until they arrived, which we managed to do! Two hours later they arrived, just before closing time, having crossed rivers with no bridges and driven along rivers where roads should have been. What followed was sort of a welcoming party, before we rushed off through the darkness to find our crater lodge, finally getting there at 21.00. What a day! Looking back, I remembered my friend Wing Commander Gerry Turnbull's saying: "We'll cross those bridges when we come to them." Now I understand that it has a second meaning – Gerry uses it quite differently...

02.02 – The Ngorongoro crater and the outstanding permit

Next morning, fog, mist and some light drizzle over the crater with light winds. Today's programme was to pay the chief conservationist of the area a visit and finally sort out payment for all our local flying and filming permits. We had already paid the Prime Minister's office and the Tanzanian CAA quite a lot of money but the local authorities wanted their share too. Mysteriously, the bill came to quite a few thousand US dollars, which was more than twice that negotiated from Germany. We knew that without payment we could not fly, and the officer knew that as well. It was left to Jurgen (in his first life a banker) to sit down with him and, after a few hours, come back with a satisfactory compromise.

The film team had already started off on a crater safari, and Freddie and I had driven to the little airstrip to check whether we could fly the airship from it. There were no problems, but the local heavier-than-air pilots warned to watch for strange gusts and thermals. It wasn't airship weather, and as the permits still hadn't been granted, we went to see the Grzimek monument a few kilometres off the airstrip at the edge of the crater. Father and son are both buried there. Michael was killed in an aeroplane accident early 1959 and his father, Bernhard, died in early 1987. His last will was to rest next to his son. I was filled with emotion, because I knew the whole story from the old book. We stood gazing out across the crater taking in the vastness of the scene; at 20km in diameter, the largest meteor crater in the world. Grzimek wrote about the Ngorongoro as the 'largest natural zoo in the world', and that is exactly what it seemed to me.

03.02 – Finally in the Serengeti: 'The Eagle takes off'

We left Ngorongoro late morning, paid the National Parks organisation the modified fee for the permits, and arrived in sunny Ndutu early afternoon. Ndutu is virtually 'nothing' on the map. It comprises a lodge, a crossroads, a lake, an airstrip for bush-pilots and, hopefully, thousands of wildebeests which we wanted to film from the airship. According to all our books, and careful planning, they should be in the area, migrating to the inner Serengeti ecosystem.

Mike, the local Ranger, showed us the way to our private campsite but, because the weather looked quite promising, with only around ten knots, I was more interested in checking out the little airstrip. "There is hardly any traffic," Mike pointed out, "so you can lay out the envelope quite close to the takeoff strip." We waited until 17.00hrs and started cold inflating, by 17.30hrs the airship was hovering on its mooring lines.

Haimo, in charge of the charity postcards, clambered aboard, and off we went. The first 50ft were fine, less than 10 knots, but climbing to 100ft we hit something like a rubber wall. The airship stopped completely and the flight pattern took on the appearance of dance – 'Rock and Roll', with plenty of 'Go Go'. I wasn't too enthusiastic about it and, after a minute or so, we decided to try closer to the ground. We descended something like 30ft and off we went again.

Did I tell about the wonderful Akazia? There are only three important things to know about akazias if you are flying an airship above them. There are tall ones, there are very tall ones, and the most important thing about them are the thousands of extremely long, extremely hard, and therefore extremely nasty thorns. The tall ones were fine, but then one of the very tall ones appeared, all of a sudden, like they do!

The turbulent air suddenly forced the ship's nose down by 10 degrees and there was this tree coming at us. Already flying at almost full power, there was no chance of clearing it in classic 'Gerry Turnbull style', using more throttle to bring some



Early morning, and we prepare the airship gondola for the morning's flight.

aerodynamic lift into the picture, so I opened up both burners and tried to circumnavigate the tree by pulling the right rudder. Sweating profusely, I saw millions of thorns in microscopic detail as we cleared this African tree by just a few feet. Thankfully, we would fly again, but I was not in the best of moods and decided to fly back and land.

The landing was uneventful but, on the way in, the TV team asked me whether we could just hover for a moment over another akazia close by, as they had not been able to film the real one. That was not a problem at all, as the wind came across the airstrip and the landing was quite tricky anyway... Once the envelope had been packed away we drank the first bottle of champagne brought



The ground crew battle with the pink giant in ten knots.

over from Germany.

04.02 – Flights from our camp site

Rose at 04.30. The plan was to take off from the campsite. We had checked yesterday and decided that, if we cut down a few small thorn bushes, it would give us a good margin from the nice akazias surrounding us. Anyway, more or less all of Tanzania seems to be covered by akazias, and I started getting used to them. I mostly liked them at sunset with a cold Safari lager in my hand. But that came later... It was about 6-8 knots on the surface; not ideal, but manageable. It was in fact quite easy to inflate, as the wind died off to only a few knots for a while, and 30 minutes later we

took off.

Haimo came on the first flight and, after an intermediate landing, swapped with Klaus the cameraman. We went along the Lake Ndutu towards the lodge, passing a few giraffes breakfasting on akazia leaves. I remember one or two hyenas and a few flamingos who did not seem to be too interested in our German eagle, perhaps because we, like them, were pink! Half an hour later the wind picked up and we called it a day. Klaus was very pleased with the flying characteristics and the stability of the airship, and we were both looking forward to the coming flights. The crew now realised their very important role in the game, and the landing was smooth, with the airship packed away in 30 minutes. Everybody agreed it had been a successful morning.

Let me describe our camp: There are 15 of us altogether. The airship and film team comprises eight people in five tents, with four Tanzanian crew in their own tents, and a kitchen gang. Supporting us are three Land Rovers and the Mercedes truck. The tents are quite comfortable, with another tent built onto each one with a toilet and a shower. Richard, the cook, is brilliant, his meals excellent, and service outstanding. We like this African style of living much more than hanging around in lodges.

05.02 – 1,000 'Kinderdorf-postcards' need stamps and airship seals.

My relationship to the 'Pestalozzi-Kinderdorf' goes back well over ten years. The Kinderdorf people established a clever way of sponsoring themselves in the mid-50s. Whenever they heard about a balloon or airship flight which might be historic, they printed postcards commemorating the flight and asked the pilot to take them on the flight. They have their own circle of 3,500 philatelists who buy this kind of post. All the cards are nicely stamped and carry a report about the flight. Haimo, who had organised many such flights over the last decade, had 4,500 such cards. One thousand of them had no stamps, nor airship-seals yet. Have you ever stamped 1,000 postcards and sealed them as well? I had never done it before the Serengeti. Believe it or not, it is very tricky, because the cards need to look nice, and the stamps mustn't get damaged. A little miracle happened when we got back to Arusha a week later and gave all 4,500 cards to the post office – they were officially stamped with the year 2998, increasing their value tremendously!

06.02. The search for the big herd and an evening 'Out of Africa' with Alan Root.

We still hadn't found the thousands of wildebeests and zebras, which we'd all seen on the Discovery-Channel, also depicted in the old Grzimek book. This morning, over a pot of coffee, Mike the ranger explained to us where he thinks we could find the animals. He had seen a huge herd yesterday afternoon, close by in the direction of the Ngorongoro crater. The

migration was quite slow, so we should not have a problem finding them. All of us set out. Bernd wanted to film the herd, I wanted to study the animals from a close range to learn more about their behaviour, and we still wanted to do a flight over the herd and were running out of time...

We found the herd; thousands of wildebeests and zebras with an awful lot of hyenas and vultures accompanying them. My concept was to inflate the airship a kilometre or two leewards, if possible starting in the dark. Our Tanzanian crew did not like that idea at all, because of the danger from the lions and hyenas hanging around, which we would not see in the dark. I calmed them down. "That is tomorrow, not today," I reassured them.

Since meeting Alan Root the previous year, we'd kept in contact, and in his Christmas fax he suggested meeting up in Ndutu on the 5th or 6th. He would fly into the airstrip in his own aeroplane. In the afternoon we first heard, and then saw, the single-engined Cessna 206 approaching the airstrip.

Half an hour later, Alan and Nigel, one of his pilots, appeared with a Land Rover, loaned from the lodge. Apparently they'd had engine trouble the day before. It was too windy for airship flying, so we cancelled the flight and headed off for a Safari lager. Of course, we wanted to hear his thoughts on the weather, and whether we had just been unlucky. He agreed that it was exceptionally bad this year and by far the worst weather pattern since 1961, when he, Anthony Smith, and Douglas Botting made their first balloon flights in the same area.

We soon got chatting about the old Grzimek story, and watched another romantic sunset with an ice-cooled Safari lager. Alan told us how he got involved with 'Serengeti shall not die'. "When they started, the Grzimeks had a German cameraman who had done a lot of filming with the Formula One Silver Arrows for Mercedes Benz. He was too fast for wildlife filming, and not patient enough to wait for the right moment, so I was called in." Having deeply admired father and son Grzimek from childhood, I was eager to learn more about their relationship. Alan went on, "That was not an ordinary father and son relationship, it was much more a kind of friendship," he explained, "and they had a lot of fun together like good friends." When Michael was killed in the crash, Alan took over the complete filming. Later, when his father finished his work in the Serengeti and went back to Germany, he asked Alan to complete the film in his own way, any way he felt fitting. Alan later won an Oscar for the camerawork. "Since then my career's gone downhill!" he pointed out a while later. In the background we could now hear our kitchen-gang and, further away, some hyenas, the evening turning into one from 'Out of Africa'. We decided to get up early, at 04.00 the next morning. It was our last chance to try and meet up with the big herd and fly above it.

Later that night I dug Grzimek's zebra-striped Serengeti book out of my case, and finally found the sentences which confirmed what Alan had told us:

'...I now wish for all fathers to have a son who is their comrade and friend, whom they really get on with. Even if it is only for a few years...'

07.02. Finding the big herd in the dark and take off at sunrise.

Four o'clock, a fast breakfast and off to the lodge where Alan was staying. He and Nigel took their borrowed Land Rover to be a bit more independent from us and the TV team. The last information we had from our local ranger was that we should follow the road to Ngorongoro for a few kilometres and we should then meet up with the big herd – thousands of wildebeests and zebras. And that is what we did; we stopped a few times, listened out into the dark and, after having done so three or four times, we could hear them, even smell them.

My plan was to inflate the airship downwind, a good kilometre off the animals, and then fly against the wind to the end of the herd, following them with a more or less idling engine. Even before sunrise the wind was around 10 knots, and it looked doubtful that we would be able to inflate the airship. To my surprise, everything worked wonderfully, everybody knew it was our one and only chance to get the superb footage from the air, which probably nobody had done before, and inflation took only a bit longer than normal due to the strong breeze. After half an hour we were ready to go.

By now the sun had come up and everything was perfect, except the windspeed, still something like 10 knots. This was to be my longest airship flight by far and although it seemed like 10 hours to get to the herd which was only about two kilometres away, my propane check told me that only 20 very long minutes had passed! When I realised we would make it, I started enjoying the battle and explained to Klaus the cameraman, via the intercom, how we would approach and where he would then get his best shots. We were both quite excited and, finally reaching the end of the herd as planned, I throttled the engine down and we sailed along above the migrating animals. Altitude was around 100ft, sometimes less. The wildebeests seemed unconcerned, showing no signs of panic, and after a while I got a good feeling of just how close they would allow us to come. When we arrived the head of the herd I throttled up and we battled back to the tail again. Because of the engine noise at full throttle we had to fly off some 50 metres or so, and I climbed some 50ft. After a long while going flat out, we arrived back at the end of the herd, turned with the wind, and sailed back once more.

We circled the herd three times and landed after 65 minutes, exhausted from flying more or less full throttle all the time, but extremely happy. By comparison, the day before we had tried the same using a microlight. Even flying at 500 feet the wildebeests ran off, and the flying characteristics of the microlight were much less stable. Later it proved that the microlight shots could not be used for our

film. Alan congratulated us on the successful flight, informing us that, "I would not have flown in a balloon today!" It was difficult to say how many animals we had seen, but it looked like many thousands of wildebeests, plus hundreds of zebras. Later we had coffee with Alan, before he flew off in his Cessna and, roaring 30ft over our camp, waved 'goodbye' with his wings.

In the evening the wind dropped off and, with some friendly cumulus clouds in the area, we made another flight. Inflation was easy and I took off with our photographer this time. The flight itself was uneventful, but there was a breeze. For the last time I flew along Lake Ndutu, with the sun going down, and after some 30 minutes we were back to the landing site. Landing was smooth and we kept the airship inflated for a while, the idea of getting a night glow going, but it meant waiting for 20 minutes or so for darkness. The cumulus above us turned from white into grey and then into black, as the one in Arusha had, but this time we decided to stay inflated. Suddenly, before we knew it, a big gust came through, stronger than the ground crew could handle and as our inflation site in the camp was not too large we had to act quickly otherwise the akazia trees would tear the envelope to pieces. I ripped out but in the hectic chaos the gondola toppled over with a big bang. This situation reminded me a bit about scenes from Anthony Smith's book 'Throw out two hands', and some of the stories which Alan had told us the night before about ballooning in Africa – but eventually we got everything under control again and had our night glow without envelope!

08.02. Back to Arusha

The Mercedes truck left at 05.00, we followed some three hours later and passed the Ngorongoro Gate at around 11.00. We had feared the road conditions, having frequently seen lightning over the Ngorongoro crater area in the evenings, but the roads were much improved, even having been repaired in places, and we easily made Arusha by 16.00, half the time it took us a week ago! I can only remember having a hot shower followed by two extremely cold Safari lagers later that evening with Peter Lindström from Hoopoe, who was eager to hear how the expedition had gone and pleased that everything had turned out so happily in the end.

09.02 – Freight and customs – Problems

07.00, Freddie takes us to Kili airport. Jurgen joins me, and today's task is to convince customs to let us go back to Germany without too much of a headache. We had therefore employed a freight and customs agency in Germany with a sister company in Tanzania. Customs therefore took only half a day and, astonishingly, freighting the gondola was much more of a problem. Apparently nobody really explained about the complexity of the problem.

Eventually it transpired that, again, the dimensions of the gondola were the problem. The freight people had not been

properly informed that our gondola was XXL. The special platform for XXL was standing in the corner, but they did not know how to pack it so that it would fit through the freight door. The situation was rather difficult to handle, because we knew how it worked but, of course, did not want to upset the freight people with offers of help. At 14.30 the boss declared that closing time for his company would be at 15.00. Hard moments for tough German guys, but we decided to admit defeat with the 'promise' we would be back tomorrow morning, very early. Not quite knowing what was necessary to get the gondola to fit the platform, we called in at Hoopoe's workshop and prepared some timber blocks, on which the gondola would later lay in at a height of 55cm with the envelope packed underneath. This was our last evening, so we went to celebrate it with Peter Lindström and our drivers in a nice Tanzanian restaurant with local food and the second bottle of champagne brought over from Germany.

10.02. 'Kwaheri' means Goodbye

Up at 07.00, we still have to sort the freight problems. Customs were luckily cleared last night, on arrival at Kili Airport, but there is still something mysterious about freighting the airship. Eventually we learn that Kili Airport is not certified to transport radioactive material and somehow our starter battery had been classified as being radioactive! We did not find out why, nor could we just change the freight papers because that meant going back to customs again. So we decided to leave it in Tanzania and fortunately weren't asked to re-import it!! By early afternoon we had the gondola back on its special platform; the freight master measured everything very carefully, including our four blocks of timber and it was within the good old margin of 13mm. Everybody was happy and, after giving out loads of little airship pins, we rushed off

Technical Information

The airship we used was an AS 105 GD, which has been developed and built by GEFA-FLUG using an upgraded Thunder & Colt tandem gondola. This type of craft is longer and thinner than other hot-air airships for pitch control and a higher speed. On top of that, the envelope and fin configuration were developed by the technical university in Aachen, using the university's world-famous windtunnel and with the help of numerous computer simulations.

Length:	41.0m
Diameter:	12.8m
Volume:	105.000ft
Max take-off weight:	850kg
Max speed:	40km/h
Engine:	Rotax 52Hp
Max flight duration:	1.5hrs (two people on board)
Means of lift:	hot air, max 127°C
Max windspeed at ground level:	10 knots

back to Arusha.

Everyone turned out to say their 'goodbyes' at Hoopoe's office, after which Freddie and Hashim drove us to Kili-Airport, along with Mr Greyson, the government PR officer, who wanted to help with customs and immigrations. He told me that our airship expedition had been the second-largest project in his time as government PR officer. His largest was the preparation for Walt Disney's 'Lion King'. The last thing I remember was Freddie giving me a big hug and a promise to write me a letter. This was truly out of character for Freddie. Hugging anyone other than his children, who he adored, was unheard of. 'Kwaheri, Freddie, Kwaheri Hashim'. The scene was more overwhelming than any emotive sunset in the Serengeti had been...

11.02 – It is damned cold in Europe – and is Burma also 'Out of Africa'

After the heat of Africa it was exceedingly cold when we finally arriving at Maastricht (via Amsterdam) at 10.30, and I was very grateful for the heavy sweater that awaited me. We learnt that the Breitling balloon team had had to land in Burma, having no permission to fly over China. No permission! We have heard about that, but Burma, is that also 'Out of Africa'?

Retrospective

It's the end of March and our airship has finally arrived in Germany. There had always been 'more important' freight, like 10,000 red roses for the Netherlands, which probably earned more money for Tanzania! The TV film has just been transmitted, and already repeated once. It will be transmitted again by the French/German culture channel, ARTE, and there is more good news for our sponsor. The picture of the airship hovering over the big herd of wildebeests and zebras has been printed in more or less every large German newspaper, more than ten million times, and I have been asked quite a few times now about new plans to go out again. To prepare for the Serengeti took us two and a half years, and it will take some time to create a new expedition but, perhaps, if Alan would be willing...

A few days ago I started to read Grzimek's zebra-striped book again and, even after 35 years, I'm still impressed by his foresight and wisdom about the human race and nature:

'... Michael and I will be proved right. Nature is eternal, as long as we don't destroy it thoughtlessly. In fifty years, nobody will be interested in the outcomes of conferences which, today, fill the headlines. But when a lion steps out of a bush glowing in reddish light of morning, roaring resoundingly, even in fifty years' time our hearts will open to that experience, and it does not matter whether these people are Bolsheviks or democrats, and whether they speak English or Russian, Swahili or German... and they will stand there without speaking, and they will take their neighbour by the hand, when, for the first time, they see twenty thousand tiger-horses crossing the limitless plains...'