

When Cows Fly



(here) Ten minutes after launch and at about 900-1,500 metres in the air, the camera-toting balloon snaps this shot near Saskatoon; (inset) recovery in a field.

The sky really is the limit for local hams

REMEMBER, AS A KID, letting a helium-filled balloon float into the sky? You probably wondered how high it got and where it eventually came down. In Saskatchewan, amateur radio enthusiasts never lost that sense of wonderment. With a few added components, they know exactly what their balloons have been up to. • “Our hobby uses lots of high-tech equipment that we can use to help others,” says Bruce Coates, a member of the Saskatoon Amateur Radio Club. “But we do the balloon launches because they’re fun.” • About one morning every month, the club launches a balloon to explore the high reaches of the atmosphere. A military surplus balloon hoists a payload containing GPS trackers, still and video cameras, an electronic beacon – and a small toy cow for good luck. From the ground, the group monitors the balloon’s position, altitude and speed. The apparatus rises until the balloon bursts in the thin air around 24,000 metres, then returns by parachute in the mid-afternoon. Meanwhile, ground teams race ahead to anticipate the landing site, which, depending on winds, can be several hundred kilometres from the launch. Fun aside, these balloon launches also provide an opportunity to hone technical skills and practice working with other agencies. –Darrell Noakes
Check the Saskatoon Amateur Radio Club website for launch dates:
<http://ve5aa.dyndns.org>.



ALLAN CASEY'S THE LITTLE BOAT THAT COULD won the Gold Award Best Article – Saskatchewan at the 27th Annual Western Magazine Awards gala in June in Vancouver. To read the story, flip back to the Summer 2008 issue of *Westworld Saskatchewan*, or visit caask.ca/wwonline.html.



BOOK REVIEW

PRIME PICK

The Europe Book has all the nifty features one expects from a Lonely Planet coffee-table tome: gorgeous photographs, helpful maps, neatly organized summaries of 52 nations. But it also contains a couple of delightful surprises. The continent's quirky and modern side is explored in a short series of entertaining essays, with titles such as: "Can They Do That in Public? – Europe's Outrageous Landmarks." There is also a chapter of dream itineraries, including a five-week walk across northern Spain, an 11th-century route once the hottest pilgrimage for Catholic monks. U.S.\$40; the Canadian list price – at chapters.indigo.ca – is \$52, but the book is sale priced at \$34.32 if purchased online.

Through Scottish Eyes

James Henderson (1871-1951) was born in Scotland but would later become Saskatchewan's first professional artist to make a living solely through artwork. Take in his portraits and landscape paintings (right and below), as well as commercial work during the James Henderson: Wicite Owapi Wicasa (the man who paints the old men) exhibit at the Mendel Art Gallery in Saskatoon, September 25-January 10.



Iceland's Blue Lagoon.

slow DOWN FOR TOW TRUCKS

A REMINDER that motorists in Saskatchewan are required by law to slow to 60 kilometres per hour when passing tow trucks stopped on the side of the highway with amber lights flashing. The requirement was added to The Traffic Safety Act in 2006, which already required motorists to slow to 60 km/h when passing stopped emergency vehicles, as well as highway workers. The fine for failing to slow down is at least \$140.

what's your ecological footprint?

Ever wonder how many planet Earths it would take if everyone in the world lived like you? Find out with the eye-opening free online quiz at myfootprint.org.

GAS CAP CONFUSION

Why isn't the gas cap in the same place on every car? The answer involves both microeconomics and macroeconomics. On the micro side, you have the historical preferences of carmakers. For example, the Porsche 911 has its fuel filler on the right front fender. Back in the 1960s, there was a logical reason – the gas tank was in the front of this rear-engined car – but now the fuel filler is there largely for tradition. In sporty cars especially, designers like to position

the weight of the fuel close to the car's centre. • Today, gas tanks can be molded to fit almost anywhere, yet given engineering demands, it would be impossible to standardize the fuel filler position. And maybe you wouldn't want to. Here's where macroeconomics comes in. If fuel fillers were all on the same side, wouldn't that mean one side of the gas pumps would be busier than the other? Sure, you could pull up from the other direction, but not all gas stations have good two-way flow. • Regardless, confusion over gas-cap location has largely been resolved. Most fuel gauges show an arrow or a hose image on the side you should present to the pump. ▣ –Dan Neil, courtesy AAA's Via Magazine