

Russian adventurer Fedor Konyukhov breaks world hot air balloon record



Photo: Fedor Konyukhov has broken a world hot air balloon record. (ABC News: Briana Shepherd)

Russian adventurer Fedor Konyukhov has broken the record for the fastest circumnavigation of the Earth in a hot air balloon in just over 11 days.

Konyukhov, who set off from Western Australia's Avon Valley on July 12, has gone past the point he needed to fly over to break the record and is expected to land in WA's Wheatbelt late this afternoon.

But the difficult task of landing his balloon is still ahead of him and the crew is eager to get the craft back on the ground before nightfall.

One of Mr Konyukhov's crew members is his son Oscar, who said if the landing does not happen by 5:30pm (WST) he will need to keep flying until tomorrow, which is far from ideal.

"Because he dumped fuel in the ocean it's a bit of a worry that there won't be enough fuel for the night flight, so we really need to get him down on the ground before sunset," he said.

The crew has been waiting for winds to drop and to find the ideal place for the adventurer to land.

According to tracking information on Mr Konyukhov's website, the balloon has now slowed considerably and has descended to about 500 metres.

The 65-year-old has broken the 14-year-old record set by American adventurer Steve Fossett.

Mr Fossett is the only other person to circumnavigate the world in a hot air balloon, which he completed in 13-and-a-half days.



Photo: Dick Smith (centre) and Oscar Konyukhov (r) celebrating the record. (ABC News: Laura Gartry)

As Mr Konyukhov broke the record, his team on the ground let out three cheers and popped some champagne. Oscar Konyukhov described his father's achievement as a miracle.

"As a son, I'm very proud of my father. It's just difficult to comprehend what he just achieved," he said.

"He completed round-the-world solo flight on the first attempt.

"This is one chance of a billion and he took the chance. But as Dick Smith said we still have to land him safely, so we need to be careful and work until the end of the day."

The flight's coordinator John Wallington said it was an incredible achievement.

"The objective was to get him back on the ground safely, but of course this record is just a fantastic bonus," he said.

"To have the bravery, the courage... I don't think there is a more capable adventurer anywhere in the world today, very few other people could have done this."

Extracted from:

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-07-23/russian-adventurer-lands-hot-air-balloon-in-wa/7654812>

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