Weather Balloon Encyclopedia Article

Weather Balloon

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Weather Balloon

The invention of the weather balloon inaugurated the age of remote sensing, the ability to collect information from unmanned sources.

The first observation balloon was launched immediately before the first manned balloon flight by Frenchmen Jean-François de Rozier and the Marquis d'Aalandes on November 21, 1783, for a pre-flight wind reading.

Later, French meteorologist Leon Teisserenc de Bort (1855-1913) pioneered the use of weather balloons, handily proving their utility. With balloon-acquired data, he determined the existence of a lower level of the atmosphere, which he termed the troposphere or "sphere of change," where weather takes place.

Since the 1930s, when radio tracking systems were invented, balloons have been used as complete floating weather stations, employing such instruments as thermometers, barometers, hygrometers, cameras, and telescopes. They are used widely to collect such atmospheric information as temperature, pressure, and humidity.

Since their inception, the elongated bags of helium have been carrying aloft more sophisticated observation devices, taking the science of weather observation to the edges of outer space.