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Weather Balloon Lands in Maxey



Imagine the surprise when the weather balloon & transponder (pictured left and below) landed on the Roof of a house in The Retreat, Maxey. The recent chilly spell in January must have pushed the balloon, launched by the Met Office in Bracknell, Bucks., northwards before descending via parachute when it was over Maxey.

A quick visit to the Met Office web-site revealed that weather forecasters rely on information received from weather stations to find out what the weather is going to do. There are 800 weather stations all over the world and twice a day every single station sends up a weather balloon. The balloon takes about an hour to rise 20 km above the Earth. Attached to the balloon are special instruments which measure the temperature, humidity (how much water is in the air) and air pressure. This information is transmitted back to the weather station using radio signals. Weather people can also tell how fast the wind is blowing and in what direction by tracking the path of the balloon. When the balloon gets very high into the atmosphere it bursts and the instruments fall back to the Earth on the end of

a parachute, often the instruments are lost but sometimes people do find them. Depending on the complexity of the equipment the Met Office asks them to return it. In this case, disposal by the finder was recommended.

There are even special weather ships in the middle of the sea (there is one in the middle of the Atlantic) which release balloons so we can tell what the weather is like in the middle of the ocean. Weather stations also make measurements from the ground. They record the daily maximum and minimum temperatures, the amount of rainfall and the strength and direction of the wind. All the information from these balloons is fed into 2 Cray T3E supercomputers in the Meteorological Office in London, where it is used to try and predict what the weather is going to do over the next few days.



The parachute is clearly visible in this shot, with the dark brown rubber/latex of the burst balloon visible below the parachute folds.

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