



Third Annual Monument Valley Balloon Event - January 13, 2013 by the Three Sisters - Photo by: Geri Camarillo

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Roberta John - Senior Economic Development Specialist
Email: bobbie@navajonationparks.org

Navajo Nation Hosts Successful Balloon Event

WINDOW ROCK, ARIZONA – A rendition of beautiful aerial poetry in motion.

Those are words that depict the Third Annual Monument Valley Hot Air Balloon Event at Monument Valley Navajo Tribal Park on January 11-13, 2013, which was sponsored by the Navajo Nation Parks and Recreation Department. The increasing-popular event was definitely a novelty and catered to every desire.

First-time participants and visitors describe the annual dovetailing event as “absolutely amazing to mystic,” which is the credo of Navajo. And there’s something that makes worldwide



visitors embrace the elegance and timeless Navajo cultural treasures to the showcase of architectural ambience.

Hot air balloon pilot enthusiast Graham Bell from Malvern, England has an insatiable love for the Navajo Nation. Case in point, he made a triumphant return to the Navajo Nation – this marks his seventh visit to marvel the beauty of Navajo. However, it was only his second time to participate in the annual premier event at Monument Valley Navajo Tribal Park. Graham was one of 20 pilots from throughout the world who soared through the crisp blue skies in a towering grand assembly fashion.

“Monument Valley is a mystic place in the nicest possible way. There’s just something that I just love here,” Bell explained. “When I received an invitation to participate in the Monument Valley Hot Air Balloon Event, it didn’t take me more than three seconds to say yes. I always dreamed of flying here.”

Graham has been coasting his balloons through the skies for 22 years and has participated in many hot air balloon events throughout the world. Although the signature event at Monument Valley has fewer balloons in the air, Graham said he especially enjoyed his rides on the Navajo Nation.

“It was very peaceful and serene,” he noted. “There’s no pressure here, just pure enjoyment to see a panoramic view of the area. I also met a lot of amazing people.”

Bell said he vacationed with his son and daughter and visited several parks in the Four Corners region including Grand Canyon in the past. However, Bell said their favorite place was Monument Valley Navajo Tribal Park.

Chris Bell from Aberdeenshire, Scotland who is Bell’s brother came along for the ride so to speak, but he didn’t know he was going to also get a birds-eye-view of the iconic red rock formations.

Bell said “It was absolutely amazing and it exceeded my expectation. It was just wonderful and I feel privileged that I had an opportunity to be a rider. I can see why people see it as special place – it’s mystic. To see Monument Valley from the sky is just magical.”



Cathy Stringfellow of Albuquerque said although she is from Albuquerque, she would rather fly at Monument Valley, adding, “There is no comparison to the balloon event in Albuquerque. This place is absolutely beautiful.”

Bryan Hill of Page, Arizona echoed similar comments. “Monument Valley’s most unique rock formations, mesas, buttes and iconic scenery provides a jaw dropping backdrop creating one of the most breathtaking places on earth to enjoy hot air ballooning.”

Hill said the idea of hosting a hot air balloon event on the Navajo Nation was discussed in 2007 and finally brought to fruition after many months of planning by Hill and Navajo Nation Parks and Recreation Department staff. Since then, Hill has been working quietly behind the scenes with Navajo Nation Parks and Recreation Staff to launch three successful hot air balloon events at Monument Valley Navajo Tribal Park.

He was quick to point out his gratitude to the Navajo Nation, noting, “The balloon pilots and crews are all grateful to the Navajo Nation Parks and Recreation staff for putting this event together. We hope this event will continue for years to come and be a boost to the local economy. All the pilots feel privileged to both fly Monument Valley and spend time with the locals. Flying hot air balloons in Monument Valley is exciting then when you add the welcome we received from the people of Monument Valley and the Navajo Nation, the event elevates to ‘outstanding!’ We are all already looking forward to next year.”

No expenses were spared at the third annual event, which featured a variety of activities, games, speakers, entertainers and musical genres that was suited for the entire family. Distinguished Navajo leaders also attended and participated in the eye-catching celebration.

Event Coordinator Geri Camarillo, said “I met with the community six months before the event to gather input on who would be performing at this event. We try very hard to accommodate the community’s input and this year we had a great line-up for both Youth Day and Family Day.”

Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly said “Thank you for coming out and thank you Navajo Nation Parks and Recreation for bringing this event to the Navajo Nation. Thank you to all the visitors for coming. You can get to know who we are. We have a lot of great food and



places to shop. Look at our beautiful sites here on the Navajo Nation. I am very proud of the Navajo people.”

Navajo Nation Vice President Rex Lee Jim has become a mainstay and especially enjoys the annual Monument Valley Hot Air Balloon Event. In fact, this is Jim’s third time he has journeyed through the skies as a rider.

“Thank you for allowing us to be here today,” said Jim. “I’d like to welcome all the non-Navajos here. Be sure and buy from our Navajo people and help them. Let’s also take care of our land and keep it beautiful.”

Navajo Nation Council Delegate Jonathan Nez who was also a rider stated, “It gives you a better appreciation of our land from the air. We have one of the most beautiful places in the world. I want to challenge the Navajo people to be good stewards of our land and keep it beautiful and pristine.”

Larry Holiday, a community liaison who works with the schools in Monument Valley assisted with the Navajo shoe game, which was a first-ever featured event.

Holiday said the Navajo shoe game was a match-up between elders who have years of knowledge and wisdom versus the younger generation. Holiday said that it is imperative that communities host Navajo shoe games and other winter events because that is when oral stories and activities can be shared about early Navajo history.

Navajo Nation Martin L. Begaye, said “I am very proud of my staff who worked tirelessly to plan and host this wonderful community event. I would also like to thank the many partners and sponsors who assisted to make it successful. We are doing our best to promote the local businesses and help boost the Navajo Nation economy while simultaneously accommodating our visitors. This is one way that we are saying ‘thank you’ to the Navajo people for their support and our way of giving back to the community. The Navajo Nation is a haven of unparalleled scenic beauty, however, it is the Navajo people who are truly unique and beautiful.”