Long Jump 2026 report

Pilot David Sutcliffe
Co-Pilot James Lawson
G- BXDZ
LBL 105A

Flight Date 8th October 2026
Launch Site Witton Castle Co Durham 07:38
Landing Site Sapperton Lincolnshire 12:46

Total Distance 133.2 Statute Miles 214.4 KM 115.7 Nautical Miles

I haven't done the long jump for a few years and I thought I would give it ago this year.
Friday 2nd October in the evening I was looking at the weather I noticed there was a possibility of a flight from the north to the south on Thursday 8th October. Saturday morning, I went to do the day job of flying the 400 out of York racecourse. We had 4 no shows so I rang James Lawson who lives right next to York racecourse, to see if he was up and free to add some weight to the basket. During the course of the morning I mentioned to James that I was doing the long jump hopefully on the Thursday 8th if the weather stays as it is forecast As my first choice co-pilot, my daughter Abi was unable to do the 8th. Sods Law . James was keen to take part but had to move some meetings around. Anyway during the week the forecast stayed the same apart from the wind speeds being slightly slower but still worth a go.

By Wednesday evening everything was in place and ready for an early morning drive and for the flight to take place from one of my launch sites in the north east Witton Castle Co Durham We had Neil Marshall and "Auntie" Barbara Chamberlain crewing ready for a big drive. Also my crew from the north east assisted us on the launch field Michael, Neville, Dave and Clive.

We arrived on site approximately 6.30am. From checking the forecast on the way up to the launch site the winds weren't as strong as we hoped but still enough to give it a good go. We had 320 – 25kts at 6000ft, 355 – 40kts at 10000ft, no weather no cloud.
Prepared the basket 5 tanks strapped inside and 3 on the back on the outside.

After some blowing around on the launch site, the site is sheltered – one reason for choice.

We launched at 7.38AM.

We took off and started heading east but as we climbed up 2000ft we started heading south as the forecast suggested. Kept climbing up to 5-6000 ft and we were doing approx. 28mph. We relooked at the forecast as if we stayed on the south eastly forecast we would have flown into Waddington airspace which had a NOTAM out from surface to 12000ft, for that day only guess as such a good day for flying. So we knew we would have to land if we got close as probably wouldn't let us through We assumed the red arrows were practicing. Decided to climb up to see if we could find the more southerly track, which we did at 11500ft with a speed of 45mph heading 355. It was bloody freezing.

At this point we were following the A1 south flying directly over RAF Leeming which weren't open (8;45) after having a conversation with the Air ambulance taking off from RAF Topcliffe. From that height we could see both sides of the Pennines – Leeds and Manchester, I also could see my house in Harrogate and we could see James work site at Thirsk, a Dog food factory. We also saw the sun rising over the Humber. We took pictures but they don't show up the same as being there. The visibility must have been 70/80 miles plus
The only issue we had sitting at 11500ft we were burning through a lot of gas. But we decided to stay up there to keep our track away from the NOTAM at Waddington, or so we thought at the time.

So we are heading south and just passed Wetherby and we knew when the M62 appears we have to descend to avoid an air corridor into Manchester and Leeds airports so we had to be below 6000ft. So descended just south of the River Aire which turned us slightly more to the east but still looked like we could miss the potential issue at Waddington.

We spent the rest of the flight at this height, showing the flight planning worked as we were 1 mile west of RAF Waddington's MATZ. But having spoken to them via the radio on approach I don't think it would have been an issue to go over them at that time of day anyway.
(Many years ago I did a long Jump from Bedford to North Cave with Malcolm Skilbeck and we ended up flying over Scampton where they were

based then with 5 Red Arrows practicing below and when finished 2 came and flew around us upside down so we could see the pilots at 10k It was in the days of the Nokia phones and no camera on board so no pictures)
 Having missed Waddington we did have to cross RAF Cranwell and RAF Barkson Heath which both were very accommodating to say, as there was A LOT of activity below us! Which was good to see.
During the flight we where amazed at how many solar farms we could see and also prison along our route

Once the airspace was cleared we decided it was time to start to come down and look for somewhere to land as the last 2 tanks were starting to register. And a suitable landing field appeared in front of us after about 20 minutes which we touched down one side of a dyke as got caught out due to some curl over from a wooded area behind us but came to land the other side of a dyke after a 52yard drag. Landing at 12.46pm just south of Grantham at a place called Sapperton Lincolnshire Rang the crew to let them know we were all safe took some pictures and no more then 15minutes the crew drove into the field after speaking to locals and getting landowner permission.

While packing the balloon away I mentioned to Neil that I was sure Andy Baker, a fellow balloon crew, daughter had a pub close to where we were and he is the chef there. Neil rang him it was 3 miles away in the right direction for us going home. We went for a survivors lunch and a really good catch up with Andy.

Then set off on the long drive home. I was 14 hours door to door. Slept well that night.
Great way to spend a day out
Summary
Looking back, I feel if we actually stayed at 6000ft and sat there we would have been more fuel efficient and could have got another couple of hours flight time and maybe flown Another 30/50 miles but who knows.