Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	Lafayette, Colorado	**Accident Number:**	CEN23LA305
Date & Time:	July 14, 2023, 07:18 Local	**Registration:**	N895FA
Aircraft:	Adams Balloon AB	**Aircraft Damage:**	None
Defining Event:	Other weather encounter	**Injuries:**	2 Serious, 3 Minor
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Personal		

Analysis

While conducting a sightseeing flight for a balloon festival, the pilot noted wind about 17 miles per hour (mph). He was unable to locate calmer winds at different altitudes. The pilot decided to terminate the flight and make a high wind landing. During the high wind landing, the basket touched down hard and began to drag. One passenger was ejected from the basket which resulted in the balloon becoming airborne. The pilot was releasing air through the top vent and the balloon settled again to the ground and dragged to a stop. The passenger ejected and another that remained in the basket were seriously injured. The pilot and two passengers had minor injuries. There were no mechanical malfunctions with the balloon.

Prior to the flight, the pilot obtained a weather brief, and the weather forecast reported a front to pass around 0800. After considering the weather, the pilot decided to launch on a low, short flight between 30 to 45 minutes. The pilot reported that he launched at 0643 and a couple minutes later, he noticed the winds aloft were stronger than expected and attempted to find a suitable landing area.

On the pilot's weather forecast, obtained several hours prior to the flight, the velocity and direction (VAD) winds showed wind at 5,900 ft mean sea level (msl) at 19 kts, which increased to 26 kts at 6,200 ft msl. At 0655, the closest aviation weather reporting facility reported a calm wind. At 0715, the same facility reported wind at 5 knots gusting to 15 knots.

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be:

Failure of the pilot to ensure the passengers were properly braced for the high wind landing. Contributing to the accident was the increase in prevailing winds prior to the forecast.

Findings

Environmental issues	(general) - Effect on operation
Aircraft	Landing flare - Not attained/maintained

Factual Information

History of Flight

Maneuvering	Other weather encounter (Defining event)

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Commercial	**Age:**	59,Male
Airplane Rating(s):	None	**Seat Occupied:**	None
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	Balloon	**Restraint Used:**	None
Instrument Rating(s):	None	**Second Pilot Present:**	No
Instructor Rating(s):	None	**Toxicology Performed:**	
Medical Certification:	None	**Last FAA Medical Exam:**	
Occupational Pilot:	No	**Last Flight Review or Equivalent:**	February 9, 2022
Flight Time:	599 hours (Total, all aircraft), 599 hours (Total, this make and model), 26 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft), 17 hours (Last 30 days, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Adams Balloon	**Registration:**	N895FA
Model/Series:	AB	**Aircraft Category:**	Balloon
Year of Manufacture:	2021	**Amateur Built:**	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Balloon	**Serial Number:**	279
Landing Gear Type:	None	**Seats:**	1
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	December 27, 2022 100 hour	**Certified Max Gross Wt.:**	2070 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:		**Engines:**	0
Airframe Total Time:	217.5 Hrs at time of accident	**Engine Manufacturer:**	
ELT:	Not installed	**Engine Model/Series:**	
Registered Owner:	On file	**Rated Power:**	
Operator:	On file	**Operating Certificate(s) Held:**	None

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Visual (VMC)	**Condition of Light:**	Day
Observation Facility, Elevation:	KEIK,5132 ft msl	**Distance from Accident Site:**	2 Nautical Miles
Observation Time:	07:15 Local	**Direction from Accident Site:**	94°
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Clear	**Visibility**	10 miles
Lowest Ceiling:	None	**Visibility (RVR):**	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	5 knots / 15 knots	**Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:**	/
Wind Direction:	20°	**Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:**	/
Altimeter Setting:	30.09 inches Hg	**Temperature/Dew Point:**	18°C / 9°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:	No Obscuration; No Precipitation		
Departure Point:	Erie, CO	**Type of Flight Plan Filed:**	None
Destination:	Erie, CO	**Type of Clearance:**	None
Departure Time:	06:43 Local	**Type of Airspace:**	Class E

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	3 Minor	**Aircraft Damage:**	None
Passenger Injuries:	2 Serious	**Aircraft Fire:**	None
Ground Injuries:		**Aircraft Explosion:**	None
Total Injuries:	2 Serious, 3 Minor	**Latitude, Longitude:**	39.975563,-105.07882

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Aguilera, Jason
Additional Participating Persons:	Derek Smith; FAA FSDO; Denver, CO
Original Publish Date:	October 5, 2023
Last Revision Date:	
Investigation Class:	Class 4
Note:	The NTSB did not travel to the scene of this accident.
Investigation Docket:	https://data.ntsb.gov/Docket?ProjectID=192627