ARBiT
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World Freedom Day: Celebrating Liberty and Reflection

World Freedom Day commemorates the signing of the Compensated Emancipation Act in 1862, which led to the abolition of slavery in the United States. The day is a reminder of the struggles endured by those who fought for liberty and equality, celebrating the triumph of human rights over oppression. It encourages reflection on the ongoing fight for freedom worldwide, inspiring individuals to value and protect civil liberties. Through educational events, discussions, and public commemorations, World Freedom Day honors courage, resilience, and the enduring spirit of justice that continues to shape societies.

राष्ट्रदूत
SUNDAY
09 November 2025
A-B

#FLOWER

Don't Touch Be Cured

Touch Me Not (Mimosa pudica): Nature's Sensitive Wonder and Its Remarkable Benefits

The plant popularly known as 'Touch Me Not' or Mimosa pudica is a fascinating botanical marvel famous for its rapid response to touch. When gently brushed or shaken, its delicate leaves fold inward and droop as if shy or recoiling from contact, earning it nicknames like the 'sensitive plant' or 'shy plant.' But beyond this intriguing behavior, Mimosa pudica offers an array of benefits, medicinal, ecological, and more, that make it a plant worth knowing.

Medicinal Properties and Health Benefits

Mimosa pudica has a rich history in traditional medicine, especially in Ayurveda, Chinese, and folk healing systems. Various parts of the plant, leaves, roots, and stems, are used to treat numerous ailments. Some key health benefits include:

- **Wound Healing:** Extracts from Mimosa pudica have antimicrobial properties that help prevent infection and promote faster healing of cuts and wounds.
- **Anti-inflammatory Effects:** It has natural anti-inflammatory compounds, useful for treating swelling and pain in conditions like arthritis.
- **Antioxidant Properties:** The plant contains antioxidants that protect the body from harmful free radicals, supporting overall health and potentially reducing the risk of chronic diseases.
- **Digestive Aid:** Mimosa pudica is traditionally used to treat digestive issues, including diarrhea, dysentery, and intestinal worms.
- **Diabetes Management:** Some studies suggest it may help regulate blood sugar levels, making it beneficial for people with diabetes.
- **Nervous System Support:** It is believed to have calming effects on the nervous system, helping with anxiety and insomnia in traditional uses.

Ecological and Environmental Benefits

- **Soil Enrichment:** Mimosa pudica is a nitrogen-fixing plant, which means it helps enrich soil by converting atmospheric nitrogen into forms that plants can absorb, improving soil fertility naturally.
- **Erosion Control:** With its sprawling growth habit and extensive root system, it helps in preventing soil erosion, especially in disturbed or degraded lands.
- **Natural Indicator:** Its sensitivity to touch makes it a natural bio-indicator of environmental stimuli, sometimes used in scientific studies on plant response and behavior.

Unique Behavior: The Science Behind 'Touch Me Not'

The rapid folding of its leaves is not just a curiosity but a defense mechanism. When touched, the plant releases potassium ions and water moves out of the cells in the pulvini (the joint-like thickening at the base of the leaf stalks), causing the leaves to fold quickly. This sudden movement can deter herbivores or reduce damage from harsh environmental conditions.

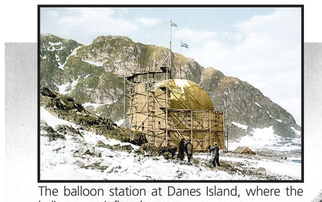
Growing and Using Mimosa pudica

Mimosa pudica is easy to grow and often kept as an ornamental or educational plant, especially for children, due to its unique interactive behavior. Besides its aesthetic and scientific appeal, the plant can be harvested for its medicinal benefits but should be used cautiously and under guidance since more research is needed on its efficacy and safety. The 'Touch Me Not' plant is a remarkable example of nature's ingenuity, blending fascinating behavior with practical benefits. From healing properties to environmental contributions, Mimosa pudica offers much more than its shy demeanor, proving that sometimes, the most sensitive beings have the strongest impact.

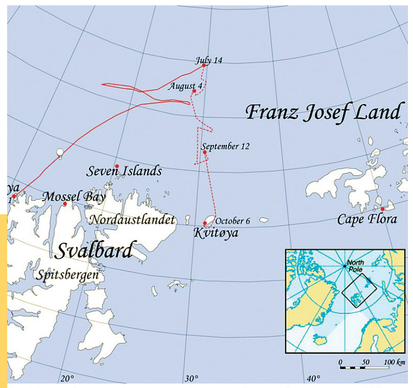
Salomon Andrée's Ill-Fated Arctic Balloon Expedition


Salomon August Andrée.

The remains of Andrée's expedition were discovered thirty-three years later, in 1930, by a Norwegian hunting party. While searching for water, two sealers came across Andrée's boat near a small stream, frozen under a mound of snow and filled with equipment, including a boathook engraved with the words "Andrée's Polar Expedition, 1896." When a search was organized, the bodies of all three crew members were found, along with diaries, Strindberg's photographic film, his logbook, maps, and other artefacts.


The balloon station at Danes Island, where the balloon was inflated.

The balloon Örnen lies where it crashed on the ice pack. Photo by expedition member, Nils Strindberg.



Map of Salomon August Andrée's Arctic Balloon Expedition of 1897.

KAUSHIKI PATWARDHAN

By the late 19th century, the North Pole remained one of the last great geographic mysteries. The quest to reach the inhospitable and dangerous frozen ocean became a lifelong pursuit for many explorers around the world. Numerous adventurers threw themselves at the challenge, often at great cost. They faced untold hardships, failure, and even death. Like many spirited explorers, Salomon August Andrée, a Swedish engineer and aeronaut, was bewitched by the Arctic. But unlike previous expeditions, Andrée, a fervent believer in the power of science and technology, was convinced that success could be achieved not by traveling through the sea or over ice by sled, but by flying above it in a hydrogen balloon.

Andrée's fascination with balloons began in 1876, after a chance encounter with American balloonist John Wise, whom he met while traveling to the United States for the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. After returning to Sweden, Andrée opened a machine shop. When that venture failed, he sought and found employment as an assistant at the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm. He also participated in a Swedish scientific expedition to Spitsbergen, an island in Norway's Arctic Svalbard archipelago.

Later, he joined the Swedish Patent Office as an examiner, evaluating patent applications, assessing the novelty and technical feasibility of inventions, and ensuring compliance with patent laws.

Andrée's professional experience as a patent engineer played a significant role in shaping how he planned and approached his 1897 Arctic balloon expedition. Working with the cutting-edge technology of the late 19th century fostered in him a belief that human ingenuity could overcome natural obstacles. He applied this mindset directly to Arctic exploration, convinced that a balloon, outfitted with technical improvements, could succeed where brute force and traditional methods had failed.

Sweden has a chance

On February 13, 1895, Andrée stood before the Royal Geographical Society and delivered a passionate speech, declaring that an expedition to the Arctic offered Sweden a chance to claim a place on the world stage. He thrilled the audience of geographers and meteorologists by proposing that the feat could be accomplished by balloon. He gave a glowing, optimistic account of how easily such a balloon could be constructed and equipped with a novel steering method of his own design.

Typically, hot air and hydrogen balloons drifted with the wind. But Andrée had developed a special system of heavy drag ropes that would lie on the ground and drag through the water or across the ice, slowing the craft enough to be steered with sails.

Andrée assured the audience that Arctic summer weather was ideal for ballooning. The 24-hour sunlight, he claimed, would allow him to fly and make observations around the clock, effectively halving the time required for the voyage. He also emphasized that the drag-rope steering technique was particularly well suited to a region where the ground, composed of ice, was 'low in friction and free of vegetation.' He explained that the minimal precipitation in the area posed no threat of weighing down the balloon, as any precipitation or ice will be blown off the balloon's smooth surface by the wind.

Andrée's confidence and optimism convinced his audience, an audience largely disconnected from the realities of Arctic summer storms, fog, high humidity, and the ever-present threat of ice formation on aircraft. As Andrée left the stage, one witness wrote that the audience 'cheered until the great hall of the Colonial Institute rang.'

A King's backing

Andrée's project received financial backing from King Oscar II of Sweden, Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite, and several other prominent supporters. With these funds, Andrée ordered a 20-meter, three-layer silk balloon called Örnen ('The Eagle') from Paris. The balloon basket was designed to accommodate three adults, with sleeping quarters in the floor area, along with some of the stores and provisions. Because of the highly flammable hydrogen in the balloon, cooking could not be done in the basket itself. Instead, a modified Primus stove, designed by a friend of Andrée's, was used. It could be dangled eight metres below and then lit from the basket at a safe distance.

From among the many eager volunteers, Andrée selected two companions: Nils Ekholm, a forty-seven-year-old meteorologist who had previously led an expedition to Spitsbergen, and Nils Strindberg, a twenty-three-year-old assistant professor of physics.

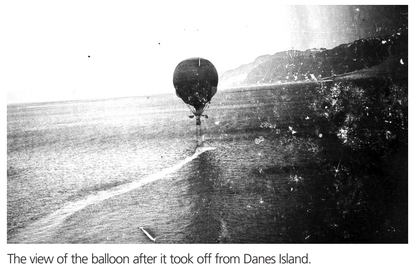
An initial attempt to launch the balloon was made in the summer of 1896 from Danes Island, but unfavourable winds prevented the expedition from starting and Andrée was forced to call off the launch. During the three weeks that Andrée and his team spent on Danes Island, Nils Ekholm studied the balloon and discovered that it was leaking too much gas. When he raised concerns about the balloon's inability to maintain buoyancy, he was hastily dismissed by Andrée. Ekholm later learned that Andrée had been secretly topping up the hydrogen to give the impression that the balloon was sound.

Caught in his own dream

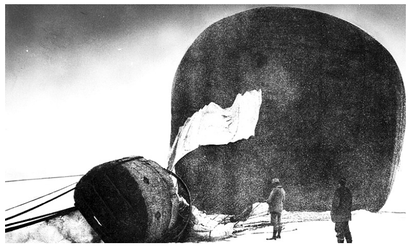
Why did Andrée choose to hide the balloon's flaws, knowing that its integrity was vital to the safety of both his crew and himself? Some writers suggest that Andrée had become a prisoner of his own successful fundraising campaign. The sponsors and the press were tracking every delay, reporting on every setback, and clamouring for results. When the first attempt was called off, Andrée found himself under immense pressure to deliver. In his 1967 novel *The Flight of the Eagle,* author Per Olof Sundman theorized that Andrée could not bear to let the press report that he had misjudged the prevailing wind direction, had miscalculated in ordering the balloon, and now needed a new one to correct the error.

Ekholm refused to take part in the expedition, and his place was quickly filled by Knut Frænkel, a 27-year-old engineer.

Andrée, along with Strindberg and Frænkel, returned to Danes Island in the summer of 1897 for a second attempt. This time, the winds were favourable. On July 11, the three doomed explorers climbed aboard the already heavy basket, and Andrée gave the order to cut the ropes. Almost immediately, problems began. The drag ropes, which Andrée had hoped would stabilize the balloon and prevent it from drifting uncontrollably, became entangled due to their great length, several hundred meters. As they twisted around on the ice, they pulled at the screws securing them to the basket, causing several ropes to detach. The remaining ropes dragged the basket down into the frigid Arctic waters.


The view of the balloon after it took off from Danes Island.

#ILL FATED


The crashed balloon on the ice pack on 14 July, 1897.


Knut Frænkel (left) and Nils Strindberg stand over a shot polar bear.

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Knut Fraenkel (left), Salomon August Andrée (sitting) and Nils Strindberg (right).

> The question of what exactly killed the men has long attracted both interest and controversy among scholars. The most likely explanation is that they died of exposure and exhaustion, the most common causes of death among polar explorers. However, other factors may also have played a role, such as trichinosis.

About 530 kilograms of rope were lost, and the explorers were forced to dump 210 kilograms of sand to lift the basket out of the water. In total, 740 kilograms of essential weight was lost in the first few minutes. Before it had even cleared the launch site, Eagle had been reduced from a supposedly steerable craft to an ordinary hydrogen balloon with a few ropes dangling from it, entirely at the mercy of the wind. The crew had no means of steering and too little ballast to ensure stability. Lightened, the balloon rose to 700 meters (2,300 feet), a height for which they had not planned. At that altitude, lower air pressure hastened the leakage of hydrogen through the millions stitching holes in the fabric of the balloon.

After the balloon rose, it travelled about 400 km north-east in 10 hours, when loss of gas and cooling by cloud brought it down and within the range of the dangling drag ropes. Then, the wind failed and it came to a complete stop for an hour. When the wind picked up again, the balloon travelled almost due west for about 180 km in 19 hours, occasionally stopping and continually bumping. At one point, the guide rope became entangled on a protruding ice formation, causing the balloon to become stationary. Strindberg and Frænkel had some much needed rest, while Andrée wrote in his diary: "It is not a little strange to be floating here above the polar sea."

Despite their perilous situation, Andrée remained optimistic. On July 13, two days after launch, he sent a message by a homing pigeon, addressed to the newspaper *Aftonbladet*. The message reads:

"The Andree Polar Expedition to the 'Aftonbladet,' Stockholm. 13 July, 12.30 p.m., 82 deg. north latitude, 15 deg. 5 min. east longitude. Good journey eastwards, 10 deg. south. All goes well on board. This is the third message sent by pigeon. Andree."

However, his diaries, found long after the members of the expedition perished, tells a story of increasing desperation. The balloon was struggling. It was soaked by rain, weighed down, and losing hydrogen rapidly. The crew was constantly jettisoning ballast and supplies to maintain altitude.

On July 14, after another 230 km of bumpy ride since their last stoppage, the crew unexpectedly opened the valves and the balloon descended onto the ice. At eleven minutes past eight in the morning, "we jumped out of the balloon," wrote Andrée. Why Andrée chose to bring down the balloon so abruptly, when at last it was sailing high and on the desired course, remains a mystery.

The goal of reaching the North Pole was abandoned, and the crew sensibly decided to head southwest towards Cape Flora in Franz Josef Land, where a large depot of supplies had been laid. Since it was not possible to carry all their provisions, they were forced to leave behind much of their food. Instead, they hunted and ate seals, walruses, and even polar bears along the way. The trek across the ice was more difficult than they had anticipated. At times, they built bridges by bringing ice floes together. Sometimes, they used axes to carve tracks for the runners of their sledges. On occasion, the ice gave way beneath them, plunging both men and sledges into the freezing water.

After several days of marching, the men realized that the ice was drifting backward faster than they were advancing, making the journey futile. On August 4, they gave up heading east and decided instead to turn southwest towards a smaller depot on the Seven Islands.

On April 17, Andrée wrote, "Our journey today has been terrible. We have not advanced 1,000 meters but with the greatest difficulty have dodged on from floe to floe." They set out fishhooks baited with bear meat but caught nothing. One evening, Andrée suggested they try the bear meat raw, and they decided it tasted like oysters. They made 'blood pancakes' from bear's blood and oatmeal, fried in butter. Strindberg prepared soup from algae, which Andrée noted 'should be considered as a fairly important discovery for travellers in these tracts.'

By late September, winter had begun to set in, and pulling the sleds became more difficult. Strindberg built a shelter on the ice by heaping up snow and pouring water over it, and for the first time since they had left home, the men slept under a roof. On October 2, at five-thirty in the morning, Andrée woke to a thunderous crash and saw water streaming into the hut. The ice floe they were living on had split into smaller pieces. Some of their belongings drifted off, and they had to hurry to retrieve them. Andrée's diary ends on October 2 with the entry: "No one had lost courage; with such comrades, one should be able to manage under, I may say, any circumstances."

The remains of Andrée's expedition were discovered thirty-three years later, in 1930, by a Norwegian hunting party. While searching for water, two sealers came across Andrée's boat near a small stream, frozen under a mound of snow and filled with equipment, including a boathook engraved with the words "Andrée's Polar Expedition, 1896." When a search was organized, the bodies of all three crew members were found, along with diaries, Strindberg's photographic film, his logbook, maps, and other artefacts.

Later, scientific analysis revealed that Andrée's diary contained additional entries made after what was previously thought to be the final one on October 2. These later entries had initially been illegible. On October 4, the three men began building another shelter. They also saw a lowland on the island, "a refuge if we don't drift too far past," Andrée wrote, and in the afternoon, they observed birds flying towards it. The next day, they moved ashore, working partly in darkness beneath the northern lights. That day happened to be Andrée's mother's birthday, and he christened their camp Mina Andrée's Place.

The final diary entry is dated Friday, October 8. Andrée wrote that bad weather had kept them in the tent all day: "It feels fine to be able to sleep here on fast land as a contrast with the drifting ice out upon the ocean where we constantly heard the cracking, grinding, and din. We shall have to gather driftwood and bones of whales and will have to do some moving around when the weather permits."

The question of what exactly killed the men has long attracted both interest and controversy among scholars. The most likely explanation is that they died of exposure and exhaustion, the most common causes of death among polar explorers. However, other factors may also have played a role, such as trichinosis, a parasitic disease that they could have contracted from eating undercooked polar bear meat. Additional theories include vitamin A poisoning from consuming polar bear liver, lead poisoning from metal cans, botulism, and carbon monoxide poisoning caused by inhaling fumes from a cookstove used in a poorly ventilated tent.

Trichinosis is considered unlikely, as the diaries mention none of the typical symptoms of a severe infection. Similarly, vitamin A poisoning was ruled out because the diary indicates that the men were aware of the danger and deliberately avoided eating polar bear liver.

In 2010, Swedish researcher Bea Uusma proposed a new theory, that the men were attacked by a polar bear. According to this hypothesis, Strindberg was killed during the attack, while Frænkel was injured and died shortly afterward inside the tent. His body was found without mittens or shoes. Andrée, having buried Strindberg and finding himself alone on the island with no way to leave, may have then decided to end his life using morphine. This theory is supported by several pieces of evidence. Andrée's body was found in a semi-upright position, propped against a rock with his rifle by his side, an unlikely posture for someone killed by a bear. Nearly empty morphine bottles were discovered at the site, along with Andrée's diary, which had been carefully wrapped in a sweater, hay, and balloon cloth, as if he intended to preserve it for posterity in the hope that it would be found.

Coming home in a shroud

The remains of the three explorers were received in Stockholm with solemn respect on October 5, 1930. King Gustaf V, who was present at the pier where the ship carrying their remains docked, said: "In the name of the Swedish nation, I here greet the dust of the polar explorers who, more than three decades ago, left their native land to find an answer to questions of unparalleled difficulty."

Today, several remnants of the expedition, including the clothing worn by the three men, many of their scientific instruments, and several film canisters from Strindberg's camera, are preserved in the Grenna Museum.

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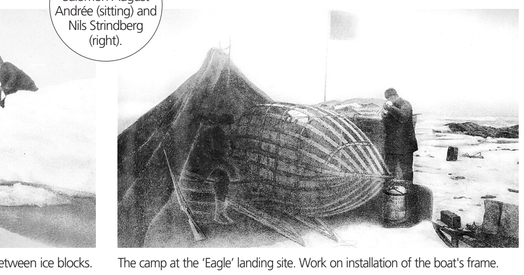
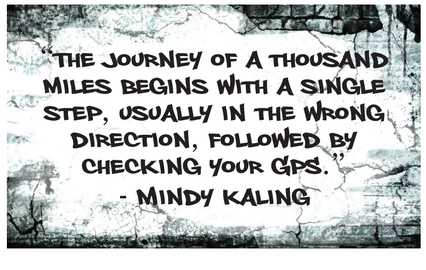
Andree and Fraenkel work at the upside down boat.


Andrée and Fraenkel tug at a boat used to carry the sled between ice blocks.

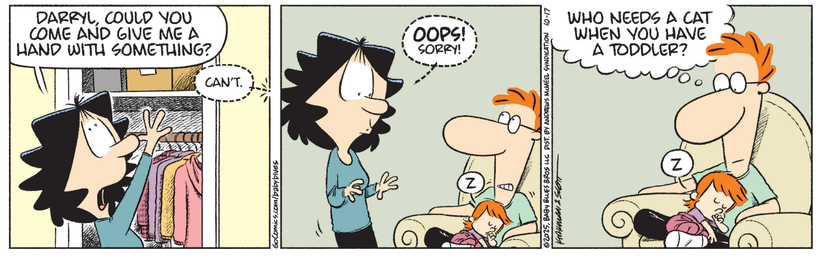
The camp at the 'Eagle' landing site. Work on installation of the boat's frame.

THE WALL



BABY BLUES

By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott



ZITS

By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman