Balloon captures images 16 miles up
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OTTUMWA, IOWA -- While everybody has an interesting hobby, not everybody chooses theirs to be launching balloons into near space.

That is what Marshall Dias and the iHAB (Iowa High Altitude Balloon) project did Saturday. They launched a balloon from the Aviation Building at Indian Hills Community College near the Ottumwa airport Saturday morning.

The balloon was equipped with a camera taking photographs every 10 seconds into near space this afternoon.

As an amateur, Dias constructed the project from scratch and said most of the stuff comes straight off the shelf.

"We wanted to get photos near space, the blackness of space, the curvature of the earth, and obviously the earth down below. You can get some pretty fantastic photo opportunities at 60,000, 80,000, 100,000 feet in the air," Dias said.

The balloon made it to a maximum altitude of 84,400 feet, or 15.98 miles, above earth before bursting. It took about 2,300 photos in its flight of more than five hours.

Dias became interested in the project after finding out about two MIT students attempting the project last year to do so spending as little money as possible.

Dias spent nearly $800 on the project. The MIT students did it for $148.

The balloon was equipped with a HAM radio. Dias said he had people picking up the signal from many countries around the world including Brazil.

Dias said he plans to do this again. They tracked the balloon and recovered it using GPS. Very little damage was done to the equipment on the flight or landing. Dias said temperatures get as low as 50 below Celsius at that elevation.

You can view more photos here. Be patient, the page may take a while to load.