

## The couple who reached for the skies

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AN INTREPID Reigate couple have flown two-thirds of the way round the globe in an aeroplane they built in their garage.

Husband and wife crew Patrick Elliott and Linda Walker have already plane-hopped through 20 countries.

Only 10 people have completed a full circumnavigation in a homemade light aircraft before. The couple could join that select list, even though a recent hiccup forced them to ship their plane by sea across the Pacific.

Mr Elliott, a retired British Airways pilot, built the tiny Rutan Long-EZ craft with the help of a manual in the couple's Reigate garage.

It took 16 years to finish and it was only once the couple started flying it that the around-the-world plan took seed.

"We are not ones for just piddling about in the sky," said Mr Elliott, 57. "We always wanted to get somewhere with it. Initially it was going to the Isle of Wight for a cup of tea, then it got further to visiting relatives around the UK, and [France](#) for lunch. Then early last year we made our first long trip down to [Malta](#). That made us realise we could probably do this."

The couple set out for [Australia](#) on September 11 last year, hitting France, [Italy](#), [Greece](#), Saudi Arabia, [Bahrain](#), United Arab Emirates, [Pakistan](#), [India](#), [Bangladesh](#), [Thailand](#), [Malaysia](#) and [Indonesia](#) on the way.

Their feat – and their minute, futuristic-looking plane – attracted attention at every stop.

Aside from a couple of hairy landings in high winds, the adventure went smoothly until they hit a stumbling block on the return journey.

The Japanese authorities would not permit them to land without a particular certificate that is not granted to homemade planes.

"We tried everything to get in," said Mr Elliott. "But when the earthquake and tsunami hit we decided it would not be moral to continue to pursue it.

"The alternative route was [China](#) but it hasn't quite opened up enough yet."

Their beloved plane is now being shipped from their last stop, Taiwan, to Vancouver, from where they will continue their trip this summer.

They may not now qualify as "earth rounders" – although others have after shipping their planes for a section – but the duo are philosophical.

"I think it is an amazing achievement that we have gone as far as we have," said Ms Walker, 57. "We have always said we will get as far as we can and if we don't make it all the way around, so be it. It's a journey of a lifetime."

"It irks me that we aren't going to be able to do it," added Mr Elliott, "but at the end of the day Linda is right. I do look at the map though, and just think, 'if only'.

"The trip has been about having fun and visiting lots of places. The highlight has been the people we have met, who have been just amazing."

Follow the adventurers' blog at [www.travelpod.com/s/L.P+EZ+Adventures](http://www.travelpod.com/s/L.P+EZ+Adventures)

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