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The Great Flying Seal

In [1926](#), Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen, American financier Lincoln Ellsworth and Italian aeronautical engineer [Umberto Nobile](#) were responsible for one of the most remarkable air flights ever witnessed in the far north. These men with a crew of 13 made a pioneering flight over the North Pole in a semi-rigid dirigible designed by Nobile.

These courageous adventurers made the first crossing of the Arctic in the airship [Norge](#) (pronounced *Nor-geh*). They left [Spitzbergen](#), Norway on [May 11, 1926](#) and landed in [Alaska](#) two days later. The average speed of the dirigible was 40 mph. The three previous claims to have arrived at the North Pole – by [Frederick Cook](#) in [1908](#), [Robert Peary](#) in [1909](#), and [Richard E. Byrd](#) in [1926](#) are all disputed, as being either of dubious accuracy or outright fraud. Some of those disputing these earlier claims therefore consider the crew of the Norge to be the first verified explorers to have reached the North Pole.

Fifteen hours after leaving Spitzbergen, the Norge dropped U.S., Italian, and Norwegian flags over the North Pole from a height of 600 feet. Soon heavy freezing fog was creating ice particles that the ship's propellers were flinging into the hull at great force. Throughout the trip the crew could see vast wastes of rough, frozen ocean. A much-relieved crew finally sighted the dark coastline of Alaska after 45 hours of flying. The Norge's goal was Nome, but worsening weather and winds forced the ship to head west, and after dodging mountain peaks in fog, the Norge eventually made Teller located 75 miles west of Nome. Amundsen was forced to make a landing on the harbor there. While the crew safely debarked, most of the Norge was wrecked by high winds. The residents of Teller helped to dismantle the huge, ominous looking airship.

The landing of the Norge on Norwegian Independence Day in May 1926 must have been an incredible sight to the people of Teller. The residents called the strange looking vessel, "The Great Flying Seal". Those who witnessed the landing still have a vivid recollection of the event. Some of the salvage was used by the Eskimos. The rubberized outer skin of the Norge was transformed by diligent mothers into rainproof parkas while some of the small metal parts were used as children's toys and kitchen utensils.

*Information provided by the Carrie M. McLain Memorial Museum
Nome, Alaska*