

Daredevil Nik Wallenda Completes High-Wire Walk Across Grand Canyon

Daredevil Nik Wallenda completed a historic high-wire walk on a 2-inch (5-cm) steel cable over the Grand Canyon on Sunday and was greeted by wild cheers after his hair-raising stunt.

Wallenda, the self-described “King of the High Wire,” took 22 minutes and 54 seconds to walk 1,400 feet across the crimson-hued canyon with just a distant ribbon of the Little Colorado River beneath him. The event was broadcast live around the world.

Wallenda, the first person to cross the canyon, made the walk without a tether or safety net.

Wallenda could be heard praying almost constantly during the walk, murmuring “Thank you, Jesus.” He kissed the ground when he reached the other side.

“It took every bit of me to stay focused that entire time,” Wallenda said. “My arms are aching like you wouldn’t believe.”

He said he stopped and crouched down twice, first because of the wind, the second because the cable had picked up an unsettling rhythm.

He spat on his hands and rubbed it on the sole of his shoe for grip as the cable had gathered dust.

Wallenda said the walk was stressful. But he also said the view, from 1,500 feet above the snaking river, was “breathtaking.”

“It was a dream come true,” Wallenda said of the crossing.

“This is what my family has done for 200 years, so it’s part of my legacy.”

A seventh-generation member of the “Flying Wallendas” family of acrobats, Wallenda also made history last year by becoming the only person to complete a high-wire walk over the brink of Niagara Falls. He used the same cable on Sunday.

The 34-year-old first dreamed of Sunday’s challenge during a visit to the Grand Canyon with his parents as a teenager.

There was no word on the financial benefits of Wallenda’s stunt. He was listed by the Discovery Channel as one of the executive producers of the live broadcast. A Discovery spokesman could not be reached for comment.

Viewers watching live in 217 countries were able to share Wallenda’s point of view from the cable during the crossing, through cameras rigged to his body. Wallenda held a 43-pound (20-kg) balancing pole.

Nik’s great-grandfather, Karl Wallenda, slipped and fell to his death from a high wire in Puerto Rico in 1978.

In an interview after Sunday’s walk, Nik Wallenda teared up describing how he thought of his great-grandfather.

“I knelt down and I thought of my great-grandfather and that everything I do is to honor him,” Wallenda said. “It took my mind off all this movement underneath me ... and I was able to focus on him and regain composure.”

Wallenda said before the crossing that his greatest concern was the unpredictable wind gusts that are prone to buffet the site in a remote section of the Grand Canyon’s watershed on the Navajo Nation.

Wallenda trained in his Florida hometown of Sarasota as Tropical Storm Andrea barreled ashore. He also used air boats to blast him with side and updrafts of 55 miles per hour.

Wallenda talks about his Christian faith in his new book *Balance*.

“That’s really where I get my peace,” he said. “I have confidence that if something were to happen to me, I know where I’m going.”

For a future stunt, Wallenda said he dreams of walking between New York’s Chrysler Building and Empire State Building.

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