

The gas leak spacemen

VILLAGERS thought the two round - the - world American balloonists were creatures from another universe when they made a forced landing in a muddy Indian field.

"We were asked whether we were from outer space," said 46-year-old pilot Max Anderson, yesterday.

A continuing gas leak forced the balloon—the Jules Verne, piloted by Mr Anderson and co-pilot Donald Ida—

Express Foreign Service

to land near Milkapur, 120 miles north-west of New Delhi.

The villagers gave them steaming cups of spiced tea and chunks of sugarcane, said Mr Anderson. "They were as curious as children—very sweet and excited."

Families streamed to the spot yesterday on foot, camels and tractors.

As more than 3,000 people surrounded the balloon, rifle-toting police used sticks to push them back.

Later the two balloonists were driven to New Delhi the Indian capital, by jeep.

A US Embassy official stayed behind to guard the balloon's gondola.

D. EXPRESS

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