

Davis Instruments Plays Key Role in Historic Walk Across the Grand Canyon

When it comes to life-challenging feats of courage that involve dynamic weather conditions, modern day daredevils know who to call.

Nik Wallenda, of the Flying Wallendas' fame, made his second historic tight wire walk in 12 months. He crossed the Grand Canyon, with 13 million Discovery Channel television viewers watching.

For Wallenda's safety, and to provide viewers with real-time weather data, Discovery Channel wanted to measure and monitor the changing weather conditions within the Grand Canyon. Its requirements were unique to the magnificent topography and changing microclimates.

Discovery Channel wanted to track the divergent weather conditions both in the canyon and on the ridges. There was no power or cell service on the floor of the canyon and the walk was starting on a 10-acre bluff called "the Island" that rose above the Little Colorado River gorge. The only access to the Island was via a helicopter. It was a logistics nightmare.

That's where the Davis Instruments team came into the picture.

Davis played a critical role in Wallenda's walk across Niagara Falls on June 15, 2012. Its equipment made it possible to get weather readings from the middle of the falls, something that had never been done before. The 50-year-old weather, automotive and marine instrumentation company was tagged by Discovery Channel to once again provide its solar-powered, wireless weather stations for Wallenda's walk and the live broadcast at the Grand Canyon this year.

The Weather Channel's Jim Cantore used five consoles at the broadcast site to keep him on top of the dynamic situation.

"The weather consoles are like an iPad on steroids," said Cantore, meteorologist in charge of Discovery Channel's "Skywire Live" special. The consoles collect historical data and even do forecasting. Each console tracks several weather variables including temperature (indoor and outdoor), barometric pressure, humidity, rainfall, wind, wind chill, and dew point. Cantore appreciated the sophisticated at-your-fingertips weather technology.

Team engineers had to be creative in making the data transmittable. They deployed a repeater connected to a receiving antenna and a transmitting antenna to boost the strength of the signals coming from the canyon floor, 1,500 feet below. From both sides of the canyon, the Skywire Live technical team monitored the network of five Vantage Pro2 stations and reported the changing conditions to Discovery Channel weather producers. All the Vantage Pro2 stations worked flawlessly from the moment Wallenda stepped onto the wire, to his triumphant finish-line crossing.

After the awe-inspiring walk, Wallenda asked, "How much does one of those Davis weather rigs run? I would like to have them at all my walks."

Davis Instruments also provided weather equipment for Wallenda's walk between two skyscrapers in Chicago, the very windy city.

