

TIME TRAVEL

Giuseppe Pelosi
University of Florence, Florence, Italy

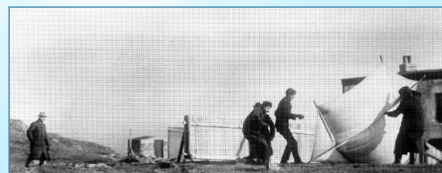
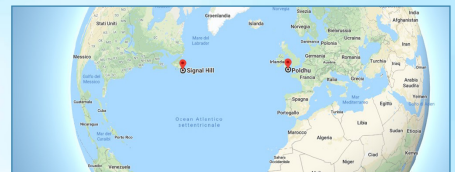


Marconi's Transatlantic Leap: 12 December 1901

In 1901, Guglielmo Marconi (Bologna, Italy, 1874 – Rome, Italy, 1937) was 27 years old and had been working in radio communications for six years. Fresh from numerous successes and from the foundation of his “Marconi International Marine Communication Company” in 1900, he decided to attempt the leap of radio communication across the Atlantic Ocean, from Poldhu (Cornwall, U.K.) to St. John’s (Newfoundland, Canada). Several years after, in 1932, he remembered this feat in an interview (the recording is still available):

On the morning of the 12th of December, everything was ready, and the decisive moment was approaching despite a very strong wind. After many unsuccessful attempts, a kite was flown that raised one end of the antenna to a height of about 120 meters. At 12:30 p.m., on the telephone of the receiver a rhythmic succession of the three points corresponding to the letter “s” of the Morse alphabet reached my ear from Poldhu station on the other side of the ocean, weakly but with such clarity as to leave no room for doubt. Radio telegraphy on the distance of more than 3000 kilometers, that seemed enormous at the time, had been possible despite the alleged obstacle of the Earth’s curvature that everyone considered insurmountable (translated by the author).

Transatlantic transmission from the transmitting location (Poldhu, Cornwall, U.K.) to the receiving location (Signal Hill, St. John’s, Newfoundland, Canada) on 12 December 1901.



Marconi (far left) witnessing the kite carrying the receiving antenna at Signal Hill, St. John’s, Newfoundland, Canada.

Sources:

1. Marconi’s speech [in Italian], Web, <https://www.teche.rai.it/2015/04/guglielmo-marconi-1901/>.
2. G. Bussey, “Marconi’s Atlantic Leap,” Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (U.K.), 2000.
3. K. Grandin, N. Olander, P. Mazzinghi, G. Pelosi, A Wireless World, One Hundred Years Since the Nobel Prize to Guglielmo Marconi, Contribution to the History of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences series, Florence University Press, Vol. 42, 2012.