

AIRWORTHY



Newsletter of the Black Forest Soaring Society - Fall 2003

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President's Message

The fall season has arrived, are you soaring?

It was a great summer of soaring with lots of club related activities available for members who regularly hang around the airport on the weekends. I believe we achieved a BFSS personal best concerning the quantity of clubhouse BBQs at the end of the day. I must have attended at least 12 such informal and spur of the moment get togethers, and many more were held.

I know of 8 members who attended either a local, regional or national contest or cross-country soaring camp, many for the first time ever or in many years. The BFSS club finished 2nd in the national online (OLC) cross-country contest. We have members who had their first solo flight while others received a private pilots certificate. Some of our newly anointed soaring pilots experienced a 10-knot thermal and a 1,2 or 3 hour flight for the first time! Still other eager soaring pilots took the next step in cross-country flying by stretching their wings just a bit more. Congratulations to all.

We can and should be proud of this kind of healthy club activity. This glowing report however misses telling the whole story.

Taking a look at the other side of this activity coin, I have also observed too many good summer soaring days when only 4 or 5 pilots flew, usually the same 4 or 5 pilots. For a club with 70 members this is a disturbing occurrence.

The reasons for this apathy may be as varied as the individuals and not a new problem in this sport of soaring. For the experienced soaring pilot, perhaps life changes such as a new job, spouse, children, finance and health issues including the baby boomer issue many of us are facing, taking care of elderly parents, does take a toll on our free time.

For the newer low time pilot the same issues may also apply but it would seem a more compelling reason for this apparent passive attrition is a general lack of support, direction and experienced information comfortably available to the new soaring pilot.

The training process to achieve solo status is fully supported by the instructor. The training process to receive a private pilots certificate is well documented and relatively well supported for the mature, self-motivated pilot.

This is where the fog sets in and the support system typically collapses. A low time soaring pilot who is proficient with the basics, can core a thermal when he bumps into one, is eager to know more about the many mysteries of playing 3-d chess in the sky with mother nature.

Where to go from here? Yes, he or she can and must read all the material available about weather, clouds, thermals, safety, XC soaring etc. and stay a proficient, safe pilot. But nothing compares to receiving hands on flying experience with a seasoned soaring pilot who can help unlock the mysteries, open the eyes and instill the passion for soaring in the heart of a low time soaring pilot.

This is being called the “Mentoring Program”, a concept discussed in the soaring community and being discussed at BFSS as a way to help the low time pilot fill the void and become a high time seasoned pilot. One possible way to begin, is to ask our seasoned pilot’s to sign up on the web site to be available 1 day a month to fly and share knowledge with one or more BFSS low time pilots who also sign up.

This is just a beginning concept and I look forward to generating a club wide discussion on this exciting idea that will be a benefit to all involved.

Fly Safely and fly often,

Rick Culbertson

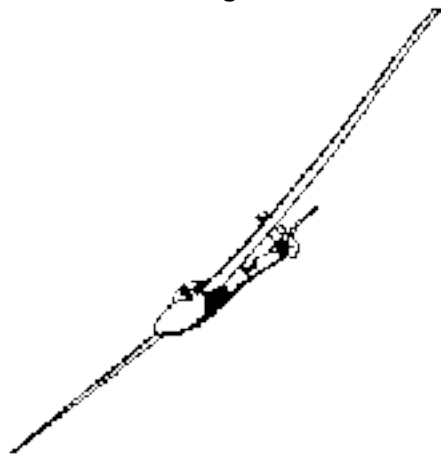
Club News

Taylor Elington soloed on June 1.

Mike Plante accomplished his Commercial Glider add-on in October.

Ramon Colomina accomplished his Commercial Glider add-on in September. In the last year Colomina has accomplished five ratings: Private glider add-on, Commercial power & glider, Power instrument, Power multi-engine.

Steve Johnson passed his Private glider written test and practical test in June.



Air Sailing Flying Camp 2003

by Robert Chur

Friday June 27:

Today is the last day of the Air Sailing Cross Country camp and this morning's speaker is Dick Horn.

Dick begins with a diagram showing time and the useable lift band and notes that the typical flying day can be thought of as having distinct phases. It is necessary to pay attention to what's going on and shift gears as the day progresses:

1. early: you're scratching and working hard to center lift and make forward progress. It really isn't your thermalling that's bad, it's the lift. Thermals are small and weak and hard to work.
2. peak: there's good, strong lift and the bases get higher. This is the time to move and not waste time working weak thermals.
3. dying: there's probably not much lift down low so get high and stay high. This is often the hardest phase to work since you need to slow down and fly conservatively after booming along for the past few hours. Think and fly best l/d.

He offers some additional advice: No matter what, sometime during the flight you will probably get low. When this happens don't give up immediately; work the options and be persistent. 75% of the sport is a mind game: success requires good risk management and decision making.

The next part of Dick's talk covers his experiences flying cross country tasks into and out of AirSailing, Minden and Truckee.

Chad Moore, camp coordinator, does a quick weather briefing, calling for good lift, but with the dry conditions it will be mostly a blue day. Bases, if any, will be around 15,000 and maybe rising another thousand feet or so later in the day.

We progress to flight planning. This being the last day of camp, the idea is for everyone to head out and put into practice what we've learned during the week. Several people opt for silver distance flights and others elect to not try for badge legs and just fly small or medium local triangles instead.

I vacillate, my goal for the year is to earn a silver badge. The altitude and duration legs were taken care of last week during the thermalling camp, all I need is the 50km distance leg. I've never done a cross-country flight and even after this week's cross-country camp I have doubts about attempting one. 50km seems ambitious enough, but Dave Cunningham (one of the camp lead pilots) has already planted the seed for a gold distance flight mentioning a 300k yo-yo that doesn't stray more than 30 miles from AirSailing.

This idea has been growing for a few days and is tempting: the course covers territory I've been flying over for the past 2 weeks and I'm comfortable with it. Also, I can always elect to abandon the 300k task and just land out for the silver distance.

But Dick's talk covered a different 300km out&return task down south to Mount Patterson using Lobdell Lake as the turnpoint. Both Dick and Chad feel that this would be a better choice for people wanting to stretch their wings since conditions are expected to be better to the south and the landout and aero-tow recovery options are better too.

Two others have already committed to trying this route with Dick following along as chaperone. Chad is trying to keep students roughly grouped by task and lead pilot and suggests I declare this task too.

Linda Monahan is flying a borrowed 1-36 and is part of the SSA Master Cross-Country Instructor class that is running concurrent with the XC camp. She intentionally landed out on a dry lake bed for the experience earlier in the week. Hal Chouinard is flying an ASW27B, he landed out at Minden earlier in the week for his Silver distance flight.

We're advised to hustle and be near the front of the launch line, so I scurry around tracking down and filling out a flight declaration form, loading a barograph and setting up a turnpoint camera. Linda and I are both using disposable cameras, however Linda's 1-36 has a camera mount on the canopy rail. I have to resort to duct-taping the camera to the canopy: crude, but effective. Hopefully.

I study Dick's drawing and the big wall map trying to pick out and mark the required navigation landmarks on my sectional and get after myself for not taking better notes during the talk. The sectional shows a couple of different lakes near Mt Patterson. Which one is Lobdell? Which peaks are the route landmarks? I spend 15 minutes prepping my sectional by drawing range circles around airports, noting landing spots and scribbling out a cheat sheet, uhm flight plan, listing waypoints, landmarks, alternate fields and distances.

After a quick trip back to the RV trailer for flight gear and water, I preflight 87E and wrestle her by hand out to the staging area. I'm number 5 in line, Linda and Hal are ahead of me. Dave Cunningham helps me with a positive control check and offers some last minute turnpoint photography tips. We watch several dust devils skitter across the runway as the first ships launch. With two tow planes my turn will roll around quickly, so I strap in, get comfortable and try to relax for a few moments.

Pretty soon I'm hooked up and with a waggle on the rudders, rolling; the quartering tailwind that's given me problems all week doesn't seem to be an issue today. As the dust devils warned, things are starting to cook and the tow is pretty bumpy. I exercise my slack-line techniques and get some practice thermalling on tow. The earlier launches seemed to be staying in the middle of the valley instead of taking ships to the ridges to the east or west. There's plenty of lift around so I release right over the hanger at 2300AGL in what appears to be a good thermal. I don't want to tow too high since the silver distance flight to Silver Springs that I may fall back on is subject to the altitude rule.

I pop the brakes, dive down a couple hundred feet and pull up sharply to notch the baro. This successfully maneuvers me out of the thermal, so I scratch around for 20 minutes trying to find the lift that seemed so abundant. Quite a few ships are

now milling around looking for the lift too. Just as I start to worry about having to land for a re-light, I see Dave Prather's 1-35 cranked over hard working a thermal and fly over to join in below. Turning very tightly, I'm keeping up with him and we're climbing fast, the averager shows 8kts. Strangely, RD (another 1-35) is turning lazy circles a 1/4 mile away and climbing just as fast.

Feeling better now with 11K in my pocket, I set off for Pond Peak 13 miles to the south. Cruising at 55kts, I don't hit any other bumps and proceed to get uncomfortably low. I can see a couple of ships marking a thermal right over the NexRad radar dome, but can't get to them.

I turn back towards AirSailing and get lower... and lower... poking around the nooks and crannies of the ridgeline desperately looking for something going up. I have options, there are alfalfa fields out in the middle of the valley and a couple of dirt strips and paved roads on the way back towards AirSailing. We scouted these on a field trip earlier in the week and I amuse (?) myself looking for the various hazards we noted from the ground, but they're invisible now. I can't see any of the telephone poles, wires and fences that I know are there. But fortune smiles and puts a thermal right in front of my nose, I bumble into it and manage to hang onto it up to 12,500 and can leave those landout thoughts behind.

It's now 2:15 and I feel like I'm finally en route. I head southwest towards the Mustang VOR (named for the famous Mustang Ranch Bordello or so the story goes) and try to figure out where I want to try to jump the I80 gap. I can see the Tracy power plant on the other side and locate it on the sectional. Noodling along and following the ridgeline I know I'm hesitating. What looms before me is both a physical and psychological big step: AirSailing will be out of reach and I'll be committed to either Silver Springs or Tiger: officially flying cross country and headed into Terra Incognita.

Feeling brave, I push out into the gap and am pleased to note that I don't immediately fall out of the sky as feared. I cross the gap without incident and have a clear view of both Silvery Springs and Tiger field. They're both within easy glide distance and I have plenty of altitude so I begin working along the ridgeline.

Having taken the big step and now standing firmly (metaphorically) on the other side, is liberating, I push the nose down and begin following the ridgeline to Virginia City and the highway 50 gap. I seem to be able to fly along and keep the vario at 0 sink; it is very cool. Virginia City comes up quickly and without incident. I spend some time circling there in strong lift to build up an altitude cushion and to study the terrain ahead. I can see the Dayton Valley field next to the highway and study the hills on the far side trying to decide which one is Rawe Peak. After a moments thought, I decide it doesn't really matter since the Pine Nuts run straight south and that's the direction I need to go.

I execute a textbook thermal exit and punch through the surrounding sink at cruising speed, flinging my 530# gross weight at the yawning gap. Halfway across I feel a bump, a quick look at the altimeter and nagging fear of being low entices me to circle for more altitude. After a few turns I notice a couple of jets several miles distant. Remembering the warnings about commercial airliner traffic being vectored along the highway on approach to Reno, I decide this is not a good place to loiter, and

press on.

I get to what I think is Rawe Peak and start running south on the Pine Nuts. Lift is good and I can cruise along at 65/70kts making good progress down to Mt. Siegal while staying above 13,000. I find I'm much more relaxed now with the time and wherewithal to enjoy the scenery and absorb the experience. My thermalling seems a lot better too; I can maintain bank and airspeed while working on the navigation problems.

I flaunt these newfound thermalling skills over Mt. Siegal while matching up what I'm seeing out the window to what's on the sectional. Topaz Lake sparkles to the west and in front of me is the wide gap before Desert Creek Peak.

3:15pm and I'm at 14,500 making good time, feeling confident, enjoying the ride. As I push out into the gap I hear Linda call that she has turned Lobdell Lake but is scratching for lift down low. I can see the Mt Patterson massif very clearly and juicy Cu are growing a few thousand feet above it; they're the first clouds I've been near all day. Linda must be too low to get to the strong lift that should be there. I make a mental note to stay high and not get trapped low over the lake.

Stop in a nice 8kt thermal and see an ASK21 join in a thousand feet below. We thermal together for a while and I'm pleased to note that I maintain the altitude separation. While working the thermal and taking the time to point my wing at a ground landmark and note if and how I drift, I notice again that my stress level decreases and sense of fun increases with altitude.

I notice Dick Horn in his Discus GE zipping by down below knowing that he launched an hour and half after me. His earlier advice about utilizing the peak of the day to move fast and cover the miles echoes loudly. Chastened, I abandon my fun, peeling out of the thermal at 15,000 to continue on towards Patterson. I resolve to fly faster and waste less time circling.

By the time I get to Patterson and its fat clouds, Dick is already well on his way back north. I work a strong thermal up to cloudbase at 16,500 before setting off to turn Lobdell Lake and take pictures. My plan is to get as much altitude as I can before venturing out to the lake and to make it back to the lift over the high ground before stopping to climb again.

Heading out to the lake now, I replay Dave's earlier advice on turnpoint photos: fly over the turnpoint on course, count to 30, do a 45 degree banked turn and snap the picture. It seems to work, but I discover that I managed to lay a big strip of duct tape directly over the camera's manual winder.

Consternation!

Frantically wrestling the infernally sticky duct tape and thoroughly encased camera with both hands I manage to uncover enough of the winder to advance the film. Turn another circle to take a couple of additional pictures as backups. (Note to self: if badge flying is going to continue, must invest in approved data-logger as soon as convenient.)

Calmer now, chest swollen with accomplishment and with as nonchalant a voice as can be mustered, I make a position and altitude report. "87 Echo, Lobdell Lake, 14 thousand." I want to wallow around in this moment and savor the thrill of achieving my goal: mortal men will cower in my presence, beautiful women will tear their clothes and throw themselves at my feet, children will compose songs about the audaciousness of my exploits, dogs will bark. This giddy euphoria lasts but a few seconds before reality intrudes... Hello?! It's 4pm, 90 miles to where the cold beer awaits, nothing to celebrate yet. I start the voyage back north.

Reach Desert Creek Peak again at 14,000 and struggle to climb higher, but can't. I can see the Farias Wheel runway and know I can make it easily, so I cross the gap and get back to Mt Siegal to look for lift there. Exploration results in a few climbs but the thermals seem to break up and vanish after only a few turns. I manage to get back up to 14,500 again and feel that I have enough to continue north along the Pine Nuts. Happily, I don't seem to be losing much cruising at 60kt and only feel the need to stop a couple of times in what feel like extra-strong bumps trying to get higher. No such luck.

I arrive at Rawe Peak with only 12,500; I'd really like to have more before trying to cross over highway 50. We were warned that this gap is a late afternoon trap; it looks like it should produce some thermals but it doesn't -- all the lift gets washed out by the "lake effect" winds coming off Lake Tahoe. I fly around vainly looking for lift but nothing strong enough to climb in materializes. With Dayton Valley in range there's really nothing else to do but try to cross over and hope for better things.

From Virginia City I follow the ridges north back towards the Tracy Power plant, retracting my earlier route. There are small bumps coming off that allow me to maintain altitude so I continue creeping along. I can see Tiger field to the east and have Reno International to the west (!); there's also Spanish Springs as a last resort.

Maintaining just enough altitude to feel like there's a chance, I hop I80 again and work back over to Pond Peak arriving at 10,500. It is now 5:15pm and I have AirSailing in my sights but I'm 2000' below the conservative glideslope. That 2000' is almost all of the built in safety margin. There's still no lift worth turning in.

Studying the terrain that's around I decide to ease over to the east side of the valley where the west facing ridge may still be producing some lift. But the day is dying out and there isn't much besides a few burbles of reduced sink.

I foolishly try turning in couple of stronger bumps, but end up just wasting a few hundred feet of precious altitude. Creeping along at best I/d now and feeling very low and foolish, AirSailing, 11 miles distant, is teasing me.

3000' AGL. I should just make it at 18:1 (3.5NM/1000). There are landing options to the left -- the landout fields and dirt strips are still there. I press on. The ground gets closer, I'm now 8 miles out and have about 2000'. I should make it, but I'll be well below pattern altitude.

I get to Flying Eagle Ranch, a fly-in community development just 2.5 miles from Air

Sailing (the runways have been laid, but no houses started yet) at 1000' AGL. Serious concerns about my situation set in and I consider landing. The voices in my head start talking louder: what a letdown to have made it so far and come up just 2 miles short- men will scorn me, women will refuse to make eye contact, dogs will pee on my trailer. Giving in to the siren song and wishing to avoid such shame, I decide I can make it, rationalizing that at worst it is a straight-in final to runway 35. Acceptable but not preferred.

After another minute or two I finally know I've got it made. I reach AirSailing with 400' so I fly a short base and turn final to 35.

I'm back, 4hrs 45minutes after launching. I've completed my first official XC flight. A squeaker and a little shaky towards the end, but I've done it: 300km declared O&R, gold distance and diamond goal.

Everyone else has returned safely and there were no unplanned landouts. Most people have accomplished what they set out to do. Final tally: several silver distance flights, two 5 hour durations, a silver altitude and 3 of us have done the 300k O&R.



Pyramid Lake near Air Sailing, Nevada

Region 9 Contest in Hobbs, New Mexico

by Bill Howe

This summer some members of our club went to the region 9 contest in Hobbs, New Mexico. Rick Culbertson flew in the sports class, Dave Leonard flew in 15 meter class, and Dave Fanning flew in standard class, with his friend Karen Davis crewing for him in her first experience crewing at a contest.

Rick flew in his first glider contest in the sports class. He's flown hang glider competitions before, even a national contest, but, as he put it, "it's a different game with sailplanes."

When asked about his best day and his worst day, he said they were the same day. It was one of the more challenging days of the contest; people were having low saves and just squeaking back to Hobbs. Rick managed to make his last turn point and get back to Hobbs with a fourth place for the day and fifth overall in the contest. Or so he thought. It turns out he made an error on his data logger settings and missed the turnpoint by a mile, putting him in fifteenth place in the contest.

Rick keeps notes of the good things that happened and the errors each day, then reviews them each morning. Another day he learned from his mistakes was starting off to be a good day as he was second in line for once. Then he noticed the flat tire. He went for his spare tube and realized he had the wrong one. He raced to an auto parts store with no success. Then the other pilots pitched in. One found a tube Rick could use. Another held an umbrella to block the sun while Rick worked on his ship. Charlie Spratt said if Rick got the tire fixed in time he could sneak in at the end of his group instead of going to the end of the line and having to fly alone the whole day.

Rick learned a lot from talking to and flying with other pilots. He had Dick Johnson, who's now in his upper 70s, in the line in front of him and got to talk with him. "I wish I had half his smarts". Another day a lady introduced herself to Rick and she turned out to be the first owner of his ship. Her husband is an engineer and designed the skid wheels on his ASW 19. "It's a big family," Rick said. "It's actually a big group of friends having some fun".

Dave Fanning hadn't been in a contest since the standard class nationals in 1998, and he thoroughly enjoyed this one. The terrain was forbidding and not as scenic as Colorado flying, what with cap rock and oil fields below. "One day we went to Big Springs, Texas, a 100 mile first leg in desolate country." But there were airports you could land at, though some were remote. But after 7 days you start to get a feel for the area. "The terrain near Hobbs is featureless, but by the end of the contest you don't need a map."

It was a superb place for a contest. Dave enjoyed the camaraderie and the chance to be there with friends from our club. "Bob and JoAnn Didders run the place and are wonderful...The National Soaring Association had superb people... and Charlie Spratt is a national treasure." The runway was paved and had room for three gliders to land side by side. "Dave Leonard said if you do it right you never have to leave concrete".

There was a time when Dave thought he might have to land in a field, but usually he was able to keep an airport within gliding range. He remembers one day catching the last thermal with some others and starting a 30 mile glide back to Hobbs with just enough altitude. You hit a little lift, then a little sink, and hope there is no surprise big sink ahead. "It's a long, hard sit."

The opportunity for improvement is one of the things Dave likes about contests. "I learned a tremendous amount. I can't imagine a grander adventure...It's a physical, intellectual, and emotional challenge... You get into a rhythm, a ritual, almost a choreography." This preparation routine hopefully keeps things running smoothly so that the only variable is the flight itself.

"To be able to do this, to play this game with these people, is a tremendous experience for me...I go to these things, to play at this level, because I'm fortunate enough to be able to."

Dave Leonard has had a lot of contest experience, including the national in Tonapa last year. Indeed, he comes from a flying family, and he had two brothers fly in the contest at Hobbs. He enjoys both nationals and regionals, though they are somewhat different. For example, at the nationals there were about 60 sailplanes divided into two groups sometimes in the same gaggle waiting for the contest to begin. At Hobbs there were maybe 15 people in his class, and the start gate was 5 miles wide, so it was much less crowded. Thermalling with a lot of planes requires a lot of concentration, but sometimes at contests things can be even more demanding because there can be an altitude limit before the start gate is open, so pilots are pulling spoilers, lowering landing gear, zooming through the center of the thermal and in and out of thermal, anything to try to keep from getting too high.

This was one of the best contests for Dave in terms of consistently good weather, but here were no real strong days, about 7,000 AGL being about the highest he ever got. He had some moments where he got low and thought about the fact that, though there are landable spots in three directions from the airfield, some areas are very remote with no roads for miles.

At the end of the day the scores are posted and pilots gather around and hear about people's flights over a beer or coke. For Dave, this is a chance to learn from other pilots and an opportunity to get to know them as people instead of just the competitor in the other sailplane. Dave commented on what it is that enables some pilots to fairly consistently do better than others. "In general it works out that they're able to find the better lift when they need it. Usually for me my speed gets killed when I end up getting low and end up having to take a thermal I don't really want to take; not as strong as I want."

One thing Dave wasn't able to use this year was the, shall we say, eerie strategy he used at the contest at Owl Canyon a while back. He had cut off most of his ear lobe in a non flying accident with a car door. Flying with a painful, dangling earlobe made him mad, and this somehow inspired him to fly faster. Fortunately, Karen Davis was at the contest as an observer and, thanks to her medical training, she was able to super glue Dave's earlobe back on over dinner that evening.

Perhaps it was this skill that inspired Dave Fanning to invite Karen to crew for him this year. Karen thoroughly enjoyed her first crewing experience. She even wrote a piece about her experience in October issue of Soaring.

She helped Dave get everything ready, including things such as making sure there was enough food and water, and had her own check list to double check Dave's. She would familiarize herself with what the task was for the day and where the task might take her pilot "so if you have to go retrieve him you have a clue where the heck you're going."

There was a radio for crew but contest rules discourage contact with the pilot so crew can't give information that might give an unfair advantage. If the pilot feels he is close to a land out he can contact people at the gate or another pilot. So Karen needed to stay fairly close to the radio in case landed out and needed to give her information such as GPS coordinates.

While waiting she chatted with other crew members or read a book, and tried not to think about how hot it was surrounded by mostly pavement in 106 degree weather.

She also enjoyed the fellowship at cookouts, as well as exploring the few restaurants in the area. She didn't need to super glue any ear lobes at this contest, though the wife of a pilot did cut her hand and, since Karen didn't have any medical equipment with her, she had to take her to the emergency room for stitches. Karen would love to crew at another contest; the one thing she'll do differently though is make sure next time she has her sutures with her.



Dave and Karen at Kelly

Soaring Safari 2000 (part 1) by Dan Marotta and Claudio Abreu

Dan: It was the third and, to date, most successful soaring safari to launch out of Black Forest in Colorado. I had flown in two previous safaris in my LS-6a with my former partner and neither one could compare to this one.

The first safari was in 1995 and began and ended by trailer; the weather being so poor that we towed to Taos, NM, flew two outbound trips, trailered to Parowan, UT, flew the remainder of the week, and trailered back to Colorado. The second attempt was in 1998 and, although beginning by air tow at Black Forest, again the weather was so poor that the first leg only made it to Pueblo. It was then another trailer ride to Taos and only two more decent flying days.

The year 2000 was different. Again there was only one glider going on the safari but what was different this time was the weather and the use of Claudio's excellent self-launching ASW-24E, "CT". Since it was Claudio's glider and, indeed his tow vehicle as well, I deferred the first flight to him. Claudio is from Brazil and, having never flown over the territories that I had in mind, we agreed that I would plan the flights. I should mention that Charlie Tango is equipped entirely with metric instrumentation (quite a learning experience for me!), therefore the flight references are primarily metric.

Claudio: When my friend Dan Marotta suggested that we should go on a gliding Safari, I was very interested and intrigued. Since I relocated from Brazil to Denver, five years ago, my flights in this area have been sort of shy, venturing not much beyond the "first step" to the west from our base of operations at Black Forest Soaring Society - Kelly Airpark, southeast of Denver. This was a great opportunity for seeing more of this beautiful region and sharing experiences with a fully seasoned pilot and friend like Dan Marotta.

My glider, an ASW24E, was imported in Brazil back in 1992 and moved to Colorado with our households. Operating in much lower ground altitudes (around 3,500ft.) it was OK to self-launch with the small engine of only 24 HP. Taking off from Kelly runway (7,050 ft.), with above standard temperatures has been an adrenaline pumping experience, so far successful.

Day One, 1 July

Dan: I suggested to Claudio that he fly from Black Forest to Taos, NM, about 280 km (170 sm). After preparing the glider, trailer, and vehicle, we positioned Charlie Tango for takeoff and got him airborne. As I completed hooking up the trailer and turned on the radio I discovered Claudio to be over Pike's Peak already (35 NM). In a hurry, I left the field and headed south along the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains. Since Claudio was so far ahead already, I used Clay Thomas in his LS-3 as a relay station. We learned upon our return that Clay had landed out, but that's another story...

Radio communications were not the best due to the mountainous terrain and to the fact that the base station was a Dittel case with attached whip antenna mounted directly to the box. I had brought along a magnetic mount antenna but needed an adapter that I planned to pick up at the first Radio Shack we found along the route.

We were out of contact for a couple of hours as I crossed La Veta pass and entered the San Luis Valley. Once in the valley, other gliders closer to me were able to relay messages to Charlie Tango and I found that I gained on him while he was struggling near the Great Sand Dunes National Monument.

Claudio: I selected to take a tow and be on my way to Taos NM from BFSS as soon as possible. Last moment "must dos" always steal some precious minutes that otherwise should be used in flight. Therefore, I took the tow without going through the standard recommended procedure of starting the engine on the ground. If I did, it would require even longer delay in order to let the engine cool down before stowing it into the fuselage.

After the release, I contacted strong lift, climbed and headed southwest to the US Air Force Academy area on the foothills of the Front Range. Again climbing to clear Pikes Peak (14,110ft.) I decided to go around it to the west, flying over Cripple Creek. Radio contact with Dan: He informed me that he was leaving the gliderport and heading south.

Passing Pikes Peak with terrain sloping down to south I could see Canyon City with the Wet Mountains in the background. So far the sequence of clouds has been good but some Virga could be seen to the west. Pushing further ahead, I tried to get as high as possible before crossing the Wet Valley. Relaying by our club pal, Clay Thomas, I kept in contact with Dan who was passing Colorado Springs on his way to La Veta pass.

Dodging some Virga, I finally reached the east slope of the Sangre de Cristo Range in cloudy sky conditions. At this point I was concerned about my bleeding altitude and was looking for any available lift. Wandering along the Sangres, still flying south, I kept an eye at the now seeming reachable runway at Westcliffe. At this moment I had to make a quick decision: either to fly back to Westcliffe and land there, or deploy my "Iron Thermal". I opted to do the latter. We were not competing – this was a for fun flight. If I landed at West Cliff, Dan would take several hours to drive up the valley and rescue me. Let's do it: master switch on, gas cock open, press the engine deploy button, hold tight the propeller hand brake cord so the propeller does not start wind milling before fully out. Out came the engine with the familiar air rush noise and fully upright horn sound.

Now lets start it. Gas pump on, start. What seemed eternity of time with propeller turning by starter and wind action, after trying some combination of gas/choke levers, finally the engine came to life. Now be calm. Let's wait a minute in low power until the cylinder temperature builds up. Full throttle and to find lift.

At this time Clay was repeatedly trying to communicate with me, asking for my position to relay to Dan. I explained that I was struggling to gain altitude. Flying next and below the peaks I found the "Alleluia Thermal". Now quickly climbing, stopped the engine, waited to cool down, retracted it – back to the blessing of silent flight. The altitude was now enough to go across the Sangres and reach the sunny west slope.

Beyond I could see the San Luis Valley with its incredible number of irrigation circles. Virga was still visible in many areas to the West, so I kept close to the mountains,

now flying parallel to the range, approaching the Sand Dunes National Monument. I was passing abeam and below Blanca Peak (14,345ft) with reverence. The weather started to improve, with shiny flat bottom clouds. Pushing further south, I had to closely monitor my navigation and position, not difficult because of the mountains to my left, the Rio Grande and the parallel highway and railroad. Get high, and stay high.

Dan was back in radio contact again, having entered the valley. I could now see the area around Taos as visibility was back to normal (100 Km +)! I quickly approached the Taos area with its green patch and the nearby Rio Grande gorge and high bridge. I stayed high in order to wait for Dan to arrive and to be present for landing.

Wandering around I took some pictures of the gorge, bridge and city. Time to land; Dan informed me that wind was across runway gusting at 34kt, slightly favoring approach from the southwest. A bumpy approach and somehow I could not receive answers to my transmissions. Using extra speed I made the final faster than usual to keep control over gusty winds. To my horror I heard that another airplane was approaching in opposite direction! I radioed the fact that I was a glider, landing to east, very short final. Charlie Tango floated quite a length in ground effect, finally touching down when I saw the huge yellow Ag plane coming in my direction. I tried to maneuver out of the runway when he turned south without landing. I finally realized that in my bumpy approach I have inadvertently tripped the radio switch from microphone to headset, disabling the radio microphone in the process. I could hear their transmissions but they could not hear me!

Dan: Upon arrival at Taos, I checked in with the FBO and got the current winds, a direct cross wind at 27 gusting to 34 knots, and the Unicom frequency. I radioed the information to Claudio but in response heard only the hiss of the radio carrier. Knowing that Claudio was close but not exactly where and seeing a powered aircraft enter the pattern, I radioed a warning about other traffic. I put down the microphone and turned around to see Claudio rolling to a stop, struggling to keep the glider on the runway. Before he could open the canopy, a water bomber that had been fighting a local fire went around from the flare in the opposite direction.

Claudio: Dan helped to move the glider to a safe spot and we proceeded to put the bird in the trailer, ending a day of great flying and big emotions. The Ag plane pilot came to us apologizing and explaining that he normally lands to the south because of the reversing propeller push capability. No hard feelings since the incident ended without consequences.

Dan: Of course the airport manager then had to investigate the “near miss”, the government ground agent for the water bomber had to collect information to report the “near miss”, and the pilot came over to admire the glider and to apologize for flying so close before going around. It turned out that Claudio had inadvertently bumped the “Mask/Microphone” switch on the panel disconnecting the boom mic from the radio. He was hearing my transmissions but was not getting out himself.

The first choice of motels was full and the one they recommended sounded like quite a loser but we were pleasantly surprised by the Sun God Motel in Taos. We then had a fine Mexican dinner at a restaurant within walking distance, hit Baskin Robbins for dessert, and turned in for the night.