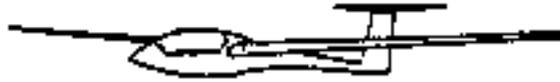


AIRWORTHY



Newsletter of the Black Forest Soaring Society - Summer 2004

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Solo by Matthew Curry

The propeller of the tow plane was humming and I was back in my glider all strapped in. It had been a chilly morning and with the brisk, cold air on my hands and face made it seem even cooler. The sun was just over the horizon and, although it was still early, I was ready to solo.

I had been taking glider lessons for about four months and it was now in the heart of December and I was going to solo. That morning when I woke up I did not know that I would solo. I would find that out later. I had driven up to the airpark with my family and started to pre-flight, or inspect, the Blanik L-23, which was the type of glider I was going to be flying. My instructor came and we towed the glider to the runway.

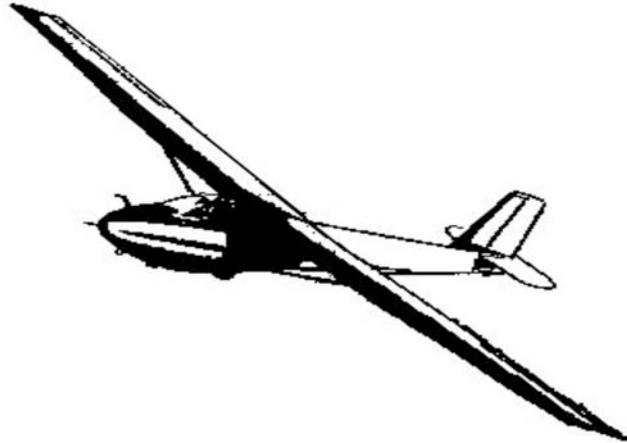
Once at the runway my instructor and I got in the aircraft, hooked up to the tow plane and we were off. We went up to 10,000 feet. After releasing from the tow plane I worked on turns and a couple of stalls. Once my instructor and I had landed the two of us hauled the glider back to the other end of the runway and took off again. This time we took a tow to 8,500 feet and I did a couple of turns and then entered the pattern and landed. After we had cleared the runway my instructor told me he was happy with my performance and wanted me to solo. Hearing this I got a tingly feeling through my body, one of excitement and joy. So, once again, we towed the glider to the north end of the runway and prepared for takeoff.

During this flight I would have no one to fix my mistakes, or help me if I needed it, so that made me slightly nervous and a little bit scared. After getting secured in my seat I closed the canopy. I gave the thumbs-up for the ground crew to level my wings, then I wagged the rudder and off I went, all alone into the sky. While being towed up to 10,000 feet my hand grasped the stick tightly and I was extremely tense. The sky was clear except for some light hazy clouds above me and the ground below me was white from the snow with brown patches where the snow had disappeared into the ground.

I glanced at my altimeter and saw that I was approaching 10,000 feet and readied myself for release. I pulled the release knob and quickly made a clearing turn to the right. Almost directly after detaching from the tow rope my tense hand relaxed and was now comfortably controlling the aircraft. I started to do some turns and then I thought to myself, "Wow, I am actually up here all alone 3,000 feet above the earth! How cool is that?" I looked down at the ground and remembered the bad landings I had had, and the bad tows I had previously made. Now I was up in this glider flying all by myself, doing the best I had ever done! Once I realized that, I was pumped with adrenaline and excitement.

I glanced at the altimeter and saw the glider was at 8,000 feet above sea level which told me I was only 1,000 feet above the ground. That meant it was time for me to land and for my fun to stop for now, but there would be another day. I came down and landed perfectly on the runway and pulled off onto the taxiway where I got out of the aircraft and closed the canopy.

Well, I had done it! I soloed in a glider and was ready to do it again and again! I felt good about myself and was glad of the opportunity that I had. My family and instructor congratulated me and we put the glider inside the hangar before going inside to get warm. It had been an amazing morning!



A Day Out East by Clay Thomas

Every year, about mid July, we get a day where the only place to go is east. Dave Fanning said it best, "Flying at Kelly is like flying at Hobbs, New Mexico and Parowan, Utah. Go east and you have the flats of Hobbs, go west and you have the mountains, like Parowan."

This day, six pilots set out. Rick Culbertson was first up and off towards Calhan. After all the recent torrential rains, the eastern plains looked like a flattened Ireland. Cloud streets were forming and everyone else headed in the general direction of Calhan. From there a beautiful street took us northeast and over dryer ground. Conditions got better and Rick pushed on to Last Chance. Somehow that does not sound like a good place to fly to!

The best part of the day was that we were all able to communicate with each other and pass on important information. When I heard Raul Boerner getting low near Limon I recalled a day last summer when Dave Leonard showed me how the truck stop at Limon always produced a good thermal. After relaying that little tidbit of information, Raul was back up to 10,000 feet in no time. Meanwhile Tom Serkowski had reached Siebert and was headed south. Dave Fanning made his first flight to Limon and back. Soon we were all thinking about getting home. Lee Kuhlke warned of cloud shadow creeping in at Calhan. It looked like the last 30 miles would be tough. Rick spotted a thermal at Simla and I snuck in under him. Our final glides were a bit of a nail biter but the GPS kept saying I would make it back with 400 feet to spare. I love technology when it works! I am sure there will be some more "easterly" days this summer and you can bet someone from the club will make it to Kansas and back.

Owl Canyon Soaring Competition: My first, sort of. by Raul Boerner

The experienced pilots in our club had been talking with each other about a contest at a place called Owl Canyon; it is near Fort Collins. Being a relatively new cross-country pilot made me to discount this activity. But as we approached the date, I asked Rick Culbertson about details. He wasted no time in saying that I should participate. After all, this event was designed for the experienced as well as first-timers.

My early thought was about a contest identification number for the plane. This is a two or three digit identifier placed under one wing and on the tail. The SSA website (Contests) outlines the rules about contest numbers. I wanted DM (short for Deutsch Mark) but it was already registered to someone else. The Sponsor of the contest told me he would come up with something. I ended up with a roll of black electrical tape to place XX on the vertical stabilizer.

With a look of panic, Karen Serkowski asked if I was bringing a crew. Without my own helper, she would have to assist in assembling, and possibly retrieving not only her husband, but Dave Leonard, Rick Culberston, and me. She had reason to be afraid, very afraid. So I convinced my teen son to come with me; actually, it was not hard to do. Unfortunately, he was later disappointed when Britney Spears could not show up.

The drive to Fort Collins was easy. On day-one, we registered and paid our fees. Then we attended a pilot meeting to learn the rules. For three of us, there was much to take in since this was our first contest. We didn't even know what start cylinder was. However, the experienced pilots were kind and helped us along. The weather briefing was educational; it taught me about what to look for during my personal flying days.

While waiting for the winds to calm down, we all drove into town for lunch. It was fun to sit at the very long table and listen to the other pilots. When we returned to the field, the wind was still howling; we canceled day-one. Regardless, we three new guys learned a bunch.

Most of the competitors drove to their homes for the night. Rick Culberston, my son, and I stayed at the Owl Canyon clubhouse. We brought food and sleeping bags. Their club has two rooms with beds. We used them. That night, we played guitar and visited. Then it was sleepy time.

Day-two brought more winds. Contest Director Dave Leonard explained to us that the weather was outside of his parameters for safe flying and competition. Day-two was canceled.

Day-three was the same: too much wind. Although one plane launched to check things out, it returned shortly due to lack of lift. So at noon, the three-day event was over. Although disappointed, I left eager to try future contests.

I learned not to worry about not having a contest number. I learned that other pilots have also never competed, and that any kind of glider works. I learned more about weather. I learned how to use the Internet to find waypoints and suitable airports and ranch fields for landing out [see part 2. I learned that experienced pilots are willing to help newer pilots. I learned that Rick's wife bought him a really nice guitar. I learned how other clubs do things differently, and that the way we make weak links is not the only way to make them. Finally, I learned not to be afraid of competing.

Downloading Turnpoints

There are several easy ways to view or download waypoints (also called turnpoints). One way is to go to the SSA website and follow the Links. Another way is to go directly to the website containing the turnpoints. There are other ways, too.

Although a soaring-type computer program is not required, the presentation on your home computer is nicer with one. I use See You only because the big boys in our club like it. These programs allow you to print a map of the area with nearby airports and land-out points. Without such a program, all you would have to do is manually mark your sectional chart with the coordinates provided for the turnpoints.

Follow this path to access turnpoints via SSA:

www.ssa.org
Contests
Turnpoints
acro.harvard.edu/SOARING/JL/TP
North America
Colorado
Kelly Within 100 SM

Now, choose what you wish such as Control Points, Files formatted for downloading and importing into your programs (such as See You), etc. Downloading instructions are available on the web page.

The other path to access turnpoints is to go directly to <http://acro.harvard.edu/SOARING> and then take it from there.

Knowing good landing spots is key to branching out on cross-country flights. Here is a tip that was given to me that proved to be very helpful: Make your first land-out intentional and at some nearby field you are familiar with.

You will learn many things in a safe way. I chose Meadow Lake near Colorado Springs. Among many other lessons, I learned that a fully charged cell phone is good because a pay phone may not be available. I also learned to carry coins for the pay phone. I learned to watch out for runway lights. I learned that Sunday evenings are not as good as Sunday afternoons when it comes to finding someone at Meadow Lake to

help pull the plane off the runway. I learned to carry a road map in my plane and a matching one in my car. I learned to leave my trailer hooked to my car in combat readiness to make it less unpleasant for someone to drive my car to save me. I also learned not to be so afraid of cross-country flights and of landing out.



Raul ready for another day of cross country.

Downwind Dash by Bill Howe

On September 18 the club brought back to life the old tradition of the Downwind Dash. Seven pilots found crew people to follow them as they heading with the wind behind them, in this case more or less towards the east. The weather was good for this event if you weren't in the wrong place at the wrong time. Two pilots, Clay Thomas and Jens Aarnaes, had some bad luck and landed out at nearby Calhan airport, but five pilots made it all the way to Kansas.

There was a 25 mile bonus for landing at an airport and most took advantage of this except Rick Culbertson, who pushed on and on and landed in Park, Kansas in a farmers field just beyond a crop of Malo. About four locals wandered over to chat with Rick and his crew person, Bill Howe. Just as the sun was setting they had the plane disassembled and drove off to a Kansas steak house. One pound of prime rib and a potato. They didn't bother cluttering the plate with a vegetable. After all the handicap math was done, Rick came in third place for the race.

Ahead of Rick was Tom Serkowski in his ASH 26E motor glider, with his wife and crew person, Karen, following behind. They were a great help to Rick and crew, helping relay messages, and with Karen's help actually were able to give Bill an exact freeway exit to take to find Rick's ASW 19. Tom landed in Hayes, Kansas and he and his wife decided to stay the night and come back to Colorado in the morning. After the dust settled on the calculator, Tom got second place in the race.

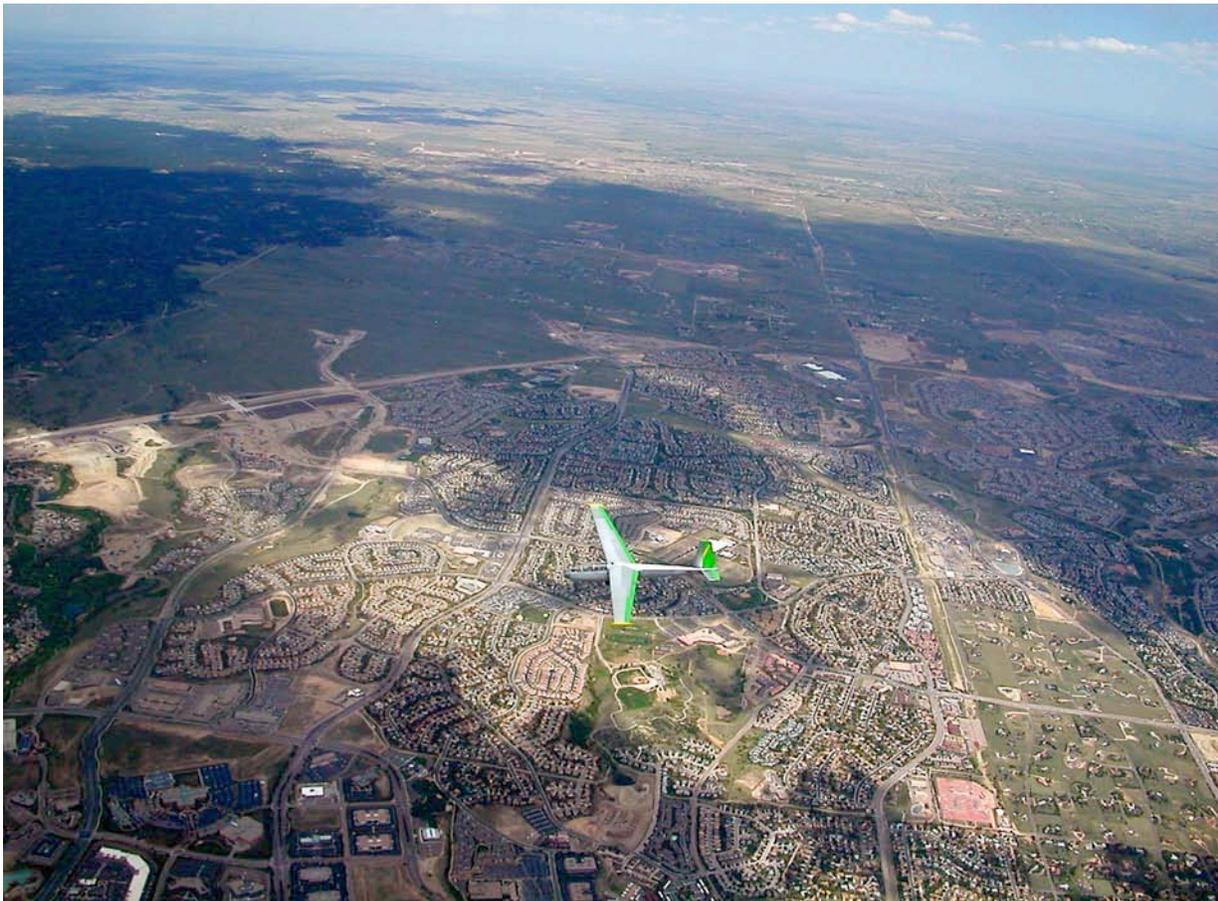
Chugging along behind the ASW19 and ASH26-E were Rick Ranson (Sky Farmer) and Quay Snyder in Rick's L-13. Rick was a newly licensed pilot and neither he nor Quay had any cross country experience to speak of. It was fun to hear the chatter between all of the pilots and their crew, especially the excited chatter between Rick and Quay and their crew person, Jim Pilkington (just back from a few months of living on his sailboat). They did not have some of the fancy equipment the other ships had but they managed to get by using old fashioned pilotage skills. It took them a while to get to Limon, Colorado, and then they decided to keep going, at which point they really felt like they'd cut the apron strings.

They landed in Colby, Kansas, but there was a strong wind on the ground. Fortunately the natives were friendly and allowed them to store the plane in a hangar. The pilots managed to contact two other club members, Dave Fanning and Matt Hoover, who had landed in Goodland, Kansas, and they all met in Goodland for dinner. A few days later Jim drove back and got the plane. We were all happy that after adjusting for the handicap, Rick and Quay got first place in the race.

This event was so much fun, thanks to many volunteers who came out to help, that there is talk of doing this every year like the club used to. Some are suggesting we do it more than once a year. This crew member is thinking next time he wants to be one of those crossing the Kansas border in the air.



First time crewer finds his pilot in a Kansas farmer's field.



First place winner John Deer (also known as L-13).

You're Not Here by Bill Howe

In the summer of 2002 I had a chance to attend my first cross country camp. I spent two weeks at Air Sailing in Nevada improving my thermalling and cross country skills. Two student's were teamed up with an instructor and the three planes kept in touch via radio. Our instructor hoped to take us to the place where we were too low and too far away to get back to our home base. The idea was to learn to shift "home" to a new airport. I finally did this while flying back from the Pond Peak area. My instructor had been coaxing me beyond where I'd have turned back if I were on my own. I had almost enough to get back if I didn't have any sink, but not quite.

My instructor was nearby and told me to look for lift and plan on landing at the nearby dried lake if need be. The dried lake was on an Indian reservation. I'd heard stories about landing on the Indian reservation. Rich white men with expensive toys were liable to get into some trouble. I was really hoping for lift.

I found the lift I needed, and later talked to my instructor about the experience. "What do you think the Indians would have done to me if I'd landed out" I asked? I'd heard storied from the locals and imagined endless paper work, fines, tar and feathering.

It's too bad I didn't land out, I later thought. It would have made a great modern cowboys and Indians story, for my instructor said "I had been in contact with Air Sailing tow pilots on another frequency. If you had to land out I was going to land out with you. The tow pilots were ready to race over the mountain and try to retrieve us before the Indians had time to get to us."

Well, I returned to Colorado ready to put some of my new found confidence to the test. I decided to play it safe though and improve my thermalling and landing skills before I ventured too far from the plains into the unknown territory of the Rockies. But then a day came late in the season when it looked like I might make Devil's Head 25 miles from my home airport at Kelly and about 10 miles into the mountains. I went for it. After all, I had Perry Park, a private landing strip, between me and Kelly.

I can't describe the excitement of finally flying over the Colorado foothills, though the air seemed rough and I realized I was in an unknown environment. I didn't have enough altitude to safely make it back to Kelly but I had plenty to reach Perry Park at the base of the foothills, so I pushed on. Finally my GPS said I was 25 miles from home. A personal record. The trails of Devil's Head were visible below me.

Now to get back to Kelly. I got back to the edge of the foothills near Perry but could not get enough altitude for a final glide to Kelly. After searching for lift for a while I decided to travel along the foothills to see if conditions were better to the south. I found lift but I couldn't take it high enough. Then I saw Rampart's Reservoir in the distance. It was like a magnet. I really wanted to fly over that body of water. I could always come back towards Perry as the lift was keeping me at a decent altitude. And there was always the Air Force Academy near the Reservoir if need be.

I swooped over the edge of the water. But my mind kept saying “time to get back” so I didn’t play there too long. I still wasn’t finding any great lift, but there were a lot of good looking cumulus clouds out on the plains. I decided to head out there where I would likely find the lift I needed.

As I left the last bumps behind me I started hitting pretty strong sink. I increased my speed. That dial was going the wrong way. Where was that Academy airport anyway. I’d better start locating it since it was fast becoming my new “home” field. I remembered flying over Calhan during a previous season and not being sure which scratch on the ground was the landing strip. Would I be able to tell where to land from way up here.? Then I saw a nice long dark strip with numbers written on each side and gave a sigh of relief; I was flying right over the Air Force academy strip.

I was also much lower than I’d hoped to be when I reached the plains. I’d have to search for lift fairly close by. I found little bubbles but I could not do much with them except stay at about the same altitude. I decided I’d better inform the Air Force of my presence and call Kelly to tell any club members who might be listening that there was a chance I would land out.

This is when I learned a lesson. Be prepared. I had changed some automatic radio settings for my Nevada trip and had reprogrammed some of them when I got back to Colorado, but had neglected to put in the Academy. I’d have to switch to automatic on my radio and get out my map to look up the Air Force’s frequency. All this at a time when I should have been concentrating only on thermalling. And how do you switch back to auto on this darn radio? Don’t get stressed. Watch your speed.

“Russia, we can’t see you” the Air Force controllers said after I’d contacted them. “Do you see two of our gliders that are up?”

“No. I’m about two miles east of your runway at eight thousand feet. I may have to land on your runway.”

They described the runway I should use, a grass strip. Trouble is, nothing looks the same from the air. I could not tell where the grass strip was.

“58 Romeo, I’ll try and stay up in case you land out. If you do I’ll come and get you.” The voice of a fellow club member was most comforting. I was lucky. Horst had just come back from a cross country himself and almost landed out. He had just switched to my frequency and heard my radio call.

I called the Air Force Academy again. “This is the Russia sailplane, 58 Romeo again. I’m at seven thousand feet and have to land. I can’t find the grass strip so am landing on your main runway. “

t was an unfamiliar strip, but my concentration was sharp. I landed right on the

beginning of the runway and came to a stop before it ended, right by a little dirt road; a good place to be to get my glider off of the busy runway quickly. A voice broke the silence.

“Russia, are you still in the air.”

“No. I’ve landed”.

“Well, you’re not here.”

I looked around. I felt like I was here. “Maybe he’s at Colorado Springs East,” said a voice in the background.

“I’m sure I’m not way over there. I saw the Academy chapel as I flew over the area.”

Finally someone said. “Maybe he’s at Aardvark”. And that’s where I was. A little touch and go practice strip belonging to the Academy about four miles north of their main runway. I called Horst. I hoped he knew where I was.

I was in luck. Horst was a retired Airforce officer. “I know Aardvark. I’ll land and be there as soon as I can.”

“Ok. My car keys are in the ashtray.” I had my trailer ready for a retrieve as was my recent habit, a helpful recommendation from a club member.

I pulled my plane off of the not so busy runway. I could see interstate 25 in the distance but I felt like I’d landed in the wilderness. There was nothing around. No buildings or people. I waiting under a small tree as it was hot. I had just run out of water and I was thirsty. Another lesson; have a better land out kit. Another lesson I did not have to learn the hard way was to have plenty of radio battery power. My battery went dead just after I talked to Horst.

Even though I was thirsty, it felt good to be alone thinking about my flight, watching a train go by in the distance. After over an hour I decided to walked along the dirt road, just for something to do. I passed a sign saying I was subject to being searched for being on government property. I remembered club members saying that these days it’s best not to land out at the Academy.

Finally, after two hours, I saw a jeep coming. That wouldn’t be Horst. Maybe it was the “search” party. But Horst was not far behind his jeep escort. The cadet in the jeep was friendly. “You been here two hours? Wow, that’s too bad.”

Horst’s son in law was with him and we got my Russia apart in no time. When we got back to Kelly, Jim Pilkington congratulated me on my first land out. I felt disappointed about not having the skills to make it back, but I also felt a little proud of being a member of the society of pilots who have landed out. Mostly I felt thirsty though, and I guzzled a gator aid as soon as I could get to the club house.