

The Rainier Paragliding Club Newsletter

Serving the Paragliding Community of Western Washington

www.rainierparaglidingclub.org

February 2008

The Thermal Column

Flying is the second greatest thrill known to man!



In This Issue:

Ecuador: 2008
A Trip to the Beach
This Place is BIG!

by George Sturtevant
by Wayne Maxwell
by Jim Baldo

Page 2
Page 3
Page 4

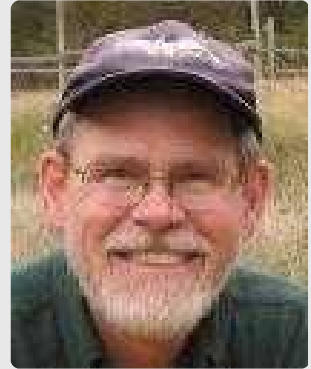
On the RFC Web Site: Calendar & Membership Form

"It's Not A Tour; It's An Adventure": Ecuador 2008

by George Sturtevant

No matter how much I study the guidebook and maps before we go, I can't seem to get a picture in my mind of Ecuador. The landing approach to Quito makes it real. We're at something like 9300 ft and coming in low and fast right over the city, which is tucked into a valley between tall volcanoes and other high peaks.

The next day, driving out of the city, the route is all steep gorges and high ridges. The 13,000 (really! I didn't add an extra zero) ft launch we go to first is perfect – well, except for the farmer far below who doesn't want us to use his land for our LZ. Maybe we can come back another day.



Up around Ibarra paragliding is apparently a tourist attraction. I haven't seen so many official government road sign for launches since Lakeview. Unfortunately, the take offs all seem to face west and the weather pattern this week is out of the east. The 10,400 ft launch is socked in and, when it's not, the wind is over the back. I pull up my wing on the back side and a startled burro brays loudly enough to startle me. After a couple of tries, we find that that the lower takeoff (9300 ft) is launchable and we all get a flight landing on the shores of Lago Yahuarcocha where indigenous people are cutting reed for their totora mats.



We try an early start for a launch high above Rio Chota but get bogged down as the roads change from paved to cobblestone to mud wallows. The launch is in a persistent cloud and when it breaks we can see dust devils breaking off the fields far below – it's too late.



Back near Ibarra conditions have improved and we get two flights in a day, soaring over the almost-obscured pyramid ruins on the plateau below. Then it's on to an upscale hot spring resort where we luxuriate in hot pools and cold river water.

The trip to the coast is long but scenic as we go from the 13,000 ft Papallacta Pass, down through the cloud forests of the interior and along the white sand beaches. Flying here is easy – long ridges and steady winds provide lift to paraglider and frigate bird alike. Gaps in the ridge provide challenge – can some of us make it back to the Hosteria Canoa, our hotel? The answer is “yes, if you believe”.



When the weather turns rainy at road to launch probably likewise. We wait it out instead, walking the beach hoping to turn the corner and find the storied bat cave. The tide is too high. Later we swim in the breaking waves; the water is warm! Air horniness strikes in the late afternoon and some of us carry our gear up to launch even for the probable 2-minute sledder. Surprisingly, conditions are better than expected and we get another three-quarters of an hour of soaring.

Rain in the morning convinces us to move on to our final flying destination. Crucita is not far as the buzzard flies but takes most of the day what with disrupted ferry schedules and roads that take the path of least resistance through the dry coastal forest. The next day we're on launch early and wait eagerly for the velocity to increase. The impatient ones launch early, fly to the beach, and get quick rides back to launch. Finally it's on and we head south skimming the bluffs, rising above the "stilt house", soaring The Spoon. Toplanding is easy with such a large launch area and there is a restaurant right there. A few of us press against the southerly trend and reach the far end of the ridge, at the very last getting low single digits on our GPS speedometers. The downwind leg back is exhilarating but we can see windlines and whitecaps forming. To land on the beach in front of the hotel requires penetrating out over the surf then carefully crabbing back to the shore, keeping in mind the powerlines on both sides of the waterfront Malecon.

Packing up our wings, we're glad we've come to Ecuador. It's not just the flying, it's the adventure of new food, haggling at the Otavalo market, climbing up inside the Basilica and walking the Balrog bridge above the nave, and, of course, parabonding with our fellow adventurers.



Contact info: Kevin Lee, Ashland, OR
<thermaltracker.com/Ecuador.htm>

A ride to the beach in Santa Barbara.

by Wayne Maxwell

Five or six years ago, I flew to the beach with Chad Bastian. At that time, you had to land way down at the east end of town. Guess what? The rules have changed and now you can land on the beach right in town, right where we park the moho! Yeah! Is that cool or what??



These new rules have been in effect since sometime last year, so since then, no matter how much I wanted to and no matter how much I tried, I've been unable to get enough altitude to

safely commit for the flight to the beach.

Today I'm on launch with 14 to 16 other pilots with clear blue skies and gentle 3/5 mph cycles coming up launch. Right off launch I catch a thermal and get 200/300 feet over. This is enough to make the transition to the "Thermal Factory." I arrive with enough altitude to start working it and climb my way to a little above four grand. Repeated attempts to go higher convince me that this is where the lift tops out. The rule of thumb is that if you're at 4000 msl at the thermal factory, you have enough altitude to make it to the beach. I've made it to 4K here before but always piddled away my altitude trying to get higher. "Not this time!!" I turn and go on glide for the beach.

I arrived at the antenna farm at 3700 ft - 200 over what's needed for the final glide to the beach. I continue my glide with a 3/4 mph tail wind. I like that!

Next way point is the Parma lz where I arrive at 2900 ft. I've now increased my safety margin to 400 ft as 2500 feet is needed from here. I continue onward, looking at where the top of the palm trees intersect the surf line. I'm beginning to feel nervous as I'm uncertain if the angle is improving.

Wuss Wayne decides to push on a little further while keeping Parma within glide. I've put off the decision as long as possible. I'm now just seconds to the point of no return. The palm/surf angle still doesn't look like it's improving. Butterflies are rising in my chest. A choice has to be made. "Heck!" I rationalize, "everybody knows I can't see anyway." And now it's too late. Parma is out of reach. After a few more anxious minutes I can see that I've have it. My tensions evaporate and now I can relax and enjoy the rest of the flight.

"Wow! What a view."

Before long I'm over the beach at 900 ft. My thoughts are of performing a SAT but I realize if I blow it, it could spell trouble for the local club. Now is not the time to ruin a great flight and experience.

After a nice landing I kite over to the moho, drop my glider in the grass, and get a cold beer for myself and the other pilots packing up.

Wow! Double wow!!



Th is Place is Big!

by Jim Baldo



What do the following mountains have in common: Mount Whitney, Mount Williamson, North Palisade, Middle Palisade, Mount Sill, Mount Russell, Split Mountain, Mount

Langley, Mount Tyndall, Crooks peak, Polonium Peak, and White Mountain.? If you said they are all over 14,000 feet tall then you are probably a mountaineer, a geologist, or just a very knowledgeable person. But if your answer was that they all surround the Owens Valley, then you're probably also a paragliding pilot.

Last fall, I had the opportunity to take a trip to Owens Valley, Ca. Although the flying was limited due to higher than ideal winds, the trip provided a great introduction to the flying available in this immense valley. Being guided

by Kari Kastle... priceless!

Surrounded by so many gigantic peaks, one quickly loses the ability to judge the enormity of this place. The valley itself is about 100 miles long by 10 to 15 miles wide. The east/west terrain also gently slopes up from the middle of the valley and quickly gets gobbled up by ridges that protrude like fingers on a hand from the bordering mountain ranges. What looks like a



mile can easily be five. As you can imagine, XC is the norm for this area, as are the booming summer thermals which generally make the area

unflyable during that season. But come fall, the thermals mellow (at least by some pilot's definition) and the place becomes more friendly to embark on your own XC adventures.

The launches we visited were mostly on the eastern slopes, these are the ones that benefit most by the afternoon sun. All were 4 wheel drive roads – and I do mean 4 wheel drive – making our local NW drive up mountain sites look like kindergartener's driver training roads. The barren terrain leaves the roads highly exposed thus adding a new dimension of fear to our sport. One particularly nasty switchback required the driver to stop and back up to correctly position their vehicle so it can make it around the hillside. Cut it short, and the outcropping rocks will slice your rear tire. Cut it too long, and you'll fall faster than a paraglider in a full stall without a reserve. People occasionally tell us that we are courageous to partake in this sport. To drive these sites, our drivers put our courage to shame. As I was told by my wife, “Yes, you know the end of your vehicle is hanging out over the cliff but you also trust that your front wheel is still on the road.”

The launches themselves were not particularly challenging as our local launches at Bremer, 2-Bear, and the Toutle, provide us adequate and

varied challenges to hone our launching techniques. In fact, the launch I found most intimidating was at the one at a site called the Chalk Bluffs. This site is just a 100 ft. tall ridge line in the valley that provides nothing but ridge lift. It was however, my first exposure at launching in higher (18 - 20 mph) winds. Since the launch is in the compression zone, once away from the ridge, the flying was routine as was the launch after that first time experience.

And, as I stated earlier, our flying was limited due to the higher winds which generally destroyed most of the thermals and had them tracking deep into the mountains. Two flights from Flynn's, two from Paiute, and two from the Chalk bluffs were all we had to fill our log books. Trips to Walt's launch and the Alabama

Hills provided no flights just great site introductions. The first day, twenty five miles out was the farthest anyone of our group flew. I only managed a somewhat disappointing thirteen.

But for Gail and I, the trip was a rousing success. Spending time together, with new and

old friends, was a reward in itself. OK! A hundred miler would have been nice but there's always next time – and there will be a next time.





Landing is the First!

2008 Club Officers

President	Kim Smith
Vice President	Mike McIntyre
Secretary	Kathy Smith
Treasurer	Kathy Smith
Director (Social)	Steve Messman
Director (Safety)	Doug Etter
Newsletter	Jim Baldo

Please contribute your stories and photos to the newsletter. Without your contributions, this newsletter can not exist.

The submission deadline for the next newsletter is March. 27th.

Please Share your Stories
and PHOTOS!

This month's photos submitted by: George Sturtevant, Chris King, Wayne Maxwell, Kim Smith, and Gail Baldo.