

# The Rainier Paragliding Club Newsletter

Serving the Paragliding Community of Western Washington

[www.rainierparaglidingclub.org](http://www.rainierparaglidingclub.org)

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## The Thermal Column

"I've looked at clouds from both sides now."



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On the RFC Web Site: [Calendar & Membership Form](#)

## Remember When

by Kim Smith



This next month (Feb) marks 14 years since my first paragliding flight. My first day of training is etched keenly in my mind. First, we practiced putting on a harness, hooking into the wing, and working on forward inflations. After a

lot of sweat, running, bunching, and folding the wing at the park we were off to a small hill.

The training hill was not far away and soon we were getting ready to get off the ground. I was both scared and excited and jumped at the chance to give it a try. With the help of two instructors I was able to launch and land without any trouble. WOW! I did it!

The flight was only about 5 feet off the ground and about 50 feet long but I was stoked! I wanted to do it over and over again until my legs finally gave out.

A couple of weeks later I finally got my chance at a high flight. I was really apprehensive as I waited for my turn to run off Tiger

Mountain. Soon I was next in line to launch, shaking like an aspen leaf in a 20 knot breeze. Over the sound of my pounding heart I heard, "You ready? Yes? On the count of three, OK? OK. One, two, three! Lean and run!" My paraglider came up perfectly and I was off. As the ground slipped below me I asked myself "what the heck am I doing!" But it was too late to change my mind and I was soon hundreds of feet above the valley floor. I logged four flights that day and paragliding has been my passion ever since. I have spent many, many hours studying weather and flying conditions, driving to launch, parawaiting, and of course, flying.

I was so hungry to learn that I read everything I could find about paragliding. I spent almost every waking moment on the hill, in the LZ, or

in the air during those first few years. I set myself some goals when I started and earned my "Class I" rating in the first month and my "Class II" within 6 months. That was before USHGA changed to the current P-1,2,3,4,5 system. Over the next few years, I worked on getting all the para-ratings along with my tandem and advanced instructor ratings. I think that my wife was about ready to kick me to the curb because of this sport.

Many times I wondered if I would survive long enough to become a proficient pilot. There were also a few times I almost quit paragliding. One time I 'neg spun' my glider twice during one flight and then almost had a midair collision with another pilot. For three days I was consumed with what had happened and what could have happened. I had been very lucky and decided to either figure out why it had happened or not fly again.



The following Friday I was on launch and waited until everyone was off the hill and sinking out. "Ok," I thought, "I can do this." I launched, flew straight out over the LZ and purposely neg spun my glider. In the

LZ one instructor advised me not to do that anymore but I wanted to know what my wing would do and how it would react in similar situations. Over the next month or two, I was spinning my glider everywhere. Instead of turning the glider I would spin it 180 degrees. I was happy, but I am sure everyone thought I would end up in the trees sooner or later.

I now felt invincible and thought I knew everything there was to know about paragliding. I think they call this feeling intermediate syndrome. Then I had a few close calls, some friends had flying mishaps, and I started wondering if I would be next. So I started taking it easy by not taking as many chances and leaving more room for safety. I sold my hot

wing for a safer one and discovered that I had a lot more to learn about paragliding.

Fourteen years have since come and gone, I have learned a lot from other pilots, from articles in magazines, from my own experiences, and especially from my students that have asked questions that I could not answer. I would like to thank them for making me study, think, and figure out the answers.

I am still here and my passion is still paragliding. My passion is not as strong as it

once was but is always renewed when I'm around newer P-2 pilots. It is good for us older pilots (yes, older) to mingle with newer pilots because each has something to share. The older pilots have their many experiences while the newer pilots share their enthusiasm while seeking to expand their paragliding knowledge.

Let's hope that we all have enough luck in our bag to last as pilots until we fill that bag with experience. Good luck during the coming season.

"In aviation you very rarely get your head bitten off by a tiger.  
You usually get nibbled to death by ducks."

## THE RPC SOCIAL SCENE

by Steve Messman

Here it is January of 2008 already. Where has the time gone? A better question even—when is the local weather going to be good enough to fly? I truly believe I have never had such a long dry spell. I'm thinking of getting out the Oasis for the first time I fly instead of using the Zoom.



That said, we have a projection for a couple of club activities that have been added to the club calendar. Speaking of calendars, be sure to check out the calendar on this month's web site. We are working on changing it. So far, we have a relatively good collection of events coming up during the year. Those include every event I can find that has anything to do with paragliding. As time goes on, I will change the calendar in a couple of ways. First the change will be a simple format change. Ultimately, I am looking for a way to make it interactive—if any of you have an idea on that, let it flow.

Parachute Repack:

***MARK YOUR CALENDARS!***



This will happen on the 16th of Feb. I will send out additional notices as well as driving instructions. That will all happen in the next week or two, if it has not already.

Ebey Camping Trip: Yes, we have this one scheduled also. It is on the social calendar for 18, 19 and 20 April 2008. Let's hope for a great year. I didn't fly at all last year. Had fun with the group as always, but it was the first time I ever went to Ebey and failed to fly. I am praying that this year is not a rerun—but when you're dealing with the great northwest, who knows?

Fort Flagler Trip: I am not scheduling this one, other than to put it on the calendar for May. It is very tentative. I am waiting to coordinate with some of the folks up north that spent time and



energy putting together the Fort Flagler flying packet. Flying there, by the way, is not a sure thing just yet—so more to follow.

That takes us into June and the annual Bremer camp out. Then, into July with all kinds of things like Lakeview, the Chelan Classic, the Rat Race, the Tiger Mountain fly in, and a potential trip to Goat Mountain. Tons o' stuff.

Check out the calendar at the web site for more info. You might even suggest dates, especially on those events that we have not firmly scheduled.

As always, if anyone has any other ideas, comments, suggestions, criticisms, you know how to reach me. I, and I am sure the rest of the club, would welcome anything constructive.

## An Eye opener at Santa Barbara

by Wayne Maxwell



I'm sitting at the Skyport launch, a little before noon, with 13 or 14 other bags. The cycles are sporadic, sometimes cross, ranging from 0 to 4 mph. The sky is clear, colored a perfect blue, and the temperature is warm,

so warm in fact that I see one guy launch in a tee shirt.

The rest of us are not in a hurry. Instead, we enjoy the scenic coastline below watching as the Ronald Reagan - a nuclear aircraft carrier - steams out after three days in port.

*Life is good!*

After an hour of waiting, the lure of the sky is too great and pilots begin to launch. For the most part they stay up, but don't get much above launch.

At about 2pm with only five other pilots remaining on launch, it's my turn to leave the ground. After being a launch potato up until now, I'm very warm in my light nylon shell and anxious to cool off with a nice afternoon flight.

Feeling much too cocky with my launch skills, I quickly pull up in a very light cycle. As I turn, I

can feel the wing is not pressurized but my confidence propels me forward. The edge of launch is close, too close to gain enough speed to fully load the wing from its current almost collapsed condition. As I clear the edge, I free fall (normal for such a poor launch) and barely miss the big rock just below launch. I'm flying, but below launch and feeling really bummed about my dumb ass display.

At Skyport, you need to find lift immediately or head out toward the LZ. As I'm already below launch, my chances for a soaring flight are worse than normal and I'm afraid to turn in the light lift I'm finding so it's off to the antenna farm for me.

Over the BIG power lines at about 100 feet

higher than the nearby antenna height, I finally find some light thermals allowing me to gain some altitude all the while wondering what it would be like to have a collapse and fall onto an antenna.

There's a gaggle of 8 or 9 of us hanging our here, mostly between

2000 and 2400 feet. The thermals are small, weak, and a little too infrequent for my liking, but I hold on for about 20 minutes. After a little "sinky" period, I decide to head for Parma, the LZ, before losing any more altitude. I can see that some pilots have already failed to reach Parma and have landed at Saint Marys, the nearest acceptable bailout.



Parma is on a bit of a slope, with some trees, bushes, and rocks scattered about. It also has a lip and steep fall to a ravine on the east side. In the normal wsw winds here, you don't want to get downwind of that lip, as there is a little waterfall type action that occurs there.



At one point on the way out, I noticed a little more west wind than normal. Now, looking toward the tree where the hangs breakdown, I notice the windsock is missing so shift my focus to a nearby streamer that's hanging limply. My thought is now of a no wind landing forgetting about my earlier west wind observation.

WRONG!! I land short of the lip dropping the wing into line hungry bush. As it turns out, the streamer is in the lee side wind shadow of that aforementioned tree.

The next pilot landing, is also fooled by the streamer and lands below the lip. Following him, a pilot takes a higher approach and hits the waterfall. What a sight!! He seems to be sinking two feet for every foot forward. He lands only inches from the lip.

Reviewing my flight provides me some good safety tips.

- Always consider "the big picture" while focusing and interpreting the smaller details.
- Humility is a good virtue to have on launch and elsewhere in all conditions while participating in this sport of paragliding.
- Always remember, *Life is good!*

## COME, TAKE A WALK WITH ME....

by Mike McIntyre



It's January 8th, a Wednesday in southern California. I've been flying down here for a couple of weeks, but not as often as I had hoped, and none of my usual playmates are available, so I decide to go have a look at 'The Grade' on my own.

I flew the grade a week ago with four local pilots who know the site and know what they're doing. That day it was nice and thermic with everybody getting several hundred feet over, but for reasons unbeknownst to me, we all landed early at around 3:30 pm. Today, all the piloting decisions will be mine to make.

Around noon with the sky showing a 30% cloud cover, I start the hike up this steep and rocky slope, headed to the launch about 700 feet above. Now usually, when driving up to launch, I don't spend too much time for reflection. I concentrate on analyzing conditions and hopefully figuring out my soon to be executed flight plan. Today however, this steep and solitary 45 minute hike up in the sun, with frequent breaks along the way, changes my mental dynamics, and I take the time to contemplate all the experiences that have brought me to this place, to give me the confidence to think I can fly here on my own. At least some of you will think that what I'm doing today is just driven by a big ego, and that is one way of looking at it. I had a friend who would say I was being brave when she really meant I was being stupid. Today she would have said I'm being heroic. I don't feel heroic, just confident in the things I've learned.

As I'm walking up, I reflect on my first flights, my instructors insistence on safety always, the

tips received from other pilots, all the flights I've made in different conditions, and the lessons learned from watching others.

One experienced pilot told us that on any given day most all of the sites we fly can be mellow and easy. On another day with the wrong conditions any and all of our sites can be downright dangerous. Another pilot taught me how to recognize some basic parts of a thermal as they come through launch. (They have parts? Yes, they do.) Another talked about sitting on launch and timing these cycles. Yet another impressed upon me that I finally had the skills and judgment to control my glider on launch and not launch until and unless I wanted to. And of course there were my initial instructors who taught me in no uncertain terms, to give my glider and all equipment frequent airworthiness inspections, and to perform a complete and systematic preflight before every flight.

All these lessons, experiences, and associations with every pilot I ever knew, are coming up this hill with me today, and I'm grateful for the confidence it gives me to make my own decisions.

Arriving finally at launch, I draw on all my piloting experiences these last three years. Sitting there, taking a break, I watch the Red-tailed Hawks, look at the sky near and far, time the cycles, and observe the motion of the flags

when the cycles come through the left or the right, or up the middle. I lay out my glider and gear, looking it over all the while, then look around the sky some more. Hooking in, I do my preflight (R1234RTS), and feel good that I'm not worried that I've left something out. Inflating in the first third of a nice little cycle, I check my lines and canopy, turn calmly and take a nice gentle step up into the wild blue.

This flight took me to mountain top, about 1400 feet, and lasted about an hour, with no close calls or fear of the unknown. Only a relaxing flight in the company of the Red-tails and a landing right next to the truck.

Ahhhh!

This is what it's supposed to be like.



## 2008 Club Officers

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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 Feb. 24th.

"We all share the same sky."

Please Share your Stories