

The Rainier Paragliding Club Newsletter

Serving the Paragliding Community of Western Washington

www.rainierparaglidingclub.org

June 2008

"Fly the wing or the Wing will fly you!"

photos by Kim Smith



The Thermal Column

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

Love My Job / Hate My Job

by Jim Harmon

I'm back in my office after a week, and two trips, to Alaska. As most of you know, I work in the seafood industry - building donation programs that benefit food banks across the country. In the spring, it can be frustrating holding down a job when the flying invitations are coming in via email and phone calls. But in the summer it's a pretty good gig, particularly when I head out to the fishing grounds to meet friends who actually help us make a difference.



To the point.... I had to make a quick trip to Anchorage last week. I managed to cram the three scheduled meetings all into one day. The last one was scheduled for 2:30 at the local soup kitchen. While I acknowledge that I was there to work, I couldn't help but think "when is this going to be over? It's one day before the solstice, it's not raining, and I have 3 cell phone numbers to call as soon as I'm free." The meeting wore on, and my next thought was "I love my job / I hate my job."

Finally, at 3:45, we were done. My wing was in the rental car, and there's no need to change along the way because, well,,,,, we're in Anchorage. I called the first number, and a local instructor said they were at Alyeska resort, waiting for conditions to improve, and that I should head on down in case it got flyable. Maybe. My second call got no answer, but I left a voicemail. The third call was to a friend of a friend. Matt was on his way to Eagle River LZ, and said he'd wait for me if I hurried. By the time I got there, Matt was waiting and two others had already left for launch. We met them at the lower launch, saddled up, and were rewarded with extended sleds. Man, that felt good.



*Lower launch, 1900' MSL - next to the radio tower,
looking out at Cook Inlet*

It was now 5:30 p.m. and one member of our group had a class starting in 30 minutes. I heard him call a classmate and tell him to inform the professor he'd be late because he had to pick up his mother at the airport. Then we all piled in for the drive back up.

Winds at the lower launch had died down, so we voted to hike up to the top. You all know that I enjoy hiking up, but I was a little spooked when Matt said we should keep talking so that we wouldn't surprise any bears that might be around the corner. It turned out to be a tough climb, and I was glad to have my lighter kit (30.8 lbs. on the Alaska Airlines luggage scale). We arrived on top around 7 p.m. It was totally unimproved,,,, just a ridge with rocks. We were at cloudbase, and winds were light and variable.

Matt and Jason both set up for forward launches. I didn't want to be left behind, so I hustled into my gear and got lucky with a successful reverse launch. It was now 8 p.m., but the winds were still coming up and allowed us to soar for 20 minutes before heading out to the LZ. I think this qualifies as XC, for me anyway. It was 4 miles to the parking lot, and wouldn't have been do-able if I hadn't found more lift behind the radio tower.

What a great flying community we have. I met two Anchorage pilots a year ago at Ft. Ebey. We've stayed in touch. One of



*3 of us made it to the top, 3100' MSL.
Mark decided to launch below the crest.*



Matt coming around the front of Baldy, Eagle River

them even got his new wing from our club's "Deutsch Connection." Although neither of them was available last week, they went out of their way to connect me with others. Matt, Jason, and Mark took the time to show a visiting pilot around. There are at least 9 flying sites around Anchorage, and these guys knew which one was working. Go to Midnight Sun Paragliding for more info. I hope I get the chance to return the favor.

The moral of the story is, once again, always take your wing along.

Ouch !

By Chris King

A sudden feeling of numbness followed by the innate loss of ability to move the foot was proof enough that it had broke upon impact. The mixture of other associated shock and pains on the leg put me through a quick self diagnosis to be sure that nothing else was damaged. Dragging myself up to the sandy part of the bar, I had left my harness after unraveling my speed bar and tying a piece of driftwood to my leg to splint it up. OK. Stabilized, now all I needed was to scoot to a more comfortable location and wait it out.



Wow that was a fast downwind landing. But at least I wasn't in the water facing a more serious problem - a nylon cage being swept downstream in a flood stage river. The only thing preventing a softer landing was my feet hitting on mud cemented river rocks. Had I landed in grass, sand or even cement I would have been able to walk away unscathed.

A river bar surrounded by water like Gilligan's Island is fun when Broadway puts it together. However, after radioing Mike to let him know I was injured I realized I was in a serious dilemma. I was marooned with only the professor. Maryanne and Ginger were nowhere to be found. Sun scorched yet not mentally disabled, I could definitely tell the difference. Mike's voice was way to low! Mrs. Howell ... in drag perhaps. Chuckle chuckle.

What just happened?

The valley winds were predicted to be 5 to 7 MPH. There was a NE Flow with a southerly convergence up the valley. The result? A very fast up valley wind that probably should not have been flown. Earlier in the day it was fine. By the afternoon things had changed and the thermals were popping everywhere.

After the work party, we went to launch to fly and fly we did. 6000 feet msl was reached by some of us. I had mentioned to Joe just a few minutes before I took off, that the thermals really looked fast and a bit tall judging from the clouds above Jupiter's peak. I hadn't really flown since fall. I launched and immediately was in some great air. I realized that it was a little greater than I had hoped for and decided to head to the valley to get into smoother air. If it didn't settle out, I would land.

On my way I decided to ride a thermal up a bit. I got to about 3500 feet, leveled out and proceeded to go towards Brinnon. Holding altitude very well I decided and would split the difference between Brinnon and the Normal LZ to decide if I wanted to go on the Brinnon to land on the beach. I spotted and planned a couple of possible LZ spots just in case something happened and I couldn't make it, and had a plan for each successive spot to land based on where I would be. My mental road map was planned out. I had plenty of altitude and was on a great glide slope to make it to Brinnon.

Mike was about 30 seconds ahead of me and suddenly came down like balloon loosing its helium. Caught by the predominate NE flow coming over Brinnon one. I think he was about 6000 feet and was down within two minutes onto one of my LZ choices. The River bars. There was lots of room and I was in the center of the valley so I should be able to avoid his down drafts. Well I didn't. The air flow extended well into the valley and I was next down in this elevator of air. NO problem I would

land on the river bar and join him on a nice walk out.

I set up to land on the river bar. On the west side of the bar a row of trees created ridge lift that lifted me up enough that I thought I would be able to land by Mike. Instead, it pushed me higher into the headwinds. Instead of heading to the middle of the bar now I was heading into the river with no room to burn off altitude even with "S" turns. Why? Because the time I needed to burn off the extra altitude was lost in making the judgment call to land where Mike was. At that point my only choice was to do a fast turn around for a downwind landing. Totally in control, just flying fast, the rest is history.

Mike and I did walk out together. I was carried out on a stretcher and he carried the wings out.

What did I learn? Lots. Once committed to an LZ stick to it especially if you're already at low altitudes. It would have been better for me to do a couple of "S" turns and land on the bar rather than waste precious moments deciding to land next to a friend. The other was that with such limited flying done all winter, it would have been better for me to have gone to another site later on in the season and flown to get some of the bugs out. It is not too late to make a life saving decision as long as you keep your mind away from any fixation and are actively thinking. The last lesson... If any of you are still in hiking boots and tennis shoes you may want to consider getting the parachute boots. Boots cost about \$300.00 new. My heel is going to cost me over \$40,000 and a years absence from flying! It would be a great idea to also get insurance! We have none. I will be glad to be a driver at some point!

Another important point I must mention is the importance of a good harness and helmet. My harness is very well padded. It took most of the impact of my body and my helmet also took a very strong strike as I came in. I would recommend a full face helmet as it was the front right side of my face and head that struck the rocks. Without a full face helmet, I may have had some serious damage to my celebrity formed features. The other to remember is the importance of having a radio. Either a FRS or 2 meter is fine as long as it is consistent with other pilots and you can get help!!!

Looks like I will be a driver at some point!

Fly high, fly long, and fly safe

We wish you a speedy recovery and hope that your 'healing' process goes quickly.



Friends don't let friends fly strapless!

Just Another Day At The Toutle

by Jim Baldo

As many of you know, the Toutle can be a wonderful place to fly. It has provided many pilots memories that will last a lifetime. I've always said that the Toutle "will find a way." Now I can say, "it has done it again."



It's June 25th. Jan has put out the call for pilots to join him for a Toutle adventure. He's also "coming out of the closet" (his words not mine) on the Cascade Paragliding Club message board inviting those pilots to join in on the festivities. There are but a few members of that club that fly this site due to the tree growth creating difficulties at launch, and the numerous accidents attributed to the thermic conditions on launch. Make no mistake about it, the launch is thermic, sometimes greatly so. To fly here you need to be prepared to fly actively before your feet leave the ground. Any later, and you may end up becoming a statistic of the most unpleasant kind. "Fly the wing or the wing flies you!"

Today is no different. The cycles are short, somewhat punchy, occasionally strong and mostly from a poor direction. After an aborted first attempt, Jan safely clears the trees and begins an upward trek. Soon he finds himself out on the point bouncing in and out of a house thermal. After I have an aborted attempt, one shot Kim does it again and is skyward. He too joins Jan at the point. The view of their wings from launch shows limited upward movement, sometimes limited forward movement, but always unlimited wing movement. Not to be discouraged, I launch on the next viable launch cycle about 10 minutes later. I too have an immediate upward trek but head to the point assuring myself I'll be in glide of an LZ and not pinned to no man's land by lack of forward

penetration. Back on launch, Mark Sanzone and Jacques De Villiers wait for their chance to join the activity.

Just before they launch, Jan radios a comment "there it is!" and is now circling upwards, heading back to launch to find a second thermal that would take him about 1K over. And so it begins! Kim soon deserts me at the point and is circling at launch with Jan and now Mark. I must wait a few minutes more before my ride shows up to ferry me back to launch. But sometimes, coming late to the party is the thing to do. I've quickly found the house thermal north of launch, am joined by Mark, and we circle our way to 5K (about 3K over launch) a respectable altitude at this site. Soon after, Jan and Kim whiz by on their skyward journey. But what's happened to Jacques? Looking down

reveals he's still trapped on launch as the site has now become stingy with cycles that make their way through launch. He would be tormented for another 30 minutes watching the specs overhead as he awaits his release from the hill.

Cummies are popping, cloud streets are forming, and we're propelled upward yet again. Down below, Jacques is now airborne and on his way up. Jan is out over the valley under a cloud circling ever higher. I'm racing below Kim and Mark trying to catch them as they tag base. My vario is incrementing through 6K as my cloud separation is decrementing toward the legal limit (that's my story and I'm sticking to it!)



And now I'm about to make a first for me. I've never flown cloud streets before so I turn NW and head to the next cloud. I top up my altitude, turn NW again and target the next cloud. At 4200 feet and about half way to the Hoffstead visitors center, my vario sings again and I once more break through 5K. Hoffstead is now within glide and is my chosen target until I see a helicopter sitting at its pad with its rotors turning. Although the rotors are slowing down, there have been objections to us using the center as a LZ with the helicopter in service. I turn NE targeting a cloud in that direction. In the distance back beyond launch, I can just make out a couple of gliders riding the thermals. The others are back there somewhere but for now I'm on my own.



For all the nervousness I've endured with my wing, I must say that I'm now fairly relaxed. This day has provided only a few tip tucks and no collapses that I can recall. Although I've taken no photos, I did spend some time flying one handed while I fiddled with my GPS. Now, as I turn and head out toward the river, Jacques 'Zooms' by 500 feet overhead like a jetliner racing its passengers to their destination. Before long, I'm circling yet again and playing at base.

Jan announces his intention to top land and soon we've all left base and are seeking earthward air flows. Jan has been in ears for quite some time bobbing at launch not being able to avoid the thermals breaking off just out in front. Kim has made an attempt or two and is also struggling with the last few hundred feet over launch. I make a pass in front of launch at about 2800 ft and instantly enter the elevator upward. Turning outward, I fly toward the valley as my vario sings sweetly and clicks through 3200ft. I'm aware that I'm very relaxed and not really flying

the glider but am more just enjoying being flown by it as I continue outward searching for the edge of the thermal and my escape to freedom. At first there was a sharp tug on the right wing tip and then a massive collapse on the left. I'm thrown backwards, am weightless, and the collapse continues. There is still some pressure on the right wing tip but I'm estimating that my wing is now at least 70% gone. In an instant my body spins through 90 degrees and beyond. My mind races. "Get your weight back in the harness. I wonder if this thing is going to recover?" As the pressure returns to my rear, I look upward to see a fully pressurized wing which appears to be flying normally. I've been instantly turned 135 degrees and fly off in that direction.

Maybe it was because it happened so fast or maybe it was because I knew I had become a the passenger and not the pilot, but I was still very relaxed. "Fly the wing or the wing flies you!" I now resume being a pilot and not a passenger. This is the largest collapse that I have experienced in my paragliding career. I guess that make two firsts on this one flight.

In time, Kim, Jan, Jacques, Mark, and I all successfully top land. There was quite a bit of excitement on launch as we all knew this had been an epic Toutle day. We didn't surpass our personal bests for the highest or the farthest Toutle flights, but it was one of the most abundantly lifty days that we could remember providing opportunities to fly all parts of the sky.

On logging this flight, I've discovered another personal best. It had been the longest single flight I've ever recorded. So for me, this one flight provided three notable events. Maybe, just maybe, it was more than just another day at the Toutle.

Just a friendly reminder. Club dues are due in July. Have you renewed your membership yet? Don't let your membership lapse. Renew Today!

THE PRACTICAL VALUE OF INSTRUMENTS/EQUIPMENT

Part 2

by Mike McIntyre

Last month's article was focused on listing some items that we had some experience with at 2 bear, that I considered to be useful for safety.

The first two are worth mentioning again. They were our radios, which proved to be very useful, and our cell phones, which neither one of us had. We had enough water for a casual flight and incident free landing, but I wished for more in light of the accident down in the river bed. In the end, it turned into a long afternoon in the hot sun, with a lot of exercise wading across the river many times to get us out and retrieve our gear.



The other items that proved useful that day aren't usually thought of as being safety items but certainly are. Perhaps the most obvious is something neither of us had, and didn't really need on the day, and that is a GPS. Our situation was that one pilot was injured on the river bed. We were in contact with the rescue services but they had some minor trouble in locating us exactly. Having GPS co-ordinates could have made our position easier and faster to find. I considered our location an easy one to find on the river. If we had been up on the mountain, it would have been much more difficult, especially since we weren't very familiar with the local micro landmarks to tell anybody where we were exactly.

The last item that came in handy to me was my digital readout vario. The fact that I could reference my descent rate and agl helped me to decide *early* when to abandon my flight plan and pick out a suitable landing site. This in turn helped me to make a safe and uneventful landing.

Though I own many of these items, I now will carry all (radio, cell phone, extra water, GPS, and digital readout vario.) I hope that you will also be encouraged to carry at least the radio, cell phone, and extra water, just in case you or one of your flying buddies finds yourself in similar circumstances.

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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 July 27th.

Please Share your Stories
and PHOTOS!

COMING UP:
GoatyUp: July 17 - 20
(Contact Mike McIntyer for more information.)