

The Rainier Paragliding Club Newsletter

Serving the Paragliding Community of Western Washington, USA

WWW.RainierParaglidingClub.org

August 2007

The Thermal Column

Flying in the Aleutians

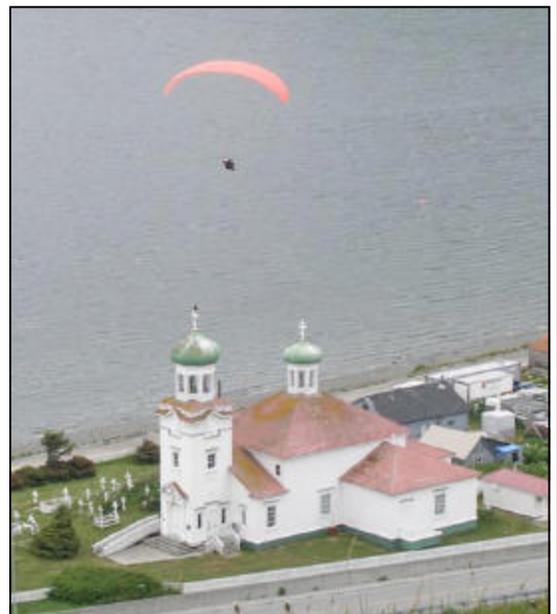
By Jim Harmon

I used to spend a lot of time working in Dutch Harbor, Alaska. It was grueling work in a tough environment. I was glad when it ended, and I hadn't been back for ten years. But recent developments took me back there last month, and it turned out to be one of my best trips ever.



The probability of a weather delay is pretty high when traveling to the Aleutians, so most folks add a day... Just in case. I left on Saturday for meetings on Monday. The weather turned out to be exceptional, and I arrived Saturday evening to record-warm weather and clear blue skies. Since I hadn't been there in a long time I jumped in my rental car to have a look around. I drove around Ballyhoo (Aleut word for "strong wind")

Mountain and saw a paraglider in the air! It took 5 minutes to find the right road up to where he was flying, and the 1998 Ford Taurus rental may never be the same, but I was stoked. I met Scott Amy, an experienced pilot/instructor who had been transferred to Dutch as a MedEvac pilot. He flies a King Air for work, and a paraglider for sport. Scott said he was glad to see another paraglider pilot in Dutch Harbor and asked me to join him. But my wing hadn't arrived yet (the original flight was canceled for mechanical and my bag was delayed), so I had to wait until Sun-



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day.

On Sunday the wind had switched and was coming out of the south, but it was still warm. We headed to the other side of the island and found a ridge facing the wind. There are two good things about the island of Unalaska: 1) lots of hills facing every direction, and 2) normal rules don't apply there. The signs at the road end said "Explosives! Do not enter", but this being Dutch, and us wanting to fly, we proceeded anyway. Both



of us climbed through the soft tundra to a 400' ridge over Captains Bay. The wind was perfect, and we had numerous incredible flights, soaring and exploring two ridges that no one had ever flown before. Then the wind switched again, and we had to find another launch. Scott showed me his favorite site, Haystack Mountain, which launches over the small town,



including the Russian Orthodox Church (Russians settled here in the 18th century, long before Americans). I had 6 or 8 more flights from this launch, each one better than the last. My partner from work, Tuck, was along taking photos, and he ended up getting a tandem ride. Thanks, Scott! I won't complain again about having to go up to Dutch Harbor for work.

I had brought my wing along because I planned to fly at Alyeska resort, outside Anchorage, on my return. Doug Paeth had just been there, and a pilot friend offered to show me around. But, after joining the local club, buying the tram ticket, then getting the orientation, I parawaited for three hours. Then I rode the tram back down and headed to the airport. The clouds never burned off, so the sun never heated the ground enough to cancel out the catabatic flow from the glacier above launch.

I had planned to fly Alyeska, and got skunked. But I didn't plan to fly in the Aleutians, and ended up having a great time. The moral of the story: Always take your wing along.

Let's do the Goatiup

By Mike McIntyre

Well, five pilots, Wayne, Wade, Steve T., Ole, & I started out on Thursday morning in the face of a heat wave warning for Goat Mountain near Winthrop, Wa. We stopped at the Big Johnson on the way, but only two of us flew in light and diminishing lift for extended sledders, and the rest drove down. We arrived east of Winthrop that evening in time for four of us to fly short sledders from Bowen hill back down into camp. On Friday we all went to Goat, where conditions weren't great, but I launched goat anyway, & got a semi-nervous sinking sledder out over the bluff to about 500 yards short of the wind sock. This convinced the others to go over to Flag launch, lower on the same mountain and do some extended sledders/ partial ridge soaring down to where I was quaffing beers at the country store. In the evening we went back to our camp at Bowen & a few of us flew again back into camp. On Saturday morning Wayne & Wade decided to try Chelan, partly to visit some relatives, and the other three of us went back up to goat & got some results that justified the whole trip. In the morning we soared Flag (launch at 3400, lz at 2200) with all three of us in the air at the same time for about an hour, but only maybe 5 or 6 hundred over. Then lunch in the lz, & back up to the real goat launch (at about 4400) at about 3pm. Conditions were



ideal for the advance p2 & new p3s we are, with thermal cycles barreling through on a steady basis, & the background wind speed being maybe 10mph from straight south. (if you ever go to this site, please get a full briefing from us and the local pilots as to what constitutes safe conditions, or better yet, get the above group to fly with you) Anyways, as the now senior pilot of the group (how did that happen? And eek!) I elected, with gleeful agreement from the other two, to launch first. Into a bit of a lull, & then up, up, up at rates of climb ranging mostly in the 1-5 hundred feet per minute category, but sometimes up to 650 according to my vario, with not much sink anywhere. After about ten minutes, I'm nearly to the top of the peak (about 6800'), and Steve launches & does the same thing, twenty minutes later & hear comes Ole...the whole mountain is alive with lift and sink is a distant memory. The three of us fly the mountain and above it to roughly 7900', where all three of us decided independently that was enough & flew (two pulled ears) out to the valley to escape the lift and get back down to something we were a little more familiar with. We found that after ten or fifteen minutes of flying out to the valley that we could in fact get down a bit maybe to launch level or a little above, and then feeling calmer, we all went back toward the mountain & did it again,,, & again,,, & again. With the elevated stress level, & having proved to ourselves that getting up there could be duplicated at will, Steve flew out along a ridge to the west expecting to find lift,

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but finding none, sank out to a strange field a couple of miles up valley. Ole & I flew together a couple of miles the other direction out over flag launch with which we were already familiar & found buttery smooth ridge/mildly thermal lift (at around 3400 to 4200) so we boated around each other followed each other, flew formation, took turns picking our flying pattern, flying close enough to practically carry on a conversation for about maybe 15 or 20 minutes, then flew back along the rock face towards the Iz where by now Steve was waiting & we intended to come down out of politeness. But along the rock face a mile or so & down low (maybe 2800 to 3100) the old goat gave us yet another chance & we stayed there and practiced staying in the lift & skimming the trees for maybe another 20 minutes, & then went down to link up with Steve. My vario recorded a one hour & 54 minute flight that seemed to have had everything, and both Ole & Steve concurred that we had had an "epic" day. One weird thing happened during my flight, that I maybe will never understand, & that is that as I seemed to be topping out above serious lift up into a haze but not into a cloud (there were clouds in the area) at just under 8k, I went quickly into cold air from warm air & I heard something that sounded like rain or possibly little dry ice crystals rattling like an avalanche on my canopy, though nothing seemed to be hitting me. The air seemed to be rougher there as well, to the extent I didn't like it so flew out to the valley as quickly as possible in order to get into the smoother warmer air down

lower & away from the mountain. After a little while and at the lower altitude the noise went away, much to my relief. Discussing it later, we thought it might have been some sort of shear layer, but we still couldn't figure how any kind of ice or mist could be hitting my canopy without hitting me. What do you more experienced guys think? Is there any possible explanation besides the obvious one that I've reached premature senility? Anyway, today's conditions didn't look like suitable or safe, so we came home one day early but feeling well satisfied with these maybe best ever flights. Lastly, I'd like to give all credit and thanks to Paul Kunzel, who by showing me this site last year, gave me a gift that keeps on giving. I'll be going back every year & maybe again later this year. We're trying our best to be wary of dusties, Paul, & to keep 'em flyin'. Mike

Three PG Pilots were sitting on launch waiting for conditions to improve.

1st Pilot: I had to promise my wife that I would paint the entire house if I come out today.

2nd Pilot: I had to promise to install hardwood floors in the dining room.

After several minutes had passed the 1st pilot asked the 3rd what he had to promise?

3rd Pilot: Nothing promised.

2nd Pilot: How did you manage that?

3rd Pilot: I set the alarm clock. When it went off at 5:00am I asked her if it was paragliding or sex? She just reminded me to put fresh batteries in my radio and vario before I left.

The Can Am Lived up to its reputation:

By Jim Harmon

Lots of pilots, Good Flying, and great fun in the campground. I think

there were 6 pilots from the RPC:



- Wayne Maxwell (& Barb)
- John Erickson
- Doug Paeth (& Jan & 2 daughters)
- Ole Kanestrom
- Steve Torgesen
- Jim Harmon (& Daniel)



The air was great on Friday and good on Saturday afternoon. At one point we counted over 40 gliders in the air. Not sure about Sunday, as I had to leave at 11 a.m..



Bar-B-Choo 🍴

Launch 🍴

LZ (with road bisecting it) 🍴



Application to join the Rainier Paragliding Club

Name: _____ Date: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip _____

Home phone: _____ Cell phone: _____

E-mail: _____

USHPA #: _____ Rating: _____ Exp. Date _____

Emergency Contact: _____ Phone: _____

Annual dues are from July 1st to June 30th of each year.

\$24 for Individual membership

\$36 for Family membership living at the same address.

Send completed application and payment (payable to Rainier Paragliding Club) to:

Kathy Smith

P.O. Box 13

Cinebar, WA 98533

2007 Club Officers

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|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>President</i> | <i>Doug Etter</i> |
| <i>Vice President</i> | <i>Mike McIntyre</i> |
| <i>Secretary</i> | <i>Kathy Smith</i> |
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| <i>Director</i> | <i>Steve Messman</i> |
| <i>Director</i> | <i>Scot Lamb</i> |
| <i>Newsletter</i> | <i>Kim Smith</i> |

Calendar 2007

Sept 1-3 Pine Mountain Fly-In

Sept 14-16 * Northern Lite Campout.

Sept 22-23 Baldy Fly-In

Oct 19-21 *Saddle Soar Campout

(*) denotes RPC sponsored activity