

Mountaineer Hang Gliding Association

Newsletter – December 2006

PRESIDENTS PAGE

Finally, the year *(three months)* of my presidency is almost over. This being my second and final edition of the President's page, I'm glad to be able to end Jim's endless nagging phone calls to get this page finished *(all two paragraphs of it)*.

I haven't been flying since summer, but I've been setting my glider up almost every day. Maybe not for the reason to fly, but to train my hawks. Its my own spin to the sport, to truly fly with the birds. My hawk "Booboo" is back on track with my training and my new hawk Sarah is catching on fast. I plan to go the training hill soon and hopefully my hawks will follow me down as I fly. Then in the future I will take them to the mountains and then XC

I hope to see everyone this spring and 2007 will be a better flying year.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year, Marvin



Secretary/Treasurer's Report of the MHGA Meeting 2006

The meeting got off to a late start as we waited for the arrival of our president who neither showed up nor bothered to call to say he wasn't coming. After several attempted telephone calls to determine whether or not he was on the way, we decided to proceed without him and our vice-president, Will Jenkins, led the meeting in his own inimitable style.

Present for the meeting were: Jim Rowan, Greg Beyer, Larry and Lesa Ball, Will Jenkins, and Florent Fumey. It was decided that we would give hams and calendars to the same landowners as last year. We also decided to have both the Memorial Day and Labor Day fly-ins this year, rather than just one or the other. We also elected/drafted officers for 2007 and they are as follows:

President – LE Herrick
Vice President - Will Jenkins
Secretary/Treasurer – Jim Rowan
Board of Director – Larry Ball
Board of Director – Christy Huddle

MHGA Airtimes – the only edition

9/4/06; High Pt; NNE 0 – 6 mph; Florent (PG), JR (S2), and Chuck (Ultrasport) take sleds while the Gardinator chooses not to fly his heavy-assed Groundpounder.

9/7/06; High Pt; L&V; JR (S2) and Pete (flying JR's T2) take sleds to the LZ where the cooler beckoned them to come hither.

9/21/06; High Pt; L&V; JR (S2), Pat, (S2) and Chuck (Ultrasport) take sleds once again. Chuck had the FOTD by working a little lift over the NE corner of the LZ for a few extra turns before gravity won out.

9/25/06; High Pt; W 5 – 10 mph; After proving that no good deed goes unpunished (while chain-sawing a downed tree across the road, he took a few yellow jacket stings to the face and arm), JR (S2) followed Pat (S2) off launch and they proved that the Cumberland sites are, in fact, sometimes soarable. While it wasn't automatic, brain-dead soarable and they were sometimes below launch, both managed to get an hour or so. It was a good day for flying upwind and touring the local valley. Pat had the gain of the day to 4300' with JR getting to 3900' and seeing 6.0 on his averager for a little while. And it's always nice when the day ends with good landings and cold beer.

10/1/06; High Pt; W 10 – 20+ mph; It wasn't that strong when they arrived, but by the time they finished setting up, the wind had picked up considerably. Pete (T2) was the

only one who chose to launch initially and after getting up off of launch and then going OTB with the first thermal, he made it to Ft. Ashby before deciding to try to fly back upwind. Unfortunately, the headwind was just a little too strong for him to make it back across Knobley Mtn, so he ended up landing south of Ft. Ashby for 8 miles. JR left his glider and the rest of the gang back at launch and retrieved Pete. They returned to find everyone starting to tear down their gliders due to the cranking conditions, but after a few words of encouragement and questions about their manhood, everyone ended up flying and having a great time. John Fenner (Litespeed) was followed by Pat Halfhill (S2), Pat Brooks (U2), JR (S2), and Pete for his second flight of the day. Conditions had backed off and the air was strong, but not too turbulent. Everyone ended up getting an hour or more. It was another interesting day in the LZ with the wind switching back forth between north and south. There was no major carnage.

10/9/06; High Pt; L&V; Pete and John F being the bad influences that they are, drag JR out for a weekday flight with a questionable forecast and even more questionable-looking conditions. JR (S2) ends up being the only one who flies and takes a sled directly to goal – his cooler.

10/15/06; High Pt; WSW 5 – 10 mph; A good day with a moderate amount of turbulence from the reasonably strong thermals (5.0 – 6.0) and the associated shear. LE launched first followed by JR (T2) and Larryboy (T2). They were able to stay up without difficulty in the sometimes ratty thermals. JR flew upwind almost to Haystack Mtn after getting to 5000' before wimping out and flying back to the Knobley ridge. He eventually flew down the valley past Zirks and almost to Rawlings before heading back north and landing at Barton's LZ. LB decided to follow JR's lead and head for Barton's, but he caught a nice one off one of the knobs and took it to 6300" going OTB for 12 miles to the Hwy Dome LZ. LE landed at the main LZ and had a gain to 5000', as well.

10/22/06; High Pt; Light NW; JR (S2) launched first (and too early) getting an extended sled of about 10 minutes. Pat B (Falcon) launched later and showed that it was just barely soarable over the NW Cliffs if you were good. He got an hour and his best gain was to 2200'. Larry Huffman (Falcon) launched next and managed about 20 minutes scratching over the NW Cliffs before being scraped off the ridge. Larryboy (T2) showed why they say patience is a virtue. By waiting until later, he was able to get the FOTD, climbing to 3400' and making it to Barton's LZ after an hour and 20 minutes of airtime.

11/4/06; Pinnacle; SE 3 – 7 mph; With a forecast of W 5 – 10 mph, JR met Larryboy, Lisagirl, and Gardinator at the Fairgrounds LZ only to find SE winds. Gardinator bailed and made the 2+ hour drive back home, while the rest of the crew drove up to Miltenberger's Gap to see which way the wind was blowing at altitude. After confirming it was, in fact, SE, they drove over to Pinnacle launch to find reasonable conditions and birds soaring, but by the time they were ready to go, things were dying down. Both ended up with sleds to the LZ, but it was better than a stick in the eye.

12/9/06; High Pt; SSW 0 – 10 mph; After the annual club meeting at the LaVale Library ended, Larryboy, Greg, JR, and Florent decided to chase the wind, going first to Pinnacle (blowing cross and down) and then ultimately ending up at High Pt (light to nil wind) on a day they were calling WSW 5 – 10 mph. It was probably launch-able at High Pt, but by then it was getting late and no one wanted to set up for a sled to the LZ. Although there was no wind at launch, the smoke in the valley showed a good bit of southerly wind on the ground.

12/10/06; High Pt; SW 5 – 10 mph; Adam (U2) showed how the early bird catches the worm by sledding directly to the LZ where he was given ample opportunity to search for worms and other multi-cellular creatures. Greg (HP-AT) launched next and showed that conditions were improving and he was able to hang on over the West Face for several minutes before being scraped off the ridge while trying to leave room for Ben (Arcus) to take-off from the Fairgrounds launch. Ben soared the West Face for several minutes, but he was soon scraped off the ridge. JR (S2) was able to stick by hanging out over the NW Cliffs as conditions continued to improve, despite the cross nature of the winds. He was followed by Larryboy (T2) and then Homer (S2) and the entire ridge between High Pt launch and the North Pt was working with light and smooth, i.e. “poosh-out” thermals. JR had the FOTD getting an hour and 45 minutes and to 2660’, but Larryboy and Homer both got over an hour. JR edged Homer out in the spot contest, but it took a threat of public humiliation and physical abuse before he’d cough up the \$5 wager. LE DNF from Fairgrounds launch.

12/16/06; High Pt; L&V becoming SE; JR, Larryboy, Gardinator, Ben, and LE are tricked once again with a W 5 – 10 mph forecast only to find marginal conditions at launch. Everyone set up, but only LE and JR made it out to launch. LE had one aborted attempt to aviate her PG and JR spent 45 minutes standing on launch until deciding it was beer-thirty.

King Mountain By the Numbers

By Mark Gardner

Drive time: 2.5 days (each way)
Number of Flights: 5
Total miles: 93
Max altitude: 16,500 msl
Longest flight: 69 miles
Number of sleds: 1
Launch Altitude: 7500’ msl (lower launch)
Launch AGL: 5000’
Highest mountain in the Lost River Range : Mt Borah - 12,662

What’s in a number?

As an eastern pilot I think I have the same idea about flying out west in the “BIG AIR” as most of us East Coasters. If I don’t get a hundred miler I feel like I’ve missed out somehow.

I mean, I’m a reasonably talented cross-country pilot, ain’t I? I’ve had some good long flights out east, right?? Why can’t I get my number (100) when I fly out west in the Big Air??

Well, the answer is, that when you plan a hang gliding trip, you are, of course, subject to the gods of the sky (wind, rain, gust fronts, lightning, etc.). I have found that even with excellent conditions, I just can’t get my BIG FLIGHT.

This time, tho’, it was NOT about the numbers. Maybe I’ve crossed an important threshold in my flying career that has been too long in coming. I had decided when we planned the trip to King, that my priority would be to have a good time, and if I got a good flight, cool! If not ---- no biggie. I was going to be in the Leisure Class.

I had spent the previous week in North Carolina for my family vacation and ended up with a nasty head cold. After driving 12 hours home from NC, JR came up the next afternoon and we loaded up and started driving toward Arco, Idaho.

We had chosen to have a hang gliding trip to King Mountain where we had been before, nine years ago. I had also been through King with my wife Sheila back in 1999 and had a fantastic glass-off flight with my bud Joe Gregor.

King Mountain has been described as a black diamond hang gliding site for good reason. It is a high mountain site that sits just a few miles up into the Lost River Range in southwestern Idaho. The high desert plains to the south, with their expansive ancient lava flows, feed the mountains powerful desert air. It is a place that deserves acute respect. The entire area often overdevelops quickly with enormous storm cells and their associated gust fronts, and can have serious consequences for miles around.

And yet, King can also provide the sweetest late evening glass-offs you could ever hope to experience. As it happened, we experienced all of the above.

When planning a hang gliding trip out west there are some important considerations to take into account even when you’re in the Leisure class. One of the issues is having other pilots around during the week so that you can get in more than just a couple of days flying. Also, if your intent is to get some XC, it sure is nice to have a bunch of pilots and drivers all going in the same general direction. The King Mountain Meet was just the ticket...

After two and a half days driving, JR and I arrived in Arco, Idaho just south of King Mtn in the early afternoon. We checked into the D&K Motel and made our way to the park in Moore to see who was around and maybe get a ride up for a late flight.

The first folks we met were Kelly and Nancy. Kelly was sewing up a bum zipper on his Moyes Litespeed and after a few minutes we ambled on and met up with the meet director Lisa Tate. It took a little prompting, but I finally convinced JR that we ought to at least try and see how far the minivan could get up the launch road. As we pulled into the main LZ we were followed closely by Ashley Groves and his buddy Rob. We all threw on the minivan and made it all the way up to the Coyote launch, but decided that the wind was too cross. So we went back over to the King lower launch and set up.

The wind was really light, and JR elected to drive. Much to his dismay, my buddy Rob and I got off and were rewarded with one of those spectacular King Mtn glass-offs. I think we launched around 8 o'clock p.m. and flew in the smoothest pooosh out lift you could ever imagine and got to 12k. We landed after about an hour, and I didn't even pound!

The next day we went up to King again with great expectations. The day was bright and beautiful, there were a dozen pilots around, and life was good.

JR and I had instantly determined after we had met Kelly and Nancy that they were possibly the coolest people on the planet, and it happened that Kelly's glider repair wasn't holding up. JR graciously offered up his spare glider, the Wills Wing Sport 2, and we all launched and climbed out.

I was fortunate enough to get to cloudbase pretty quickly at 14,800 and had to decide whether to go XC or just hang. I decided to stay in the valley and go look at the Arco airport about 7 miles south of us. One of the reasons for that decision was that there was some over-development to the north, and I thought it might be a good idea to go the other way.

JR headed my way a little bit later, and after I had landed, was asking for wind direction etc. It was totally L&V as he could see by the airport windsock until about 10 minutes later. The storm cell up north was pushing a strong gust front, and within another 10 minutes, it was blowing and gusting 30-40 mph on the deck.

All I can say is that he made the best possible approach, but was seriously spanked on final and got turned 180...I couldn't see exactly what happened from a mile away, but it didn't look good.

I was having my own problems trying to keep my glider from being blown away and we finally got to him after he had managed to start breaking down in the gusts. Amazingly, there was no damage to the pilot or glider. Kelly had landed JR's Sport at the main King LZ up north, and was able to get it in the bag before the gust front hit up there. He and Nancy came down to the airport to get us, and found their buddy John "Ole" Olson struggling to keep his trike from getting blown across the runway. An exciting day was had by all.

The next day, Wednesday, was the official start of the comp, and fortunately, was a rain out. It was good to have a day to recuperate some from my head cold and get all the equipment organized and tuned up.

JR had scored oxygen systems for both of us thanks to Pete Lehman and Will Jenkins, and it's always interesting to add yet another complexity to your harness.

Thursday came and the morning routine with the pilot meeting was getting well established. Lisa and crew would pick names out of the hat and every pilot would get some pretty good prizes over the course of the next few days. The best part of the pilot meeting was the excellent weather forecast provided by Dr. John Kangas. He was extraordinarily accurate every day.

On this day (Thursday) I managed 18 miles over the back. I climbed to cloudbase again and thought I had a pretty good street, but half way across the valley toward the Lemhi range, the street dried up and I trickled into the Lemhi's low. After nothing but sink, I retreated toward a ranch with easy access to the main valley road. I worked a couple of low drifters, but they kept tracking up the valley over the alluvial fan, instead of into the mountains. I finally bailed and landed/pounded at the ranch.

The best plan for a reasonable pilot in the leisure class is to LAND NEAR THE ROAD And I am happy to report that that is what I accomplished each day.

Another thing about desert flying is the absence of cell phone coverage. I walked over to the ranch house and the landowner graciously let me use his land line phone in an attempt to get a retrieve. After leaving several messages, I started walking out of the ranch toward the main valley road and after about a mile started to get some radio contact with another pilot landing a couple of miles down the valley...It worked out that I copped a ride with his driver and helped retrieve him as well. He had had an exciting landing, and I would have to say that I can't ever remember seeing two down tubes pretzeled as well as his were.

A lot of pilots went far, maybe 40-60 miles, but I was well satisfied with my flight. I had gotten to base @12,500' and stayed there for about 10 miles....cool. Even though I had payed my money and joined the comp, I had no real intention of doing anything but having a good flyin' vacation.

The way the King meet works is that there are 4 predetermined XC routes, and an experienced task group decides which route to send everyone on each day. The goal is the farthest you can get, and the routes have all been flown in the past and proven to have 100 mile + potential. The routes have a corridor a few miles wide, and as long as you don't land too far outside the corridor, you get scored based upon your mileage.

I was certain that I had landed outside the corridor, but Lisa convinced me to fill out a landing form with my gps coordinates. I guess that since that ranch was about the last reasonable place to land, it was just inside the edge of the task corridor. Who knew?

Good things can happen when you're in the Leisure Class.

Friday was an especially tough day for our bud Bruce Engen. King Mountain was not forgiving that day and Bruce got burned while scratching over the finger that cuts loose the gnarly house thermal. Fortunately, a couple of guys saw him disappear into a dusty impact, and several of us ran over to find him and help him and his glider get off the hill. It wasn't pretty, but he only lost a couple of teeth and a busted arm...King has treated others much less kindly. Most of us who trekked across the hill to help decided to bag it, but after a short nap I thought I'd launch, and ended up with a sled.

Saturday ended up being the Big Day.

As Dr. John said during the pilot meeting that morning "I haven't ever really seen numbers this good before..... It could get scary". For me, it was one of the most fantastic flights of my career.

I've always had a dream of flying high over a big mountain range, and when I had first been to King 9 years ago, I had hoped to fly over the snow capped Mt. Borah, but could never get more than 10 miles up the range, where I landed in the infamous Pass Creek Rd area a couple of times. This time, however, I just barely made it across that area and got onto the main part of the range at Invisible Mt. After a good bit of bar grippage, I got up to 15k msl and more.

Of course, the first time I tried to drink from my camel back, the bite valve ejected and I sprayed water all over my instruments and cold hands...I got that taken care of and figured I ought to try and use the O2 that I had borrowed from Will...

Wouldn't ya know that after about 15 minutes, my excellent rig job broke the tubing and I had to suffer with no water or O2 at 16,500 and cloudbase.

It was OK...I was cold and maybe a little hypoxic after a couple of hours, but it was the kind of flight I had always imagined. I flew along the spine of the Lost River Range and 4000 ft above Mt. Borah at cloudbase. I never got low, and for a while was pretty sure that I had gone over 100 miles. As it happened, I had only gotten to Challis @ 69 miles. It was a spectacular flight.

I had reported over the radio that I was pretty sure I'd gotten over 100 miles.... But of course, I just didn't know how to use the GPS and I'm blamin' the hypoxia, too.

The big number still eludes me, but the truth is, it's only a number. I could start sayin' I got over 100 kilometers, but would that have made the flight any better or me any less gay?

-gardner