

Jeff Huey set the Oregon record with a 111 mile flight from Pine Mtn to Crane, 7/2/2004

Pine Mountain is in the high desert about 25 miles east of Bend, Oregon. Pine can be one of the best locations to hang glide or paraglide in the Western United States. Additional information about Pine Mountain can be found at: <http://www.desertairriders.org>

The following story is pretty long and for those who don't want to wade through the sordid details here are a few assorted ones.

Launched at 1:13 pm, landed at 7:04 pm, 111 miles from launch. The drift was generally straight down my course line, which averaged about 105 degrees or just south of east.

Thermal wise it wasn't a great day, the cores were small and not all that strong, but the tail wind made up for it. The average speed was 19.4 mph (31.3 km/h). Average glide was 12.2:1. Average lift was 231 fpm.

The flight was also relatively uneventful. There was no need at any point to take any undue risks. A good road was always within an easy glide. Anybody could've done it had they been in the right place at the right time.

I was flying a Gin Gliders Boomerang III, a competition glider with unsheathed lines. The boomer is perhaps the best performing paraglider produced today, although flying one is certainly not for everybody. And while the performance undoubtedly helped, it was really not all that crucial on a downwind day.

However, the Boomer also handles extremely well with a "sportscar" like feel and precision. This undoubtedly helped, particularly when suffering from an altitude deficiency.

The harness was a Kortel Kamasutra, a racing harness built with comfort in mind. The comfort part is crucial for a long flight like this.

I fly with a Flytec 5030 flight computer. The 5030 is an integrated GPS-vario unit that performs both of those functions well. In addition, it provides several other bits of information that can be invaluable on a long flight, including wind speed and direction indication, a marker that provides an indication of where the last lift was (for when you "lose" a thermal, glide ratio info and more).

The 5030 also records a 3D GPS and barograph log that can be downloaded to a PC and evaluated using a flight analysis and planning software such as SeeYou. Then you can review the flight from any angle, and see more statistics about it than you'd ever care too.

You can also use the flight log to enter the worldwide HG/PG online contest, which I did. Here is a link to the track log for the flight.

http://www2.onlinecontest.org/olcphp/2004/ausw_fluginfo.php?ref3=13089&ueb=N&olc=holc-kna&spr=en&dclp=1b91555cf2fa3f1ceb739235c122e84d

I had an expert chase crew that stayed under me, providing support, encouragement, surface wind updates and more. Frankie went above and beyond the call when she volunteered to drive that afternoon.

So here's the long version.

Somehow the night before, we knew that Friday, July 2, 2004 was going to be a big day for paragliding at Pine. The over development and associated thunderstorms that had been affecting the weather for the entire week had been lessening. A weak cold front was forecast to be passing north of the region on Friday night.

On Friday morning a check of the weather seemed to confirm our feelings. Winds aloft were predicted to be 280 degrees and 11 miles per hour at 6,000 feet msl and 260 degrees at 21 mph at 12,000 feet. Surface winds were to be WNW. This direction will drift you nearly straight down highway 20. The skew-T temperature plot from FSL was predicting that the lift would go to 13,000 feet. The only less than optimal forecast was the thermal strength prediction found on Dr. Jack's Blipmap website. His models were predicting relatively light lift (thermal strengths to 400 fpm) for the area around Pine as well as to the east.

So I began rounding up the usual suspects. Johnny (Loser) VanDuzer was ready. Matt Dadam said that he really had a lot of things that he should be doing but that he'd be there. Everybody else was either headed out of town (to other paragliding sites - a reasonable excuse) or said that they had to work (not a reasonable excuse). I mean, I called Billy and Billy twice each and Pete once, I explained the forecast. Pointed out that they had the type of jobs that would allow them to take the day off if they really wanted to. But to no avail. You know the old adage about leading a horse to water? Well, basically these guys wouldn't even approach the water trough much less drink out of it. Billy got so he wouldn't even answer his phone. Matt called him and was told to stop bothering him. Jeez, some people really need to get their priorities straight.

So anyway Johnny, Matt and I met at the "Y", left my truck there and went up the hill.

It looked good when we got there at around 12:30. A light cycle was coming up the west launch, just a little cross from the south. Whilst getting ready, it lulled. Johnny suggested waiting a bit, so we watched a couple of more cycles go by then laid out during one of the lulls. A high band of cirrus was drifting by from west to east and had just cleared us leaving the sun to shine fully. Johnny asked where the Qs were. There were plenty off in the distance but none nearby. I predicted one o'clock. (OK, I know that it was a WAG but hey, a little optimism helps.)

Did I say lull? What I mean is that the wind went dead, no scratch that, went really, really calm. For about twenty minutes. And we were all dressed up ready to go. It must be going off out front we said. Then a cycle, cross from the north. It blew fitfully light and cross for another 5 or 10 minutes than finally straightened out and filled in.

The three of us bailed at once. It was 1:13. As the three of us worked together in a light thermal near the NW spine a wispy cloud appeared over launch. Even with the three of us searching and working we only got about 200 over launch (launch is about 6,200 msl) before the lift went away.

Johnny and Matt headed out the NW spine towards the Flying Farm. I headed down the NE spine back towards the "Y". I figured that if we all went down that at least I could make it near the truck so that I could pick the other boys up.

We weren't hitting anything. Not even a little bump. The air was still. As I watched Matt and Johnny get closer and closer to the ground I saw Johnny (who was a little higher) start to turn. Then Matt. Matt was nearly on the ground at this point, probably less than a hundred feet AGL.

Frankie Apinwall said that she could hear the air in Matt's lines he was that close. But he saved it. Climbed out good.

Meanwhile, I was doubting my ability to make the glide to the "Y". Went through all the known thermal spots, finally the last chance spot at the end of the training hill ridge buoyed me enough to make the "Y".

OK, I reasoned, I'd land by the truck and then chase Matt and Johnny. You know you've got to pay your dues once in a while.

As I neared the "Y" I could see the streamers blowing down the hill, away from the mountain, i.e. to the north. 180 degrees from the way it should be blowing. "Hmmm, must be a thermal breaking off nearby but I'm pretty low, I just hope that it clears out so that I can have a safe landing." As I turned on final I flew into light lift. Like Matt I was no more than 100 feet above the ground.

OK, I'll turn in this. Gained 15 feet in the first 360. It was a little early to celebrate but I did keep turning. Ten turns later and I had gained 100 feet. Woohoo! Meanwhile Matt and Johnny were going to the moon.

Finally, the lift got better such that I could do a full 360 whilst going up. After six minutes I had gained 800 feet at an average of around 120 fpm and was breathing a little easier.

Then the thermal broke loose and the strength increased to an average of 700 fpm. I had peak readings of 1500 fpm and higher during the climbout to a newly formed cloud that was at about 12,500 msl.

At about 7,000 feet a funny thing happened. A small frontal collapse, then an asymmetric and then I just wasn't quite sure what the glider was doing. Don't get me wrong - the collapses were really no big deal and easily handled it's just that I found myself going up really fast, trying to keep a tight spiral, as the thermal seemed determine to keep the glider pulled directly over my head. It was one of those times when it feels like a giant hand is lifting the glider (and you) straight up. The brake toggles felt mushy and it didn't seem like I could keep enough airspeed or enough bank as I rocketed upward. I kept it turning though and after about 30 seconds of this (that seemed like 30 minutes) things calmed down a bit and I once again felt is if I was in control.

The cloud above kept getting bigger, and as I approached it wispy's began to form to the east, the direction that we were headed. Johnny and Matt came over to join me as I neared the top. The newly formed clouds to the east were calling though and I headed that way from 12,300, about 500 feet short of cloud base.

The sky was starting to look good. The development behind was looking better and better and was also beginning to push east a little.

Somewhere during the climb I switched from thinking that I'd be chasing to remembering the large cloth "Glider Pilot Needs Ride" sign stashed in my flight bag, that had been so thoughtfully provided by Gail Haley and the Rat Race organization. Basically we were going XC and just not worried as to how to get back. Then, out of the blue, Frankie came on the radio and offered to chase. She said later that she figured that a short drive out to Brothers and back wouldn't be that big of a deal. Turned out she thought wrong but nonetheless stayed underneath and supported us the entire day.

I raced to the clouds out front as Johnny held back a little. He ended up getting to over 13,000 about halfway to Brothers. Just south of Brothers I had climbed to 11,300 and then glid off to Frederick Butte Road. The wind by this time was just as predicted, a little north of west at the lower altitudes and a little south of west as you climbed higher. Drift speed was around 12 mph at this time.

Meanwhile Matt had glid to the ground and had landed near the Brothers oasis.

So there I was struggling near the Frederick Butte / Highway 20 intersection. For 15 minutes it was all I could do to gain 600 feet. I radioed to Johnny to come along and help me find the core. His response was to point out that I had gotten ahead of the lift and that where he was at, was where it was at. I couldn't really argue with him because he was quite a bit higher than I. So while my Flytec 5030, with the "last lift encountered" function kept me in the lift, it just wasn't very strong. 8,100 feet was the highest that I could get in the area, roughly 3,500 feet above the ground.

Finally, about the time that I was giving up on the area, Johnny came over to join me. Of course he had about a 1,000 feet on me still.

It was decision time, Johnny began to ease to the south and slightly upwind in an attempt to intercept the lift that was forming the best cloud in the area. I had watched him pull this maneuver off successfully before we had gotten to Brothers, i.e. go a little upwind. Unfortunately I was just enough lower than him both times such that it just wasn't feasible for me. Then I spotted a newly formed wispy to the south and just downwind. I quartered the tailwind until I was just upwind of the cloud and then turned to fly under it. Down to 5,000 feet but the lift was there and as I climbed out I watch Johnny's search upwind come to naught as he landed along Frederick Butte Road.

Back up to 10,300, it was time to go on glide, angling back towards highway 20 and the town of Hampton. No lift on the way. Cruised low directly over Hampton, and ended up about 200 feet above the ground. Figured that landing just past Hampton would make for a pretty good flight. After all, I had flown farther than Johnny -- not something that I regularly do.

But it was not to be. It was low save time again. Heck, I had been lower back at the "Y" so this situation was totally reasonable. Enough lift to do a 360 and then a few more. Drifting straight down the highway so I could always bail and have a good landing.

This was a sweet thermal. Took me up above 12,000 again. Suddenly it appeared as if the wave of lift (and the associated clouds) had caught up with me, as I was able to cruise above 11,000 feet for a while. The save essentially counted for about 20 miles of the flight. Had an interesting encounter with a golden eagle during this time. It showed up suddenly just below me but in a few turns was about 50 feet above me. Then it dropped its talons and dove at the top of the glider, pulling away about five feet from wing. Then he flew about 100 yards away into an obviously better parcel of lift. I followed, and after about three turns together the eagle glid off to the west, upwind.

Anyway, after the 20 mile save out of Hampton, I had followed a course line that "cut the corner" of highway 20 where it deviates a little south near Glass Butte and was approaching the Silver Creek Valley.

The Silver Creek valley begins where highway 20 straightens out and runs due east. In it is the Chickahominy reservoir, the town of Riley, the 395/20-highway intersection, and a six-mile

stretch of green irrigated fields.

This is where the flight should get easier, after quartering the prevailing westerly wind for 65 miles now the drift would be straight down the road. However, I've reached this point before during XC flights. Maybe four or five times in a hang glider and once before in a paraglider. I've landed in the valley each and every time. This time I was determined to hold on to every scrap of lift that I encountered.

During the last glide I had aimed for the spot where I saw a small cumulus cloud form. Unfortunately, the cloud dissipated long before I got to that point. In fact it was the last cumulus that I saw in the downwind direction. Fortunately, I did find some lift about 1,000 feet above the ground, right about the 63-mile point.

The next hour became a bit of a struggle as I passed a number of milestones while never really getting very high. My previous best from Pine in a PG was 65.8. I passed that in the thermal that I picked up at the 63 mile mark. It took me to 8,900 feet. Not wanting to give up on it I did six more circles in the area looking for the lift but only managed to turn in sink. Oh, well, I had passed 70 miles, so had flown farther than Matt had the week before.

So time to go on glide again. Right towards those green fields.

Just past the Chickahominy reservoir, at about 5,500 feet I found a bit more lift. It wasn't strong but hopefully would be enough to drift me across the wet area that I was approaching. By now the drift was about 15 mph nearly straight down the road so each circle bought a little distance. Was able to circle to about 6,500 feet when it was time to go on glide again. I was right in the middle of the green wet spot but figured that the Boomerang would make the glide to the other side.

It did but then I found myself really low once more. I had just passed 80 miles so had set a new site record for Pine, besting Brett Hardin's flight from a couple of weeks before.

And like had happened in Hampton, I blundered into a patch of lift that was enough to 360 in. The next four miles found me doing the Frisbee thing. Three or four circles to gain a few hundred feet then a few losing some. All the while the terrain was rising so even though I was generally climbing the ground clearance didn't really improve that much and it seemed as if I was low the entire time.

Then just past the Burns rest area, and the 84 mile mark, the 100 fpm lift turned into 400 fpm and I was headed up. Johnny told me that I had just set a new state record and asked if it had smoothed out but this thermal was just as small and rowdy as any had been all day. I asked him if they could call 911 for me but they wouldn't do it.

I had been in the air for five hours and could barely hold my head up as I struggled to keep turning as tight as I possibly could. Knew I had to work it though, because this could be the last thermal for the day. A second band of high cirrus that had been chasing me all afternoon had overtaken the area, shadowing the sun a bit. And it was after 6 pm so the sun wasn't all that strong anyway.

That thermal topped out at 11,400 at 6:30 pm. A five-mile glide and I ran into the next "last" thermal. Back up to just over 10 grand and then I was really on final glide. By this time I was over Hines, Oregon (just a few miles south of Burns), heading out over the Harney Valley to intercept highway 78 on the north side of Mahleur Lake.

The final glide was 18 miles long with an average ground speed of 38 mph and an average glide ratio of 14.6. Tailwinds are really nice to have.

I landed right next to highway 78, a few miles short of Crane, at 7:04 pm after having been the air for 5 hours and 50 minutes and 110.98 miles. Frankie and the crew showed up just a few minutes later.

The encouragement and support that Frankie, Johnny and Matt provided was invaluable and really helped when ever I felt too tired or too low.