

# SKYLINES



*Newsletter of the Skyline Soaring Club for November, 2023*

A member (Andrew Neilson) recently suggested that a nice monthly feature for the newsletter might be a brief summary of an experience that informed him or her how to soar better and/or safer. Here's the first installment!

## **THINGS I LEARNED TODAY** **Andrew Neilson**

Today I learned that winds that are only fifty feet off the ground can have a profound effect on your takeoff. I was in the Husky, towing a K with a student and instructor off of 28. Just before takeoff, as is my habit, I glanced at the windsock and it was just hanging there. I was aware of a tailwind aloft, but didn't give it much thought based on what the windsock was telling me. Takeoff was within normal, safe parameters. Then I started to climb. All of a

sudden the trees were getting too close too quickly for my comfort level, a sentiment echoed by the instructor. I then called Ground and said that we needed to switch to 10. I was reminded that surface winds are only a small part of the takeoff. Seriously consider all aspects of your intended takeoff profile before you leave the ground, not just the surface conditions.



## **LIFE ON 10** Marcelo Morichi

I was excited about my day as an ADO last August. It promised to be a beautiful early summer day in the Shenandoah Valley.

I started my shift performing the usual duties: preparing the tow rope, checking tire pressure on the gliders, testing the conditions of the grass safety area as we got ready for the safety briefing. We launched the first flight promptly at 9:00 a.m. The sky was clear, the sun was beginning to warm us up and the air was crisp.

By mid-morning, it seemed like the windsock got bored of looking towards California and decided it was time to check what has happening in New York. The tow pilot was the first to comment on the volatile windsock. A couple of flights later, the change of wind direction was permanent.

The idea of undoing all the setup we had done three hours earlier was not appealing: roll up the tow rope, fold the tables and chairs, disconnect all the cables, gather the radios, load everything up on the cart and tow it with the gators to the other side of the airport.

I dreaded being in the open with no access to the conveniences available in the FBO building: the shaded gallery that keeps everyone cool and offers a privileged view of the operations, plenty of space to park and stage the gliders, the kitchen with running water and a microwave to reheat the coffee that I bought at 6:00 a.m. on my way to the airport. And the bathroom.

The set-up of operations on 10 was fast and smooth. Our task force was efficient and coordinated: everyone picked a job and executed it independently: getting the tow rope ready, staging the gliders, setting up the gazebo, desk, and communication equipment for the air boss' command center.



It didn't take long until we launched the first glider. Several flights followed. It was past noon by then and we moved from students to rated-pilot flights. It was sunny and hot. The sun was at its zenith and that made that the gazebo's shade area small. Time went by. Keith setup the field kitchen for the hungry troops. He surprised everyone by bringing from the hangar the gas grill he had donated to the club.



During a moment of downtime, I looked around me: some people were by the grill enjoying Keith's burgers, other chatted under the gazebo. I noticed all the vegetation around us: the trees at the end of runway 10 were now much closer than usual, bushes of different sizes and varying degrees of green. The smell of freshly mowed grass came in waves. It felt good to be around nature. That was when it occurred to me that operating on runway 10 is like backcountry camping with the things that I love about it: nature and its sounds, fresh air, sun, and clouds. And the others that can be a challenge at times: no electricity, no running water, no fridge or microwave, no pavement. And no bathrooms.

The flying and airplane watching experience on runway 10 is different. You experience the raw power of the Pawnee as it gets ready to land – and where the different tow pilots drop the rope. It is exciting to see all the other power traffic up close. It is possible to appreciate details of the gliders on final that are missed when they land on runway 28.



I asked the club members who were with me when I was ADO what they liked about operating on 10, and this is what they said:

*I like that there are better low altitude release landing options off of 10! If you're too low to turn around. (Christopher Carswell)*

*Shorter glider push for take-offs, the restroom! (Carlos Troncoso)*

*Its just us, esprit de corps is better. No parachutes and other aircraft distractions. (Scott Bradley)*

*It's a half mile closer to the ridge than 28. If there's enough east wind to use 10, the near ridge is often working as a thermal collector. Even if you lose your battle with gravity, you can move out to the (often productive) slopes before the ridge - closer to the airport - and eventually to fields right off the approach end of 10, working somewhat lower while having the runway underfoot. (Hugh McElrath)*

*The only thing I like about operating on Runway 10 is that it gives us the opportunity to experience landing on another "airfield." When I was training, I only landed on runway 28. The day that Jim Kellett signed me off to solo we switched from runway 28 to runway 10. He flew with me a couple times off runway 10 and turned me loose on my solo. It was a great experience! (Keith Hilton)*

*I like that I don't have to land on 28 when the AWOS is E13G22. (George Hazelrigg)*

BY 4:00 p.m. we had successfully managed the operate with the changing wind direction. A fully stocked water cooler kept us hydrated, the gazebo gave us shade, a power inverter kept the laptop running, and Keith kept us well-nourished.

By the end of the day, I realized that I would approach my next opportunity to ADO or fly from runway 10 with a positive attitude. You just need to change the mental chip. Then, the no-bathroom conundrum is easily solved. It is just like backcountry camping.



## ANOTHER FABULOUS 'AWAY DAY'



Thanks again to the generosity of Bill and Sharon Burner for opening their airport in Woodstock to a family outing for our club!! It was

a great soaring day, a great picnic day, a great club social day, and a great day for families and friends of club members. We even had several visitors flying those funny flying machines that had fans in front!



Here are just some of the dozens of participants:



## A 300K CAKEWALK?

Alex Zobel

My plan for soaring on Oct 21st was very different from what actually happened. I recently completed a 20+ year build of a Russia AC-4KC homebuilt sailplane. I completed the airworthiness inspection with an FAA DAR back in July. Timing didn't align to bring it out to the airport until the 21st. My plan was to bring it out to the airport, assemble, and then do a crow hop or two (release the rope while only 3-4 feet above the ground) and then if everything seemed good with the aircraft I would take a 4k tow for the first real flight. Upon arrival to the airport the winds were 11G22, they were right down the runway but it wasn't an ideal day for a 1<sup>st</sup> flight. I spoke with Piet briefly and he mentioned that I should assemble GWZ (my 51 year old ASW-15b) instead and fly the cakewalk 300K task along the ridge. I mentioned that my flight recorders were set up for the Russia and I had no easy way to change the declaration with my laptop left at home. Piet said no problem and that he would lend me his Nano 3 for the flight. I mulled that over for 5 minutes and then decided to take him up on the offer. We quickly completed the flight declaration and then I was pulling GWZ out of the box for only the second assembly of this season.

I spoke with Ron Wagner before I launched to get a pipe. He stated that the ridge lift was working best at 3,200 ft MSL and they could have stayed up all day if they had wanted to. My launch was a little after 1215 and due to the winds the tow was a little bit sporty, I was bounced around a fair bit and there were several times I was correcting for a slack line that had developed. I have experienced worse while flying through the rotor in the Sierra Wave on the west coast but this tow was about the bumpiest I have experienced at Front Royal. After 5 minutes or so I was off tow and diving for Signal Knob and the start line. I have a fair amount of cross-country experience flying thermals along the Sierra crest in California, but this was my first experience traveling cross-country via ridge lift. Once I passed the start line I tried to settle into a comfortable altitude to run the ridge to the south. 3,200 ft was too low for my comfort level at the

start of that flight. I let the ridge lift carry me up between 3,800 to 4,000 ft and I tried to keep the airspeed up to 70 mph. I found myself challenged dealing with some negative transfer from my previous cross-country flying and what I was doing now. When thermal flying along the Sierras our mantra is Get High and Stay High. Landing options are few and far between and altitude is life. Ron was correct that the lift was best about 3,200 feet and I found it challenging to keep the sailplane at that altitude. I wanted to be higher.

The run to the southern turnpoint at the ski area was straightforward. I found the transitions from one ridge to the other somewhat tricky. This is where my irrational desire to remain too high was helpful. I was able to head into the wind, speed up and made the transitions with a little bit of altitude to spare. The first leg took a little over an hour, I was clearly flying too slow. The return to the north went quicker. The first big northbound ridge transition near New Market resulted in additional discomfort. I should have stayed with the initial ridge a little bit longer before venturing out to the west to meet the new ridge. I don't think I would have lost as much altitude as I did. I also found it more comfortable to take the stick in with my left hand when flying northbound. With the winds and the speeds I was flying a 15 degree crab was required to keep the ground track right along the ridge, it was easier to fly that crab angle with my left hand when northbound. Upon reaching the I-66 and I-81 interchange turnpoint it was time to do it again. Speeds were up during the second lap and I was finding myself more comfortable flying lower along the ridge. I also noticed that if I flew lower I could see the trees moving in the wind (imagine that) and that provided some assurance that the lift would be good. I still flew too high and was still nervous with the required ridge transitions. Somewhere along this run I accidentally knocked the Nano 3 off of the Velcro attachment while trying to make it display the distance to the next turnpoint sending it forward along the instrument panel cover. Now for navigation I had to just wait for it to beep to know if I had reached the turnpoint or not. Near the ski area turnpoint Caleb Smith in his Sparrowhawk

had caught up to me. We made the turnpoint at the same time and then it was off to the races. Well not really, Caleb left me in the dust and I think the handicap for his aircraft is much too generous. This run I was able to push my altitude even lower to the 3,200 ft that Ron recommended. I completed the task after about 3 hours and 15 minutes in the air. I still needed to disassemble and drive the 2 and a half hours home so I pulled the dive brakes and was on the ground 10 minutes later.

A couple of days later the paperwork and .igc file was submitted to the SSA and I was awarded the Gold badge. I flew the altitude portion of the badge back in 2017, and have been trying to make everything to align so that I could complete the distance task since then. Thanks to Piet I had the shove I needed to make it happen. Was it a cakewalk? I wouldn't call the flight difficult but for the first time really running the Appalachian ridges there was a fair amount of learning going on inside my old ASW-15b that day. Now it's time to go hunt some Diamonds and do it in the aircraft I built. Stay tuned for a flight report on the Russia AC-4KC soon.



**Skyline Soaring Club, Inc.**

is a private, 501(c)7 non-profit organization, dedicated to the enjoyment and promotion of the sport of soaring. SSC is based at the Front Royal-Warren County, Va. Airport and is an affiliate club of the Soaring Society of America.

For information about the club go to [www.skylinesoaring.org](http://www.skylinesoaring.org)

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