

Dual 1000km Flights from Truckee

by Peter Deane ASW20 2T - July, 1995

Since I started soaring some years ago, cross country flying has always been the aspect of soaring that has most captured my imagination. Like most pilots I graduated through the badge program and was able by the good graces of my young family to stay involved enough in soaring (albeit at a somewhat reduced rate of progress) to complete my Diamond distance flight some two years ago, one month after my soaring friend, Mike Schneider, completed his first 1000km flight, the first ever from Truckee on June 19th 1993. Mikes flight 2 years ago was something of a benchmark for me; Mikes achievement, flying a Mosquito B, made a BIG statement that it could be done in an average 15m ship by the right person on the right day; and at that point I decided that this was something I wanted to do! There was a major problem however and this was the obvious one that I would have to fly a lot faster than 60mph (my usual average) to fly 2 diamond distance flights back to back in one day! I was flying my newly acquired ASW-20, call sign 2T, and Mike was flying a similarly acquired Mini-Nimbus, call sign 3U, so we certainly couldnt blame equipment for any lack of success.

Progress on the long distance flights was curtailed last season through the effort of setting up the PASCO league, which I enjoyed immensely, but I promised myself that I'd reserve July and June this year for long distance flying and to have a go at the 1000km task. The Truckee PASCO league event was scheduled for the end of June, and Mike had volunteered to fly pundit for my team (Delta Devils, from the NCSA at Byron) on June 24th/25th, while I was hoping for a good chance of a 1000km attempt that weekend. Kempton Izuno, Tom Massoth and I had set up an internet weather alert network transmitting warnings of 1000km weather from both Doug Armstrong in Reno and Walt Rogers near LA. Sure enough, the weather gods smiled and an official 1000k weather watch was announced for the weekend of the League event. Mike and I headed up to Truckee on the Thursday night, rose early, declared, and made an attempt, but conditions were slower to improve than at first thought, and we settled for difficult 300km flights. I was hoping for better things on Saturday. People arrived for the PASCO league event on Friday, but then Mike fell ill with a virulent stomach complaint that put him flat on his back for the entire weekend. With Mike out of action, I had to take his place in my League team and my weekend was spent in a very enjoyable way, but not doing what I had originally planned to do. On Saturday, Mike Bird (aka Platypus from Sailplane & Gliding column fame) completed his 1000km from Minden in a ASH-25. Strike one.

With the Open Class and Standard class Nationals close together, our two sources of weather watches (Doug and Walt) dried up in July, and so I resorted to watching the satellite movies on the TV and watching temperature trends like a hawk. Every day I would call the Reno FSS soaring forecast, note the conditions and trends for the following day. If the trends sounded promising, I would call NOAA at Reno and politely ask for general information about moisture and temperature medium range forecasts; the key was high temperatures with moderate moisture, since overdevelopment would spell disaster for us if the usual moist weather scenario of thunderstorms at Mt Grant and Mt Patterson developed, blocking our route either north or south.

For the first half of July, the temperatures were a full 5 degrees below seasonal

norms, but the pattern finally broke with low to mid 90s forecast for Reno on Saturday and Sunday the 15/16th of July. A call to NOAA gave me the moisture trends for the weekend; airmass dry and stable, temps low 90s Saturday, mid 90s Sunday with increasing moisture and chance of thunderstorms on Sunday. The soaring forecast looked pretty good but not outstanding, but Saturday seemed like the best day of the two to make an attempt. While going through the administrative misery of making an official declaration on Saturday morning, I suggested to Mike that that I thought it might be good if he wanted to try something that day. The forecast trigger time was 11.30am (late for a 1000km attempt) this day and both he and Steve McRobert, ahead of me in line, were quite agreeable to me launching first as soon as there was any sign of triggering. In fact, they seemed positively eager for me to go first. At 11.30, the air felt right (dont know how else to describe it) and I took the first tow of the day.

The tow was uneventful, and conscious of possible height penalties, I released in the first strong surge of lift near the airport at 7800msl. (1900 agl), knotted and promptly lost the core of the lift and was unable to find it again, nearly landing before slowly grinding out from pattern altitude over the Martis Creek Dam in a 2kt thermal. With a little more height in the bank, I went searching for something better. Nothing. Back to my 2kn thermal and try again. 30 minutes later I was struggling to get through 10k, with both Mike and Steve trying to climb up nearby. Finally things triggered properly and at last I left Mt Rose with Mike close behind, at 12.45 pm and 12.5k, heading for some wispiers forming just NW of Minden in the foothills.

Time was awasting and at this early stage I was not terribly optimistic that I'd be able to complete the task due to leaving Rose so late, but I pressed on anyway since I'd never been south of Bishop before and wanted to at least get to the southerly turnpoints for future reference. The task I'd planned used Cerro Gordo as the final turn and I'd never actually seen it before, save a very blurry photocopy of a faxed photograph that Tom Massoth sent to Kempton, who showed it to me. I was concerned about being able to find it once down there. Anyway; back to the flight.

I decided not to take any thermals until I arrived at the foothills of the Pine Nuts, near Minden where after a some time-anxious scouting around I found a 6kn climb to 12.5k where it softened a little so I pushed further into the Pine Nuts in search of better lift. The Pine Nuts were working fine, and on the main ridge north of Seagal I found 8kn (average) to 14k. Porpoising across Mt Siegal, I climbed to 15k flying straight and level and then left Siegal at 100kn heading toward Mt Patterson. Another strong climb west of Desert Creek Peak gave me plenty of altitude to scoot over the top of Mt Patterson which was home to some raggy looking cus. Conditions at Patterson were soft, however, and I decided to head over to Potato Peak where some haze domes were visible. Mike called and said that he was finding Patterson a little weak. I told him I was heading over to Potato Pk to check it out. I arrived under a freshly forming cu at 12k and I climbed to 15k with alacrity. At this point I was with a VERY blue route to the Whites around the eastern side of Mono lake. At this point the Whites were still blue with the exception of 2 small cus near Boundary Peak. Meanwhile, Mike had taken a more westerly route toward the Sierras from Patterson.

I was not very inclined to go over the no-mans land between Potato Peak and the north end of the White mountains with no clear indication of lift, so decided to head for a weak looking bunch of raggy pancake-thin cus to the north shore of Mono, took a moderate climb there and headed out across the lake to some more pancake cus

near the Mono craters area. I kept pushing forward despite a disconcerting decrease in altitude and at 11k found a good climb between Mono Craters and Glass Mountain to 16.5k. My more direct route meant that as I banked out of the top of the thermal I saw Mike slip into the thermal about 3k underneath me. This was to be the last time we had visual contact until the end of the flight. During one of our periodic position reports during the climb out we concurred that conditions were better than they looked, but would we make it? Time, a precious commodity on a long flight, was not on our side.

From there I took a long glide to the Whites near White Mtn Peak, porpoising in patchy lift near Glass Mountain, still not stopping due to time anxieties. I experienced fairly strong sink over the Owens valley, which meant I arrived at the base of White Mountain at around 11k. Conditions were still mainly blue but with a few cu forming east of the peaks and some promising looking haze domes to the south.

After arriving at the Whites I flew straight ahead southbound trying to find a good climb. The Whites look really intimidating when youre looking up at them! On the western flanks of the range, down low, there was lots of lift but very small cores meant dolphining worked the best until the thermals widened out a little with height. Gradually I got high enough to where the thermals were big enough to climb in easily with a full load of water and took a climb to 16k near the Bishop radio towers. By now, a nice strong cloud was forming on the North end of the Inyos and I buried the nose and put the flaps full negative, flying 100kn to the cloud south of Westgard Pass. On arrival at 12k I connected with a 10 knotter and climbed like a train and then headed for the start of a street heading south. I followed this until alongside Lone Pine, where I left the street to head directly to the first turnpoint, the road junction due south of Keeler, arriving at 14k at 4.05 pm. On the way down I checked out the turnpoint at Cerro Gordo which was thankfully very obvious from the air. I took several shots of the first turn and headed straight back to the mountains east of Lone Pine for a climb.

Here I was at 4pm with only 380km of the flight completed. Only 620km more to cover before dark, and the big question...would we make it???? At this point Mike was 10 minutes behind as hed flown more conservatively taking a climb at Glass mountain before hitting the Whites. I called out a position report; Three Uniform, Two Tango is at Keeler junction, heading north, doing fine. Mike, having done all this before, called back so, Two Tango, local soaring from Truckee, huh?! I had to confess it felt pretty special being this far from home. I was also starting to think that this crazy flight might be do-able after all.

The next portion of the flight would make or break the attempt. If I could get to Basalt by 5pm I figured I could do the flight. Fortunately, the street was visibly strengthening so cranked up a few gears and went for it, dolpining all the way from Lone Pine to Basalt at 100kn inter thermal speed, 60kn in pullups, not turning ONCE for 100 or so miles, averaging 110+ mph over the ground. Words cannot describe the sense of thrill, amazement and gratitude that these conditions induced! I cruised over Boundary Pk at 16k and headed out to Basalt road junction. Shot the turnpoint at Basalt at 5.05pm and decided to head south again, as the street was still active. I reported position to Mike, who was now about 30 minutes behind, having flown the street more conservatively. I reported the speed to fly I was using, and I promptly stopped pulling away! I told Mike I was going south again because I thought we could do it, despite the lateness of the day. He concurred and shortly headed south as well.

At this point I was just about as high metaphorically as I was physically. After a 110 mph run, the first of its kind I had ever experienced, I wanted to go back for more! I'd only ever read about these kind of conditions in books, and frankly had never entirely believed the hangar stories that other pilots had told me about the Whites on a good day, attributing these seemingly impossible speeds to hypoxia or artistic license. Now I know otherwise! Simple mental arithmetic showed that if I could maintain these speeds I could be back at Boundary Pk around 7-7.30pm, where I would need one final climb to 18k to make a long final glide into Yerington, my minimum completion distance and safe airport landing site.

Still not circling, I arrived at the Whites at Boundary Peak and climbed straight ahead at 80kn and continued the dolphin flying, flying faster once I'd reached my porpoising band of 15-16k. The street continued to be strong on the Inyos, although spreading out and getting darker while simultaneously drifting westward, which was unusual. I arrived at Cerro Gordo at 6.10pm where I decided to take a climb near the turnpoint to 15k. Took the shots and headed north; By this time the street was beginning to soften a little, with strong lift for dolphin pullups fewer and farther between, so I reduced inter-thermal speed to 80kn, and eventually had to take a climb near deep Westgard Pass again. The clouds on the Whites were definitely softening, (well, pathetic looking actually) so I tiptoed up the Whites at 70-80kn, maintaining between 14.5 and 16k, becoming more and more anxious about the need for a successful last climb at Boundary Peak. Arriving at the north end of the Whites and searching for a few minutes, I found a really nice wide, gentle climb. The sun was getting low and at 7.20pm I left Boundary Peak at 17.8k at best glide, heading into the murk in the direction of Yerington. Visibility was very poor at this point with the glare from the low sun, and I navigated with compass and major mountain features, pointing the glider between Sweetwater mountains and Mt Grant. There were some clouds north of Boundary Peak and near Mt Grant, which had me fantasizing wildly about the possibility of making it as far as Carson City, but they dissipated as I arrived underneath them so any hope of getting beyond Yerington became academic. The air was dead, save residual and occasional small patches of 1kn lift. I experienced mostly gently subsiding air. There is something quite disconcerting about a final glide that takes an entire hour towards a destination you can't even see! I felt very vulnerable. A position report to Mike revealed that he had headed toward Sweetwater to try and make it to Minden, but he decided to head into Yerington due to daylight considerations.

Finding the airport against the glare of the low sun was done by following the Walker River into Yerington, where I arrived over the Yerington airport at 2k agl. A quick call to Yerington unicom for wind conditions was, to my great surprise, answered, and I landed safely on runway 1 at 8.20 pm. 8hrs, 50 minutes after takeoff, out of lift, low on sunlight, low on water, oxygen and battery juice, to complete the second ever 1000km flight out of Truckee. And what a feeling! The fun was not over yet though; I got out of the cockpit and was immediately attacked in a quite ferocious manner by about 3000 mosquitos. It was quite impossible to get my long pants and sweatshirt on before being bitten about 50 times. Most unpleasant. It turns out that there is a large sewage plant right next to the runway. Be warned!!

A short time later Mike entered the pattern at Yerington and touched down, to complete the third 1000km from Truckee, and Mike's second successful 1000km flight. A red letter day for both of us! We called Truckee to let everyone know the news, and are forever grateful for our retrieves from fellow pilots Marc Ramsey and Steve McRobert. We celebrated by parking the gliders and heading to the local store

for an ice cold beer each!!

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