

Quest for Silver - 1996

by Ken Ward

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Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Ken Ward, I'm the (thankfully ex-) Maintenance Chairman (also known as "Hey you! This is busted! Fix it before I want to go soaring again!") of the Bay Area Soaring Associates glider club. I've been flying hang gliders since 1977, sailplanes since 1990, and aircraft with portable fire hazards since 1992. This article is written in an attempt to coax more glider pilots into cross country flying in general, and FAI badge flying in particular. I know there are some pilots out there who belong to the "Badges? We don't need no stinking badges!" club. I initially wasn't that excited about it, but once I started, I found it to be highly addictive and enjoyable. There's certainly something to be said for attaining an internationally recognizable goal, one whose accomplishment will always spark admiration by those who have also met the challenge.

I began my quest for Silver, as a club requirement for moving up from the venerable Schweizer 1-34, into the Centrair Pegasus 101a. My approach was to gain familiarity with the FAI badge procedures via completing the Silver (and Gold!) Altitude Gain and Silver Duration badge legs, while flying out of Soar Truckee. I was fortunate in that the FBO operator, Les Sebald, was always willing to act as an official observer. Documentation is requirement number one: find a current set of FAI rules and forms; read them carefully. Order a copy of Jackie Payne's book from the SSA, called "Badge and Record Flying." Now go try it, and don't get discouraged if your first attempts at these legs run afoul of paperwork and/or procedures. Lessons learned now will pay large dividends on future badge attempts.

The beauty of the first two legs is that they don't have to take you away from your home airport at all. For the completion of the Silver badge, I had to complete the Cross Country leg. I chose to attend the PASCO Cross Country Camp, hosted by Carl Herold at Air Sailing Glider port. It was a interesting week, and one that I would recommend, especially if you can bring your own ship You'll be using equipment that you're already familiar with, and can focus on absorbing the lecture and flying information. You will want to purchase a copy of Carl's excellent text, entitled "Cross Country Landing Sites." At the end of the week, it was time for participants to undertake a solo XC flight, and most of Team Low Performance opted to attempt the 50 km task. I chose to fly to Truckee, use it as the opening turn point, and then return to Air Sailing.

It was with some trepidation that I turned the nose of the NSA 1-36 away from the Dog Skin Range, and pointed it across the high desert towards a distant Truckee. This course was chosen as I was confident that I could locate Truckee (pick turn points that you can find), and Reno-Stead as well as a good dry lake lay midway along the path, should I fall out (identify bailout spots). As it happened, I did get low at Peavine mountain, which left me relieved that I had thoroughly reviewed the Reno-Stead pattern and frequencies, leaving me to focus on working that narrow thermal back up to cruise altitude. Once back on course, the day really began cooking, and I zoomed straight towards my turn point. Once again preparation paid off, as I knew exactly where I needed to be in order to get a valid turn point photo. The return was total cruise mode, with regular progress checks revealing that I could fly faster than best glide. A good pattern, landing, and then the final round of paperwork, resulting in a application for completion of the Silver badge.

After weeks of tense waiting, a fat envelope (a good sign!) arrived from the SSA, the product of a meticulous review by the ever-vigilant, always helpful, Arleen Coleson. In conclusion, the journey was the reward, and the key to a successful journey is preparation, preparation, and more preparation. Come up with a good plan, and fly the plan. Ask for suggestions from others who have done the deed. Be ready for the day, and let your flying meet the challenge. You'll be a better pilot for it. Next task: the Quest for Gold. Good Soaring!