

Mountain Valley Labor Day Weekend 2002 By Dan Rihn

After some great flights in the OCSA Grob 103 last year at Mountain Valley I've been waiting all year to get back to this fabulous gliderport. But this year would be even better; I was set to take my newly purchased ASW-20 (WO) for 4 days of Soaring fun. Unlimited flying if the lift was good!

OCSA member and good friend Aaron Munger agreed to crew for me, we left Long Beach o'dark way too early on Friday the 30th for our trek to Hemet, then to Mountain Valley. After a very long drive we arrived at Mountain Valley and assembled WO. The first flight was to be local and get reacquainted with the valley. I was rewarded with a nice 4.3-hour flight where I shared thermals with other OCSA members, Larry Tuohino in his PIK-20, Steve Mawhinney in his ASW-25 and Dave Raspert flying his Ventus. Although I never saw Dave, he was always radioing us about the Wave lift he was working. Larry and I shared thermal lift for quite a while then later I encountered the Wave Lift that Dave was experiencing. Smooth lift, nice and steady, but not real strong. It was fun to play in. After a while I was able to hook up with Steve and we chased each other all over the mountains to the south of the airport. I learned a lot and had a ball. I've flown over the Tehachapi Mountains hundreds of times in power aircraft but I've never seen them like this. I even shared some flying with the new Sparrowhawk ultra light sailplane. At the end of this beautiful day enjoying great lift I was treated to watching Steve do over a dozen continuous loops to bleed off the altitude, me I just let it float back down, savoring every minute. What a great day, what a very long day.

Saturday the 31st was a weird weather day. We had a bright blue day but there was a lot of rotor activity, which slowed the launch activity for a while. My father had traveled to Mountain Valley to spend the weekend with me and see my new ship. While waiting for the launching to continue I was able to show him WO. My Dad taught me to fly at a very young age; we used to fly gliders together over 30 years ago. He was very impressed with WO looked forward to see me fly her. When I finally launched it was extremely rough, some of the roughest air I'd ever flown gliders in, but there was lots of good lift to be had. Again, Dave Raspert found the Wave and got to 17,999' MSL (yeah sure Dave). Paul Savario flying his Libelle and I had some fun, Paul showed me the way to Kelso Valley until I got chicken and turned back. This flight was 3 hours of bouncing around the valley, which I found to be very tiring so I decide to call it quits. Later we adjourned to a nice OCSA dinner in town. Good food, good conversation and great comraderie.

Sunday the 1st started even more weird weather wise. We were awakened to thunder and lightning to the east. I was really wondering what this day would bring, little did I know that this day was to be my first real cross country in a glider. When we got to the airport there were signs that a rainstorm had passed through. Good excuse to wash down WO. Eventually the storm clouds started to clear and I over heard some of the local hot shots say "this is going to be one heck of a great day if the weather can figure out how to become a great day". I got a fairly early launch this time and decided to try for my 5-hour endurance flight; I had Aaron act as my official observer for the launch and off it went. The first 30 minutes were great, I took a 2,000' foot tow and was climbing really well over the Bald Spot when my friend Tom Riley flying his Spirit called me and asked if I wanted to join him flying North. Why not, I got plenty of altitude and a cloud street is forming in that direction, plus I was a lot higher than Tom. So off I went chasing Tom to the North. We passed Kelso Valley with plenty of altitude (no chickening out this time). A nice cloud street had formed nicely to the North so we kept pressing on. After

quite a bit of high speed porpoise flying, I called Tom and asked him how far North did he plan to take me? He called back and said we could turn back anytime; it was up to my comfort level and me. I called Tom and said we had passed my comfort level miles ago so lets keep going. We were flying over terrain I'd never flown over before and would never fly a power plane over. We got up to Walker Pass and circled for a bit to tank up. The cloud street to the North was starting to look a bit nasty but we decided to keep pushing North. By this time Tom and I were about the same altitude and I was afraid of running him over so I flew a bit to the east of his track. This turned out to be a slight mistake; I hit a lot more sink than Tom. I should have stayed over the high ground where the lift was better, good lesson for me to remember! Just north of Little Lake the weather really started to look bad. I called Tom and asked if he could see the lightning strikes? He had seen them too and we agreed that maybe it would be a good time to head back. By this time I was getting way too low for my comfort so we both worked our way to the ridges south of Sacatar Meadows. I was able to climb up but Tom was now quite a bit higher than me. The cloud street we had flown north on still looked good for the return trip. We flew back towards Walker Pass along the ridgeline at top speed. Again I got lower than I liked, somehow I had got in front of Tom so I stopped for a climb to make the glide to Kelso Valley. At Kelso Valley we needed to tank up again, there was a real nice cloud street over the northern Windmills that was looking very strong so when we had good altitude took off at top speed again to the clouds. When we got there we were rewarded with some very strong lift right up to cloud base just over 15,000'. From here it didn't look like there was any lift between the Windmills and Mountain Valley but we had plenty of altitude so we decided to make a long flat formation final glide. We headed west to Bear Mountain, flying around the west side of the peak and finding only very smooth air. From here we turned east and headed back to Mountain Valley. When we got back into the valley we spotted our mutual friend Doug Fronius in his restored LK-10. Doug is very familiar with the area so I decided to follow him for a bit. To learn more about the valleys lift areas. Tom decided to call it quits for the day but I wanted to keep playing. Doug and I had good fun working the small 2 Knot thermals just above pattern altitude. After doing this for a while I noticed I'd been flying for 4 hours. I completely wiped the 5-hour endurance flight from my mind, the excitement of the cross-country had been enough for me, but after a while I decided I could hang on for another hour. A quick call to Aaron to see if he still had my time, sure enough he and my Dad had followed my entire flight from the ground radio. So why not stretch it! As it turned out I made it 5 hours and 8 minutes. Sure wish I had taken my time playing around at 15K over the windmills but at least I got it done. I said thanks to Tom for shepherding (waiting for me to climb back up when I got low etc.) me along and showing me the way. Can't wait to get back up "north".

After a nice landing and cool swim in the Travel Lodge pool we returned to the airport for the OCSA cook out. Aaron mentioned that the Nimbus 4D, 2K was not back yet. It was about 7:30 and they were one of the first to launch. I happened to look up and there they were on downwind. Turns out they had flown to Dayton, Nevada (east of Carson City) and back, total time was over 7 hours. Wow! That is some machine! After helping tie 2K down we were treated to great Barbecue. OCSA President Keith Schrader out did himself with the Tri-tip. Next we attended the Ralph Barnaby Lecture given by Gerhard Waibel (the W in the AS-W sailplanes). What an awesome day.

Monday the 2nd was a bright sunny day with lots of good potential. Everyone was at the airport waiting to launch, we all wanted to get airborne by 11:30 so it was a mad scramble to the grid. I had decided to stay local and fly with Aaron and Jerry Clark. They would trade off in the OCSA PW-5 and I would show them what I had learned

about the local flying. After another 2,000-foot tow I was able to get back on the mountain and joined Jerry near the Bald Spot. We had a great time flying to the west over the mountains. Jerry didn't have any O2 so he was a bit limited on his altitude, but we still had a ball flying together. After about an hour he returned to let Aaron give it a try. By this time the grid was half way down the runway. I flew all over waiting for Aaron to get his tow, even made a run to Kelso Valley and back and got to 16K while waiting for him. I was right over the field when Aaron finally got his tow. We had trouble joining up and the lift over the mountains was really getting spotty and rough. Aaron went back to the valley and used his good Hemet small thermal skills to climb back up. I left the mountain and we joined up for some good tight thermal flying in the valley. Aaron called it a day when his hour slot was over but I wanted to keep savoring my last day. When I was assured that my Dad had completed the Beer Run I decided it was time to call it quits. I made a nice landing after 4.7 hours of flying, another great day at Mountain Valley.

As it turned out this was probably the best day for cross-country. Tom Riley easily made it to Lone Pine with plenty of altitude. Keith Schrader made his Diamond distance out and return, Larry Tuohino called back saying he made it to the top of Mt. Whitney, I heard guys were flying back to Hemet and making it. The Nimbus 2K probably went to Moon and back!

This trip is by far the best sailplane flying I've had. If I had a data logger I could have easily knocked out several badge flights. That will be a good project for the winter. It will be fun preparing WO knowing that I'll be back to Mountain Valley next year!