

September 1, 2003

This past Saturday I completed my silver distance and silver altitude gain. Earlier in the week, Jim Hard had sent interested parties a “heads up” about soaring conditions through the weekend. It was promising to be an excellent long weekend for soaring. Originally, I had wanted to spend Friday at the airfield, but as I had FOO duties at the field on Sunday, I decided to spend Saturday and Sunday at the field, and planned a soaring task for Saturday.

I decided tentatively on Stanton as a goal. This would be sufficient to achieve my Silver Distance, and take me farther cross-country than my only prior cross-country flight – to Rush City. After getting up early on Saturday morning, I drove down to Benson’s, arriving at 9:30am. I was happy to see other club members already there. Mike Finegan was rigging, and obviously was going to soar. Upon talking to him, he told me about his plans for a Gold distance attempt. Clearly, I was in good company with my plans! I offered to help Mike with his rigging when he needed me, and set about to ready the Pilatus B4.

I prepared a barograph, and called Anoka for wind direction and pressure. Winds were out of the Northwest. I started looking at my maps with the wind in mind to finalize my goal. Others at the field added their two cents worth, but I decided in the end (after borrowing an Omaha sectional from Nile McAdams—I need additional sectionals!) that I would stick with my Stanton plan as the general clockwise change of wind direction with altitude should take the wind direction more Southernly, and I was most prepared for navigating the Stanton route. I extended my flight goals further on advice

from Pete Kroll. He suggested that if I reached Stanton and all looked good, I should continue on and make for Faribault. So, that was my goal for the day.

By about noon Mike and I were pulled out to the flight line. I was asking around for takers on crewing for me (hopefully in the future I'll get my crew ready beforehand—I hadn't asked Andy Power this time, who has graciously offered to crew for me before). Paul Esser arrived, and I was mildly shocked at how receptive he was to being my crew. No arm-twisting was needed. This was great! I was just about to launch, and I had a ground crew.

Mike launched first, being ready first. I launched shortly thereafter, at around 12:30pm. As I was preparing for a Silver Distance attempt, I released at about 2000 feet AGL. This tow was not to be the one that kept me in the air. Within about 10 minutes, I was back on the ground. I found myself low and South of the field, so called in a left hand pattern on the radio and brought the ship in. Erwin fetched me back from mid-field, and I said "yes, put me back on the flight line." Mike Finegan was still in the air, and seemed to be working the lift. My second launch was at about 1pm. I managed to work my way North, trying to figure out if I could work with the conditions this day, but again found myself low. I was near to Forest Lake this time, so I landed there. Left hand patterns seemed to be the rule of the day. I was low and to the South of Forest lake, so made a left hand pattern into Forest lake after calling it out on the radio. Benson's ground (Paul Esser) acknowledged. After landing at Forest Lake, I saw a pair of Canadian geese flying low. The day was beautiful. And I was just a little disappointed. I was losing confidence that I was going to be able to attempt my task for

the day. I called Benson's on my mobile phone and asked for Ted Perron, our tow pilot on Saturday, to give me a tow from Forest Lake. In no time at all he was there, he pulled me back to the other end of the field, and we launched. I was in the air, on this my third and final launch of the day, at about 2pm.

This time it seemed the conditions had improved or my luck was better. At about 1/3 the way back to Benson's, at about 1800' AGL, Ted was towing me through a strong thermal. I released, saw the rope was clear, and dove to notch the barograph (for the third time that day!). This launch was to prove to be the ticket. I was at cloud base quickly (around 6000' MSL on this first thermal). I was already well North of the TCA, having not towed very far South. I called into Benson's on the radio and told them my status, and started to inch my way East. My confidence started building about the conditions. While there was strong lift (my best lift of the day was a 10 knot thermal—timed with my wrist watch), there was also certainly strong sink, perhaps not surprisingly. Flying faster between thermals, I was soon at Bayport. Somewhere in around this time, I had regained my confidence and told Benson's ground that I was going to start on my task and make for Stanton. At the end of the day, I was a little surprised at just how easy it was to navigate to Stanton. After getting well across the river to Bayport, heading South lead me to the junction of the St. Croix and the Mississippi rivers. At the time I thought I was by Cottage Grove. Looking at my map again I think the city was actually Prescott. As I'd been told, Byllesby Lake (not named on the sectionals, but just NE of Stanton) was clearly visible from near cloud-base at the junction of the rivers. I think it was just after this that I attained my high altitude of the day,

around 7000 MSL. This was the highest I've made it in flights in Minnesota, and with my roughly 3000 MSL tow should give me also a Silver altitude gain for this flight.

Continuing on towards Byllesby Lake, I was at the West end of the lake fairly quickly, at good altitude. Generally, I was at 5000-6000 MSL for most of the flight. It took a little concerted staring at the ground to pick out Stanton, but I found it, and was over the field. Directly over the field, I found a thermal, and started turning. Looking above me, I saw a glider, and took off my hat to keep him or her in view. Later in the day, I learned that this was Romeo Tango (Leon Zeug).

I'm not quite sure where it was on the trip, but somewhere I became very grateful to Mike Finegan for his advice in telling me to wear long pants that day instead of just shorts. For much of the flight I was cold, and wishing I had worn a good Canadian sweater 😊. From Stanton, I decided to keep up the plan to head for Faribault, as I was maintaining reasonable altitude, and the cumulus clouds still were plentiful. My fatigue level and the temperature were OK too. So, from Stanton, I headed towards Northfield. This was one of the times I dropped down to 4000 MSL (about 3000 AGL) and was looking for places to land. When I started scouting for landing areas, there were generally one or two brownish fields that looked like possibilities. Here again though I found reasonable lift and worked my way back up to cloud base.

Heading on my final leg to Faribault, I arrived there at about 5pm. I saw a Blanik glider in the air there, and thermaled near them for some time. I was looking at my maps, and thinking about the rest of the day. It was posing no problem to stay in the air. It was getting on the day, however. To the

West, the cumulus clouds looked good. One option was to push on farther West, for Lé Sueur. That was the direction in which the clouds looked best. Landing was my other option. It seemed a shame to land as the day was still strong. I opted to land though, as my fatigue level was relatively high, I was somewhat cold, and Paul Esser could navigate with the trailer to Faribault with relative ease. Another factor, which should have been in my consideration, which became evident later was that there were knowledgeable people on the ground at Faribault (notably Bob Wander) who might help us de-rig the glider. After deciding I was going to land there, and still maintaining my altitude, I pulled out my “landing peanuts.” (After my 5 1/2 hour duration flight for the Silver duration, I was talking to Jim Hard about my fatigue after that flight. On that flight, I landed back at Benson’s, but was pretty tired. What could be done about this—to decrease one’s fatigue level prior to landing after a quality day in the sky? Jim told me to eat something. So, I’ve started carrying a bag of “landing peanuts”). Eating my peanuts and having some water, I started looking more at the airfield. I saw a glider land, and noted that they were using the grass area just East of the main asphalt for landing. Radioing my intent to land, JC Cunningham gave me some additional information on landing, and I started my descent to land. This time, I was going to make a right hand pattern, having plenty of time to plan the landing. Setting up for downwind, I did my landing checks, extending the gear, and was soon on final. I closed the spoilers a little when I saw the runway lights, wanting to make sure to clear them. I haven’t landed on many fields with lights, so was a little surprised to see them. I landed somewhat long, touching down and rolling to a stop in the second grass area at Faribault. In retrospect, I think I should have used the asphalt at Faribault on this first

landing. There was little traffic that day, the asphalt was far longer than the grass area, and the second grass area (East of runway 31 if I'm recalling correctly) is somewhat narrow—with a ditch to one side. Bob Wander pulled up in his car shortly after I landed, and hooked me up to tow back to the glider area. I recognized his face from the RWSA reunion, but this was the first time I'd talked to him. I was on my mobile phone talking to Paul Esser, asking him to come with the trailer and my truck. I had made my goals and more for the day!

De-rigging the glider turned out to be no problem. With Paul, I was very happy to have the help of Bob Wander, Leon Zeug (who landed after me), JC Cunningham, and a few others. JC added some safety wires to the door of the Pilatus trailer as a final touch to get us home safely.

In closing, I would like to thank Jim Hard formally for his mentorship and helping me to start on cross-country soaring. He pushed me to get my Bronze, inspired me with his enthusiasm, graciously organized and conducted his cross-country seminar in the Fall, and has helped in numerous other ways to have me (and others) reach the level to be able to make these flights. This summer I feel again like I did when I was first learning to soar. I'm alive again with gliding. Thanks Jim.

*Badge note:* It's now 5 October 2003, and I have received my Silver badge (#6434) from the SSA Badge Lady. It arrived in a ring box!