

## My First Stanton Flights

5/30/04, Sunday

This past week, Monday through Friday, was the soaring event at Stanton, organized by Paul Remde. I had appointments in Duluth on Monday, and so headed down on Tuesday AM. The pattern of coming down to Benson's, derigging the Pilatus, and trailering to an event is starting to become familiar. This time though it was a little more difficult to find people to help out derigging. My hope that Slim was around at Benson's airfield did not materialize, and so I depended first on the good will of one of the Motor Home inhabitants at Benson's to help pull the ship over to the trailer, and then Richard Weil came by in the PM to help with the Pilatus wings.

Trailering to Stanton was unremarkable except that I didn't find the "Stanton" turnoff sign I was expecting from HWY 52 from St. Paul. Instead, I had to stop at the local gas station in Cannon Falls to ask for directions. Fortunately the pleasant woman there had a grandfather who used to live in Stanton, and guided me towards 19 heading East, just to the North, to get to Stanton. While I'd driven to Stanton one time previously crewing for Jim Hard, my ground route at that time was tracking his glider (plus its been a while since I crewed for Jim—take the hint Jim—refresh my memory with another crewing opportunity!). I had actually previously been to Stanton a total of two times—but the other time was enroute to Faribault during my Silver Distance flight, and the knowledge from the air flight didn't translate well into ground navigation skill. I arrived at Stanton at close to 6pm, and tied the trailer down to avoid it sailing off into the wind whilst still in the trailer. It was not possible to rig the glider that evening as most of the folks had headed out for the day.

Setting up my tent at the East end of the soaring clubhouse, to avoid the wind of the day, my RV neighbor, Ray, asked me if I wanted to join him for a beverage. Ray turned out to be a very pleasant camping neighbor for me in Chez Tent. He offered me quality conversation (including stories of his trips to Africa—one of my heroes grew up there, so I listened attentively), Becks beer, breakfast in the AM, and helping hands to rig the Pilatus after breakfast.

Wednesday AM looked like a possible great soaring day. The sky was blue, the precipitation was slowing the past few days (no rain in Jim Hard's rain gauge) and the soaring forecast looked promising. I launched at 12:10pm after several others, with not much hope of staying up. Gliders seemed to be uniformly launching, and returning to Earth. After struggling with thermals to stay up and getting down near pattern entry altitude, I found my first good lift of the day, and made it up to near cloudbase, 4,000 MSL. Thinking about this now, after the flight, and after talking to people about the flight, the cloudbase was rather low. My working altitude band was 3,000 MSL to 4,000 MSL. My plan was to head directly East from Stanton, to cross the Mississippi, which I accomplished just South of Red Wing. The lift was somewhat fragmented but relatively plentiful, and so curiously I didn't find the sight of the Red Wing airport comforting. Crossing the river was on my mind. I thought I might loose rather a large amount of

altitude. My crossing point was fairly narrow and I smiled after only losing a few hundred feet across the river. From there, I started to head in a North-Easterly direction. The MOA's (Military Operating Areas) East of Red Wing were operational for much of the day (a good reminder to make sure to call 1-800-WX-BRIEF to get the status of these areas), and so my generally West to East line I had drawn on my map gave these areas wide berth.

I joined the Chippewa River near Durand, about 15 miles past my river crossing. My line on the Green Bay sectional had me heading due East at Eau Claire, but that didn't materialize. I started losing lift a little past Durand. I was a little upset about not having made much headway on my plans (a Gold distance flight), but realized that the ground was approaching and made my choice of landing field. I decided on a landing to the West as the winds were out of the South-West. My landing field was nice and flat, and long—a corn field that hadn't yet been re-planted. I tried avoiding the dried foot-high corn stalks in my roll out, but hit many of them. They didn't seem to cause problems though. I had successfully selected my third farmer's field, and accomplished the landing! The time was 2:30pm. Shutting down the electrics in the glider, I put my things together in my flight bag. I was pretty stiff—it was good to be walking around. Mobile phone reception was absent, so I started walking to the East. I had seen a farmhouse in that direction when I was landing.

It took about 1/2 hour of walking to find some relatively consistent reception on my cell phone. I had knocked on three house doors at that point, and decided to stay sitting on the step of the 3<sup>rd</sup> house as that's where I had cell phone reception. I was wondering what the people of the house would think if they came before my crew arrived, and had to face that in short order as a boy got off a school bus and headed towards the house. I had managed to contact JC Cunningham at Stanton and knew he was organizing a retrieve for me, so now I settled in on my next challenge of the day: Trying to make this young boy think I wasn't an axe murderer! Here I was, unshaven, dirty and smelly, wearing my goofy soaring hat. I told the boy my name, and he had the good sense not to tell me his. He gave me directions though to his house. It turns out I'd landed about 5 miles South of Menomonie—the town was Downsville. Fortunately my new friend's Mom arrived shortly after him and I didn't have to worry about this situation any more. To his credit though, Ethan (his name, I learned from his mother) handled the situation well. First wondering where I'd crashed my plane, then trying to figure out which of the local fields I'd landed in. With his Mom and little sister (Kirstie) home, the four of us headed out in their truck to my landing site. It had taken me a while to walk to their house and so it took us a while to get back to the field. I learned that this was not their cornfield, but they knew the farmer and didn't think it was going to be a problem for him. I offered the kids to sit in the glider, and took some pictures with Ethan in the plane and Mom and Kirstie standing aside. We started doing what we could to derig the glider and prepare for the arrival of my crew, and also walked out the path for the retrieve vehicle—to avoid the damp areas in the field.



I felt relieved now that I'd taken the family to the glider. My story was confirmed and the Mom would hopefully realize I wasn't a threat. Back in their home, I was offered a beer (thanks!), and the phone rang. It was Jim Hard—he was in Downsville and heading our way. A short while later, Jim pulled up. He had called into Stanton, found out where I was and came over. This was only an hour away from his home. Dick Andrews was also on his way, in my truck and pulling the Pilatus trailer. Jim told me that I had likely made the longest distance flight of the day, and later this was confirmed. It turns out I had flown some 60 miles from Stanton to Downsville. Jim was in his element with the landout situation, and I learned from the master about talking to the family and the farmer. I felt like we were gliding ambassadors. I gave the family a handwritten certificate for two glider rides at Benson's airfield, to be flown by myself. They spent several hours with me—it was the least I could offer!

Dick Andrews arrived, suffering through my bad directions, and we derigged the glider, with the help of the entire family—Ethan, Kirstie, and Mom and Dad (Dad had arrived recently). The Pilatus trailer was showing its advanced wood rot. We had to put a rope around the end of the horizontal stabilizer container as it was about to fall off the trailer. Thanking Jim Hard, and the family, Dick and I started the drive back to Minnesota. My first landing in Wisconsin had been successful and positively memorable.

I hadn't had the opportunity previously to talk to Dick (it turned out he was the one who had been outspoken at the morning pilots meeting, and clearly told me that I'd have crew that day—he was a man of his word!), and he kept me alert and awake with quality discussion and questions. I learned that he was a contest pilot and that he was about to head to Illinois to partake of a contest. How exciting! I dream of contest flying at a future date. Dick invited me to stay at his family home that evening, and the thought of having a shower was too much to refuse. Pam Andrews made us dinner putting up with our late arrival and fresh-from-landout appearance and odor. The shower was all that I was expecting. The Andrews' had not only pulled me out of a farmer's field, but had been incredibly kind hosts.

The next morning, after breakfast, we resumed our trip back to Stanton. It was Thursday, and the day looked like it might offer some gliding. Several of us (Paul Remde, Kathleen Winters, Jim Hard, and myself) launched that day. Jim Hard made a cross-country flight of 136 sm (the flight was 4 hours 15 minutes and Jim landed in farmer Francis Forst's bean field in Iowa about 5 miles west of Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin). The rest of us pattered around the local area. Flying the Pilatus on Thursday and returning to Stanton this time was my first landing there. I had decided that for me, it was now time to retire the Pilatus trailer. Too many signs were showing that trailering the Pilatus from more off-field landings might easily result in massive failure of the trailer. Clearly someone had to say "enough" and so I didn't venture far from Stanton that day. With JC Cunningham's help, and use of one of his wingstands (a nicely modified table-saw wood-guide), we tied the Pilatus down for the night. (JC had checked the weather and it looked fine for the night.)



My last day at Stanton (Friday) also started up well. This time many Stanton glider folks showed up and were rigging to fly. I was mostly setting up to have Richard Weil fly that day as he had said he would come down. Richard did have a flight that day, but the glider was available after that, and I took a flight also myself. The day looked better than Thursday. I launched at 2:20pm, and sauntered around the local area for a little over two hours, landing at 4:30pm only because I had yet to derig and I was planning to trailer back up to Benson's that night. I came in to Stanton from the South, at nearly 5,000 MSL. At least during my two-hour flight, the lift was more consistent (and the cloud base was higher) than either of the two prior days. I had fun burning off my altitude in wide S-turns, and went through the first thousand feet of altitude flying left-handed.



After derigging and dinner with JC, Kathleen, and Jim, Kathleen and Jim had me over to their home for the night. It had gotten late, and the drive back to Duluth seemed too much for that day. Spending time with Kathleen and Jim was a great way to end these three days of flying. Kathleen asked for pictures of my girlfriend and after observing that she (Natasha) was pretty, and that she looked intelligent, asked if Natasha would be willing to crew for me. Clearly we know where Kathleen's priorities are! Thanks Kathleen for looking out for my interests. Natasha has confirmed her willingness to crew for me, in return for me doing some cross-country bicycling with her. Seeing as I enjoy cycling, and Natasha's company, it's a win-win situation!