

## Lucky number 13!

By: Gary Leach, P2

Saturday 7/8/06 was a milestone day for me in paragliding; I've been working to get my paragliding 10-mile XC this summer...

The day started slow for flying, so we left the house to head out for the tow road about noon. On the way, we determined it would be a while longer before things started really kicking in, so we stopped for an extended lunch. All the while, Paul Greenwood is talking through pointers with me. Now I've done some thermaling and XC in the past, but had yet to make my first 10-miler. So I soaked in as much of Paul's knowledge as I could, and thought 'this may well be the day!'... and what's more, I would be using Paul's wing, not mine. As we've determined, I need one size larger wing 'cause I carry so much &@\$% with me... I do leave the kitchen sink in the tow vehicle, however.

It was definitely a forward-launch day... no wind, yet a few light thermals coming through just to keep things interesting. So we decided to set up on the south end (basically so we wouldn't have to spend the extra minute and a half driving 'all the way' to the other end of the road)... and; after all, we WERE already ON the south end... AND we were already out of the car! So as Mother Nature would have it, I set up and the winds start to play with me... from behind. After re-collecting the system after a couple of blows of the wind, we decided to head to the north end... yea, yea. NO! There wasn't enough wind, so I STILL did a forward. Paul had told me we were going to launch over and over to the end of the day... I told him I was only launching once. He didn't seem too happy about the efforts he was going to put forth to have the pilot only give it one try. I guess he had yet to figure out I meant it was only going to take me one launch to do what I wanted to do today! OK - so after a 3.2 mile trek, I figured I was wrong about launching only once... yes, it actually took a second launch. 'Oh boy', I thinking - - 'I can hear Paul now...' :)

By this time, the thermals were starting to come through pretty well... quite big in size, but fairly gentle in strength. They were providing some good launch winds, when they came through. So like many other days, I'm set up off the west side of the road waiting for one of these thermals to come through so I can do a reverse launch... at least a 60-degree angle launch. But I wasn't worried; I've launched with those angles many times, and a few times even at 90-degrees. However, it was interesting trying to wing up with an XL wing when I'm so used to my medium. It kind of felt like an albatross at first, but once I had it above me and stable, I turned for 'go' and Amy & Paul did what they do so well. As I managed the wing to ensure safety in a 60-degree launch, the dynamic duo pulled me right up off the ground and kept me on a steady, smooth tow to 2000' AGL. I hit a thermal at low altitude, but decided to go through it. When I passed through the backside of another one, I pinned off and turned to go back and catch it. I heard Paul use some flavorful wording about the tow line breaking... especially since it was brand new! However, he soon recovered as he rejoiced in noticing the drogue chute deployed to allow for what they told me was an awesome retrieve... due to a couple of 'quick fixes' to the spool system just prior to launch.

It was great having the big, fat thermals to play with. It was truly the first time I was able to feel which side of the wing was hitting the thermal first. My GPS data indicates I made a nice steady gain in altitude to 3400' AGL, then sunk back to 1300'. I really needed to find another thermal, or I'd be making that third launch today... NOOOooooooo! Then I had lift hit my right wing, made a turn and caught it head on. Went right through it (hey, I'm still learning!) and turned downwind to try to catch it again. This time the left wing hit first, giving me a pretty good idea of its shape. Trying to keep that visual in my mind, I started really trying to apply notes Paul provided me on the trip out to the site. This day, I was able to feel the wing's movements while listening to the vario telling me where I was inside the thermal. It took a few times to get the hang of when to make my move, how big a move to make, how long to hold a turn, and then make another move. My vario only registered 100-200 feet per minute most of the time... but it was pretty steady. That big, fat thermal was just great! Paul continued to coach me through the ascent... all the way to CLOUD BASE... yes, I made it all the way to cloud base... now that's definitely a first... something I had not really planned on today. But what an experience! Oh yes, it reinforced just how fast cloud base can come up on you when you're busy. Once 'on the other side' and downwind, I went on a 4-mile glide, then

picked up a more westerly heading. After a couple attempts to catch some more lift, I went on a 2.5 mile glide, focusing on how far I could go down Hwy 29 beneath me... and to see if I could cross the SH130 toll road (still under construction). No problem... plenty of altitude, plenty of glide. Just beyond the toll road, I began my final search for a suitable LZ... in this case, it was a small patch of grass between a farm house, a penned bull (who was more than well aware of my presence and let me know it), and a Baptist church... right on the north side of Hwy 29 in Hutto. What a trip.

So as it turns out, 2 milestones were met for a relatively new thermal pilot:

1 - 10 mile XC

2 - Making it to cloud base

Actual distance = 13 miles

Max altitude = 4800 AGL

Air time = 1 hr 0 min (launch 4:20pm)

Not bad for a couple of firsts, huh?

Big kudos to Paul & Amy for their work to help me throughout the day. We celebrated with a nice dinner and re-lived some of the events we each experienced. Now THAT'S really what it's all about!

Hey - - Amy's next! I look forward to being on the tow and retrieval side for her, as that's how we do things here in Austin TX... and off we go...

Pilot: Gary Leach P2

Tow & chase crew: Amy Tomko - driver, Paul Greenwood - tow tech & in-flight coach (Paul is instructor for and co-founder of Paraglide Texas!)





