

Greenwood & Leach Set Paragliding Distance Records

by Gary Leach
August 11, 2005

Paragliding trip to set distance records in Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, and South Dakota
Paul Greenwood & Gary Leach
July 10, 2005 – July 22, 2005

State Records Set During July 2005						
Pilot	Miles	Kilometers	Duration	Launch Site	Date	Wing
Paul Greenwood	32.3	52.0	3 hrs 20 min	Hwy 385 at TX-OK state line	7/13/05	Airwave Sport 2
Gary Leach	5.7	9.2	35 min	Elkhart KS	7/14/05	Airwave Sport 2
Paul Greenwood	33.5	53.9	2 hrs 15 min	Ovid NE	7/15/05	Airwave Sport 2
Paul Greenwood	3.0	4.8	15 min	Vivian SD	7/18/05	Airwave Sport 2

Paul Greenwood of Leander TX and Gary Leach of Austin TX express their passion for paragliding by setting distance records in Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, and South Dakota in July 2005. Greenwood and Leach have set the bar in these states for other paragliders to surpass, providing a unique opportunity for fellow pilots to take a trip, see some of their homeland and experience first-hand an enduring camaraderie found within the paragliding world.

GREENWOOD TAKES OKLAHOMA WITH 32.3 MILES

It didn't take long for Paul Greenwood to start setting state distance records for paragliding. First stop... the Oklahoma panhandle. Greenwood promptly began his sequence of record-setting flights when he released from tow at 1:15pm at approximately 1,100' and flew the record-setting distance of 32.3 miles. His flight took him from the Texas state line just north of Dalhart TX to the Black Mesa area of Oklahoma, only a couple of miles shy of the Colorado border...yes, that's all the way across the Oklahoma panhandle! "This has been a goal of mine ever since I became a paraglider pilot," said Greenwood. During a flight lasting just over 3 hours, he reached an altitude of 12,385' mean sea level placing him more than 8,000' above the ground for his highest flight to-date. From my end, there were no wrong turns during chase... thanks to a friendly local couple helping me across the land they've spent many years traversing. Of course, we had to stop and say "hi" to several of their friends along the way. They know EVERYBODY in the area. And I almost missed the landing because there was a bar we had to stop into and... well, you know. Says Greenwood of his flight, "First, I made a low save off the start. Then I climbed out to some VERY CHILLY air just below the high clouds. It made me long for the 105-degree surface temp of my Austin homeland,



Paul Greenwood's LZ in the Black Mesa area of Oklahoma

considering I was not really dressed for the occasion!" (Yeah right, he said this trying to hold back his laughing.) He continued, "I'd hoped to ridge soar the Black Mesa prior to landing. However, after flying over a recently-drained (as we found out later) lakebed and losing most of my altitude, I was faced with a question... 'Should I even attempt flying over those rugged boulders? Hmmm...'. My left brain won out, deciding to land safely with my home-state record." This is Greenwood's first record; and his achievement is the first flight in Oklahoma to be recorded with the United States Hang Gliding Association (USHGA) for the purpose of recording distance in the sport of paragliding from towing operations. It was also the precursor to record-setting flights in three additional states.

LEACH TAKES KANSAS WITH 5.7 MILES

Kansas was next on the list. We found ourselves in a small Kansas town with two motels, two restaurants, two liquor stores, and a grocery store. We visited them all. It's where I attained a milestone in my paragliding quest... I flew 4.1 miles for what was my first XC! Whoohoo! As we awakened to the following day, we finalized our time in Elkhart with breakfast in the Downtown Restaurant... yes, that's the name.

The owner claimed to have the best breakfast cook in town... and we have to agree. It was nice finding a place to fill up on a well-prepared meal prior to a great day of flying. As we set out on our search for potential launch locations, we found them to be plentiful as the landscape is adorned with irrigated fields of corn separated by N-S and E-W section-line sandy dirt roads. After finding a suitable location without trees

or power lines to further test my skills, we stopped and took a break to eat and make final preparations for launch. The winds were 45-degree cross at 10-15mph. Not a vehicle in sight all morning... well, until "wing up" of course. Wouldn't you know it! As I'm waiting for the wind to settle, here they come, cresting over the hill...two farm trucks. My thoughts...

"Do I get out of their way or show them how it's REALLY done?" Yes, yes, I chose the latter. With just a tinge more wind than I really wanted, I went with wing up. My feet began to slide across the sandy dirt road as smooth and silky as an ice skater during an Olympic trial. Then came the edge of the road, you know, where the road meets the corn field... there was a 1½-foot sharp rise. My first priority was to manage the wing. To do this, I had to almost ignore what was happening in my lower extremities. But thanks to friend Riss Estes (tandem pilot and instructor for www.airaddiction.com) letting me borrow a wing for a few months prior to me earning my P2, I had plenty of kiting practice; although I have to admit I hadn't really practiced for lying-sideways launches. Nonetheless, all that practice afforded me the skills needed to manage my wing while my body was hunkered over sideways from getting knee-knocked at the edge of the road. Paul, being a very astute tow tech in addition to his piloting skills,

applied pressure to get me up and over the corn just at the right time for what culminated in an 'uneventful' launch... ooohhh OK, so that's how I hoped the guys in the trucks saw it. I soon attained 2,000' on tow, released and enjoyed seeing Kansas from the air. At altitude, I received the true impact of a vision of circular-watered corn fields as far as the eye could see dotted with occasional houses, windmills, and... pig farms (pewwwwee!). I experienced the most thermal activity for me to-date, attempting to get a better feel for where they are and how to enter and remain in them. Things were going quite well until I found myself directly downwind of a pig farm. WHAM! Wow, I felt like a Mac truck just ran over me. It sure made for an interesting time remaining in the air, as I switched some attention to adjusting my full-face helmet to ensure my mouth was exposed... just in case a certain urge overcame me. I suppose I had a pale

applied pressure to get me up and over the corn just at the right time for what culminated in an 'uneventful' launch... ooohhh OK, so that's how I hoped the guys in the trucks saw it. I soon attained 2,000' on tow, released and enjoyed seeing Kansas from the air. At altitude, I received the true impact of a vision of circular-watered corn fields as far as the eye could see dotted with occasional houses, windmills, and... pig farms (pewwwwee!). I experienced the most thermal activity for me to-date, attempting to get a better feel for where they are and how to enter and remain in them. Things were going quite well until I found myself directly downwind of a pig farm. WHAM! Wow, I felt like a Mac truck just ran over me. It sure made for an interesting time remaining in the air, as I switched some attention to adjusting my full-face helmet to ensure my mouth was exposed... just in case a certain urge overcame me. I suppose I had a pale

applied pressure to get me up and over the corn just at the right time for what culminated in an 'uneventful' launch... ooohhh OK, so that's how I hoped the guys in the trucks saw it. I soon attained 2,000' on tow, released and enjoyed seeing Kansas from the air. At altitude, I received the true impact of a vision of circular-watered corn fields as far as the eye could see dotted with occasional houses, windmills, and... pig farms (pewwwwee!). I experienced the most thermal activity for me to-date, attempting to get a better feel for where they are and how to enter and remain in them. Things were going quite well until I found myself directly downwind of a pig farm. WHAM! Wow, I felt like a Mac truck just ran over me. It sure made for an interesting time remaining in the air, as I switched some attention to adjusting my full-face helmet to ensure my mouth was exposed... just in case a certain urge overcame me. I suppose I had a pale

applied pressure to get me up and over the corn just at the right time for what culminated in an 'uneventful' launch... ooohhh OK, so that's how I hoped the guys in the trucks saw it. I soon attained 2,000' on tow, released and enjoyed seeing Kansas from the air. At altitude, I received the true impact of a vision of circular-watered corn fields as far as the eye could see dotted with occasional houses, windmills, and... pig farms (pewwwwee!). I experienced the most thermal activity for me to-date, attempting to get a better feel for where they are and how to enter and remain in them. Things were going quite well until I found myself directly downwind of a pig farm. WHAM! Wow, I felt like a Mac truck just ran over me. It sure made for an interesting time remaining in the air, as I switched some attention to adjusting my full-face helmet to ensure my mouth was exposed... just in case a certain urge overcame me. I suppose I had a pale

applied pressure to get me up and over the corn just at the right time for what culminated in an 'uneventful' launch... ooohhh OK, so that's how I hoped the guys in the trucks saw it. I soon attained 2,000' on tow, released and enjoyed seeing Kansas from the air. At altitude, I received the true impact of a vision of circular-watered corn fields as far as the eye could see dotted with occasional houses, windmills, and... pig farms (pewwwwee!). I experienced the most thermal activity for me to-date, attempting to get a better feel for where they are and how to enter and remain in them. Things were going quite well until I found myself directly downwind of a pig farm. WHAM! Wow, I felt like a Mac truck just ran over me. It sure made for an interesting time remaining in the air, as I switched some attention to adjusting my full-face helmet to ensure my mouth was exposed... just in case a certain urge overcame me. I suppose I had a pale

applied pressure to get me up and over the corn just at the right time for what culminated in an 'uneventful' launch... ooohhh OK, so that's how I hoped the guys in the trucks saw it. I soon attained 2,000' on tow, released and enjoyed seeing Kansas from the air. At altitude, I received the true impact of a vision of circular-watered corn fields as far as the eye could see dotted with occasional houses, windmills, and... pig farms (pewwwwee!). I experienced the most thermal activity for me to-date, attempting to get a better feel for where they are and how to enter and remain in them. Things were going quite well until I found myself directly downwind of a pig farm. WHAM! Wow, I felt like a Mac truck just ran over me. It sure made for an interesting time remaining in the air, as I switched some attention to adjusting my full-face helmet to ensure my mouth was exposed... just in case a certain urge overcame me. I suppose I had a pale

applied pressure to get me up and over the corn just at the right time for what culminated in an 'uneventful' launch... ooohhh OK, so that's how I hoped the guys in the trucks saw it. I soon attained 2,000' on tow, released and enjoyed seeing Kansas from the air. At altitude, I received the true impact of a vision of circular-watered corn fields as far as the eye could see dotted with occasional houses, windmills, and... pig farms (pewwwwee!). I experienced the most thermal activity for me to-date, attempting to get a better feel for where they are and how to enter and remain in them. Things were going quite well until I found myself directly downwind of a pig farm. WHAM! Wow, I felt like a Mac truck just ran over me. It sure made for an interesting time remaining in the air, as I switched some attention to adjusting my full-face helmet to ensure my mouth was exposed... just in case a certain urge overcame me. I suppose I had a pale

applied pressure to get me up and over the corn just at the right time for what culminated in an 'uneventful' launch... ooohhh OK, so that's how I hoped the guys in the trucks saw it. I soon attained 2,000' on tow, released and enjoyed seeing Kansas from the air. At altitude, I received the true impact of a vision of circular-watered corn fields as far as the eye could see dotted with occasional houses, windmills, and... pig farms (pewwwwee!). I experienced the most thermal activity for me to-date, attempting to get a better feel for where they are and how to enter and remain in them. Things were going quite well until I found myself directly downwind of a pig farm. WHAM! Wow, I felt like a Mac truck just ran over me. It sure made for an interesting time remaining in the air, as I switched some attention to adjusting my full-face helmet to ensure my mouth was exposed... just in case a certain urge overcame me. I suppose I had a pale

applied pressure to get me up and over the corn just at the right time for what culminated in an 'uneventful' launch... ooohhh OK, so that's how I hoped the guys in the trucks saw it. I soon attained 2,000' on tow, released and enjoyed seeing Kansas from the air. At altitude, I received the true impact of a vision of circular-watered corn fields as far as the eye could see dotted with occasional houses, windmills, and... pig farms (pewwwwee!). I experienced the most thermal activity for me to-date, attempting to get a better feel for where they are and how to enter and remain in them. Things were going quite well until I found myself directly downwind of a pig farm. WHAM! Wow, I felt like a Mac truck just ran over me. It sure made for an interesting time remaining in the air, as I switched some attention to adjusting my full-face helmet to ensure my mouth was exposed... just in case a certain urge overcame me. I suppose I had a pale

applied pressure to get me up and over the corn just at the right time for what culminated in an 'uneventful' launch... ooohhh OK, so that's how I hoped the guys in the trucks saw it. I soon attained 2,000' on tow, released and enjoyed seeing Kansas from the air. At altitude, I received the true impact of a vision of circular-watered corn fields as far as the eye could see dotted with occasional houses, windmills, and... pig farms (pewwwwee!). I experienced the most thermal activity for me to-date, attempting to get a better feel for where they are and how to enter and remain in them. Things were going quite well until I found myself directly downwind of a pig farm. WHAM! Wow, I felt like a Mac truck just ran over me. It sure made for an interesting time remaining in the air, as I switched some attention to adjusting my full-face helmet to ensure my mouth was exposed... just in case a certain urge overcame me. I suppose I had a pale



Gary Leach kites his wing in preparation for launch

yellowish-green hue at that point. Needless to say, I tried my best to get away from the smell and in doing so did not pay as much attention to my thermals as I had initially. I landed out 5.7 miles from launch, which was in fact only my second XC and a state record! In reality, I had a fantastic time on all my flights during the course of our trip, and this one was no exception. I also learned some things, three of which I'd like to pass on to others: **KITING**... it's important. Practice, practice, practice. You need to be ready for that one moment that will nail you when you least expect it. **FLYING SKILLS**... read, listen, practice. I regularly review articles, videos, and DVDs. Plus it's great to have two instructors (Paul Greenwood and Riss Estes) in the Austin area where I can assist, listen and learn on a regular basis. And what may be the most important lesson of all... **PIG FARMS**... steer clear!

GREENWOOD TAKES NEBRASKA WITH 33.5 MILES

On to Nebraska! Greenwood set his second record on July 15 by flying from the Kansas-Nebraska line to Hwy 26 just east of Bridgeport. After 20 miles, he asked himself, "Why am I in this same situation again? I guess I really need to start looking downwind on the MAP prior to launch. As I found myself at altitude, I suddenly noticed all the roads ended... at a drop off... of a couple hundred feet. There was irrigated farmland all around. And if that wasn't enough, the terrain got rough... and a river appeared. Decision time again! Fight or flight?" Greenwood radioed me to let me know he'd go only if he hooked a good thermal... so, he went. Zooming in and out on my GPS, I soon realized I would be taking an hour and a half trip around the fields of Nebraska... just to get where he was at THAT moment. Needless to say, during the time I made my trek, we lost radio contact. It was nice to actually hear his voice over the radio again to help me determine his whereabouts. He landed just across a fence near a railroad track on the south side of the highway. It was still early, so we decided to head north towards South Dakota (that kinda sounds weird... think about it). At this point, we're thinking we're on a roll - - 3 days, 3 records. Greenwood now has distance records in two states; I have one.



Leach and Greenwood recording Greenwood's flight plan.

GREENWOOD TAKES SOUTH DAKOTA WITH 3.0 MILES

South Dakota, let's say, presents some unique "opportunities" for the paraglider pilot. Two days in, no flights to our names (due to the wind sailing through the area at a mere 40 miles per hour), a trek around Mt. Rushmore, a woolly mammoth dig site, the Crazy Horse monument, a couple of state parks, and a quick drink with the bikers in Sturgis (whew!), the wind FINALLY dropped to a mere 20+ mph. During a quick chat with the locals, they asked us if we were soon to launch. We told them we were waiting for the winds to calm down just a bit more... to which they responded, "This IS calm." You can imagine the looks we gave each other when we heard this... that little slanty-eye kinda thing. "No, we're not falling for that! Ha!" As the locals just continued with the conversation, we began to realize they were serious. So, we looked at each other again, both giving and receiving an approval to begin readying our gear. Greenwood said he'd like to go, to which I quickly replied, "Sure, YOU go!" After a slight hesitation, he made his way to the tow rig and began to prepare his gear. Funny though, he sure took his sweet time. If I'd have known how "thorough" he was going to be, I would have pulled out my lounge and taken a nap. He finally got the nerve to launch, and he really didn't have to try hard to go downwind... there was no way I could keep up with him. Greenwood was able to pull out a 3.0-mile flight in winds that only an advanced pilot should consider encountering. But that's him... he is a good and safe pilot. If he wasn't completely sure he could do it, he would have remained on the ground to fly another day. Greenwood closed the event by stating, "But, I was facing forward when I landed!"

The tow winch used during our trip is affectionately referred to as “V-tow” by us and our friends in and around the paragliding community. It is so named for ‘V. Paul Greenwood’ (known to some as “V”), as he is the designer and builder of this hydraulic winch system used to bring a paraglider airborne from the ground by attaching a tow line from the winch to the paraglider. Typically, the paraglider releases from ‘V-tow’ between 1,000’ and 2,000’ above the ground. From there, the paraglider attempts to find lift (via thermal activity of the air), ascend above the release altitude, and travel downwind on a cross country, or “XC” as it is referred to in the paragliding world.



The 3'-diameter spool of “V-tow,” the tow rig designed and developed by V. Paul Greenwood, depicts paragliders flying at altitude (artwork by Gary Leach).



Gary Leach, author