

This article is a summary of the Region 4 South Contest at New Castle International by our Competition Director, Richard Kellerman. This material is reprinted with the permission of the Soaring Society of America.

REGION 4 SOUTH SOARING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Late September: All along the East Coast monarch butterflies take part in the annual migration south along ancient flyways. Below them a more recent migration takes place along Interstate 81 as glider pilots make their annual pilgrimage to New Castle. Freed from the trailers on arrival, the gliders share the air with the monarchs, each in their own way masters of flight, the one operating at a Reynolds number of 4,000, the other 1,500,000, the monarchs weighing in at about fifty to the ounce with a wing loading of 0.02 psf, the gliders about 800 lbs with a wing loading of 7 psf. Few would dispute that the monarch's achievement is the more remarkable, but in most years the gliders too produce some remarkable flights, reminding us not to take for granted the improbable spectacle of forty or so 800 pound motorless aircraft flying hundreds of miles.

The gliderport, or New Castle International (NCI) is located only half a mile from Virginia Highway 340. Most of the traffic is in a hurry, either to get to work, or to get home, and few if any notice the little sign which simply announces "BRSS," for Blue Ridge



THE MIST CLEARS

Hills peer o'er hills, and Alps on Alps arise. The view to the south before the mist clears. In a few hours the mist and the tranquility will give way to a grid of forty gliders and the roar of the tow planes.

Soaring Society. If they did, and if they allowed curiosity to get the better of haste, they would quickly enter another world, home all year around to BRSS, and home for one week each year to the Region 4 South contest.

The center of this world, and the point of departure and return for so many epic flights, is the grass runway, almost 3,000 feet long and 300 feet wide, manicured, smooth, and green in this wet year beyond all reason. The field is only a 2,500 foot tow and one mile from Sinking Creek Mountain and, unless it is actually raining, some aspect of the mountain can be counted upon to produce lift – ridge, wave, thermal – sometimes all three. When the wind is from the northwest only a modest climb is needed to proceed upwind first to Johns Creek Mountain, then to Potts Mountain, and eventually to Peters Mountain from which flights of 300 miles to the northeast and 150 miles to the southwest are possible. When winds are not strong enough to support long ridge flights the terrain seems to have magical properties. Even the contest turnpoint names are magical – Riverwood, Oriskiny, Peaks of Otter, Sweet Springs, Maggie and Marion – who could resist flying to such places?

Not even New Castle can guarantee good soaring every day however and

neither of the two unofficial practice days produced much. On the second, for some reason best known to him, the CD called a task which featured two of the most notorious sink holes in the contest area and both claimed victims including John Murray who proved that it's easy enough to put his brand-new ASG-29 into a field. Most pilots hearing 123.3 accounts of the carnage on course elect for various flavors of flying around and, in what will be a theme of the contest weather forecasting, Ray Galloway gets the cu wrong, calling for blue conditions. Eventually he's right, but not before most of the days sees lots of cu, albeit not very honest ones.

Social life at NCI has two epicenters: The Towplane Tavern and the outdoor fire which burns throughout the contest. Tasks are set at beginning of the day at the Tavern. Tales of the day's task are told at the end of the day around the fire. Our host, Lanier Frantz, brings the Pilots' meetings to order by discharging a small cannon, probably as good a way as any to muster forty glider pilots. On the first contest day our weatherman, Ray Galloway, advises us to expect blue conditions but, as expected by the more cynical pilots, we have cu all day. With many getting to over 6,000 ft before the start, the 114 mile task looks like an under call but on course the clouds prove to be deceptive, promising much and delivering little. At New Castle, as at all mountain sites, the requirement that air goes down as well as up is inescapable but largely predictable: The air goes up over hills and mountains, down over valleys. Our CD, Dick Butler is new to the job but knows enough to make us all leave the unstable air over Bald Mountain for the absolutely dead air embracing the first turnpoint. Some are caught trying to get into and out of Riverwood with rather less altitude than makes for comfort and either waste time trying to climb back up, or land out.



A SOUND IDEA

Forget gavels – Lanier Frantz calls the Pilots' Meeting to order. Each day the ritual firing is preceded by a five second countdown to minimize hearing damage to all and cardiac arrest amongst the grey and greying. The Towplane Tavern is in the background.



THE FIRE

It's lit on the first day, it burns throughout the contest. In the background may be seen some of the RV's which are the preferred accommodation at NCI where the nearest motel is a decent drive away.

To fly 120 miles out-and-return at NCI requires only that the wind be from the northwest and at least 15 kts. No thermals are necessary, and a cloudbase of 3,500 ft is adequate. By early afternoon on the second contest day this is pretty much what we had as the entire fleet headed out along Sinking Creek Mountain to Big Walker Tunnel and back. Although often dismissed as a milk run, this task has pitfalls for the unwary and traps for all. The ridge descends towards the gap which the New River has punched through Gap Mountain, and then starts to rise again. It does so just as the landability begins to degenerate. The day goes off without incident however, and the results are strongly correlated with wing loading. John Seymour lands after completing the task, takes another tow, and does the task again, two minutes faster. It took more than two minutes to explain at the next day's pilots' meeting how the rules allow for this sort of thing.

By the next day the frontal passage which gave us the milk run is now a force to be reckoned with. Galloway predicts blue conditions even as the convective cloud coverage approaches 8/8. It is to remain that way all day but with 20 knot winds out of 320 degrees no one much cares. Five pilots decide to

abandon the contest in favor of a 1,000K flight. The day starts badly for the 1,000K guys with one early landout and one early retreat to NCI. Two more eventual landouts leave only Al Tyler to survive the attrition. For the rest of us a turn area task with a maximum distance of 330 miles is set, increased from 310 miles after Dale Kramer convinces the CD that speeds of 100 mph or more ought to be possible. The contest task takes us first to Tazewell then back up to Ingalls, down to the tunnels and home. Flying at 100 to 120 kts it's not easy to fully appreciate the understated beauty of the ridges and mountains which control the landscape here, making me wish I was not flying against the clock. A few miles southwest of Ingalls the ridge rises to almost 4,000 ft where we fly over the earthly home (well one of them) of Pat Robertson. It crosses my mind that we are closer to the angels than he is ever likely to be as we soar unseen and unheard so far, so fast, and with such ease. Sad to note, even at 120 kts it's hard to miss the growing number of houses which are popping up on the hills and in the valleys, and the brutal intrusions of microwave and cell phone towers. The Jefferson National Forest at least seems safe, but with the economic growth fueled by Virginia Tech in nearby Blacksburg, the rest of the task area will likely not remain untouched much longer. Dale Kramer not only flies faster than 100 mph (in an unflapped glider yet) but does so without circling.

Al Tyler calls in about an hour after we have all the gliders in the trailers and the flight logs uploaded and receives a joyous welcome. One of the 1,000K pilots had the misfortune to land on the only shore of lake Moomaw (19 miles north of Covington) without road access or humanity. Misfortune soon turned to extreme good fortune when the only boat on the lake able comfortably to transport first glider wings then a glider fuselage was flagged down by the pilot. This must rank high in the pantheon of heroic retrieves.

Some cold fronts produce days of good soaring weather. Not this one. Light winds and a sky dotted with cumulus gave us hope for another good day but it soon became obvious it was not to be, with trouble already evident before the start. Pre-start gaggles are common on a blue day but, on a day with cu, usually suggest inconsistent or difficult thermals and so it proved to be as pilots complained of dishonest clouds and hard-to-center lift all day. Further complaints were occasioned by the gradual erosion and eventual complete loss of the few cumulus clouds we started with. Few weathermen survive a week of contest forecasting unbloodied and the day consummated an unbroken string of cumulus miscues as the one day forecast to have cu quickly turned blue. John Good made good of this and won the day by starting as early as possible on the assumption that the day would go blue.

Neither Friday nor Saturday were flyable, but such is the magic of New Castle that almost no one left early, and no one complained.

-Richard Kellerman



THE START OF ANOTHER ADVENTURE

Who unfamiliar with our sport might imagine what amazing feats can be accomplished by glider pilots with no more than a 2,000 ft tow?

REGION 4 SOUTH SOARING CHAMPIONSHIPS FINAL RESULTS

New Castle, VA

STANDARD CLASS

RANK	POINTS	ID	NAME	GLIDER
1.	3394	K1	Kramer, Dale	LS-8
2.	3082	XM	Smith, Mike	LS-8
3.	3071	X	Good, John	Discus 2A
4.	3047	44	Gough, Andy	LS-8
5.	2604	JB	Bearden, Chip	ASW-24

15-METER CLASS

RANK	POINTS	ID	NAME	GLIDER
1.	3378	434	Schwartz, Ron	ASW-20
2.	3341	SM	Seymour, John	ASW-27B
3.	3340	66	Stant, Kirk	LS-6B
4.	3229	UH	Nixon, Hank	ASW-27
5.	3225	KO	Higgins, Michael	LS-6A

18-METER CLASS

RANK	POINTS	ID	NAME	GLIDER
G.	2912	KS	Striedieck, Karl	Duo Discus
1.	2849	LX	Murray, John	ASG-29
2.	2464	711	Kelley, Tom	ASG-29
3.	1916	7K	Dezzutti, John	ASW-27
4.	1755	D	Ungerma, Chris	DG-808B

