

by Jim, Rod Man, Afinowich

Asbestos Peak, A Little Bit of Hell on Earth

It was Sunday 7/15, Kim Shipek, Jeff Johnson, Karen Johnson, a hang 4 driver, and air horney me went to Asbestos Peak. This little flown site near Lake Roosevelt is relatively close for us east valleyites. With a clean west facing launch, shaded set up area, and easily accessible LZ this site suckered us in. No crowds and potential XC were a bonus. Access to launch has changed yearly based upon forest service maintenance or lack of maintenance. This was an accessible year due road improvement made for forest fire access.

I had never flown this site, Jeff had. Prior to going up the mountain Jeff reviewed the "landing options" with us. We walked the best landing area, putting up numerous wind streamers. There are no retrieval roads at the bottom of the mountain. A couple thousand feet below the top of the mountain is a shelf broken up like fingers forming 500' cliffs at the ends and canyons between the fingers. Close to the down slope of the mountain and on the shelf is the road. West of the road the terrain slopes up to a series of plateaus. The west end of the plateau, or fingers, are the cliffs. The north and south end of the fingers are the canyon drop offs. In short the landing area has cliffs on three sides and is uphill to the west. Anticipating turbulence we decided a fast, long, straight in final approach would be best. With an over abundance of confidence to land in a tight area, an underestimate of how the turbulence could increase, the enthusiasm of a hang two, and the arrogance of a hang four I headed to launch.

Once you turn off the main dirt road it is about a 45-minute ride to the top. At 6500 MSL you are in the trees, just like Mingus. The beauty of this site suckers you in further. Out in front, maybe 10 miles is the lake, around and behind you is a magnificent forest. The wind seems to come into launch perfectly. The launch itself is awesome. Kind of like a road cut with a good steep slope.

We all set up immediately. The wind in the

trees was like music to pilot's ears. Kim got to launch first. The wind had picked up since our arrival. Kim was not satisfied with the way she was able to balance her glider on launch. After three attempts she backed off. Jeff went to launch next with his 195 Falcon. The wind was now too strong for this big single surface boat. I didn't bother going to launch now. Left my glider in the set up area and got out my wind meter. The average velocity was 17 MPH, the peak gust was 31 MPH.

We waited an hour and a half, it was now 3:30. The wind seemed to have mellowed for the last twenty minutes. The gust differential seemed to be less. I figured it was my turn to stand on launch and feel the conditions. Being a fat boy in a small glider, 140 TRX, I have had no problems previously in high winds. It felt good, I was in my comfort range, I launched. Immediately off launch the air was real trashy. I couldn't let go of the base tube to zip my harness. Radioed to Kim and Jeff "don't launch", it's like a washing machine out here. They could see it was turbulent and watched me gaining altitude as I flew straight and away from the mountain.

Eventually I got out of the trash into smooth air and got up. Every time I drifted back to the mountain I got beat up again. I spent about 45 minutes going up and down between 1000 and 2000 over then headed to the LZ. At 1000 foot over I flew the edges of all three cliffs in a lot of turbulence. I headed inland to set up my long straight final. On final glide I hit big sink, 700-800 fpm down. Announced on radio I would be short of LZ. Got popped up several hundred feet, announced on radio I would make LZ. Hit massive sink, radioed I would be short. At 20 feet off the ground, with one hand on the base tube and one hand on an upright, I was quickly turned 180 degrees and pushed down. I had no control over the glider; it was over in an instant. Going down hill with a 15 mph tail wind I impacted on a bed of rock.

This rock bed was in a bowl east and down slope from the LZ and west of the road at the base of the mountain. Jeff, Kim and Karen had turned onto the plateau road when I was on final. Kim said I just disappeared.



Jim Afinowich

photo by Gill Couto

We no longer had radio contact, it disconnected on impact. This bowl was not apparent from the roads, the LZ or the air but was a contributing factor to the strength of the rotor.

Results: Helicopter ride, open fracture of the left femur, right shoulder bone chipped, torn muscles, rotator cuff damage, shattered ego, 3.5 hours in surgery for installation of titanium rod from knee to hip, 10 days in hospital.

Since the accident I have talked with three other pilots that have flown this site and said they would never fly there again. Most had similar experiences being uncontrollably rotated and tossed around like a rag doll.

Conclusion: Some sites should never be flown. As this one, topography can create severe rotors that are beyond a pilot's ability to overcome. Seemingly minor increases in wind velocity have major effects on the air moving across the plateau.

As a pilot I made a mistake in judgment and underestimated the potential turbulence. The total cost of this mistake aren't known yet. So far the medial bill are over \$50,000 dollars.

NEVER FLY ASBESTOS PEAK

by Chad Koester, event organizer

Demo Daze 2001

Demo Daze 2001 is planned for October 12-14. I have put up a web page to keep everyone up to speed on what is going on. This will be periodically updated as I get more confirmation on participation from manufactures.

www.soothing-solutions.com/DemoDaze/DemoDaze.html

Friday, October 12 - Falconeers Glass Off
We always talk about how much fun it is to fly Falcons, well its time to get to the craters for a great evening of soaring to start the weekend off with hours of airtime. (Of course, if you don't have a Falcon you should come out too...we won't hold it against you! :)

Saturday, October 13 - Demo, Demo, Demo - Try out lot of new toys and see how you can do in the spot landing contest! While you are there, check out the swap meet/fundraiser for Mingus Mountain

Saturday Evening - 'Refreshments' in the campground provided by Soaring Solutions (while supplies last ;)

Sunday, October 14 - Demo, Demo, Demo - Keep flying more new toys, more spot

landings, more swap meet!
I can be reached at 480-782-6936 or cokoester@netscape.net

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TF: Having gone through this situation, has there been any psychological affect on you? What innocence have you lost?

Chad: In the weeks following, I was surprised at what my concerns became. I expected turbulence to scare me after having gone through such a violent tumble. Instead, what I found was that lift concerned me more. When getting in a thermal, I found myself diving out occasionally to confirm for myself that there was sink near by if I needed it. The next couple of flight were all thermally and a bit rowdy...but turned out to be exactly what I needed so that I could work through it all in my mind and rebuild my confidence in what I was doing.

As for losing innocence, that is not a way I had thought about it but suspect that might be pretty accurate. I have been trying to decide if it was confidence or arrogance that I lost, but innocence could very well be it as well. I no longer look at the air the same, every bump has new meaning and I have a completely different understanding than I previously had.

Unfortunately, I don't think I can accurately describe it in words, it's just an intuitive feeling.

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Another interruption was a report that a bull had destroyed Dustin's glider after a cross-country flight that began at the Zapata airport ended in a pasture. I later researched and found that it wasn't Dustin, but Paris Williams. Later reports were that the glider, while being tossed about by the bull, was relatively unharmed. The bull just ate all of the pads and glider bag.....

One final note that I failed to mention in last month's column. August is the month where we nominate our club officers. I remind you that all of the current officers are in the second year of our unofficial two-year rotation. New blood is always welcome and sometimes needed. Come to the meeting to make your suggestions or else be warned you may end up on the list. That's all for this month.

PS: Someone stiffed the bartender for a \$6.00 tab. He cornered me on the way out and I paid it. Somebody owes me a beer. Handcrafted pale ale please.

Monument Valley Trip Planned

We are planning an aerotowing trip in Monument Valley, Utah for Labor Day weekend. Just a casual affair: camping, flying, donation for tows. Other trikes/tugs welcome. contact Laura Salamone at ahgc@northlink.com