



# Society for the Preservation And Restoration of Skyrangers

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## SPARS Moves East!

The more attentive of you might notice that the address in the masthead is a bit different. Yup, it's true: we've up and moved the whole kit and caboodle east to Pittsburgh Pennsylvania. "What?" you're saying, "Did he get tired of the uninterrupted VFR and relentless mild weather of northern California? Is it the irrepressible urge to be close to other Skyranger owners? Truth be told, it's just for a better job. I'll be working for a private software research lab affiliated with Carnegie Mellon University – it's a pretty good gig, but it means leaving California.

There are a few immediate consequences of the move: the first is that the old Menlo Park address is defunct, and all SPARS correspondence should be sent to me at the above address. The second consequence is that this issue of SPARS has been delayed while I've been busy interviewing for the new job, househunting, and ferrying NC33395 across the country in the dead of winter. The third consequence is that, as a result of the aforementioned ferrying, I've got some material for the current, somewhat overdue issue of SPARS. Read on.

## Sightings

Eric Rearwin has posted some nice photos of the 1998 APM/AAA Fly-In in Blakesburg. Only one Skyranger was present, belonging to the seemingly omnipresent Jeff Spencer. Eric reports that Skyranger guru Al Barbuto also attended. Al recently sent me a short video of his Skyranger, with some good exterior and interior shots, along with five or ten minutes of flight time around North Adams in Massachusetts. A few times when I've not been able to take '395 up, I've sat down and watched Al's video for a quick fix of Skyranger flight. Hey, now that I won't have two mountain ranges and several thousand miles to cross, perhaps '395 will finally start putting in a regular appearance at the big Midwest gatherings!



Photo by Ed Gallagher (NSU@aol.col)

## Finally – an Official Identifier: SKYR

I've finally found it. After years of putting up with Flight Service asking for my FAA identifier and my explaining that there just isn't one for the Skyranger (and having to put up with the indignity of filing as "experimental"), we finally have an identifier of our own: SKYR. Don't know when it popped into existence, but it wasn't there a few months ago.

In the past, when I talked with FSS or the FAA, I'd been told that the correct ID was variously, C-185, C185 or 185, and foolishly believed the teller. It wasn't until I actually tried to file with any of these that I discovered it didn't work. But I've now successfully filed as "SKYR/U" and Flight Service has taken it for a Skyranger, so I guess that means it really is the right identifier at last. Whew!

## Looking for N34834

Fritz May wrote in: In 1963 I was a member of the Kingsville, Texas Civil Air Patrol. We were in need of an airplane. After several weeks of looking we found a Rearwin Skyranger in need of some TLC in the back of a hanger. It had been setting there for several years when we found it and purchased it for \$300.

It was a good old airplane and we flew and enjoyed it for many hours. I do recall that the person in the right hand seat got the inside of their knees beat to death in a good cross wind landing. In South Texas there is always a stiff breeze blowing so it was an every time you went flying occurrence.

Do you or anyone in your organization know if this aircraft is still in existence?

Fritz ([fsmay@bellsouth.net](mailto:fsmay@bellsouth.net))

[Note: I did a quick search through the online FAA database, and N34834 isn't on the books anymore. Perhaps it was re-registered with a different tail number – anyone know what serial number that would have been?]

## Looking for a windshield

Ken Oder wrote in asking if anyone's recently replaced a windshield, and if so, where did they get their replacement, and at what price. Ken's part of a partnership that recently bought a Skyranger – welcome aboard! You can reach Ken by email as [Noken@aol.com](mailto:Noken@aol.com), or can write to him at 560 Townhill Road, Taylorsville, KY 40071.

## Need Some Company Building Ribs

Floyd Phillips wrote in that he's doing his best to build ribs in his spare time after work. He wants to know if there's anybody else in the same boat. You can send him email to share advice or just commiserate – he's at [amyfloyd@gowebway.com](mailto:amyfloyd@gowebway.com).

## More Skyranger Memories

Gary Irvine (JIrvine56@aol.com ) wrote in: You have touched on old memories talking about Rearwins! ... When I was 17, I was able to purchase a 1940 Rearwin Skyranger ... I loved it! (N32402) I could chat for hours ... I'm 43 now, have not flown for years. In my younger days, I flew nearly 400 hours ... Cherokee 140, Cessna 150/152, 172, 206, Citabria, Luscombe, and of course the Rearwin. I nearly had my instrument rating, working toward a CFI, then marriage... the rest is history! I had the Rearwin at Torrance Airport, CA ... Flew it for over 100 hours! Have the engine quit on me once, made it back with now damage! I have since tracked the old Rearwin down and have found it in a museum in Liberal, Kansas ... My family now lives near Louisville, Kentucky. I am considering a trip to Kansas to check the Rearwin out! ... I have old pictures of the Rearwin I'll scan if you would like some pictures! Chat later, Gary

## PAO->AGC - The Long Cross Country

As promised, a blow-by-blow report of my recent Skyranger cross-country from Northern California to Pittsburgh. My main concerns, as some of you might recall, were the short winter days, and the prospects of eastern storms that could leave me stranded. I opted for the southern route, down into the California desert, across Arizona and New Mexico, and into central Texas, holding off making the turn north until I hit the Mississippi. I packed a laptop computer with a modem, and managed to post a few times on/over the road:

### **Day One: Too much of a good thing**

The plan was to avoid winter and the Rockies by heading south before heading east. Next to the short short winter days, cold and altitude are my prime obstacles. The southern route, down to Bakersfield, Blythe, Tucson and El Paso, alleviates much of that.

It seems I always have a headwind, so I was initially psyched to see that there was a stiff tailwind for both the south and initial east legs. Until I saw that it was 30 knots at the surface, which would make crossing the Tehachapi mountains suicide. Sigmet for severe turbulence along all the southern mountain ranges, with numerous PIREPS backing up the forecast.



Winds were supposed to abate somewhat tomorrow, but I could at least get a start. Making it as far as Bakersfield, just north of the mountains and their concomitant turbulence, would let me tackle the mountains at daybreak, when the winds should be lighter. So off I went.

Out into the central valley, with blue sky above and a scattered layer of cumulus below. I dipped my wings west, looked back on the place that had been my home, and whispered a soft goodbye. I was leaving the nest. Pushing south, the scattered layer turned to broken, and it was time to go below. Cloud bases were at 2500, so there was plenty of room. Wait for an appropriate gap, throttle back and head down into the murk. Bakersfield dead ahead. I've got the choice between "International" and "Municipal" – got NOTAMS for both, but the choice is clear: Muni's got an EAA chapter on the field – that's my kind of airport. As I'm tying down, a fellow ambles up and asks about the Skyranger. He's Harry Hackney, the airport manager. Takes me on a tour of the field, showing me the various planes he's built and helped others build. RV-6's, Harmon Rockets – the fast stuff. But it's clear that he loves all airplanes – anything that'll fly. Harry gives me a ride into town and tells me to give him a call in the morning for a ride back. Happy to oblige; this is what flying's all about. .

### **Day Two: Back to the headwind.**

By morning, the winds had abated and, predictably, shifted 180 degrees. A headwind again. Sigmet reduced to airmet for moderate turbulence, and the pass looked clear. On the ride to the airport, Harry suggested an alternate, more direct pass to cross. Wind was blowing along, rather than across it, which allowed me to ride the canyon wind up to altitude. Always pays to talk to the locals.



Over Palmdale at 4000', they kept calling me "Helicopter '395" - I guess anything clocking 85 knots is fair game as a helicopter. Overhead the field, Palmdale called my traffic as an F-117 entering the pattern. I never saw him - I guess that stealth technology works, after all.

Followed roads around Twentynine Palms and across the Joshua Tree area to Blythe, being chased by allegedly scattered rain showers all the way. Set down in Blythe and let them pass by - 45 minutes later they'd dissipated and I was on my way to Arizona.



Absolutely beautiful. At 85 knots, not much moves if you're up high (and besides, I had a headwind at altitude), so I dropped down to the deck and followed the (sparsely settled) highway at a distance of 500-700 feet. Looked just like Roadrunner and Wile E. Coyote. Big Saguaro cacti everywhere, tall skinny mesas, dry lake beds, sand washes, and a million colors of rock with the sun on it. I was aiming for Mesa, AZ, to meet with another Skyraider owner.

Approaching Phoenix, I was vectored around Luke AFB, and kept having F-16 traffic ("10 o'clock, two miles, below you, 1 o'clock 5 miles, and 9 o'clock three miles - report traffic in sight..."). Very pretty. I suspect that some of the F-16 drivers edged a little closer than they needed to, just to have a glimpse of my approximately stationary Skyraider putting along through their airspace. Luke handed me off to Phoenix Approach, who were helpful and chatty, in spite of their insistence on routing you to South Dakota to avoid the Class B core.

Landed at Mesa (home of the Champlin Fighter Museum) at 4:30 - just in time to get into the museum and have a look for a half-hour before it closed. But damn - I've crossed a time zone! It's actually 5:30, and the museum doesn't open until late tomorrow. Ah well, maybe the weather will suck and I'll get to see it tomorrow. Or the weather won't suck, and I'll get to fly. Sometimes you just can't lose...

#### **Next update: Across Texas, and across Texas, and across Texas.**

The motel I stayed at last night didn't have any phones with modular jacks, so I couldn't log on and send an update. First time I flew across the country (Seattle->Boston) I spent about half the nights camping at the airports where I stopped. Airport managers always seemed quite encouraging of that practice, and frequently offered their airport office as a place to lay my bag. "Nah, you don't want to camp outdoors - you'd have to get up and walk barefoot to get to the coffee machine. Just set everything down inside - here're the keys to the building...." Lots of fun. But that was mid summer, and the prospect of pitching my tent outdoors in December wasn't quite so inviting. So I've been compromising, and staying at motels along the way.



Yesterday began with a slow battle uphill against a headwind out of Mesa (near Phoenix) for my climb up to the New Mexico elevations. 20 knots on the nose, and at times, during the agonizingly slow haul up to 7500 feet, I was seeing a GPS ground speed of 38 knots. A harbinger of the day to come - the low-pressure area in Mexico gave me a stiff headwind throughout the southern NM mountains. Surprisingly little turbulence, though. I cut the corner north of Tucson and headed due east to pick up I-10 near Demming, NM. A lot of hostile terrain below, but there was always some long thin strip of flat farmland somewhere below. Only had to hold my breath a few times when I knew I'd be out of gliding distance.



Out of Demming, over the flats – I still had to keep altitude, but there were no more mountains to cross. The continental divide isn't as impressive down south as it is in the northern Rockies. Somewhere on the 4800' high plains approaching El Paso, I noticed that the rivers were flowing east rather than west, and that meant I was over it. Cut across the salt flats of west Texas, flipped a coin and settled on aiming for the small town of Monahans, about 60 miles southwest of Midland. Very friendly folks, as is the case with most small town airports. Airport manager Kermit Steira handed me the keys to the courtesy car and gave me a

rundown on where to stay, where to eat, and where to avoid. A couple of other folks around the airport showed me their projects, and we talked airplanes until well after the sun went down.

Next morning: frost. Wow, I haven't had frost on my wings for three years! Pulled the tail around so the rising sun would help it melt, and watched as a high thin gray overcast approached from the west. It's that low from Mexico, following me east. It followed me most of the day today, and will probably catch me by tomorrow morning, but that's for another episode.

Finally got the last of the frost off around 9 a.m. Hopped in and headed east across west Texas. Absolutely positively nothing for hundreds of miles but sagebrush, oil wells, and rabbits. Dropped down to the deck a few times, less than 100 feet, just to watch the world go by a little quicker. Nothing to do but keep the nose pointed east and the wings level for hundreds of miles. I pulled the pocket shortwave radio out of my bag, stuck the earbud speakers in under my headset, and tuned in an oldies station on FM. There's something vaguely surreal about blasting across desolate sagebrush to the sounds of the Beach Boys' "Surfer Girl".

Finally, near Dallas, signs of civilization (or whatever it is that causes golf courses to exist) began creeping over the horizon. The headwinds had abated somewhat, so I amended my plan to stop at Stephenville in favor Cleburne, about 50 miles further along. Beautiful little strip on the edge of town - a mom and pop operation with friendly smiles and genuine curiosity in how I was doing and where I was going. Kind of place that this kind of trip is all about.



But daylight was wasting, and I'd hoped to clear Texas by day's end. I said goodbye and headed east again, south of Dallas, aiming to make Arkansas by sunset. East of Dallas, Texas becomes truly beautiful. Gently rolling hills, plenty of trees, pretty towns, and lots of little lakes. As usual, I picked out three candidate airports for my destination, and chose between them as dictated by winds and remaining sunlight. Decided that I could bypass Magnolia, but not quite make it to Warren. That left El Dorado as my Arkansas destination. Little airport right downtown, looks great!



In choosing El Dorado, I blatantly violated the "Greenland" rule: Leif Ericksson called that cold icy place up north "Greenland" in order to lure unsuspecting shipmates into thinking it was warm and green (in contrast to the relatively temperate "Iceland"). Well, El Dorado (named after the mythical city of gold) is an industry town. Its main industries are papermills and chicken processing plants. As far as I can tell, the entire town consists of papermills and chicken processing plants, with a K-Mart, a few motels and gas stations stuck in between. Rather than "El Dorado," perhaps "El Pollo"?

But it's not that bad. In spite of (because of?) the surroundings, the folks here are really friendly. Informal and relaxed - "yup, I figured you were from up north... where 'bouts?"

So, tomorrow it's going to get tricky. I've done the difficult terrain, but easy weather. Now, as I head north, the weather is going to be crucial in the endgame. There are fronts sweeping the midwest, but they keep changing speed and direction. If I'm lucky and I play it right tomorrow, I can position myself to hit Pittsburgh after just one more day. If not, I could be hunkered down in Kentucky or Indiana until the spring thaw. Well, not really \*that\* long, but it'll feel like it. Wish me luck!

### **Day Five: Squeeze Play**

Yesterday's posting found me in the quaint town of El Dorado, Arkansas, about two days of good weather from Pittsburgh. I'd been battling headwinds all the way east, and would now need some careful maneuvering on my way north to dodge the cold fronts sweeping down from the Great Lakes.

Morning brought more of the gray overcast that had been following me east, but the forecast brought unexpected news: high pressure moving in off the east coast was going to keep it in check. That high pressure area was butting shoulders with the low in the Great Lakes, and the two were going at each other like sumo wrestlers, trying to push each other out of the way. Running between them was a squeeze play: turbulence, but if I could ride it, there was a forecast 37 knot tailwind all the way north.

Before the morning's weather briefing, my first planned stop had been just north of Memphis, and I figured I could make Bowling Green, KY by night. Tailwinds are never as good as they sound in the forecast, but I was thinking I could stretch it a bit - I'd just have to head out and see. As I bounced up to 3500 feet, it was clear that this was a good solid wind. Not only right at my back, but cold and dry too - the Skyranger's meager 85 horse engine was drawing good power, showing about 87 knots (airspeed) at cruise. Flicked on the GPS and confirmed the news: I was making 105 knots over the ground. Rechecked my range and decided that I could make Springfield on this leg, 45 minutes short of Bowling Green.

Up, up, further north, I watched the earth turn from green to brown to gray as I entered winter's domain. I was leaving the south behind. I'd been planning on skirting Memphis' airspace, but ATC steered me right on through ("395, I suggest a heading of 059" "But that'll put me in Memphis class B - am I cleared?" "Oh, sure, N33395 cleared into Memphis class B, heading and altitude pilot's discretion...") Try \*that\* one in Boston!

Across the mighty Mississippi and out over Tennessee. By now my ground speed was 109 knots. I searched a bit in altitude feeling greedy for speed. Winds were stronger higher up, but less on course, so I lost some speed. Back to 3500 for the ride. Another check of time and distance.



Yup, my luck was holding: I could even make Bowling Green on this tank with a 45 minute reserve. By now I was tempted - check the GPS distance and ETE - just a bit more speed and, incredibly, I could even make Pittsburgh by sunset. The stop in Bowling Green would cost me at least 30 minutes, and winds should die down in late afternoon, so it was a pipe dream. But at least I'd be in easy striking distance for the following morning.

BG looks like a very pretty town, and as I (literally) swooped down into the pattern from altitude, I was sorry I'd not get the chance to spend some time there. But, as my friend Jim would say, I was smelling the hay and heading for the barn. Fuel, oil, a quick friendly conversation with the line folk, a bag of PopTarts from the vending machine (to supplement the goodies Devon packed for my trip), and I was on my way.

Back up at 3500, I began plotting my options: Portsmouth, OH looked pretty good, as did Moundsville, WV if the winds held (not that "Moundsville" was all that auspicious a name, but coming out of El Dorado, truth in advertising sounded pretty good). I called Flight Service on the radio for conditions and NOTAMs along the route. Everything sounded great, and the briefer asked for a pilot report. I confirmed the nifty tailwind and moderate turbulence. He suggested that maybe, if I didn't mind, I might try a bit

higher for smoother air and a "better" tailwind. Better? I wasn't going to argue - at this point I'd believe in Santa Claus if FSS told me to.

So, up I went to 5500'. Nice cold air - in the California summertime I'd be hard pressed to reach 5500' but the prop was still taking nice big bites out of the cold air. 80 knots indicated airspeed at altitude and letsee, 117 knots over the ground. Yehaw! I still couldn't make Pittsburgh by sunset, but it would be a short hop from wherever I stopped. Just keep the compass on 057 and the altitude at 5500.

Below me, winter reigned. Even in the late afternoon, the skeletons of trees on wooded hillsides glinted with frost. From time to time, there was a small frozen pond here, a bare hilltop dusted with white -- I was glad I'd donned my cold weather gear this morning. Occasionally I'd catch a glimpse of my own breath in the Skyranger's unheated cockpit.

I was so caught up in the beauty of the landscape below that I lapsed on my flight planning. Crossing into Ohio, I checked and rechecked my progress. No, that can't be right - but the GPS confirmed it: 128 knots over the ground - a tailwind of 50 miles an hour, directly at my back. The weather gods aren't just smiling, they're giving me an early Christmas present (hey - I'm Jewish, but I \*never\* say "no" to presents...).

One more check of the charts and tables, and I realize I can do it: if I keep altitude and the wind holds, I can arrive at Allegheny County Airport in Pittsburgh just 15 minutes after sunset. I inch the throttle up a touch.

The sun disappears behind clouds low in the west as I cross the Ohio into West Virginia. There is definitely snow here. It's cold, uncomfortably cold, but the adrenaline keeps me warm. As the horizon glows red, I glance at the GPS - 132 knots, and 35 miles to go. Lights are coming on below, as I push the nose over for my descent. The sky is still light, but the sun is definitely down a few minutes later when I make out the outline of AGC - I'm there. But there's a catch: the wind is 200 at 19 knots. Inexplicably, they offer me runway 28 - almost a direct crosswind. I ask for, and am given runway 23 - only 30 degrees into the wind, but still a handful for a dusk landing with a fatigued pilot. (They suggest "But 28's longer...." These people obviously don't understand little aircraft, especially not taildraggers.

I swing wildly onto base, then final of 23. In crosswinds, a "wheel" landing offers more control, but requires precise pitch control I'm not going to be able to achieve on a dark runway. I opt for a full 3-point attitude. Feel for the ground, watch the runway lights in my periphery - can't see anything out the front. Correct a wild gust that blows me off the runway, then a shot of power to keep the bottom from dropping out. Damn, I know the ground's down here somewhere. Boing! A hard bounce and I'm up again. Hold pitch and hit throttle. Boing! A second bounce, but much smaller, and I'm careening along on the ground before I can react. Throttle full idle, stick full back, and dance on the rudder to keep the runway edge lights at bay.

And then I'm stopped. I'm so elated and breathless that I forget what to do next. Tower prompts me: "'395, exit runway next turnoff, contact ground 121.7..." Huh? Oh right. Get off the damn runway. I taxi in, ask for directions to the infamous Corporate Air, where I've made arrangements to keep the plane.

I pull up in front of the big hangar, turn off radios and electrical equipment, but leave the engine running at idle for a few minutes. I sit there listening to that soft regular thub-thub-thub-thub -- the purr of a contented kitten. That purr has carried me faithfully over undercast valleys, through mountain passes, across harsh deserts - 2500 miles to my new new home in Pittsburgh. I just want a few minutes of time to appreciate that purr before I switch off the magnetos and the trip is really over. The lineman comes out and waits for me to shut down - he sees me sitting there, smiling, doing nothing. He must think I'm crazy. But for him, airplanes are just a job. For me, this is what life's all about. I take a deep breath and flick off magnetos and master switch. A couple of coughs and then just silence. "Thanks," I say to noone in particular, or perhaps to the Skyranger and myself. "Thanks, and welcome home."



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Commonwealth/Rearwin Skyranger