November 2011 Bloemfontein South Africa Report

Note:Like most blogs - this will make more sense if you start at the bottom and work up.



Flying Day # 13 (last) - December 4

Today promised to be a good day and 5 of us declared 750km flights while others declared 500s. The course was a giant hour glass shaped one with turnpoints at Hertzogville, Kroonstadt, Pramberg and return. The 3d leg of the course was over 300km long! But - it was also my last day and I really did not want a 7:00pm “scrape it back home” end to my flying so I resolved to keep things reasonable for the last day. This was my 13th straight day flying, and my third day over 5.5 hours in the hot sun - so

not a time to go crazy with a marginal last hour of flying.

All gliders got back home, 5 did 500kms (one new Norwegian pilot did his first) , 2 pilots did 750s, and myself and another turned at Emmaus 250 km on the long leg and we flew 650 km. I was in the air 6.6 hours. Here is a link to the course and See You map: https://picasaweb.google.com/lh/photo/PYbmzXbTM9b005QiExF6p9MTjNZETYmyPJy0liipFm0?feat=directlink



I've reached the end of my flying time here this year. I flew 57 hours on 13 straight days, with total cross country distance of slightly over 4700 km (2900 miles). I saw a lot of South Africa I had not seen before (and some I still can't pronounce) and had a great time with my friends. With two 650 km flights and four 500s including the 500 km around the TMA, this was probably my most successful trip here. If you love flying

gliders cross country - there is no better place to go.

Flying Day # 12 - December 3

Another blue day with few or no clouds in the sky. We flew a big task - 498 km from New Tempe to Greylingsdrift, over to Kroonstadt, to Bultfontien and return. I managed the task in about 5.5 hours and OLC optimized my distance at 512 km. I had difficulty on the second leg and got low going into Kroonstadt (a place I had never been to before). Here is the link to the task map & flight:https://picasaweb.google.com/lh/photo/WlsglHSVQ0hfNBxjwdqjc9MTjNZETYmyPJy0liipFm0?feat=directlink
Tomorrow will be my last flying day here.

.Flying Day # 11- December 2

It will help to understand today's flight if you scroll down to the Introduction section below and look at the map of the 3 controlled airspaces. Essentially, 3 of us (myself, Ed Downham and Anders Anderson) flew a task clockwise around the Bloemfontein TMA and down the narrow corridor between that and the TMA to the east (which is for Maseru - capital of the kingdom of Lesotho). It was a fascinating flight over terrain that I have never seen before (only one of the 3 of us who did it had done it before) and it was especially difficult for me because I did not have any moving map display in my glider and mostly had to rely on a "real" map. On the far east side I flew over a large town called Thaba Nchu with a beautiful mountain near it. Most maddening was flying in the southern extension of the TMA where we were prohibited from flying above 10,500 msl. The terrain was completely unlandable in all directions as far as I could see - yet I had to leave 9 kt thermals at 10.5 K (6000'agl) because of airspace restrictions - which make no sense considering the limited traffic in and out of Bloemfontein. Still - it was one of my most memorable flights and a flight that has been done here only once before (by Anders Anderson who flew it with us today). 498km in 5.8 hours. Here is a link to the See You map of the flight https://picasaweb.google.com/lh/photo/tN1TKyEVG3AQmwUJKxZY-NMTjNZETYmyPJy0liipFm0?feat=directlink The light green areas are the places that allowed flight below 10.5 k (6000'above ground).

Cross country flying here is a little different than back in New England because airports are very sparse. The nearest airport to Bloemfontien is at Bultfontein - 85 km away. It is

essential to land in cultivated fields (and preferably near to a paved road). While some uncultivated fields may look landable from the air, all are loaded with thousands of meerkat holes or the ubiquitous anthills that have the consistency of cement. Either will wreck a glider. Below is a fairly small anthill - with the Nimbus tail dolly for perspective:



Flying Day # 10 - December 1

Storms in the area so a rest day for most. I took a 1.8 hour local flight and went out to

look at some landing places. Came back as a storm came in.
Tomorrow should be a good day.People think that “flying in Africa” is like looking down on jungles and rhinos. It actually looks a lot like this in the agricultural areas.



Flying day # 9 - November 30

The confusion continued about the weather and so we decided on a 316 km triangle racing task that would keep us all reasonably close to the airport. However, several of us saw that conditions were better looking toward the second turnpoint so 4 of us decided to do the task in reverse order. It was fun flying. I covered 327km in 2 hours & 50 minutes on course for an average speed of 72 mph(116 kph). I flew total time of 3:25 in the air. The storms gave us a break and stayed away in our task area (although we could see them elsewhere). All in all a good, fun non dramatic day. Here is a link to the

barogram for today's flight: I've no idea what caused the vertical colored lines - but you can see the altitudes clearly. Note the standard 1500' agl tow.https://picasaweb.google.com/lh/photo/_GMQVkt6ufD87eg7niBOQNMTjNZETYmyPJy0liipFm0?feat=directlink

Flying Day #8 - November 29

I can't recall a day where there was as much confusion and disagreement among the different weather forecasts. SA Weather Service and NOAA were saying completely different things. Commercial broadcasts had a third opinion. Everybody predicted storms somewhere - but nobody agreed where they would be. I finally gave up and decided on a simple plan: I would fly as far as I could upwind until storms started appearing , and the downwind run would get me home on time before the storms hit the airport.

Wrong! About 2.4 hours into the flight I was 135 km away when word came on the radio that there was a dust front line (caused by thunderstorm outfall) moving toward the airport. I broke off the task, climbed as high as I could, and started a glide back to the airport. At the same time Ed Downham started back from a similar distance but more to the east.

At 55 km out I could see the very clear wall of red dust moving in from my right to left and cutting off access to the airport. There was no option to go left because of the controlled airspace restrictions. I was below glide but have seen these dust fronts before. They can be used much like a ridge and I deliberately flew toward it to use the energy it was creating as it slid across my path (the cold air from the front pushes the normal warm air up - which picks up the dust much like a giant wedge).

The front had strong lift and both Downham and I climbed in it to 12,000 msl at which altitude we could see over the dust to the the ground behind it. At that point ground radioed that the field wind had shifted to the west and was now blowing steady at 50kts (!) which is also common when a storm front passes here in Africa. Ed and I discussed strategies and we decided that since visibility was OK behind the front we would just circle the airport (to get a sense of wind drift) and execute a high wind landing. I decided to hold the 420 lbs of water ballast right to the ground to give the Nimbus more stability

and penetrating power into the howling wind. I flew the approach at 145 kph (90 mph) and zero flaps, with my base leg right over the fence. That worked well, the landing went fine, and Downham landed about 2 minutes after me on the same runway.

My total time in the air was 3 hours 41 minutes. I flew 299 km. Here is a picture from last year that shows what a dust front looks like as it leads the thunderstorm outfall. I was much closer to it today:



Flying Day # 7- November 28

After yesterday's surprise storms none of us were very confident about the weather forecast and so the task today was designed to keep us reasonably close into the airport if storms developed again. I selected a 500km task from New Tempe up to Christiana, and then down to the diamond mine at Koffiefontein. At the midpoint of the course I would be only about 75km from New Tempe - if storms developed locally. But - there were storms to the north and I had to select a substitute turnpoint just south of Christiana. I had no trouble to the north but I got hammered with sink as I rounded the second turnpoint near to the mine and got down to around 2200' agl directly over it. I dumped all of my water ballast to climb better and was able to get back to cruising altitude and ultimately to New Tempe around 5:00 pm. My total distance was 470 km and I was in the air for 5 hours 21 minutes. I've now had 3 straight days of flights over 5 hours and I am getting a little tired. But it's fun and the reason I come here.

The mine is a 1500' deep hole in the ground and it is still an active diamond mine. Here is a photo:



Flying day #6 - November 27

We thought that today would be a great day so we had our pilot's meeting an hour early with most of the gliders on the grid by 9:00 am. I declared an FAI type 750 km triangle (no leg less than 28%) with turnpoints at Klerksdorp and Reivelo. Each leg was about 255km. I launched at 10:30 am and was on course by 10:45 and made good time up to Klerksdorp cruising between 10 and 12,000' and at about 160kph (99 mph). I made the turn at 1:00 pm and headed west toward Rievelo. Unfortunately, as I got toward the midpoint on the second leg it appeared ominously dark directly ahead. I radioed New

Tempe for radar information and they confirmed a thunderstorm directly ahead. I abandoned the task at Lindberg (about 110 km on the second leg) but that still put me some 205 km from home.
The trip home was complicated by high altitude blow off from the thunderstorm but the ground held it's heat and I was able to get back to New Tempe just as another storm hit the airport. With difficulty two of us landed in the storm and we got the gliders put away before the heavy rain started. One glider landed out at Bultfontein.

I was in the air a total of 5.4 hours and subtracting the time climbing off tow I flew 570 km in 5 hours for an average speed of about 70 mph. Without the storms I think that the flight could have been done.

Here is a link to a screen capture of today's flight (Google Docs won't let me paste it here or load it on the page):

https://picasaweb.google.com/lh/photo/3TIaOvTvSwDcXhL78A46pNMTjNZETYmyPJy0IiipFm0?feat=directlink

This is what the morning grid looks like here:



Flying day #5 - November 26

We have been watching the weather all week looking at this weekend being really good. Today was an excellent gliding day - although it was completely blue - not a cloud in the sky. The official task was a 513 km flight out to Westpoint, down to an airport / dam called PK Le Roux, then up to a turn point about 120k, north of New Tempe. However, by mid flight I thought it was an undercall and continued up to Bloemhof Dam some 165 km to the north. My actual turnpoint distances were 639 km apart (one leg was 277km) but See You optimized the flight at 652 km (405 miles). I was in the air for 6 hours 16 minutes and am pretty tired . Subtracting the time climbing off the 1500' tow, I was on course for about 6 hours so I had an average speed of 67.5 mph. My friend Ian Cook flying an 18m Ventus 2 (with sustainer engine) did 673 km by going a little farther south than I did. My high point was 15,888 msl. Best lift was about 10 kts. The Nimbus was at 1650 lbs (450 lbs of ballast) and I generally cruised at 95 mph. I never felt like I was low or in trouble for the whole flight. I was pretty cold and tired in the last final glide from 13,500 MSL.

Here is a link to a screen capture of the flight:
https://picasaweb.google.com/lh/photo/j_0DSqsW6o2bH9vY1Lf6i9MTjNZETYmyPJy0liipFm0?feat=directlink

Flying day #4 - November 25

Today was my 60th birthday and they presented me with a big chocolate cake at the pilot's meeting. It went with fish & chips for supper at the end of the day. I can't imagine a better birthday than being here with friends flying gliders in November. The day was completely blue and we declared a 308 km triangle to the north and west. I was late to get enough altitude to start and was pretty slow up to the first turn. I was also getting pretty sun baked in the relentless African sun. I flew about 270km in a little less than 4 hours and was pretty conservative. One fellow (a sustainer engine glider) made it around. I am feeling good, over my jet lag and looking forward to the weekend.

Internet is pretty sketchy right now - I am working on some more photos for you all.

Flying day # 3 - Thursday 11/24 (Thanksgiving)

The weather here changes so fast. Last night it was really windy and the morning was cold and blowing. But, by the 10 am pilots meeting it had died down and was looking like a pretty good day. We set a 410 km chevron shaped task with the first turn at

Westpoint (where we clear the airspace around Bloemfontein), then 123 km down to a turnpoint called Luckoff, then north to a point just above the town of Dealsville then back. The first part of the task went well until I got to Petrusberg at which point I hit a huge blue hole across which was a big white wall (rainstorms). I diverted back north past Dealsville and came back before the rain hit the airport. I flew about 250km in a little over 2.5 hours.

Flying Day #2 - Wednesday 11/23

Today looked promising for thermal strength but with a real risk that high winds would blow the thermals apart. I launched second in line and got off at 1.4 AGL into a great 7.7 kt thermal that took me to 10.5 K altitude. I set out on course - and that was the last good thing that happened to me. As I approached the Krugersdrift Dam (about 22km out I kept getting lower & lower and struggled with fractured lift that I just could not circle in. I had 350# of water on board. Finally I decided to retreat back toward the airport and blundered into a huge sink area resulting in a really dumb marginal glide back. I was unable to take a relight due to a tow plane issue. I'd like to blame it on the wind which was a pretty gusty 15-20 kts - but at least two other gliders made 300KM flights today - so they clearly did something I wasn't doing right. I am looking forward to talking with them tomorrow to see how they found it. That's part of the fun and learning here. But it sure didn't work for me today.

There are six other pilots here this week. Two Germans, two British and a British couple who both fly. The private fleet includes a Ventus 2, a DG 808 self launcher, two turbo Ventus. The facility gliders include an LS-4, a Ventus, an LS-8, an LS-6, an ASH 25 (2 place) an ASH-26, a JS-1 and the Nimbus 3 that I am using. We have a single tow plane right now - a Cessna 182.

It really does look like this in November:



Flying Day #1 - Tuesday 11/22,

OK - so much for “I won’t fly until Wednesday”. Today turned out to be a really pretty good day. A new young German pilot did his first 300km (so he bought all the beer tonight) and one of the more experienced fellows did a bit over 400km. My Nimbus got done with the tail repair around 3:00pm, it made sense to give it a test flight, and I was feeling reasonably good considering the 7 hour time loss from Boston. So I climbed into “Hotel Sierra” and took a tow at about 4:20 pm and flew for 2 hours. As I have written often before the presumptive tow height here is 1500’ AGL and I got off there and

managed a climb to 7600' AGL (12,200' MSL). I didn't go far and just flew up past the Krugersdrift dam near to a little town called Dealsville. Landed at 6:22 pm. Glad I did it as there are a couple of things I need to adjust in the cockpit. Still, I will take it easy for the next few days and not push until I feel I am physically ready.

We have home cooked meals at the airport pub/kitchen every other night. Tonight was a traditional South African dish that I cannot pronounce (much less spell) made with minced lamb, spices, sliced nuts and raisins. It was pretty good!

Travel & Repairs. I arrived Sunday morning (11/20) in Johannesburg after 14 hours on an Airbus a 340 600. It's non stop getting here from JFK (there is a fuel stop on the return flight) I spent an overnight in Joberg and then took the short commuter flight to Bloemfontein Monday mid day. It's 82 degrees, a popcorn sky, and time to settle into my room, go and get some food, and head to the airport to see my friends. I won't fly until Wednesday so as to let my body acclimate to the 7 hour time zone change.

We are also waiting for a part to arrive from Schempp to repair some minor damage to the Nimbus 3 that occurred on Saturday in a really bizarre accident. It seems that we share New Tempe Airport with a South African Army billet which is across the field. They do parachute drops all the time - including some high wind exercises and unmanned material drops. Well, one of the 120 kg unmanned parachute packages got let go early (or late, or something) and the wind dragged it down the runway to the stationary Nimbus which was parked, minding it's own business, and waiting to fly. The chute hooked on the tail and the wind pulling the chute straps pulled the elevator up and bent the split elevator metal fitting (imagine a 5 degree difference in the left and right elevator angle and you will understand the damage). The part should arrive tomorrow. Not a big deal as they are pretty comfortable here doing most types of minor repair - but this was a whole new way to damage a glider . . ..

Here is the standard introduction to this blog. - with a little new information. I suggest that you

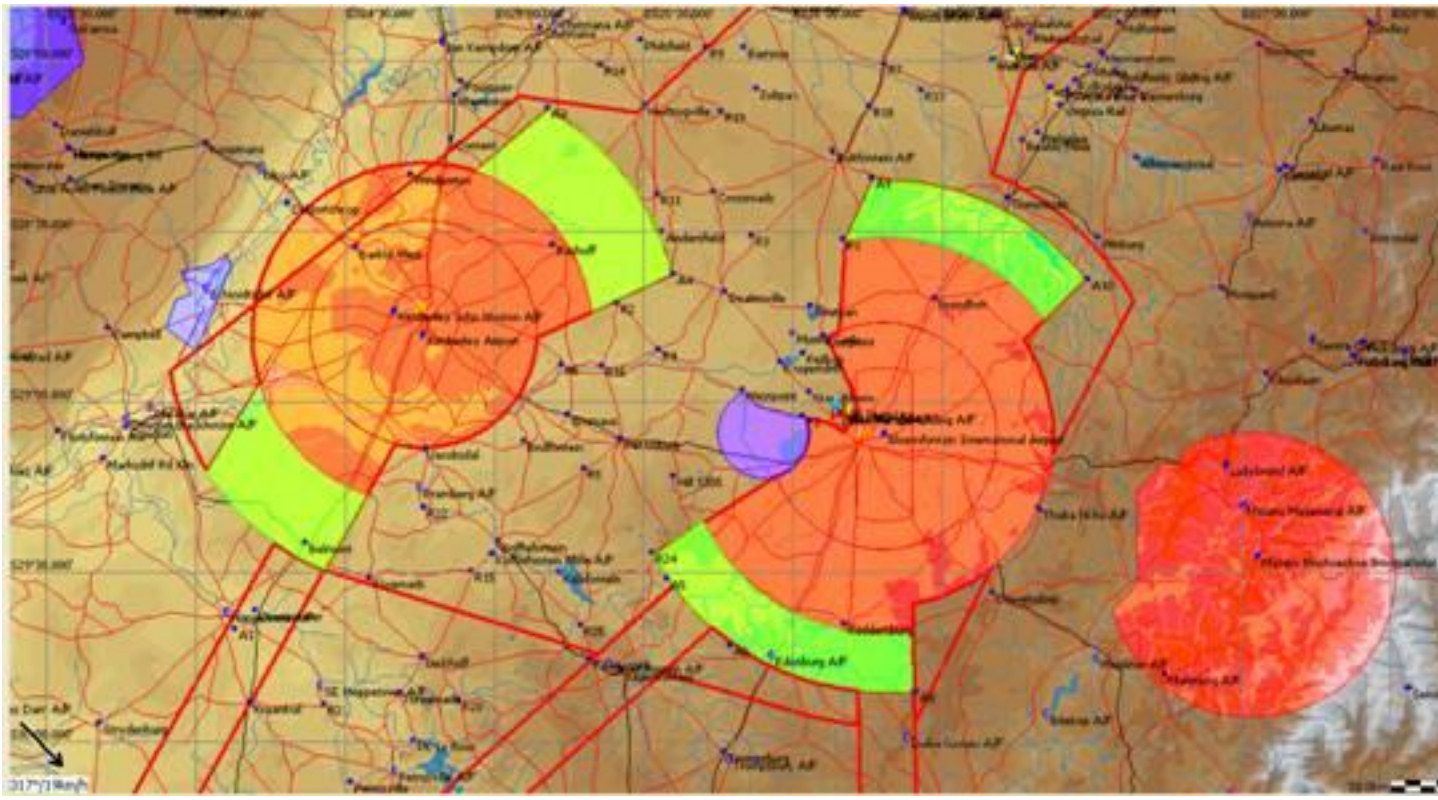
scroll down and read from the bottom articles up to the most recent one(which will always at the top):

Introduction:

Every year I try to take a gliding vacation and in 2005 I visited South Africa for the first time and just fell in love with flying here. This is my 7th trip and, like earlier years, I will try to send on daily "reports" to friends back home. These daily reports really began as emails to my son Dan (who now flies an ASW-20 out of Boulder) but some more people have enjoyed reading them so they are getting a little more developed. In South Africa I fly out of an operation called "Soaring Safaries" in New Tempe, which is just North of Bloemfontein the capitol of Free State Province. They have a web site you can visit at http://www.soaring-safaris.com/ . The operation is sort of an advanced glider cross country camp where you can rent (or "hire" as they say here) a modern well instrumented glider and are expected to push it to its (or your) limits. Typical daily flights here run 300 to 600 km and there have been several 1000 km flights done here. Some of the gliders belong to the operation and others are shipped here in containers from England and sometimes other countries. All are available for rent. The operation is also supported by outstanding meteorological support and full crew and minor repair support. There are national contest quality pilot briefings every morning. The head of the operation is Dick Bradley who is a 7 time South African National Champion and well known in the international gliding community.

Most of the participants are from Europe with about 2/3 from the UK. They are lucky that they can get here with minimal jet lag. There is a motley assortment of French, Danes, Spaniards and a few others. The Germans tend to go to the operation at Gariep Dam for some reason, and I am usually the only American here. It's not really a good place for beginning to learn cross country flying (airports are very sparse and any land out is likely to be in a farm) - but it is not uncommon to have people do their first 500km flights here. It's also not uncommon to have members of several European gliding teams show up to fly or to find out that the guy you are sharing a thermal with is the National Champion from his home country. There are some interesting differences in the gliding "culture" here compared to back home - the most challenging of which may be the presumptive tow height of 1500' (500m) which - with the usual full load of water ballast - really gets your attention at the beginning of each flight.

Another unique feature here is the issue of controlled airspace around Bloemfontein. In the image below our airport is in the point of the “pie slice” in the middle area. Return flights from north, west or south have to avoid all of the controlled areas - which can be maddening when you are low in a glider or racing a thunderstorm home. It is mandatory to turn in a flight log each day and airspace violations are taken very seriously as they threaten the entire gliding operation. It’s hard to understand the point of all of the controlled space as Bloemfontein isn’t much bigger than Manchester NH or Worcester MA and it’s rare that you even see another airplane out on course. Still, it’s a minor problem that we all work around. The soaring conditions here are among the best in the world - it’s a great place to fly gliders.



This year I will again be flying "Hotel Sierra" which is a Nimbus 3 nearly identical to my old one that I sold in '08 - which adds a certain comfort level to my flying out here. She is a 24.5 meter open class ship in excellent condition. I confess however, to ZERO comfort level driving little cars on the left side of the road - and for me the cliche that we tell our friends is very true that "Driving to the airport is a lot more dangerous than flying".

The terrain here is high plateau (around 4500' msl) sparsely populated with low crops and sandy dry red soil. One sees the occasional center pivot irrigation systems that look like large green "dots" on the ground - just as back home. There are also large flat "salt pans" that look like cement lakes (you can land in them but they have high edges and it's hard to get out). The area can be pretty desolate - especially south down toward the other large gliding center at Gariep Dam (which tends to be more motor glider oriented). The conditions are not unlike West Texas and Eastern New Mexico - with a fairly constant wind. Thermal height bands run very high and all gliders are equipped with oxygen. Controlled airspace in South Africa is carried a bit to the extreme but some airspace violations are "winked at" while others are taken VERY seriously. It takes a while to know what is what. (Actually a lot of regulations in South Africa are like that). Altitude restricted airspace is 14500' near some urban areas and 22000' outside. Thermals up to 16-18k (12-14k AGL) are quite common. So are thunderstorms!

I'm here by myself so I welcome your emails. I am hoping to have regular email and Internet access but the email address here is roybourgeois3@gmail.com

If you are so snowbound and bored that you can't get enough of this stuff, here are links to last year's report and the previous 3 years (I didn't use Google Docs before that):

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1eQELaF2m_kKw1Pm293mpMUMv6T9oIlD4_NkmbBSodzk/edit?hl=en#

https://docs.google.com/Doc?docid=0AYDoYn8-HtODZGRmajQyNjNfNDRkcmZmOWZoYw&hl=en

http://docs.google.com/Doc?docid=0AYDoYn8-HtODZGRmajQyNjNfMWN4bmRzMw&hl=en

http://docs.google.com/Doc?docid=0AYDoYn8-HtODZGRmajQyNjNfMjRocHR0dmQ0cw&hl=en

Roy

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