

# AN OREGON STATE Paragliding X-C Record

by Rick Higgins

*Rick Higgins flies his Apco Allegra (DHV 1-2) 83.6 miles in four hours and three minutes from Black Cap in Lakeview, Oregon to Iron Mountain, reaching a maximum altitude of 13,714 feet MSL.*

Jeff Davis looked over at me. I could see the look on his face. He yelled, "Let's go." At 3,000 feet above Black Cap Mountain in Lakeview,

Oregon, the view was nice, but I wanted to get higher before going cross-country. We made a few more turns in the same thermal, watching each other carefully, so that we did not bounce into each other.

We were in Lakeview for the paragliding and hang gliding X-C contest, and Jeff's wonderful wife Judi was willing to chase him all over Lake County. I just wanted to make a 100-mile flight and go home! It was fun flying with Jeff, and of course I did want a ride back to Lakeview at the end of the day. It never really worked out that way.

Jeff took off and went on glide to the north. We had a southwest tailwind. For some reason I stayed with my thermal and got higher and watched Jeff hit sink as he glided above the canyon near Highway 140. I looked at the clouds to the north and took a different route, following the clouds. Jeff and I glided to the cliffs that were west of Bull Prairie and he was about 500 feet below me. I stayed high and worked some weak lift and drifted north to Sherman Valley. I arrived low and used the west wind that was coming up the open faces to ridge soar and get back up. I had been here many times during the last three years and had landed here once.



*Rick at 8,000' MSL north of Lakeview, Oregon. Photo by Rick Higgins.*

Jeff made it there after I did, got too low and had to land, then hiked back to the road that went south to Highway 140. I got back up and went over to Tagues Butte, thinking that Jeff had flown down to Highway 395 and Judi would be down there looking for him. She drove back to Lakeview and finally heard from someone else on the radio that Jeff was up in Sherman Valley. She finally met up with him near Highway 140. They drove back to Lakeview and assumed that I would be fine and that I would follow Highway 395 and hitchhike back.

I was now at Abert Rim and I knew that I had to get very high there to get to the north end of the lake and the rim. I got up to 13,700 feet, raced to the north end of Abert Lake, and was low when I got there. This is the area in which everyone sinks out. (I had landed there three

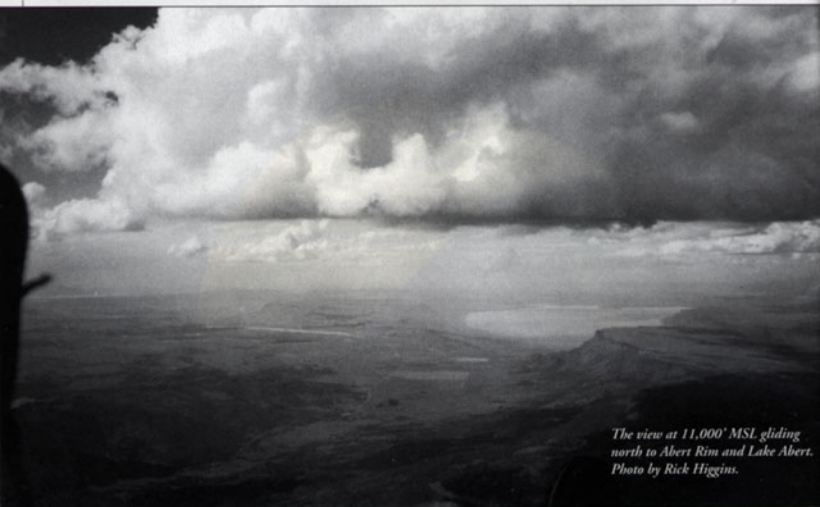
times before and had only gotten back up once.)

I drifted toward the low mountains to the north, working every bit of lift. I floated about two miles at about 200 feet above the ground and drifted past Hogback Road in a wave of lift, but not exactly a thermal. I was not going up, just maintaining. I saw that if I could stay up, I would be drifting to a small bump that had some rocks on the face. I got there and was about 30 feet above the ground. The bump was only about 20 feet high, but the bump and the rocks were enough to kick the

wave into a thermal and I was able to make full circles close to the ground and get back up. It was amazing to be that low and to get back up 3,000 feet above the desert.

Meanwhile, Tom Moock and Kitty Goursolle, from the Bay area, were following me and on the same radio channel. Tom had flown to Abert Lake and landed. Kitty picked him up and they decided to chase me up Highway 395. I was glad to know that I was not alone out there.

I was up and down for a while, trying to stay high and follow Highway 395. I kept drifting away from the highway, but still thought I could land close to my new chase vehicle, but a cloud that was overdeveloping to the west of me had other plans. It was between my little aircraft and Highway 395.



*The view at 11,000' MSL gliding north to Abert Rim and Lake Abert. Photo by Rick Higgins.*

I was high and on full speed bar, and relaxed when I decided to drink some water from my camel-back. I let go of the brake handles and, of course, ran into a strong thermal and suffered a huge frontal collapse. I looked up to reconfirm my suspicions. Yes, bigger than life, a full horse-shoe, and it stuck. This was not helping my glide, so I decided to fix it, casually reaching up, grabbing both brake handles and pulling the wing back into normal flying mode. I must have been getting a

little hypoxic at that point, because I noticed that I had forgotten to let up on the speed bar the entire time. The Apco Allegra was stable and flew straight. Maybe that is one of the reasons it is rated DHV 1-2.

Meanwhile, the huge cloud to the west of me was getting darker. I was at cloud base and saw a bolt of lightning about a mile away. I wondered what would happen to a paraglider if it were struck by lightning. I was getting sucked up into

the cloud and it was snowing lightly. Three years prior, I had been 10 miles west of here and saw lightning nearby with hail bouncing off of my wing. This year it was only snow. Maybe it was time to get down.

I kept flying north, away from the nasty cloud, and tried to get back to Highway 395 and closer to Tom and Kitty. My GPS was telling me that I was losing ground speed and hitting a head-wind. The cloud was overdeveloping and

pushing me away from Highway 395. I told Tom and Kitty that I was about six miles east of 395, but could not see the highway because of the dark cloud, and was actually about 10 miles east of them. I had some options: full speed bar to the ground toward the black cloud, rain and Highway 395, or fly east to a cloud street that would take me to the middle of the desert. I did not realize at the time that the cloud street would have taken me toward the town of Burns, Oregon. I decided to go north away from the cloud and just get down safely. I told Tom and Kitty that I was landing and they said that they would come and look for me. I had flown over 80 miles from Lakeview at this point and would be *very* happy just to get down safely.

I finally landed going backwards, facing into the wind. I touched down, took a huge wrap on the brakes and turned around and pulled the wing down. It was blowing about 20 mph on the ground. I was glad to be down!

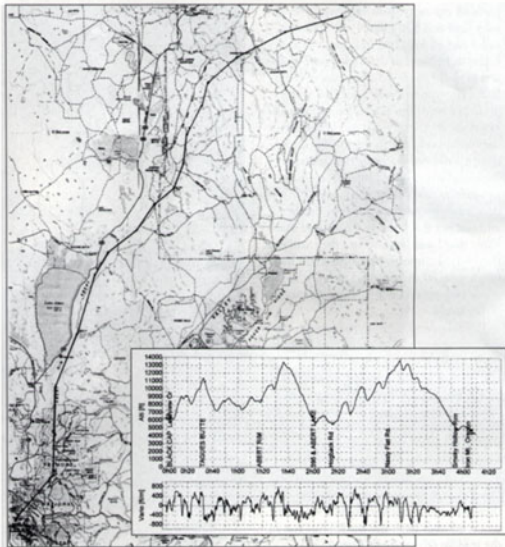
I tried to contact Tom and Kitty on the radio with no luck. I was actually 20 miles from them and Highway 395, and life was not good. As I was coming down I had looked for any signs of life, but there was not a ranch in sight. I was next to a road with fresh tire tracks, but was in the middle of the great "Oregon Outback." I considered my options and found that I had cell phone service so I called Jeff and Judi's cell phone numbers. They were not on. I tried to call information to get their hotel phone number, but no luck. I found out later that Tom and Kitty did not have cell service while they were looking for me. They had driven into the desert for two hours, finally gave up, drove back to Lakeview and told some other pilots that I was still out there.

So, I packed everything into a small bag that would be needed for the long hike out, leaving my glider and harness which I would come back later for. I took my maps out and found that I had landed three miles east of Iron Mountain and one mile south of Big Stick Road.

I needed to let someone know that I was okay and where I was. The Lakeview Chamber of Commerce had put on the event, but they were closed for the day. I was thinking about the hang pilot who had walked out the week before and was followed by coyotes and a cougar. I had



*Rick kiting at Torrey  
Pines, California.  
Photo by Ancil Nance.*



mind hiking five miles with my pack or 10 miles without it. To try to hike out 20 miles would be foolish if I had another option.

I decided to call "911" and tell someone where I was. I talked to the Harney County Sheriff's Department and told them that I was okay and where I was. I gave them the GPS location and asked them to contact Jeff Davis at his motel in Lakeview, to tell him where I was and that he could come and get me. They said they would not call him, but they would come and get me. I had no choice but to wait. I walked down the road to an old homestead that was just stone walls and watched the rain and wind for the next three hours.

A four-wheel-drive SUV pulled up, I got in, and they drove the 20 miles to Wagentire, Oregon. I told them I was sorry to bother them, but was told several times that they were glad I had called; they did not want anyone trying to walk out 20 miles to Highway 395. They had

found a dead body two weeks earlier out in the desert and had no idea who it was. I was glad I had called them.

On the way to Wagentire they called Jeff and Judi, and they drove my Jeep from Lakeview to Wagentire to pick me up. We got back to Lakeview at about midnight.

I was glad to be safe and could now enjoy my new Oregon State Paragliding X-C Record flight. I had flown 83.6 miles, was up for four hours and three minutes, had gotten up to 13,714 feet MSL, and won the Lakeview contest for the fourth year in a row. If I had only decided to fly east and to the cloud street that would have taken me northeast, and maybe I could have landed in Burns, Oregon for 100 miles. Perhaps next year.

*Rick Higgins has been paragliding for five years, is a P5, Advanced Instructor, Tandem Administrator, and owner of SunSports Paragliding in Hood River, Oregon. ■*