

First XC

Okay, I didn't quite make it to the river, but I certainly went for it.

Saturday, April 10 at the Sac. I'd done my bushwhacking duty in the slot, and was eager to take a shot at the river. I'd been telling myself for a while that the next time it was blowing 10-15 at the Sac I'd go for it.

The early launchers were reporting gnarly air, so I allowed myself to be talked out of launching for a while. Eventually I got off at 2p.m. after Fred Permenter and Shawn MacDuff, and the long-since-went-outahere Bacil. The air was active, to be sure, but not unpleasant.

After a couple of passes in front of launch I headed West. Caught a couple of good thermals along the way, and attacked the Klingerstown gap with 1100 over launch. Lost most of that in the crossing, during which I waded to the ground-bound Fred, only to pick up most of the loss in a thermal the other side, which was coming up from the egg packing plant. After the thermal gave out I headed back to the ridge, but things went quiet, and I sank to 100 over.

There was a big patch of trees coming up, and I needed more altitude to get across. Passes back and forth along the ridge weren't doing anything, so I reluctantly threw in the towel and headed out across the creek towards the huge field I'd picked out. Flew through a couple of teaser bubbles that had me thinking "low save!" — but it was not to be.

I resigned myself to coming down, and did a big DBF pattern to put it down in some corn stubble next to a house (with no-one home) whose mailbox proclaimed "Klinger." I broke down, and fiddled with my GPS to see that I'd managed 6.2 miles from launch, which is 2 miles beyond the gap. Managed to raise Robert on the radio, who was magnanimously already on retrieve duty to the third gap for Bacil, for a very timely pickup.

Here's the barograph from my Ball Graphics Comp. The big V-shaped dip pretty well mimics the gap in the ridge that caused it.

So, what did I learn? (Yes, I'm an engineer, so I *have* to analyze these things!) I should have milked the big thermal for more altitude before the gap. I didn't want to get too far back on the ridge, but with 1600' over I should have gone for more. And I'm going to play with my flight toys to figure out this speed-to-fly thing better. I've a feeling I attacked the gap flying just a little fast. Maybe not, but it was all guesswork.

I'm sure a more experienced pilot could have scratched harder and stayed up to go further, but I feel good about my decision to bail with plenty of altitude and options.

XC was so much more interesting than boating around in the fishbowl. Man, I love this sport!