

61

Here Mike was not patient enough and ended up in this field while I flew 780 Km that day.



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In one way this is a pretty unpleasant kind of flying because you cannot count on the ridge and the slope is so shallow that you always wonder if you will be able to reach a suitable field in the valley on the other side of the Shenandoah River. On the other hand, when your pilgrimage is over, you are blessed with this amazing feeling that you just flew like Jonathan Livingstone.



63

In Front Royal, it is another challenge to cross the little valley up to the Massanutten Ridge in the direction of the Knob. If you did not get the chance to find wave while traveling on the Blue Ridge, the entrance of the Skyline Drive is generally a very good spot to find it. Then you can smile, the Ridge is only a few minutes away,



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but otherwise you can be stuck for hours trying to cross this 10 miles gap into the wind. When we reach Front Royal in wave we are confronted with the choice of staying in wave or descent to the Massanutten Ridge. If clouds are present, it is advisable to stay in wave. If not, running the ridge is the best option, although it might be difficult to climb back from the ridge once back to the Knob.



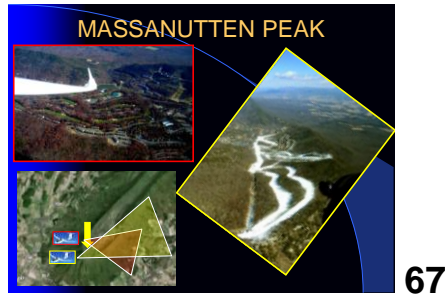
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Once on the Massanutten Ridge it is pure fun. It is one of the nicest ridge available in this part of the country. Although it is only 50 miles long, with four little gaps; it is very pleasant and easy to fly. And it increases your average speed dramatically as soon as you reach it.

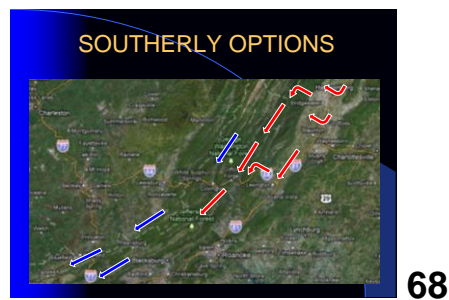


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It also often allows an easy transition to wave that can be very useful if you want to press further south.



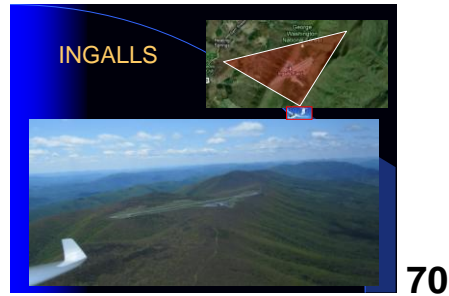
From Massanutten Peak, or just a little prior to it, it is often easy to climb in wave. But the difficulty, afterwards, is to find markers, as clouds have a serious tendency to disappear to the south.



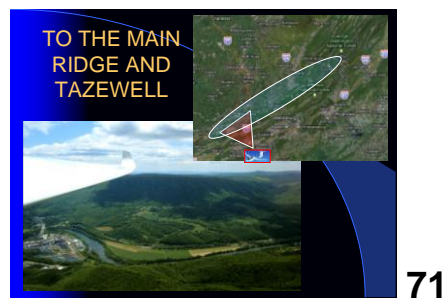
If clouds are available a further progression to the south southwest is possible; and at least on one occasion, but not during winter, I was able to get down to the Main Ridge and proceed down to Tazewell.



In winter time though, I was able to reach Lexington above the 81 Valley on two occasions and two winters ago I succeeded reaching Riverwoods at 12,000 feet. So, from this altitude, there is no doubt I could have made Newcastle and possibly Tunnels. The cloud cover ahead of me halted my temptation. For those of you who are familiar with the Region 4 south **(CLICK)** you can see the Mad Farmer fields right above my wing tip.



The following two pictures have been taken along the Main Ridge to illustrate that option. The first one is of the airport of Ingalls on top of the Main Ridge, north of Covington, Virginia,

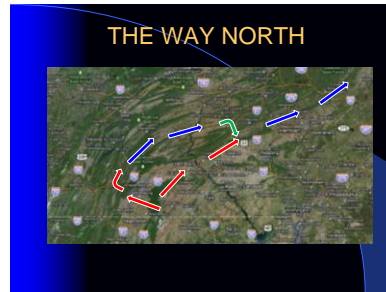


and the second one, on the way to Tazelwell, is Narrows in West Virginia. Both pictures were taken in June 2010, on a 1300 Km flight from and back to Fairfield.



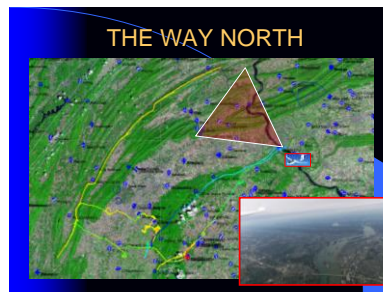
If the weather is not cooperating south of the Massanutten Peak, we prefer moving back to the north, closer to home. We know that we have ridges available on the West side of the Chambersburg Valley. Depending of the time left, they allow us to extend our flight by up to 500 km.

The way North



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The route North is dependant of a successful crossing of the Chambersburg Valley. We then fly the Tuscarora ridge towards Thompson town. The main problem of flying further North towards Blairstown is that coming back implies a big crossing headwind, relatively late in the day. Consequently, the weather should be watched attentively. Another option is to find wave to the northeast.



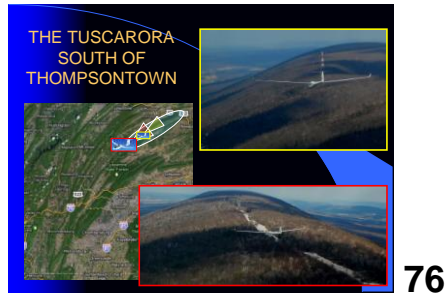
74

Using the ridges is how we have been doing until now to get to Blairstown. In two occasions, recently, I was able to proceed, in wave, to the Susquehanna River past Harrisburg. We think that we should be able to proceed more easterly in wave towards the Blairstown Ridge, **(CLICK 2)** The unanswered question is how to come back?



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The Tuscarora Ridge is our home garden, and although it is not especially easy, we know every inch of it. It consists of a relatively low ridge to the south, with a lot of escarpments and a few little gaps.



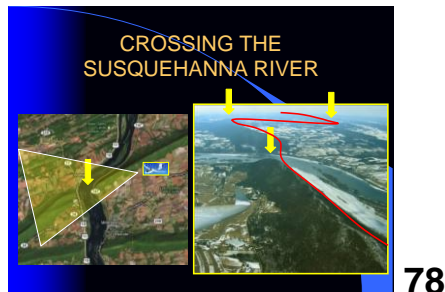
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It is followed by a massive and well defined ridge south of Thompsonstown.



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Slowing down and grapping a few hundred feet are generally well enough to cross the gap eastward to Buffalo Mountain. The opposite cannot be said and Buffalo Mountain is very seldom a good lift provider. We prefer to take a few thousand feet prior or right above the Susquehanna River on the way back.



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On this picture, taken from the north and at a much higher altitude, you can see the Thompsonstown Ridge from which we transit to Buffalo Mountain. From this little ridge, we cross the 1 mile large river at about 500 feet above the water.



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Crossing the Susquehanna River at ridge level is always exciting.



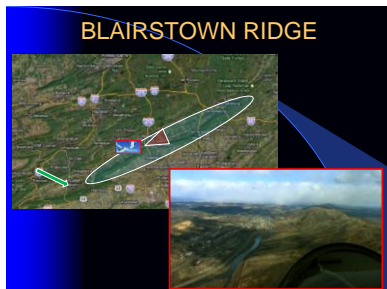
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The crossing often offers amazing views with the mix of snow, ice, water and the reflecting blue sky from above.



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Following is the Mahantango Ridge, which curves towards the east and requires more northerly winds at the end of it.



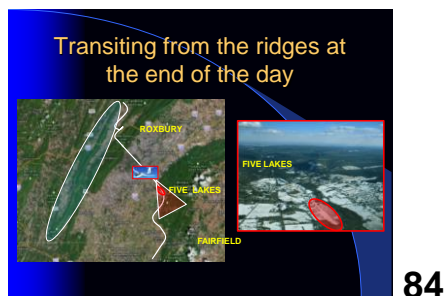
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From there, we are obliged to take a lot of altitude for the long crossing towards the Blairstown Ridge. It is not always easy downwind and it is always difficult coming back. The Blairstown Ridge is pretty intimidating, especially on its southern part, which offers a very shallow slope to the wind. But Blairstown pilots trust their ridge and fly it frequently, so do we; from time to time!



The northern TP is Catfish Pond. Going passed the pond is possible for a few miles, but going further north implies a switch to thermal flight which should have a negative impact on the flight average speed. So we don't do it.

The way back home



Timing the return home is critical and we failed doing it a few times. Of course we want to stay as long as possible on the Tuscarora ridge to achieve the maximum mileage, but between two and one hours before sunset we have to find a way to come East. After many experiences we found a rather reliable path home. It consists of finding the last thermal to an altitude of at least 3700 feet, which is only 1500 feet above the ridge top **(CLICK 2)** in the vicinity of Roxbury dam. Flying max L/D, with the wind in the back above the Chambersburg Valley, we can reach the little airfield of Five Lakes with 2000 feet MSL.



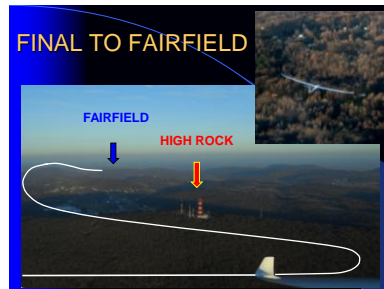
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Just 1 mile further east is a little quarry at the foot of the first hills. If the wind is above 10 mph, 1700 feet MSL is my minimum to continue to the south.



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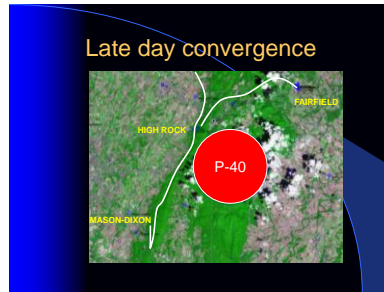
Those little hills often allow a slow climb back to 23 – 25 hundred feet MSL.



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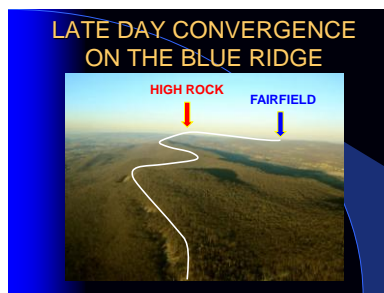
This is enough to reach High Rock where we generally climb easily to 28 – 35 hundred feet, 2500 feet being the lowest limit for a safe final to Fairfield. It translates in a low altitude but safe glide above the forests inbound Fairfield.

Late day convergence



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If time permits, we can now extend the flights by another 30 to 50 more miles, going down the early morning little hills to Mason-Dixon or the Potomac River and back to Fairfield.



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This is generally a very calm but slow flight in what we call convergence. Even in very calm westerly winds below 10 MPH, we are able to maintain altitude thanks to an opposite wind coming from the other side of the ridge, as you can see on the next picture.



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The SN-10 is showing the wind 17 mph from 290° while I am flying the JS1 due North and the smoke at the base of the ridge is obviously coming from the East

Sunset

One of the many rewards we get when flying late is to witness those beautiful sunsets.



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Here are a few more...