

Hyner View's 50th Anniversary: Labor Day, 2025

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Mike Hennig soon after launch from the Hyner View Overlook; Setup area: note spectators at the wall.

The phrase “a Boo-waa day” was born at Hyner. It started at the 1978 Nationals, three years after a young Dennis Pagen and others pushed a couple picnic tables up to the wall of the Hyner View scenic overlook. Actually, that’s a tale that should be told first. It was in February of 1975 that a group of pilots who had been flying the local ski slopes heard about the overlook (from a pre-avian Judy Hildebrandt: it seems Hyner gave birth to the dream that led to the Women’s World Team) and came to check it out. The others in the group are sadly passed, but Dennis gets the spotlight as the first to launch “probably because I was the stupidest.” They landed directly out front (across the railroad tracks from our present LZ). Word traveled fast and the very next day a group from Philadelphia came up, found the picnic tables still in place, and flew. An iconic site was born.

Inevitably a ranger caught them in the act. In response the pioneers eventually worked their way to the upper echelons of the Pennsylvania Park Service and were pleasantly surprised at the enthusiastic reception. The next step was securing a permanent LZ. Across the river from launch was an abandoned grass airfield owned by the Conti family. And... they operated a bar at the end of the field! They had a friend living on site who was happy to mow, and camping with easy access to the river was rolled into the bargain for a very reasonable annual fee (originally free). And thus a relationship was born that lasted nearly 40 years. A great launch with a 150 degree directional window, landing where you camp, a bar you can stumble home from without even needing to check for traffic – is it any wonder Hyner drew people from a 300+ mile radius? In its heyday a Hyner summer weekend would draw 200 people, with tents and campfires lining both sides of the LZ and back into the woods. You could spend the whole night wandering from fire to fire; each with a different personality. It was not unheard of for diehard partiers to see the sunrise.



Contestants in the 1978 Nationals; Bob Beck waiting to launch below the overlook.

But back to the Nationals. In the days before towing, Hyner was an ideal choice for a contest, and everyone came. The Cleveland boys brought a van that had only two discernable gears: the low gear would let out a low “booo” which then shifted into high “WAAA!!”. So a day featuring weather propitious enough to fire up the van was known as “a boo-waa day”. Though the phrase originated at Hyner, as far as we know the first exultation of “Boo-waa!” in flight occurred near Blacksburg Virginia, attributed to Randy Newberry. Now it belongs to the ages.

That van also was a fearsome presence in the bottle rocket wars that raged for years. People started firing rockets from campfire to campfire; but when the van pulled up and the door rolled back, everyone knew to dive for cover: for a full volley of rockets were lined up ready to burst free. Soon people started firing off home-made PVC cannon, then quarter sticks of dynamite; and the echoes would come rolling back from the cliff-like ridge across the river. The obsession with all sorts of combustion was a natural fit for a camping festival. Pete Welhofer worked at a chemical factory and managed to extract a block of pure lithium from it. It was a couple pounds in a metal can, wrapped again in plastic. He and Bob Beck went down to the river one warm night, filled with moonlit bathers (most of them likely buck naked). Pete opened the can, but as he pulled out the plastic bag it ripped, and in the moist air the lithium began to glow, sputter and fizz. Fearing for their safety they quickly flung the entire thing in the river. And then all hell broke loose. It erupted a hundred feet in the air and broke into pieces, each splashing down to make secondary eruptions, and the cycle continued. The bathers were running for the woods, hearing ripping leaves and explosive pops all around them. The experiment has never been repeated, and never forgotten.

And then there’s the naked fire jumping. Sometime in the mid 80’s Bob Beck, Dave Brown and others were sitting around a largish campfire in the wee hours. Bob says to Dave “I bet you can’t jump over that fire”, and in accordance with the Male Code of Stupid Dave could not refuse, beer in hand. Others followed. Then the ante was upped to “I bet you can’t jump it naked”. This was even stupider and hence less open to refusal. Dave met the challenge,

others followed, and a Hyner tradition was born. It developed into an almost programmatic item of the Hyner experience, culminating with 13 naked couples jumping hand in hand in 2003, including a sister and brother. It has eventually retreated into an element of surprise, where the goal is to sneak off without anyone noticing, do the deed and vanish back into darkness before anyone can suss out the details of what just happened. And it still happens, especially if ladies are present.



Hyner virgins outfitting the Statue of Liberty; the Statue in action.

Parallel to the naked fire jumping was the Statue of Liberty, for which Dave Brown dressed first in long underwear, then a bevy of “Hyner Virgins” (quotes required) lovingly wrapped him from head to toe in tinfoil, with a spiked head piece above the welder’s glasses he wore. A few coffee cans were duct taped to a pole, and packed with small bottle rockets wound with a wick. Holding this with an asbestos glove he processed to the fire, lit the fuse and promenaded as the rockets blossomed into a sparkling aura about him. Once it was safe, the naked fire jumping would commence, ushered in by Dave transformed into his role as the preacher of the Church of What’s Happening Now.

Saturday Night Live produced a skit in 1976 about drag racing: men dress up in drag and race. That stuck in Bob Beck’s head clear until the mid 90’s, where he brought it up to a few others. It seemed stupid enough to be worth a shot, and on the upcoming July 4 weekend they went into their tents and with some help from their lady friends emerged in full regalia – heels, fishnet stockings and all. Feeling a bit sheepish they proceeded to the windsock to start the race, but as they went word got around and everyone started coming out to watch, and the worried progenitors realized they were in fact a hit. Over the years it would grow to over 20 contestants meeting in front of Turkey Fred and Raean’s green bus, categorized into flats and heels, with the local community showing up to enjoy the show. Shawn McDuff took over as master of ceremonies. The tradition continued into the early 2000s, when Shawn discovered that old ladies in the local yard sales and Goodwill were setting aside larger dresses that they thought would be a good fit for the contestants, and decided it was time to put it to bed before it got into the papers.



Drag race contestants at the starting line; then in full gallop. Note the smoke that seems to accompany all Hyner activities.

I made my first appearance as a hang two during the heyday of the drag races, knowing none of this. I had just finished setting up my tent and noticed another tent being set up in the middle of the field, which seemed a strange choice. It was an old army tent with a roof, sides and no floor; acetylene gas was quietly being generated inside. Suddenly a couple bottle rockets flew towards the lightly closed door, the tent glowed orange and jumped 10 feet in the air. I realized I had walked into the Burning Man of the Pennsylvania Wilds. The mastermind of the acetylene tent was Dave Haughwout, otherwise known as “Spoons” for his brainwave to weld spoons onto the leads of one of those old phone generators you see in the movies: the ones they crank a few times to get a signal. Well, if you have one person hold one of their spoons in their hand, and another hold the other spoon in their hand, then make a circle of people holding THEIR hands, you’ve got an electrical circuit. Spoons would start cranking and your hands start tingling, then the crank rate goes up and up until somebody can’t take it anymore and in a sudden paroxysm breaks free. The circle seals up, but now the voltage is divided among fewer people. The contest continues to the final winner, usually with singe marks and their hair sticking out. For some reason people from behind the Iron Curtain were unbeatable at this game. Spoons was always coming up with new inventions, like dribbling glow stick juice over condoms inflated with helium, letting it dribble down the strings tied to the ends, then wiggling the string as the glowing condoms ascended to create “sky sperm”. He was a starving artist who was thrown out of clown school for his unseemly sense of humor.



Sadly Spoons, and Dave Brown, and so many others that helped create the special Hyner magic are no longer with us. But the memories are strong, and you can come and still hear the stories from Dennis Pagen, Bob Beck and others. Some of the craziness still endures, though we are older, and have moved from private to state property which dampens the wildness a bit. That move is a story worth telling.

The LZ was owned by the Conti family, but when the patriarch died and the kids moved away there was an opening. A local real estate speculator gained 1/3 ownership, which wasn't enough to give him control, but enough to raise the antennae of the previous president, Shawn MacDuff. He researched our new owner and saw the profit motive spelling our eventual doom. But a property across the river was becoming available, adjacent to where the first flights off Hyner had landed. In a masterstroke of political maneuvering, Shawn convinced the Nature Conservancy to buy the property and turn it over to the local Forest Service for management. The covenant was that the land would be available for pilots to land, and even camp, for perpetuity. Free flight at Hyner was secure, but the script had to play out. Forestry cleared and leveled an LZ for us; seeded it and commenced mowing.

For years nothing happened, and there was concern that Forestry would get annoyed at mowing a field that only had a dozen or so landings each year. Then a year after I became president the remaining Conti family wanted out. We started taking pledges for buying the remaining 1/3, and got support from the Free Flight Foundation, but couldn't compete with a speculator who could offer cash on the barrel. To his credit, after taking control he spent a couple years trying to figure out how to use us to make money without actually charging us extra, but that was a pipe dream.

Skipping the details, we ended up at the field Shawn had secured. After we mowed a starter campground, Forestry graciously agreed to clear the brush out of a forested portion to make a pleasant shady campground for us, which we've continued to lovingly landscape. They maintain the LZ; we maintain the campground they made for us. So far it's been a match made in heaven, for they get sent usage fees from the state, and appreciate how carefully we maintain the land.

That move was eight years ago, it's now our 50th anniversary, and we'd love to show off our mountain, new LZ and camping area with a river for swimming directly across the neighborhood road. The celebration is the weekend of Labor Day, but if you can't make that, we'll also be gathering over the Memorial Day and July 4th weekends, and you are welcome to join us (if not this year, any year you'll find us!) What can you expect when you come?

Let's start with the flying experience. The launch is a scenic overlook, which means it's wide open; guaranteed since we keep it cleared as part of our agreement with the park service. It's a popular tourist site, so you are on stage from glider setup to launch: you may as well enjoy the attention. The main launch is a steep slope with WNW to NNW directions available. There's also a west ramp launch for hang glider pilots. PG who don't feel comfortable with the steep slope have a grass pad and gentler slope available for west to SW winds. The LZ is a 3:1 glide and plenty large for experienced pilots, though new hang twos will need to practice setting up approaches over a larger field before coming to Hyner.

Those from the west who have never flown around trees may feel it's a bit tight. PG should not have any landing issues.

Without a long ridge (though there's a bowl at launch) you may be scratching for thermals during many flights. But when Hyner turns on it's an unbeatable experience with a river valley as your playground. Even if conditions don't seem favorable, Hyner is steep enough to get off in light winds from most directions. If you don't get up, the sled ride from 1300' AGL is beautiful, with plenty of time to check out the river and nearby ridges. And many mornings the river valley will fill with clouds, with launch poking out above. We have all passed through clouds in an airline, but here's your chance to do it while in the open air of your own aircraft. You wait until they begin to break (it can happen fast), and once you get a glimpse of the LZ you are off. 100 feet below launch you are in class G airspace, and can legally come as close as you want to clouds without entering them. With the LZ slightly less than a mile away, so long as you can see it you are within the VFR protocols, being treated to a fairy tale flight that words fail to describe.



The author doing a cloud dive; Will Perez over our new LZ – look closely to see the star Forestry mowed for us.

If winds are not good for Hyner, within two hour's drive we have sites for the East, North and South East.

We charge \$50 for tent or camper, regardless of how many are in it (family friendly!), though if a second pilot is included it's an extra \$25 (the flying fee is a monthly membership good for the entire month of July). Portapots will be on site, the river is available for washing or you can drive 5 minutes up the road to a campground and slip them a few dollars for running water and a hot shower. We will cater a dinner Saturday night, included in the fee. Every pilot will get a free history of Hyner booklet or pdf compiled from the online forums by Aron Lantz.

The LZ is not suitable for spot landing contests and the environs are too forested for cross country flights (though a dozen have occurred over the decades – brave and talented souls). But we may feature a duration contest for fun. And you don't want to miss the campfires. Look us up on www.hynerclub.com; fly-in information will be posted by the end of March, probably increasing in detail as time goes on. Our detailed site guide is available for those who register, though you may have to shoot us an email to request it.

Hyner is rich in the history of our sport, with incredible views and experiences. Nothing would make us happier than to welcome you to what many of us consider to be our second home.

This article could not have been written without the invaluable input of Dennis Pagen, Bob Beck, Shawn MacDuff, and Aron Lantz.