

HYNER HISTORY—FROM DAY 1

In the summer of 1974 the newly minted pilots in the State College area were eager to fly everywhere, anywhere, all the time. There were no designated flying sites except Skimont (now Tussey Mtn. Ski Area). This 450 ft. site faces northwest (good thermal lift) and the slope was open all the way to the bottom. Therefore it attracted new pilots and due to its proximity to Penn State, some who had gone to college there remembered the hill and came to fly. For example, Jim Hutchins, Eric Siegel, Don Nocito and others showed up and we all learned from each other. Don Nocito (living and working in Philadelphia) eventually became my partner in a school and dealerships, but the important matter was he had a girlfriend, Judy Hildebrand, who's family had a cabin up near Hyner View and she told us about its spectacular height and the possibility for flying. By late fall we were only flying Council Cup (Wapwallopen), Purdue Mountain (above Bellefonte) and Skimont, so we were eager to check out Hyner.

Note: We eventually flew from 17 sites within an hour of State College, but only about ten became consistent long-term sites. Don Nocito was first to fly a few of our sites, but he scared himself couple times and quit flying. However, Judy Hildebrand soon learned to fly and continued into the recent decade. She has flown Hyner and has been a multiple member of the US Women's Team. She currently lives near the takeoff on Lookout Mtn., Tennessee.

On February 15, 1975 we trekked up to Hyner. When we got to the top we were amazed, excited and intimidated. The wind was about 15 mph blowing straight in (west). None of us had flown such a steep, high launch, but we had soared at Purdue a couple weeks previously. The only problem was, there were trees and brush right up to the wall all around the View. The obvious solution was to use a ramp. Of course, we didn't have any building material, but we soon realized the picnic tables were the perfect height. We hauled them over to launch and had a functional flat ramp once two were lined up in position. I don't remember if we drew straws or simply let the craziest one go first, but it was me who got his glider up on the tables and proceeded to hook in.

Of course, the wind was vigorous and a bit rowdy, but we were used to flying in 20+ mph winds, because that's what it took to soar our standard gliders. The boys helped me steady the glider and I launched into the cool, stiff breeze. We weren't thinking of soaring at that point—we were most concerned with making the landing field, so I flew straight out after popping up at launch and gradually sunk to landing.

The landing field we used was the weedy, brushy triangle between the railroad tracks and the road (next to our current landing field). That field was perfectly clear and flat at the time. I believe three of us flew that day and a fourth pilot, who had only started flying a month or two previously, drove the car down. Everything was fine and fun and we drove home. Come to find out a couple days later I received a call from Jim Hutchins (Philly club) who said they had gone up there the following day, found our picnic bench ramp and flew. The word had spread.

The Hyner road may have become impassible after that, but we didn't return until later in March and found our tables returned to their normal area. We also encountered a ranger who put a stop to our flying fantasies. However, resourceful as we were, we talked to Jimmy Conti who owned the bar and landing strip below launch. He gave me the number of the Renovo Tourist Bureau

and I made contact later that week. I soon met Donna Harger the president, her husband Dan and her sister-in-law. We quickly realized we needed to meet with the park service to make progress. So Donna, a local pilot, Don McKenzie, and I went to Harrisburg to meet with the head of Parks and Recreation. We were tentative and intimidated, but he soon put us at ease with his enthusiasm. It seemed that the parks were eager to support any non-invasive activity that would attract more visitors (i.e. more funding). So we got permission to fly there, and Donna and Dan hooked us up with Jimmy Conti (Dan was his godson) and we were given free use of the landing strip across the river for landing and camping.

Only three matters remained for Hyner to become a full-blown community site: First, we had to organize a club, which we did with Donna, then Don McKenzie serving as our presidents (*after Donna and Don our presidents were Skip Frank, John Crockett, then Jeff Sims, serving into the mid-nineties*). Next, we were given permission to build a ramp at the wall and this served us well for a couple years. Eventually the park was tired of our structure, even though we had it painted natural green. So the solution was to cut the trees and brush below launch. The local boy scouts, organized by Dan Harger, did all the initial cutting and it ended up as we see it today, except for the southerly face, which we cleared out a year or so later.

Finally, we had to prove to ourselves that we could consistently make it across the river in our standard gliders (4-to-1 glide at best). After a couple heart-in-mouth attempts we knew it was a breeze and we were in business. So Hyner became Hyner in all its storied glory, infamy, sled ride heaven and spectacular high flights. Many, many flights and adventures took place there over the years, and we can only hope we continue to make history and memories.

CROSS COUNTRY AT HYNER

To the best of my knowledge, there have been twelve cross-country flights flown by eight pilots at the Hyner View flying site. (I have talked to some of the pilots, but am not sure on some dates and details, so please correct any errors). In this list I have not included flights around the valley that came back to the regular landing fields (many of us have flown to Renovo and back—a 10 mile round trip). Here's a list of flights leaving the neighborhood in chronological order:

Jeff Sims flew the first XC flight at Hyner in 1982 on an Ultralight Products (UP) Comet OVR (Owens Valley Racer). He was feeling his oats and tracked a thermal over the back of the mountain (I believe that this is the only flight over the back of the mountain—all others proceeded south, down river towards Lock Haven). Once he reached Pine Creek he tried to head south to the open Susquehanna valley, but sank out, turned around and landed in someone's back yard along Pine Creek.

Steve Krichton was the second pilot out of there, perhaps at the end of the eighties (fill in details, Steve). He chose a more reasonable track along the river and landed near Lock Haven. He opened up the safe possibilities for the rest of us. Cross-country fever had gripped many of us by then, but I had a policy of not going XC at Hyner unless the river was way down, affording bailout landings along its bank. In the early nineties drought conditions meant an abundance of thermals and bare shorelines, so Randy Grove and I climbed to about 7,500 feet over and made it to Lock Haven on that one thermal. A couple years later, Ron Dively, Claire Vassort-Pagen and I

again flew to Lock Haven, landing by the cemetery SW of Mill Hall. We were all flying Airwave Klassics (king-posted) gliders by then.

A few years later T-Bone (Tom Beatty) joined us in the trek and he, Claire and I again went towards Lock Haven. Claire headed out first, but eventually sank and landed along the shore across the river before the last ridge. T-bone landed further, while I continued on, crossed Bald Eagle Mt. to Nittany Mt. and tried to fly home (we lived below the mountain towards State College). By then we had flown along the Nittany ridge from the Pleasant gap site and I knew it well. I got stopped 5 miles short of my goal at what we affectionately called the “Death Gaps,” two large gaps on either side of a 2,500 foot long lower section of the ridge.

Those were the last flights in the nineties, but in the new millennium T-Bone took off in his Wills Wing T2. We were standing in the landing field watching Tom get stinking high, wishing we were up there, then all of a sudden he disappeared. It turns out he flew home (Tom lives a few miles southwest of Mill Hall). The cross-country flights dried up (maybe because the river didn't) until last year (2024) when Steve Van Eerden flew to Lock Haven on his paraglider (the first and only PG XC flight).

So there you have the twelve flights in a peanut shell. The pilots with multiple XC flights are T-Bone with two, Claire with two and myself with three. However, Steve Krichton may have gone another time and this record may be corrected by anyone with additional information. I have never considered Hyner to be a primary cross-country flying site because of the sea of trees that surround it, but it certainly offers some spectacularly high flights and on the right day...