

Spring is Here..... At Least It Is In South Florida

The Florida XC season is off and running, Saturday's forecast was 5-10 SSE, Cloudbase around 4000ft, cloud cover 30%, 10% chance of rain. Perfect conditions to give it a go. The task was set at Avon park, 100KM away.

The morning started off with fog until late, with high cloud blocking some of the Sun and a thick layer of cloud coming in from the south, what happened to a 30% cloud cover.

Glen Curran preparing for the first flight of the day.



Despite a very good forecast there was not that many pilots out for free flying. Jonathan and Henry were there try out the latest delivery from Wills Wing two shiny mylar encrusted T2's. There is something special in getting a new wing, the proud owner has a smile from ear to ear and the envious pilots sniff around the gliders like dogs on heat.....same old story.

The tug pilots reported improving conditions, this was borne out by Jon Small who was able to get to cloudbase to the west of a graying and filling sky. Despite the pessimistic picture that was emerging, Johnathan Baoarini, JJ (Jeff James) and myself rose to the challenge. Glynn Curran was already waiting in line as the gang of three joined him. Once in the air Glynn was quickly to cloudbase at 4000ft. Our expectation was small spring clouds, the picture was somewhat different with towering cumulus, is this Summer?????

The tow was definitely lively with our transplanted tug pilot David from Lookout doing a great job to keep me in his mirror. After another huge hit at 1900ft I released into a nice thermal, only to see David Fly into an even better thermal marked by birds and a Tug going up at a rapid rate on knots. I did not need a second invite, I connected with this monster thermal and within two turns I was hitting 700-900 feet per minute surges, in no time I was at cloudbase with Glenn. The first thing that hit me was how powerful the cloud suck was. It was definitely a Summer sky. I worked the edge of the clouds and rode the lift in front of the cloud to 4800ft while waiting for Jonathan and JJ.

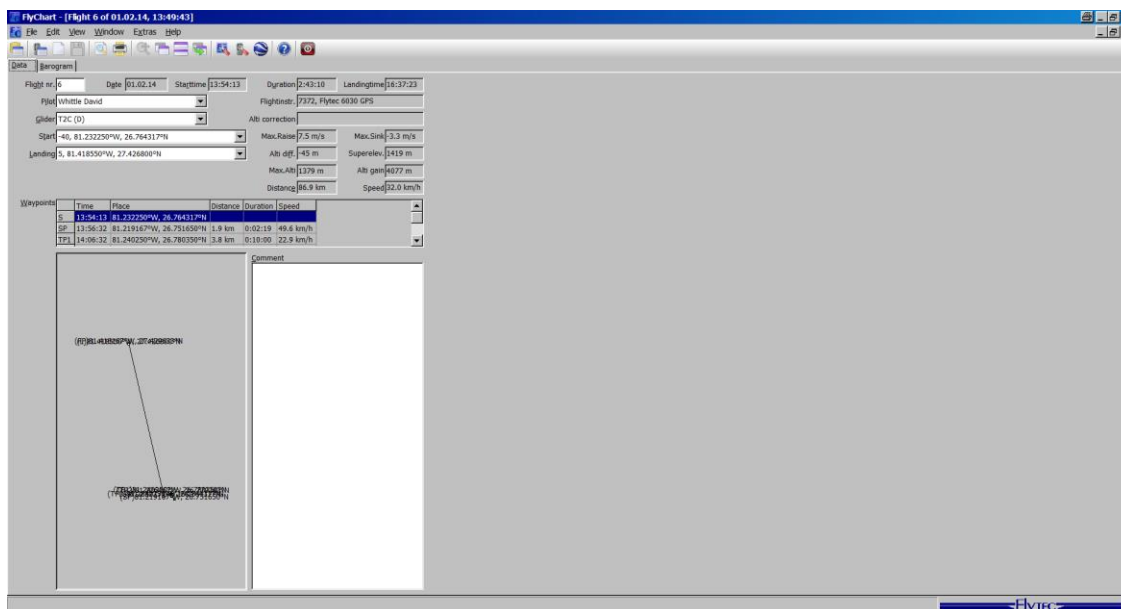
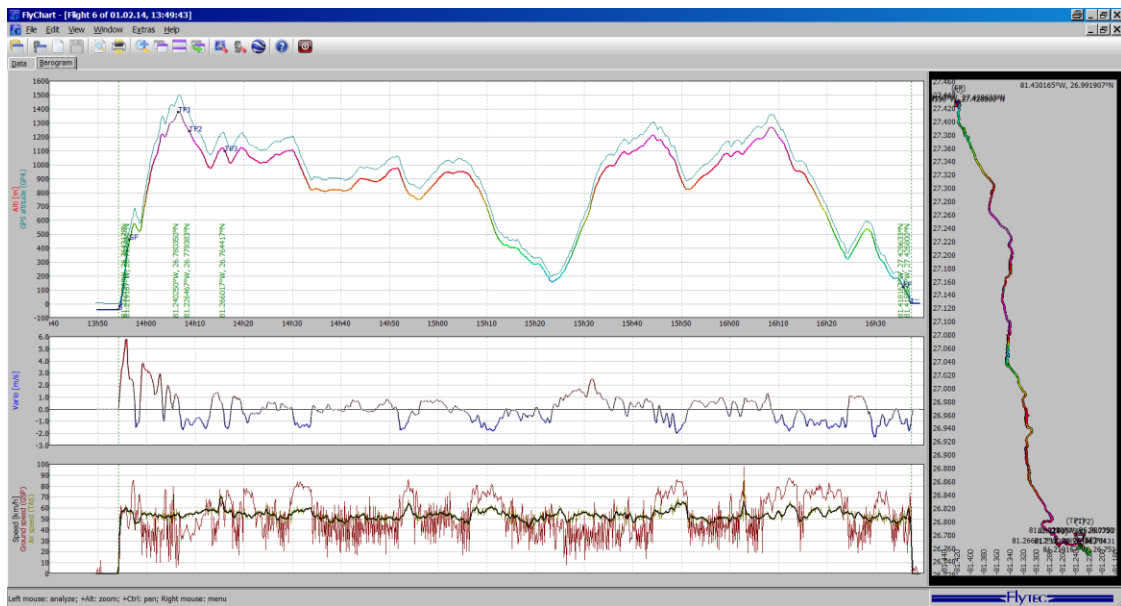
Glynn at Cloudbase, notice the large cumulus, not normal this time of year.



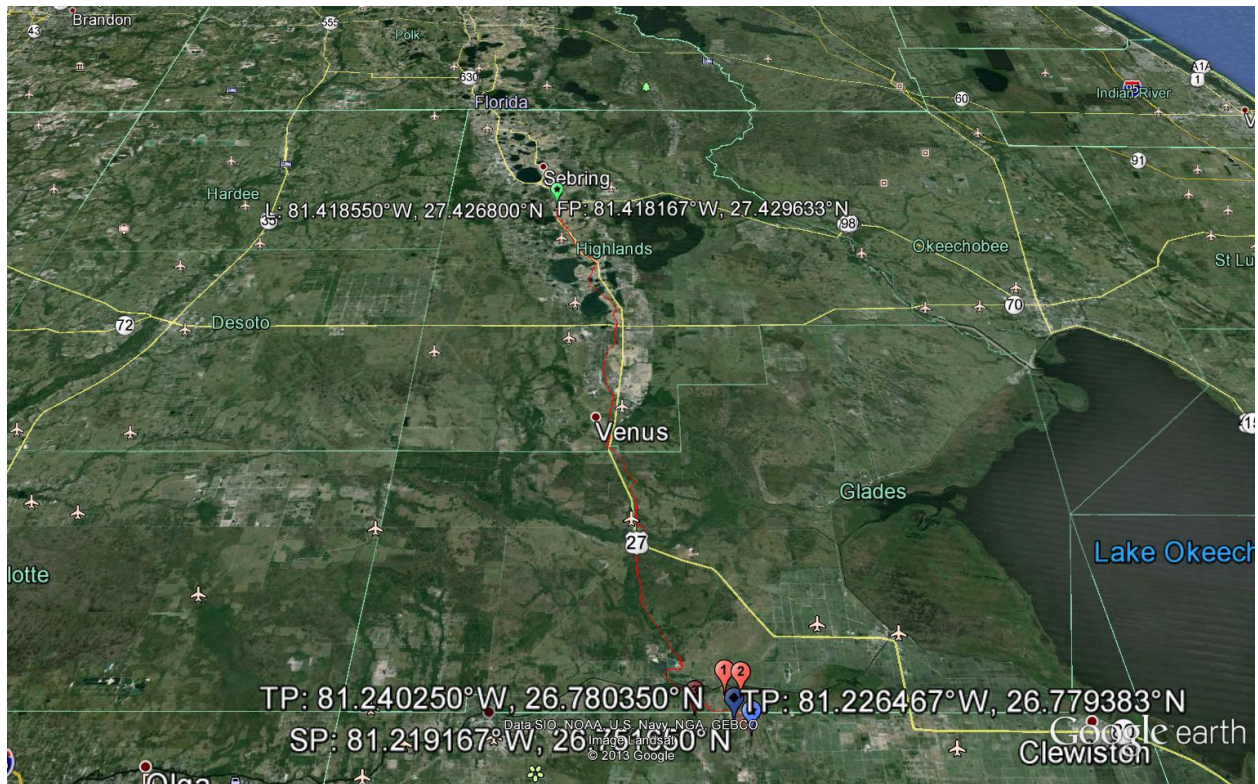
Jonathan was to West over the Paragliding tow paddock working a smaller thermal so I stayed where I was until I saw JJ being towed towards Jonathan. I went to join them and found the clouds over to the West were working well with the same problem, strong cloudsuck. We grouped together about three miles to the west of the tow field. We had to make a decision to go as the clouds were overdeveloping and producing pockets of rain. The initial thought was to go West, however the area was shaded and while the clouds were smaller there was little or no lift. Back to the area that was working to top up before hedging North. The small pockets of rain had started and while there was good lift it was time to head North and keep dry hopefully getting some lift from the front edge of these cloud bursts. The ground to the North was about 90% shaded, the sink was minimal so it was along glide until I hit the weakest of lift in the middle of the triangle of doom. The drift was good and with zeros's and 100up, it was time to switch to super patient mode and eak out anything that was not sink. Jonathan had ventured a little too far to the West and was sruggling to find any lift. I Could see him to the North West of me heading to the large landing field I have used many times before at the Palmdale junction of US27 and US29. JJ was nowhere to be seen. I was about 1800 feet and could make it to Jonathans field and then some, the trouble was there is not many landing option for about five miles to the North once you commit to go past Palmdale. I got to Jonathan with about 2300feet and felt comfortable with the light sink and the patchy lift and the great glide from the T2C to continue. The ground remained completely shaded so it was more or less a death glide to the abundant landing fields 8-miles Noth of Palmdale. I was at 600 feet tryng to pick the best of four landing field options when the glider told me there was a thermal, the birds below me started to come together and were riding this wild small air current. With landing optiond for the next two miles I zipped back up and let the glider work its magic. The T2C showed those birds how it is really done and took me and my smiling face back to cloudbase. From here I could see Lake Placid and with the minimal sink, I knew I had a landing field on the South East Shore, that would give me a 50K flight, but I wanted more. The glide, as predicted to lake Placid was without incident arriving with about 2000ft and immediately connecting with another small thermal that got me back to 3600ft. The sky had a thin layer of upper level cloud keeping the gound in shade, there was very little thermal activity. I flew to a large fire to the Noth West of the Town of Lake Placid and despite the

size of the fire there was nothing. I was heading to what looked like a nice landing field next to 27, when I managed to catch a small weak, broken thermal that never managed to develop but did give me a few hundred feet and some more drift to get me within glide of the landing field I know so well just south of the City of Seebring. The landing was uneventful. The fruit stall owners are used to me landing next to them and they like the added business I draw when the customers come to see the glider.

My retrieve crew of Dennis, Jonathan and JJ made me feel like a sky god and appreciated the magic of going for it. The flight was about 25km's short of the goal at Avon Park. It might have been possible had there been anything to connect the air mass south of Seebring to the now developing sky to the North, I have seen this a few times on previous flights, everytime from the ground.....so I must be doing something wrong.



The flight as mapped out by Google earth.



South Florida offers some amazing flying all year around. No flight is ever the same. I should have wrote up the 72K flight on the 23rd of December from the Ridge to Okeechobee but that was a little present from Santa to me. I landed at the road marker 70 in the picture above.