

Thursday, October 7, 2004
9th Cobra flight, 19th solo
North Rio Puerco, Double Eagle, Balloon Fiesta

Launched 7:00am, Landing 9:45am
Flight time: 2:45 hour Total time: 39:30
Launch: Dead calm Landing: Calm, thermally

Launch Code Double Eagle predicted 3 or 4 mph the night before. Met Frank at Dions at 5:00AM Got to Belen at 6:00am. Filled up the gas tank to overflowing, had to clean up the spill. Frank had to do a long preflight in the dark. GPS log shows wheels up at 7:00am.



Took off about 15 min before dawn, with plenty of light to see. Headed north along the volcanoes. Frank had some sort of problem with his radio, he could transmit, but could not receive. I am sure I was OK cause I did a radio check to MidValley and DoubleEagle. Frank could hear me keying the microphone. Eventually, he replugged all his connectors and everything worked.





After getting the radios back, we followed the line of small volcanoes, then approached the Rio Puerco Escarpment. I was flying lower and felt a small bit of turbulence coming off the ridge.

I had planned to dip down into the Rio Puerco Valley and follow it north for about 20 miles to avoid any aircraft traffic near the VOR station or East/West traffic from the Albuquerque airport. Frank stayed up on the ridge. He was planning to land at Double Eagle and top off his gas tanks, and empty his bladder. I have a bigger bladder and bigger fuel tanks so I didn't need to land.

Down lower in the valley, the air was much smoother. Flew by the truck stop where I-40 crosses the Rio Puerco.



The northern stretch of the Rio Puerco is just as windy and oxbowed as the southern end near Belen, but it seemed wilder here. No train tracks, no paved roads, no power lines.

Off in the distance I could see Cabazon Peak, my next XC destination?

I could overhear Frank calling in his approach to Double Eagle airport while I circled around to the north.



I turned away from the Puerco, flew up the valley and could see the balloons ahead. They were everywhere. Up and down the river, some looked like they were south of I-40, near downtown Albuquerque.

Ultralights are banned from flying over populated areas and there was a 5 mile exclusion zone centered at the Balloon Fiesta park. But the winds had scattered them to the high mesas on the northwest side of town near Paradise Hills and Rio Rancho.



Out over the desert, balloons were spread apart so I could circle, fly under them, and keep them all in sight. Lots of friendly hand waving to the balloon riders.





Frank landed on this road construction project. It was a long curving road, a little too sandy for me with 3 ft drop offs to the sides.

Frank's bladder is smaller than mine, his two extra landings on this trip were not optional.

Around 9AM, we headed back, flying east of the volcano chain which acted as a wall to keep us separated from the traffic at Double Eagle.





Flew by the motor cross track and race track at the top of 9 mile hill.



One last look at the south volcano on the way back to Belen.

There was a bit of traffic at Belen, Conditions were calm, but with some nice wide thermals. I got lifted up over the runway, but just extended my glide and had a good landing. I would have done some touch and goes, but it was crowded.

Frank had to yield to a Bonanza who declared he was on final about 4 miles out.

GPS track showing all the looping and circling of the balloons. I never got to "Farcorner" the remote NW section of Rio Rancho where there are plenty of dirt roads to land on. B5's mark the 5 mile keepout zone around Balloon Fiesta Park.

Back at the hanger, I worked on the strobe for the kingpost and reconnected the leaky exhaust at the fuel pump.

