

Sunday, October 31, 2004
14th Cobra flight, 24th solo
Magdalena, Smooth Valley, 4 Landings

Launched 6:30 am, Landing 10:00am, GPS odometer 182 mi
Flight time: 3:30 Total logged time: 51:55
Launch: Dead calm Landing: Light down 03, thermally

I have always wanted to check out Magdalena. My first exposure to ultralights was a fly-in at Magdalena on Labor Day weekend, 2003. A year later, I had barely gotten my trike operational and was having some minor problems with the ignition key, so I drove down instead. USAPhotoMaps showed wide valley heading south from Magdalena, between the San Mateo mountains and the Magdalena mountains. This valley (Mulligan Gulch) empties into the Rio Grande at Ft Craig. There was a second wide valley, east of the Magdalena mountains that I could follow north to the flats west of Socorro. I was ready.



Heading for Ladron

Launch Code predicted calm at dawn with a west 10 mph wind developing towards noon. Winds aloft predicted W-15 at 9000 ft. So I was wary of these winds all trip. Today was Daylight savings time switch morning.

I got the hanger at 6:00AM, and was off the ground by 6:30. As I circled the field, I saw Frank had arrived with his son for a lesson. I did two touch and goes then headed for the Ladron spine.

I crossed the Rio Puerco which always is impressive at dawn, then climbed towards the spine on the north side of Ladron Peak.



Over the back



On the back side of Ladron was a convenient road to follow. In the distance are the 10000 ft Magdalena Mountains on the left and 10000 ft San Mateos on the right.

Wild country to the west of Ladron Peak



The terrain got rugged near Rio Salado. The sandy river bed had some water, and an occasional cottonwood tree. If the winds were calm, I would like to fly down this valley sometime.

Tucked in one of the tributary streams was this ranch house complex.





Past the ranch house, it flattened out. I approached these hills that are just east of town of Magdalena. Until this time, I was always on the upwind (west) side of any hills. As I approached these hills, I could feel some turbulence. Beyond the hills on the left side of the pict is Magdalena, NM.

Magdalena, NM

Main Street (Highway 60) goes left to right in this picture





Magdalena Airport

I was tempted to land. The wind sock showed dead calm. The uphill (south) end looked in better shape. But I decided to pass, being alone down here.

In my preflight planning I had considered doing a big loop around the Magdalena mountains, and had programmed a route in my GPS to do this. The conditions were very smooth so I wandered on a little further south, always thinking I would probably retrace my steps.



To the west I could see the south east leg of the VLA, a huge radio antenna farm, in the Plains of San Augustine. Those white specks are the antennas.



The terrain in this valley was extremely smooth. And except for the dirt road heading down the valley, there was no sign of man here. No roads, no powerlines, no fences, no houses. Nothing.

The ground looked like it had been polished smooth, with none of the fractal erosion near Ladrón Peak and the Rio Puerco. I have never seen anything like it before. I kept heading south.



The air was smooth, hands-off, relaxing flying down in the valley. As I gained some altitude to give me plenty of clearance of the rotor on the range ahead and I climbed into some turbulence. It was about as strong as the bumps on the Cabezon trip. It wasn't scary, just confusing. What was causing these bumps? I was upwind of the range ahead. I continued on south and flew around the range, still getting bumped. Later on, I realized I had climbed into the wave of the 10000 ft high San Mateos, on the west side of the valley, 10 miles away.

The San Mateos (distance) are on the west side of the valley. Mulligan gulch is the name of the valley on the map. I don't like the name, I'll call it "Smooth Valley" instead. The Smooth Valley eventually drains into the Rio Grande by Fort Craig. Someday I will check that out. I was worried about the higher winds predicted for noon, so shortened the trip and turned to the east, intending to cross over the low southern tail of the Magdalenas and head north up the valley on the other side.



Ladron Peak



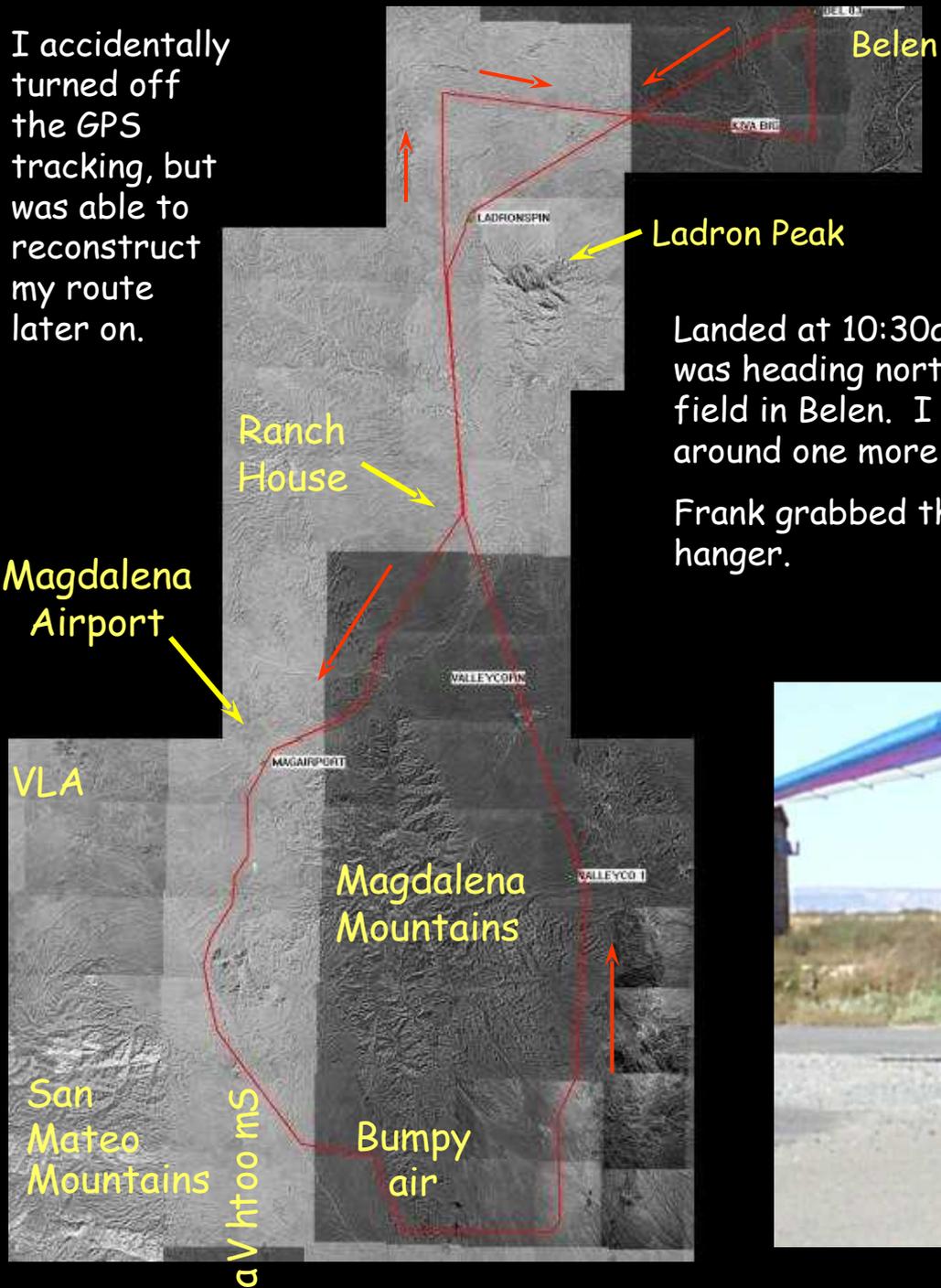
Flew east with a 20 mph tail wind. I knew the winds were out of the west. Flew north up another wide valley. This one was not as wild as Smooth Valley. In the far distance I could see Ladron Peak. I had flown pretty far south.

I flew west of the Socorro airport and into the valley I had come down earlier in the flight.



Badlands SE of Ladron. I flew around to the left over smooth ground, passed over the ranch house again north to the Ladron spine and on to Belen.

I accidentally turned off the GPS tracking, but was able to reconstruct my route later on.



A very nice long flight. Learned something about waves breaking off high mountain ranges. If I had flown in the smooth air below the wave coming off the San Mateos, I would have probably gone on to Ft Craig.

Landed at 10:30am. I heard Frank on the radio the entire time I was heading north. He was on the ground when I flew over the field in Belen. I landed in calm winds with light thermals. I went around one more time for some landing practice.

Frank grabbed this picture me coming in as I was taxiing in to the hanger.

