

## The Howe Farm Hawk

We've been flying tailless aircraft of various types for nearly twenty years. During this time, we've had the privilege of tracing the face of the Dungeness Spit with seagulls, coursing through huge clouds of nearly invisible insects with swallows, and flying through the same general mass of air as Bald Eagles.

During all of the flight time we've shared with various feathered creatures, we've never had one of our tailless aircraft attacked. In fact, we recently had an experience which demonstrated an opposite avian tendency.

The site of this enlightening experience was the Howe Farm, an 83 acre plot of land which is now under ownership of Kitsap County. The included map shows the general layout of the site. The parking lot on the west side is quite small, capable of holding just a few cars. The area between the parking lot and the barn is a rounded uphill slope, while the area to the east of the barn forms a shallow valley. Another shallow valley begins south of the parking lot.

Because the site is completely surrounded by trees, and there are lines of trees on the property, it's very difficult to determine wind direction on the ground. Still, breezes coming from various directions hit the tree lines and provide sporadic "slope lift." Additionally, on this visit, the larger open spaces produced some light thermal activity.

We met Mike McIntyre, a fellow sailplane enthusiast, at the farm and set up the winch between the parking lot and the barn. We put the turnaround out in the eastern valley, about 900 feet away, as noted on the map. Due to the slope, the line was completely clear of the ground for its entire length once the winch motor was run up.

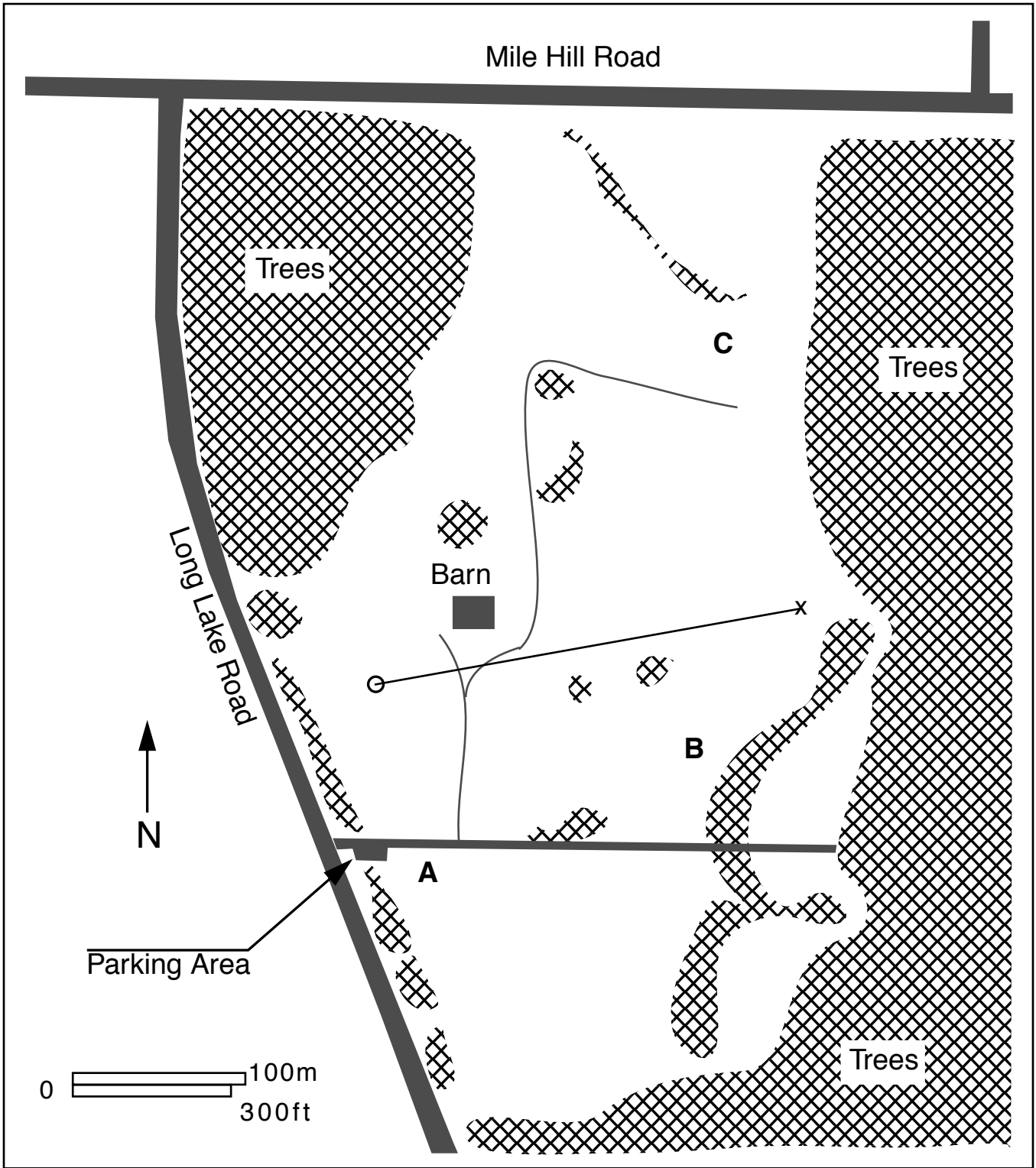
Several flights of increasing duration with both the R-2 and Blackbird #7 demonstrated the challenging aspects of finding significant sustained lift at this field. The R-2 was launched again. After a few moments of flying around in search of thermal activity, it was steered to the area over the parking lot (Area A on the map). The wind at this point was blowing into the trees around the lot, and a light updraft was present. The R-2 started climbing.

Several turns later, the R-2 had gained some height and it seemed like the lift was going to be somewhat consistent. Suddenly, we heard the squeal of a raptor and saw a Swainson's Hawk flying in from the south. Unhesitatingly, the hawk joined the R-2, calling intermittently in a joyous tone.

We had the R-2 in a left hand turn, and the hawk, while able to turn a bit more tightly, was making left hand turns as well. For a few minutes the hawk and the R-2 shared the same lift and climbed in unison. When it became obvious that the lift was getting lighter, we turned the R-2 toward Area B, where we'd found lift during a previous flight.

As soon as the R-2 left the hawk and headed across the field, the hawk screeched loudly. As the R-2 got further away, the cries of the hawk became more intense. We found some lift in Area B and started climbing in a right hand turn. Two turns later, we heard a loud "kreee-e-e-e," and looked up to see the hawk, wings folded back, streaking toward the R-2.

We anticipated the hawk rejoining the R-2, but we did not anticipate the hawk would circle in the opposite direction. Meeting head-on twice per revolution was immediately envisioned as being a problem, but the hawk was back to the happier sounding squealings of before and seemed comfortable with the situation. We tried to keep the R-2 circling steadily.



Howe Farm, Port Orchard Washington

As when we were flying over the parking lot, the lift began fading. Since we had good height, the R-2 was headed north toward Mile Hill Road. In Area C we hit a bump that seemed promising and began circling. We heard the hawk call out and turned just in time to see him make a near vertical descent into one of the trees a short distance to the north of where we had been circling.

The bump turned out to be nothing more than a bump, so we steered the R-2 west and then south between the tree line and the barn, circled a couple of times and landed slightly downhill from the winch. As soon as the R-2 was on the ground, the hawk let out another “kriee-e-e-e,” left the tree and headed to Mile Hill Road. It was difficult to estimate, but it seemed like the hawk went further toward the road than we had traveled before he started circling and climbing. Perhaps he caught a bubble coming off the asphalt roadway.

Interestingly, the hawk made only three climbing circles before tracing the same west-south route taken by the R-2 just moments before. A single squeal was heard as he flew overhead, and seconds later he was sitting in a tree to the south, most likely the one where he started his journey.

What had just transpired was both amazing and awe inspiring. There was never a hint of aggression from the hawk the entire time. The hawk’s behavior was notable not only because of his flight behavior, but also because of his nearly continuous vocalizations and the emotional content of his calls.

As he joined up with the R-2 for the first time, it was as if he was saying, “Hello, I see you found some lift, I’m going to join you.” His calls while circling were, as said before, obviously joyous. When we left the initial lift and headed across the field, the hawk sounded surprised and somewhat upset, almost as if to say, “Hey, where are you going? What’s wrong with the lift we’re in now?”

He once again announced his arrival as he followed the R-2 to Area B, then gave out the same happy vocalizations as we circled past each other, and sounded overtly distressed when the R-2 broke out of circling mode and headed for Mile Hill Road.

The astounding verbalization, however, occurred as he passed directly overhead during his trip back to his original perch. He was so obviously telling us how proud he was to have found that elusive third thermal when we had failed. He had circled in it just long enough for us to see that it did indeed exist, and, despite our initial apparent ability to find lift, he was superior at the task.

Flying with the hawk was so thrilling, so perfect, that we didn’t spoil our own emotional state by launching again. Rather, we packed everything up and headed for home. Our interaction with the Howe Farm hawk was truly an unforgettable experience.

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#### References:

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Howe Farm, Kitsap County, Washington State  
<<http://www.kitsapgov.com/parkcatalog/howe.htm>>.