

Maine Powerchute Association Newsletter

"If it's in the Newsletter, it must be true"

October 2005

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It's getting colder, but we still have a few events before we get the skis out. Let's get a good turnout at the two big events left this year, the fly-in at Robin's near Presque Isle on Oct. 1 & 2, and the Bethel fly-in on Oct. 8 & 9. We'll try to get the Top Gun competition in at Presque Isle, and the fall foliage season will be at its peak for the Bethel event – should make for some great scenery with all the mountains as a backdrop. Who says we MPA brutes don't have a sensitive, poetic side?

In this issue, we give full report on our first Chute Across Maine adventure – the next Newsletter (coming soon) will cover the other stuff for which we didn't have room here.



www.maine-powerchutes.org

First annual MPA "Ride for Charity" wildly successful!

Early this year, we were pondering what hare-brained scheme we could come up with for an MPA adventure this summer. We've already done the Flying to Kitty Hawk, NC thing, and since we could not top that adventure, we were somewhat stuck for ideas that could be close. Ponder, ponder, and ponder – still nothing.

Finally after a few bottles of beer (or was it a few cases of beer?), one of our members who is otherwise generally unimaginative and rather slow, came up with a brilliant idea of doing like the bikers and the snowmobilers do – ride across Maine for charity. By the time he sobered up, it was too late – a few others already liked the idea.

So after months of planning, coordinating, mapping, meeting, and trying to charm airport officials (you think THAT's easy?), we finally got it all together, and had 8 intrepid MPA members take off for the inaugural Chute Across Maine ride for charity.

In case you missed the last few Newsletters, our charity was Camp Sunshine, which is actually quite a success story on its own. The Camp, which is in Casco, Maine is a facility for children with life threatening illnesses and their families. They provide emotional support and coping skills to these

families, and have about 250 people in residence there most of the year.

Our trip started in Bethel, and went to Lewiston, Augusta, Pittsfield, Brewer, Deblois, Machias, and ended in Eastport.

Making the entire trip were pilots Jerry and Doug Sukeforth, Robin Paradis, Scott Adair, Jim Holloway, Herb Micue, Mike O'Donnell, and John Gobel. Joining us for one of the legs, and the provider of a unique experience was one of our new members, Herman Junkerman. Making the trip as drivers, general support, companionship, and occasional comic relief (not saying who was which!) were Bonnie Micue, Darlene Paradis, Eric O'Donnell, and Gordon Sukeforth.

Now at this point, we could do the standard, eye-crossing boring typical newsletter stuff that other organizations do. Those go something like this: "We woke up early, checked the wind, flew from Augusta to Pittsfield, hung out there most of the day, gave some rides to people, and went to sleep." But, since this is the MPA Newsletter, we're going to add a lot more color to what was, well, ... basically what was described above. So, here we go.



Bethel: All 8 of our MPA pilots got there, and were all set up and ready to go by Saturday afternoon. Due to several flights over the city, a lot of people turned out to see what was going on. Luckily, Bethel is a gated airport and we were able to make sure their guns were checked at the gate.

Actually, the local paper gave it some good press a few days before, so we had more people turn out for rides than we had available pilots – we had to turn some people away. We flew well into dusk, and the last flight had to be brought in on airport landing lights. Exciting – we love this stuff!



Typical evening scene during the Chute Across Maine adventure. All the crossed legs can be explained by lack of restroom facilities.

One of our pilots who generally gives lots of rides unfortunately could not do so this day, as his chute was incapacitated a few days before. Apparently, some vicious bulldog spotted the chute coming in, and ferociously attacked it making several big rips in it. There were no witnesses to this, and the physical evidence of leaves, twigs, and branches all caught in the chute could be explained by the fact that the bulldog just finished eating a whole tree before he attacked the chute.

But Herb, being always positive, borrowed a chute from Jerry and was ready to go on the rest of the trip by the next day.

Auburn/Lewiston: We left Bethel early Sunday morning, and had some rain along the way, which was welcomed as we don't get a chance to wash the chutes too often.

The airport manager there, John McGonagill is absolutely the greatest guy – he welcomed us with incredible hospitality, had coffee and doughnuts waiting for us, made all the arrangements with the locals, called ahead to some of his peers at the next airports along our route, designated an area for us to camp during the day, and was just all around tremendously supportive.

Unfortunately, the generally unsettled conditions made for some bad flying, so we were not able to give too many rides.

Augusta: Some early morning fog at Auburn/Lewiston airport kept us on the ground for quite a while (which time we filled up with procuring our standard 4000 calorie breakfast, washed down by some more doughnuts that John McGonagill provided. But, we finally made the trip to Augusta, where the airport staff was also very friendly and supportive, and did not seem to mind that we kept flying into the paths of commercial and passenger jet traffic.

Had nice turnout that evening from the public, and once again kept giving rides until late dusk. Augusta from the air is quite beautiful with all the city lights turned on.

A fellow powered parachute enthusiast, Herman Junkerman from New Jersey heard about our trip and wanted to know if he could join us for a leg or two. We, of course, extended our MPA hospitality to him, and he was so happy to have met some new friends that he actually joined our club. Just goes to show you that people from other states also have low standards! More on Herman later!

Pittsfield: Had a nice tailwind from Augusta to Pittsfield on Tuesday morning, so we made the 40 mile trip in good time. All 9 of us, in 3 groups of 3, actually stayed together like we planned, ever striving for that elusive military precision, while of course trying not to fly into each other.

Pittsfield is the sky diving capital of Maine, so we made some new friends there as well, and watched these CRAZY people jump out of an airplane that did not seem to be on fire, plummet towards earth, then open their chute for the last couple of thousand feet, and amazingly, land in the exact spot time after time. We were impressed, but they were also impressed by seeing a parachute that can go UP as well as down.

Had pretty high winds most of the day and evening, so we were only able to give a few rides in Pittsfield.

Our new friend and member Herman had to go back to Augusta to meet the rest of his family who came with him, so he decided to FLY back. Now remember, we had a tailwind coming from there so we averaged 42 MPH to Pittsfield, so going back was not really an option – not even for the few of our more crazy members who generally disregard adverse wind conditions (oh, I don't know why, but the names Doug and Herb keep popping into my head). We tried to talk Herman out of it, but he had a plan. We gave him our cell number to call when he got there.

So Herman left Pittsfield, heading back to Augusta, into a 15 MPH wind, with a marginally adequate amount of fuel. After a couple of hours, we tried to contact him – no luck. After 4 hours, still no Herman. By 6 hours, we started to organize a search party, as we did not want him to be in the record books as having the shortest MPA membership in history. Just before we contacted the Civil Air Patrol to start a search, we found a cell phone number from which he called earlier.

Called it, and YES, Herman was safe and sound, sitting in Waterville (which is about 20 miles from Pittsfield). While the decision to go was not the best, the decision to put down in Waterville was definitely the right one, as he would have certainly run out of fuel if he continued.

Brewer: It's Wednesday morning – we're in Pittsfield, and the most exciting leg of our journey is just ahead of us. Most exciting because we're headed to Brewer, which means we have to fly through Bangor's controlled airspace, have to be on their radar, have to follow their directions, and then when we get there, the crews of three television stations and a couple of newspapers will be there to record our arrival.

We get up early as usual, ready to go by 7 AM – except there's so much fog we can hardly see each other. Which by the way, after 4 days on the road, is not all that bad a thing.

So we wait and wait. By about 9 AM, it's marginal, which of course is good enough for us. The fog has lifted somewhat, and was replaced by a bunch of clouds at about 200 to 300 feet. We formed into two groups, and headed east. Visibility would

range from poor to really poor – so we kept an eye on the others in the group, on the GPS, and on various cell towers that would pop out of the clouds. Exciting stuff! Our backup plan was to just follow I95, so if things really got bad we'd just fly along with the traffic.



One of our members visited Toronto, and was kind enough to send us a picture of the famous Toronto Tower – see red arrow. Thank you, Scott!

When we got within 10 miles of Bangor airport, we called Bangor Approach Control so they could watch us as we maneuvered around their controlled airspace into the little cutout they have for the Brewer airport.

When I first contacted the control, he was talking to a US Air airline pilot, telling him he had no traffic on his approach except for what appeared to be a flock of geese. I clarified his slight error by telling him we were a flight of 8 powered parachutes, and we don't like to be mistaken for geese, especially so close to hunting season. Anyway, he actually made radar contact with us (which he soon lost as we ducked below some more low clouds). So now we know that powered parachutes CAN be tracked by radar, and also that we CAN evade radar by hugging the tree tops.

We formed into one tight group near Brewer airport, and came in one after another with almost military precision. The TV crews taped it, and then interviewed most of us one after another. Yes, we were on the 6 o'clock news for all three networks!

The trip to Brewer truly demanded the best of our flying skills and judgment skills. Conditions were marginal, but they were not unsafe – we had a backup plan with the highway. This trip could not have been done if every pilot flying was not experienced, mature, cool, and confident – there were just too many opportunities to panic, to make the wrong decision, and to stop thinking clearly. Congratulations to the group – one hell of a job!

We had pretty good turnout from the public, and we added a good chunk to our fund raising coffer.

As exciting as the flying was, the highlight of the Brewer leg was the fact the Hampden police received 3 phone calls reporting UFO-s! One of the newspaper reporters picked up the reports on his scanner, and came to the Brewer airport to investigate. I guess our appearing and disappearing in the ground fog and low clouds got a few people nervous. Being mistaken for UFO-s is clearly the biggest honor we can receive, so our year is made!

Deblois: Flew to Deblois on Thursday morning - we figured this stop would be the least attended, and one where our opportunities for fund raising would be minimal. We were wrong – I guess not having too much to do around that area made us the excitement of the month! Lot of people came out, and again, we had to turn some away and tell them that we'll be in Machias on Friday – come on over!

We promised the mayor of Deblois that next year we'll give her plenty of notice about our trip, and she promised she'd bring busloads of people out to ride and to donate.

Machias: Left Deblois on Friday morning, and headed to Machias. This was another venue where we weren't sure how many people would come out – again, we were very pleasantly surprised. Since the winds were calm, we were able to give a bunch of rides all morning, and most of the afternoon and evening. And yes, some of the Deblois people did come over.

The trip itself was uneventful, except that this was the most desolate part of the entire trip – lots of marshes and trees. We figured that if any of us went down in that region, you'd need a Chinook or Blackhawk helicopter to get the plane out, which would probably cost as much as a new plane.

It was at Machias where Bonnie had a revelation. Up to this point, we've been saying “make a \$20

donation” to Camp Sunshine for a 15 minute introductory ride. She now started saying “make a MINIMUM of \$20 donation” to Camp Sunshine, and right away, we started collecting more money!

That evening, we made our second campfire (Deblois was the first), and the ensuing inferno made for a very pleasant evening as we all sat around and were amazed at how well this event was unfolding. But, we still had the long, wet leg to Eastport (music from “Jaws” to be played here!)

Eastport: As we got ready to fly from Machias to Eastport on Saturday morning, we noticed that the flags were not only waving pretty vigorously, but were also shifting direction quite often. When that happens, the best thing to do is to close your eyes and go. Something like getting into a cold pool. Or taking a bandage off your hairy arm. Or getting married.



Doug is figuring out the mysteries of a seatbelt as millions on TV are watching him take the beautiful TV news reporter for an orientation ride.

So we loaded up on fuel and started east. This was a relatively short trip of 25 miles, so we didn't get very organized, and that decision came back to hurt us when we had some people flying alone at times.

With a stiff head wind, our little trip could take two hours, so there was some concern. But off we went anyway. Shortly after takeoff, Jim noticed that his GPS told him he wasn't going to make it so he turned back. Scott with his backpack rig also turned back for the same reason. The rest of us figured we could follow the road to Eastport and stop at some Irving station if the winds got too bad and we needed fuel.

Iron Mike was experimenting, and noticed that while at 700 feet he had a 10 mph headwind, at 3000 feet he had a 10 mph tailwind! So up we

climbed, and the trip became much shorter. Except for the fact that 3000 feet is way up there, and several of us get a little edgy thinking how long a fall that is when your risers decide to break.

We crossed the evil waters which seemed so big on the map, but from 3000 feet, they looked pretty insignificant. We did our customary victory lap around town to drum up business, and the remaining 6 of us landed at Eastport.

Oh yes – it was really 7. Ed and his lovely wife Carolyn joined us at Machias, and provided air cover for us during the trip. In his trike, he of course is flying at 60 or 70 mph, so he could have made that trip in 20 minutes, but he circled around us, visited us, gave us moral support, dropped peanuts into our laps to make our flight more enjoyable, and led the way.

The winds were pretty high, so in spite of good publicity in that area, not too many were there for our arrival. Those who came during the rest of the day had to be told “maybe by this evening.” A pretty good number showed up by late afternoon, but unfortunately only two of us were still there so we could only give a few rides – had to turn away quite a few people.

Chute Across Maine – special thanks

Bonnie Micue – Bonnie did her usual superb job in organizing and keeping tabs on our fund raising activities. She was also in charge of having our donors sign the waiver before flying (which said that if we kill you while you’re flying with us, it’s NEVER our fault, and YOU probably caused it so we should sue YOU). She also was the dispatcher, so people wouldn’t just sneak in line for flying (which we discovered was happening before we got wise). She also kept Herb out of trouble.

Jerry S. and Jim H. – Jerry and Jim did the planning for the route, and printed out all necessary information for each leg of the trip. It was near perfect – we got to fly across Maine in just the right increments. Jerry also gets credit for simplifying the trip – originally, we had a complex set of departure and arrival times throughout the entire journey. With Jerry’s suggestion of staying at one location all day, then going to the next one early in the morning, the entire trip was a whole lot more relaxing and more successful for all of us.

Scott Adair – Scott has the back pack chute, in which he can’t take any passengers, but he was our

business recruiter where he and his weird contraption flew over the towns we visited and drummed up business. People had to come out and see this crazy guy up in the air with his legs flailing, throwing kisses to the locals! Scott also made a generous donation to our charity.

Our drivers, Darlene Paradis., Eric O’Donnell, and Gordon Sukeforth – these folks helped out with all the miscellaneous tasks that came up during the trip, from driving people back to the departure points to pick up their rig, to getting supplies, relaying messages, talking to the newspapers, making arrangements with the airport operators, briefing the donors/passengers, and dozens of other jobs without which this event would not have been nearly as successful.

Chute Across Maine – next year

We had three primary objectives with this event. One was to conduct a flying event where we could generate lots of good will and positive publicity toward powered parachutes. The second was to raise \$600 or \$700 for a great charity that helps out hundreds of very unfortunate families every year. The third was to have a good time and a good flying adventure with our MPA friends – after all, that’s why we have a club.

We achieved all three of our goals, so we pretty much unanimously decided that we want to do this event again next year, and probably make it an annual event thereafter.



The MPA funds turnover delegation after the fly-by, with Scott, John, Jenn (event coordinator), and Jerry. All hands are accounted for except Jerry’s right hand.

Chute Across Maine – lessons learned

While we did a whole lot of things right, here are some items which we'll do better next year:

- figure out a way to get better advance notice to the communities we're visiting – maybe posters?
- at most stops, we only had 3 or 4 of us giving rides to the public – there was enough demand so we need more passenger-riding pilots
- need better flight planning and flight discipline; on the last leg, we got too separated from each other and if one of us had gone down, it would have been tough to find him.
- turn it into a vacation; bring family, friends, as we have enough time at each location to enjoy each other's company, visit the local attractions, and still get a lot of flying in.

Chute Across Maine - Summary

We all had a great time, got lots of flying in, got to be little better pilots, visited some new places, and met some super people along the way.

Instead of the \$600 or \$700 we thought we could raise, we ended up raising over **\$1,800!** Pretty amazing, considering this was our first year, and we had minimal advance publicity at most places. Overall, nice going, MPA!

Fund turnover to Camp Sunshine

Of course, we could have just mailed the \$1,800 check to the management of Camp Sunshine in Saco, but that's not our style, especially after the cool way we raised the money. So we arranged a fly-by so all the kids and parents in residence could see these machines in action.

Since Camp Sunshine does not have a field large enough for us to use as an airfield, we had to get permission from the golf course a few miles down the road so we could take off and land on their fairways. Once they actually understood what we were and what we were flying and how well we could dodge golf balls, they were very cooperative and pleasant to us.

Anyway, Jerry S., Scott A., and John G. took off exactly at 8:55, flew over the assembled crowd at Camp Sunshine precisely at 9:00, did a bunch of passes and criss-crosses for about 10 minutes to the oohs and aaahs of the crowd (which included Jerry missing Scott by about 10 feet), and then landed back on the 13th fairway at 9:20, precisely as we promised the golf course owners. Except for the near miss, this event almost had military precision!

Afterward, we presented the check to the director of the facility – see pictures. They were very pleased, and hoped this could be a yearly event.



Handing over the check to Camp Sunshine director Mike Smith. On an unrelated issue, notice the grass stains on Scott's knee – don't ask! (but OK to guess)

New members

Welcome to some more new members who joined us over the last several months. Obviously, they've been out in the sun too long which ruined their judgment and destroyed their ability to maintain their high standards for new friends and acquaintances – how else could you explain it?

Anyway, a sincere welcome to Robert Scheurer from Pownal, to Mike and Dusty Whitney from Lincoln, to Herman Junkerman from Monroeville, NJ, and to Steven Goulet of Greene. Hope you all enjoy your association with us, and hope to see you at our many official and unofficial functions.

Christmas party around the corner

Since many of us MPA members also belong to the Procrastinators' Club, this is just a reminder that our MPA Christmas party is scheduled for Sunday, December 18th from 3:30 to about 6:00 in Bangor. See, if you put it on your calendar now, and an opportunity comes up later on a 50%-off sale on washing your dog but it's on the same day, you can say "oh, what a great deal, but I already have something else to do that day." See how simple it all is?

Disclaimer

We have more news but ran out of room and are too cheap to pay additional postage for an extra page. In the next issue, more from the Procrastinators' Club, Bingham, the Perfect Flight, and a lot more humor.