

Interesting Things about Flying Gliders in Southern Ontario

Summer time in Southern Ontario offers a good variety of interesting gliding experiences.

The most significant physical facts about the area are, the proximity of the Great Lakes with attendant lake fronts, flat and intensely developed farm land, an elevated plateau, a good mixture of weather conditions with a frontal passage every 10 days or so, and long daylight hours.

Most local area soaring flights use the thermals arising from convection in the atmosphere, usually starting late in the morning and going on into the evenings. Best conditions for this arise in high pressure conditions following a frontal passage, with light north-west or westerly breezes. Exceptionally good days occur when the high pressure is centred over Chicago. Thermals will commonly go up to 5,000 ft. above sea level, and occasionally as high as 7,000 ft. Good thermals are usually marked by cumulous clouds, in the fairly humid atmosphere associated with the Great Lakes. Often, gulls and an occasional hawk will provide markers for thermals. The land north of Lake Simcoe goes from farm fields to rock, with a step-up in thermal strength and height.

For cross-country pilots who venture as far as the shores of the surrounding Great Lakes, lake front conditions are quite frequent. The Great Lakes completely surround the area where York Soaring Association has its field. Lake Huron, Georgian Bay, Lake Simcoe, Lake Ontario and Lake Erie all lie within 100 km and encompass the field. Local cold fronts along Great Lakes shore- lines tend to move inland as the summer day warms up offering the opportunity to ride along the zone of lift on the inland side of the front. Cold dead air on the lake side of the front has ended many otherwise promising flights! Convergence of the lake fronts between Lake Simcoe and Georgian Bay will occasionally set up an attractive low-energy flyway for migrating raptors from Northern Ontario.

For the adventurous cross-country pilots, good, flat, landable farm field are everywhere, and generally it is possible to find a field without deep crops. Stubble fields are the best. Main farm crops are corn, wheat, oats, beans, canola, and hay. Flights of over 500 km are possible in Southern Ontario, but this task sorts out the men from the boys (and the women from the girls).

Commercial air traffic abounds to the south of the area, around Toronto, Hamilton, Kitchener-Waterloo and London. The cross-country pilot must avoid the Toronto Control Area, and great care needs to be exercised in the "Guelph Corridor" between Toronto approach and Kitchener-Waterloo. Airspace further north is relatively uncrowded. Always keep a sharp lookout. See and be seen!

Southern Ontario has five active gliding locations, at Rocton, Arthur, Tottenham, London and one just west of Shelburne. Many of the area glider pilots will be out flying on nice summer days. Visiting pilots are always most welcome. Come and enjoy our soaring conditions.

Tim Wood, May 4 2014