

July 2011 Condor Corner

Frank Paynter and Bruno Vassel IV

Flying the Logan Scenery with B4

Bruno Vassel IV is a highly successful businessman and a cross country racing pilot in the Utah area. He flies B4, a highly-tricked out ASW-20, and is well known for his many wonderful soaring videos depicting flights in the Logan and Parowan soaring areas. Bruno and I met at last January's SSA convention in Philly, and a few weeks later he emailed me about possibly flying some in Condor. I mentioned that I had just received Dave Leonard's prototype Condor scenery for the Logan region and had made a couple of flights in it already (preparing for the 15m Nationals in July). Would Bruno be interested in flying with me in the Logan scenery? The resulting conversation went something like this (highly edited for readability and dramatic effect):

Bruno: Are you planning to compete in the 15m nats at Logan this year?

Frank: Well, yes – that's why I want to fly in the Logan scenery with you

Bruno: Hmm, I'm flying in that too, so why is it that I should help you beat me?

Frank: Good question. Are you open to bribery?

Bruno: Yes, but it will cost you a copy of the Logan scenery

Frank: Done - here's the link to the files on my Google Docs site.

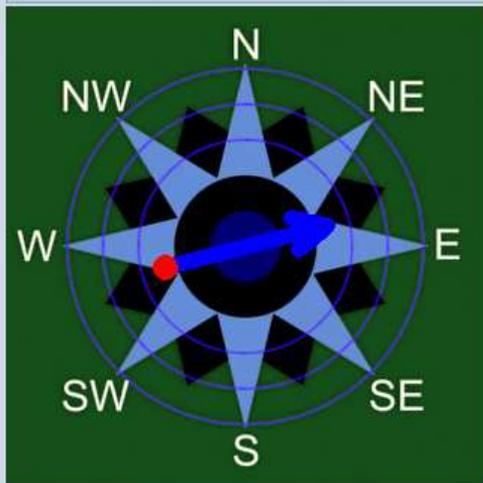
And so, with this auspicious beginning, we agreed to meet on a Sunday evening in the middle of February to go fly. In a series of emails, Bruno suggested that we fly a modified version of the Day 3 task (which Bruno won) from the 2010 Logan regional, as it provided a pretty nice tour of the soaring area, and highlighted some of the challenges unique to Logan. The task involved a lot of ridge running, but a fair bit of tip-toeing to get from one ridge area to the next.

Figures 1 and 2 show the task layout and weather setup in the Condor Flight Planner dialog.

FLIGHT PLANNER

TASK WEATHER PLANE NOTAM

Wind

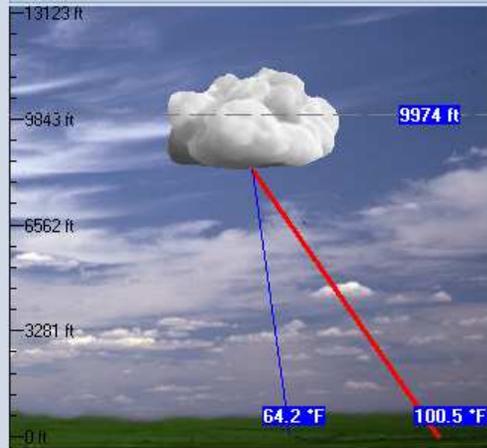


Direction: 255° Variation: Medium
Speed: 13.0 kts Variation: Medium
Turbulence: Moderate

Weather preset: Custom

Randomize weather on each flight

Thermals



Cloud base: 8202 ft Variation: Medium
Strength: Moderate Variation: Medium
Width: Wide Variation: Medium
Activity: Normal Turbulence: Light

New

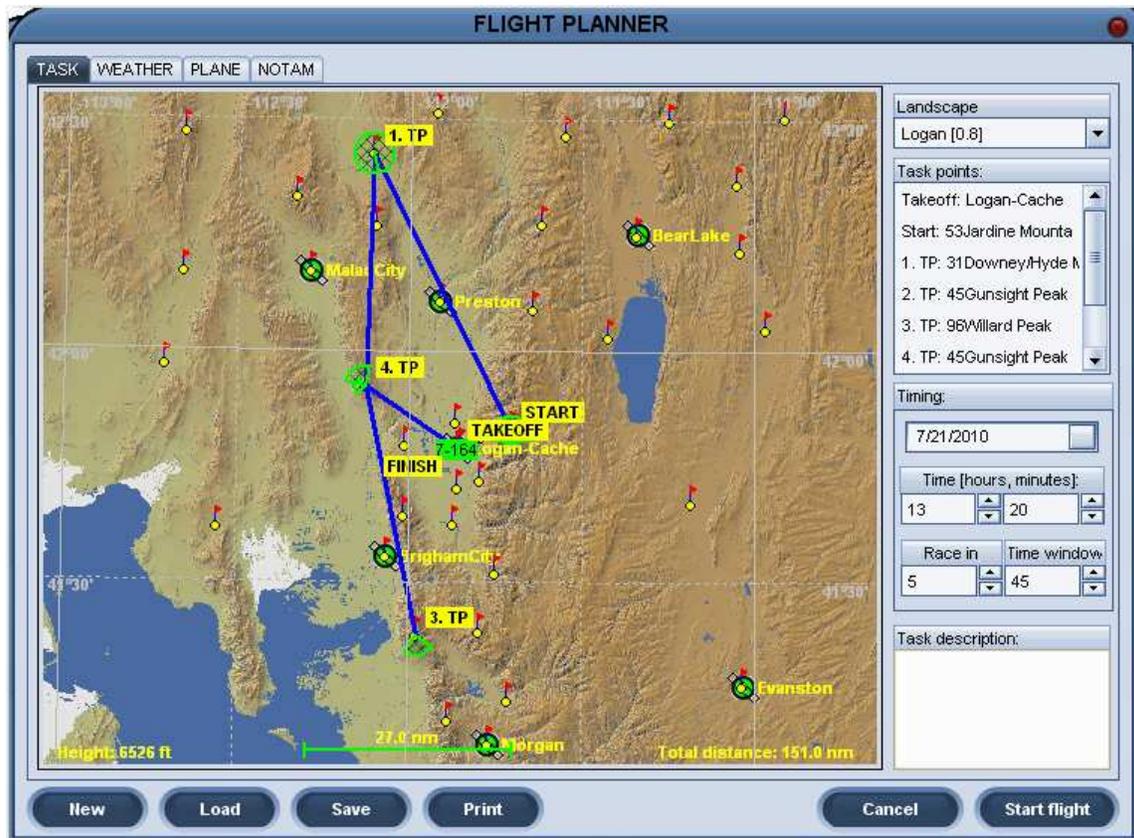
Load

Save

Print

Cancel

Start flight



The task involved starting from the 01North Start control point northeast of the airport and along the 'local' ridgeline, and then ridge running north for about 20 miles or so to near the 90 Sugar Creek turn, then a long cruise northwest across a valley and some low hills to the first turnpoint (31 Downey Hyde). From there it was due south mostly ridge flying to 45 Gunsight Peak, then south southeast across a fairly large gap and some more ridge to 96 Willard Peak, then back to Gunsight, then a downwind run home. The weather was set to approximate the conditions for the real Logan Day 3 weather.

As I do in my mentoring flights, I setup the task on my PC here in Columbus, Ohio, and 'advertised' the server on the Condor server list on the web. Bruno joined the flight from Utah by clicking on the 'Tango Alpha' listing and entering the required password. Bruno and I used hands-free telephone setups to communicate, much like a hot-mic radio setup. I chose my trusty Ventus 2bx, and Bruno chose an ASW-27 (he flies an ASW-20 in real life).

Figure 3 below shows us on the runway at Logan, getting ready to take off. The view is to the east to the 'local' ridge where most tasks start.



After takeoff, Bruno and I cruised back and forth along the local ridge, working our way up from the 2500' agl tow height. Eventually we found a good thermal to about 10000 and started out the gate.

On the run up the ridge toward Sugar Creek (the point where we planned to jump out across the valley), Bruno explained that only the top 2000' or so of the ridges really work well, so if you get down below 8000' msl or so, you are looking at a real good chance of a landout. On this day we weren't having much trouble staying at ridgetop, but it wasn't particularly fast, either. I was pleased to see that I was able to stay with Bruno, even though I had only flown once before in the Logan scenery. As we approached the Sugar Creek area, Bruno started looking for a climb, saying we wanted to be as high as possible before starting across the valley. Apparently there is a lot of moisture in the valley (hard for me to believe, but what do I know?), and this really cuts down on thermal activity. Bruno's plan was to arrive at the foothills surrounding the first turnpoint at or above 8500' msl, which would allow us to basically nick the turn area and then get onto the high ground to the south. This was a 30 mile or so gap, so we wanted 12,000 to 13,000 msl before starting out. Bruno emphasized that staying in even a weak thermal at this early point in the flight was a good trade if it kept us out of trouble later on. At this point, only 20-30 minutes into the flight, I felt I had already learned more than I could possibly have hoped for. Flying with a local expert in unfamiliar terrain is just priceless, and there were more lessons to come!

We didn't get as high as we would have liked before starting across the valley, but there were some uncharacteristically good looking clouds out over the valley, so we stopped a couple of times in 3kt thermals to stay high. Bruno mentioned that in real life we

probably could have climbed significantly higher over the ridge before starting out, but on the other hand, having a couple of climbs in the valley compensated (Condor giveth, and Condor taketh away). Anyway, we arrived over the first turnpoint in good order, and so we were able to nick the southern edge of the turnpoint and turn south toward Oxford Peak. At this point, Bruno had managed to get a 2-3 mile lead on me, which he promptly squandered by missing the turn and having to come back to get it. This allowed me to catch up. I thanked him for being such a gentleman, but his reply was unprintable ;-). As we crossed the small gap from Downey Hyde to Oxford Peak, Bruno was a bit disappointed at our average task speed so far – about 100kph/60mph. I thought we had done really well up to that point, and pointed out that we still had a very good chance of finishing the task in the 80mph range – not bad for no ballast!

Once we were established on the ridge at Oxford Peak, it was a nice easy (not fast, but not real slow either) run down to Gunsight Peak, our 2nd turnpoint. The screenshots below shows us just contacting the ridge at Oxford Peak. The image just below that shows B4 in real-life at the same point in his real-life flight.





We ran neck and neck all the way down the Oxford Peak range to Gunsight Peak, where I picked up a small lead because Bruno got enticed by a 10kt 'pop' off the ridge that died as soon as he tried to turn – hee hee (not that we were at all competitive, or anything!). Unfortunately, I made my share of mistakes too, and by the time we got down to Willard Peak and were getting ready to turn north again, Bruno had regained a (slight) lead. The following shot shows Bruno slightly ahead of me just after turning Willard Peak, the southern-most turnpoint in the flight. The immediately following image is from B4's real-life flight.



After Willard Peak, we still had to get back to Gunsight Peak and then home. The transition from the Willard Peak ridge to the Gunsight Peak ridge is a bit interesting as there weren't any clouds or lift lines available – we had to conserve our energy as we flew north, and then float out over the gap. Bruno was pretty optimistic, as the Gunsight Peak ridge has a pretty nice shape all the way down to the valley floor here. About halfway up the Willard Peak ridge, Bruno pointed out an interesting lake to our right (east) – he called it 'PacMan lake' based on its shape (see the figure below). He said he

wanted to make sure I saw that, as I was probably old enough to have played the original PacMan game on a Pizza Hut table-top game surface. I gave him the virtual finger in return, because I *was* old enough to have played the original PacMan game at Pizza Hut!



The next shot shows us transitioning off the north end of Willard Peak ridge, aiming generally for the Gunsight Peak ridge and the last turnpoint before home. As the final

glide computer shows in this shot, we are 14 miles from Gunsight Peak, about 1000' (actually 997) above the turnpoint, but about 1200' below final glide to that turnpoint. The real-life shot from B4's flight is also shown.



As it turned out, as shown in the next shot, we arrived at Gunsight Peak about 1000' below the peak, pretty much as predicted from 14 miles out. This shot shows Bruno just

banking away after clipping the turn, about 1/2 miles ahead of me. The image immediately below is from B4's real-life flight



After this turn, all we had to do was to get home. We flew back south to the gap between Gunsight Peak ridge and Willard Peak ridge, floating up as much as possible on the way, and then a slow (but not particularly marginal) downwind final glide home. At this point

I was about a mile back, but a couple of hundred feet higher, when Bruno said something like “Hmm, don’t we have a 500’ minimum height on arrival?”, and I said “Oops! It’s actually more like 700” (Condor uses metric, and that was as close as I could get when I set up the task). At which point both Bruno and I slowed to max L/D speed to try to get home above the floor. My flight computer said I would arrive at 736’, give or take an inch or so, but Bruno’s was showing something like 536’ – not quite enough. This situation allowed me to brilliantly overtake and pass Bruno, although I did hit some turbulence due to the blue cloud around his cockpit! ;-).





After landing, we both agreed this had been a wonderful experience, flying together in the Logan scenery in realistic weather conditions. Certainly for me it had been an invaluable introduction to the soaring area by an accomplished local pilot. During the flight itself, I kept hearing Bruno say something like “I can’t believe how realistic this is”, or “Wow – the dead spots in real life are also dead spots in Condor. Even the ‘PacMan’ lake was in the right place, and looked like a PacMan! As proof, Bruno sent me images from his real-life flight, selected to match as closely as possible the screenshots I had for this article. For those out there who find Bruno’s statement a little fanciful – look at his real-life images and make your own judgment. Keep in mind when you do that this is a prototype scenery that is less detailed than more finished ones – imagine how accurate it will look when it is finished!

For a flatland pilot like me, with limited real-world mountain experience, the value of Condor for area familiarization cannot be overstated. The value of flying in Condor for area familiarization with a recognized area expert like Bruno is even more over the top. I learned more in this 3-hour flight with Bruno than I could have in 30 hours by myself, but even without such a guided tour, it is entirely possible to become familiar with an area through Condor without ever having seen the place in real life (in fact, that is just what I did at Parowan last year, winning a day at the Sports Class Nationals). Now, knowing that my local expert (Bruno) has validated the Logan simulation, I can fly the area with confidence, knowing that, within reason, what I find in Logan/Condor I will also find in Logan/Real Life (a notable exception pointed out by Bruno is that in real life, there is no significant ridge lift on the main ridge below about 8000’ msl).

As a final note, I want to express my gratitude to Bruno for not only sharing his knowledge of the Logan area with a competitor, but for poring over hours of video to

extract the real life images used in this article. When you see how well the Condor scenery matches the real life terrain, right down to Pacman lake, its enough to take your breath away!