

Welcome to The Whaleback Flying Site

Welcome to The Whaleback hang gliding and paragliding flying site located on the Klamath National Forest and maintained by the Rogue Valley Hang Gliding & Paragliding Association (RVHPA). In the interest of preserving this remarkable flying site and to promote safe flying, we have prepared this guide to assist pilots in getting the most out of their time here. It is no substitute for a thorough site introduction from a knowledgeable pilot. As always, use your own judgment in determining whether it is safe or appropriate for you to fly the site under current conditions. **If you are unsure, do not fly.**

The Basics

Flight types: Thermal, XC, Glass-off

Season: Summer & early fall (when access road is clear of snowpack)

Pilot proficiency: USHPA P3/H3 minimum; P2/H2 only under appropriate conditions with mentor or instructor present.

Special skills: Flat slope launch (FSL), cliff launch (CL), high altitude (HA), and turbulence (TUR) special skill endorsements are recommended for all pilots.

Membership requirements: USHPA and RVHPA memberships recommended.

Launch: 41.5353, -122.1526 (41° 32.118'N, 122° 9.156'W); Elevation: 7437 ft. (2267 m.);

Wind directions: NW to SSW

Primary LZ (Military Pass Road): 41.5505, -122.2000 (41° 33.030'N, 122° 12.000'W);

Elevation: 4480 ft. (1364 m.); Glide Ratio: 4.8:1

Radio Frequency: 151.505 MHz

Cell Service: Good on launch but variable on valley floors depending on carrier.

Emergencies: Dial 911. Nearest medical facilities are in Weed, CA.

Airspace Restrictions: None in immediate vicinity of The Whaleback. See Cross Country section below for airspace restrictions on XC routes.

Air Traffic: Sailplane traffic is common in the general area and over The Whaleback.

Landing Restrictions: Do not land on Highway 97 or its shoulder. See Cross Country section below for landing restrictions on XC routes.

Weather Hazards: Over-development, cloud suck, strong desert conditions, dust devils, gust fronts, shear, thermic LZ, high winds, density altitude.

Weather Info: See RVHPA's Weather Page at rvhpa.org/weather

More Info: See RVHPA's Whaleback Site Guide at rvhpa.org/site-guide/whaleback

Rules & Regulations

The Whaleback launch and primary LZ are both located on Klamath National Forest lands and all National Forest rules and regulations apply. A fire permit, available at any Forest Service, BLM, or CalFire office, is required for any campfire, BBQ, or camp stove use outside

developed campgrounds year-round. Additional fire restrictions may apply during periods of high fire danger.

The Whaleback launch and LZ are in a restricted road use area. Many Forest Service roads are closed to driving between August 15 and March 15. Please consult the Klamath National Forest map for details. Please drive slowly and attentively. Traffic may be heavy during logging operations, firewood cutting season, and in fall during deer hunting season.

Flying Conditions

The Whaleback is a high altitude, high desert flying site that has changing weather conditions throughout the day and is often very strong and demanding. A typical summer day begins with calm conditions in the early morning, increasing thermal development and accompanying winds by mid- to late-morning, and well-developed thermal cycles by noon. Early afternoon brings on even stronger conditions, cumulus cloud development, and increasing wind speeds. Mid-afternoon conditions can be very strong and turbulent, even if winds are relatively light on the surface. Peak lift in excess of 2000 feet/minute (10 m/s) is not uncommon. By evening, thermals typically begin to lose strength and winds usually begin to slow, sometimes making for smooth evening flying conditions suitable for pilots of all skill levels. However, strong conditions sometimes persist into the evening. Winds often lighten then turn catabatic or cross in late evening as solar heating subsides.

The Whaleback and surrounding peaks often overdevelop in summer, sometimes forming tall cumulus or cumulonimbus clouds fairly early in the day or during the afternoon. This tends to happen during periods of hot, stable weather especially if an upper level cold front has moved into the region and during periods of monsoonal flow. South winds often accompany this weather pattern that may persist for several consecutive days. Keep an eye on the sky and know the detailed forecast before flying. Cumulus clouds before noon and south winds aloft are a warning sign that the conditions are likely to overdevelop.

All pilots are advised to monitor changing conditions as peak heating begins. Conditions suitable for intermediate pilots can quickly strengthen, leaving intermediate pilots flying in advanced conditions. This is a particular concern for landing as the small LZ heats and becomes increasingly thermic and windy. Advanced pilots will often find conditions suited for XC flights in the afternoon but, like all other pilots, need to be aware of evolving conditions.

In general, fall conditions are gentler than summer conditions and pleasant, sustained flights are possible well into the season.

Pilot Proficiency & Skill Level

Because of its high desert location, weather conditions, flat slope launch, and thermic LZ, The Whaleback is an intermediate to advanced level flying site (USHPA P3/H3 minimum). Flat slope launch (FSL), cliff launch (CL), high altitude (HA), and turbulence (TUR) special skill endorsements are recommended for all pilots.

One of the keys to safely flying The Whaleback is to match your skills to the time of day with appropriate flying conditions. Some days are suitable for advanced pilots only. Some days are not flyable at all. Novice-rated pilots (P2/H2) should only fly here with an experienced mentor or instructor who can help evaluate conditions and all novice pilots should avoid mid-day summer flying altogether. Most often, The Whaleback is suitable for novice pilots only in early to mid-morning and in the evening if thermals have weakened and winds have backed off. Even with the recent LZ expansion, novice hang glider pilots may find it a test of skill to land in a grassy area.

Launch & Landing Zone

The launch faces NW to SSW and has a fairly flat slope with a steep drop-off. This is a flat slope launch and all pilots must have the requisite launching skills and experience before launching here. All pilots must be able to safely fly off the top of the launch area without running down the steep drop-off. The launch is at 7437 ft. (2267 m.) MSL, making this a high altitude launch that is also greatly affected by density altitude (which often exceeds 10,000 ft./3049 m. equivalent). On days with south winds, consider flying Herd Peak on the other side of Highway 97 from The Whaleback. East winds at The Whaleback are over the back.

The primary LZ on Military Pass Road is visible from launch. Look for the rectangular clearing to the NW between launch and Highway 97. It is a 5:1 glide to the LZ and winds often become stronger as you descend. Depending on wind direction, a pronounced wind gradient and turbulence may be encountered as the wind rolls off the tree line immediately SW of the LZ. Landing in the sagebrush short or long of the LZ is usually uneventful. All roads on the northeast side of Military Pass Road are closed to driving from August 15 to March 1. If you land out here, you will need to walk out to Military Pass Road for retrieve.

Parking is very limited at both the LZ and launch. Please carpool efficiently to launch and tightly park vehicles head-in at the parking area on the left as you arrive at launch. Please do not parallel park because this will restrict other vehicles from being able to park in the limited parking area after you. Do not drive or park by the launch slope or layout area and do not block the roadway at either the launch or landing zone, even temporarily.

Amenities & Services

There are no amenities at The Whaleback. The nearest towns and services are Weed (14 miles / 23 km south of LZ) and Macdoel (25 miles / 40 km north of LZ), both on Highway 97. Gas is also available along I-5 at Grenada and on Route A12 at Big Springs. The Deer Mountain Snowpark, located on Deer Mountain Road on the way up to launch, has a pit toilet, picnic tables and pavilion, BBQ pits, and a forested camping area but no water source. Medical services are available in Weed.

Getting to the Primary LZ

The primary LZ is located about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile east of US Highway 97 on Military Pass Road. From launch, return 1.6 miles and turn left onto 42N24. Continue 3.1 miles on this winding road then turn left onto the paved Deer Mountain Road. Go six miles to Highway 97 and turn left. After two miles on 97, turn left onto Military Pass Road. Go about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile and look for the

small parking area on the left side of the road. A short trail leads to the LZ, which is not readily visible from the parking area. It takes about 35 minutes to drive from the launch to LZ.

Site History

Legend has it that sometime around 1989, local area paraglider pilot Jim Yates flew from Herd Peak to The Whaleback and identified a potential launch site while thermalling higher and higher. The rest is history: pilots have been enjoying amazing flights from The Whaleback for over 20 years.

In the early days, pilots launched from a small, carpeted strip surrounded by brush. The carpet can still be seen in the bushes southwest of the new launch. In the mid-90's, a local club, the Northern California Foot Launched Pilots Association, built a cindered launch slope and kept a small LZ cleared below. It was suitable for paragliders but the relatively few hang glider pilots who flew The Whaleback preferred making it a few extra miles to land in the (then) larger Herd Peak LZ. Between the mid-90's and 2009, The Whaleback flying site was not regularly maintained. Sagebrush overtook the LZ, shrinking it to the point that it became a deterrent to flying the site for many pilots. Use of the site slowly declined but a core group of Shasta Valley pilots and a few RVHPA members continued flying here fairly regularly.

In late 2009 the Rogue Valley Hang Gliding & Paragliding Association, the current stewards of The Whaleback flying site, initiated The Whaleback Site Improvement Project with the goal of making The Whaleback a safer, more user-friendly site from launch to LZ. With significant assistance from the Klamath National Forest, RVHPA cleared the LZ of brush and enlarged it twenty-fold, making it safer and more accessible for all pilots. It is becoming greener as the native grass takes hold.

In summer 2011 RVHPA completed a major reconstruction and expansion of the launch to create a 90 degree launch window, a setup area, expanded parking and a vehicle turnaround. This project was generously supported by the Foundation for Free Flight, RVHPA and its members, and individual pilots and flying clubs. Hazard trees around the LZ were removed by the Klamath National Forest in summer 2011. In less than two years, the entire infrastructure at the site was greatly improved.

Cross Country

The Whaleback is a common launching point for XC flights, most of them heading north or northeast. Unless your route follows Highway 97, you'll probably be flying over very remote and unforgiving forest, mountain, flatland, and lava terrain, much of it without easy (or any) road access or cell service. Detailed knowledge of flying routes, landing areas, and road access is essential to avoid long hikes out and/or an unintended night camping beneath your wing. This point cannot be overstated.

Pilots who regularly fly XC at The Whaleback carry multiple maps, a GPS, a SPOT or other satellite location tracker, extra water, water purification, extra food, spare batteries, a headlamp, and enough clothing in the event they spend the night out before being

retrieved. A supplemental oxygen tank is a good idea in July, August, and September as cloudbase is often over 14,000 feet (4300 m) MSL.

Landing in the Lava Beds National Monument—even unintentionally—is prohibited without prior permission from the National Park Service. It is up to pilots to know where this is and how to obtain permission prior to flight. If you have not received clearance to land in the monument, do not fly over unless you know for sure that you will be able to cross without landing. Most of the lava bed area is inhospitable to landing and even walking. Do not land in crop fields anywhere along XC routes.

Klamath Falls Airport, located 48 miles (77 km) NNE of launch, has Class D airspace with a 5.4 mile (8.7 km) radius with 6600 foot (2012 m.) ceiling centered on 42.1561, -121.7332 (42° 9.366'N, 121° 43.992'W) plus a Class E surface extension to the SE that extends over the Lava Beds National Monument. Multiple military operation areas and the Klamath Falls airport are used for F-15 fighter jet training. Sailplanes and other aircraft are frequently encountered along XC routes and near The Whaleback. Be alert.

In short, The Whaleback is an advanced XC site and all pilots interested in flying XC here should carefully study maps, routes, and be fully prepared and self-sufficient. First time Whaleback XC flights should be made with an experienced Whaleback XC pilot. This is not the place to attempt your first XC! All XC pilots and retrieve drivers should have the Klamath National Forest, Modoc Country, and Upper Klamath Basin paper maps (available for purchase during business hours at the Klamath National Forest office at 37805 Highway 97, south of Macdoel, CA). The DeLorme California Atlas & Gazetteer is very useful for retrieve but should not be relied upon exclusively. The BLM Lakeview District map is key for those really long flights northeastward. Make sure to have a full tank of gas before driving retrieve in this remote area.

The new Whaleback launch, built in 2011, was a cooperative effort between the Rogue Valley Hang Gliding & Paragliding Association and the Klamath National Forest. Generous support was provided by the Foundation for Free Flight, RVHPA and its members, and individual pilots and flying clubs. Learn more at rvhpa.org and foundationforfreeflight.org

Fly Safe! Fly High! Fly Far!