



FOUNDATION FOR FREE FLIGHT



[from top right] West Rutland launch ramp. Paraglider setup area. Hang glider setup area. All photos by Mike Holmes.



VERMONT ASSOCIATION PROTECTS KEY HANG 2 SITE

Beginning in the fall of 2002, the Vermont Hang Gliding Association (VHGA) embarked on a project to guarantee ongoing access and protection of what is arguably the best Hang II, SW facing, hang gliding and paragliding site in the Northeastern United States.

The preservation of this site really began in 1989 when the property was acquired by Jake Schwaiger, a local hang glider pilot and long time member of the VHGA. As time went by the question became: how could the site be preserved in perpetuity, so that future generations of pilots might continue to enjoy West Rutland's wonder winds?

Long term preservation of the site started with John Arrison, VHGA president, who approached Jake about the sale of this parcel of land to the VHGA in September of 2002. He proposed that VHGA purchase the 10 acre launch site at the top of Mt. Hanley in West Rutland, Vermont, for \$1,000 per acre. The purchase and sale agreement was signed in February of 2005, and the title search on the property was completed in March, 2005. Early that year the VHGA raised \$8,000 toward the initiative. In May of 2005 the United States Hang Gliding Foundation, which is now known as The Foundation for Free Flight, put in a matching grant of \$10,000. At that time, the VHGA estimated that the final cost of the project would be approximately \$25,000. After many hours

of negotiation between the land owner and the VHGA, the deal was finalized late in 2006 for a total price of \$17,000, including property costs, surveys, taxes, and Jake's attorney's fees. The VHGA saved \$4,000 in attorney fees by having Rick Sharp, a local pilot, paragliding instructor and Vermont attorney, execute the club's legal work. The remaining unused funds were placed in a special "West Rutland fund" to be used for the purchase of a permanent LZ in the valley below.

Other VHGA pilots also contributed to the project. Some of the most prominent were: John Arrison as the president of VHGA at the start of the project; Gary Trudeau as USHPA Region 8 Director; Peter Kelley as the main contact in Rutland who handled communications with Jake, and supervised the survey and permit work with the town of West Rutland; and Rick Sharp, the aforementioned attorney who provided all VGHA legal services free of charge. In addition, many pilots in the Northeastern U.S. were solicited by the VHGA and gave generously. These generous contributions resulted in Foundation For Free Flight being given a matching grant based on the funds that were collected. As Gary Trudeau remarked, "The project was a lot more involved than anyone thought it would be, and it took longer than we originally thought it would." VHGA's purchase turned out to be well worth the effort, patience, and money expended. The flying community now has permanent access to a Hang II site for the VHGA and free flight pilots from all over New England and New York!

The project originally involved a 10 acre mountain top parcel. But as Rick Sharp points out, "there were extensive negotiations as to acreage to be acquired and quite a bit of wrangling as to the actual boundary lines, but the VHGA finally settled on a mutually agreed boundary for the parcel. The final solution allowed Jake to retain a cabin on the property while ensuring that the VHGA got title to the main SW launch site, a SE launch site, a possible NE launch site, the top parking area and a deeded right-of-way across the acreage Jake retained to access the mountain top."

Looking back on this project, it's critical to see it as a multi-year, multi-person, labor of love that could not have come about without the hard work and effort of many individuals. It demonstrates how site preservation can be accomplished with persistence and commitment. Gary Trudeau, the USHPA Region 8 Director, says: "Without the foundation we might never have been able to save this site for current and future pilots."

The Foundation For Free Flight was a vital participant in this project because it not only acted as a catalyst organization that helped put together necessary funding, but also enabled the VHGA to

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build the commitment and energy necessary to succeed in their preservation project. The Foundation, its trustees, volunteers and friends are committed to working with USHPA clubs in the mission of long term flying-site preservation.

Although this effort was a key component in being able to preserve free flight in the Northeast, even more

progress is underway towards preserving other parts of West Rutland. The VHGA is currently working on the purchase and preservation of a permanent landing zone in the valley below. Preservation is an evolving and ongoing task of stewardship on many levels. As Rick Sharp indicates, "It is critical that the VHGA now goes on to acquire a permanent landing zone in the West Rutland Valley." This project is likely to unfold in a manner similar to the Launch Preservation Project. Mike Holmes, the current VHGA president, is in the process of working with land owners on securing a permanent LZ. The Club's Treasurer, Don Massoni, as well as other members of the VHGA's Board of Directors, also have put in a lot of leg work on this LZ project. They hope to get this project underway in the spring.

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*Submitted by Douglas Sharpe
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**We're pulling for you,
but we can't do it alone.**

The Foundation works to preserve free flight through site preservation, safety, education and competition excellence.

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