

## The Vermont Hang Gliding Association Protects One of the Best Hang II Sites in the Northeastern USA

By Douglas Sharpe, Trustee for the Foundation for Free Flight



Figure 1: View of the West Rutland Launch Site (photo by Will Peery).

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 U.S.

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 on the question became, how could the site be preserved for the long run beyond Jake's time, so that future generations of pilots might also enjoy West Rutland's wonder winds?

Long term preservation of the site started with John Arrison, VHGA president, who approached Jake in September of 2002 about a sale of this parcel to the VHGA. The proposal was to 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 2005 and the title search on the property was completed in March 2005. Early that year the VHGA had raised \$8,000 toward the initiative. In May of 2005 the United States Hang Gliding Foundation, (now 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 much work and back and forth between the land owner and the VHGA, the deal was finally completed late in 2006 for a total of \$17,000. This included 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 a Vermont attorney, perform the entire 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.

Many VHGA pilots contributed to the project including: John Arrison, 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 VT handling communications with Jake, and supervising the survey and permit work with the town of West Rutland; Niece Miller, the VHGA treasurer at the time, for meticulous accounting in keeping track of all and protecting contributions to the site fund; and Rick Sharp as attorney providing all legal services for the VHGA free of charge. There were many other important contributors as well. Many pilots in the northeastern U.S. were solicited by the VHGA and gave generously. The Foundation For Free Flight grant was a matching grant given based on other funds that the VHGA had raised. As it was pointed out by Gary Trudeau, “the project was a lot more involved than anyone thought it would be and it took longer than was originally thought”, but it has turned out to be well worth the effort and patience in the long run as it now guarantees that there will be permanent access to a Hang II site for the VHGA and for 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 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 is 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 is important in this project because it acted as a catalyst organization that helped put together necessary funding and enabled the VHGA to build commitment and energy to make site their preservation project come together in ways otherwise not possible. 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 aspect of preservation of free flight in the Northeast, even more progress is underway towards preserving other aspects of West Rutland since the West Rutland Launch Preservation Project. This underscores that preservation is an evolving and ongoing task of stewardship on many levels. The next effort that the VHGA is looking toward and working on is the purchase and preservation of a permanent landing zone in the valley below. This next step has been an ongoing challenge. 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 Clubs Treasurer Don Massoni has also put in a lot of leg work on this LZ project along with the

other members of the VHGA's Board of Directors. Mike can be reached at [mikesgnflyn@verizon.net](mailto:mikesgnflyn@verizon.net) regarding this effort which they hope to get under way this spring.

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Site Photos for Use:



**Figure 2: View of the West Rutland Launch Site, photo by Will Peery, provided to Parafly Paragliding, Inc..**



**Figure 3: View from Launch, provided by Gary Trudeau**



**Figure 4: Paraglider setup area behind ramp area, photo provided by Mike Holmes**



**Figure 5: Hang Glider setup area, Photo provided by Mike Holmes**



**Figure 6: Gary Trudeau assisting on Launch, photo provided by Mike Holmes**



**Figure 7: West Rutland Launch Ramp, Photo provided by Mike Holmes**



**Figure 8: West Rutland Main LZ, photo provided by Mike Holmes**



**Figure 9: VHGA Club Logo**