

33rd Annual Starthistle fly-in

BY RUTH AUSTIN

This was the 33rd year for the local paragliding and hangliding event, the Starthistle Fly-in. It was a colorful, fun event with perfect weather at the end of May, the 23rd through 25th, and attracted approximately 120 pilots from several states and British Columbia. The theme this year was “The Grapes of wRATH,” with many pilots dressing in author John Steinbeck’s era clothing, as they made their landings near viewers at the local winery patios of LongSword and Fiasco.

The launch site at Woodrat Mountain (the name of WoodRAT being used by the event planners for the theme) was a busy location - two thousand feet above the Hunter pastures, and overlooking Highway 238. From this flying off-spot, paragliders and hanggliders took off to enjoy flights as the thermal winds kicked up along the cliffs in the afternoon hours. Woodrat is known as one of the premier launching areas in the states.

Weekend events included cross-country flights to Ashland, a kiting contest, and a bag drop for accuracy. The kiting competition, refereed by Bill Kaelin of the Applegate, was a challenging contest, with winners being the last three remaining pilots in the air above a landing zone. Although their wings could touch, they could not physically come in contact. At the kiting event, no local area pilots were in the top three winners. It was a game of skill



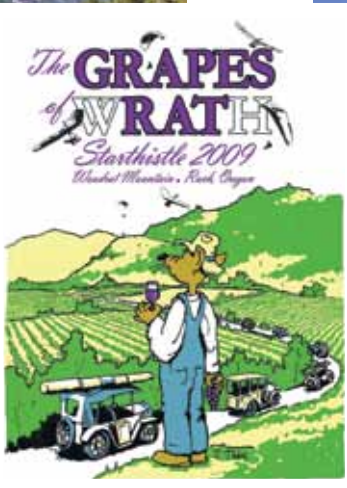
with luck playing a part. An awards ceremony and barbeque was held at Cantrall-Buckley Park where many pilots camped.

Local paragliders included Randy Bogardus, Paul Murdoch, president of the local Paragliding chapter, and Norm Young, among others.

When visiting Woodrat several years ago, it could be seen that paragliding attracts a wide range of folks, young and old, from all professions and backgrounds. It includes some women pilots. A local pilot tells me that the thrill of soaring can be “an addiction”—it gets in your system.

As an added bonus, most of the landings were free of starthistle!

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Photos clockwise from top left:

- Tandem launch, Woodrat Mountain during Starthistle 2009
- Grapes of wRATH, Starthistle 2009 art theme.
- The final three wings in the air as the Paraglider Kiting Competition at LongSword Vineyards nears its end.
- Summer Barham, Ashland paraglider pilot, aggressively departs Woodrat Mountain west launch. Summer's parents, Larry and Blythe Barham, have also taken up paragliding and flew in Starthistle 2009.

Photos by Don Fitch. Artwork by Jim Tibbs.

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