

Night Diamond



For decades, Sugarbush, Vermont was the Gatineau Gliding Club's destination for fall-time wave flying. Sugarbush will be familiar to those who have watched the 1971 soaring film *The Sun Ship Game* as it opens with a regional soaring contest at Sugarbush. And those familiar with the airshow world may know Sugarbush as the home of Jim Parker who, amongst others, was asked by US Navy's Blue Angels to perform for them.

Long time members John Soulsby and Eric Wimberley owned a Slingsby Skylark 4 together, CF-OZH and where at Sugarbush on October 12th, 1968 stalking wave. It had been John's day to fly but he landed early and said he was through for the day. Although it was late in the afternoon, Eric elected to have a flight.

Unexpectedly, Eric found wave and was soon climbing away. It was not long before Eric was above 10,000 feet so he donned his oxygen mask and kept climbing. But passing through 19,000 feet, Eric received a call from his partner John. John was concerned that the sun had set at ground level and felt that Eric should descend. Eric on the other hand was still in lift and only 2,500 feet short of a Diamond climb.

Charlie Yeates of Montreal Soaring Council appeared on the radio and, intuiting that Eric was within reach of a Diamond, encouraged Eric to keep climbing. Charlie volunteered that he would arrange for cars to be parked along the runway to provide illumination for Eric's eventual night landing. Another 45 minutes and Eric was now at 21,500 feet, high enough to qualify him for a Diamond climb.

Eric reported to those kindly waiting for him at the airport that he was now starting down .. almost an hour after sunset ! And it would be another 30-45 minutes before Eric was back on the ground. Although Eric was now descending in darkness, Eric reported having no trouble navigating as he simply kept station using the Sugarbush Inn's illuminated parking lot. Warren-Sugarbush airport was about a mile east of the parking lot.

True to his word, Charlie had the runway illuminated by numerous car headlights and Eric landed without difficulty over an hour and a half after sunset. The Skylark 4 was de-rigged in the dark and tucked into its trailer. A quick check of the barograph confirmed a good trace and everyone headed to the Farm for dinner, Eric providing bottles of champagne for the GGC and MSC tables in celebration of his 17,635 foot Diamond 'C' climb.

Yes, Official Observers back then were a little more lax about air regulation infringements in the pursuit of FAI badges !