

APOGEE

PEAK OF FLIGHT

NEWSLETTER

How To Find a Flying Field

By Tim Van Milligan

Finding and obtaining permission to use a large field to fly model rockets is a labor intensive task. If it was easy, the hobby would probably be twice as big as it currently is.

In this article, I'll try to give you some ideas that may help finding a flying field. I don't guarantee success though... I don't have too much experience in this area. My limited experience is with getting the site for NARAM-2000; and with getting permission from the neighboring property owners. With NARAM, it was simply a matter of asking Mr. Vern Estes if he knew of any property in Cañon City, Colorado. He said he did; and volunteered his own 400 acre parcel of land. That's about as easy as it gets.

Here is the good news. According to promotional literature about rocketry, more than 5 million rocket motors are sold per year. If the average number of flight per person is five, that means there are a million people flying rockets. Extending this logic further; there are a lot of flying locations. You just have to find one of those other million modelers where they're launching.

In the back of my mind, I don't think getting a launch site is the real task. The real problem is that you don't have someone in your club that has access to a piece of land that you can launch from. In effect, getting a launch site is a "recruitment problem" for your club.

Before you put a lot of labor in tracking down a piece of land, why not have a recruitment drive for your club. If you find someone that has access to a good site, it will save you a lot of time and effort.

So, ask your local club members first. They may own land, or have a relative and/or close friends that do. If they don't, then have another recruitment drive. An upcoming issue of this e-zine will give some suggestions on recruiting new members. If you can't wait for it to come out, you can order Apogee Components product number 1024: "[Attracting](#)

[and Retaining New Club Members.](#)"

My second suggestion is to ask local community leaders. Have you asked the local 4-H coordinator? Maybe they have a kid in their program that lives on a farm and flies rockets too. There are other community leaders that you should talk to too. They would be organizations like the VFW, Lions, Elks, and Jaycees.

Another thing you might try is to work with a school. Don't underestimate the power of the educational aspects of rocketry. The teacher or principal probably knows a lot about the parents of the students, and may know which ones have vacant land. If the school is willing to act as an intermediary, you could have your next flying field very soon.

However, I think if you enlist the aid of those organizations, you better be prepared to "give back." This may be something as simple as showing up at a pancake breakfast, or something more elaborate.

If you've exhausted those resources, your next step may be to find a piece of land on your own and track down its owner. Before you start driving around, get on your computer and download some aerial photographs of your local county. My favorite photo site is: <http://teraserver.microsoft.com>. Vacant fields show up real easy on aerial or satellite photos. Print these photos out, so you have a hardcopy.

I'm sure you'll be able to quickly find a field that might make a good launch range.

Next, you'll need to track down the owner of the land. This will involve going down to the county clerk's office at City Hall. Show him the aerial photos, and compare them to the County Clerk's maps. County clerks do this type of thing all the time, and will know which section map to look on.

Once the property number is known, the county clerk will can get the owner's addresses; because they send out property tax statements to them every year. They usually don't charge for any of this type of service.

A lot of times, the vacant land may be owned by someone



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out-of-state. It may also be owned by the Government -- such as a National Grassland, or managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). If it is owned by the Government, your chances of using it are probably better. It may also be owned by a land developer.

All this was the easy part. The hard part is trying to persuade the owner to let you use his land to fly rockets. This is tricky too. Look at this from the perspective of the land owner:

He probably doesn't know you, nor how responsible a person you are. He doesn't trust you. Plus, even if you promise to clean up after your launch, it is probably that you will somehow mar the land. This could be caused by driving out into the field in your car, or wearing away the grass from excessive foot traffic.

Before you approach the land-owner with your proposal, find out as much about him as possible. Does he have any kids? What school do they go to? What church does he attend? Maybe you know someone at his church that will give you an introduction. It is the "introduction" by the third party that is the most important. If the land-owner trusts this third person, then he'll be more likely to sit and listen to your proposal.

To repeat: the third party "introduction" is the most crucial step in getting permission to use the land-owner's property. Without it, you don't stand a chance. I wouldn't even bother contacting the land-owner if you don't find a mutual friend.

Finding a mutual friend isn't as tough as you think. The first person to talk to is that County Clerk. They are a wealth of information. They know the history of the county, and know people that know other people. Best yet, often times, they are elected officials. This means they have wealthy friends that helped to pay for their election campaign. Who are the wealthy people? The big land-owners! So prod the County Clerk for information. The more the better.

Another friend might be a local Real Estate agent. They probably sold the property to the owner, so they may know a lot of background information about him.

In a small town, you might even chat with the local barber as you get your hair cut. They seem to know everyone in

the town, and all the good background information you may need. Just sit back and ask him if he knows anyone in town with a big vacant piece of land that you might launch your rockets. It doesn't hurt to ask.

After you get your introduction, you can make your sales pitch.

I would suggest that you approach the land owner by trying to start small. Don't ask right away to fly J and K motors from his field. Instead, tell him you'd like to fly C & D motors. Invite him to come out to a launch at your current site. Don't try to tell me you aren't launching from somewhere... everyone in rocketry has launched from a field "somewhere". I know my fellow rocketeers; we're resourceful people!

An actual launch is a great way to show the landowner what a small rocket does. You'll be demonstrating your safety rules, and how organized the launch is. Then explain to him that you'd like to find a bigger field because you are losing too many rockets that drift away. The owner will be more receptive to small rockets, than to bigger ones. If you are lucky and get to use his land a few times, you may then come back to him and ask permission to launch a few bigger ones. Work gradually. As he gets to know and trust you, he'll allow the bigger models.

In conclusion, finding a flying field is going to take a lot of effort. I don't know if any of these suggestions will help. I suggest you have a "idea" session at your next club meeting. We did something similar at our local club; and we had a ton of suggestions. It may just be a matter of whittling them down one-by-one.

About the Author:

Tim Van Milligan is the owner of Apogee Components (<http://www.apogeerockets.com>) and the curator of the rocketry education web site: <http://www.apogeerockets.com/education>. He is also the author of the books: *"Model Rocket Design and Construction," "69 Simple Science Fair Projects with Model Rockets: Aeronautics"* and publisher of the FREE e-zine newsletter about model rockets. You can subscribe to the e-zine at the Apogee Components web site, or sending an email to: ezine@apogeerockets.com with "SUBSCRIBE" as the subject line of the message.

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