

Beyond Tracy

Report on Possible Land-Out Locations

Site Visits by Tom Anklam and Shamim Mohammed

May 19, 2018

We drove to 5 possible land-out sites: Patterson, Crows Landing, Turlock Airpark, Westley - Valley Crop Dusters, and New Jerusalem. A summary of our findings appear below. At the end, I offer some thoughts on how intermediate XC pilots might use this to extend flights out of Byron to beyond Tracy.

For each site, I comment on suitability for aero and ground retrieves. As Shamim observed, there may be NCSA rules that preclude an aero retrieve, even when it is technically possible; from an unpaved, non-FAA approved runway, for example. So this needs to be sorted out before assuming the aero-retrieves are possible for some of the sites discussed below.

Patterson

Patterson is not a currently functioning airstrip. It is located a short distance to the East of I-5. The runway is oriented parallel to a large, white warehouse that is used as an Amazon Fulfillment Center. The warehouse is white and should be useful in locating the field. The paved strip is about 2300' and oriented due north/south. However, the quality of the asphalt is poor with numerous broken areas (see photo). You could probably roll through the broken area that we observed close-up. It was mostly small pieces of asphalt, not big chunks or pot holes. Ramy says that he landed on the asphalt several years ago without incident.

There are large open fields to the east and west of the runway that are being used to grow hay. The day that we visited, the field to the west was filled with hay bales and farm equipment. Large flatbed trailers were parked parallel to the runway, just off of the pavement. However, the field to the east was newly mowed and wide open. One could easily land a glider there and Shamim commented that he would be comfortable aero-towing from the field, although Club rules may preclude this. Access to the field was open and it would be easy to bring a vehicle in for a ground retrieve. The field is located within the Patterson city limits, just off of I-5, so it should be easy to get an Uber pickup or other transport if needed.

In summary, Patterson is potentially a good land-out location, but you shouldn't count on it unless you have very current information on its status. The day we visited, the east field was wide open, an almost perfect land-out spot. But tomorrow, it might filled with farm equipment or have stacks of hay bales strewn about. Three or four weeks ago, the adjacent fields probably were probably filled with high grass. Patterson is probably most useful if you fly over it on the way out and then, if clear of stuff and brown, hold it for possible use later in the flight. The other option would be for someone to visit the site on the day of the flight and report conditions back to pilots preparing to fly.

Links to some photos taken the day that we visited appear below:

<https://tomank.smugmug.com/South-of-Tracy/i-QWbkVWW/A>

<https://tomank.smugmug.com/South-of-Tracy/i-hMH2kpX/A>

<https://tomank.smugmug.com/South-of-Tracy/i-FZjRJ5v/A>



Patterson Land-out: Note large warehouse to the East. Should be useful in locating the airstrip. The day we visited, the field to the East of the pavement was best area to land.

Crows Landing

Crows Landing is a former NASA test center. It is a huge area with multiple, concrete runways. Should be a no-brainer to land and tow from there, except that it is being used for other purposes. The day that we visited, a local "Race Club" was using a portion of the field for time trials; rendering a portion of the field unusable. Other areas of the field were covered in orange traffic cones and appeared to be used for automotive or motorcycle training.

Despite this, the sheer size of the facility would seem to almost guarantee that a suitable landing site could be found, even if some areas are off limits due to competing activities. It's obviously important to commit at a high enough altitude to get a good look at what's going on before selecting an area to land. It should be fine for aero-tow (the runways are so huge that Shamim jokingly commented that he thought that he could land his Citabria across the width direction).

We drove through an open gate the day that we visited. However, the racing folks were using the same entrance, so it's not a guarantee that the gate is always open. The site is a little more isolated than Patterson, but a ground retrieve should still be relatively easy to arrange. I'm guessing that the site has cell coverage, but unfortunately forgot to check.

From the air, it should be easy to locate Crows Landing, because of its enormity.

Here are links to some photos from the day we visited:

<https://tomank.smugmug.com/South-of-Tracy/i-hTJnQVf/A>

<https://tomank.smugmug.com/South-of-Tracy/i-5WQbkPv/A>

<https://tomank.smugmug.com/South-of-Tracy/i-8mSJVXd/A>



Crows Landing, lots of places to land, but also lots of other things going on there. Important to get a good look from the air before selecting where to touch down.

Turlock Airpark

The Turlock Airpark is a private airstrip on the west side of Turlock. A sign at the field indicated that you need to pay a fee if you land there. The runway itself is in good condition, although it appears much shorter than indicated on the Sectional. Apparently, this is an optical illusion because a check on Google Earth verifies that the runway is about 2100' long. There are displaced thresholds on both ends of the runway and a useable length of 1800' is painted in large numbers on the runway. However, the full length would be useable by a landing glider. Orientation is 330 deg. The name of the field and its elevation are painted on the runway; something that should be useful in locating the field. There were signs at the field indicating that it is also frequently used for RC aircraft operations. It was all-quiet the day that we visited, but this remains a concern. It might be possible to contact the RC Club and find out their schedule for using the field.

Access to the site was open and it would be easy to do a ground retrieve. Aero-retrieve to the north is not a good idea because a busy highway and congested area is just off of the north end of the runway; not so good for rope breaks. A takeoff to the south looks possible, if wind conditions permit. As mentioned, the Airpark is within the City, so ground transportation should be relatively easy to arrange. Ramy says that he has landed there in the past and found it a good option.

Links to some photos appear below:

<https://tomank.smugmug.com/South-of-Tracy/i-kG66268/A>



Turlock Airpark: Notice that the runway is identified by large painted letters. Apparently it's often used by RC aircraft enthusiasts. Landing fees may apply.

Westley – Valley Crop Dusters

As the name implies this is a private, crop dusting strip. The runway is paved, about 1600' long with east/west orientation of 230 degrees. All of the other sites that we visited in this area have north/south oriented runways and we noted that the day we visited had a roughly 90 degree cross wind whereas the other locations had minimal cross wind. The east end of the runway has multiple hazards including parked aircraft and various structures and fences. The strip is about 105 feet wide as measured between the two lines of trees. The day we visited, the weeds along the edges of the runway were low and probably wouldn't be a factor, as long as you keep your wings from dropping during the roll out. But of course, this could change as the growing season proceeds. Also, it appeared that there may have been one or more high spots along the left shoulder of the runway that could cause problems for a glider. You could probably land a 15m glider far enough to the right to avoid these areas. But I would walk the runway before using it as a primary land out option.

Not sure about doing an aero-retrieve from there. Would need to discuss with the owners. Ground retrieve would seem straightforward, again with permission from the owners. Overall, I guess Westley

could serve in a pinch. But uncertainties in useable width combined with the likelihood for cross winds on post-frontal days, and potential for high vegetation would likely dissuade me from relying on this as a primary land-out. It seems that these concerns could be addressed if the owners of the strip were amenable to us using it as a land out and allow us to more closely assess it. But, as likely as not (maybe more so) they would resist the idea of large winged gliders landing in the middle of their crop dusting operation.

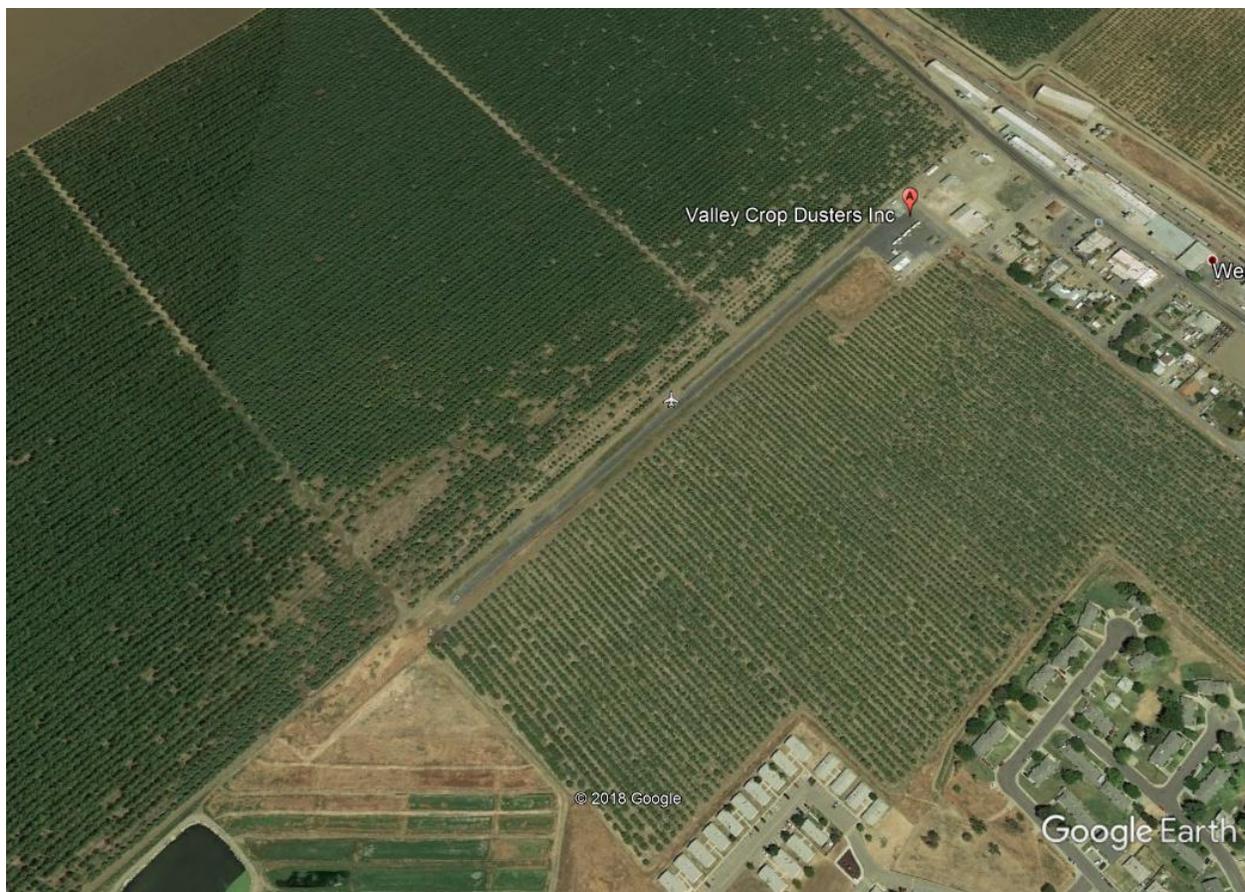
There is another private field near Westley, Del Mar. The runway is longer and more north-south oriented. We weren't able to locate it in the time we had available, but Ramy indicated that Del Mar is a better option than Valley Crop Dusters.

Links to photos are below:

<https://tomank.smugmug.com/South-of-Tracy/i-7wCgvC6/A>

<https://tomank.smugmug.com/South-of-Tracy/i-TJg7kGm/A>

<https://tomank.smugmug.com/South-of-Tracy/i-ZFH948M/A>



Valley Crop Dusters Strip in Westley: Notice that the strip is essentially in the town of Westley and just west of some large warehouse-like buildings.



One concern with Westley is useable width. The yellow line is about 107 feet in length. The day that we visited, the weeds along the side of the runway were low, but this may change as the growing season progresses. Also, it appeared that there may be high spot along the south shoulder. The runway is oriented west/east, so cross winds are more likely on post-frontal days. This exacerbates the concern about narrowness.

New Jerusalem

New Jerusalem is a north/south oriented, 3900' asphalt runway, in apparently good condition, about 6.5 miles east of Tracy Municipal Airport. It is surrounded by fences and locked gates, no terminal buildings or other support facilities, and is accessed via an unmarked dirt road that runs alongside an orchard. In other, words there is no apparent reason for it to be there. However, it is there, and appears to be a good land out option. Aero-retrieve appears to be straightforward.

As noted, the gates leading to field were locked and it appears that a call to the Airport Manager is required to gain access. Ramy says that the combination for the gate lock is in the Club database (of course combinations change from time to time). The only indicator that an airport is at the end of the

access road is a small government sign warning against unauthorized access into the airport protected areas. So for these reasons, ground retrieval appears more involved than at other sites visited.

Links to photos appear below:

<https://tomank.smugmug.com/South-of-Tracy/i-6Q53LZb/A>

<https://tomank.smugmug.com/South-of-Tracy/i-8ZLZDLk/A>



New Jerusalem: Great land out site, with no apparent reason for being there. Aero-retrieve appears the better option as field is surrounded by locked fencing and access is road is unmarked and non-obvious.

Beyond Tracy

For my glider, I typically set the flight computer for McCready 4 and 1500 feet reserve in order to calculate final glide arrival altitude. This results in a no-wind L/D of 28 compared to book value for the ASW 20 between 40 and 43, depending on whose polar you believe. With a 5000 ft cloud base and a 15

kt head (tail) wind component, I calculate that I should be able to fly back and forth between land-out airports separated by about 30 nm and maintain safety glide to one or the other (in other words, the cross-over point to the destination airport, from 5000', is still within glide to the retreat airport). This compares favorably with the distances associated with some of the land-outs that Shamim and I visited:

Tracy to New Jerusalem 6.5 nm

New Jerusalem to Crows Landing 18.7 nm

Crows Landing to Turlock Airpark 13.2 nm

Turlock Airpark to New Jerusalem 25.5 nm

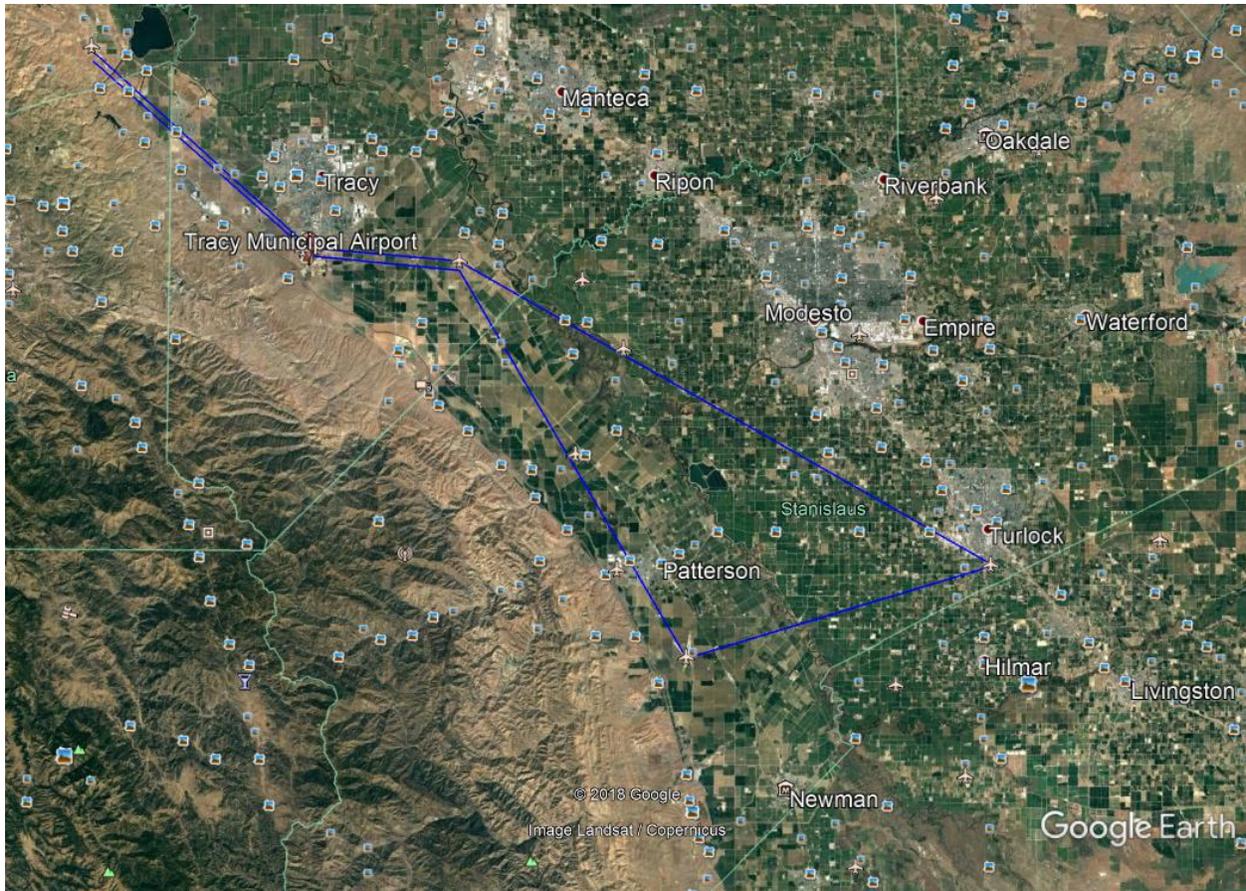
So on a good, but not necessarily epic, Valley soaring day, it should be possible to conservatively fly Byron-Tracy-Jerusalem-Turlock Air-Crows then back to New Jerusalem, Tracy and Byron (graphic of path below). As an aside, I'm not advocating that one should slavishly fly point to point, regardless of conditions. But describing it this way is simpler and illustrates how different land-out sites can be used in combination to extend beyond Tracy.

Total point-to-point distance is 95 nm (176 km). The longest leg, Jerusalem to Turlock, could be done as a downwind leg with the option to divert to Crows if, for some reason, Turlock didn't look good. Also, if Del Mar checks out, it would be an option on the Jerusalem to Turlock leg.

Based on our site visits, I feel pretty confident about using Crows Landing. For Turlock, I want to do a little more homework on RC operations before committing to use it as a primary. The leg from Crows to Jerusalem flies almost directly over Patterson, so it could serve as an additional option, if site conditions are known with certainty.

A second option would be to fly Byron-Tracy-Jerusalem-Crows-Gustine and then back the same way. We didn't visit Gustine, but my impression is that it's a legitimate airport, suitable for landing out. This circuit would be better when lift is limited to the hills west of the Valley.

I would consider completing either of these circuits the makings of a darn good day and a step forward in terms of flight complexity and management compared to what I do now out of Byron. I suspect some of my fellow early career XC pilots would agree.



One possible “Beyond Tracy” task. Total distance is about 95 nm. Longest leg is about 25 nm.