

Visit to Barker Airfield on Saturday January 2, 2010 by Fred Hermanspann and Mark Nyberg

Summary

Barker Airfield is located about 20 minutes north of Smokey Point. The 1,950' grass strip (oriented north to south) is very suitable for low intensity glider operation, although there is considerably less space that we are used to. Airfield is within about 1 or 2 miles of lift sources (e.g. high ground, hills).

Owner has let parachute jumpers use the Airfield for jumping, but that is over. I believe the owner would like to get help covering the costs had helping with the labor involved in maintaining the airfield. He is currently working to make the runway more useable.

Owner said he would definitely consider allowing the glider community to fly gliders there, but would have to consider the conditions. Owner is definitely not willing to sell all or part of his Airfield at this time.

Operating gliders at Barker Airfield for any length of time will require the following:

1. A lease between ESI and the owner of Barker Airfield. This would include the work ESI is responsible for on the Airfield.
2. Some sort of insurance coverage for the airfield owner to protect himself.
3. Use of hangar space for each towplane based there.
4. Possible installation of a door on each T-hangar used.
5. An enclosed space for a golf cart.
6. New operations procedures.
7. Tie-downs for club gliders.
8. Space for trailers for club gliders (and private gliders?).
9. Fuel strategy for the towplane.

Operating with less overall space will be an issue, but not a showstopper.

Location

Barker Airfield is located South of Mount Vernon just West of I5 between the frontage road and the train tracks. Location is 19 miles by car North of Smokey Point. Total land area is approximately 7 acres.

Lat: 48° 22' 29.372", Lon: -122° 20' 19.566. Elevation is about 10' above sea level. No discernable slope.

Airfield Status

- Privately owned by Jeff Brown 360/661-2673
E-mail: jeff@diversifiedmanufacturing.com
- Activated on 3/1/1958.
- First commercial Airfield in Skagit County.
- Hosted Agricultural spraying operations.
- Has hosted general aviation.
- Has hosted Parachute Jumping.
- Has hosted Glider Launches.
- May have hazardous waste from spraying. This may affect what can be done with the land.

Runway

16/34, Length: 1,950', width: 120 ft, surface: healthy grass, sod, no lights, no centerline.

Rail line is built on a berm running along the West side of the runway.

Power and telephone lines run along the East side of I5 – about 750 feet from the runway.

Layout

There are three basic pieces of land:

1. Runway is defined above.
2. Remaining Airfield property is about 650' (measured from East to West) by about 200'.
3. Owner is renting additional space (about 650' by 100') on the South side of the Airfield.

Noise Issues

Airfield was challenged in court within the last few years by Skagit County at the request of a couple of vocal residents. Skagit County sued to shut down the Airfield. The court decided in favor of Barker Airfield.

Buildings

There are 4 major buildings on the property:

- A tiny restaurant located just in the driveway just off the frontage road. The building contains two bathrooms and what used to be the restaurant. The restaurant is no longer used.
- A shed located on the SE corner of the property near the road. I do not know what it contains.
- A square hangar containing a small aircraft, a workshop and toys.
- A long set of T-hangars that contain an assortment of cars, aircraft, pumps, tractor, mowers, etc.

The property is located 10 feet or less above sea level. Well water is rather brackish. Property has a septic tank that requires periodic pumping. The owner intends to upgrade the airfield and its run-down facilities over the next 2 years.

Runway Condition

Runway is healthy grass, but has had drainage problems (e.g. muddiness, standing water) in past winters. A ditch runs along the train tracks side of the runway to hold excess water. There is no path for water to run out of the ditch. The owner has used a disc to turn over the soil to provide better water penetration and level the soil to provide a better runway.

The runway was wet, but there was no mud or standing water when we were there.

Jeff has plans to remove dips from runway and develop a crown.

Suitability for Glider Operations

Space will be a challenging issue at Barker Airfield because they have much less space than we are used to at Arlington Airfield. Enlarging the airport and adding new building may run counter to zoning. Contamination from previous crop duster operations may also pose limitations on what can be done on the property.

- There is lots of space for staging gliders at the South end of the runway for launching to the North. There is not additional space (other than the 125' runway width) to stage gliders at the North end. Staging large gliders at the North end may be challenging. Owner suggested that we might lease a bit of land on the North end of the runway for staging gliders. It may be hazardous to move gliders around on the north end of the runway while gliders are taking off and landing.
- There may not be a lot of space for tying down club gliders.
- There may not be enough space for lots of glider trailers.
- Runway length looks very good.
- The local area seems to have lots of landable fields on all sides.
- Farmer with fields adjacent to the Airfield (on the north and south) is reported to have low crops (e.g. potatoes, beans) most of the time, and grow corn every 6 or 7 years.

Suitability of Winch Operations

Property on both the north and south ends of the runway is owned by the same farmer. Jeff explained that the farmer is not interested in selling any of his land. We do not know how the farmer feels about leasing some of his land.

Distance from the North end of the runway is approximately 2000' from East Hickox Rd.

Distance from the South end of the runway to West Stackpole Road is approximately 1100'.

Total distance between roads (parcel north of Airfield + runway + parcel south of Airfield) is about 5100'.

Without use of additional space off the ends of the runway, cable length would be limited to about 1,950' – not enough to be practical for winch operation.