

# FLIGHT INTO THE MUSKEG

by ROY GRAY

The task for July 4th, the second day of the 1962 Canadian Nationals, was free distance, and I needed all the points I could get and my Gold Badge distance leg.

I took off in the Ka-6 from Regina Municipal Airport at 11:40 and was waved off at 2000 feet. (All heights mentioned are above ground; Regina is 1891' MSL.) My intended direction was due east, to a declared goal at Souris airport, approximately 200 miles away.

After an hour and a half and only forty miles out I was down to 2000 feet again. Twenty minutes later I finally got a thermal that I could hang on to. It took me to 8000 feet and I was on my way again.

I was now faced with a large thunderstorm directly on my intended course. The wind had also changed from west to southwest, so that the only way for any distance was to the northeast. For this direction I had no maps after the first 70 miles but there was strong lift so I was off for as far as I could go.

The fields gradually got smaller and the land below became quite rough. Then I saw ahead something that I did not recognize. As I got closer I discovered that for over 35 miles ahead there was nothing but bush and lakes—the Duck Mountain Forest Reserve. I was over the west edge of this forest at over 8000 feet so I started across and could eventually see the clear fields on the other side as well as several towns.

Near the town of Winnipegosis on the shore of Lake Winnipegosis, after 5 hours and 220 miles, I was down to 2500 feet and could see nothing ahead but large lakes and a lot more bush. I was flying around looking for a good field and having a good look at the country, when I found weak lift which I circled in, not really caring too much whether I got up or not since I had apparently gone as far as the terrain would allow. After climbing slowly for about 20 minutes, low cloud started to form about 1000 feet above me and below the higher cumulus. Lift became very good in the clear air beside the low cloud.

After reaching 7000 feet I decided to go across the lake to a few houses and a road on the far side. I arrived there at 5000 feet and from here could see another road, a good

field and what appeared to be houses farther on across the north end of Lake Manitoba. As I got closer I found that there were no houses along the road but the field was very large and from 500 feet it looked like a hay field next to a swamp which turned out to be Basket Lake. I landed at 5:50 P.M. on the dry muskeg after 6 hours and 10 minutes flying and I did not have any idea where I was.

The first thing I did was try to walk through the bush to the gravel road, but after over half an hour of walking I discovered that I was lost. I tried to find the road by climbing a tree and after a good look around and no sign of the road I saw the white wing of the sailplane. I did not realize that it was so easy to walk in a circle in the bush. After making my way back to the glider over an hour had elapsed and I was right back where I started, feeling tired and very thirsty. I carried no food or water with me (I will from now on) and the lack of water appeared to be a major problem.

I now walked to a shack a mile away that I had seen on my approach. I broke the lock to try and find something to drink inside. There were many empty pop and beer bottles but nothing to drink. When I turned to go outside I saw a pump which really made things seem much better. I could not swallow the first water I pumped from this well because it tasted like swamp water, but after pumping more water it began to taste better.

I now made stakes to use in tying the aircraft down. After walking back to the glider through the muskeg and the swarms of mosquitoes I got it tied down just as it started to rain. Fortunately the rain was light and did not last very long.

I again returned to the shack and

tried to rest, since I had no idea how far I would have to walk to get to a house, but the mosquitoes made this almost impossible. It was now beginning to get dark and I decided to take some water with me and start walking along the track which led into the shack from the gravel road. It took half an hour to reach the road and by this time it was 10:00 P.M. and quite dark but the white gravel road stood out well.

I found a farm house after walking about eight miles more. It was midnight when I woke the occupants and was very fortunate in that they could not seem to do enough for me. They gave me food and coffee and I now found out just where I was. I was told that north of where I landed there were no towns for over 150 miles. It was a ten-mile drive to the nearest village, St. Martin, Manitoba, where we woke the telephone operator and got in touch with many anxious people back at the Regina Airport.

My crew had stopped at the Mounted Police office in Brandon, Manitoba, 160 miles south of St. Martin, to wait for word from Regina as to my location.

I stayed in the hotel at St. Martin that night and my crew arrived at 8:00 A.M. the following morning, a roundabout route being necessary as the Lake Manitoba ferry does not run at night.

The muskeg I had landed in was very dry and by driving very slowly along the track and across the muskeg we were able to get the car and trailer almost to the sailplane. The mosquitoes were very numerous. With some help from the local people of St. Martin we quickly had the sailplane in the trailer and were on our way back to Regina. We arrived back at the airport at 8:30 P.M. that evening. My crew had driven almost 1000 miles for a flight of 264 miles, my Gold Badge was completed and I had earned 1000 points for the day.

