

History of The Radial Ramp 1977 - 2008

In August 1977, it became apparent that The Tennessee Tree Toppers (TTT) needed their own flying site. The Henson Gap site where you are now standing was purchased in 1978. A large rectangular ramp consistent with the typical design of the day was erected that fall, courtesy of TTT founders Dick Stern and Don Guess. Air flow over the first ramp created dangerous launching conditions, demanding a better method and an innovative solution. A blown launch by Dennis van Dam, taking Chuck Toth over the edge, was the beginning of the end of "The Ramp of Terror".

A day at Edisto Island in the winter of 1981 provided the inspiration needed in the shape of a horseshoe crab placed on a small dune and facing into the breeze. Imaginations soared and Dennis Van Dam immediately returned home to begin the design process of something never before imagined - a *radial* ramp. The initial budget was authorized April 10, 1982 and dozens of Tree Toppers began their assigned tasks.

Radial truss construction began in April 1982 at the old Post Office in Wildwood, Georgia. On site construction began May 1 and was completed on May 10. As we finished decking, we knew we had created something special. We exceeded our budget but launches became pleasurable instead of dreaded, and the ramp lasted twice as long as expected.

The ramp and its untreated wood trusses under the flat section endured for nine years. Obvious repairs were needed by 1991. Iron workers and Tree Topper members Tom Churay and Casey Deering led the effort. Tom donated the steel and Tree Topper volunteers provided the labor. The project was completed that March and the steel is in good shape today.

The natural beauty of the radial ramp design has been enjoyed by untold numbers of pilots and non-pilots, alike, from across the country and around the world. The ramp's longevity and reconstruction are testaments to the cohesiveness of the hang gliding community. Every launch from the ramp is a celebration of realized dreams...to soar.

Revamp The Ramp

In December 2007, a group of Tennessee Tree Toppers met to discuss the deteriorating condition of the wooden support structure under the radial portion of the ramp. Jim Lamb suggested replacing the radial supports with curved steel struts and installing new decking. The estimated cost of over \$20,000 was huge, though, and the time needed to raise that much money was expected to surpass the remaining life of the ramp. Jim then made a most incredible challenge. He offered to match up to \$10,000 of the funds raised by the club for repairing the ramp. The announcement was made during the TTT awards banquet that same month and the "Revamp the Ramp" fund raiser took off.

Brainstorming ensued on *TTTFlymail* over the next two weeks. The board of directors decided to encourage donations by offering decking planks "for sale" for a contribution of \$100 each. In just eight weeks, The Tree Toppers "sold" the equivalent of 220 planks to Tree Toppers and friends from all across America and Canada. With Jim's matching contribution, the total raised came to \$32,000. S & H Steel Erectors of Chattanooga won the bid and installed new steel supports and concrete footings in a matter of weeks. TTT decking crews worked fast and furiously over five weekends, completing the new ramp in May 2008.

The radial ramp at Henson Gap has stood resolutely for 26 years. It has become a hang gliding icon recognized world-wide for its graceful lines and forgiving launch characteristics. The reconstructed ramp should last another 50 years and launch hundreds more hang glider pilots to soar high above the Sequatchie Valley. The TTT has thrived and accomplished so much during its 34 years of continuous operation because of the vision, dedication, and volunteerism of its membership. The Tennessee Tree Toppers can rightfully claim the distinguished title of "*The Best Hang Gliding Club in America*".

The Tennessee Tree Toppers World Famous Radial Ramp



Vision. Dedication. Volunteers.

Dennis van Dam had the vision to design and supervise construction of the original radial ramp in 1982.

Hank Hughes was instrumental in securing our 45-acre LZ in 1991.

Jim Lamb generously donated \$10,000 towards the reconstruction of the ramp in 2008.

Original Ramp Builders - 1982

Nick and Mary Berry • Bryan Burnside • Henry Cherry • Cliff Covington
Dennis van Dam • Jim Diamondtopple • Curly and Katie Dunn • Dave Freeman • Jimmy Griggs • Larry Guetthoff • Denny Haldeman • Dave Higdon • Carol Hullander • Rick Jacob • Tom Phillips • Mark Poling • Barry and Cindy Price • John Sarri • Dave Schmidt • Doc Smith • Chris Starbuck
Chuck Toth • Terry Tweedy • Bruce Wolf • Charlie Yowell

Ramp Improvement Volunteers - 1991

Nick and Mary Berry • Chris Blythe • Bryan Burnside • Tom Churay • Bill Colvin • Casey and Cindy Deering • Curly Dunn • Gary and Alice Engelhardt • Dave Freeman • Guy Freeman • Larry Herndon • Dennis Michels • Tom Phillips • Mark Poling • Jim Salmon • Dave Schmidt • Charlie Yowell

Commemorative Plaque Donated by Mike Nash

Revamp The Ramp Donations February - May 2008

Cloud Base

James Anderson • Keith Atkins • Buddy Cutts • Ollie Gregory • Jim Lamb
A-I-R ATOS USA • Mike Nash In Honor of Rob Kells: 1955 - 2008 A Great Friend and Hang Gliding Leader • Nate Newkirk • The Ohio Flyers • James Stinnett • Jim Yocum

Top of The Stack

David Giles • Ray Helman • Steve Kroop - Flytec USA • Cliff Whitney

High Flyers

Alain and Candace Azurmendi • Donald Banas • Larry Bunner • Bill Colvin
Rob Dallas • Jeff and Allie Dodgen • Richard Heckman • Scotty Hubbard
Jeff Laughrey • John and Susan Lawton • Steve and Kathy Lee • Sven Matern • Don and Stacy Murdock • Jeff Nibler • Steve Prater • Terry and Linda Presley • Tom Primavera • Tom Prouhet • Dan and Cindy Shell • Rick Simpson • Chris Starbuck • Davis Straub - *The Oz Report* • Jeff Wilson
In Memory of Kim Meriwether: 1953 - 1989 Fallen Tree Topper, Friend to All

Soaring Partners

John Alden • Ken Allen • Alan Atkins • Susan Atkins • Bill Baker • TJ Beatty
Steve Bellerby • Ken and Dottie Berry • Mark Bolt • Phil Brown • John Christof
In Memory of John and Jane Christof • Mike Compton • Kraig Coomber - Moyes USA • Roger Coxon • Gary "Sugarman" Davis • Wayne Devilbiss • Marc Fink • Vince Furrer • Mark Gardner • Ricker Goldsborough
In Memory of Joy Elliott • Jackie Gregory • Clark Harlow • John Hill • Colin Hodsdon • Steve Johnson • Jerry Keller • David Kissick • John Lane • Pete Lehmann • Scott Leonard • Greg Lloyd
In Memory of Henry "From Hamilton" Maciesowicz • Barron McKinley • Ralph and Pam Miller • Terry Mull • Rick Mullins • Randy Newberry • Dennis Pagen • Sean Pepper • Eric Proulz • Stephen Rickert • Kevin Sheridan • Roger and Chady Sherrod
Henry Stiriz • John and Patricia Sumner • David and Bonnie Sweigart
Kinsley Sykes • Christopher Thale • Gary and Connie Thompson • Wayne Walker • Stephen Walko • Julie Weber • Barbara Weidemann • Michael Williams • Wills Wing • John Wright • Roger Wright

TTT Supporters

Larry and Lesa Ball • Bob Belshan • Lindsey and Kay Chew • Mark DeMarino • James Donovan • John Dullahan • Paul Farina • Gerry Grossnegger • Cathy Gwozdz • John and Mary Hall • Craig Hassan • Robin Hastings
On Behalf of the Rio Grande Soaring Association • Thomas Ide Walter Jordan • Peter Kane • Ron Kellerman • Linda Kramer • Thomas Lanning • Chris McCluer • Keven Morland • Michal Moskaliev • Frank and Deb Murphy • Ron Pasch • Robb Pepper • James Rowan • Wes Schield
Holger Stephan • Mark Stump • Mark Thogmartin • Eric Troili • Paul Voight
Paul Wennerstrom • Jeff Williams • Alan Wilson • Larry and Linda Wright

Ramp Revamp Construction Volunteers

James Anderson • Keith Atkins • Slava Batyrev • George Brisson • Bill Colvin • Buddy Cutts • Jeff and Allie Dodgen • Eric Donaldson • Adrian Dybwad • Ricker Goldsborough • Ollie Gregory • Clark Harlow • Ray Helman • Scotty Hubbard • Rick Jacob • David Kissick • Jeff Laughrey
Steve and Kathy Lee • Mike Nash • Nate Newkirk • Jeff Nibler • Kyle Oslos
Aric Paulson • Tom Phillips • Mark Poling • Tom Prouhet • Dan and Cindy Shell • Roger and Chady Sherrod • Jeff Shipman • Chris Smith • Dan Strobel • Heather Stoddard • David Sweigart • Marco and Julie Weber
Jeff Wilson