

# A New Flying Site Way out West

by Mike Simi

Photos courtesy the author except as noted



The Diablo Valley Radio Controllers' beautiful new field is situated in the rolling hills of Northern California in the small rural community of Pittsburg. Greg Gallegos photo.

**WAY OUT WEST**, in AMA's District X, there exists a secret: the Diablo Valley Radio Controllers, or DVRC. This club has been around for a long time, and although the name isn't too exciting, that's where any connection with ordinary ends.

**The DVRC facilities** are located on the east side of the San Francisco Bay Area. This radio-control flying organization was started in 1967, when a group of local hobby-shop customers teamed up to promote RC flight safety and exchange ideas.

DVRC enjoyed its early existence at a half-dozen venues in the area, but, as is the case with many AMA chartered sites, nothing was permanent. That all ended in 2001.

After some success operating at a regional park, the DVRC group's time ran out and it had to start looking for a new place. But this time would be different; it

was time to look for a "permanent home." The 32 years of renting space would become history.

**The small town** of Pittsburg, California, is a semirural community located along the banks of the Sacramento River. The local constabulary had decided to abandon a long-unused pistol-firing range situated back in the green, rolling hills of Northern California. The site even had a "house" that was used for urban training. An arrangement was made, and DVRC signed a 10-year lease with a 10-year option to occupy and maintain this property.

But not so fast. There was still an airfield to build, and there was nothing flat about the terrain. A long, winding dirt road led to a small hill, on top of which sat what would become the DVRC clubhouse. During the winter of 2001-2002 this "new" club's membership decided to get the job done.

The initial task was to bulldoze a small hill located roughly 50 feet below the "clubhouse," for a runway. This would not be just any runway, though; it would be a 500-foot-long, paved airstrip carved into the top of a mountain! And it needed a name.

One of the founding fathers of DVRC was Orin Allen—the son of the first African-American pilot to fly coast to coast. That was a huge feat in the years before World War II. Therefore, the "Thomas C. Allen Memorial Airpark" was born.

The new airstrip languished in the state of a usable dirt runway during most of that first year while work on the abandoned building and runway drainage began. Having met wildlife-preservation requirements, the drainage system was approved, and the clubhouse—with its large rock fireplace, meeting room, kitchen, and restroom—was getting a new look. The substantial observation deck was also a prize.

It was time to make a flying field. Up to this point club members and their guests were content with the dirt runway. With the donated help of local contractors and donated materials and equipment, DVRC members dug in and saw their new paved runway completed, along with a small alternate for windy days. (Windy days are a facet of this site I'll cover later.)

Another "freebie" arrived in the form of artificial turf for the surface of the pilots' pit enclosure. The San Francisco 49ers football organization was the contributor.

At this point it was time to relax and enjoy the flying, but that didn't last long; the group involved in this enterprise were dreamers, and they wanted to see more.

As the end of that first summer approached, a series of permanent safety fences was erected and five access taxiways became available. A 120-foot-long shade structure was erected over the pilots' area, and no less than a dozen aircraft maintenance tables were incorporated into this substantial building.

As time passed DVRC recognized the growing interest in rotary-wing aircraft, and a large, grassy helicopter operating area was built. It gets



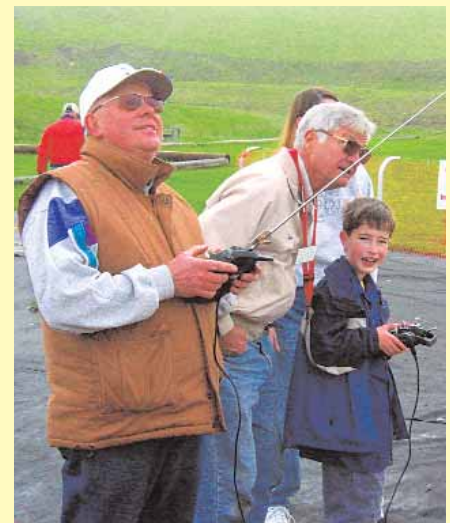
Can you say "picturesque"? The DVRC flying site sits on a long-unused pistol-firing range. Gallegos photo.



DVRC members Jack Schonberger and Ron Pogue prepare for a morning of Giant Scale flying. Nice benches!



A gathering of Cub Scouts at the DVRC annual Kids' Day fly-in. This is a civic-minded club.



Jack Schonberger and Bill Bradt enjoy teaching the youngsters how to fly RC.



Participants at the annual gathering on Veterans Day in November at the DVRC field.



It doesn't get any better than this! The finished site with paved runway and pavilion. Gallegos photo.



Longtime DVRC board member Phil Young with his Scale aircraft.



The DVRC site as construction progresses. The members put in a lot of "sweat equity," but the results were certainly worth it! Gallegos photo.



Father and son Jeff (center) and Travis (R) Raaberg use a buddy box to instruct the local Cub Scout pack.



Author Mike Simi displays one of his warbirds on Veterans Day in 2005.



New 2005 DVRC member Kristie Hicks gets ready to solo.



Kristie Hicks and Phil Young enjoy a DVRC monthly meeting lunch at the field.



This gives some idea of the topography around the new DVRC field. Gallegos photo.

substantial use these days.

Slowly, while continuing to enjoy the new field, the members became restless again. Another notch was carved in a hillside, and the barbecue/picnic area was opened. Parking and an RV camping site were added behind a protected hill that once enclosed the pistol range.

Spectator bleachers were assembled between the helicopter pads and the fixed-wing areas, as were flagpoles, a wind sock, and an impound building—everything a modern airfield would need. DVRC members even had to “X” the runway because they were getting occasional full-scale traffic!

**In November 2002** the DVRC airfield was formally dedicated with a grand opening presided over by the city of Pittsburg’s mayor Nancy Parent and police chief Aaron Baker. After that it was time to fly again.

But something was missing ... Aha! Power and water! Because of the facility’s somewhat remote location, no reasonable amount of thought was given to running power and water lines, so DVRC decided to use the existing terrain to its advantage.

The club recently completed a gravity water-supply system, a septic tank and leech field, and the construction of two concrete pads for the power generator. Soon to be finished are the flying-field

restrooms. Can you picture yourself doing at-the-field repairs with power tools and then washing up at the sink? Or firing up the RV and plugging in for an overnight stay?

All of these were hands-on projects carried out by members, and everything continues to pass local codes and ordinances. This is a dedicated and hardworking group of RCers, and their community involvement has put DVRC out in front as a resource for the families of these Bay Area suburbs.

**After all this** hype and promotion, you would think there *must* be something to complain about. Actually a couple things *do* come to mind that some might consider negative.

The surrounding terrain does test one’s mettle, but it has proven to be just another challenge to club members. The flying skills of these RC fixed-wing and helicopter pilots are outstanding!

And remember the wind I alluded to earlier? It’s not much fun trying to land in crosswinds in the hills.

The summer months in Northern California do present us with the strong westerlies, but then again this area doesn’t have any poor-weather flying seasons. So on the windier days of mid-summer, DVRC members enjoy arguably the finest glider and Soaring venue in the west.

The nearby hills are thick with thermals, and access is all two-wheel drive. Late summer, fall, and most days of the winter are a power flier’s delight, thanks to a newly purchased wireless weather station.

Oh, and the locals used to leave presents on the runway for the DVRC club fliers. However, the new cattle guard at the gate has taken care of that.

**DVRC is proud** to be a permanent part of the community of Pittsburg, hosting everything from the local Veterans Day commemoration to Boy Scout Troop functions and a continuing association with the Orin Allen Youth Guidance Center.

Look us up if you are ever out West. DVRC may be the best-kept RC secret in AMA. When you visit, ask anyone in the area. He or she will probably say, “Oh yeah; it’s right up the hill. Turn right at the firehouse.” Didn’t I mention that we have our own firehouse?

There are currently 155 club members, and that number is growing. The facility has drawn a great deal of attention and rave reviews. Big events are finally in the future, and the club and its members are what AMA is all about. Check us out at [www.dvrc.org](http://www.dvrc.org). **MA**

Mike Simi  
[mikesimi@comcast.net](mailto:mikesimi@comcast.net)

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