

The "Golden" Adventure

San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge. Under it, more than 40 percent of California's water flows, clashing with the Pacific tidal surge and creating waves rivalling an open sea squall's. Through it, winds funneled by the narrow mountain pass blow at speeds up to 60 miles per hour. And from it, nearly 1200 people have jumped to their deaths

since its 1937 opening.

So jumping from the Golden Gate Bridge is nothing new. But in 1984, Ronald Broyles added a new twist: he made the act *repeatable* by jumping with a parachute. Here is Broyles' own account of his historic leap, the first recorded BASE jump from San Francisco's world-famous span.

by Ron Broyles

At 1:30 a.m. on July 4, 1984, I walked from the deck of the 42-foot motor launch "Truth Ferry," and tried to find my car. The thick fog of the San Francisco Bay had engulfed the Toyota along with the vehicles of the other 28 members of the operations crew.

I had arrived from Los Angeles the previous day with three cameramen and \$50,000 worth of video equipment in order to shoot my first BASE jump. Our plane had landed at San Francisco International Airport in the heavy soup, and now I was slightly depressed and more than a little concerned. All our preparation and organization, not to mention money, were hanging in the balance. A clear day tomorrow, and we would film a great adventure; a repeat of today's weather would mean an abort; and I simply couldn't afford to wait an extra day for conditions to improve.

Not being all that religious, I found myself whispering a prayer as I searched for a blue sedan in the parking lot of the waterfront hotel where we were staying.

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Wandering about aimlessly in the heavy mist, my thoughts began to wander. A jump from the 746-foot north tower of the Golden Gate Bridge ... it seemed like the perfect way to start off this sport of low-altitude skydiving I had been hearing so much about at California's Perris Valley DZ. I had only been jumping since Jan-

uary, and this big leap would be my 22nd parachute jump of any kind. But as the legendary Carl Boenish had told me in one of our many conversations: "There's really not a lot of comparison to skydiving." Armed with the reassurance of this knowledge, and the gut feeling that I could execute all the instructions I had been given by several BASE veterans, I set out to organize a crew and scout the bridge in March.

I made two trips to San Francisco to check access and logistical problems. How could we get onto the top of the tower with a large, broadcast quality video camera, radios, and my rig -- all without being spotted? There was plenty of scuttlebutt about cameras and alarms and constantly roving security patrols aimed at preventing suicide leaps. Security was the tightest of any structure that had public access, I was told. Well, I've heard that kind of talk before. Having climbed six of the world's tallest buildings, including San Francisco's Transamerica Pyramid, I knew a little about security and its weaknesses. Getting one's climbing equipment attached to a building at 4 a.m. and then ascending to a point beyond the reach of a 70-foot hook and ladder truck, between guard shifts, was good training in silence and evasion! Consequently, I brought along several members of the team which had been with me on my previous excursions, confident that they could calm the nerves of some of the less adventurous of the crew. *No one* wanted to get arrested!

Our first trip was pretty fruitless. But on the second scouting expedition we were extremely fortunate: a workman had left the hatch on the eastern leg of the tower's base unlocked. The foundation of the bridge touched dry land on the Marin County side of the river, and an access road led

