

Michigan Team-1 History

Michigan Team-1 was formed on November 12, 1988 by a gathering of rocket flyers from Ohio, Indiana and Michigan. We are Prefecture #9 of the Tripoli Rocketry Association, and a federal 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation. We are also registered as a Michigan nonprofit corporation. See the Michigan Team-1 website (www.team1.org) to view the Hall of Honor for past and present officers of Team-1.

Our first high-power rocket launch was held on March 25, 1990 on the John & Virginia Chesnut farm near US-12 and Avery Road, east of Three Oaks, MI. We held spring and fall launches here until 2015. Past issues of the *Team Talk!* newsletter are available on the website, and have many accountings of these launches. Michiana Rocketry, prefecture #78, now holds Three Oaks launches throughout the year. Some members of Team-1 felt that driving to southwest Michigan was too long of a drive for regularly scheduled launches, so the hunt began for a closer launch site in southeast Michigan.



The Prefect at the time, Stuart Davis, discovered the Du Russel Potato Farm near Manchester while he was working at Chrysler Corporation's nearby test track. Coincidentally, and unbeknownst to Stuart, the Du Russel's were long time neighbors of founding Prefect Jerry Kolb's family when both were active farmers in Sterling Heights, a suburb of Detroit. Expanding development forced the Du Russels to relocate to the rural Manchester area in 1970. The farm proved to be an excellent place to fly rockets, with large fields and few rocket-eating trees.



Alas, it did not last; after about four years of great flying, the farm was sold to a large corporation in 2014. The new owners were focused on growing vegetables only; thus, they forbade all future rocket activities on their property.

Michigan Team-1 suddenly faced the nightmare of all high-power rocketry prefectures everywhere: we had lost our launch field. Realizing the

dilemma at hand, member Jeremy Smith presented to the Team-1 BoD the opportunity to fly at newly-renamed Alkay Airport near Clio. Jeremy's father, Doug Smith, had recently retired and realized his dream of buying a 90-acre grass-strip airport. Jeremy secured permission from his father to fly rockets at the airport, and Team-1 was back in the rocket-flying business! The first launch at Alkay was held on December 5, 2015. From reading the launch report of the day, it was a HUGE success. Flights here occur under an FAA waiver of 5280 feet above ground level (AGL), due to local conditions and the proximity of Bishop International Airport near Flint. While this waiver altitude is modest by high power rocketry standards, it does provide a venue where flyers can perfect their craft and ready themselves for higher altitudes allowed elsewhere.



Alkay Airport continues to be a great place to meet and fly on a monthly basis (except for the winter months). Team-1 and the owners of the airport have a great working relationship, which allows storage of our main trailer and other equipment at the airport.



Team-1 demonstrates high-power rockets during the annual one-day Alkay Airport Fly-In/Walk-In open house held in late summer. This is a fun family-oriented event, well attended by locals. Team-1 also interacts with other aviation-oriented clubs at Alkay, such as the Michigan Ultralight Airplane Club, and the Cloudbusters Model Airplane Club. Team-1 will also provide launch support to youth groups such as scouting on up to college level activities.



In 2018, Team-1 flew high power for the first time at Saginaw Prairie Farms Cooperative, near Birch Run, Michigan. Discovering this launch site and developing the ability to fly rockets there was largely due to the efforts and perseverance of Prefect Norm Nazaroff. The FAA waiver allows flyers to fly as high as 17,999 feet AGL, depending on conditions. Due to agricultural operations, flying here is restricted to winter months.

While the biggest motors flown at Alkay Airport are typically J and K class, the much-higher waiver at Birch Run has allowed the use of up to M class motors.



In the years since Michigan Team-1's 1988 formation, launch sites have included Alkay Airport near Clio, Chesnut Farm near Three Oaks, Ithaca, Lyon Oaks County Park in Lyon Township, Michigan State University property near Lansing, and Saginaw Prairie Farms Cooperative near Birch Run, and West Branch.

In the early days of Tripoli Rocketry Association, it was common for prefectures to borrow TRA launch pads to fly high power. This needed to change in order to save on scheduling time and the costs of shipping heavy hardware around the country.



In the 1990's, Prefect Stuart Davis recognized that we needed our own stable of versatile launch pads. Stuart formed a "pad team" to this end. Frank Coppola obtained the steel at a very substantial discount. Tony Sanfilippo cut all the steel to length, and Paul Bonham assembled them into the final product. The result was a collection of some of the finest, most durable high

power launch pads in the hobby. Over the years members like Bob Schultz and Chuck McNeice have performed structural maintenance and repainting of the pads.

Team-1 continues to add new members, both young and seasoned, to its membership rolls. In 2025 the membership count is stable at about 50 current members in good standing.

Note: An earlier accounting of Team-1's history can be found in the Team Talk Summer 2001 edition of Team Talks found on our website in Team Talk downloads