

SkyWords – Aug 08

The Newsletter of the DHPC

No you haven't missed the July issue. I have decided to call this the Aug issue to give you the false impression that I am ahead of the game...

Martin's Moan

OK, OK, I know. The majority of you just want to fly. You are prepared to drive vast distances to do just that, but you are not particularly interested in club nights or social events, although you may glance at the newsletter occasionally...

Whilst we have some very hard working members on the DHPC committee, we also have a number of vacancies which we cannot fill. Newsletter editor is the one closest to my heart at the moment, but we also need to fill other posts such as chief club coach. We desperately need enthusiastic committee members who want to give something back to their club. There are lots of things we would like to organise for members: interesting club nights; organised coaching sessions, zip wire reserve re-packing, and more besides but of the 152 members there don't seem to be too many of you willing to volunteer for the committee.

So in order to encourage you to stand for a committee post, and to reward those that already have, I am considering a set of proposals for the next AGM. For a start we should increase the travelling expenses from their current rate of 20p to 30p per mile. Secondly active committee members should be given a club sweatshirt that they can wear with pride when meeting farmers, new members, etc. And finally committee members should not have to pay membership fees. How about that?

See you at the AGM in November...

Baildon Sod

No you haven't missed it yet. Any time now...

BPCup

The Dales are hosting the BPCup this weekend (1-3 Aug) so choose your site carefully otherwise it might be a bit busy.

Website/Sites' Guide

We have experienced a slight, erm, technical problem with improvements to the website but we hope to get the sites' guide uploaded shortly. Don't print it all off straightaway though because the plan is for all members to get a complementary hard copy in due course.

Club Nights

Kate is getting bored with keeping her own company on the first Thursday of the month at the Riverside Hotel in Ilkley so she won't be there this month (Aug). Formal club nights start again on 4 Sep. We have booked Ben Keayes as guest speaker for Thu 2 Oct so put that date in your diary as a definite. He will be giving us a slide show and talk about his expeditions in Nepal.

Ilkley and Baildon

Ilkley and Baildon both lie under the Leeds/Bradford Class D airspace. Not considered to be a problem at Baildon, but do not be tempted to fly higher than 500' AGL or go XC from Ilkley.

Martin Baxter (mr Baxter@hotmail.co.uk)

Ager: Flying the Spanish Pre-Pyrenees

by
H. H. Tsai

Ager is a very special place. A sleepy pretty little Catalan village perched in a wide valley in the foothills of the Pyrenees may not sound like much but for its backdrop. It is located in the heart of the Sierra del Montsec a range with its 40 km of almost unbroken rock faces, topping out at 1000 m over the valley floor. The mighty tectonic forces that wrought the Pyrenees when the Iberian peninsula pushed into France lifted these mountains and here in the crumple zone of the pre-Pyrenees, mighty ranges of calcareous rock were pushed up like layered cake. These are arranged as East-West ranges, the mightiest is the Montsec d'Ares that dominates the Ager skyline. The high Pyrenees to the north protects it from strong northerlies and draws valley winds up from the south. It also means that any frontal precipitation tends to fizzle out leaving this area remarkably dry, hence the name Montsec or "dry mountain". This unique combination of geography and aerology makes this a spectacular place to fly.

With the poor British summer nagging on Jamie, Steve and I hooked up with Winston Gliddon of Wegofly for a week of paragliding. And what a week it turned out to be. We flew our socks off every day, several times a day and I clocked up 20+ hours airtime, so much so that my GPS memory filled up completely and overwrote my first two day's tracklogs. It would take too long to describe all the flying in detail but for flavour I shall describe a few of the more memorable ones.

The top launch site at Coll d'Ares is big and glider-friendly. Even the fresh-out-of-school CP would feel at home here. At 1540 m high it is 900m (3,000 ft) above the landing zone giving pilots lots of time to find lift. It has two tiers with a flat terrace in between. This gives the pilot two chances to pick up thermals releasing from the upper or lower slopes. The typical day would be thermalling in improving conditions in the morning. If you do sink out, there are huge landing fields and bomb-out fields. Winston is tireless at ferrying pilots back up to launch if they do bomb out. The big cliffs in hot sunshine throw off good thermals but it is often more satisfying to go thermal hunting in the vast valley. The pig farm is a reliable thermal source which could be sniffed out with its distinct stink. The monastery perched on the hillside is also a house thermal. Farmers harvesting is also a good bet. It did not take me long to work out which bits work best.

The first day started with rather low cloud with the tops in orographic. Winston took us to the lower launch where we launched to get the feel of the place and the air. On my second flight the sun came out over the valley and it was possible to thermal to base and hop from one source to another for a couple of hours of thermalling practice on my Axis Vega II.

Base was much higher on the second day at the more typical 2000 m. We flew the length of the ridge, working on thermals kicking off the rocks. Eventually at the end of the ridge I picked up one that took me to base and I drifted with it. It got a little sucky and I pulled my ears to get out. I was by now behind the hill and committed to xc. There was the usual sink behind the hill then a drift as the southerly wind took me over the wide plains behind. Passing picturesque villages, castles perched on hilltops and a large lake, the Pantano de Terradets behind the mighty rock faces of Montrebei. The sky was rather blue so I just drifted, admiring the views and finally landing near the town of Tremp.

By the third day I was getting more familiar with the site and, having pored over Winston's maps and studied the XC lines to take into account the region's unique aerology and topology, I was plotting a good XC. There are three classic XC lines to Berga (90Km), Castejon (57Km) and Organya (52Km), the latter a task goal of the 2007 WPC. Also there are plenty of triangle flights in front of the range and out and returns to Vilanova following the ridge. Forecast was for light SE turning SW. The day dawned rather disappointingly with low cloud shrouding the tops. Even at midday the summit was still in cloud. We took off for some thermalling for an hour then had a lunch break before getting back to launch again. By now cloudbase had risen and the local aces were taking off in their hot ships and climbing out. We launched promptly and were soon soaring the cliff-face up to the summit where the transmitter aerial was throwing off good thermals. Soon I was at base at 2200m. I radioed Byron and Steve, both on identical blue Niviuk Hooks to join me so we can have a little xc. I waited at base but it was a decaying cumulus and both Steve and Byron could not latch on. I could also see the local pilots low and struggling on route to Vilanova to the east so I decided to fly north over the back instead. I headed back to the ridge to wait for another climb to drift with and soon was in the fluffy stuff again. This time I could drift back. The line I took the previous day was not

fruitful so I chose to fly across the lake hoping to connect to something on the eastern side. Unfortunately the sky filled in with high cloud and cut off the sun completely. Over some small hills I waited on zeros over some small lumps for what seemed an age before the sun came out over the plain. I headed over to some quarries which were just beginning to work and picked enough to fly over a small village criss-crossed by power lines. I was just thinking that I should land when I felt a strong tug just above the village church. A cracking 4 m/s thermal was just releasing. It didn't take long to get back to base and I was now high over Isona. In front of me were some formidable rock faces with nicely arranged E-W cliffs. If I could latch on to them it could be an easy ride to Organya. But sinking out there in remote country would probably mean a 4 hour walk out in the heat. Alternatively I could follow the road over the pass. I chose the latter for safety and flew toward the pass. Unfortunately, it was sinky air and on my first attempt I was not high enough. I flew back to Isona and found a good steady thermal off the wheat fields and was soon thermalling happily with a pair of Griffon vultures. The drift took me right up the pass. This place is magical. The sharp pointed peaks and shear rock-faces were more reminiscent of the Dolomites or Swiss Alps than Spain. However, the forested valley offer no escape route or landing opportunities. I felt confident and radioed to Winston that I was heading for my goal....Organya. Surely in this mountaineous area with a favourable wind I would find my final thermal to take me to there. But the final thermal proved elusive and a glide into bandit country was looming. I finally called it a day and landed by a small house near Montanissell just 5km short of Organya. The man and his daughter from the house came out to greet me and fortuitously were German speaking (which I can manage) rather than Catalan (which I can't).

I was a little disappointed to land short but at least I think I had cracked the route. Given a day with higher cloudbase or a more committed line over the cliffs it may have taken me to Organya. Still, a 47km flight is not too shoddy especially when I learnt that the local XC hounds on their comp gliders all bombed out at 10Km! I did not have to wait long for Winston to find me and get me back, the drive back took over an hour where the rest were chomping at the bit for an evening flight. Already airborne for 4 hours, I was tired but I thought I would join for a little stress-free evening restitution. But I did not expect restitution like this! The whole valley was working late into the evening and even in near total darkness. It took some determined spirals and ears to finally hit the ground in the dimming twilight.

The next day followed a similar pattern, this time we played in the wide flat valley in front of the hill, again followed once again by startling restitution flying. Thursday was windy at Ager and we went to Organya. They call this "la montaña mágica" or the "magic mountain". This range sits astride the valley winds, which get lifted, giving easy dynamic soaring all day long. A low launch into gentle winds and we get hoovered up to 2000m. This is where the top acro pilots hone their craft, as they can strut their stuff and get easy climbs back up for more. We flew for hours amongst the crack Spanish acro team showing off their helicospins and tumbles and SATs all around us. Quite a display.

My final day followed the usual pattern with a long morning flight that just merged into an afternoon XC without a break this time to Isona. In total I flew for over 20 hours airtime with XCs well over 100km - not bad for a XC novice. Those interested can view the flights on Leonardo (www.pgforum.com) Both Steve and Jamie had the best flights of their life and certainly their best flying holiday.

Ager is a superb place for pilots of all abilities. This is a hidden gem still not widely known and therefore quiet. In fact on most days there were few other pilots about apart from our group. Fresh CP's would find the launch and landing areas user-friendly and can make use of the calmer morning air and late evening restitution flying under the attentive coaching of Winston. Progressive pilots will find this place perfect for practicing thermalling and first forays into easy flat-lands XC in front of the hill. Experienced XC pilots will find this a most beautiful place to fly with stunning scenery and mountain flying as exciting and challenging as anything in the Alps. Winston and Amanda of Wegofly.co.uk are wonderful hosts, doing everything possible to keep us comfortable. Retrieves are superbly organised and prompt. For the budget conscious, it is very cheap to boot. So if you are fed up with the British summer, why wait? You can..... gofly!

Club Coaches

The jump from school to club can be intimidating. If you are a recently qualified CP, haven't flown a site before, haven't flown for a while and are a bit rusty, want some advice, or just need a reliable companion to fly with then please get in touch with a Club Coach. These good and trusty people have volunteered to help new pilots to our club.

Name	Available	Location	Phone
Hang Gliding Club Coaches			
Trevor Birkbeck	Various	Ripon	01765 658486
Alistair Irving	Various	Huddersfield	01484 844898
Steve Mann	Weekends	Kirby Malzeard	01765 650374
Paragliding Club Coaches			
John Ellison	Various	Gargrave	07791 887693
Noel Whittall	Various	Leeds	01132 502043
Steve Mann	Weekends	Kirby Moorside	01751 433130
Liz Addy	Weekends	Settle	01524 251682
Pete Logan	Various	Shiopley	07720 425146
Peter & Sara Spillett	Weekends	Skipton	01756 760229
Tony Pickering & Zena Stevens	Various	Otley	01943 466632
Sean Ogi	Various	Howarth	01535 642304
Kevin McLoughlin	Weekends	Lancaster	07767 652233
Martin Baxter	Weekdays	Skipton	01282 841060
Ronald Green	Weekends	Hartlepool	01429 864229