

SKYWORDS

Email katerawlinson@hotmail.co.uk if you wish to submit anything for next month's mag.

Kate X



CHAIRMAN'S CHAT

What have you been up to?

You can read about my adventures at the Ozone Chabre Open elsewhere in this newsletter. Last night was the Baildon Sod which, as ever, proved to be great fun with plenty of frantic running and the inevitable 'face planting' whilst attempting to escape the 'Devil's Pubs'.

We have had 2 successful coaching days so far with more planned. As I write this the Dales team is leading the Northern 54 competition series with another round planned for this weekend. Planning for the Dales Bash on 3/4 Jul is at an advanced stage.

Some you participated in the Lakes Charity Classic where the weather was much better than last year. Even the hangies got a good task in during the BOS. Alex Colbeck was in Slovenia for the Nationals and John Ellison continues his paragliding trip around Europe: <http://john-ellison.blogspot.com/>

Maybe you have been out and about in the Dales notching up some cross country flights or perhaps you have had some relaxing soaring flights. Whatever stories you have to

tell please pass them on to Kate so that she can include them in Skywords, or alternatively put a note on the forum:

<http://www.dhpc.org.uk/forum/>

That way those poor souls stuck at work or out shopping with the family, looking enviously at the sky, can find out what they are missing.

Our ex Chairman John Ellison is currently travelling and competing in various competitions this year check out his blog at <http://john-ellison.blogspot.com/>

Fly safely,

Martin Baxter
Chairman

Pete Roberts died after a short illness at the end of May. He was a DHPC member and looking at the database he was a very experienced HG pilot. The funeral happened earlier this month and his sister was just asking that people who may have know him in the club be informed.

Dales Bash

(Northern 54 Round)

3-4 July

The Green Dragon INN

Hardraw Village | Upper
Wensleydale, Hawes DL8 3LZ

Camping – payable at the bar on arrival
– New shower block now open!!

BBQ & Band – Saturday Night – Burgers, Sausage, Veggie Burgers with a selection of rice and coleslaw etc £4.95 per person, pay at the bar to receive a ticket. Please request veggie option when purchasing ticket.

This weekend will host **The Northern 54 Series** entry level competition. Come along to experience some excellent sites you may not have flown before and get some good flying in.



Please contact Kev
Kevinmcloughlin@hotmail.com
if you want to join in.

Ozone Chabre Open

Martin Baxter



As a member of the TA I was lucky enough to be invited to join the Joint

Services team in the Ozone Chabre Open at Laragne in SE France in early June. Over a hundred pilots from many different countries entered this friendly competition sponsored by Ozone and organised by Dave Owen from Allez-Up Holidays. Jocky Sanderson acted as meet director. We flew out to Geneva with EasyJet and were picked up by Gavin Foster from Ski Weekend who had also entered a team 'Chamonix International'. We broke up the 3 hour drive to Laragne with a couple of hours flying at 'Mens' which has to be one of the most beautiful sites in Europe.



Rather than roughing it in the camp site in Laragne, which is the focus for the competition, we stayed in a rather nice gite, owned by someone called Ray Giles. Ray turned out to be father of Steve Giles (CSC Chairman and owner of Sick & The Wrong in Keswick). It's a small world! Although the gite was very comfortable we missed out on quite a few of the presentations/reserve repacks/debriefs that took place at the campsite.

For those that haven't been to Laragne (yet) the main site is called Chabre. It is an enormous ridge running east to west and its top drivable. The normal take off is to the south with a nice gentle slope and plenty of room. The majority of the north face is a cliff face several hundred feet high, and tends to be less popular. Dust devils are prevalent and chains are provided to anchor hang gliders to the ground.

Following registration and the loading of waypoints into GPS a practice task was

set. This was a 45km race to goal from Chabre. Conditions were close to overdevelopment allowing a buoyant race to the half way point. Unfortunately the strong valley wind made it difficult to complete the return journey and only 2 pilots made goal. I scored a modest 29km.

Task 1 was an elapsed time 32km route via 5 turnpoints. Special mention must go to the pilot who, flying a new glider, inadvertently entered a cascade of manoeuvres just in front of the Chabre launch. He pulled his reserve which deployed very quickly and had just enough time to gather in his main wing. He was lucky to have his legs forward when he PLF'd back into take off. About 20 pilots jumped on his reserve to collapse it before he was dragged over the back. If he had been another 50' higher when he deployed his reserve the wind would have blown him over the cliff face which could have been interesting. His reserve bag landed next to me as I was about to launch.



Unfortunately the task had to be stopped due to the developing risk of thunderstorms. GPS positions were recorded at this point and scores worked out accordingly. This was somewhat frustrating for those pilots at cloudbase (me!) who could have converted their height into distance, had they known what was about to happen. A disappointing 10.7km.

Day 2 proved to be a long day. The various weather forecasts made the decision about which launch to use a

difficult one. Having driven for an hour to Bergies Sederon a 29.7km elapsed time straight line task to goal was set. However the wind on launch refused to play and the decision was made to move to Buc Sederon. The logistics of moving over 100 pilots and their gliders to a different mountain shouldn't be underestimated, especially when there are insufficient mini busses to complete the move in one lift, and some can't climb the steep track to launch. By about 1600hrs we were all in the new location and re-set. The task remained the same (if a little longer) but conditions were difficult at this late stage of the afternoon. Initially a layer of high cloud obscured the sun. The pilots who took off early went straight down. However after about half an hour the layer of cloud thinned and the sun broke through. Some pilots launched and managed to stay up and a few lucky ones even found a thermal and managed to climb out. The air around launch was very busy for a time and so I decided to go on a glide to the next hill. I got to the face with enough height and I was pretty sure that I would be able to climb out. However when I looked down I realised that the landing options consisted of 2 alternatives: trees or steep river gulleys - yikes! So when I hit a bit of lift I chickened out and made for a safe landing field rather than scratching around. Other pilots, who arrived with me on the same face, managed to climb out but, with hindsight, I still think that I made the right decision. Bomb out - distance only 3.5km. Unfortunately for those that got away the task was again stopped because of thunderstorms.

And sadly that was it. The next 4 days were blown out and no tasks were set. Alternative activities included climbing, canoeing, hill walking, mountain biking, go-karting and shopping. We spent 4 hours sitting on the hill on the last day hoping that the wind would drop but it didn't happen. There was torrential rain during the presentation ceremony which at least made the journey home more palatable. And at least we got out before

the storms ravaged the whole Cote d'Azur region.

When it came to the results I came 45th (out of 101) overall, and 10th (out of 42) in my class (EN B). 'Chamonix International' won the team prize and we came 9th (out of 24).

I don't normally do competitions for a number of reasons and a couple of these were re-inforced at Laragne. Firstly launch and the air immediately around it can be very busy. This adds to the pressure and undoubtedly compromises safety. Secondly the competitive element encourages pilots to take risks. I was disappointed by my bomb out on task 2, but still believe that I made the right decision to land. That said the competition scene is a fun environment where you push your limits and learn loads.

The entry fee is 220 Euros (200 if you fly an Ozone wing) which is quite a lot, but includes transport to launch, a very efficient retrieve system, two evening meals with a drink and excellent bands, a T shirt, prizes, and free entry into a raffle for a new Ozone wing of your choice. Sadly I didn't win the wing which is a shame because when I go next year I definitely need a new one – probably still an EN B, but something a bit newer than my 7 year old Artax.



Martin Baxter

Baildon Sod 2010

The biggest and most important event in the Dales calendar took place on Thursday 17th June, some big distances were on offer to those clearing the bracken with many getting to the fairway and further.



For the paragliders Kev McLoughlin led with a flight landing on the practise green (460m), followed by James Watson and Pete Logan. For the hang gliders Kev Gay showed how it's done, landing at the end of the reservoirs (600m) with Trev Birkbeck bagging second. We certainly taught that bracken a lesson, well most of us, yeah that's me face planting again! As usual the evening ended with beer, pizza and chips outside the pub. Photos can be seen on the forum, General Discussion – thanks Melise and on



www.flickr.com/photos/thealtitudeaddict

thanks Rich.

Kate ☺



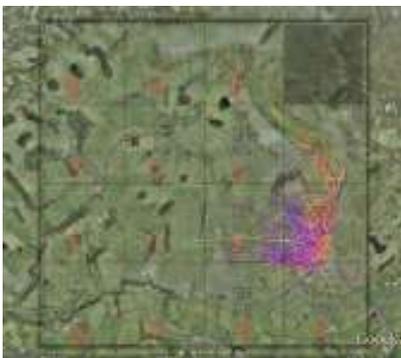
THE DALES DAY OUT ON PARLICK

The second round of the brand new Northern 54 Series competition was held over the weekend 19/20th June and the Dales win again. On Saturday we visited Longridge Fell, more for a look round really because it was obviously too windy for paragliding, trees bending over is never a good sign.



The comp was canned for Saturday and with a more favourable forecast for Sunday no one was too

disappointed. After a look at Longridge early on Sunday morning the comp was moved to Parllick. Although the true wind direction was North West the West facing bowl of Parllick produced some lively flying. Dave Evans the meet director obviously had a misspent youth playing computer games because the task set for the A group resembled a game of PacMan. The task set for the B group was a challenging XC flight to goal in chipping show ground. The Dales club fielded three B group pilots and all three of them made the flight to goal. Well done to you all!



Seven Dales Club pilots took on the A group task, see their tracklogs overlaid on the grid in the picture.

Each square carries a score dependant on how difficult it was to fly into, the more squares you bag the better; the best individual effort was to become the score for the team. To further the coaching aspect of this comp for the A group score to be valid a B group pilot must have

made it to goal. There were plenty of thermals close to the hill but it was difficult to find any lift further out. This made the furthest squares



unreachable, but Fred Winstanley had a cunning plan, he flew across to Fairsnape, managed to creep right onto the end then head

across towards the 007 (trees on the far ridge).

It bagged him five of the squares but he was forced to turn back after losing height. I tried to follow his route but was



a little bit lower down the slope on Fairsnape and found it far too rough so I cut and run, not surprising really the cloud shadow was running down the slope!. Best flight of the day was by Dave Bradwell who flew for the



longest and managed to collect the higher scoring squares well out in front for a well deserved victory. Well done Dave!

Thanks to all who turned out to support this club event, and for flying safely in challenging conditions. Next round is at home, in the Dales 3rd/4th July based at the Dales Bash in Hardraw, if you want to join the N54 pilots then please email [me](#). By the way we **WON** and kept our place at the top of the league ☺

Kev Mcloughlin Comps Sec

Below is a report from Bill Foster, one of our B group pilots who recount's his first XC flight.

On my first attempt I launched into a good thermal that took me straight up to 400ft ATO, then found more which took me fairly quickly up to the required 1000ft ATO. I decided to get my speedbar ready for the glide to Chipping, only to discover that the maillon on one side had become disconnected. After a lot

of mid-air fumbling, I had reconnected it but lost about 500ft and in trying to regain it inadvertently drifted over the side of the hill. I



decided not to fight it because of possible rotor so landed out without incident in an empty field. I packed up and climbed back up to

take-off for a second attempt. Once again, I found thermals quite quickly and got back up to 1000ft ATO. This time I turned and headed straight for goal, picking up a couple of thermals on the way. I arrived at the showground with a good 5-600ft to spare, so decided to carry on to land in the campsite. I flew downwind over the campsite and then turned into wind over a field at the edge of the village – to discover that there was an even stronger wind here, making it surprisingly rough and impossible to penetrate (which was exactly what Kev had warned me about just before I took off on my first attempt!). After a quick play with speedbar which gave me a wingtip collapse, I decided to stay where I was and came down slowly into a field of buttercups just on the far side perimeter road of the village. A lovely flight and a few valuable lessons learnt for my first ever XC!!

Bill Foster Dales Club.



Thanks to everyone who attended the N54, it worked out well in the end. For those who were absent, we didn't fly on Saturday because it was far too windy. Sunday was good, with strong WNW winds we were able to fly at Parlick. Two tasks were set, an excellent suggestion by Andy was to set the B pilots off on a small XC to Chipping which many completed. The A task was set in the bowl using the 'square collecting' idea. People seemed to enjoy this. A couple of Pennine pilots went XC and didn't get very far, it would have

been difficult to have had any meaningful XC task in the A comp, even with GPSs. Cloudbase was only about 3000' AGL and



the thermals died off at about 3pm, when I stopped the task. I'd like to hear any feedback from the pilots on what they thought of the A task please. It was a new idea and I thought it

worked well. If people want to do something like that again we could distribute maps with the squares on before the comp to allow pilots to put them into GPSs. I'd also make the squares smaller and put them behind as well as in front next time so that there is more to go at. Let me know what you think.



Dave Evans
Pennine Soaring Club

Site Guide Updates

Ilkley Moor Baht 'at

The Dales Club welcomes all visiting pilots but we reluctantly have to announce that our sites at **Ilkley Moor and Baildon will become members' only from 1 June 2010**. We hope this will only be a temporary restriction.

Both sites lie within the Leeds Bradford International Airport (LBIA) Control Zone. Over the last year we have been negotiating a local agreement with LBIA and this will come into force on 1 June this year. Whilst I don't want to bore you with the details there are new rules stipulating the vertical and horizontal dimensions of both sites, and we now have to telephone the LBIA duty controller to activate and de-activate each one.

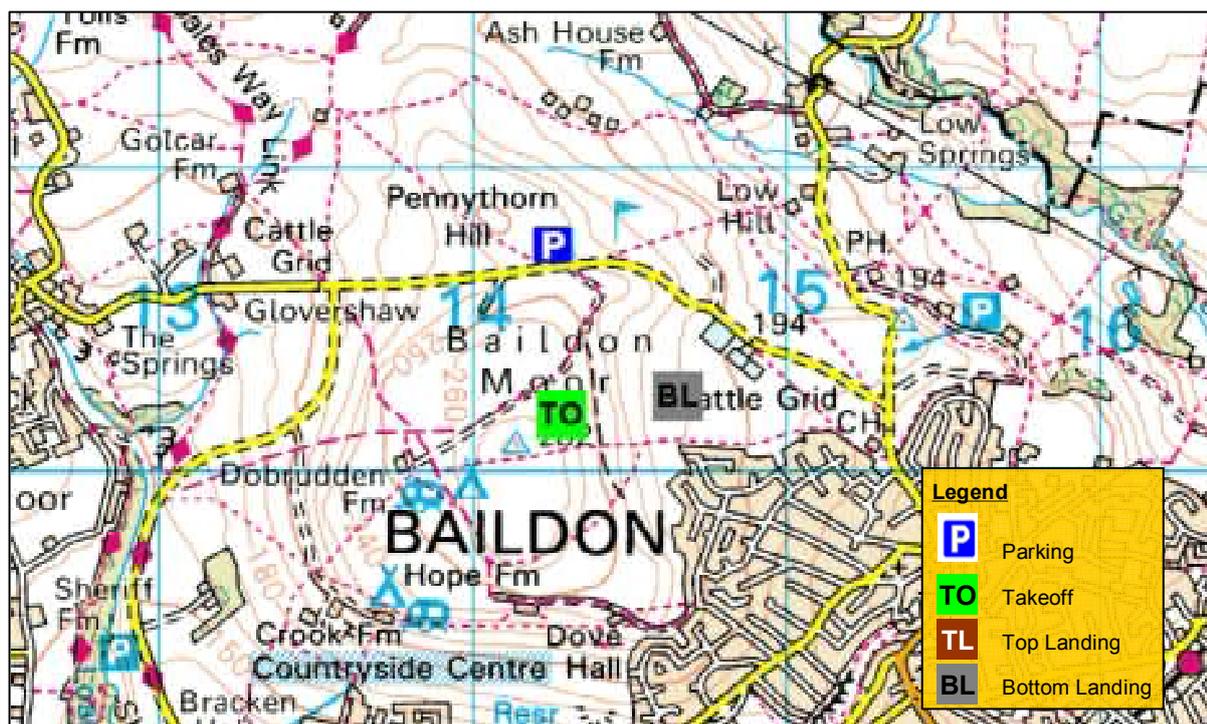
One of the conditions of the agreement is that we have to ensure that all pilots are fully briefed, prior to flight, on the local agreement. We also have to maintain a list of who has been briefed. Unfortunately we don't yet have an up to date online sites guide so our intention is to distribute the new sites information via our newsletter, allowing us to rely on our membership database to confirm who has been authorised.

We are still finding our way with LBIA ATC who have been extremely helpful to date: we'd like to keep it that way. The agreement comes up for renewal in a year and armed with an up to date online sites' guide and a problem free year we may be able to review the restriction. Please help us to avoid any infringements.

Neither Ilkley Moor nor Baildon have XC potential (obviously!) but if you do find yourself in our neck of the woods and can't resist the novelty value then please get in touch with us either via our website www.dhpc.org.uk or the contact in the back of Skywings for an update on the current situation.

Who knows, we may even find someone to accompany you. Don't forget your hat!

Martin Baxter
Chairman
DHPC



Site Name	Baildon East Face
Site Code	8.050 (Use for Notams mid week)
Grid Ref	SE 145 404
Wind Direction	E (70 – 110)
Height	930ft AMSL, 200ft top to bottom, 120ft soarable
Grade of Flyer	All grades but primarily a training slope.

Parking In the car park shown on the map. Strictly no parking on the track as this upsets the owner of the caravan site.

Access Walk along the track or over the hill.

Telephone Dubrodden Caravan Site at the end of the track. Good mobile phone reception.

Capacity Five in good conditions, but only one in poor.

Hazards Take off is shallow and requires a good run. Beware bracken!
Flight can be turbulent especially in wave.
Used by modellers, avoid them by following BHPA/SAME rules.
The slope is shallow sometimes producing good lift but usually patchy.
Bottom landings – avoid golfers, walkers and riders.
Top landings – sloping, land well back and to the South.

Rules Do not drive onto the moor.
Be considerate to other moor users.
Do NOT use other faces of the moor for soaring as they become unacceptably turbulent and have hazards such as power lines, cars on road, etc.
Within the Leeds/Bradford CTZ. No limit below 100'AGL. If you think you may be able to get higher phone ATC on 01133 913282 at least 15mins prior to flight. If approved you will be cleared to 1,500' AMSL within 1 mile (1.85km) radius. Close booking afterwards. **No XC.**

Owners Run by Bradford Metropolitan Countryside Wardens

Comment This is a very important training site and venue for the world renowned Baildon Sod. Losing it would be a disaster so please follow the site rules carefully

Site Name	Ilkley Moor
Site Code	8.058 (Use for NOTAMs mid week)
Grid Ref	SE 135 464
Wind Direction	NNE - NE (020 - 040)
Height	1015' (310m) AMSL, 165' (50m) Top to Bottom
Grade of Flyer	PG – Soaring HG - Expert

Parking By the road or in the Cow and Calf Carpark.

Access Path from road.

Telephone Cow and Calf Hotel.

Capacity Conditional (3 - 6).

Hazards Bottom landing slopes down to the road; beware of traffic. Rotor at top behind rocks. Rocky and bracken covered slope can give PG pilots problems on TO and landing. Bracken looks soft ... hidden rocks aren't!

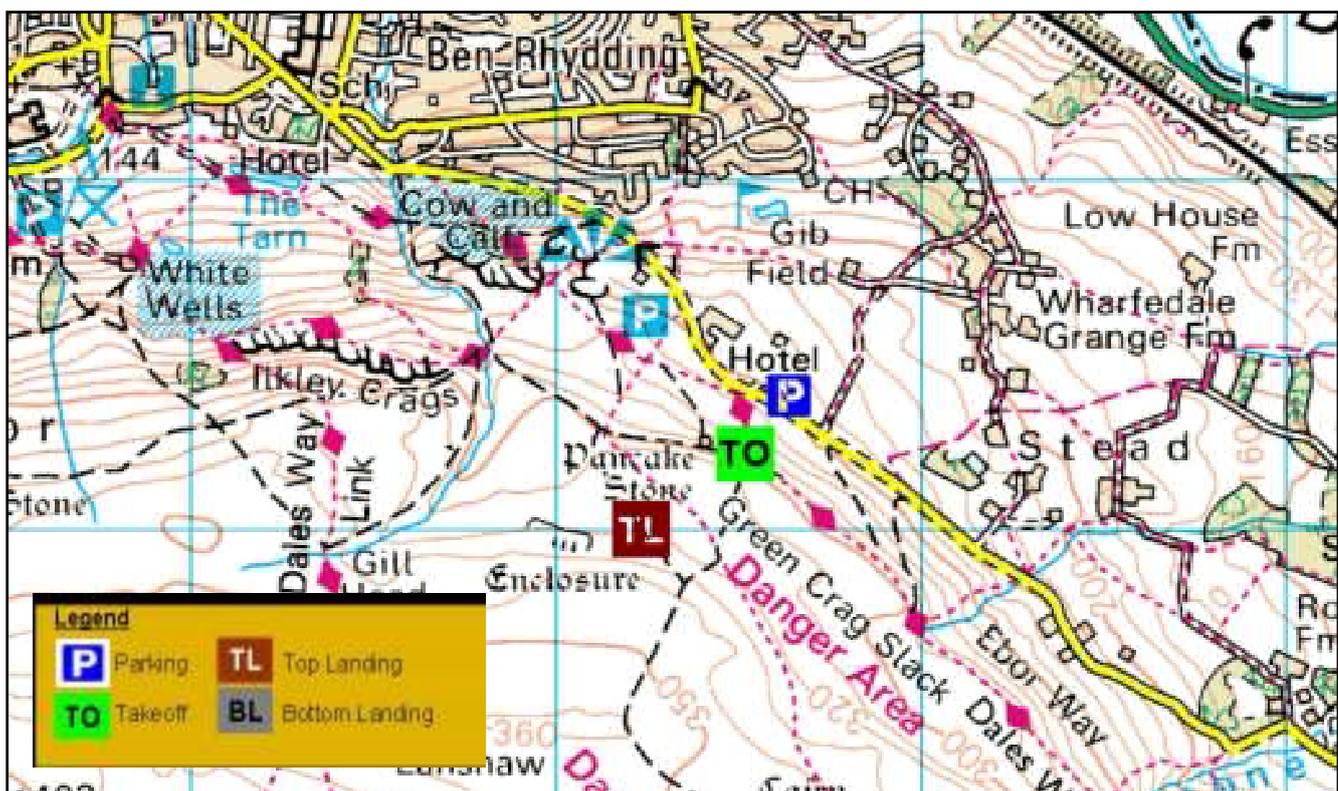
A very popular spot with tourists, hikers etc. so keep a good lookout when landing, especially for courting couples.

Rules Permission to fly is only really available for the ridge to the left of the rock this being owned by Bradford Council. The farmer who owns the land to the right of the rock is not happy for us to fly there since this is being developed into a grouse breeding/shooting moor..

There are stables on the far side of the road and horse-riders often use the moor. Keep a good lookout for them and halt flying activities if they are close by.

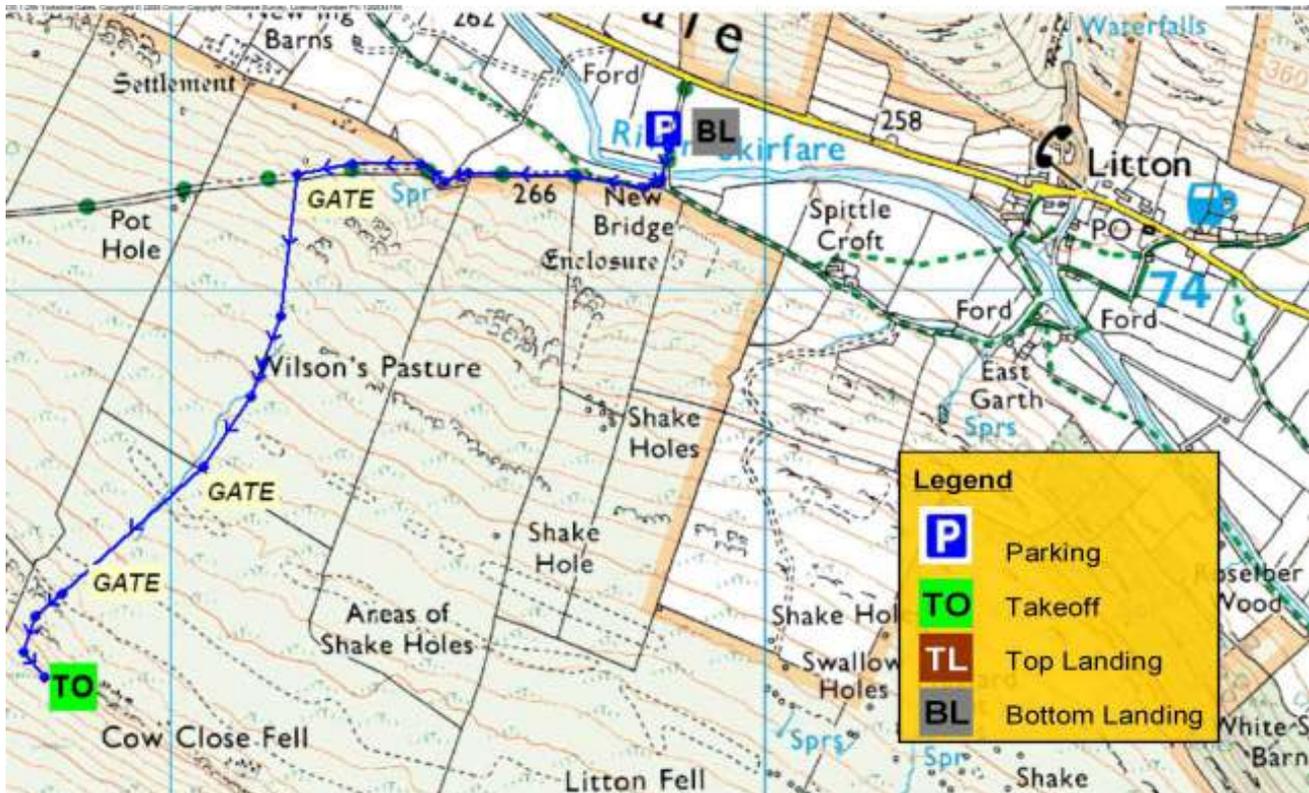
Comments Within the Leeds/Bradford CTZ. No limit below 100'AGL. If you think you may be able to get higher phone ATC on 01133 913282 at least 15mins prior to flight. If approved you will be cleared to 1,500' AMSL within 1 mile (1.85km) radius. Close booking afterwards. **No XC.**

Owners Bradford City Council.



Site Name	Cow Close Fell
Site Code	17.003 (Use for Notams mid week)
Grid Ref	SD 890 732
Wind Direction	NNE – NE (025 – 045)
Height	1870ft AMSL 300ft top to bottom of fell, 1030ft top to bottom landing field by river
Grade of Flyer	All types (except when making bottom landings)
Parking	Go through Litton and park at the bottom of the track before the river, preferably on the right and without blocking the track, gates or the fell track. It is possible to take sturdy vehicles up the very rough track, part way up the fell, to SD 885742, where there is limited parking space.
Access	Via gates to the left from SD 88 742 and onto the fell.
Telephone	Litton
Capacity	Plenty, but the landowner has requested a limit of 6 pilots on the hill at any one time.
Hazards	VERY bad turbulence can occur in the valley bottom in soarable conditions, especially under wave conditions. A wire fence runs along the bottom of the ridge; make sure you are aware of its position before flying, as it is difficult to spot from the air.
Rules	Landings are permitted only in the large field in the valley bottom. Collapse gliders on landing, de-rig and remove from field as quickly as possible as the farmer does not want to attract spectators. This, of course, does not apply to top and bottom landings on the fell itself. Do not climb the wire fence along the bottom of the ridge, use the gates at the NW end of the ridge. DO NOT CLIMB WALLS. FOLLOW THE COUNTRYSIDE CODE.
Owners	Fell and bottom fields – Mr Steven Lund, West Farm, Litton 01756 770213
Comments	A long walk. On sunny days, mowed field in the valley bottom can give good lift. There is a refreshing spring at the base of the fell.

© Dales Hang Gliding & Paragliding Club



Dales Hang Gliding & Paragliding Club
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Hang Gliding Coaches

Name	Availability	Location	Contact Telephone Number
Trevor Birkbeck	Various	Ripon	01765 658486
Alistair Irving	Various	Huddersfield	01484 844898
Steve Mann	Weekends	Kirkby Moorside	01751 433130
Ed Cleasby (Hg and Senior power coach)	Various	Ingleton	07808394895

Paragliding Coaches

Name	Availability	Location	Contact Telephone Number
Sean Hodgson (chief coach) Ogi	various	Haworth	07999606084 sean@ogi.me.uk
Rob Burtenshaw (senior coach)	Sun+various	Oxenhope	01535 643872
John Lawson (Safety)	Various	Leeds/Horsforth	077470819678
Peter Balmforth	Weekends	Leeds	07714213339
Noel Whittall	Various	Leeds	01132 502043
Alex Colbeck	Weekends	Harrogate	07717707632
Steve Mann	Weekends	Kirkby Moorside	01751 433130
Pete Logan	Various	Shipley	07720 425146
Peter & Sara Spillett	Weekends	Skipton	01756 760229
Tony Pickering & Zena Stevens (treasurer)	Various	Otley	01943 466632
Kevin McLoughlin	Weekends	Lancaster	07767 652233
Martin Baxter (chair)	Weekdays	Skipton	07814 599754.
Ronald Green	Weekends	Hartlepool	01429 864229
Fred Winstanley	Various	Higher Bentham	0777041958
Richard Shirt	Weekends	York	07786707424
Andy Bryon	Weekends	Keighley	07796 421890
Dave Couthard (sites)	Weekends	Leeds	07595895149
Ed Cleasby (pg coach)	Various	ingleton	07808394895
Peter Rodgers		Barnard Castle	07872 144549
Wendy Griffiths	Weekends	York	07545 493634

Helicopter Rescue

Last season, on a busy day at Whernside, a walker got taken ill, and needed a helicopter rescue. There were several pilots in the air, who needed to get down quickly....

“On average, an emergency air ambulance takes off every 10 minutes in the UK, flying 365 days a year in daylight hours. Put another way, during every hour of every day 7 Air Ambulances are attending accidents and medical trauma”

Air Ambulance Association June 2010

As well as the 60 air ambulances covering the UK, there are between 24 and 40 military & coastguard air sea rescue helicopters on call at any one time.

Given where we fly, and the types of accidents we tend to have (with spine, head and lower limb injuries all too common) it's not surprising that we're quite often in situations where helicopters are sent to help us.

It's also surprisingly common for us to get caught up with incidents where the injured party is nothing to do with us. The photo below was taken just after I'd landed to see why a bunch of police cars, fire engines and coastguard pickups were milling around on the cliff and the beach, whilst I soared the sea cliffs at Barton On Sea.

It turned out that the air sea rescue helicopter was about to pick up an injured walker from the beach below, and none of the emergency service had thought to tell us that we might be in the way.



The walker wasn't critically ill, but the tide was coming in – and to our embarrassment, the rescue operation was delayed by well over 5 minutes whilst the three pilots and the three fire fighters on the cliff top dithered and delayed (and took pictures), whilst the helicopter pilot waited, and then got annoyed with us.

It became clear to us that there was no communication, beyond an angry waving,, between the helicopter and the emergency services on the ground. It was up to us to do the sensible thing, which, eventually, we did.

So what should we have done, when we became aware that a helicopter was on its way?

Well, if we don't want to delay the rescue by being in the way, nor put ourselves at risk of being pinned or forced into dodgy air by an incoming helicopter – or worse to get caught by the very big downdraft created by a hovering helicopter, we need to get everyone out of the air, wings packed up and everybody safely away from anywhere that the helicopter might land, or hover.

Usual incident management techniques will apply, such as nominating someone to take charge, and allocating roles.

There are likely to be two or three jobs to do:

1. Liaise with the emergency services & rescuers and/or the casualty & their party about what has and is likely to happen
2. Communicating with pilots & bystanders on the ground

3. Communicating with pilots in the air

Finding out where the helicopter will land can be impossible (and you can't assume that mountain rescue, or emergency services on the ground will know, or be able to ask), but we are pilots and should be able to make an educated guess.

The hardest thing may well be to communicate with pilots in the air – if they are on radios, and there are radios on the ground, and someone knows the frequency, then all well and good – but how often will that be the case?

It might be possible to shout or signal to pilots who are soaring near to the hill – otherwise, as the Pilot Handbook puts it:

“the **All Land** signal, a large **H**, needs to be set out”

What you make the large H out of depends on what's to hand, I guess wings, glider bags, and clothes are all possible. Anything, so long as it's big, and visible.

And... if you ever see everyone else land, or putting the big ears in, for no apparent good reason, it's a pretty good rule of thumb to land yourself. It might be a gust front coming rather than a helicopter, but you'll be glad you're down either way.

When the new sites guide is published, we'll add a reminder on incident management in general, and on helicopter rescue in particular.

PROJECT '0' CHARITY CYCLE - LONDON to PARIS - May 30th to June 2nd 2010 **A personal account of the journey by Kate Maddison**



In March 2010, after much deliberation about my fitness to take part, I decided to join a Leeds based group who planned to cycle 307 miles from London to Paris in 4 days, to raise enough money to build a new orphan children's home near Durban, South Africa. To ensure all the money raised went directly to charity, the trip expenses were kept to a minimum and self-funded by the thirty-eight cyclists and to assist with camping, catering and logistics along the route, there were twelve volunteers on a support team.

We assembled with the inertia of a large group of people of mixed ages spanning fresh faced teenagers to cycling veterans, waiting to be organised. Most came from Leeds and knew each other through activity at St Georges Church in Leeds, but some, myself included, were there through a variety of routes and without prior introduction.

The cyclists were divided into four groups based on cycle speed and experience. Although these groups were largely stable, there were a number of moves made during the four-day trip, mainly

due to strain or injury requiring some initially faster cyclists to ride at a slower pace, and the subsequent reorganisation of numbers to stop the slower groups becoming too big.

DAY 1 - YHA Thameside, London to Calais Campsite - 77 Miles

Breakfast was at 6am and at 7am, with bags stowed in the support lorry and a day bag in the minibus, the cycle groups set off, slowest first and the fastest went last. The ride East out of London was fast and required high concentration: constantly changing gear, watching for traffic, pot-holes, drains, other riders changing position or whose drinks bottles or chains fell off, all while trying to keep close together at junctions and traffic lights.

A welcome first break came at a church car park with a chance to rest, refuel our drinks bottles and eat as many snack bars, flap jacks and peanuts as we could manage in the time. This pattern was to be repeated twice daily for the duration of the trip with a longer lunch stop in between, to eat a more substantial meal and briefly socialise before getting back in the saddle. There were more hills than I expected, our route took in many small roads that had fairly steep climbs, although those on the main roads were generally on a slower gradient. We rode through many of the Medway towns before connecting with the A2 heading South East. The last stretch crossing the South Downs was encountered when we were all tired and at a pace which I found rather gruelling. This was a shame as it was the most scenic stretch of the route and the only point at which sun came out. With relief we reached Dover and regrouped for the escorted ride through the port and onto the Ferry. Once the bikes were stowed we had a big meal on the crossing, which was thankfully calm and once docked at Calais, we cycled round the harbour to the nearby campsite. Tired and aching, I put up a reluctant tent (more on this later), had a quick shower and crawled into bed. Calais turned out to have the best wash facilities of the three campsites we stayed at, we didn't know it yet, but washing facilities and water in particular was destined to play a major role in determining our route and our deteriorating standards of comfort and cleanliness.

DAY 2 - Calais to Blangy-Sur-Ternoise – 60ish miles (the way we went)

Much refreshed after a hearty breakfast and a later start time, the cyclists set off, closely followed by the support team who efficiently packed up the kitchen tent and loaded the vehicles with all our bags and camping gear. Despite feeling tired from the exertions of the day before, I found the first day cycling in France much more enjoyable than the ride from London to Dover. I had a better night's sleep in the tent than in the stuffy and noisy YHA the night before and had opted to switch teams from the engagingly youthful green team, to the more mature riders of the 'sight seers' yellow group, led by a tandem whose pace more closely matched mine, fast down hill and slow up hill (as opposed to the other way round which seemed to be the trait of the bottle and chain loosing gang). The more relaxed style of the group, the quieter French roads and the novelty of the new surroundings allowed for more conversation and distraction from the relentless task of pedalling. The second day had always been planned as the shortest day's ride, but a last minute decision to switch campsites from Bangerval - Blangemont (due to inappropriate water and wash facilities) to one further North at Blangy-Sur-Ternoise, led to a further 12 miles being added to our already longest planned ride of 80 miles the next day.

We camped that night on a spacious field by an established caravan site surrounded by lush woodland. The grand scale mono-culture farming of Northern France has had a massive negative impact on bio diversity and local wildlife. This green oasis provided our first glimpse of French bird life: cuckoos, song thrushes, woodpeckers and a cacophony of smaller birds were augmented by the screech of owls as dusk approached, dawn was heralded by competing farm yard cockerels and snoring campers. The weather for the first two days was overcast and mostly dry although overnight rain at Calais and Blangy-Sur-Ternoise meant our tents and belongings were packed up damp.

By day three the damp became drizzle, followed by rain.

DAY 3 Blangy-Sur-Ternoise to Bresles – 92 miles

The additional miles to reach Bangerval - Blangemont before the start of our planned journey meant that the first refreshment stop was over 3 hours ride away. A long and arduous ride followed and we all adopted a determined sense of purpose and a compulsive approach to eating, drinking and pedalling. A few riders became addicted to energy gels, my own approach was to endlessly eat flapjacks, augmented by peanuts and snack bars washed down with isotonic drink and the occasional jelly baby for hills. This was an un-appetising mixture that kept my energy levels up but eventually induced indigestion and a longing for warm drinks and savoury food.

As the day wore on and the rain set in harder, I became concerned about getting too cold. I eventually managed to retrieve some wet weather gear from the minibus and despite my already damp clothing, this proved invaluable in keeping me warm as the rain persisted and my energy levels depleted. After a gruelling 12 hours since setting off, we finally arrived at the third nights campsite, a compact arrangement of hard-standing bays that proved difficult to fit the tents into and drive in the pegs. My camping gear had been hastily put together, a second hand tent turned out to have a mismatched inner tent and flysheet, with no obvious way of linking the two layers together. After wrestling for an hour with some cadged garden wire on the first night, the second night was spent in a borrowed tent, whose price tag of £9.28 was borne out by its inadequate size and construction. On the third night, while the rain teamed down, I opted for another permutation, using my original tent's flysheet over the borrowed smaller tent with its inner door left open for my legs to poke through. Needless to say, I was relieved that the fourth night was planned for a hotel. My new bike and cycling gear were a joy, the lightweight race style road bike was ideally suited to the task and the modifications I made during practice rides turned out to be invaluable, and with the proportions finely tuned, I felt I had achieved a comfortable cycling position. I am glad I insisted on mud-guards as who wants a wet back and whilst I know it is a personal choice, I cannot over state how good a second gel layer is between a compact racing saddle and good gel lined cycle shorts. I did not suffer from saddle soreness and contrary to all the myths of cycling, everyone with a hard race saddle did appear to suffer, and No the gel cover did not cause 'chaffing'! I did however suffer neck and shoulder strain by the third day, exacerbated by not mastering the ability to ride without holding onto the handle bars and not being able to stop to relieve it, when I wanted too. My chain fell of once due entirely to mismanaging the gears and being too tired to notice and I did not have any punctures. I managed to remain upright, despite wearing clip-in shoes, although I did have a few close calls when starting off and events around me required a quick change of plan. The technique of spinning your legs fast in a low gear rather than pushing harder and slower in a higher gear, I think was the reason I did not suffer a knee injury like others seemed to around me. I did notice knee strain on the longest cycle day when required to push on faster than I felt comfortable with, but this was short lived.

My food consumption was unbelievably big! I have never eaten such a volume of stodgy meals, sweet snacks and drinks, while remaining at a constant weight.

NB I was totally misled - Northern France is not flat!

DAY 4 - Bresles to Paris – 69 Miles

The day dawned misty and with a promising forecast we packed up our sodden gear and headed off on the last leg of our journey to Paris. Our spirits rose with the sun, it's warming effects finally induced me to peel off the layers of clothing and reveal my knees and eventually my arms. A scenic ride through undulating fields of wheat, rape seed and unidentified crops, were punctuated by steep climbs and fast descents, pretty but decaying farm buildings, unexpected chateau's and encounters with supportive locals who allowed us to use their loo's and shouted encouragement, usually including the name 'Armstrong' in any comment they made. As we neared Paris from the North West, a set of skyscrapers were clearly visible, although these turned out to be false heralds as they are nowhere near the city centre.

A last refreshment stop by a river was followed by a long and tiring ride into Paris, the journey was slow due to traffic lights with continual stopping and starting, unclipping and clipping into pedals, splitting up and regrouping, navigating and correcting mistakes. Our worn down spirits were briefly raised by the sudden appearance of fast groups of professional looking cyclists circling the stadium near our route, passing us with such speed we were drawn to follow them and as we later discovered, deviate off course.

We regrouped just before our triumphal finish and excitement grew as we approached the Eiffel Tower and vied with the heavy traffic and frantic lane changes to reach it. An emotional arrival at around 6pm marked the end of a 307 mile journey. A few family and friends were there to greet us and of course the support crew were cheering us on, photographing us and in one case cycling the last 200metres with us! After group hugs, more photos, a celebratory beer, we got back on our bikes to ride a further 4 miles to our hotel for a quick turn around and out again, on foot, for a well earned celebratory meal. Most of the group returned to Leeds the following morning, I opted to stay an extra day, for a little sight seeing and to go up the Eiffel Tower. I did walk up the first two stages but my legs refused to climb the 3rd stage and I took the lift, despite the long queue. The view from the top is spectacular; you can see well beyond Paris to the horizon, it must have been

mind blowing for those experiencing it when it was first built. London to Paris is a long way to cycle in four days, especially for the majority of inexperienced cyclist that took part. It was made possible by the detailed planning of the organisers and the dedicated support of the volunteer team that looked after the cyclists along the route. The organisers plan to visit Project O in South Africa in July to deliver the money and help with the building work of the new orphan home. It adds significantly to the satisfaction of completing the ride to know that the charity will benefit so directly from our fund raising endeavours, and that a small but dedicated group can achieve so much from the generosity of mostly friends and family sponsorship.

