

Around the Dales Three Peaks

It's June, it's hot, I'm climbing up Whernside, and for those of you who don't know it, it's steep. You climb straight up the front face and because your paraglider is trying to tip you over backwards, you have to grab onto tufts of grass to make sure it doesn't succeed. It is also the case that because you have to counter the paraglider weight by leaning forwards, the ground ahead is often only a couple of feet from your face. Let's say it's just no fun. About half way up the radio pops into life and I recognise Jake Herbert's voice - 'Well I'm glad that awful climb is over, I'm bolloxed.' Chris Fountain replies 'Yes I wouldn't want to have to do that again, it's far too hot.' Then they both burst into laughter. 'Gits' I think to myself and smile; I know they are both stood at the top. We had arranged to meet here earlier that morning and agreed a radio frequency. Still, it could be far worse, they could be climbing out away from the hill and I have definitely been there before.

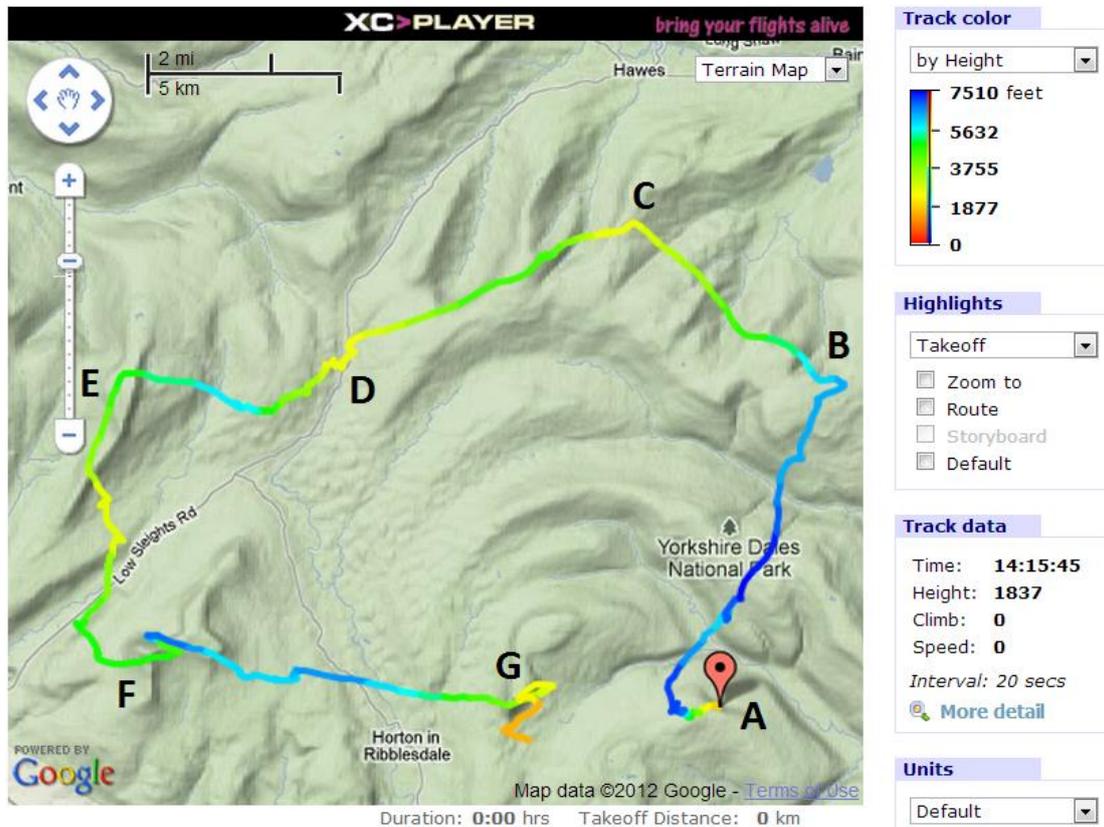
On arriving at the top Jake and Chris are just about unpacked, whilst I'm dripping with sweat. There is a brief mention of maybe doing the three peaks if there isn't any wind and there certainly doesn't really appear to be very much. The Dales three peaks are Whernside, Ingleborough and Pen-y-ghent and people in the club have talked about flying round them for years, with the club even putting up some prize money for the first person to do it.



Whernside with Ingleborough in the background

I had previously given it a go when Jake had suggested it one day back in April 2011. It was a 'Weather Jack 5 day' and we both walked up Cow Close fell. We sat around on take off (point A on map 1), just the two of us, for ages with no wind and after a couple of hops I was cursing to myself - 'What on earth were we doing on a North facing slope when there was no wind? We

should be on any big South facing ridge.’ A third pilot turned up to join the wait - it’s never the busiest site. Eventually a thermal came through and it was a monster, Jake launched first and we both pinged straight up to 7,000 ft. Frown to huge grin in 5 minutes.

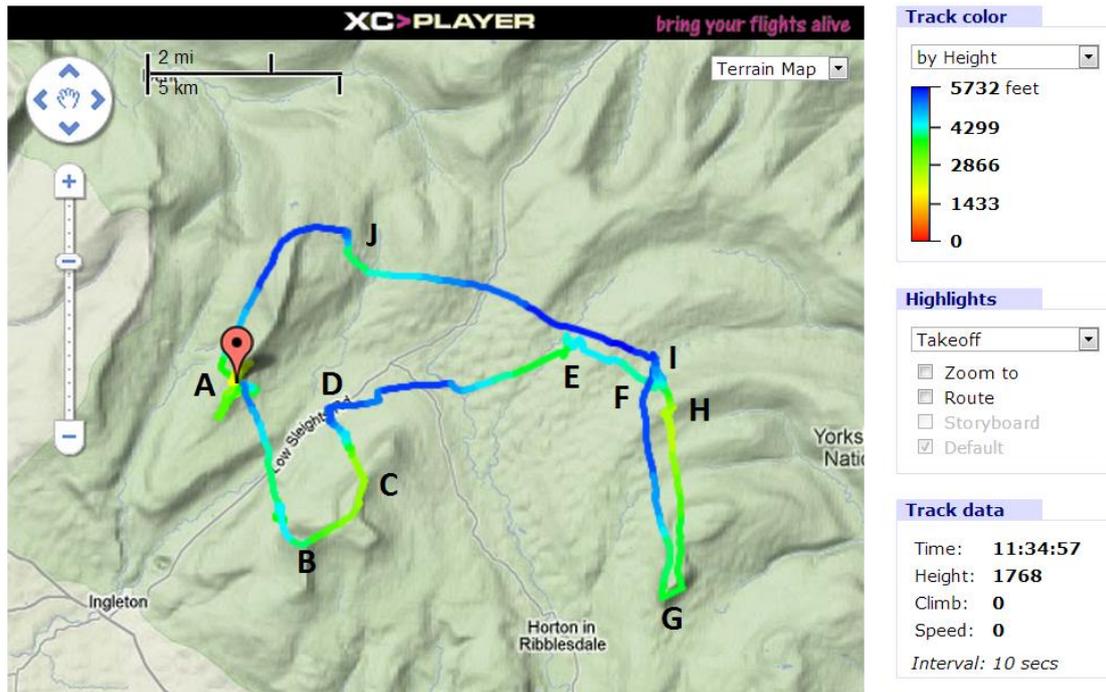


Map 1

We headed NNE towards Semeer water in orbit, and then just passed Hubberholme turned left (B) towards Wether fell. We lost height all the way on this leg, arriving low at the back of Wether Fell take off (C) but fortunately found a climb there. It’s difficult to describe how weird it was climbing out from a place I have flown so much but drifting in completely the wrong direction. This slow climb took us over Dodd fell but never really took off and we got really low in the next valley (D). After a lot of scraping around, a weak climb turned into something better and got us to Whernside (E). Heading off South towards Ingleborough, Jake took a much better line and pulled ahead. But soon after I got a really good climb at Ingleborough itself and headed off towards the Ribblesdale valley crossing. This is a really wide valley and as a result quite difficult to cross, but the next climb gave me enough height to reach Pen-y-ghent just above the top, where I was shortly joined by Jake. Now with the difficult valley crossing over, and not far to go, I thought it was in the bag. Just one last climb off Pen-y-ghent and it would be an easy glide to Cow Close Fell. But it wasn’t to be. We both scatted around the windward side of Pen-y-ghent slowly losing altitude, and with air turning blue we both landed short. Talking to Jake afterwards he suggested maybe less caution at the end and a straight glide over the top of Pen-y-ghent would have closed the loop, allowing for ‘loop gap’, and he may have been right. But despite not

making it round, it was a great flight - cloudbase was massively high, the views were great and it is always more fun flying an XC with friends. The last time I think I had had this much fun flying was going from Semer water to the Lakes with Ali Guthrie and John Ellison.

So, back to June 2012. Chris launched first straight into a thermal (A on map 2). Jake and I followed soon after and we all climbed to 5,000ft. Heading South towards Ingleborough (B) we all caught a top up climb before reaching the peak.



Map 2

Turning North East we headed off down the ridge and I took sharp left at (C) to join a climb Jake was in. Topping out at 5,700ft (D) we headed West towards Ribblesdale. Now Pen-y-ghent (G) was in SSE direction but it was a bit blue that way. Alternatively there was a big black cloud way off track on the other side of the valley at (E) and I decided this would be my route. Jake chose the more Southerly track and Chris chose another XC altogether,

further North. After a long glide, when I eventually arrived under the big cloud I found no lift, and because it covered a large area there was also sun either. I was a now bit worried about my route choice but persevering I at last found some light lift which gradually improved. The cloud was now working, scooping me up and allowing me to push on easily. I had now lost track of Chris and Jake by this point. I found a good climb to 5,500ft at (F) then headed South towards Pen-y-ghent (G).



Pen-y-ghent

Round the peak I turned back North expecting the same good air but instead found significant sink. With hindsight, and looking at the track, maybe I should have returned on a route further West. I came into a ridge low and a bit concerned at (H), but a very weak climb drifted me over the back of the ridge to point (I) where the climb really took off, straight back up to 5,500ft. Interestingly the track shows this climb was in the same place as the climb on the way out and I had noted at the time it was also under the same cloud which by now was even bigger. Terrain wise, (I) is not really a point you would expect to find a thermal but it was working well and just shows drifting with zeroes or light lift when low down often takes you in the right direction. The glide back towards Whernside was very buoyant under a short cloud street. Another paraglider marked the final climb at (J) followed by an easy glide back to take off. I was ecstatic, landed and had a quick chat with Dean Crosby before flying about for a bit more fun, then going down to land at the bottom.

It was a grand day out with great conditions. Chris, Jake, Dean and I all had excellent flights and Ali Guthrie flew to the lakes too.

Links to XC league flights:

Dave: <http://www.xcleague.com/xc/flights/20121472.html>

Chris: <http://www.xcleague.com/xc/flights/20121498.html>

Jake: <http://www.xcleague.com/xc/flights/20121495.html>

Ali: <http://www.xcleague.com/xc/flights/20121497.html>

2011 attempt: <http://www.xcleague.com/xc/flights/2011599.html>