

January 2002

Avon HG & PG Club Newsletter

nova

Featuring:

Introducing the new committee

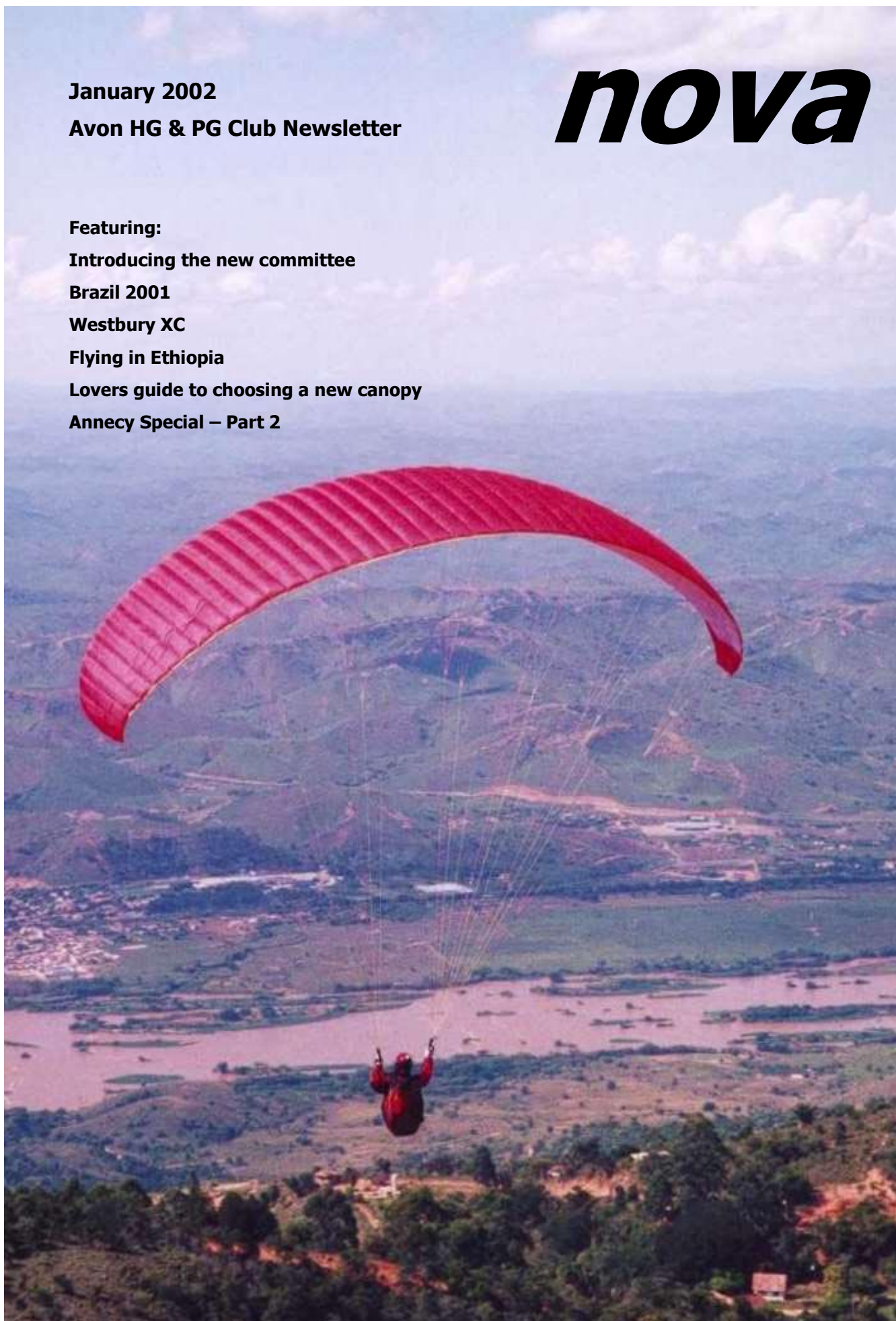
Brazil 2001

Westbury XC

Flying in Ethiopia

Lovers guide to choosing a new canopy

Annecy Special – Part 2



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Club Meetings

Club meetings are held on the second Thursday of each month at the Compass Inn at Tormarton (just off the A46 about ¼ mile north of junction 18 on the M4). For further details please contact Tim Pentreath.

7 February – Talk by Chris Scammell - Vol Bivouac across the Alps

14 March – Major Incident First Aid

11 April – Question Time

NOVA is the newsletter of the Avon Hang-gliding and Paragliding Club. The views expressed in this magazine are not necessarily those of the Editor, or Committee of the Club.

All contributions should be sent to the Editor of NOVA.

NOVA can also be found online at www.avonhgpg.co.uk

Send your articles to Cathy Lawrence

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Cover shot – Hugo Taking off from Governador Valadares, Brazil – by Cathy Lawrence

EDITORIAL



Having been a member of the Avon club and into paragliding for over two years I decided this year that I would like to get more involved. Why? You may ask. Well my motto is "Don't analyse it – just do it!" (except when thinking about flying of course!) I suppose there are two reasons, partly to get to know more people that share a love of flying, and also because I want to feel part of the club and not just number 175 on the membership database. Marcus's departure for new pastures left a vacancy for Nova Editor that nobody else was prepared to challenge me for, so here I am. Little did I know that before my first issue of Nova went to press I would have clocked up more hours putting it together than I have had total flying hours!

Nova magazine has been the envy of many other hang-gliding and paragliding clubs thanks to the previous editors and club members that contributed to it. I hope to keep it that way. Thank-you to everyone that has sent me photos and articles so far. Please keep them coming. If your contribution is not in this issue then look out for it in the next issue. A big thank-you all those who have helped drag me from the Jurassic period of computer technology almost up to modern day. Not bad considering a few weeks ago I didn't know the difference between a j-peg and a clothes-peg!

The previous issue of Nova was in January last year so hopefully you have all been eagerly awaiting this issue. There has not been a lot of flying or even social activity within the club in the UK this year due to the FMD but several keen, desperate-to-fly pilots (who could afford it) have ventured abroad and in this issue of Nova we hear what it is like to fly in Brazil, Ethiopia and Annecy (revisited). Finally be sure to read the Westbury XC, a truly emotional account of Garry Mitchell's most enviable XC experience – when I first read it I could feel the adrenaline rush as if I was there with them. One day I will be.....

Cathy Lawrence

Chairman's Waffle

When I joined the Avon Club back in the early 90's, I had no idea that one day I would be writing the Chairman's bit for NOVA. In fact as one of only three Paragliding members in the club at the time (the other two being Marcus and Fiona) I felt like a bit of an outsider. Since then the club has grown and gone from strength to strength, I have many new valued friends, and my flying has progressed through leaps and bounds. Eventually even taking me to second place in a leg of the BP Cup, nobody was more surprised by that than me I can assure you. I'm still not quite sure what mental aberration made me open my gob in the first place and offer to take over from Brent, having been on the Committee for several years doing a variety of jobs I was quite happy with my lot. What I do know is that I feel that I owe a lot to the club and certain people within it, for their enthusiasm and encouraging me to better things. As a result of this I intend to do my best to ensure that the club continues to improve, and that the same kind of support and encouragement continues to be available to others. Equally important I believe is the social side to the club, and I would encourage everybody to join in with the various activities, and attend the meetings if they wish to get the best out of their membership. If nothing else it's gratifying to see our efforts on the Committee being well received by the membership at large, but more importantly if the club is going to continue to grow and improve it needs your support.



At the time of writing, this edition of NOVA is looking likely to be a very thin one, and Cathy's job as new editor is looking decidedly difficult. We can all do our bit to help here, because without your contributions there will be no NOVA. So please, please, if you go abroad to fly or even have a good day's flying here in the UK. Take time out to write about it and send it to Cathy. I can guarantee you that it will be very gratefully received, and it will give us all something good to read in the next edition. Don't forget also that NOVA is your voice within the club, so if you have any news, or views about the club and how it is run. Then you can air them within these pages for all to read. Finally remember that there is a splendid trophy awarded each year for the best contribution to NOVA, so get writing and who knows you may be taking home a bit of posh glassware next year.

Moving on, I would like to thank all the retiring Committee Members for their hard work over the last year, or in the case of some, many years. I'd also like to welcome all the new Committee Members who have volunteered to give up some of their time to help run the club in the future.

Looking back it's been a very difficult and frustrating year for us all, with FMD virtually completely wiping out 6 or 7 months worth of flying in the UK. Some of us have been lucky enough to be able to go abroad to fly, sadly I was not amongst them. Although along with Marcus and Charlotte I was fortunate to be able to revisit the Nepal Himalayas earlier in the year, but we spent our time climbing mountains instead of flying. This meant no more holidays for the rest of the year for me, so I spent the rest of the season dreaming about flying with the occasional visit to Snowdonia just to remind me what was missing.

During such a trying year, the co-operation of the overwhelming majority of our members by respecting the site closures has been greatly appreciated by the Committee, and has helped us enormously to assure the continued use of all of our sites for many years to come. Those of us who have been liaising with the landowners have said that our responsible attitude to the situation has been well received by the grateful farmers in question, and hopefully it will be remembered for some time to come.

Looking onward to the next 12 months. We have plenty of new blood in the Committee, bringing fresh ideas and enthusiasm to the running of the club. FMD is finally in decline and if it remains so we will be reopening the X/C Leagues as soon as the spring arrives. Hopefully there will even be a Mere Bash in 2002, we came very close to being able to go ahead with the Bash this year, but we felt that it was just too risky to chance going ahead with suspected cases of FMD still reoccurring in isolated outbreaks nearby. Hopefully we will be trying to organise a foreign club trip or two, as well as a number of UK events such as a parachute re-pack and the regular X/C Virgins weekend. We look forward to you supporting these efforts as in previous years.

Well I reckon that's enough waffle from me for now, so in the immortal words of Marcus our departing editor.

Get high, stay high and fly far.

Simon Kerr

The Webmaster – Hamish Atkinson

As you may know, the Avon Hangliding & Paragliding Club web site has been developed and run by Marcus King for the last few years. Thankyou to Marcus for all the work he put into the web site making it arguably the best HG/PG club website in the country. Marcus is now off in sunnier climes and has passed the mantle of webmaster to myself and the post of Nova editor to Cathy.

Important details of changes to the club website can be found in the Club News section of this edition of Nova.



Paragliding Low Airtime Contact – Rich Harding



The Avon club has always prided itself on the support it gives to pilots at all stages of their development and a mark of this was the decision of the committee of the time to approach a pilot with twenty-five hours to become PG Low Airtime contact in '96/'97. I'm delighted to return to the role now, having myself greatly benefited from the support, encouragement and advice of more experienced members.

There's one rule, and one rule only, that has been adopted by the last three Low Airtime Contacts - it's up to the progressing pilot to seek assistance: we've found that the best use of time is to concentrate on those who want our help. As far as day-to-day "Where can I fly?" type advice is concerned, I work from home so can be contacted most days; I also have permanent, high speed internet access for up-to-the-minute weather data, so am open for consultations even when I'm not going out myself. With regard to more organised excursions, I cannot wait to get back in the swing of flying weekends next year and everyone is welcome, as ever. I look forward to seeing you on and above the hill, down the pub and in the campsite!

Library Keeper – Fiona Macaskill



Hi, if you're new to the sport read on....if not you probably know who I am already!

For the past 12 years I have flown paragliders and became semi pro thanks to a Toyota sponsorship in 1997. I've been in the British Team three times (two European and one World Championship) and got one British and two World records. In January I will be off to Mexico to train and hopefully compete in the Paragliding World Cup, of which I've done about 30 in the seven years.

The Avon HGPG Club has one of the largest free-flying video & book libraries in the country. We regularly buy new stock and want to keep it up to date. You can borrow up to two items a month but are expected to return them at the club meeting the following month. Any suggestions for new videos or books are most welcome. Just drop me a line and I'll try and get it ordered.

Social Secretary – Tim Pentreath

I learnt to paraglide in 1991 with Dave Ward-Smith and Rob Stimpson of "Parapente Wales" (anyone remember them?), and joined the Avon club in 1993. I first became involved in the Committee in 1996 when I ran the PG comps side for a couple of years. In 1998 I took over as Membership Sec from Fiona, a job I did for two years before handing over to Charlotte. I had a year off in 2000, before returning to the Committee in 2001 as Social Sec. For my sins I've also been running the PG XC league for years - let's hope 2002 makes up for this year...

I try to go flying whenever I can, which isn't very often what with a Mon-Fri job and a young family, but if you do see a large yellow and blue Omega 4 gale-hanging above Westbury, chances are that's me!



Regarding my position as Social Secretary, please feel free to make any suggestions as to the sort of things you'd like to see at our club meetings - the more ideas the better! Good Flying.

Sites Officer – Stafford Evans



Due to my timely arrival at this years club AGM, I'll be your Overall Sites Officer for the coming year. Compared to most pilots in the club I'm a bit of a novice really having only started flying in 1998, although I did try flying an old Harley square wing on Milk Hill in light drizzle and a gale back in 1988. The hangies on the ground must have thought we were mad. Foot & Mouth aside I've had a great years flying with trips to Brazil & Spain and even passing my pilots exam, this year I hope to try the BPC and Airwave Challenge. You'll normally find me flying my local site at Westbury on my pink UP Soul (under review) where this year I managed my first UK XC flight.

My role is to co-ordinate and assist your regional site officers who have all established good working relationships with the local landowners/farmers, the BHPA and also to pursue any new sites that may become available to us as a club. As you can imagine this is the tricky bit and although we have some new sites under investigation if you think you know of anywhere that might be suitable please let any member of the committee know. Your chairman and myself are hoping to get you a new sites guide in time for the spring thermals, so all you have to do is follow the rules, enjoy your flying and have a F&M free season.

The Treasurer – Paul Ellis

My sole aim in life is to look after the club's finances making sure the committee spend your money wisely! In my spare time I read my coaching manual and go out flying, mainly on our local club sites or on the winch when it goes out. I have been in the club 13 years and some good times have been had. Look forward to meeting you on the hill.



HG Novice Contact – John Jones



I had my first solo flight in a sailplane in 1966 aged 16, my first hang glider flight at Merthyr in 1973. However, I moved away from hang gliding, and got involved in the Popular Flying Association and spent the next 25 years involved with flying, restoring, and building light aircraft; I've flown a variety of types including veteran tail draggers, ultralights, and modern spam cans. About five years ago I took up hang gliding again, and now it is the only flying I do. I find it totally absorbing and challenging, and I find that there is so much to learn that I really regret those years I spent away from it.

The local pilots were a tremendous help to me when I ventured back out on the hill - our fellow pilots are one of the best things about the sport. I'm still new enough to hang gliding to be able to remember those novice feelings, and how important a friendly face, and some experienced guidance is. I don't pretend to be able to give novices that sort of help myself; but I can do the friendly face, and I can point you towards the pilots who can help you out when you need it.

Membership Secretary – Tony Moore

Hi chaps and chapesses..I'll be dealing with all the membership issues such as sending out renewals and helmet stickers, as well as welcoming new members. A big job with well over 200 members! The best way you can help me is to be prompt and legible with the renewals....please!



PG Competitions – Pete Taylor



Age: Twenty Something

Occupation: Flight Test Engineer

Rating: Pilot (Hill) and Club Coach

Residence: Bristol

Usual flying sights: Selsly, Frocester, Westbury, Mere, Ubley, Draycott sleights and S.E wales sites in summer

Favourite (localish) site: Pandy

Hi there, welcome to all old and new club members, If you are reading this, then you are either checking out the committee for the best looking pilot, well ladies, you can stop looking now! or you might actually be interested in participating in some sort of club or national paragliding competition. As you probably know 2001 has been an absolute disaster for flying and for my availability to the club. Hopefully this will change for 2002. After trying many different types of flying (Gliding, Microlighting, Light Aviation) I have found that paragliding is the most accessible and stimulating form of flight available for me. I have been flying paragliders for 3 years now and I am keen to put a little back into the future of the sport.

I am in no way a great pilot or guru of all things in free flying, but I will be putting some effort into gaining new blood into the club comp scene. I hope to do this by running a PG team for the British Club Challenge 2002 and organising things for pilots interested in the British Paragliding Cup and any internal club comps such as the Easter Cup. I will also make an effort to organise a training weekend for pilots who are interested in flying for the BCC Avon team, with possibly a trip overseas to somewhere warm at the beginning of the season. A lot of new comers may think that participation in paragliding comps is for the stalwart sky god nutters, this could not be further from reality (with the odd exception). Friendly competitions are excellent for improving and gaining new flying skills and techniques and for supplying the motivation to "go over the back" and complete your first cross country flight. So if you are interested in advancing your flying experience and skills, then keep an eye on the club website competition section, where any details or news of future events will appear. See you in 2002.

PS. Gary Mitchell is deputising as the P.G club comp sec for periods when I am unable to make events.

HG Competitions/XC League – Neil Atkinson



Flying HG since 1976. Club coach.

Yes Hamish is my baby brother!

Mainly seen at: Westbury or Ubley (when it re-opens...)

Also safety officer for Mendip Tow Group who are now operating from Middle Wallop Airfield courtesy of the Army Air Corp Paragliding Club.

Claim to fame: Walked away from Midair collision despite my chute failing to open and the total destruction of my ScandalXK. Which reminds me, I must repack that parachute again!

Pet Hates: Paragliders who come to MY end of the ridge when I'm scratching at ridge height (Dave M please note!).

Job goals for 2002:

- 1) Ensure Avon wins Club Challenge
- 2) Ensure Avon wins HG XC Club Trophy
- 3) Ensure Avon qualifies for Club Challenge final
- 4) Ensure Avon flies a competition in the Club Challenge! (ONLY if F&M doesn't reappear.)
- 5) Ensure an Avon member enters an XC for the HG XC Club Trophy
- 5) Do an XC. I've had a couple sparse years since the mid-air on the Blorenge. OK!
- 6) Go flying...

Maybe the goals are listed in reverse order of achievability, maybe not...

Sites Officer (N) – Robin Brown

Sites officer North, invested interest in not losing sites due to using them!

I Make a huge amount of lolly every year by selling dodgy Paragliders to unsuspecting pilots for unreasonable amounts of money.....

Redeeming features....great legs!



Safety Officer – Alex Coltman



Hi Everyone, I am your new safety officer. I have a fair amount of experience flying paragliders and have a rating for hang gliders (and a glider somewhere although its been such a long time since I've flown it I've forgotten where it is!). I have been in touch with the BHPA about what the position entails and also have a supply of accident report forms, although I hope we shall not need them! If anyone has any safety concerns that can be dealt with at club level, or issues they want taken to a National level then please let me know. I look forward to seeing you all on the hill for a "normal" seasons flying.

CLUB NEWS

Airtopia Demo Day Takes Off

Recently we held a mini demo day...the objective was to give a small number of pilots the chance to fly several different canopies in one day, or over a long weekend. This is the way forward for me.....I will be doing it again. Moving demo gliders around the country is expensive and does not give the customer the chance to jump from one make to another on the same day.

In one day I flew the following:

Airwave Magic, Airwave sport, Gin Nomad, Gradient Bliss, Gradient Onyx and Advance Sigma5.

I haven't had so much fun in ages....and it was a horrible day.

Robin (New Canopy Tart)

Club Meeting News

Those of you who didn't attend the AGM in October would have missed Tom Eves talk about flying in South Africa. It was a very interesting talk covering just about everything you would want to know if planning a trip there. His photos were very good and descriptions of the various sites very comprehensive, including much information on when and how to fly those sites safely. It looks and sounds like an awesome place to fly, but not for the faint hearted during the height of the season. Tom recommends visiting in November - December (early summer) or June - July (winter) if you want to avoid the scariest conditions. As promised Tom has provided some contact information which will be useful to anyone who is thinking of taking their glider out there for a piece of the action (see below). Our thanks to Tom for agreeing at short notice to entertain us all for the evening.

Rob Manzoni, Cape Town & Porterville - Tel: 0027 (0) 827884398. Owner and CFI of Porterville flying school and also owns the Porterville launch

Craig Richard, Chairman of the Overberg Club - Tel: 0027 (0) 824516955

Tom Eves, Cape Town - Tel: 0027 (0) 219752886 (after March 2002)

Greg Hammerton, based in Cape Town runs X/C courses and guiding tours:

www.paragliding.co.za/hammer a useful web site

which has links to all the major South Africa clubs and flying info. South Africa's free flight association www.sapha.co.za. Tom has also provided the club with a copy of the South Africa sites guide which will be available in the library.

The November meeting which was held on the 15th featured another great talk. This time by Eddie Colfox, who had some amazing stories to tell about his trip earlier this year to the Karakoram in northern Pakistan. Eddie was accompanied on the trip by John Silvester who has previously flown and climbed in various parts of the Himalayas. The purpose of the trip was not to bivie fly as in previous visits, but rather to assess the area and conditions for future visits. Eddie brought along a short video and a superb slide show, and although the talk was largely unrehearsed he was able to convey the awesome splendour of flying in such a remote region. It's a shame that they didn't have a barograph with them, as they would quite likely have come home with some world height gain records, with climbs of around 5,000 metres. The next time he says he'll be taking oxygen :-). Eddie is doing a series of talks including one which is being attended by Princess Anne, who will be there to support his efforts in raising funds for the Save the Children Fund, of which she is patron. Before the meeting dispersed a beer glass was passed around the room, and we collected £70.00 for this worthwhile cause. Our thanks to Eddie, and to all those who gave generously to his collection.

If you don't want to miss out on future talks and events at club meetings, then drop in to the Compass Inn at Tormarton on the second Thursday of each month. Plans for the new year include a repeat of last years well received Question Time, with a panel of experts from both the HG and PG world. We are still hoping to persuade Hugh Miller (Editor of X/C Magazine) to pay us a visit, and there are several other guests which we are actively pursuing. If you have any suggestions to make regarding future guests or talks, then pass them to Tim Pentreath our hard working Social Secretary. Don't forget that it is your club, so don't be shy to have your say.

Simon

WARNING

Military Flying at on Salisbury Plain

In the near future you may happen to see people flying Battlesbury Hill or other military sites around Salisbury Plain. Under no circumstance should you fly there as you will be flying in a danger area and subject to either prosecution by the Military or death by low flying jet.

Avon HGPG Club
Record of Accounts
Year 2000-2001

<u>Income</u>	£
Membership	4212.00
Coaching Course	170.00
Interest	74.06
TOTAL	4456.14

<u>Expenditure</u>	£
Videos & Books	402.33
Speakers & Expenses	375.00
Hall & Equipment Hire	272.32
Trophies	171.50
Pilot Exams	226.90
Mere Bash Expenses	315.67
Magazine & Mailings	395.27
Membership Expenses	220.08
Sites & Farmers Treats	534.02
Others	161.04
TOTAL	3074.07

Monies in Building Society	£ 4049.79
Monies in Bank	£ 594.49

Website News

The web site has been parked on the domain www.skytribe.co.uk/avon/ for some time. This domain name belongs to Marcus and he still uses it for email. For technical reasons we are unable to continue to develop the web site on this domain name therefore, the club has purchased the domain names www.avonhgpg.co.uk and www.avonhgpg.org. These domains are now active and point to the same site. We are currently organising moving the web site hosting to a new server, provided free courtesy of Rich Harding. You will need to update your bookmarks now to point to avonhgpg.co.uk/. If you have a web site that links to the Avon web site, please change any links as well.

The new domain name enables email forwarding - that is, instead of emailing hamish.a@virgin.net to contact the webmaster (or even marcus@e3media.co.uk if you didn't know the post had changed hands), you can now email webmaster@avonhgpg.co.uk. The same applies to the other committee posts (see inside front cover). Obviously this will make the committee hand over easier each year. As for the web site itself, I'm not intending any massive change to the visual design or navigation, which I think are excellent [thanks again to Marcus]. Rather there will be minor tweaks to improve things, for instance make it possible to click on a diary entry or news story to go straight the full article. I will add the ability for anyone in the club to post full articles with photos directly to the web site, building on the success of the diary entries and hopefully making Nova more or less "write itself".

One option will be to enable SMS text messages to be sent from the web site. You will have to log in to use this service and recipients will be limited to members of the club who have opted in to receiving messages. Mobile phone numbers will not be published. This could be useful to enable midweek flyers find flying buddies or for the committee to alert everyone that a site is closed. The system I'm testing with the Southampton University club (Clickatell) costs 2.4p per text message, so usage would have to be limited somehow. (The Wendy Windblows SMS service uses Clickatell). Perhaps we could find a sponsor for the service? Orange, perhaps?

Watch this space, Hamish Atkinson

Parachute Repack

Robin is organising another parachute deployment and repack in the coming months. Look out for details of where and when on the website, the club newsgroup or in the next issue of Nova.

Contributions to Nova

Please send you news, letters, features, photos, cartoons or whatever to the editor (details inside front cover) or email editor@avonhpgg.co.uk

The Avon Christmas Party

Yet again the Christmas Dinner at the Green Park Brasserie in Bath was a huge success. Lots of pea shooting, eating, drinking and boogieing afterwards until the early hours.

The prize giving was cut short by the rude interruption of the disco but those who managed to win a bottle of wine included Fiona for the best dressed woman, Robin for the best dressed man, Tony for the best tree landing, Garry for is epic XC flight, and Stafford for the best fancy dress hat. Stafford later donned his hard hat and thrusted along to tune of YMCA. The evening wouldn't have been complete without Angie doing the rounds with the red lipstick, and Colin larking around on the dance floor with as many women as he could drip sweat over at once!

Choosing the Correct Paraglider : A lovers guide.

By Robin Brown (New Canopy Tart)

Choosing the correct paraglider for yourself is much like choosing a wife or husband.....the fact is whatever decision you make, you are going to have to live with it for a while.

If you make a bad decision, it will cost you money!

So it makes sense to think logically about this and not always follow your heart at the expense of your head.

Better still; let your instructor arrange a marriage for you.

This rough guide looks at new canopies only and is a completely biased view, based on my personal experience.

Most pilots buying their second wing will look at the multitude of different wings on offer and hopefully narrow it down to a few that take their fancy. The reasoning at this point doesn't matter....Nice colour, good advert, local dealer, whatever. You can't try them all...Getting a good go on three different canopies is doing well.....The weather and time will conspire against you.

Decide what you are going to be doing for the next two years. Pleasure flying with a few competitions? What type of Comp? Local or the nationals....the performance difference between some dhv1-2 and dhv2 gliders is minimal. The difference is often only noticeable when using the speed bar. It will depend on wing loading. A pilot with a total weight of 95kg on a glider with a max weight of 100 kg will cruise happily alongside a higher rated glider that is only half loaded.

Look at the real surface area relative to the weight range. You may find that you fit in better on some manufactures weight ranges than others. The smallest surface area that you can get away with, and with a decent sink rate the better. It will give you much better ground handling, better handling in terms of its response and better speed. I believe the majority of new designs like to be well loaded.

There is still a significant difference in performance between dhv2 gliders and the dhv 2-3 market. Think very carefully before going down this road.

It's a bit like Brittany Spearsnice to look at, but would you want to live with her for a couple of years or more? (Oh yes please) and what about

her resale value afterwards?
[Female pilots please substitute
Brad Pitt, Robbie Williams etc.
Ed]

Do not pre-judge a different canopy based on the feel of your old one.....I have heard several times' pilots describe a different canopy as 'twitchy' when their last canopy I would describe as a 'Shed'

Some like light sensitive handling and some folks like a bit of pressure to wrestle with.

Unfortunately most second hand performance or dhv 2-3 gliders are completely unsaleable at the moment.....this is a tragedy for all of us, the simple fact is, no one wants to part exchange that sort of canopy anymore.

On the plus side, the pure pleasure derived from flying a hotter machine cannot be measured against being sensible...sometimes you need to move on up!

In the end the best glider is the one you feel totally at home with....as long as it looks pretty of course.

Westbury XC

By Garry Mitchell

Following a good forecast with light Northerly winds, I awoke early with hopes of a good day at Westbury.

The foot and mouth situation was finally under control so a cross-country flight was a real possibility. As I drove to the hill inspecting every wind indicator that I passed, I could eventually see people flying on the north face, in light winds. With this confirmation of the conditions a new urgency spread through me. Already the questions in my head had started; *if its that windy now, it will be blown out by 12 O'clock; Who else is flying today? Why are there no clouds? Have I got my maps and vario?*

As I walk across to take off I start to feel the excitement building, This is a good day, already the thermals are starting to come through and there is a good group of pilots already on take off with their wings spread ready to go. As I start to prepare my wing and sort out my vario and GPS, the voice of concern in the back of my head starts to question, *why are we here? If its thermic it will be rough & turbulent, we should stay on the ground, you know this is a bad plan.* These fears & concerns are kept at bay by the voice of reason that knows that we have flown in conditions much stronger than this. We have practised for this; we have been waiting for this. We will not be killed the moment we step off the edge. As the battle inside my head rages on with every reason why I should & should not fly, I quietly

continue to prepare. Eventually the only reason that the voice of concern can hold between me and the sky is the fact that I need to pee. This is soon resolved and I am quickly in the air. The air is

smooth and lift is easy to find. As I relax the confidence begins to build, the voice of reason was right. I was not smashed into the hill as soon as I launched, this is good fun & a big grin spreads across my face. Soon I am in a small thermal concentrating on gaining high and not hitting anybody. As we climb above the hill my head is filled with excitement the sound of my vario and a feeling of kinship with my fellow flyers whose names and faces I don't know. This was a small & weak thermal and soon I was alone as all the other pilots lost the lift and returned to the hill.

Once alone the big picture fills my head, the voice of reason begins to form a plan. *There are still no clouds, if I continue this will probably be a very short cross-country with a long walk back.* The voice of concern offers its opinion, *we should go back with the rest of them, we are all alone up here. Do you know this thing could fall out of the sky at any moment?* Whilst the arguments continue we are still gently climbing. Eventually a compromise is reached and we go on a glide back to the front of the hill with a plan to use any new thermal to push out in front of the hill. If this fails then at least we will be back amongst friends. As it happens I find a new thermal and climb above the hill once again. The climb dies out at 3400ft ASL but now I have height and time to play. I wait to see if any other pilots are able to join me but unfortunately they couldn't. The voice of reason backed by the excitement and exhilaration of dynamic flight are calling for wingovers, after all they are a good way of building your confidence & glider control.

Soon I am out in front of the hill swooping from left to right daring myself to apply more brake and heavier weight shift. Before long my concentration is broken by the voice of concern, *if you continue with this insanity we will shortly suffer a massive collapse, enter an uncontrollable spin, fall from the sky & be splashed all over the hill.* As I continue the voices rage back & forth, each with a good reason to continue or stop. Eventually as the wing tips start to go loose at the top of the turn, the voice of concern wheels out its ultimate weapon, FEAR. Within seconds I am gently easing out of the wingover, but in a last act of defiance, edged on by the voice of reason telling me that we have done this before and that I should not be so easily swayed by fear without good reason. I hold the turn and enter a gentle spiral dive. As I tighten the turn, the voices of concern increases in direct proportion to the amount of G forces and the proximity of the ground until I am unable to hold it at bay any more and pull out of the dive. I am now low and opt to land back on top to reassess the day.

next thermal. I see somebody going up and turn to join them. The adrenaline rushes as I have to get this right. The sky is crowded and I don't want to be left behind. Trying to thermal without hitting anybody else or getting in others' way, requires all my concentration. But soon we are climbing above the hill once more and my head begins to fill with excitement, confidence is running out of my ears and any doubts are not given a second thought.

Gradually the crowd thins as we climb higher until only one other pilot remains, we watch each other standing still as the world spins by. As before the climb is smooth and peaks at about 500ft/min, running out of energy at about 3400ft. We are close together and conversation is easy as we set of on the first glide of the day. We are both grinning from ear to ear, this is it, shit or bust. As I lay back to increase my glide the voice of reason is giving the orders; *Where's the next possible thermal source, What about the wind drift? There are no clouds.*



Photo: Westbury by Tony Moore

Once on the ground, I decide to try to form an alliance with the other pilots that were flying in the same thermal earlier. A small group of committed pilots have a much better chance of doing well and making the most of the day as well as helping with my confidence. After a brief introduction we sit folding maps and gradually convince ourselves that this is a good plan. The conditions are good and we could easily fly to the coast today. Feeling a renewed sense of security and confidence knowing that I am not alone in my views on the conditions, I am soon in the air searching for the

Where do I go next? Where is the other glider? Is he going up? As we glide on all these question are lost as the view gradually fills my head leaving no space for concern or fear only the sound of the vario and the wind whistling threw the lines. Suddenly the moment is broken by the voice of the other pilot. He's going up; immediately I am back to the here and now, fully focused on getting to that climb before its too late. Soon I feel the surge as the glider dives through the sink into the lift. The other pilot is already 360ing so I turn in the same direction. My head is recalling every piece of information it can

from my memories of previous thermals and trying to match these with the information being offered by the glider in order to form a model of this particular thermal.

Thermaling takes time to master, only practise will allow you the ability to convert the information given by the glider into knowing where the lift is. The vario is only used to confirm these feelings as it often lags by several seconds. As I fly around in circles searching for the strongest lift, I see nothing of the outside world. All awareness of time and place is lost as all my senses are funnelled into this one objective, going up. Soon I am centred in the lift and the big picture begins to refill my head; as more and more of my brain is freed from the effort of finding the lift until I am almost flying on autopilot. This is what flying is all about for me; the view, the satisfaction of overcoming all the problems and the feeling of peace within your soul, made all the better shared with a friend. As we fly around in tiny circles lost in this massive sky looking down on the glass dome at Longleat we are joined by a sailplane and we all fly around locked in an invisible grid reaching for the heavens. I am completely lost in the moment as I try to stack all these emotions and information into my memory.....whilst sitting in a deck chair dangling by string supported by a bed sheet at 3400ft locked in a turn with a sail plane, holding a constant position to my right....

Gradually an annoying sound turns into a voice in my ear. Its my flying partner telling me to look down as below my foot 5 sail planes are circling nose to tail, all within the limited boundary of my thermal. As I watched mesmerised they suddenly disperse and speed away into the distance like white sharks in the blue. The voice of reason grabs my attention; *Where are we going next? The other guy is already 2/3k down wind, You need to get a move on or we will be left behind.* But the training and practise tells me to stay with the lift as long as possible since I have gone down too many times on good days because of my impatience. I am over Longleat forest in ones and zeros watching for any sign of a new thermal but unwilling to leave this dying lift without good reason.

My partner is now 5/7k down wind, low and still on his glide without turning once. I watch with concern willing him to find a good thermal so that he may reach the sky again and then we may continue together. I am running out of time myself as my thermal has gone and left only sink. I need to go and go quickly. I apply some bar and head for my companion hoping that he will show me where the next climb will be as I am unable to see any sort of land mark worth flying to. The voice of concern starts to leak in telling me that I am going down and

that I should find a field to land in. But the voice of reason remains confident telling me to lay back, reduce the drag, extend your glide and speed as much as possible. *This will give us more time in the air and we will cover more ground with a better chance of finding that next climb. I can see the other pilot climbing slowly but he is out of reach. I need a climb and I need it quickly.* The voices argue over which way to go, the short cut to hilly ground over the trees away from safety, or out into the flatter fields towards safety. Eventually the voice of reason, with its logical thought wins the vote and we fly directly over the last of the trees heading for the hills behind Mere.

I am down to 1000ft agl and things are getting intense. Then I feel a slight lift under one wing tip and I lean into it. Its still there so I lean harder and start to turn. *This is it we're going up.* The Vario is quietly chirping away in the back of my head as I look at the ground falling away. I am thermaling on auto pilot trying to stay relaxed and get a grip on the big picture but its not working I am clueless, with no clouds to guide me I am struggling in a thermal that is not really working. The voices are at it again. The voice of concern is already planning a landing and demanding that we call it a day whilst we are still alive and in a good position. The voice of reason is reminding me that we have gone down on good days because of my lack of patience, only to spend the rest of the week telling myself: *Next time stay with the lift however week until you have to land and don't stop until you absolutely have to or have a real indicator of better lift.*

As I slowly gain height I can see several ploughed fields in a line surrounded by hedges and a tractor working in it. The voice of reason starts to work overtime convincing me that I need to go for it. Its got to be better than this and the frustration of not going up quickly builds until I convince myself that its a good plan and leave on a glide over the fields. Soon I am above the field & doing down! The voices are battling again both sure that they are right. All I can do is wait as time rushes by and the ground gets closer by the second. Then all my senses are suddenly brought to focus as I feel lift under a wing tip. I wait. Its still there. I turn and its still there. The doubt that was filling my head is retreating as the voice of reason fills me with renewed confidence and hope. This climb is solid at 400-500 ft/min. Soon I am feeling relaxed and centred on the climb, looking for the other pilot. I see him low and as I climb I watch him gliding off into the distance about 7 or 8 km away. As I too climb things get easier and the big picture begins to fill my head. Behind me in the distance I can see the chimney at Westbury, Alfred's Tower and the hills at Mere. Below me cars silently

rush by on the A303. Ahead I see Portland and Weymouth Bay. I am grinning from ear to ear as the realisation of what I have achieved begins to dawn on me. *This is probably my longest flight in the UK and one of the best flights from Westbury on a paraglider and I'm still going up!*

Just as I am convincing myself how good I am things start to get a bit lumpy and within seconds the outside world is lost as all my concentration is centred on dealing with this new situation. I have entered air that is rising rather fast. It requires a lot of my efforts to stay on top of the situation but things are under control. My vario is squealing as if someone has poked it in the eye with a sharp stick. My head is overflowing with voices all demanding to be heard. The voice of reason is in charge at the moment but the voice of concern is there with panic and fear trying to take control. With every passing second my confidence is growing and pushing panic out. Things are happening fast but all my senses are running on adrenaline. I feel every tiny movement of the wing and am able to prevent any problem with ease. I can see, feel, smell and hear everything. At this moment I am totally alive. Time and space have no meaning as everything happens in slow motion. My heart is pounding, my legs are throbbing and my feet are visibly shaking. The voices of fear and panic have already tripped my Neolithic response systems priming my body ready to run for its life. This must be what it feels like 2 seconds after you realise that the sound in the bush behind you is a fucking great big tiger! After probably less than a minute things ease off and the big picture begins to return. I realise that I have just been sucked through the inversion and have gained approximately 1300ft. The voices of concern were convinced that we should leave the climb, because amongst other things, with no cloud to stop us we would probably be sucked clean off the face of the earth. This didn't happen. The voice of reason knew it but fear and panic have no logic or reason and left unchecked they will convince you of anything. It takes time for me to get this sorted and form a plan, but soon I am gliding downwind in very buoyant air looking for my next climb, whilst trying to remember anything that I have ever read or heard about flying back through the inversion.

I hear from my friend that he is unfortunately on the ground but OK. The glide from 4600ft is smooth and long with 0-1 down. My spirit is flying free as I allow the moment to fill me completely. The glide is only broken by a slight vibration as I fly down through the inversion. My attention is held by a passing old biplane. As I watch this WW2 flying machine rattling along I think of all the lives lost by the many young men in their own quest for flight at a time when this

aircraft was the cutting edge of technology. I consider their response to me in my (just for fun) flying machine. All too soon I am low and needing a new thermal. I am tired both physically and mentally and the voice of concern is again telling me to look for a good landing spot and call it a day whilst I am still alive. This time they are waging the war of wills. I see a good thermal source and fly directly over it but it's not really working. The voices of reason are telling me to circle but I have lost the plot and go for a glide to grab the last few K before it's too late.

Within minutes I am standing in a field feeling drained and happy to have landed safely. Looking at this pile of string and fabric that has just taken me on a journey across fields, towns, forest and through every emotion that makes me human. As I walk to a corner of the field to pack up I am already questioning my decisions and cursing myself for giving in when I could have gone further. I pack up and answer the many questions of the people that have gathered to find out where the rest of my aeroplane went to and should they dial 999? As I do so I am quietly storing all the memories away so I may recall them one day when I am old and grey and my grandchildren can see pictures of these strange flying things.

epilogue.....

As I gain confidence & ability the concentration required to fly and thermal becomes less so I am able to stay in the right head space seeing more and more of the big picture. This in turn enables me to fly for longer periods with better concentration when required. This only comes with practice.

After the flight I checked my vario and the max climb was 1560 ft/ min and my GPS recorded a max speed of 97.6 mph whilst in the spiral dive. The distance covered from Westbury to my landing field was 47.4K, just short of the site record set by Tim pentreath.

I would like to thank Stafford Evans for his company, for forging ahead and leading the way as well as congratulating him on a very good flight.

I would like to say to any pilots wishing to extend their skills and confidence that there is no substitute for time in the air. Only this will give you the skills you need. Replacing the uncertainty and fear with knowledge and confidence will only happen when you are able to stay in the right head space. This only comes when you begin to think for yourself and that takes time. Fear is good. It will safeguard your life, but uncontrolled it could kill you.

Brazil 2001

Governador Valadares

By Stafford Evans

First stop was Rio de Janeiro after a 10-hour flight and a cheap bus ride across town to the hotel on Copacabana beach to catch up with the rest of the gang. A dozen of us in all have joined Robin Brown of Airtopia and Graham Steel (some other pilot), for this trip to Governador Valadares.

We were due to stay in Rio for a couple of days so after a quick wash and brush up we arrange transport to Pepino beach and a site there called Sao Conrado. After arranging a pass from the local club you have to blag or pay about £3.00 each for a lift to the top. Well I've flew on a steep site in Spain last year but this is silly, launch is at 45 degrees and you have about 4 steps to stop or go and then it just drops into bush and trees, possibly the most committing launch you'll ever try. Whilst rigging and considering launch you also have to duck to avoid the hang gliders as they launch from a ramp above and behind you.

After calling for clearance to launch from the hangies it's time for the forward launch, you know the one you wished you'd practised before you left home, we all get Robin to stand at the front and give us a shout of stop or go. Once off the views are stunning, Rio and golden sand stretches away ahead of you, lush green forest below and the Christ the Redeemer figure on the horizon. Flying towards the beach you pass a huge monolith of dark rock that I decide not to fly to close to in case it bins me. As it turned out this flight was pretty much a top to bottom with very little thermic activity and an easy approach over the sea can be made to land on either the beach or a landing field adjacent to it. I find on the return trip that this site can be thermic with a much more

rewarding flight above take-off and this was a great finish and a way to chill out after GV. Once down the locals will pack up your wing for about a £1 and when it's 35 degs C it's a £1 well spent!

Next stop is Governador Valadares, it's an overnight 10-hour bus ride and arriving early morning gives you time freshen up in time for your first days flying. Journey time to the top of Ibituruna peak by open top truck is about an hour and walking up is not an option unless you're bonkers. Standing at about 3300ft Ibituruna completely dominates the surrounding area, even the nearest large feature know as The Shark's Fin (and very good for a low save) blends into the gently rolling Brazilian landscape. It's our first day and after a briefing from



Coming in to land at Pepino Beach, Rio de Janeiro.

Graham we decide that an orientation flight to the landing field would be the sensible option and that's about 4km away. An easy trip you may think but just this side of landing is a nice wide, brown and very wet river. Various theories circulate on how much height you need to cross it, as much as possible down to 850ft, there is no turning back once committed. It's now late in the day and I watch the first few off and conditions seem very quiet with no one really going up just a straight glide to the

bottom, some decide to land this side to avoid the early bath. There's plenty of room to rig and launch here and grass as well, a light breeze in my face and off we go. Luckily I catch the only bit of lift going over a rocky outcrop out in front and nearly get back to take off. Mindful of the fact that no one else has gone up today I use my height to cruise over the Rio Doce and into the landing field for a 20p ice cream. The locals here are also excellent packers and will do the deed for about 60p.

Day two and we're all feeling a bit more relaxed about flying here and keen to get on. Graham gets off first to show us around and he climbs to base in what seems like no time at all on his Omega 5. I launch and follow a line left of centre to catch a thermal as it kicks off the rocky spur ahead, it's quite a stiff climb out and staying clear of Ibituruna's main face I get to base. From here at 2400ft ATO you can see that the mountain is basically a spine back with launching available from both sides. I drift into cloud put on a little speed bar and drift out again this is ace! The sky is quite busy which is brilliant for thermal marking and set off at speed to the Shark's Fin about 5km away and pickup some more lift, thermaling with others is just so much more fun when you can shout to each other. Following roughly the main road to Rio I head off down the valley learning all the time on this my first ever XC looking for building cloud or good triggers like the quarries, dark rock and the ever present Urubus (Turkey Vultures) which make this an incredible flying experience. This is also the first time I've flown with a radio and you realise the sky is a very big place when you can hear your friends but can't find them anywhere even when you're all going the same way! After three climbs to base and good lift in-between I try to reach some really nice black cliffs on the far side of the valley. They're not really working now and I scratch as best I can when I hear Tony Moore on the radio, he informs me that he's just landed about 500m in front of me. Well I've still got a bit of height and it would be a shame to not fly past him, so I try a little harder and manage to fly about another kilometre to upset him thoroughly. After 160 mins and 42 km I keep a good lookout for power lines as they go in all directions and there are loads of them. Safely down, but it's so hot I drink the last of my water, which is now tepid, and walk back to the nearby garage to meet Tony. Time for a cold beer and wait for the "Rio Doce" blue bus that runs about every hour straight back to GV for about 30p for every 10kms flown. Climbing on board we see the smiling face of Robin Brown who managed 47 kms, team Airtopia has had a good day.

Now I'm not going to give you a blow-by-blow account of every flight because the conditions here

are quite consistent which is one of the reasons this place is so good to fly. Every day you fly a similar pattern but with the normal variations that the weather brings, it's still up to you to make the decisions on where the thermals are. For me it gets better. Day three, 63kms in 213 mins a max of 3650 ft ATO, 10up on the vario, loads more thermaling practice, and I get drawn into cloud and spiral dive out and finish up with a long glide in blue lift before touching down near the road. As is quite the norm here a gaggle of kids appear on unserviceable push-bikes to help you pack up, when it's this hot you don't say no. Once again though the bus brings the ever-smiling face of Robin who pips me again with 67km. You may even be lucky enough to fly with one of the worlds top pilots like America's Scotty Marion who was there teaching one on one with Wyatt, a Yank with far too much money. Over a week you could see Wyatt's flying improve dramatically and by the end he was going XC as Scotty pulled SAT manoeuvres for fun and then regained the lost height with ease. Whilst in GV I managed a total of 260km XC flying and nearly 22 hours of airtime I was dead chuffed being an XC virgin. The longest flight of team Airtopia was Graham with a 99km.

Whilst here of course there's the other side of the holiday, the nightlife. Food here is cheap, paying from pence to a few pounds, and a wide variety of tastes are catered for from local dishes to pizzas. Drink is also inexpensive and you must try the local drink of caipirinha made with lime, sugar and the local hooch or a caipiroska (*capivodka*) a bit smoother mixed with Vodka. GV really is somewhere you have to visit. It really is one of the world's premier sites. I flew 14 out of fifteen days, not all XC but all individual and challenging for one reason or another.

LOST & FOUND

Mobile Phone

Found at Westbury in the hang-glider rigging area.

If you think it belongs to you please call
Cathy on
01985 214579

Hyena on Take Off

By Michael Andrews

When I went to work in Ethiopia for six weeks, I took my canopy (Swing Astral) and asked Bob Drury for contacts. It was, for me, quite an alarming prospect to fly in Africa on my own, even if only at weekends, but the first take-off I looked at was not too fearsome.



Walking up Mount Yarrer

It was in the Entoto mountains behind Addis Ababa and was covered in eucalyptus stumps which were rapidly sprouting, and was at 8,000 feet. The thick-billed crows were enjoying soaring and I could see a convenient football pitch below on the outskirts of the city where Bob had landed, but it was late and too windy.

Next weekend it rained and I didn't try to fly. It was not till a week later that I discovered that the flight path to the football field led straight over the American Embassy compound. When Bob had flown over them, a year ago, they had called the police. If I had flown over the marines would certainly have shot me – the World Trade Center attack had been only four days before, and Americans everywhere were waiting for more atrocities.

I found some other paraglider pilots, but they were all relative beginners, with a fine record of injuries. Two of them took me to a new hill

(7,000ft). It had a shallow slope and looked beginner-friendly, though I thought the thermals might get fierce later. We walked up, attracting children like flies. As we waited for a thermal on take-off there was a loud commotion among the dogs in a clump of trees and huts below, and then a Hyena loped across the hillside in front of us, hotly pursued by the dogs. It gave me the same sort of feeling I had had when skiing in the Andes with condors circling overhead. Not a place to be on your own with a twisted ankle.

I made it clear to the others that I was not an instructor, but felt I had to give them a good briefing. Richard and Pascal flew top-to-bottoms first. Richard landed downwind with one foot on a cobble and was unlucky enough to chip an ankle – which oddly gave no trouble for the first half-hour so he could pack up and sit in the Toyota. Pascal got about 50 feet up and nearly freaked out when his canopy dived after a low-level gust. It was a competition wing, sold to him by a German 'Instructor' but he landed safely. He had never flown so long before. All of a minute or so. I launched in a weak thermal and was able to stay up just long enough to admire a kite's nest in a line of trees. By the time I had climbed back up to take-off there were about a hundred astonished spectators and the sky was rapidly becoming over-developed. I only managed another extended top-to-bottom – but I had flown.

Bob had told me about Mt Yarrer to the South of the city – and I managed to find the guide who had taken him there to a saddle about 1500 feet above the floor of the Rift Valley. It was one of the worst tracks I have ever driven on, deeply gullied and very rough and steep. We needed first gear low-ratio for

twenty minutes to get up – only to find it was howling on take-off. Bob had used an easterly take-off above a steep cwm about 2000 feet deep, and the big birds were tumbling in the rough air enjoying themselves. Lammergeyers, Egyptian vultures, eagles - an impressive display. I waited, hoping the wind would drop in the evening, but we were then joined by local Oromo villagers who told us that at that time of the year – October – it would just get stronger. Although the wind was blowing up the gully I also noticed that the waves on the crops below showed that it was blowing from north-east. So we used the time to recce another take-off which involved a hike round the mountain. A pair of duikers, mountain antelope, watched us from the crest above.

A couple of weeks later I was back at the NE take-off (not for beginners) with a party of Pascal's French friends, non-flyers. There was hardly any wind, no birds, an inversion, and I already knew that the green grass and crops were not conducive to lift.

The dry season had not really set in yet. But it was a b – big mountain so I unpacked and waited. The view was tremendous. Far below I could see the lakes of the Rift Valley, but there were no roads. I did not want to go down and still there were no vultures circling. Bad news. After half an hour I launched into a weak thermal. By watching very closely where the grass was being shaken by the wind, I managed to stay up for quarter of an hour in choppy lift. Then at last I got enough height to get away from the slope and found a decent thermal - 5 m/s.

Once above the top of the mountain I was heading for cloudbase but flew over to where Pascal was taking photos. A mistake – it appeared to be the only decent thermal of the day and I soon dropped out to land way down the valley.

By timing my take-off, I again managed to use weak lift to slowly get back up the mountain to near take-off, and landed in a field of beans. I had got my African wings – and had avoided the vultures. I was quite chuffed that I had flown when they had not. Sadly, it was the last time I could go out flying.

Not much in my logbook, but powerful memories.....



Mount Yarrer from the air

FireFly Anecy Special

Part II

By Rich Harding

2000 - Six Jours sur Onze

Last year's roll call for Avon Go Mad in Anecy 2K (or something!):

Firefly (surprisingly enough)

The Piper - minus Type 2 this time

Mr Potato Head - aka Mike Andrews

Supporting cast: Martin & Amy Stanton and family



Climbing up from La Tournette

After a frantic, fruitless search for my raincoat, The Piper and I started with a tour of airport pubs (all imaginatively named The Shakespeare!) as not only had the Stealth Camper taken a fair hammering last time (and wasn't yet ready anyway) but it was considerably cheaper to fly EasyJet to Geneva and hire a car (a gutless Megane, which endured much mocking), even counting the 15 quid it cost Simon to get his glider bag pocket sewn back on. Having spent the night attempting to ignore the monotonous recorded tannoy announcements in Luton, peals of

laughter went round the departure lounge when a conflict between the two PA systems led to the warning that 'Passengers with infants and children under five will be removed by the security section'. Mind you, Bristol Bus Station almost managed 'National Express are pleased to announce the late departure...' :-)

I'd already booked the same campsite and we arrived after a quick alcohol (okay, and a couple of other essentials) purchasing spree in town to be led to our pitch. If we'd known how bad the weather was going to be we would have flown but we were both knackered. As it was, by the time we went to fetch Mike from Geneva airport on Tuesday (in a torrential thunderstorm) we'd managed one extended TTB (and a psychedelic helmet) between us - and only after I'd blotted my copybook with a farcical attempt to launch with twisted brake lines. After each having short flights on Wednesday, Martin & canopy went down the front of launch on Thursday. Friday it rained again. I still didn't have a raincoat. Hmmm. Saturday we got just right. Arriving at Montmin around eleven, we decided to take a (very muddy) walk to the top of the ridge to the right of take off, towards Les Rochers du Roux - hopefully presaging a later flight. As luck would have it, hardly any of the showers that were still passing hit the tapis directly - just a short sprinkling. We reckoned it would take half an hour to be flyable but it soon became clear that it would be half that and we immediately rigged and launched. An hour's fun flying ensued, taking the usual tour around Roc Midal and the Dents before landing at Perroix just in advance of the next thundershower, which promptly set in for the evening. Hardly anyone else flew. We went into town again.



Looking south across Montmin take-off

Sunday was the best day of the visit, although it required patience, perseverance and a sufficiency of couilles :-). A light North-Easterly meant an hour working Les Rochers du Roux, watching others getting trashed in the Lanfonnet lee and aborting five attempts of my own to cross the col in front of the Auberge at the foot of La Tournette. Finally Lanfonnet and the Dents came into sun and the Passagers du Vent tandem and I both got in close to the rocks on the other side, stopping to deal with a nasty collapse before finding an elevator to the first cloudbase of the trip (involving paragliders anyway!). Yippee! The only question now was where to go next...

Sitting on launch I'd discussed a few options with a competent German pilot and decided to follow the loose plan and head off across the lake, where there would be more headroom, as base was only 7,000ft asl.

I almost didn't make it. From above the Dents, I lost a full four grand on the crossing and had to fight my way onto, let alone up the Roc de Boeufs - only a Brit would have made it as no-one else would have trusted a 1-up over the far edge of the lake and a pilot who went straight for the ridge found nothing and went down. Once towards the top of the ridge it became easier, although it was with some trepidation that I crossed the second set of high voltage lines, as the wind was being drawn SW along the steep cliffs.

A seemingly inexperienced pilot had been left behind by a group that had drifted off to the South and proceeded to attach her glider limpet-like to mine as I made base again and then carried on down the farther, shallower parts of the ridge, leading to the confluence of five valleys above Le Chatelard.

Finding ourselves low I again trusted my UK skills and headed towards the town of La Motte en Bauges, with the Flying Planet wing still in close attendance. Thermal; get almost back to base; try to push up the ridge a little; WHACK! I have never seen another pilot fly away from me as fast as she did after I had that, even worse, collapse! (More horrible than the complete disappearance of my wing in the Club Challenge Final last year but nowhere near as unreasonably scary as the Sirius.) Okay then - we'll carry on in the other direction :-). The air continued to be 'interesting' as I caught another thermal above the Dent de Rossanaz and then left, relatively low, pushing across to the Dents d'Arclusaz, climbing along them and scooting through the Col du Frene as soon as I had enough height, as the shallow, tree-covered slopes were producing none too friendly, trashy lift.

Out in the Albertville valley I felt that after over four hours in the air I couldn't guarantee my arms or brain handling any more rough stuff and, having played with a flatland thermal for a thousand feet, I left it and spiralled down to a sports field in St Pierre D'Albigny. It then took me ten phone calls (all to answerphones in the UK) to get a message to the others as to where I was! And then I found Simon's mobile number scrawled on the back of my map from last year...



My favourite mountain – La Tournette (about 1000ft was still in cloud)

The rest of our time was unfortunately largely uneventful, although Martin made a valiant attempt at the Grand Tour on the Monday whilst I messed around above Planfait, and I enjoyed demo-ing an Octane on the Tuesday, despite an almost total absence of thermals. With the forecast no better for the next few days, Mike and I decided to cut our losses and return early, leaving Simon to see out the rest of the fortnight alone - I really hope you didn't mind, mate - it was totally doing our heads in! I'm still intending going back though - probably take a couple of Bandits this time...

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Dear NOVA...

If you want to air your views then please post or email your letters to the editor (details inside front cover).

Clean up Westbury!

I apologise in advance for the tone of this letter but I thought it was about time I had a moan.

What is becoming of Westbury? As if it wasn't bad enough having to avoid a minefield of dog shit, litter and used condoms, we now have the occasional smashed up cars. Is it going to start to look like Merthyr or a scene from a Mad Max movie?

Whilst I can't think of anything legal we could do to stop the occasional joyrider from crashing cars there we could, as a club, try persuade the council or the appropriate authorities to provide a litter bin and a "poop" bin. I would image that most dog owners are used to putting their hand in a plastic bag to pick up their doggie-do's but don't do it at Westbury because there is nowhere to deposit it. You can't blame them for not wanting to take it back in the car. The hang-glider pilots are particularly familiar with the problem of trying to find a shit free spot to rig, but imagine what it is like for the public hoping to have a nice family picnic? Not that we want to encourage that but I think it is a public health hazard. Does anyone agree with me or am I just becoming middle-aged?

Cathy Lawrence

[Well, nobody has sent me any letters so I thought I would write myself one! Ed]

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Don't forget to let the membership secretary know if you have changed your email address or any other personal details.

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