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NOVA

The Magazine of the Avon Hang Gliding and Paragliding Club



On the front cover: On launch at the British Championships, Piedrahita. Photo: Tim Pentreath

On the back cover: On launch at Buc in the Ozone Chabre Open. Photo: Richard Danbury

Editorial

In years to come researchers will pore over Nova magazine, gleaning important insights into the lives of pilots at the beginning of the 21st century. And when the focus of their research shifts to the summer of 2007, this issue will be an invaluable resource to them. It clearly reflects our present milieu, providing an accurate picture of British free flight at this key moment in history.

Painstaking research will clearly demonstrate the reasons for the trend toward increased carbon footprint among free flyers, as they jet off to parts of the world that are actually getting some flyable weather this year.

Sarah Ward's words will no doubt be frequently quoted in the academic journals of the future. Her authoritative article was actually written back in April, so no one can say it's a knee-jerk reaction to the summer's grave disappointments. She wonders if Britain is actually becoming unflyable. Could her article be one of the early indications of a trend that will become all too real in the future?

That trend is demonstrated all too clearly by Andre Odinius' article on flying in the Chabre Open in France. He was joined by no less than 12 other Avon Pilots, all desperate to find some good flying conditions for once.

Until yesterday there wasn't a single word or picture in this issue to do with actually flying in Britain. But fortunately Richard Zaltzman has come to the rescue to let us know that all is not lost (yet). He has saved this country's image by writing about a flight he did from Milk Hill recently.

But don't forget that I always welcome material for Nova, whether it's about flying at home or abroad. And don't forget that articles on the other things you get up to are always welcome too – let's face it, that may have to be the bulk of the magazine soon! So whether you're a seasoned pilot or a novice, there's a large audience who will be interested in your experiences, opinions and photos, both now and in the future.

So get writing, you've got nothing else to do after all!

Richard

Chairman's Chunter

First things first – GET YOUR TICKETS TO THE MERE BASH!! It is THE one and only freeflying party of the year, and we have a duty, an obligation to have a cracking time on behalf of all the pilots who have sat at home this summer watching the rain lash the windows. Saturday 1st September, big marquee, three bands, bring your own BBQ, bouncy castle for the kids, kite flying, ludicrously cheap beer, and more fun than you can shake a big stick at. Send a cheque for £10 a ticket, payable to Avon HPGP to me at 36 Beauchamp Road, Bristol, BS7 8LQ, or drop me an email – chairman@avonhpgp.co.uk. Tickets are £15 on the door for those who are hedging their bets on the weather.

And now I've done the advertising, what a difference a day makes. One day's flying, and suddenly the world is a happy, rosy place. The dismal summer, compounded by the frustration of going on holiday in the Brecon Beacons the week before the weather finally changed was really starting to take its toll. The cupboard under the stairs seemed to be a final resting place for the wing, rather than a convenient intra-weekend cubby hole.

Keeping an eye on the mammoth tasks being set during the Open from the safety of my desk really did not help. The building pressure of non-flying seems to double when you can't fly on a good day, especially as the season's final countdown of weekends gets underway, with weddings and other commitments already taking out some of the last few remaining windows of opportunity.

And then finally, a half-decent weekend forecast, a solid choice of site, and a signed and stamped pass for the day. Off to Milk Hill with a light SW forecast. Wales looked like it would be covered in cloud, SW would not be great at Mere, so Milk seemed like a good bet even though I've not been there before. Hoofing down the M4, the sky looked good, but hard to tell what the wind might be doing.

Getting closer, trying to read directions around Marlborough, I pulled out behind a car with a hang glider on the roof, so could relax and not worry about getting lost. By the time we turned into the track for Milk, there

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 those of the Committee of the Club.

NOVA can be found online at www.avonhpgp.co.uk

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were four cars in convoy, with all of us craning our necks to see what was happening on the hill. Not a lot, but a few wings out and doing short hops, so game on but no rush. Perfect.

Ground handling felt like a forgotten art, rust flaking off my wing and I as I was unceremoniously dragged by a strong thermal pushing along the hill. One short hop later, and I felt slightly better, but still rather nervous about my lack of airtime and the qualities of the day. Strong gusts, quiet lulls, nobody getting high. However, on the ridge in front, life looked a little easier. People were getting higher and clearly had more space to fly in. I packed up and walked round to the ridge. It felt much better, smoother, with a small gaggle boating rather than fighting in the thermals.

Stepping off the hill into a playful cycle with five or six other wings, and at last I was really flying again. A few hundred feet up it all got a little smoother, and pushing out over the large corn fields below resulted in a smooth 200-300ft / min climb, not too hard to stay in but interesting enough to keep me guessing where the cores were. There wasn't much drift, but after a few thousand feet, with the climb still working fine, it felt OK to follow it back over the hill. Two other wings had made it out, although one was pretty low, and we all worked different sections of the climb until we met up a few hundred feet below the white stuff at about five grand. Below were crop circles in the corn, combines in the fields, Marlborough below and a smudgy blemish on the horizon which marked Swindon. As the climb died out, we split up to look for something else. Aside from about ten minutes in a zero there was very little, but the glide was good and we pushed north towards the motorway, hoping to get something off the hills on the way.

Unfortunately there was nothing, not even the obvious trigger point with a mast on top, gullies on the sides, and fields below. Two of us scratched a few beats low on a shallow hillside, but to no avail, and could not postpone the inevitable any longer, landing next to the windsock of a private airfield.

A Clarification

Following recent postings on the website, it is clear that some of the names of our club members may cause confusion. Ken Wilkinson has provided the following clarification. He will gratefully accept biographical details from other distinguished members of the club, and will then retreat nervously while tugging his forelock and fawning uncontrollably.

Rich D is Richard Danbury [That's me! Ed.], though to some he is known as 'Doctor Danbury'. He is never known as "Doctor Dick" however. He is also never known as "Dick Doctor". That is Tony Blacker, whose expertise lies in the field of urology. Nor is he known as "Doctor Rich", but there is a rich doctor, Mike Rossdale, who is also known as "Doctor Mike". Doctor Mike Coupe cannot be known as "Doctor Mike" as that name has already been taken, and so is known as "Mike Doctor". He is knowledgeable about how to fix radios but will only give you information on this reluctantly - he has to be pressed to talk about it [Groan! Ed.]. If approaching someone who you believe to be our esteemed chairman, simply ask, "Are you Rich?" If he shows you his share portfolio you will have been correct in your assumption that this is Richard Zaltzman. Rich D has no connection with the food production industry, unlike erstwhile member Rich T. Biscuit who unfortunately crumbled during a particularly difficult launch, and... [That's enough clarification! Ed.]

The other pilot and I introduced ourselves, agreed it had been a very pleasant flight, and started packing up as a few small 'planes made their way out into the afternoon. As we walked past the hangers the owner of the airfield offered us a lift to the main road, which we gratefully accepted, and from there it wasn't a long wait for a mate to arrive to pick us up and take us back to the hill.

Technically, it was not an epic flight. 17kms, one thermal and a long glide to the deck. However, in the context of this year, it was superb. Getting away when most of the other pilots seemed stuck to the hill was nice of course. Even though it was a weak climb out, I still made my UK personal best height gain, and once up I clearly didn't make any really stupid decisions, landing with a much more experienced pilot on a 2/3, next to my trusty 1 / 2. I felt ecstatic, I could still fly, I was still a pilot.

This flying thing is in all of our blood. Pilots around the country have been climbing the walls this "summer", watching the country be lashed by autumnal storms as rubber dinghy sales go through the roof. Luckily, all it takes is one good day for the balance to be restored, for long suffering partners to get a break from the grumpiness, a respite from throwing things at the weather forecast on the telly, and to remember what it is that makes us chance our luck and mood on a weather dependent sport.

With a large dose of luck and a few sacrificial chickens, we will get a good weekend for the Mere Bash, and end the summer in style (if not, there will be more time to make sure we finish the beer and eat far too much BBQ). The worst case is that this one flight has to see me through the winter, just enough to remember that I can fly by the time spring gets here.

Get out there if you can, when you can and put something away for a rainy day. Oh, and get your ticket for Mere, it's going to be epic, we'll book a minibus to bring us back from Gloucester.

Safe flying,

Richard.

News

Alex on the podium!

Alex Coltman came second in the DHV 2/3 serial class at the British Paragliding Championships in Piedrahita in June, and he came sixth overall. Avon aficionado Steve Ham came third. Other Avon Pilots competing were Pete Douglas, Fiona and Angus Macaskill, Tim Pentreath and Alan Davies.



Serial class winners Jon Chambers, Alex Coltman (R) and Steve Ham (L)
Photo: Pete Douglas

Chabre Open

Thirteen Avon pilots competed in the Chabre Open in Laragne, France this year. Graham Richards has compiled the following hall of fame. See elsewhere in this issue for Andre Odinius' accounts of his experience in one of the tasks.

	Overall Place	Task 1 Score	Task 2 Score	Task 3 Score	Overall Score
Stafford Evans	9	473	868	618	1959
Graham Richards	43	370	447	514	1331
Rich Harding	47	473	275	539	1287
Andy Edwards	50	268	421	539	1228
Richard Danbury	53	493	411	268	1172
Iain Mackenzie	62	385	444	116	945
Paul Guilfoyle	63	390	380	173	943
Mike Rossdale	66	47	521	336	904
Andre Odinius	69	292	319	213	824
Rod Taylor	78	229	93	489	811
Steuart Padwick	98	296	131	175	602
Mike Humphries	107	47	325	116	488
Mark Nunan	108	303	61	116	480

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Richard Zaltzman - Avon HPG
36 Beauchamp Road
Bristol
BS7 8LQ.

You don't always have to stay in control!

(Ken didn't!)

Touched by the white stuff

Several Avon pilots competed at the Ozone Chabre Open in June. One of the tasks was very special for Andre Odinius, and here he explains why.

I am sure by now you would have heard that a number of the AVON club flyers went to the Chabre Open at the beginning of June 2007. I am not going to give you a full run down on what happened at the competition but rather talk about my amazing experience with a lovely billowing cloud.

anxiousness dissipating.

Three turns later I was 500 feet above take-off with 4 or 5 other pilots and we were circling left to cloud base in a nice 2-3 meter per second thermal. It was so much easier flying in a gaggle here as everybody was turning the same way (part of the competition rules) and the thermals were a little larger compared to flying in the UK.

It didn't take long to reach base and we all went for a glide to Turn-Point-1, you could see about 20 gliders in



Panorama looking SSE

It was on day-3 of the comp - I arrived on Chabre take-off just as the briefings were about to start, somehow I ended up in the last minibus going up and was getting a little bit anxious. I dropped my gear at a suitably free spot right next to the briefing area, listened to the briefing and hurriedly programmed the GPS with the task. All tasks from Chabre involved first flying west down the spine back ridge for about 4.5km to the first turn point before moving on to the other turn points in a task.

This day a race to goal was set and the start gate was an imaginary 4km circle around Turn-Point-2, this meant that the start line was just north of Turn-Point-1. During the briefing we were advised to first fly to Turn Point 1 and make sure we stay high before flying on to Turn-Point-2 once the race had started.

After the briefing I had 40 minutes to get ready, take-off and fly to Turn Point 1 before the official start of the race. I laid out my wing and went through my pre-launch routine followed by a good forward launch right into the next thermal cycle. "YES!!" I shouted out aloud feeling my

the distance at the turn point, waiting near base under big fluffy clouds.



Task briefing

I arrived at Turn-Point-1 just below cloud base of 6500ft with about 5 minutes to go before the start of the race. "I am in a good position all I need to do is stay high and wait 5 minutes" I thought; and gave myself a virtual pat on the back. The wisps started to form to the south of the ridge and a big cloud was moving ever closer, as cloud flying is not allowed, we all moved out of the way, a few used the forming wisps to gain some more height and I joined that group.

One pilot in particular started to fly closer to the cloud gaining height without being engulfed. I watched him ride up the side of the cloud and followed him. The lift was a super-smooth 2.5 meters a second and we were both riding the edge of the cloud, no turning just flying the contours around the outside of it. I was approximately 20 meters behind him and gaining height easily. Nobody else joined us, which I was concerned about but only for a split second.

The cloud kept sticking out billowing arms of the white stuff and we kept weaving in and out keeping as close to the brilliant white cloud wall as we dared it was exhilarating and I felt an overwhelming sensation of joy.

We reached 8100 feet and still going up smoothly. We had come around the side of the cloud and were now facing back down the valley towards take-off, with a cloud bank to our left running all the way down the ridge. The cloud base was around 6500 feet and the clouds were towering at least 12000 ft high. A breath taking sight and I was about to grab my camera and take some shots when my GPS went beep and the race to goal started.

I thought to myself "you stupid idiot, after getting into position you are now trapped on the wrong side of the cloud to get to turn point 2, what do I do?!?" All thought of amazement and joy of being half way up a cloud went out of the window.

The other pilot started to put on big-ears and lost height rapidly and started to aim at a bit of the cloud bank where the cloud base that was significantly higher about 7000 ft, I guessed. "Ah, he is going to dive through the



Looking back at the cloud, with Andre's track up the side

gap, what a great idea" with that I put on big-ears with speed bar and followed him. It looked like we were two fighter pilots engaged in a dog fight, I was following him diving down between the clouds, for some reason the Dambuster's music was playing in my head. Its was an amazing rush, we arrived at the edge of the cloud gap and had to take a couple of very sharp 360 turns to loose more height so as to not enter the cloud, we dived and turned just like world war II fighter planes, this worked and we were both now under cloud base of 6700 ft and racing to turn point 2.

I did not make goal and ended up on the deck 2 thermals later but the images of flying around the cloud and then diving underneath it to get to the other side, I will never forget.

It was just amazing, I certainly know why I want to keep flying especially with the stupidly bad weather we have been having in the UK recently. The effort is certainly worth it.

Andre Odinius © 2007

Is Britain Becoming Unflyable?

Sarah Ward wrote this article back in April. Did she know the summer would see some of the worst floods in living memory?

When I was small we used to get thick snow every year – one year it reached up to the windows! Sledging down snowy hills was great fun. Now it's mostly a thing of the past. After the last few years' weather I can't help but wonder if paragliding will go the same way too. It's always either too windy or not windy enough these days. It must be hell for the paragliding schools with many pilots taking years to get through to CP, rather than the weeks or at most, months such a simple course would be expected to take, in decent weather.

So is the weather becoming unflyable? Looking at Met Office data would be less than useful – we all know of the days they say are 10mph and are actually 20 on the hill, or the days they say are 8mph and are almost nothing. This disparity between townie weather and what happens on the front of a hill is quite significant as it is the hill-front most of us fly, most of the time.

I asked some of the long-term Avon pilots – the guys that were flying back in the 80s – and there is no consensus about worsening flying weather. I looked at my own flying – I have flown most 'do-able' days since year 2000 – and I used to fly an average of 120 hours a year with maybe 30 to 40 of them during the winter months. I could have logged twice that if I'd had the stamina. Winter used to be quite flyable too, but last winter I only logged 8 hours total. Some pilots resorted to going out early in the day and flying the calm part before the winds kicked in. All of us have probably resorted to trying gale hanging to get some air time.

Paragliders require such a small windspeed range to work, say 7 - 18mph and lower airtimers probably fly in range 9 – 13mph. These are small weather windows and with the change in climate with more heat energy in the global system these windows may become harder to find in the UK. This winter the winds exceeded 60mph in four different Atlantic lows! It rarely dropped in the daytime below 25mph at all. Even hang-gliding is out with these rough winds.

In the summer there seems to be more of the 'too much wind or none at all' as low and high cross over the country. There seems to be no middle weather-ground anymore. The high-pressure ridges that sit between low pressure areas daisy-chaining along the sub-Polar Cold Front are now mostly windy affairs, rather than the lovely sunny, 8 – 10mph flying days they used to be in ye good olde days.

In 1980 I worked in a small airport control tower. The average winds in the summer were in the 8 to 12 range and the average direction was west. In the winter it rarely got above 30. Compare that with the last twelve months and you will see why I wonder if I should learn to fly a hang-glider instead of a floppy-top!

Flying the glacier

On their way to the Chabre Open, Mike Rossdale, Iain MacKenzie, and Richard Danbury stopped off in Chamonix under the shadow of Mont Blanc, Europe's highest peak.

Adjacent to Mont Blanc is the Aiguille du Midi, a pinnacle of rock standing 3840m high. A dramatic cable car runs from the floor of the Chamonix valley to the peak, the last section lifting the cabin almost vertically to the station which is built onto the rock face. Walking through caverns hewn out of solid rock, you come to an ice tunnel that emerges onto a snow arête just a couple of feet wide.

Wearing crampons and roped together, you descend the arête with near-vertical drops on both sides. Eventually you reach an area where you can lay out your wing on



Iain MacKenzie and Mike Rossdale, with the Aiguille du Midi in the background

the snow, and breathless from the thin air, you laboriously stamp out a launch area.

Choosing your moment carefully, you launch into the white expanse of the Vallée Blanche, surrounded by towering peaks of rock and ice. With icefalls and crevasses below, you fly the length of the Mer de Glace, a glacier that descends thousands of feet to the Chamonix Valley.



**Photos: Irwyn Jehu, Mike Rossdale,
Iain MacKenzie, Richard Danbury**





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Caption Competition

The high standard of last issue's competition entries has clearly put many people off entering this time. But the following stalwarts weren't daunted, including **Rod Taylor**, who wins this time. Well done Rod!

- Since the 1930s, the popular sport of wing walking had suffered a decline but hardy souls around Stroud have been planning a renaissance. **Ken Wilkinson**
- "Go on jump, we'll catch you." "No you'll miss me, put it on the ground and then I'll jump." **Rod Taylor**
- Humming: - I am walking in the air (Aled Jones) Snowman Animation. **Andre Odinius**
- "You see with yogic flying you don't even need a glider." **Rod Taylor**
- "Burn him! Burn him!" chanted the landowners. **Richard Danbury**

This issue's photo was taken by **Pete Douglas** in Salamanca on an unflyable day during the BPC. As usual, send you entries to editor@avonhqpg.co.uk.



Photo: Graham Richards

