

NOVA

The Magazine of the Avon Hang Gliding and Paragliding Club

If undelivered please return to:

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On the cover: Pete Waters has a quiet moment before launching. Photo: Sarah Ward

Editorial

This issue will have a somewhat wider readership than usual. The committee is holding an event for local people in Ubley Parish Hall at the end of November, and we will be giving out copies of Nova.

Ubley has been flown for a great many years, but the difficulty with the landowner means that not much flying has happened there recently. I live within walking distance of the site, and many local people have commented to me that they used to enjoy seeing the hang gliders and paragliders flying above Ubley and Compton Martin. So we thought it would be nice to tell people a bit more about free flight, about what a wonderful site Ubley is, and why we haven't been seen much there lately.

So if this is your first experience of the magazine, welcome to Nova! I hope you enjoy it. I think it shows that the Avon Club is one of the most enthusiastic groups of pilots in the country, and as you will see, we have new pilots coming through from training all the time, as well as the old stalwarts who seem to have been there forever.

This issue is brimming with articles, and my thanks go to everyone who has contributed words and pictures. It's a real bonus after the poor start to the summer. Readers may remember my editorial in the August issue, bemoaning the poor flying weather. But things improved after that, and those with enough dedication (and free time) have had an excellent year. One of those is Pete Waters, who has achieved much more in a short period of time than most of us could ever hope for. Starting as a newly qualified pilot, this year he has gained 100 hours airtime in 100 days, and has flown well over 100km of cross-country distance. Read his article to find out how he did it.

Cross-country achievements seem to be the theme of this issue, and Westbury has clearly been the place to do it from this year. Sarah Ward, Tony Stephens and Bertie Grotrian all write about fantastic cross-country flights from Westbury, and Bertie didn't even want to go XC!

But you don't need to fly long distances to enjoy great flying. Nick Somerville tells us how he successfully mixed a family holiday with some quality airtime in Spain.

So read on, and if you're already a pilot I hope Nova will inspire you to look forward to another good year in 2008. And if you're not a pilot, maybe Nova will inspire you to take up flying! You would be very welcome in the club!

Richard Danbury

Chairman's Chunter

Welcome to the Autumn edition of Nova, designed to give you a warm glow that will help sustain you through the long, dark winter months, until the first green shoots of spring appear again, the clouds break from sheets of grey into puffs of white, and anticipation returns. Don't panic though even if the dog eats your Nova, like a beacon of shining light in the gloom, the Avon Christmas Party guides us through the dark. Put the 7th December in your diaries for the Christmas Do, Bonghy Bo's in Bath, tickets from Ali Lees (socialsec@avonhgpg.co.uk).

I have to say at this point, that I'm writing this chunter from the perspective of pretty much a mothballed pilot. I have not flown since my flight from Milk Hill, chronicled in the August Nova. Prioritising flying can be incredibly hard, and it simply has to take second or third place for me behind family, work, and other commitments. Most of the flying since August seems to have been during the week, and the luxury of mid-week flying is one I can't afford at the moment.

Now, before I disappear down a melancholy ramble, toying with the idea of packing it in and taking up something more family friendly, less frustrating, more reliable or simply safer (a significant consideration with a second little Zaltzman on the

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.avonhgpg.co.uk

Send your articles to the Editor, Richard Danbury, at editor@avonhgpg.co.uk or nova@avonhgpg.co.uk, Tel: 01761 221 731

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way in a few weeks), I would like to invite you to bring your enthusiasm, energy, experience and all-round joie de vivre into the club, and be part of the process that keeps the club going, and hopefully growing from year to year.

At the AGM we will be electing the club committee. The committee is what keeps the club going, and behind the scenes, in a very relaxed manner, you have a bunch of people working pretty hard for you. It is certainly not a full time job, but making the club the fun, social, competitive organisation that it is takes a fair bit of work, and we need new blood and energy to help us keep that momentum going.

All of the committee positions are up for grabs at the AGM, so if you would like to be involved, come along to the AGM and make your case. We have some empty slots and are looking to expand our sites officer core, and of course any position is up for grabs if you want to contest the incumbent! Bribes, bungs and outrageous manifestos are all fair play.

At the last committee meeting a few weeks ago, we looked at the finances, and the club is doing pretty well. We made some money on the Mere Bash this year, and despite a slightly lower membership, have kept the coffers up. So we want to spend it on your behalf, and if you want to help us do so, please step forwards. We are looking to grow the library, and make sure we've got the latest crop of DVDs and books for you to borrow. If there is something you think we should have (preferably flying related, no Everard Cunion special interest stuff I'm afraid), then let the librarian know and he can spend his budget wisely.

We are also bagging some superb speakers for the year ahead. We are trying to get at least three big names to the club meetings next year, and have already secured Jocky Sanderson for March. We are also hoping we can entice some of Judy Leden, Bob Drury, Adrian Thomas, John Sylvester and others. If there is someone you would like to hear, let us know, we will try to bag them. Unfortunately, they are not all registered charities so we do have to pay for them, but we want to spend some money on speakers that you want to see, so help us spend it wisely.

If you haven't got the message yet, we want your involvement to help make the club even better, even more sociable, even more successful. So, don't be shy, don't necessarily think "somebody else will do it", come along to the AGM and put something back in for all of us.

Now if you have not heard the rumblings emanating from Ubley over the last few months, you have either been stuck under a remarkably high cloud-base or marooned on primitive, news-free foreign shores. Ubley has been a club site for over 25 years, but recently, for various reasons, our access to the site has been denied. We tried to negotiate, and offered what we felt was an excellent deal – club members only, Pilot rated, access from the bottom of the hill so cars do not cause traffic problems at the top of the hill etc. Unfortunately, the Will Woodlands charity that owns the land clearly had no intention of letting us fly there again, despite their view that we could "re-negotiate"... in 2010.

In the past the club has been approached when pilots flew the site when it was closed. The warden or agent would ask us to remind pilots the site was closed (pending negotiations), and we would usually have a quiet word with the offenders. However, that was when it was a club site. The position has now changed. Since we can not reach an agreement to fly, Ubley (or more precisely Hazel Manor) is no longer a club site. It is a nice hill like any other, and if you choose to rock up and fly it, then that is your lookout. You are not doing so as a club member, although you are covered by your BHPA insurance. As a club, we are not even going to discuss flying on Ubley with Will Woodlands until they are prepared to put an agreement to fly on the table. So when the wind blows from the north east, don't feel you have to hold back, if you want to exert your free will as a pilot, the club wishes you all the very best, just don't come running to us if someone shouts at you.

The Fly Ubley campaign is completely independent from the club, and has achieved a great deal in a short space of time. TV coverage on BBC and ITV, an MP on side, complaints to the Charity Commission and Forestry Commission and much more besides. If we can use the pressure exerted by Fly Ubley to bring Will Woodlands back to the table, that will be superb, but Will Woodlands can't expect an easy ride now. If we are asked to control access to the site in return for an agreement to fly, it will be on our terms that include hang glider access and the removal of corrals to make a safe take-off. Fingers crossed that they will see the light and realise that their worst nightmare, Worro, will disappear back to his castle on the Somerset levels (so legend has it), if they do the honourable thing and allow flying to resume in accordance with the spirit and indeed letter of the public money they receive.

So, stoke up the fire, close the curtains and make yourself a nice big mug of cocoa, then enjoy another jam packed winter-warming edition of super Nova, before coming along to the Christmas party on 7th December.

Safe flying,
Richard.

Mere Bash 2007

This year's Mere Bash was one of the best ever. Here Richard Zaltzman tells us what little he can remember.

The echoes of the 2007 Mere Bash rolled around the Rifle Range for a long time as we emerged from our tents and campers on Sunday morning to reflect blearily on the night before as one of the best Bashes ever. This year it all came together, the weather, the bands, the people, and we had one hell of a do, drank a staggering amount of beer, bounced around to some cracking music and even flew a bit as well.

The Bash has a great formula that works really well, rain or shine, sell out crowd or hand picked hard core. It is a family-oriented fun weekend, with the emphasis on everyone enjoying themselves rather than out-and-out flying, commercial money making or banging music fest. It's simple really; a big tent, a BBQ for everyone, with salads donated by enthusiasts. Fun for the kids, a bouncy castle, a bit of cricket or football, zaggis, kites etc, plus the joy of camping.

This year we were making the most of the westerly to fly at Westbury on Saturday afternoon. Plenty flew, and Stafford and Dave did a superb job of tandeming all and sundry. Friends, relatives, band members and even Joe Public passing by all got the chance to take to the air in a slick operation that kept rolling all afternoon. Our hardy pilots certainly worked for their beer, making sure as many as possible could fly, and leaving grins and smiles scattered over the white horse.

Back at the campsite, tents spread away from the marquee, all the way to the top of the field...and then back again! It looked like we were going to have a big crowd, possibly one of the biggest ever, so by the time the BBQ got into gear at around six, the field was thronging with pilots from all over the country. A contingent from Derbyshire came down in their campers, we had Condors from Devon, pilots from Cornwall, Dunstable, Wessex, and Wales, not to forget the stalwart Avon contingent who turned up in force.

Luckily one of the residents of Compton Martin had lent us his huge BBQ, which could cope with everyone cooking at the same time. Beside the coals was a table laden down with salads donated by many of the party-goers and there for all to share. A vast quantity of pig and cow in various guises was consumed in a reasonably short space of time, washed down with the first pints from our three barrels of beer in the marquee.



Photo: Richard Zaltzman

live up to. "The Rock Pirates" had stepped in a few days before when our original band dropped out citing artistic issues. Pansies! Into their place leapt a bunch of permed schoolboys in tight lycra, straight into a storming set of wide-legged, power-chord, ear-crushing rock. Whether you were an out-and-out head-banger or just a closet bedroom air-guitarist, it was impossible not to jump about to these boys as they cranked out classics from AC/DC, Metallica, Poison, Motorhead and others, interspersed with a few of their own. They only lost their rhythm once, but some strange bloke called Ken had taken up the bass, and clearly was a few pints off the beat.

In the middle of their set, disaster loomed as two of the three barrels rolled over having dispensed their last pint, and the third was running out rapidly. A mission was dispatched into Mere to raid the Spar for booze, and duly returned with every



Photo: Richard Zaltzman

Soon the light was starting to fade a little and our first band were plugging in and sound-checking. Jam with Robina had made the trip over from darkest Welsh Wales with some of their paragliding mates. They are a two piece outfit, performing their own songs and were simply superb. The duo blew everyone away and were met with rapturous applause and several encores. Finally they were allowed back to their pints, and our second band of the evening took to the stage. Well, the carpet in the corner of the tent.

Bitter Ruin were another two piece, with a folksy, bluesy mix that sounded great and had everyone transfixed. It's certainly not the sort of thing you'll hear on the local radio, but this commends them well above the usual X-Brother Idol Factor pap that passes for music. They did a great set, and sold a fair few CDs to help finance their forthcoming tour.

After two superb sets to warm us up, the headliners had a lot to

can of beer they had, plus 10 boxes of disco-juice for the lager drinkers. We don't remember finishing all the beer before, let alone having to replenish before 10.00pm, but with a full crowd and beer at £1 a pint, we shouldn't have been so surprised.

The "Pirates" were finally allowed to leave after playing so many encores they were asking for karaoke singers to help them out. The tent gradually thinned out, leaving a hard core throwing some shapes to an iPod playlist, and many others winding down outside by the remains of the fire. 2.00am seemed like a sensible time to go to bed for me, but certainly not for everyone.

The following morning we were rudely awakened by a paramotorist making the best of a brief window of opportunity before the wind picked up. Bleary heads peered from tents, and gradually the field shrugged off the worst of the night's excesses and emerged for breakfast. The BBQ came back to life and served up a steady stream of sausages, bacon and eggs to those who needed it most. The wind meant we were not going to be flying, so people drifted off in a leisurely manner, leaving a remarkably tidy field, with just some flattened grass and the smouldering embers of the bonfire to show for a super weekend's entertainment.

So that was the Mere Bash 2007. If you have never been to the Mere Bash, then I strongly suggest that you put the first Saturday of September 2008 in your diary so you do not miss out on next year's event. If you were there this year, you will have experienced the laid-back fun first hand, but I want to give you a flavour of how it all comes together, year after year, and goes from strength to strength.

Keeping it simple helps, it keeps the costs and the organisational worries to a minimum. The formula is pretty straight forwards – a big tent, a band (or in this case three), ludicrously cheap beer and a bunch of people up for a good night. As a club we have to shell out quite a bit in advance, from buying the beer and charcoal, to hiring porta-loos and of course getting a band and a PA. The less we spend, the less we panic about selling tickets, but normally we need to sell 50 to 60 to break even.

No matter how hard we try, we can't manage the weather, and it makes a huge difference to ticket sales, so making sure we don't overspend means we can survive a bad year. Last year for example coincided with a weekend that was so windy they had to cancel the Red Bull Air Race. The Red Bull pilots are some of the world's best, equipped with ludicrously overpowered 'planes, and yet they couldn't fly. It was a miracle our marquee stayed up to be honest, but the wind and rain clearly put many off, which meant that a tight-knit group of us really put in a mammoth effort to get through the beer, but with probably 30 drinkers and 240 pints it was a punishing task.

The planning for the Bash starts in the spring, bagging the weekend, checking that we can use the field, and asking Bertie of White Horse Marquees for his ever-generous sponsorship. Bertie's gift of a marquee every year really makes the difference to us, as it just about makes it viable even if we do not sell many tickets. If we had the costs of a marquee on top of everything else, it would mean having to sell an extra 30 or 40 tickets, which would mean a big loss most years.

Selling tickets is crucial. This year you may well have had a call from someone on the committee, as we wanted to make sure we got some decent advance sales. We email all the clubs in the South, South West and Wales, plus tap up contacts from the BCC and other comps to get them and their mates along. This year it worked really well, and we sold close to 100 tickets all in.

There are loads of other things that need doing, and the committee gets stuck into tasks to make sure it all comes together. Buying beer, booking bouncy castles and generators, designing T-shirts, flogging tickets and a lot of other stuff all goes on to make one day in September into a cracking party in a field.

So what do you get for £10? A superb weekend, the result of a lot of hard work from many people (all of whom incidentally still pay for their tickets!), and reliant on the generosity of Bertie and our other sponsors such as Red Dragon who provided prizes for this year's raffle, as well as many club members who bring salads or share zaggis and other toys, the gentleman who turned up and gave us an impromptu falconry display, the belly-dancers who shake their stuff, the extra bands who play for free... Need I go on? If you are still not convinced that you would have fun, then I hope you enjoy rotting your brain in front of series 18 of Celebrity Pastry Rolling, and for everyone else – See you there next year!



Photo: Richard Zaltzman

45 miles by a reluctant pilot

Bertie Grotrian has been flying since 1987, when he learned to fly microlights. In 1989 he was pushed off the top of an Alp on skis with a paraglider and no instruction. He survived, but his wife insisted he took lessons as the chap who lent him the glider hurt himself the next day. He went to Ian Curren at Northern Paragliding and never looked back.

Bertie has tried sailplane gliding, but it nearly drove him to frustration. He had more luck with hang-gliding, which he started in about 1997. He now has a garage full of toys – his paragliders include a Fun Air Tonic, a Trekking Espace, an Apco Extra, a Gin Bandit and a Niviuk Hook. His hang gliders include a Clubman, a Magic4, an Avian Amour, a Java, and a Discovery Skyfloater.

He is part-time microlight instructor, importer of Sky Ski hydrofoil water-skis, a kite-surfer, skier and tobogganer, an occasional hang glider/paraglider pilot, and last but not least, a father.

He says he has also been known to put up the odd marquee as an excuse for work, and anyone who has been to the legendary Mere Bash will have danced the night away in one of them – Bertie has been sponsoring the event for more years than anyone can remember.

It's nearly twenty years since my first paragliding flight, and it is reasonable to assume that by now I would be a seasoned cross-country pilot. But the sad truth is that I am reluctant to leave the hill. I can't be bothered with the hassle of getting back while missing some good flying. Sometimes work and family mean that there is too little time, but basically I'm very good at talking myself out of breaking the invisible cord that attaches me to the hill. A normal goal for the day is to get to cloud-base and stay as high as possible for as long as possible. If I'm above every one else, well that satisfies my competitive spirit, but I'm always within gliding distance of take off.



Bertie at Westbury

Photo: Sarah Ward

on his way to the bottom. Clearly Rule No. 1 for the day was STAY IN LIFT. Also having become cold the previous week I put some extra clothes on, including gloves which I don't often bother with.

The first cycle was short and small. After only climbing 50ft and sensing the lift weakening, I opted for a conservative top landing. Rule No. 2: IF NO LIFT, TOP LAND! Some of the other pilots clearly hadn't heard of Rule No. 2 as they were forced to slope land or head for the bottom.

The second cycle was also a weak broken affair but it didn't stop at 50ft. I applied Rule No. 1 for all I was worth and drifted back over the car park. The climb was slow and bumpy, and as we circled back towards the army ranges other pilots forgot

The week before 11 September 2007 there were two great afternoons at Westbury. On both flights I was at cloud-base, about 3500-4000ft above take-off, where it was chilly. On the second day I had become reckless enough to get beyond gliding back, had a I got a low save over the industrial estate and had to land out near Warminster. The day finished with a ride back to take-off with a young lady in her sports car. Perhaps XC flying isn't so bad after all?

The forecast for the 11th was for cloud-base at 4000ft, a late start after 12.00 and early finish by 5.00 with a north-westerly breeze backing westerly and falling light. After a 7am start at work we were done by midday, so I loaded up my Discovery Skyfloater and threw in the Niviuk Hook as plan B. On arrival at Westbury the breeze had already fallen light, and the lift was only coming through in cycles. Plan B was activated. Three paragliders climbed out to about 1500ft, only for two to come

down as they try to push forward from their thermal. The third stuck with the lift and looked to be at cloud-base, though quite a long way back. A forth paraglider took off late in the cycle and was

Rule No. 1 and pushed forward to the front, only to fly out of the lift. As often happens, once I had clawed to 500ft the thermal accelerated and slowed its drift towards the Salisbury Plain range. This is where the Hook justifies the name. This glider loves to climb; the tighter the better, and we were going up at 800ft per minute. The drift was now more westerly than north-westerly, allowing me to stay with my thermal without infringing the range.

Cloud-base was at 4300ft ato but there was no time to hang around as I would soon drift into the danger area. But which way to go? There was a cloud up-wind over Westbury; but there was no way a paraglider would be able to glide that far. It was blue over take-off; so I would get drilled to the ground in that direction. Down-wind was out of the question because of the danger area; so luckily for this often indecisive pilot there was only one way to go: cross wind to a cloud which looked to be just within my comfort distance of the hill. How to get there? Full speed-bar as it was sinking blue air. So with all the tricky decisions made I topped up height under the cloud and set off. Time to look around; the air was crystal clear and most of the Severn Estuary, the Welsh hills and the North Devon coast were in view.

The cloud I was gliding for was over the railway just to the north of Eddington. I was under it with 1500ft in zero lift, and with alarm I realised I could no longer glide back to the hill without a climb. This concentrated the mind, and with 900ft to go I blundered into a core which rocketed me back to cloud-base. From my lofty perch I realised two things: I can't make it back to the hill and I'm about to drift into the danger area. With all the decisions having been made for me by the circumstances, I went on a cross-wind glide, again comforting myself that it's the only way to stay in the air today and it's not too difficult to get a lift along the West Lavington road. This time I was down to 500ft before a tractor in a stubble field triggered a thermal and set me off back to the clouds. But I was only to find myself in the same predicament: I was drifting into the danger area. So I was off on a glide again, applying Rule No. 3: GLIDE CROSS-WIND. But this time there was no obvious cloud to aim for and it was away from any roads back to Westbury.

Passing through 500ft, and going down, I started to get cross with myself. I was a few miles to the north of West Lavington with no obvious roads – it was going to take hours to hitch or walk out of here. But there was a tractor working just within gliding distance, and I headed towards it in a last ditch attempt to stay up, hoping it would trigger a thermal – nothing! I flew downwind of the tractor, looking to land next to some houses. I was now at 200ft above take-off when bump! Then another... The vario beeped and I turned, now only about 200ft off the deck. One second I was in lift, the next I was out. I hung on to every scrap of lift with unusual determination, drifting within almost touching distance of the roofs of the cottages. The struggle to climb took forever; circling for what seems like miles below 500ft, before the thermal finally accelerated upwards. There was no time to relax as this thermal was a mass of broken bullets; rock 'n' roll, and the glider had a few small collapses. Thank goodness the Hook is DHV1/2 rated; I was able to concentrate on getting back to the clouds rather than keeping the glider open.



Bertie on his Skyfloater

Photo: Sarah Ward

Now at cloud-base between Upavon and Pewsey, I could see the Isle of Wight and I wondered if I could fly there. Wow, four thermals and I think I'm a sky-god! Looking at the shadows on the ground a cloud-street ran east keeping me on a track that stayed clear of the danger area. Getting cold, I headed for the sunny side of the street and flew along the side, climbing up to 4750ft ato. My route followed the rambling edge of the clouds, nipping in and out to top up my height as required. Despite the sun I'm starting to shiver and had to shake my arms to get some warm blood to my fingers. Rule No: 4: WEAR MORE CLOTHES.

After a few miles there was a big blue hole in the street near the end of the danger area. The gap looked way too wide to glide across and there were no obvious roads heading back to Westbury. Remembering Rule No. 3 I decided to follow the road to Ludgershall and Andover as it was cross wind. If I got to the A303 I could get home that way. I start to get low, skirting round Thruxton and looked down the runway of Boscome Down. By the

time I got to an industrial estate on the edge of Andover I was below 500ft, but the sun on the buildings does the trick and I take a slow climb over Andover enjoying the warmer air.

Back at cloud-base I was cold, my arms were tired and I wouldn't have minded a pee (sign of old age?). There was a cloud-street following the A303, so I set a goal of the junction with the A34. A lone glider passed beneath me going the other way, and I realised that I had been on my own since leaving the hill. The A34 arrived with 1000ft to spare, and I was still in lift, so I set a new goal at Popham airfield. I hoped they wouldn't mind non PPR and radio. At least I am familiar with the circuit pattern and the café, having learnt to fly microlights there a few years ago.

I arrived at Popham with 1000ft, joined the circuit at 800ft and decided to land behind the clubhouse. As I started to spiral down I bumped into a strong thermal that had other ideas.

It would be bad form to start climbing out in the middle of an airfield so I pull in the big-ears and fight my way down to the ground, arriving in a very undignified heap in the rough air. Rule No. 5: IT ISN'T OVER 'TILL YOU'RE ON THE GROUND. The relief of the warm air and a pee were bliss, but unfortunately the café had closed. Only the microlight school is open and they don't seem bothered by my arrival, so I pack up and head for the petrol station on the other side of the A303 to stick my thumb out.

After 20 minutes of watching commuters rushing home at 70mph I remember why I don't do cross countries. I'm just about to throw in the towel and call home when a beaming smile beckons me over to her car. Ellen is an air hostess on her way home to Bath. It gets better: she is a neighbour of Tim Pentreath and has done some paragliding, though she had a nasty accident in Monte Carlo. The best bit: she would like to see the take off at Westbury, having never been there before. It's my lucky day!

Writing these notes has been great for re-living this rare event. It will probably be several years before my next cross-country. But here are the five rules that worked for me on the day:

- (1) STAY IN LIFT
- (2) IF NO LIFT, TOP LAND
- (3) GLIDE CROSS WIND
- (4) WEAR PLENTY OF CLOTHES
- (5) IT ISN'T OVER 'TILL YOU'RE ON THE GROUND

WHITE HORSE MARQUEES

Sponsors of the Mere Bash would like to wish all free flyers a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!



Why not try flying something different in 2008 like Bertie's new open-cockpit microlight (left)?

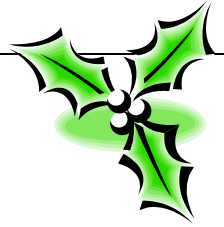
Full training up to NPPL given in this fantastic fun flying machine!

Or how about flying on water with a Sky Ski Hydrofoil (right)? Trial flights by appointment.



White Horse Marquees

Tel. 01985 840705
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The Avon HGPG
Christmas Party
&
Annual Awards

Friday 7th December

Bongi-Bo's Café Bar

Barton Court

Upper Borough Walls

Bath

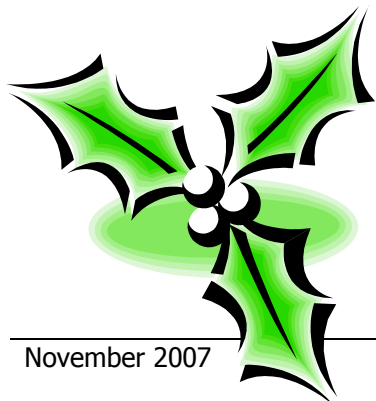
BA1 1RZ

7.30pm for 8.00pm



Buffet, Bar & Music 'til late

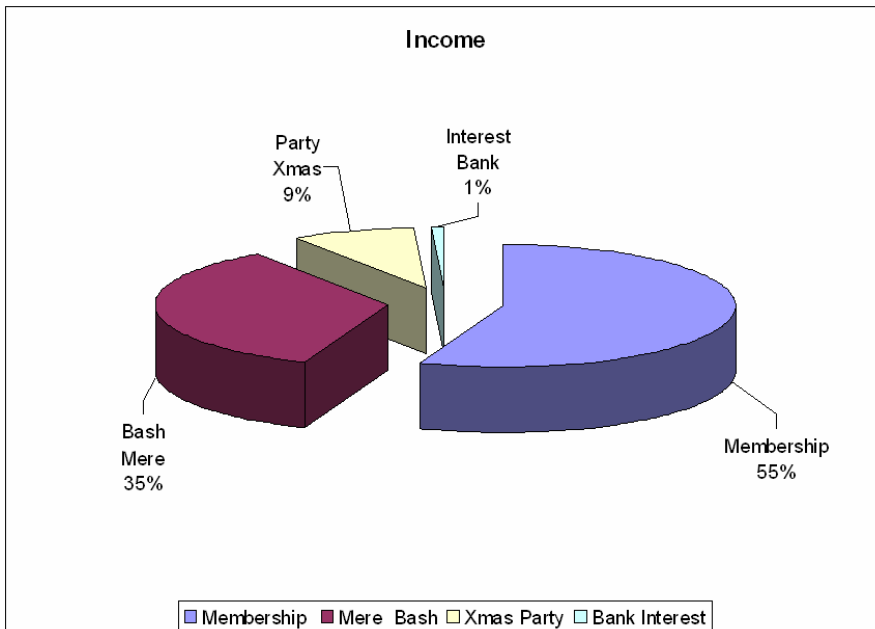
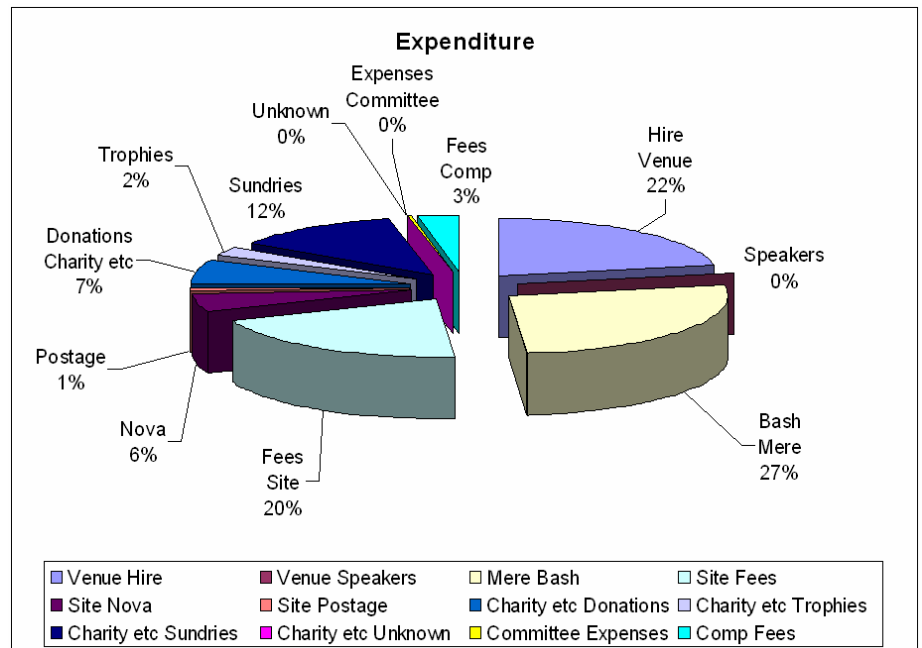
For tickets contact Ali Lees at
socialsec@avonhgpg.co.uk



Treasurer's report

Once again Stafford Evans bares all.
Now do try to stay awake...

Once again the year end demands that I let all you good folk know where your subs went in the last year. The club bank balance started the year at £3,087.27 and has finished at £5,034.18. Now that's a good increase in funds over the year, but this is probably because we've not spent any money on speakers for club nights or anything at all on the club library. So I've already started lining up some top quality entertainment for 2008 with **Jocky Sanderson** coming along in March. Also if there are any DVD's etc. that folks would like the club to purchase, then get your suggestions in to this year's librarian. These figures are also not bad considering there was a drop in membership fees of around £500.00. The Halifax building society account is in credit to the tune of £5,290.50 and your chairman and I will try this year to get the funds into a higher interest account. Something we were going to do last year but never seemed to get around to - apologies.



Other financial highlights (that's a misnomer!) are that last year's Christmas Party made a loss of £163.85, but that has been more than offset by the Mere Bash making an unexpected profit of £363.52. What a party!

Site fees for this year stand at £767.11 and one other high item was a new PA system for the club and members use at £399.00, available for weddings, christenings and bar mitzvahs etc. Some of you may have noticed that I asked for a couple volunteers to come over and go through the accounts and check that all is above board. They came, drank beer, and much to my shame found an error, for some reason I'd written out a cheque for 20p too much. Now I know who the cheque was made out to and if the editor of Nova would like to pay it back I'd appreciate it very much. [And I'd have gotten away with it if it wasn't for those pesky pilots! Ed.] My thanks go to Martin Nichols and Andre Odinius for taking the time to come over. As always if anyone would like a copy of the accounts in Excel just ask.

One hundred days, one hundred hours, one hundred km

Documentary filmmaker Pete Waters is pretty new to flying. But in a year that many people say has been pretty poor weather-wise, he has managed to prove that all you need is dedication.

At the start of my first year of flying I was told not to expect more than twenty hours, and definitely no cross-country. Now there's a challenge to be grasped!

My first day out of training was at Westbury on 31st October 2006. Very apprehensive and a little wary of the other pilots, I managed to get airborne with ten other wings on the north slope. Elated after half an hour of flying I flew straight downwind into the hill. After this and subsequent similar landings I was unfortunately named "downwind Pete" by Ian Pepper and Sarah Ward. This name was only withdrawn after some three months of much improved landings, at least not to my face any more.

In the next four winter months I found myself flying nearly thirty hours, all at Westbury with the usual suspects (you know who you all are). I did manage a trip to Spain for a thermalling tuition week in February. This I found to be money well spent later in the year. During this time I found the club environment extremely rewarding as I got to know the pilots better. Advice and guidance was given that helped me become more confident.

With spring fast approaching I started to fly more and more, visiting other sites as my confidence grew and the hours built up at a faster rate. Kettle Singes Malvern was my first site away from Westbury in the UK. It was early April, and a thermic day. I took off and managed 500ft at just boating around enjoying the site, when I hit a 600ft per minute climb, which took me to 4000ft. Now I found myself looking at going XC, as two other pilots called over to go with them. However a



Photo: Sarah Ward

combination of low hours and no planning made me decline the chance. On the way home I resolved to be prepared next time.

During April and early May I completed my pilot tasks and continued to build my hours and experience. I managed to complete two 10km triangles and one 15km triangle, but a long XC eluded me. By July I had flown 65 hours, and apart from the triangles I had only managed two 8km glides from one climb each. On the 8th August I at last found the elusive second climb over Warminster. I turned downwind at just under base for a long glide, landing after 20km just short of the A303.

Now I entered a period of 36 consecutive days of flying, ending with the Joint Services XC competition in Wales in the first week in September. Five tasks were set in five days; I learned so much from the pilots during this week, and came away with a real passion for XC and comp flying.

On the 18th September I arrived at Westbury around 10 am. The sky looked promising with a NNW at 8mph. After a few short flights to feel what the air was doing, I flew over to the northwest takeoff as the wind had gone NW. After landing I stayed clipped in and had lunch. More pilots were arriving now and I greeted Martin Nichols, who agreed things were moving out front and we should be ready.

Taking off together we climbed to 1000ft and pushed out to the cement-works. As I passed the cement-works with 750ft ATO I found a 500ft/min climb. Turning in it I drifted back to takeoff at 3000ft, but had to push out again as I was up against the Salisbury Plain danger area behind the hill. Halfway back to the cement works my vario started to scream with a 800ft

per minute climb. Turning hard, I raced up to cloud-base at 4300ft.

Looking down I could see pilots down all over, Martin had hit 800ft per minute sink and was in the bottom landing field, while others were on takeoff struggling with a gusting wind. I could only see one other pilot in the air and he was over Westbury, too far to get to as I was drifting over Bratton at base. Looking for where my next climb was going to be I saw a lovely cloud six km away downwind. Leaving base on half speed bar with 40km/h ground speed I glided straight at the cloud I had chosen. On arriving I was rewarded with a 700ft/min climb back to base.

This time I had chosen my next cloud before arriving at base, so I topped out on the side nearest to my next glide. Off again towards Milk Hill; this was a long sinking glide and I was down to 900ft when I arrived. Again I got a climb back to base but it was hard work this time, so I opted to fly to where I could see two buzzards climbing. Joining the birds I slowly climbed to 3000ft in a blue thermal and headed off to a likely looking cloud over Pewsey. I was thinking "at least I can catch the train back to the hill should I bomb out?"

Above Pewsey, and in a screaming climb, I was joined by a sailplane. I waved at him like a madman as we circle together, happy for the company at last. At base we parted company with another wave, and I glided off taking time to eat and drink on my transition. This glide took me around the corner of the Salisbury Plain danger area, and I could see Andover in the distance. I decided to go for Andover, and so tracked south-east to avoid Boscome Down MATZ. Climbing back to base over Upper Chute I became aware how cold and tired I was. So over Lower Chute I turned back, intending to land at Upper Chute. But it was warm at 1000ft and I felt better. So I started to climb out again, only to leave this climb as the cold came back with height. I landed with a big grin at Upper Chute. I had been in the air for 2hrs 10mins and covered 40.1km open distance or 58.6km counting the turn points. My maximum height was 4600ft and the maximum ground speed was 52km/h. A car stopped at the gate, and a gentleman asked if I would like a lift to Pewsey. I accepted and make it back the rest of the way by train.

Now my first year of flying is over. I have 106hrs, 150km of XC (in multiple flights), all in 100 flyable days. I am so looking forward to my next year of flying!



Pete flying above the white horse at Westbury
Photo: Sarah Ward

Soaring to the Solent

It was 9 August 2007, and Sarah Ward needed to find some peace so that she could watch the Simpsons...

It was 11am and I was the first pilot to arrive at Westbury. The weather was looking good for a cross-country flight, with cumulus just starting to form in the light north-westerly air. I'd made the effort to get out on the hill because on a light day like this I would be able to follow a thermal to cloudbase without going into the Salisbury Plain danger area.

I had a new moving-map GPS to test out and was determined to go XC. The short flight 'just to get settled' became the first thermal of the day, and it took me to near cloud-base so I headed off around the danger area, heading to Warminster and that all-important second thermal.

The day was early and Warminster was cold in the early sun. I spent half an hour stooing around over the town, being teased by proto-thermals until I was rather low, and still no bubbles of joy.

I've always had the desire to fly XC to Salisbury, following the A36 south east rather than the same old 'go-south' XC route, and so I decided there and then that Salisbury it was. So I turned east and ran for the next village, now down to 800ft. Amazingly, as I pushed the speed bar over this tiny settlement I felt the air turn warm. Then the vario started to sing gently and after ten minutes of gentle orbiting I disappeared into the clouds. The thermals were everywhere.

I flew for a time in the clouds using the GPS to maintain a good heading. That was when I noticed I was flying into a cul-de-sac formed by the Salisbury Plain danger area and the MATZ at Boscombe Down. There was no choice - I'd have to leave the security of my clouds and turn south.

The cloud ahead grew in brightness and then I was suddenly flying out of the side of the cloud into the blue. Directly ahead of me was a large cumulus, thousands of feet high and brilliantly white in the sunshine.

It was the most beautiful experience - the emotional high-point of the flight. I push the speed bar and headed toward the cloud, and reached it a few minutes later to fly into the first real turbulence of the day.

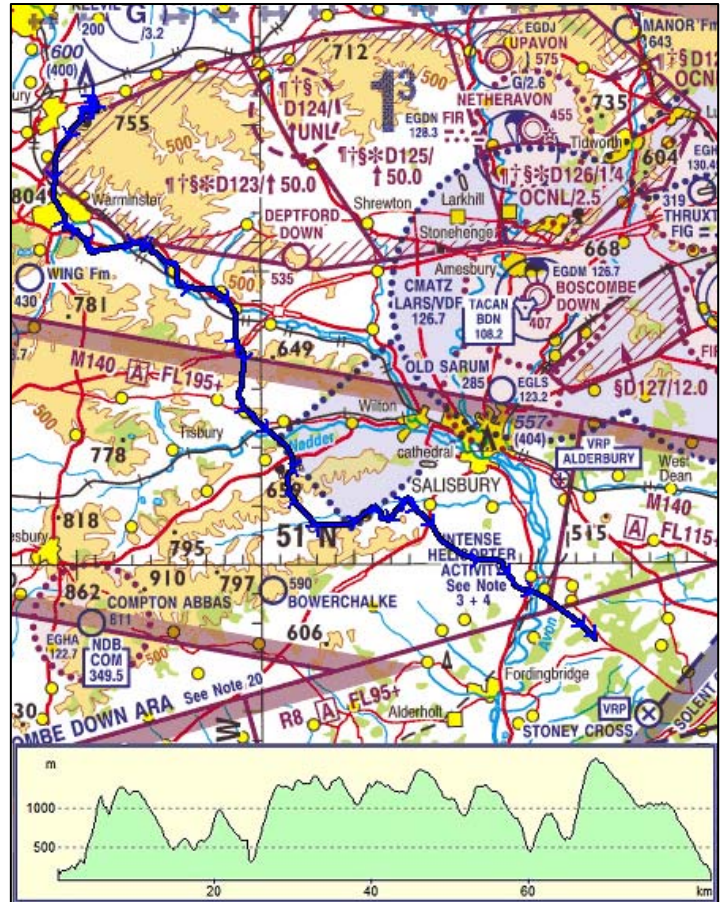
My GPS told me it was time to turn south so as to pass along the western end of the 'stub' of the MATZ. The nearest clouds were five miles away on the other side of the stub, rather far for a DHV2, even on speed-bar. I was above the MATZ at 4000ft but I expected to lose most of that just dog-legging the MATZ stub to the nearest clouds beyond it.

It took an age to transit the stub. An RAF trainer had appeared above the stub and was aerobating not far from me. I could only hope he had seen me and would keep a safe separation. I heard a number of aircraft during the flight but they were way below me, and they were the only noises I heard from base.

Finally I was around the MATZ, and there was the city of Salisbury, its cathedral spire noticeably tall, even from my height of 1500ft. I started a thermal search of the ground in the hope I could make it to the city to land. Gradually I tracked south east and past the city, picking up a decent climb.

The clouds were lessening now, almost three and a half hours since takeoff. I was mentally and physically flagging so I turned away from the clouds that would have taken me eastward and headed for a place in the New Forest that Phil and I know well, and I landed just short of Southampton airspace among thousands of pretty purple flowers.

My GPS showed 83.3km of airspace-avoiding dog-legs. But it was fun and I'd never have done it without my Pocket PC and its moving-map GPS. I watched The Simpsons on it while I waited for Phil to come and get me. You can't do that with a Garmin!



Sarah's track, avoiding the Salisbury Plain danger area and the airspace at Boscombe Down

Paragliding and family holidays don't mix!

... Or do they? Nick Somerville proves otherwise.

I know that this is a potentially contentious issue for some Nova readers, and one that many of you will have both good and bad experiences of. The intention of this article is to relate my own recent positive experiences of flying whilst away with the family and also to provide a few pointers for those who have not yet attempted it.

This year we had decided on a week staying with family in Gascony followed by a week of camping in the Pyrenees. This is a trip we have made on a number of previous occasions, and indeed this was how I was first introduced to paragliding. I made a tandem flight in 2001 from the ski station of St Lary Soulan, and then in 2003 I did a two day course with 'Comme un Oiseau', in the Val D'Azun, where I completed a 800m solo top-to-bottom. Following our return from the second trip I signed up with a BHPA school to get properly qualified.

Gascony has a few flying clubs, but these are for winch launching so I had figured on some quality family time for our first week. The children and I spent a day at a high-ropes centre near Auch, which gave them a good adrenalin fix. We all spent time chilling by a pool, and the last few days were spent in a blur at the Vic Fezensac 'Tempo Latino' Salsa festival with friends. Believe me, you do not have to like salsa to enjoy this extraordinary annual festival. The emphasis is on partying with every nook of the town taken over with a hedonistic atmosphere of Latin American music, food and drink. There were dozens of headlining groups playing over four days, including Manu Chao, playing in the bull ring till the wee hours, and a host of smaller venues with lesser known bands.



Tempo Latino street scene
Photo: Nick Somerville



Coastal ridge soaring at Zarautz
Photo: Nick Somerville

Leaving Gascony we headed off to Luchon in our camper van, where we found a quiet campsite about half a mile from the airstrip. Since the construction of a golf course at the site of the old landing field, the airstrip is now the only official landing zone for paragliders flying from Super Bagnères, which is the highest launch site on the French side of the Pyrenees. I wanted to arrange a tandem flight for both of my children but as all the pilots seemed to be booked up I, for no particular reason, chose to book a canyoning expedition instead. This involved a 35 minute hike up through dense woods in the Val D'Oô, a spectacular sage-green valley surrounded by exquisite scenery, following the path of a descending torrent of water some 200 feet below us. After donning several layers of wetsuits we proceeded to descend the gorge by sliding, abseiling and leaping in water that I can only describe as so cold that it was only suitable for penguins. It was all very technical, interesting and ultimately

exhilarating, which notched up another day of adrenalin points for the children. My wife Victoria meanwhile was enjoying a paddle in the lake below, a glass of rosé and the bliss of three hours of peace and quiet.

The new paraglider landing field at the airstrip in Luchon is quite technical, and local knowledge is essential to comply with the strict landing procedures and the variable and strong valley winds. I still had a morning to fly there, but as it turned out there was an annual horse race at the airstrip and all flying was to be curtailed until the evening. The wind had also become southerly, so moving on to Spain seemed a good option. A 2 ½ hour drive from Luchon took us over the mountains to the small Spanish town of Castejón De Sos, which has a large and clean campsite adjacent to the landing field with a pool for the children. Things were looking up. After pitching our tents I cycled into town and booked tandem flights for 11.00am the following morning, when I was reliably informed it would be flyable.

The main take off at Castejón is a 45 minute drive up a dirt road which ascends to 7500ft. It is a spectacular launch area that can accommodate a huge number of pilots on its gentle grassy slopes. After take-off the idea is to push out over Pedras, a massive spine running to the valley floor that pumps out thermals at an extraordinary rate, gain as much height as you want and then head off round the valley. Joel and Natasha were on paid tandem flights, and I figured it would be pretty much a top-to-bottom flight. However after taking pictures of their launches I strapped myself to my wing and headed after them for some air-to-air shots. Out over Pedras I was having trouble holding onto my camera in the blistering climbs that the local boys were also enjoying with my children. I could here them whooping as their wings carved into the thermal turns, and eventually I caught up with each of them to get my 'money shots'. Nearly an hour later we spiralled together down to the landing field where the valley wind was already picking up to the limits of my comfort zone.



Photo: Nick Somerville

That evening I paid my 9 Euros for another navette to the top launch and had two more hours of fantastic flying. The restitution lift at Castejón is just unbelievable and unless you fly on into the dark the only way down seemed to be to spiral and big-ear for what seemed like an age. Castejón may seem a bit scruffy to the first time visitor but it has one or two great restaurants and a whole host of paragliding shops where good local flying advice can be had. I know that I shall be going again.

Leaving Castejón we headed back into France and traversed west across the fingers of the Pyrenees on the autoroute, to return into Spain near St Sebastian. We had a couple of days holiday left before catching a ferry home from Bilbao, where a cultural visit to Frank Gehry's Guggenheim was to be our last outing.

After five hours driving we were about an hour from Bilbao and on the lookout for a campsite. Victoria had been browsing 'A Guide to Northern Spain' and quoted a recommendation for a quite hillside campsite just outside Zarautz, a moderately glitzy Atlantic seaside resort. Driving up the hill to the site I couldn't help but notice a number of paragliders beyond the far corner of the

campsite that kept appearing and disappearing above some trees. After parking yards from the cliff tops and before I could say 'put the tent up kids' I had reacquainted myself to the weight of my paraglider and was scorching up the hill to find the launch. No instruments, just a pair of shorts and a gentle warm sea breeze...a perfect end to the day. If you are ever near St Sebastian then check out this site. The locals say it is super reliable with the sea breeze kicking in most days from 2.00pm. Across the bay a small mountain top is the start point for a well known cross-country run to St Sebastian and back giving an out-and-return flight of around 50km. Suffice to say we all enjoyed our day in Bilbao. The museum is spectacular, although the floral puppy got a 'thumbs down' from all of us.

So we had been away for two weeks and I had totalled just 4 hours of airtime. It may not seem much, but we had had a full family holiday as well. I had discovered new places to fly, my children now know what it is I keep going on about when I mutter '8-up', and most importantly I think Victoria may let me take the wing again on our next family holiday! A final word of caution when visiting new flying sites, especially in the mountains: do make sure you speak to local fliers and try to make contact with more than one before deciding on flying. Fly with other pilots and never alone; if there is no one in the air there is usually a very good reason. Had I not sought advice and instead taken the cable car at Luchon and launched, I could have been emulating Willie Carson!!

So near, and yet so far

Tony Stephens got into hang gliding thanks to playing the Nintendo64 game 'Pilot Wings'. You have to fly a hang glider, and he thought the real thing would be much more fun. He's now been flying 10 years, and his longest goal flight is 142km, from Westbury to Devils Dyke. His longest open-distance flight is 155km, from Combe Gibbet to Bexhill. He only stopped because he ran out of land!

Tony has had a few close calls. His worst this year was during the second day of the British Nationals at St Andre in France, renowned for its strong conditions. He says "I very nearly went upside down - I did a hand stand on the basebar! Thankfully I had raised my sprogs before I went out there [I don't think he's talking about his children! Or is he? Ed.]. Two pilots tumbled and another went upside down twice in the same flight!"

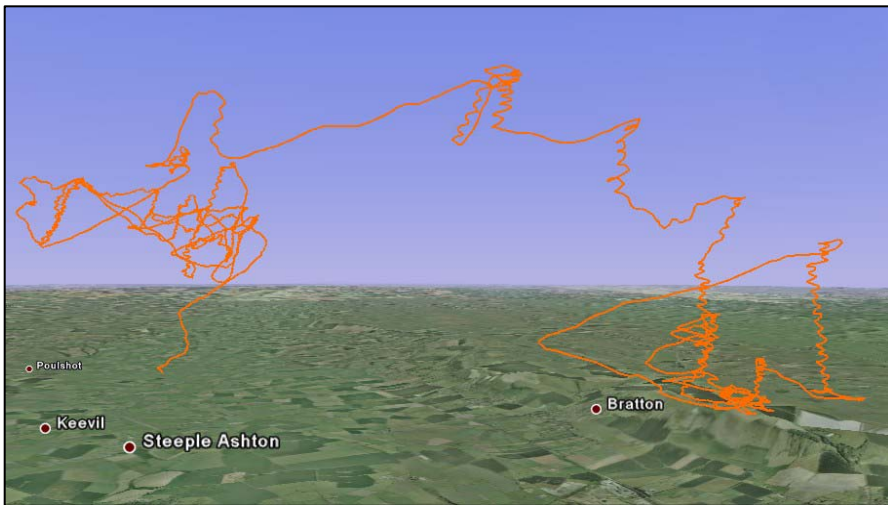
When asked what his favourite site is, Tony replies "That's easy... Westbury of course!"

It was quite amazing conditions, but took ages before it got going, about 1.30pm before any decent climbs were had. I attempted a 78.3km triangle worth some 234.9 points in the league.

I decided on leaving the longest, and what would be the almost into wind, leg last as the forecast said the wind strength would drop off considerably during the afternoon. The wind was surprisingly strong, and the forecast was for it to be light northerly so I chose a triangle flight. The wind strength was given on my vario as 18-20mph for the first leg heading west to Midsomer Norton (24.1km) which I had to do cross-wind.

The wind was still strong at 15-18mph for the second and downwind leg to Castle Cary (21.9 km). This took me just 31 minutes to complete, and that included recovering from a relatively low height.

The return leg (32.3km) was almost into wind, the wind speed had still not abated to the degree the forecast predicted, as it was still varying from 9-18mph. This was quite soul destroying as I had several climbs which I was forced to take just to stay aloft, only for most of the height gained be lost when punching into wind again. I was cursing this part of the forecast being incorrect.



Tony's GPS trace

Fortunately I found a few 400-600ft per minute climbs on the return leg that enabled me to gain ground. At 20km from goal I spotted the chimney and white horse of Westbury. It looked so close but it was still so far, the sky was starting to over-develop from the northwest, and it was blocking out the sun on my route back. Several clouds so very nearby had that sea-breeze affected look to them, and I spent the remainder of the flight with my heart in my mouth thinking "I'm going to make it!", "No, I'm not!", then "yes I am!" and so on.

With about 10km to go the clouds were ragged and spaced well apart to the north and west of me, but always looked slightly better to the east. I was forced to drift with a 2 up over Longleat, taking me further away at a soul-destroying rate. So again forced to leave relatively low at 2,800ft, I gambled on heading

into wind into a sunny patch. Down to 1500ft and 6km from goal, I spotted a combined harvester that I hoped would act as a thermal trigger. "Oh thank you," I thought. Heading for it I picked up broken weak lift and circled away from goal again. It didn't last long, or I lost it, and also the harvester stopped working so I chanced getting onto the ridges that are around the corner from launch. I made the last ridge around the corner of take-off, but the wind was too northerly to make soaring possible. I landed less than 300 metres from the second ridge, which has always worked for me in the past. From the deck I watched two hang gliders and several paragliders soaring Westbury which made it all more frustrating.

On paper I was 2.9km short of making it, but in reality it was 300 metres as I could have easily soared the second ridge back to take-off in the 13mph wind. After such a great flight I was absolutely gutted! I had broken two UK personal bests, got 6500ft above sea level, and got a new high rate of climb at 960ft per minute on the averager. (I've have had a 1250 ft per minute over the back of Merthyr, but that was in dangerous conditions so I don't count that!)

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Caption Competition

Well, this was obviously more difficult than I thought! Only four entries this time – maybe it's just because it's not flying-related. Anyway, after literally seconds of deliberation, the committee proved that less is more by voting the best to be by **Mike Rossdale**. Well done Mike!



Photo: Pete Douglas

- "Bugger, I've just realised we've given away complete instructions for a paraglider in Genesis 3:12 and those pesky humans will get around to reading it one of these days..." **Alan Russell**
- The Westbury ground-suck crew discuss their reasons for not flying. From the left: "There's no bloody wind at all!". The middle, a hang glider pilot: "My reserve has fallen out of the harness!" The last: "And I've been left looking after the kid!" **Ken Wilkinson**
- Worro: "I've torn my glider on that tree corral! Just look at this tear! And I can put my head through this hole! Let me quote from the flyubley.co.uk book of revelations: 'the Charity Commission says that a charity must serve the community as a whole or a sufficient section of the community the National Trust welcomes controlled hang-gliding and paragliding you know it's a breach of the code that charities should operate under and how do they justify the tax benefits an organisation is not charitable just because one of its purposes is charitable and horse riders and mountain bikers have also been excluded the UK forestry standard says that publicly funded forestry should create opportunities for recreation health and promote exercise...' "

Will Woodlands trustee no.1: "OK, OK Mr. Worro, you can fly at Ubley. Please just stop talking!"

Will Woodlands trustee no.2: "Yes, yes please stop, Mr. Worro! I'll tell my little land agent here to let you fly!"
Richard Danbury

And here's your next task. You can breathe a sigh of relief because it's actually got some gliders in it.

Send your entries please to editor@avonhgpg.co.uk.

