

May 2005

Avon



The Avon HG & PG Club Magazine

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Editorial



Well it seems like Spring is finally here and Nova has come out of hibernation for the new season. To recap on last year, we have in this issue, details of the new committee members that were elected at the AGM in October; a summary of the 2004 Avon PG XC League statistics together with the prize winners.

Talking of prize winners I would like to personally congratulate the 2004 winners of the "Best Nova Article" award, and the winner of the Nova photographic competition. The best Nova article was "The Great Escape" by Richard Zaltzman (June 2004 issue). The photo comp was won by Graham Richards for his amazing shot taken above the clouds at Olu Deniz, in Turkey. You can read all about his amazing experience in this issue (page 8).

I'm sure you will join me in taking this opportunity to recognize and thank the retiring Committee members for all their hard work. The new committee (some who have even taken on more than one role) is now working hard and enthusiastically behind the scenes, keeping the club running smoothly, and organizing this year's flying competitions and social events. Thank you to you all.

Cathy Lawrence

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.

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

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Cover shot – Nev Almond on his Atos V at Westbury (Photo by Sarah Ward)

Chairman's Chunter

Well if the weather's crap for flying at least you can think/talk/watch/read about flying pretty easily these days! I've been doing a lot of the latter recently what with sorting out my holiday to Mayrhofen for the British Open at the end of May, trying to decide whether to buy a new reserve or not (mine's 15 years old), sorting out new brake lines for my glider and generally reading and occasionally posting on www.paraglidingforum.com, the excellent new paragliding forum. There's lots of good stuff there with none of the bitchiness and flaming that went on at BigAirParagliding. If you haven't taken a look at it yet then I'd thoroughly recommend it.



However I did read some sad news on this forum – the death of Canadian pilot Chris Muller earlier this week during the Flytec US Championship in Florida (where Nev was competing). I guess only a few of us have heard of him, let alone met him (probably only Nev), but he was undoubtedly one of the world's most talented HG and PG pilots. He was attempting a high speed low level "grab the bag" manoeuvre at the end of a task when for whatever reason it went tragically wrong. It is a big loss for the free-flying community, and the only consolation is that he died doing what he loved most. For more information search the forum or visit www.xcmag.com.

On a happier note, did anyone see "Adventure Challenge" on Sky Adventure 1 the other night? I was fortunate to be able to get a friend to record it and was treated to an hour's wonderful film about the guys at Sunrise Paragliding in Nepal teaching a pair of Black Kites to fly with them – a great film and just what you need to inspire you on a miserable night!

Regarding my ancient Firebird R2 reserve, I think I've pretty much decided to keep it. Having given it a thorough poking and prodding and subjecting it to the Mark 1 Thumb Test I am convinced it is all still A OK. If you haven't had your reserve repacked this year then now's a good time to do it before the flying season kicks in properly. Unless you're really confident in doing it yourself I'd recommend you get Robin (or any BHPA qualified packer) to do it.

I'm really looking forward to Mayrhofen now – less than four weeks to go by the time you read this. It's not so much the competing I'm looking forward to, more the fantastic flying and scenery that fingers crossed we should enjoy. But sadly there'll be one less pilot for me to beat now – Chris Harland landed heavily at the end of an xc flight from the Bloreng on Sunday 24th April and broke his pelvis. Fortunately it's a stable break so he's not going to be encased in plaster, but he's still going to be out of action for quite a while. Chris gave us an excellent talk at the last club meeting, entitled "Why Fly?", but having spoken to Nia last night it's clear that his love of flying will be no less strong following this accident. Anyway Chris, I wish you a speedy recovery and hope that you can make it out to Mayrhofen if only to be part of the "craic".

So Spring is here (although you would be forgiven for not knowing quite where it is at the moment) so do please take care in those punchy spring thermals – I gather it was quite sporty at Frocester a few weeks ago with some very strong thermals... It's also the time when many pilots are flying new wings, so please err on the side of caution if you think it's marginal!

Well this weekend (the May Bank Holiday one) sees the final of last year's British Club Championship competition in Crickhowell, and weather permitting the Avon PGers are hoping to retain the title for a second year. Fingers crossed for at least one flyable day! This year Martin and Amy have taken over the running of the BCC and with their enormous enthusiasm and considerable organisational skills I'm sure it will be a great success. Full details of the comp can be found on the excellent www.flybcc.co.uk website. Thanks guys for revitalising this very friendly low-stress comp! Yoda Ken is organising the Avon PG teams this year so please let him know if you fancy taking your first tentative steps into paragliding competitions. Neil Atkinson is organising HG comps so if there are any keen HG pilots out there please give him a shout.

Well I think that's enough of my ramblings except to say that the Mere Bash will be held on the 10th/11th September so keep that weekend free – it's sure to be glorious weather like last year.

Oh yes, just one more thing, by the end of this year I will have been chairman for three years which I think is quite long enough for one person, so you've got plenty of time to ponder if you'd like to take over the job and to organise your election campaign :-). No doubt I'll still find myself on the committee (in a more onerous job I expect) so I won't be gone for ever!

Fly safe

Tim Pentreath

PS. It doesn't matter who you vote for, the Government always gets in!

Introducing the New Committee Members.....

Membership Secretary - Amy and Martin Stanton

We have both been flying for about 7 years, mainly part-time flying now due to one high maintenance five year old daughter, and Martin's high work load. We are based just south of Bristol and so our local hill is Westbury White Horse where we can often be found at weekends, socialising and sometimes flying.

We are very keen to get away camping at weekends with the Club, during the summer, to Wales, and hopefully with our new campervan, which should be ready by Easter. We shall spend many happy days flying over there.

We are also the organisers of the British Club Challenge (the BCC which is a friendly inter-club competition), although we have passed on the task of actually recruiting a team to Ken Wilkinson. We hope to be running a more organised event this year and hope to see many of you at the comps and hopefully at the final again next year.



PG Comps Secretary & PG Low Air Time Contact - Ken Wilkinson



I'm new on the committee and am keen to see the club go forward in the XC stakes. That's why I put myself forward for the competitions post. There's a lot of subtle decision-making in flying cross- country, and having a good club forum for the sport is a great strength of the club. I love competition, and the introductory level British Club Challenge, which has given so much fun to so many is a great thing (thanks due to Amy and Martin Stanton for getting the BCC to rise again). It's a great way to feel the pressure, and learn from many excellent pilots just what can be done if you learn how to read a competition day.

I intend that we put at least 2 teams forward (there may be a call for a third, as many are interested), and intend that team selection be made on XC form. In view of Richard Zaltzman flying 99.9k and coming 15th in the Avon league last year it shows the competition for places will be high! Even so give it a go.

With regard to my Low Air-time role, please feel free to contact me at home 0117 9620455 or on my mobile. If it's half flyable I'll certainly be considering it at least, and am available to fly weekends and Mondays.

It's a worrying time when you qualify from a school, and assessing conditions is a daunting task, especially in the first 10 hours after CP. Avon is a very friendly club, and we have many club coaches (check pictures on the website). If you arrive on a hill be sure to ask someone (myself if I'm there but there are many others around). They will be sure to help once they know you are new to the game. It's only a couple of years since I got rid of my red ribbon, and paragliding still makes the old sphincter tighten up.

In particular, as Robin Brown wisely mentioned at the last club meeting, the Spring brings excellent flying conditions but they can be too lively for beginners, especially in the middle of the day. Often scary turbulence at 2pm can turn into smooth steady air at 5.30pm. You have started on one of the most exciting learning curves. Make it a safe one. 'Its better to be on the ground wishing you were in the air, than in the air wishing you were on the ground' is a very wise old airmans' saying. Remember it!

kwilkinson2000@hotmail.com

The Avon Social Diary

Looking back on 2004, we had some fantastic speakers on a wide range of flying related topics, from fast jet flying to hot air ballooning, with of course some free flying too.

We are already off to a great start this year, many thanks to Robin, Ken and Rich D for kicking the year off with their talks on Montenegro, The BCC and flying in Nepal.

We are getting the calendar together for the rest of the year at the moment, so please put the dates below in your diary and keep your eyes on the club Smartgroup and website for updates. We would like to have a range of speakers covering all aspects of the sport, from taking your first steps out of school to competing in the Nationals and Worlds. We would also like to see a bit more from the hangies, and will try to cover the conversion process for those paraglider pilots who have dabbled with the idea of going rigid. We need your input to help us find speakers and plan the club evenings. Please send any ideas for speakers (especially if you have friends or contacts who could give a talk) to socialsec@avonhgpg.co.uk.

So far, the diary for the year looks something like this:

Date	Event
Thursday 12 th May	TBA
June	The Summer Party will be scheduled in for June, keep your diaries free on the 9 th and 16 th , date TBC.
Thursday 14 th July	TBA
Thursday 11 th Aug	TBA
Saturday 10 th – Sunday 11 th Sept.	Mere Bash! Last year's epic Bash was a superb weekend. Get the date in your diary now and book your space in the field at Mere.
Thursday 13 th Oct	TBA
Thursday 10 th Nov	TBA

We have had a bit of feedback, and we are going to try to fit the following into the "TBA"s in the schedule:

- Jim Mallinson, the Karmic Flying guru. Jim's adventures are legendary, and if we can winkle him out of the new house and away from his newborn daughter (many congratulations Jim!), he will be a superb speaker.
- Fiona Macaskill has been doing her usual world touring, has bags of photos and doubtless plenty of tales to tell. Let's hope the trees didn't suffer too badly.
- Judy Leden and Chris Dawes – Their flight park is doing really well, we would like to try to find a slot in their busy schedule to get them to talk about hang-glider training and conversion, spiced up with some of their latest adventures. Most likely to be towards the end of the year (October / November).
- A break from the norm, mountaineer Steve Berry will be giving a talk on climbing and trekking in the Himalayas. Steve has led numerous treks and expeditions including the first British ascent of Nun Kun in Kashmir and attempts on Cho Oyu in Nepal and Gangkar Punsum in Bhutan. In 1992 he made the first official British ascent of the highest peak in Mongolia. He also runs Himalayan Kingdoms, an adventure trekking company that has been running for 18 years in the region.
- Film evening: A chance to see the latest releases on the big(ish) screen. A club showing of the Never Ending Thermal, The Race and other gems personally chosen by Garry, our very own free-flying Barry Norman.
- The Holiday Program. From Alicante to Australia, the club's pilots are very active abroad. We would like to have an evening with four or five slots on your holidays and experiences flying outside of the UK. Make sure you take plenty of photos when you travel.
- Other names that we will try to cajole into putting a few slides together are Tim Guildford and Richard Westgate. If you can add to this list, let us know!

If you are new to the club, the club meetings are a great opportunity to meet other members and get advice on flying our sites. We will also be having a regular update on the British Clubs Challenge (BCC) competition at each meeting.

Richard & Diane
Socialsec@avonhgpg.co.uk

News

Obituary: John Fitzpatrick 'Fitz'

4 November 1943 – 1 March 2005

It is with great sadness that I attended the funeral of my good friend, Fitz. Many friends turned out to say their final farewells and it was a very moving ceremony.

Fitz (as he was known by most of his friends) was born in Edinburgh in 1943 and was the third of seven children. At 11 he was sent away to a seminary, a training school for the priesthood. But at the age of 15 he ran away, although he had benefited very well from the education given to him. They had given him his love of history which stayed with him for the rest of his life.

At 21 Fitz moved to London and this was at the start of the swinging sixties, where he was completely at home. It was here he met Rita whom he later married in 1969, and wore to his wedding a green suit and gold shirt. They moved to Canada for 3 years before returning to Britain.

He was always interested in flying joining the ATC when he was younger where he flew gliders. He started flying his home-made hang-glider in the 70's, and not longer after his son Ross was born. During this time he was working for a marketing company, and excelled at the challenges presented. He had the great fortune to tour the UK with the Monty Python team whilst launching their 'Big Red Book', during which he also met the Pope.

They moved to Wiltshire in the 1980's where Fitz set up his own PR company, and his daughter Rowan was born.

In the 1990's he started learning paragliding with Dave Bullard at Wiltshire Paragliding where I had the great fortune to meet him and become a friend. He later became an instructor working for Dave when the weather suited, and we spent many happy weekends and evenings on the hills and in the pubs being regaled by his stories. Fitz was a born entertainer and loved to be the centre of attention. A few years ago he took over Par-Avion, where ever since he has bringing more pilots into the club.

The ceremony closed with these words and his favourite song 'Hotel California' by the Eagles:

*He will not grow old
As we that are left grow old
Age will not weary him
As the years go by*

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*From the rising of the sun
Until its setting
He is set free
To fly*

Good bye Fitz and may you find external peace flying. If anyone would like to make a donation in memory the family are collecting for Cancer Research UK. Please send a cheque to: Thos. Free & Sons Ltd, The Parade, Marlborough, SN8 1NE

Amy Stanton

Comps Report

Another season is upon us and all are eagerly waiting for the Spring air to arrive. Mark Leavesly already has over 70k on the National XC League! We should have a busy year and hope the weather plays ball a bit more than last year.

We still have to run the BCC (British Club Challenge) final, as, having qualified we were unable to run the competition, in spite of rescheduling it several times. We won it in 2004 and are strong contenders to win it again as we have a very solid and experienced A team. However the main fun of the BCC lies in competing in the rounds leading up to the final, and this can involve newer pilots, who we hope to bring on in terms of competition tactics in B and C teams.

To whet everyone's appetites, last May saw an excellent round when everyone and their dog went XC, over 1000ks being flown. There were several XC virgins in the teams, and one (Mike Humphries) did 44k in his first flight over the back and several personal bests! There were smiles from ear to ear that night, and everyone learned a lot about tactics, take off times, watching others, and cloud hopping. On another close fought round with the Southern club, everyone flew at least 15k and only a few ks separated the teams. (We won, with me in charge of the adding up!)

We had 3 teams last year and could well have the same this year as many have expressed their interest. Comps will be announced on Smartgroups, although details of who/when/where etc will be posted on the new BCC website www.flybcc.co.uk where you can also find the full list of rules. The login to find comps etc is 'avon a' with password avon1, and 'avon b' with a password avon2. The Smartgroup is www.smartgroups.co./groups/britishclubchallenge and it is public. The first comp is the 2004 Final on the first May bank holiday over 3 days.

Martin and Amy Stanton have taken on the massive task of setting up a new competitions structure (Thanks, it was needed!) and we hope the series will benefit from that. Key changes are:

- Web based competition scoring and scheduling.
- Best of 6 rounds to qualify for the final at the beginning of August (although clubs can fly as many as they want).
- Clubs can fly against other clubs as often as they want.
- Single day comps (i.e. if the weekend is good there will be 2 rounds).
- No semifinals (If Northern clubs don't fly they won't qualify!).
- Better publicity, including links from BHPA comps website and hopefully reports in **Skywings**. This will hopefully get more involvement from all around the country.
- One 'expert' pilot (Nationals or the like) allowed per team although they can't score more than the next highest placed pilot in the team.

Competitions Secretary: Ken Wilkinson, 13.3.05

New Avon HGPG Sites Guide

The new, updated and long awaited for Avon sites guide is shortly due to go to the press. The new sites guide will be available to download directly from the website for all members (www.avonhgpg.co.uk). In an effort to keep costs down for the club for printing and mailing, the committee would like it if you could download a copy and print it yourself. We understand that not everyone has the facilities to do this, so if you would like a copy posted to you, please could you write a postcard/letter to me, with your name and address on requesting a sites guide, at *Avon HGPG Sites Guide Request, 1 Chardyke Drive, Temple Cloud, Bristol, BS39 5BE*

Amy Stanton

History of the Avon Club: Photos Wanted

Chris Jones is compiling a "History of the Avon club" photo archive to put up on the web. He is collecting photos that document the last 30 years of the club and digitizing them. They do not necessarily have to be "good" photos, just ones that capture the people, events and sites that have made the Avon club what it is today; a kind of family album for the club. If you have any shots you'd like to have included please send them to him and you will be included in the photo credits. Photos from any period over the last 30 years will be welcomed, so don't be afraid to send stuff you

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took in the 70's, 80's, 90's, last week or even next week!

Photos should be digital images of about 800x600, ideally in jpg format and 100% quality, or slides, negatives or prints that can be scanned and returned to you. Include details of when they were taken, where they were taken, and who is in them plus any background information you'd like to supply. If you have a website yourself with pictures of Avon flying please provide details so that a link can be created to it. Email Chris at chris@hgpg.co.uk.

Safety Notice

SAFETY ADVISORY. Issued by Angus Pinkerton - Chairman of the Flying & Safety Committee 23 December 2004. All pilots must READ, DIGEST AND TAKE ACTION on the contents of this Notice and keep it for future reference. If you hold a copy of the BHPA Technical Manual this notice must be inserted into it and retained until it is withdrawn or superseded on instructions from the Chairman FSC.

EMERGENCY PARACHUTE PAYLOAD: DHV CERTIFIED CANOPIES

The DHV have issued a recommendation that pilots using DHV certified emergency parachutes should ensure that their maximum take-off weight never exceeds 75% of the parachute's certified maximum payload. (This means that if the emergency parachute has a certified maximum payload of say 114kg, it is only recommended for use with a maximum of 85kg payload.) This is as a result of a DHV study of injury rates arising during the use of emergency parachutes. They examined all the reported incidents where emergency parachutes had been used by DHV pilots in 2003, and after stripping out all of those where the pilot's fall had been arrested by trees, found that the eleven incidents left showed a clear trend: pilot injury (generally serious) occurred in all those events where the load was greater than 78% of the DHV certified parachute's maximum payload. The DHV emergency parachute standard uses a 6.8m/s descent rate as the criteria. This is considerably in excess of the BHPA 5.5m/s recommendation (which is also used for the CEN 12491 standard). The high rate of injury uncovered in Germany should be no surprise to those following the FSC's carefully researched advice on parachute sizes and acceptable descent rates. If your emergency parachute is a DHV certified type, check to find the maximum certified payload and ensure that your total weight in flight does not exceed 75% of this figure. (The DHV are planning to list all DHV certified emergency parachutes and their certified max. payloads on their website: www.dhv.de.) (Nb. Reducing the max. payload by 25% should, by calculation, reduce the descent rate to approx 5.8 m/s. Members are reminded that comprehensive advice on emergency parachutes is contained in the BHPA Pilot Handbook.)

Above the Clouds

Graham Richards pushes the boundaries of the family holiday



It was my last full day in Olu Deniz. I had been up the mountain, Babadag, three times but gave yesterday a miss to spend some time on the beach with Karen. We'd walked to the lagoon where the sand was softer and the water still and fantastic – well worth the petty entrance fee. From there, occasionally I'd watch the paragliders rising over the mountain to reach the fluffy cumulus that periodically popped over the peak. I didn't mind not being there as tomorrow I dreamed I would, and for the flight of the holiday.

If you've not been to Olu Deniz and are looking for a holiday where you can fly while your partner and/or kids can just soak up the sun, then this is the place. We'd laze around the pool in the morning, then around midday I'd leave to go to one of the many paragliding booths on the promenade and get a lift to the top of Babadag for £10; takes just under an hour. You can even just stand by the road up and thumb a lift from jeeps as they go passed; though you still had to pay!

The summit is just under 6000ft above the beach and 5 km away. With no headwind you can be over the beach in 10 mins with 4000ft still to go. The air can sure be still; on one flight I must have flown hands off for 15 mins just taking photographs and steering by

weight shift. But why fly down to the beach when you can go up?

My first flight there was from the westerly take-off, a hundred metres or so lower than the summit. Despite having talked to some flyers from Kent, I had not really understood where they said the best places for lift were (because I hadn't seen them yet), so I lost over 1000ft before I twigged. I'd wasted time flying within a gigantic rock bowl that should have been cooking, and wasn't, so I went the other way to a wooded ridge that ran back up to take off to find gentle lift that got me back up. I messed around a bit and after a while decided I'd had enough and went to land on the beach, passing over the hotel where we



Over summit looking down to West take-off

were staying. I always find that first flights in strange mountains are a bit daunting so was mentally exhausted. The bus from the beach to hotel had me back by the pool and Karen, and with a cool beer, by 4 o'clock. She'd seen me overhead but hadn't realised it was me!

The second day I left the pool later, took off sooner and had a great time getting straight into the lift on the ridge, working my way up over take off and on to the summit. I played around here and practiced my thermalling technique, praying that those dust devils I'd seen on the ground wouldn't reach up and grab me. Despite one snappy collapse and recovery, I was getting more relaxed; after Snowdon in May, this was a puppy. For a second time I was amazed at how quickly the air becomes like silk when you leave the pointy bits and head off for the beach. I flew via the hotel again but this time I pulled spectacular spirals and got much lower before heading for finals and the beach. Back for a dip, a beer and to watch the sun go down (miffed that this time, no one had seen me).



Olu and lagoon

The third day on the mountain was much like the second. Found the lift, got high, stayed there. No one came to play with me and so I thought I'd do some exploring. The previous day, talking to someone, I was told you could fly over Butterfly Valley and so long as you were above the nearby mast, would make it back to the beach. It was true; I'm always a bit sceptical about what I'm told, so kept my options open for landing out. I didn't need to though; I even tried to pick up some lift from the slope just above the town, knowing I had some to spare anyway. I managed to hold my own for a while but then the thought of the pool, etc, drew me down. Landing here is a doddle.



West take-off over-looking Olu

The expert tandem pilots would come over the bars and shops at just the right height turn back to the beach and glide in landing on the narrow grassy bits between the bars and the promenade. There they would be assisted by their colleagues. I did see one landing though, where an overshoot of both the grass and the prom caused them to trip on the kerb and go face into the sand; nothing serious but enough to make Karen cancel her booking for a tandem flight (they're around £50). A shame, but she's still waiting for me to get a tandem licence. I preferred to fly over the prom and turn to land just on beach, wherever it chose to come and meet me, dropping the wing back on the prom. Preferably on one of the tarpaulins those nice tandem guys had laid out!

Well, this was it, my last day up the mountain. The morning air was quite clear but there was a definite breeze around the breakfast table that had not been there before. It was coming off the sea and I was concerned that at 6000ft it would be blown out. Although early in the morning, there began that steady procession of tandems off the top so up I went. The track runs up the North-East side of the mountain out of the wind. Around the corners small clouds began to pop out, larger and larger. First higher than the jeep, then level, and then lower. As we neared the narrowing top, it was obvious that on the windward side the orographic cloud was thickening and turning into a layer of stratus. The lee side, however was still

perfectly clear. On the top, this time the highest and Southerly take off, the tandem pilots were still taking off, forward launching into a 10mph wind, going up around the fingers of cloud that were breaking out of the stratus and rolling up the slopes from below. They would then head off for the gaps that were getting fewer and fewer over the beach. After a while, it all stopped, so we waited, and waited, and waited. Jocky was there with his group to do XC flying but even they were waiting. And they would have gone the other way, but even the lee side of the mountain, or rather the gap before the next peak, was getting closed in. There must have been about 50 hopefuls waiting all day until about 4 in the afternoon the jeeps started to take people down.



Graham's merged photo of a Dust Devil!

I'd heard talk that if you had GPS and a waypoint mark for the beach, you could fly to that, B-Line through the cloud and then, once in clear air, make a safe arrival. I thought that was probably safer than the jeeps! Talking to Ken (from the Kent group) we hatched a plan to do just that.

First of all, what did we know? Well, cloud-base was at about 3000ft and cloud top at 4000ft, pretty much all the way to the beach. We could fly in clear air for 10 minutes and be over the beach before dropping into cloud. If we went straight down, at 3000ft we would be about 4km horizontally from anything hard and nasty. We had radios to communicate, so what could go wrong?

Collision – It was just the 2 of us so we would maintain 1km separation before dropping into the

cloud. Over the radios we could ensure we also had height separation.

Equipment failure – We would have each other in sight till dropping into the cloud and so use each other as a marker. We also had compasses; we could point out to sea and whatever we overshot by, we'd make back in the 3000ft clear air below the cloud.

Ken set off first and headed straight for the waypoint. I took off about 5 minutes later and went straight into one of those fingers; stay cool, maintain bearing. Popped out a minute later into crystal clear, silky air. This was surreal; like no place on earth. There I was sitting in my armchair, blue sky, sun above and a carpet of cloud below. Ken way off in front. This was when I realised that my PDA screen with the waypoint and 'Goto information' was not very visible in sunlight through dark, non bifocal glasses. I took my gloves off, pulled the PDA off the flight deck and held it where I could see it better and relaxed again. I didn't realise it but by the time Ken dropped into the cloud I had virtually caught up with him and was not much above him, so when I went in I held back from B-lining to increase our vertical separation. Trying to maintain a direction in cloud is so hard; you think you are turning when going straight and vice versa. There is nothing to give you immediate visual clues and the compass lags. After a while Ken radioed to say he was out and at 3000ft. I still had about 800ft to drop and was about 1km from the waypoint and still trying desperately to point towards it. As soon as I did I pulled the B-lines. Not wearing the gloves now, they started cutting into the sides of my hands and so I let go having dropped about 300ft. I once again fought to get back on track and then B-lined again with a better grip, this time all the way to cloud-base.

The relief at dropping out of the cloud was immense. Keeping a cool head and having confidence in the task was essential, but the stress clearly did build up. I was now quite damp and was about 1/4km inland from the beach and over the town; Ken was about 500ft below. It would still take 15mins to get down, in which time I had dried off before making an ordinary landing next to the prom. Whether anyone was surprised to see us both, I'll never know, but my feeling of satisfaction was immense.

Well that was it, tomorrow we'd be heading home but I knew I would want to come back. Would I make a flight like that again? No... well... maybe. We do this sport because it pushes boundaries; that we like, it's in our nature and it gives us a buzz. That was an exhilarating flight that was carefully thought out in advance, threw in some complications during its execution, but resulted in success. That's what I like about this sport.

Graham Richard



A RECCI AT BECICI

MONTENEGRO UNCOVERED - BY HOWARD WOODWARD

Montenegro is a small country, part of the former Yugoslavia, due to become completely independent in about 18 months time. The flying site at Becici has been flown for many years by Eastern European pilots, but Robin Brown was probably the first UK pilot there, discovering the site during his winter tour of Eastern Europe.

As a holiday destination it has many advantages. For paragliding it has a 2400ft top to bottom with a tarmac road direct to take-off. Landing is on the beach or on the hotel lawn; however this is not a coastal soaring site.

May 2005

The lift is thermic, so for low airtime pilots thermal flying practice is easy. Once height is lost it is easy to fly out in smooth sea air and pilots can practice wing-overs and tight 360s etc. Whilst we were there, Acro-queen Orla Dunn treated us to a spectacular flat spin, a surprise to us all, including Orla; her scream clearly audible on the beach several hundred feet below.

Serious XC flying is possible from this site but seemed, from my limited XC experience that careful planning is needed due to the terrain over the back. Hugo Makin achieved the best flight buzzing off northwards towards Tivat, never below 4500ft, then returning to land on the spot, on the beach. Some days a back-wind blew, which converged with the anabatic flow and although a bit lumpy, loads of lift over the beach. This convergence provided several pilots with a height gain of 3,000ft above the beach, a big surprise and bonus when you thought you were on your way to the

deck...Once again Hugo showed off and landed on the posh beach of Sveti Stefan to the south.

Others made tentative out-and-returns, but I think after a few more trips some good XC flying will be made from Becici. The current XC record we think is 35km from a Slovenian pilot.

This holiday was organized by Airtopia, so it was CFI Robin and instructor Hugo on radio's for the three guy's still under training, and also acting as club coaches for the low air-timers. I was the driver but still managed loads of flying every day. In fact we flew for 15 of the 17 days we were there.

For non-flyers this is as good as it gets. Most flying holidays are a disaster for partners who don't fly, but this is a beautiful resort with nice hotels. Budva is in the same bay as Becici, and is a busy resort with beach, bars and restaurants. A Noddy train takes tourists along the coast line; pedalo's, jet ski's and water skiing are also available. Pilots land on the beach so little reunions happen all day!

Montenegro currency is the Euro and almost everything is cheap except minibus hire, which is so expensive we drove the Airtopia minibus through Europe for transport and for transfers from the airport.

This is a story in itself: Robin, Hugo and me drove together for 45hrs and never had a cross word! One drove, one slept and one read the map. Robin was best at driving Hugo map reading, sleeping was my special skill.

In Becici two Montenegro guys fly tandems for the tourists, pricewise a little out of reach for local people. Robin did his bit for English-Montenegro relations by taking a member of hotel staff up in his tandem each day. Strangely the first to fly were most attractive young ladies and by the end of week two, he had the night porter strapped on the front!

On one flight Robin forgot his vario; luckily the young lady on the front had natural flying ability. She squealed when in rising air, giggled on a glide, and was silent when going down.

One of the local tandem pilots wore knee and elbow pads but no helmet, so I did my usual (not shy to say something) but apparently "he never lands on his head, so it would be a waste of money".

On the last Sunday when everyone had gone home the three of us wanted one last flight. We set off to take-off, but an hour earlier I had been stung by a hornet.

On the way up I turned into a blind strawberry. Robin and Hugo thought I was going to die, so decided it wasn't worth abandoning a decent flying opportunity. Then it looked like I may survive so they reluctantly took me to hospital where I got a jab in the ass that was as painful as the hornet sting.

We found the people of Montenegro very friendly. It was an absolute pleasure to have such nice people around. The waiter in our favorite restaurant kindly refereed our knockout Buckeroo competition. Amazingly Buckeroo is not as popular as chess, although similar (it has horses in both) but unfortunately, Dave Ogle was unable to transfer his chess skills to the game and let us down badly in the final. Montenegro waiter winning by a shovel in the final.

We met a few Serbian pilots in Becici, all of them from the EOL club in Serbia and we were invited to visit on our way home so we packed up and drove for 10 hours to Kraljevo, arriving on the Monday evening. Our Serbian friends turned out to meet us. The next day the entire EOL club took the day off to take us flying meeting at the EOL clubhouse. We then drove to the mountains where we climbed into the club's old 4x4; 15 people in the 4x4, 15 gliders in the trailer. Light thermic flying over spectacular mountains, very remote. Hugo shouted at me for going the wrong way in MY thermal when everyone knows I turn right when I thermal! As the thermals died in the evening we all squeezed into a tight landing spot.

The fantastic guys from EOL got the Serbian equivalent of Jamie Oliver doing a BBQ and beer for us. We just left 6000 quids worth of kit at the side of the road to be picked up later by our friends.

Holidays that end on a high note are best. To meet so many friendly generous kind people, and a great day's flying topped off with a BBQ, I thought I had died from the hornet's sting and gone to heaven.

We said goodbye and promised to return. Sadly the bad roads had ruined the shock absorbers on the minibus so we spent the next few days inside a mad kangaroo. This made me sleep like a dog, and somewhat amusingly made Robin as sick as a dog!

I will return to Montenegro and to Serbia, both having huge potential. Robin is also in the process of buying a property in Montenegro and also hopefully buying a bit of mountain to make a better take off...watch this space.

Howard Woodward

Piedrahita's Flying Fiesta!

Richard Zaltzman



Diane Hedges flies into the sunset



Steve Etherington heads off for the plains

The British summer once again turned out to be very British and not much summer, so the prospect of two weeks in Spain got more and more enticing the closer we came to leaving. We had booked up with Fly Piedrahita (run by Steve Ham) early in the year, and decided to treat ourselves to a long holiday to lengthen the odds of good flying.

Having been for a week in April 2003, we knew what to expect, and were looking forward to the large easy take-offs and plentiful landing fields. Knowing you are not going to have to hurl yourself off some unfeasibly steep scree slope, straight over a cliff or land amongst vicious spiky trees and boulders certainly boosts the confidence and allows you to concentrate on the flying.

Piedrahita is a market town on the road between Avila and Salamanca, about 50km east of Avila. Bits of it are medieval, and the rest has grown up around it during various periods of prosperity. There is a lovely town square to enjoy a beer in during the evenings, and overall it has a really nice atmosphere of a quiet Spanish town. Quiet except for the Fiesta in August that is, and then the place is a riot of live music, street bands, late night bars and livestock.

Steve has been there years, and he introduced the free-flying community to the joys of the area. As a pilot he does not really need introducing to British fliers, his name appearing all over the place in competition results. Steve's wife, Puri, is also an excellent pilot (she is the former Spanish women's champion) and flies or assists when she can. She has an excellent knack of talking people into thermals and providing radio control low saves! Together they run a superb operation, providing guiding and half-board

accommodation. You live with Steve, Puri and their son, Oliver, in their charming house on the edge of town. From the balcony you can see take off, and it is a 20 minute drive to the top of the mountain.

A typical day starts with a leisurely breakfast and a quick check on the conditions. If the forecast tree that can be seen from the dining room is rustling very gently, then it is normally on. The bell is rung at 10:30, which is the signal to load up into the minibus for the first run up the hill. It is tarmac road all the way to the top, and for those who do not like the precipitous mountain hairpins, the trip is pretty gentle on the nerves. Steve employs a driver so that he can concentrate on getting you flying, and be there in the air to guide you through the tricky bits. This also means an instant retrieve if you bomb out early, and a ride straight back to the top.

The first flight of the day from the house mountain, Pena Negra, is usually an easy float down, just as the first thermals are starting to wake up, giving you a 20 minute top-to-bottom. This gets everyone warmed up, and ready to go for the big afternoon flights. With two official landing fields, and plenty of unofficial ones should you spend too much time scratching the hill, the fly down is very pleasant. Just avoid the fields with

one large cow in them, and the temptation of a spot landing in the bull ring.

Depending on the conditions, it might be straight back up again, or a break for lunch. The bigger flights happen in the afternoon, and as usual in hot mountains, things can get pretty boisterous in the heat of the day. Steve takes great care to ensure people are flying within their ability and the low air-timers are not lobbed off with the skygods. The target is to get away during the afternoon, or explore the valley, depending on the prevailing wind. With the retrieve driver on hand, you'll be back in time for an evening soar even after a 50km XC, and we enjoyed some really nice sunset flying.

After a hard day's flying, it's either back for supper at the house or out to dinner in town. Puri cooks fantastic meals every other night, and the town has enough tapas bars and restaurants to keep you well fed the rest of the time. The local bar, 'Panerra' seems to cater very well for pilots, huge steaks and burgers for the carnivores, and the odd salad if you're at the top end of your weight range. Post flight beer comes in iced tankards and slips down a treat.

All of our flying was done from the local site, Pena Negra (there are plenty of other sites, should the wind require it, but we did not need to travel when we were there). Pena Negra is a North facing takeoff at 1900m, on the top of a long ridge running just about east to west. To the North are the flat lands, pushing out towards Salamanca. In the summer these are burned brown with the heat, dotted with livestock and Spanish oak trees. Flying out towards the plains above the town usually rewards you with good thermals, and Steve points out the house triggers.



Diane and Steve Ham go tandem XC

May 2005



Salamanca on a day off

Behind takeoff, the ridge drops away slowly, before a serious chain of mountains rises up to the South which provide a stunning backdrop when you are in the air. Running down the ridge to the west you head towards El-Barco, along an opening valley. If you head to the East, you fly up the ridge over the corral, to the famous Villafranca pass. Here the hills rise up, and you have to get high to make the crossing onto the Avila plain. Once you are through the pass, the big distances are on, running down the plain towards Avila and beyond, or heading up towards Segovia.

Our first week began with a very pleasant evening flight on the day we arrived. Steve picked us up at the airport, and with everyone's flights coming in at about the same time, we were quickly on the way out of Madrid. There were seven of us for the first week; Steve Etherington and Claire from the Lakes, Alan, a Piedrahita regular, and Ian, Andy, Diane and I from Avon. A quick stop at the house to dump the excess baggage and we were straight up the hill and off, with our goal at a bar about 8km away. We all made it in the buoyant evening air, although Steve E probably did not mean to put his wing right over the 10ft windsock and nearby tree in the landing field. You can take accuracy too seriously.

The weather took a turn for the worse the following day, so we raided Steve's toy cupboard and broke out the kayaks and rafts. Parawaiting in Piedrahieata isn't the usual moping around staring at the sky. Steve keeps plenty of amusements on hand, including kayaks, rafts, kites, buggies, boards etc, so with the van fully loaded we headed off to the river, which was unseasonably high and therefore great fun.

Unfortunately things didn't get much better for much of the week. We were on take off in a howling over-the-back wind on the day the European record fell. We even saw the pilots scud past below us in the valley, having taken off at a different site. The two Steves did not really get peeved until the stories started filtering back about a 280km flight, breaking Steve H's recent record. There were mitigating circumstances for not flying; the wind on take off had been blowing at 30km/h when it wasn't blowing along the hill, and the pilot was French, with scant regard for his own life. I personally was quite happy to be on the ground, but I don't think either Steve wants to be asked "what were you doing when the European record fell?"!

Salamanca provided another day's entertainment. This beautiful university town is fantastic for drifting down little streets and around small shops. There are plenty of bars on the square, and for the culturally minded the cathedral has lots to see, inside and out, as do various museums and galleries. Shopping fatigue got us all pretty quickly once the culture was over, with a final stop at Decathlon for general sporting stuff being the straw that broke the camels back.

The rest of the week was plagued by high winds. One day ended as Diane got snatched by a dust devil and yanked through a small gap in a barbed wire fence, onto the road. Luckily she was unscathed, and in hindsight realised why the other pilots had jumped on their gliders moments earlier. The wind got stronger from then on, and the day was canned.

Friday brought a break in the weather, and the two Steve's and Alan got over the pass, to make it most of the way to Avila, which turned around an otherwise bad weather week. Jocky's competition arrived at the end of the week, and managed a couple of tasks. The town was packed with pilots and the bars resounded to tales of "there I was...", usually with the words "going backwards..." or "a tad rough" sprinkled in the conversation.

Steve, Claire, Alan and Andy left on Saturday, and we were joined by Bryan from the Malverns. Unfortunately for the leavers, the following week was much better. We flew every day, although some of those were just a morning and evening flight, the wind still blowing strongly from the west. The evening flights were superb, watching the sun go down over the hills to the west, with good conditions and great sunsets. They provided very relaxing flying, too relaxing at times as I kept forgetting about catabatic winds on landing, the blissful smile being wiped off my face by the stubble in the landing field as I slid to a downwind halt.

Thursday morning finally brought more normal Piedrahita conditions: high pressure with a light Northerly wind. After an early flight we were back up on take off and starting to get excited. Steve and Diane set off on the tandem, but got pretty low and were heading towards the landing field. I got off after a bad start, the delay giving that extra bit of time for things to heat up. Against all the odds, Steve had

managed a low save on the tandem and was climbing out in the valley, and I managed to join them in their climb. The sky was totally blue, not a cloud to hint at the lift, but there was plenty of it and Steve knows just where to look. We stuck to the high ground, drifting down the ridge, before pushing forwards for the corral and the usual house thermal. A slow climb there took us up and back towards the mountains, getting to about 2,900m before setting off on the glide over the pass.

Crossing the pass up in the mountains is fantastic, the hills below us now free of civilisation. On the horizon are the serious mountains to the South, and as you cross over the plain gradually opens up. We headed out for the flat ground as we left the pass and picked us some good climbs. By now the wind had changed and we were facing more of a headwind as we pushed on. We got low, into the hot air above the fields and had to work the low climbs pretty hard. Half-hearted thermals and scrappy lift kept us up for a few more km, but the game was pretty much over as the wind went further round.

We landed in a large field, and the retrieve van had arrived before we had even packed up. The flight was a personal best for me, and my first real taste of climb and glide XC. We had flown 37km, crossing the famous Villafranca pass, and after all that we were back on take off for a nice evening fly down!

Friday brought an even better flight, with Steve and Diane on the tandem again, but well ahead and urging us to catch up. I nervously crossed the pass on my own, and Bryan followed soon after. We all met up on the other side, and this time stayed in the mountains for longer, gliding fast down the range, before a strong climb and a push into the valley. Once again the wind turned and picked up. Steve and I found ourselves getting low in the valley, pushing into a strong northerly wind. Higher up, it was still westerly, but we did not find anything to escape from the wind lower down. We all called it a day and landed at 45km, another personal best, and an even better flight than the day before.

The last two days flying had been fantastic, perhaps even more so because Diane had been there too. With too few hours to go XC by herself, flying tandem with Steve she had the opportunity to join in and really feel the fun of XC flying. I'm sure we'll be back again next year and maybe Diane will have a go flying solo over the Pass.

Over the two weeks, we managed some great flying and had a fantastic holiday. We did not witness the hypoxic cloud bases or climbs so strong you have to turn your vario off before you go deaf, but given our relative (in)experience, I'll leave that for the experts. Steve's guiding and Puri's hospitality were faultless, and to make it even better, we missed some of the worst summer weather the UK has seen for years. So if you are after great flying, good food and friendly après-fly, drop Steve an email, book your ticket to Madrid and get out to Fly Piedrahita.◇

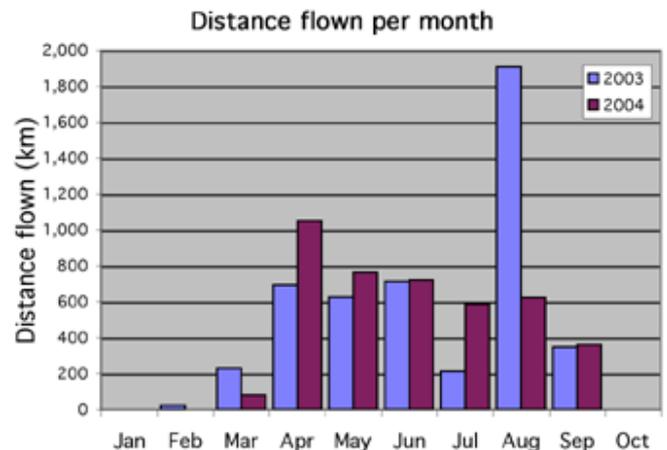
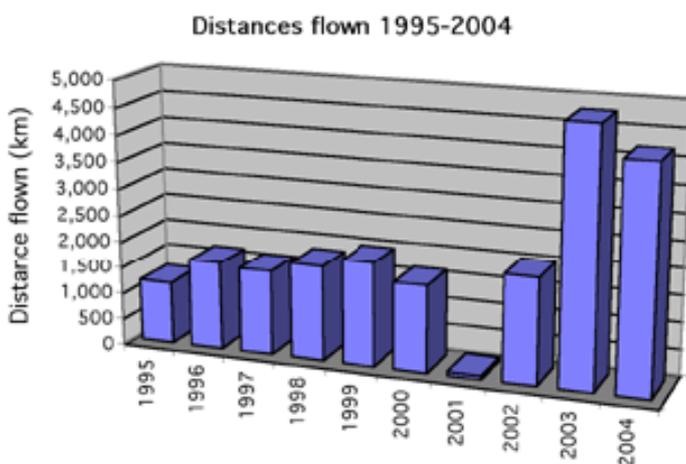
The XC Files

www.avonpgxc.co.uk

by Tim Pentreath

2004 - the final verdict...

Well, we didn't quite beat 2003's incredible total of 4759km but we did manage a pretty respectable 4188km, and apart from March and August every month last year was better than the year before. And we actually had more pilots than ever enter the league last year - 36! How many other clubs can boast that?



The 2004 roll of honour reads like this:

- ❖ **1st place XC league** - Alex Coltman (379km top 6)
- ❖ **2nd place XC league** - Jim Mallinson (372km top 6)
- ❖ **3rd place XC league** - Gary Sandell (277km top 6)
- ❖ **Longest flight** - Gary Sandell (101km)
- ❖ **Longest DHV 1/2 prize** - Ken Wilkinson (60km)
- ❖ **Most improved pilot** - Nick Farley
- ❖ **Best newcomer** - Mark Norley
- ❖ **2nd best newcomer** - Mike Humphries
- ❖ **3rd best newcomer** - Morgan Nicholas
- ❖ **Dave Yeandle Memorial Trophy (Easter Cup)** - Rich Harding (52km)

Congratulations to all of them, and all the pilots who entered flights last year, be they sky gods or xc virgins!

And lastly, a big thanks to our sponsors, Windtech, Ozone, Alpine Ascent and System X for continuing to sponsor us most generously!

2005 PG XC League (most recent flight - 21/4/05)

Rank	Name	Glider	1	2	Flights	Top 6	AV Top 6	All	Av All
1	Jim Mallinson	Gradient Avax RSE	55.4		1	55.4	55.4	55.4	55.4
2	Morgan Nicholas	Nova Aeron	29.2	6.2	2	35.3	17.7	35.3	17.7
3	Peter Taylor	UP Targa 2	34.2		1	34.2	34.2	34.2	34.2
4	Alan Davies	Gradient Aspen	21.9	10.5	2	32.4	16.2	32.4	16.2
5	Alex Coltman	Airwave Magic FR	30.3		1	30.3	30.3	30.3	30.3
6	Ken Wilkinson	Ozone Vibe	30.3		1	30.3	30.3	30.3	30.3
7	Robin Brown	UP Kantega	22.1		1	22.1	22.1	22.1	22.1
8	Mike Humphries	UP Kantega	14.9	5.3	2	20.2	10.1	20.2	10.1
9	Richard Zaltzman	Airwave Sport 2	18.9		1	18.9	18.9	18.9	18.9
10	Robert Kerslake	Not Known	18.6		1	18.6	18.6	18.6	18.6
11	Wayne Seeley	Advance Omega 6	13.9		1	13.9	13.9	13.9	13.9
Grand Total			289.7	21.9	14	311.6	22.3	311.6	22.3

After a late start in 2005 it's finally happening.....

Thursday 21st April

Jim starts his year with an 18km triangle, which under the rules gets multiplied by three to make 55km - nice one!

Saturday 16th April

Lots of people enjoyed the thermic conditions at Westbury (myself included), but no one got away. For xcs you had to go to Frocester where Alex, Pete T, Alan D, Robin and Robert Kerslake (a new name - was this your first xc?) all got away for flights of 20-30km approx.

Saturday 2nd April

Mike Humphries flies the ridge run from Pandy to Hay Bluff for 15km, but doesn't make it back due to the strengthening wind.

Easter Bank holiday weekend

Friday was disappointing and a lot of us spent a frustrating day at Talybont, however the rest of the weekend was better with Ken and Morgan both doing the Pandy ridge run with Ken then continuing on to Aber for 30km. So it was a close thing, but at the moment it appears that Ken has won the Easter Cup by 1km, barring any late entries or course! Then on Monday Talybont was working better and Alan bloody grand bloody slam Davies did a 10km flight to Brecon.

Sunday 13th March

Wayne Seeley and Morgan Nicholas get the 2005 season underway with 13km and 6km flights respectively.



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Trekking Sunbeam	95-110kg	£550.00
Gradient Bliss L	95-120kg	£900:00
Nova XRay M	85-105kg	£550:00
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Gradient Golden L	95-115kg	£995.00

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What the papers are saying:

"Windtech are acquiring a reputation for building well-constructed gliders with very good handling" "head and shoulders above the rest" "an exceptionally accomplished all-rounder" "so much more... than just very good performance figures" - *Skywings Magazine, UK.*

"Windtech has already fully convinced everyone about the great quality of their products" "one of the best finished paragliders I have ever seen" "optimal in every way" "outstanding" "really quite impressive" "fine-tuned handling and superb speed and performance" "outstanding security and maximum performance" "exceptionally well-balanced" "there is nothing too much and nothing too little. The whole tuning is just perfect" - *Gleitachirm Magazine, Austria.*

"a great many innovations" "the turn is simply delicious" "remarkable stability" "sophisticated, manoeuvrable, fast" "swift and efficient" "amazing qualities" - *Paropente Magazine, Spain.*

"Windtech today belong to the Greats of the paragliding trade" "weaknesses, there are none" "The quality of Windtech is convincing" "excellent qualities" "altogether excellent" "leaves nothing more to be desired" "Launching is pure enjoyment" "a pure pleasure" "extremely good-natured behaviour" "exemplary" "well balanced behaviour" - *Fly and Glide Magazine, Germany.*

"The manufacturing finish is beautiful" - *Aerial Magazine, France.*

"safety and performance... that would have been hard to imagine a few years ago." - *Noel Whittall, UK.*

"state-of-the-art, cutting-edge" - *Bob Drury, Cross Country Magazine, UK.*

"very beautiful sail-making" "a somewhat excellent glide" "a jewel of precision and pleasure" "I love it!" "great precision" - *Paropente Magazine, France.*



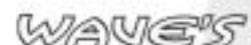
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