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NOVA

The Magazine of the Avon Hang Gliding and Paragliding Club



November 2005

On the cover: Westbury during Steve Elkins' and Neville Almond's AtosVR demo day. Photo: Alan Russell, zedphoto.com. Alan uses a 360-degree panoramic camera to take images such as the one on the cover. For safety reasons he is keen to point out that although these pilots were all present at the time, they may appear to be flying/landing/taking off in different directions to the actual directions they were heading due to the distortions of a very wide angle of view. Pilots wishing to fly Westbury in conditions similar to those depicted should only do so wearing the special 360-degree panoramic goggles now available from the BHPA shop.

Editorial

Ah, there's nothing like achieving a position of power and influence! And editor of Nova is nothing like a position of power and influence. However, it does give me the opportunity to get more involved in running the club, and to seek out any pilots who do anything remotely interesting and relentlessly hound them until I obtain a written account of their activities. I hope you'll join me in thanking Cathy for doing such a great job of editing Nova, and I just hope that I can keep up her high standard.

I'm intending to get an issue of Nova out once per quarter – November, February, May, and August. I just hope that you're all not too busy in the spring and summer to write stuff for the May and August issues, and that you're all not too depressed by the dark winter days to write for the February issue.

Anyway, the November issue should be fine if this one is anything to go by. The response to my request for material has been fantastic, and I've received so many contributions that I've had to carry some over for the next issue. Watch out next time for Alex Coltman's top ten tips for XC flying - just in time to whet your appetite for the new flying season, and Pete Douglas' account of the Open Championships in Mayrhofen – just in time to whet your appetite for competition flying.

In this issue we have a galaxy of stars - well an introduction to the club's new committee anyway. We also have Dave McCarthy's account of what it's like to train as a TI, and Chairman Zaltzman's harrowing tales of competition flying in Spain. Nick Somerville writes on his transition from model flying to paragliding and his first experiences of XC flying, Ken Wilkinson reports on two of the summer's marvellous BPC rounds, and Tim Pentreath give us a full statistical analysis of Avon's best paragliding XC year ever. We also get an update from the original inventor of pubsuck: Simon Kerr.

Many thanks to all those who have sent me contributions; your reward is immortality through the hallowed pages of this long-standing organ.

I hope you enjoy this issue, and please let me know the things you'd like to see in future issues (and please write them).

Richard Danbury

**Les Pompiers rescue a stricken paraglider pilot
at the St Hilaire Festival, France
Photo: Martin Nichols**



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

Send your articles to the Editor, Richard Danbury, at

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Chairman's chunter

Well Tim stayed true to his promise made in May's Nova to stand down as Chairman after 3 years in the job, and the first thing I would like to do is thank him for all of his hard work and dedication. I must say that I stepped into Tim's shoes somewhat reluctantly, knowing how well he has done, and that I had a rather hard act to follow! However, he has stepped aside leaving the club in superb shape, so in his words, there really is not too much to do! Thanks again Tim, you have done an excellent job, and I am very glad you have decided to stay on as Sites Officer.

On that note, a warm welcome to the new committee. We have Richard Hellen keeping a watchful eye on Safety, Andy Bailey to boost the membership numbers, Iain MacKenzie ready with a helpful word for the low airtimers, and the Nova you are reading now is brought to you under the editorship of Richard Danbury. Grateful thanks go to Paul, Diane, Howard and Gary who are stepping down from their duties; you have all done a great job. A special mention for long service to Paul; 13 years as Treasurer, many thanks for all your hard work.

It is a funny time of year to start something new. The nights are drawing in, and I have stopped wistfully staring out of the office window, mainly because it is either dark outside or lashing with rain. However, it has been a great year for many in the club. Well done Alex Coltman and Wayne Seeley who are 4th and 5th in the national league. Some amazing flights this year, including 174km from Alex and two flights over 100km from Wayne. Jim Mallinson has had a pretty good year, and an even better one if you ignore the occasional brush with airspace! Ken Wilkinson came 28th, second highest 1-2 wing, another excellent achievement. I know Ken had his eye on top 1-2 and was hoping to blag a wing for his efforts, so better luck next year, I am sure you will blitz it on the new Mamboo!

We seem to have had a good crop of newly qualified pilots coming into the club, it is great to have new blood joining, and I hope the local schools keep the excellent work up in Montenegro and elsewhere this autumn.

I have had a great year, mainly crammed into two intense weeks in Piedrahita. That seems like a long way off now, and I finally cleaned out the crud from the wing last weekend, and folded it away for what will probably be 4 months of enforced cupboard rest. Not all of us have mothballed our gliders though, 10 or so club members have packed up and headed off to Bir, India for what sounds like one hell of an adventure. Unless you have been locked away in a dungeon somewhere you can not possibly have missed their over-eager preparations, and the careless "did we mention that we are going to India in a few weeks" conversations that seemed to have been happening on the hills and in the club all summer! Good luck chaps, I hope you have a superb time and all get back in one piece to tell us all about it at the November club meeting.

So what is the plan for next year?! I would like to see the membership grow, and to make sure we get all the new pilots into the club and benefiting from the great coaching environment we have. If you know people who are training, make sure you tell them to get in touch with Andy Bailey when they are doing their CP!

I would also like to make us one of the safest clubs in the country. There were quite a few incidents this year, although luck was on our side. Garry S and Chris H are both back in the air, Tim escaped thanks to the soft Welsh hillside, Pete T recovered to make it out to New Zealand and several others have that "I was pretty lucky" look to them! I don't know what the answer is yet, but I reckon that giving careful thought to choosing the right wing for you is a start.

In Piedrahita, there were 8 reserve deployments in four days. Seven were comp wings, one was a 2/3. People fly comp wings, to get the "advantage" in racing conditions. Piedrahita was certainly racy, but when you look at the results, there were plenty of comp wings coming way down the field. Even I beat some comp wings on my trusty 1/2 Sport 2! Not only that, but Hugh Miller came 13th overall on a DHV 2 Mustang, beating a crop of top pilots (sorry Alex!), flying Boomers, FRs, Targas and other F1 hot ships.

I am a long way off even being able to claim to be an experienced pilot, but I really think that it is clear that practice, good airmanship, planning and confidence in a wing you are comfortable with will get you much further than pushing the bar on a snorting comp wing, with your teeth gritted against the inevitable boom and bust.

I am looking forward to the challenge of keeping the club running as well as Tim did, we have a great committee and a new year to look forward to in 2006. Enjoy whatever keeps you sane through the winter, put the club meetings (2nd Thursday of every month except January) in your diary, and make sure you buy a ticket for the Xmas Bash!

Fly safely,

Richard.

Your new committee!

The club annual general meeting was held on 13 October, and the new committee was elected. Amid backroom lobbying and media speculation about drug taking in student years, Richard Zaltzman's unopposed candidature for chairman culminated in a surprise landslide victory. Mr Zaltzman told Nova, "My college days were formative years in which I experimented liberally in many areas. I learned important lessons, and I have now matured into a responsible adult who abuses alcohol, solvents, and class-A drugs in strict moderation." The other members of the new committee declined to comment, but one was heard to say "This is some good shit, man!"

Richard Zaltzman – Chairman

"Where's my bong?"



Cathy Lawrence – (Very) Social Secretary

Considering that I have been a member of the club for 5 years now I am still a relatively low airtimer, and am more likely to be found at club social events or hospital A & E departments than in the air (having a smashing time either way!).



Although I started out flying paragliders and got my pilot rating very quickly I still only have about 37hrs. I have lots of excuses including FMD, kids, weather, work, but over the last two years it has mainly been lack of confidence/fear after my first accident. I am now learning to hang-glide but have not done any flying since July as I am still recovering from my broken bones inflicted by a lamppost. Hopefully you will see me flying again soon, but I whatever I am flying please give me a wide berth!

I have been asked to say what wonderful things I am going to do for the club, but Richard and Diane are going to be a hard act to follow. Mainly I see myself in a key co-ordinating role to bring a group of likeminded people together on regular occasions. These are opportunities for members to share their experiences and their passion for their sport, to make new friends, and to have fun. What a great job!

Andy Bailey – Membership Secretary

Andy is a PG CP with 60+ hours and has been qualified since 2000. Among his excuses for not getting more flying hours are:

- (a) He has a day job as an actuary in Bristol,
- (b) He likes doing other things as well - cycling, walking, badminton and a bit of running,
- (c) He's very cautious (apart from the odd rash moment – more on that story in the next issue of Nova).

He now has one more – the onerous duties of membership secretary.



Richard Hellen – PG Safety Officer

He we see Richard Hellen enthusiastically volunteering to take over from Howard as PG safety officer.

Iain MacKenzie – PG Low Airtime Contact

Iain is trying to keep a low profile, lest low airtime pilots discover who he is and how to contact him. However, Nova's paparazzo has snapped this rare photo of him.



Stafford Evans – Treasurer

Staff, you've missed a bit



Tim Pentreath – Sites Officer

I've been flying paragliders since 1989 when I learnt with Dave Ward-Spliff and Rob Stimpson at Parapente Wales in Swansea. My first glider was a Harley Contrail which lasted me for four years, then I moved onto a Nova Sphinx which I loved. I flew this for five years before moving to an Advance Omega 4, which was another great glider though I did have my first scary flying moment on it in France during a British Open comp in France in 1998 when I had to chuck the washing! My current glider is an Omega 5 which I've had for three years now - it's a great machine.

I introduced my wife Lisa to flying back in 1990 - she flew until 1997, hanging up her flying boots a few months before the birth of our second child, Toby. Since then she's always supported my flying even though it does make summer weekends difficult to plan!

I can't remember when I first joined the committee - years ago it seems - and since then I've done most jobs - PG comps, Membership Sec, Social Sec, Chairman for three years, and now Sites Officer (SO). My only agenda as SO is to ensure the continued use of the sites we currently fly. I'd love to be the SO responsible for putting Ubley back on the flying map, but I fear that may be a little while off!

I've had some fantastic experiences whilst flying (most recently popping out of cloud at nearly 8,500' over South Wales) and have met some wonderful people and made many good friends amongst the flying community in the sixteen years I've been jumping off hills, and I'm hoping this is still the beginning of my flying career!

Ken Wilkinson – PG Competitions Officer

I'm a 52 year old part time teacher, previously an oil rig engineer, married to Miki with a grown up son. I started paragliding 4 years ago but I had 7 years of intense activity on hangies in the 80s. I enjoy the spirit of competition (in safety), which is why I like the BCC and comps sec role.



Robin Brown – Sites Officer (North)

"Where's my bed?"



Tony Moore – HG Safety Officer

"Where's my razor?"



Neil Atkinson – HG Competitions and HG Low Airtime Contact

"Where's my strait jacket?"



Amy Stanton – Librarian

"Where are my spectacles, cardigan and sensible shoes?"

Rich Harding – Webmaster

Spends so much time with computers he's become pixillated



Richard Danbury – Nova Editor

What a handsome chap!



If you wish to consult a committee member at their weekly surgery, contact them via the details below.

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Avon Christmas Party

It's that time of year again! It's time to book your tickets for the Avon HGPG Christmas Party.

This year it will be on Friday 9th December at Bongi-Bo's in Bath. There will be a buffet style Chinese meal, music, dancing, and a bar. As a change to the usual disco we are going to be asking you, the members, for music requests and will be compiling our own play list to boogie the night away to. We will also have our own special lighting effects.

As usual we will be having the annual club awards hosted by our new Chairman, Richard Zaltzman. We will also have the club photo competition. If you would like to enter a photo, please bring a print with you on A4 or smaller paper. The photo has to have been taken in 2005, and is more likely to stand a chance of winning if it's got a flying theme! Each person may enter up to 3 photos.

Tickets for this superb night of fun and festivities are £10.00 per head. We need you to let us know you are coming, so please drop an email to socialsec@avonhgpg.co.uk saying how many tickets you want. Alternatively call me on 01985 214 579. Tickets will also be on sale at the November club meeting. There will be no escape!

Details of how to get to Bongi-Bo's will be posted on the website in the Club Diary.

Cathy Lawrence
Social Secretary

From IT to TI

David McCarthy used to be in high tech IT, but he just couldn't get enough leave to go flying when he wanted to. A move into property development 18 months ago gave him the freedom to make better use of those flyable days, and to do some travelling too. He has flown all over the UK, and also in France, Spain, Turkey, Morocco, Egypt, Venezuela, and India. He has been flying paragliders for more than 12 years, and has logged over 800 hours, with quite a few more being unclogged [shome mishtake surely? Ed.] He is Pilot rated and has a dual licence.

To TI or not to TI, that is the question. It is true to say that for 10 years I was very selfish about my flying: it was for and about me and what I wanted. That is not to say that flying was all I did, just that I was precious about it and was only interested in what it gave me

So why become a trainee instructor? Well you get to a stage (or I did) when you realise that you could earn some dosh while doing what you love (this is a basic mistake) and yes perhaps give some back, for all the joy you have had.

So how to start? I was living in Dorking at the time and a chance encounter with Tim King (often seen in Skywings) of Flight Culture UK while flying the coast near Brighton started the adventure with the offer of training while on a 9 week trip to Lanzarote, and who wouldn't want to spend November and December in warmer climes and flying as well!!!!

The arrival of the Instructors manual from the BHPA leave you in no doubt that this is a serious undertaking, a large lever arch file full of technical information with all the rules and regulations (and anomalies that these cause) arrives with a log book to record your progress

The trip was a fabulous experience and a very steep learning curve for me - full of highs, lows and realisations. The highs include the reaction you get from students who achieve something new. I had forgotten that feeling of being ten feet tall after your first high flight. The lows include dealing with students who only have one week when the weather won't play ball. The realisation of the amount of personal responsibility you have for the safety and accurate instruction of those students, and the first student who buries a brake when instructed to turn out from the hill



can stop your heart as you try to calmly stop them spinning from the sky. About this time you realise that the beautiful sky and perfect soaring day will see you in the bottom landing field seeing people land safely and get back to the top of the hill. Inexperience can turn a football field sized landing field into a postage stamp, so you have to stay on the ball. And of course when students have had a great day, they're on holiday, and they want to party. (Moderation is the only way to last 9 weeks, honest!) I was lucky to meet some great people at all levels of experience and learn a lot about trip Management From the boys at FCUK.

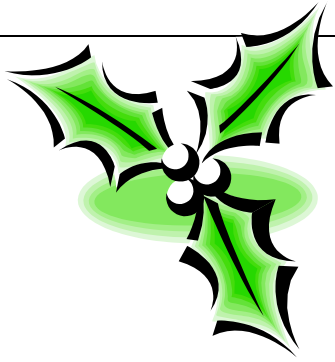
I came away from that experience really very unsure if it was for me, but being critical about the way others fly. And going back over the basic lectures up to club pilot level makes you re-evaluate your own flying and the way you react to others on the hill (when you see someone struggling it is almost impossible not to try to help) - the shared high you get from teaching is addictive. This took a while to kick in for me (I never said I was quick). So earlier this year I was lucky enough to talk to Robin Brown of Airtopia about doing some TI work (call it work but you don't get paid until you are worth something to the school obviously) for him in the UK. (The BHPA advise you train with more than one school and Airtopia was

more local to where I live now in Warminster). And after taking my dual licence (another great way to share our passion) with Robin in Spain, I decided to try again.

As you all know Airtopia is made up of Robin, Hugo Makin and Razvan Nitoiu (Riz) These guys have reinforced all the positives I originally saw in this way of training from running your heart out down hill pushing a day-one student, to getting them off the ground, to dual flying a student at Bossington to demonstrate ridge soaring. It has been a joy (the weather not withstanding).

So in closing it costs you in both time and money, it tires you out and scares you stupid, but is it worth it? Ooooooooooooooh yes, the feeling you get riding back in the bus after a great day's flying with students whether abroad or at home, is very

special and has given me back that indescribable zing. Yes I am still an addict with a lot more to do before I am anywhere near qualified. So if you have ever thought about trying it, I would say give it a go, check the guys you are looking to train with and agree a timetable for getting stuff signed off, and you can have hours of fun discussing your favourite sport with people who are really interested (no really!).



The Avon HGPG Christmas Party



& Annual Awards

Friday 9th December

**Bongi-Bo's Café Bar
Barton Court
Upper Borough Walls
Bath
BA1 1RZ**

7.30pm for 8.00pm

**Chinese Style Buffet
Bar & Music 'til late**



Tickets £10.00

from socialsec@avonhgpg.co.uk

or call Cathy on 01985 214 579

Getting the Bug

Nick Somerville is married with two children and is an art teacher. He lives in the village of Doulting near Shepton Mallet. He spent 10 years flying large scale model gliders in national competitions, wishing he was up there with the model. Finally in 2003 he did a two-day paragliding course in the French Pyrenees, and flew two solo top-to-bottoms from 800m on the second day. He enrolled with Flying Frenzy in Autumn 2003 and achieved his Club Pilot rating in May 2004. He flew with Thermal Monster for a week in the French Alps in July 2004. He now has 45 hours post CP airtime, totals of around 85km XC distance, and a personal best of 31km, all flown in the UK. Here he recounts his first flights as a newly qualified pilot, and his rapid progress into cross-country flying.

In May of 2004, after the usual frustrating months of waiting for decent weather to coincide with time out from work and family commitments, I finally passed my CP with the infinitely patient Andrew Pearce of Flying Frenzy. I promptly purchased a Firebird Z-One DHV-1 glider, a wallet-full of basic flying accessories and subscribed to the Avon Club. This was it, I was on my own.

The rest of 2004 went as fast as life goes when firmly planted in middle age and virtually all my flying was done at Westbury. In July I spent a week in the Alps with Thermal Monster, based in a pretty valley between the Les Arcs and La Plagne ski resorts. I did some big top-to-bottoms in the Bourg St Maurice valley, a little thermalling, and two days down in Annecy getting to grips with launching from the Le Forclaz take off. A scary flight on one day taught me a valuable lesson about how quickly conditions can change in the mountains, and the helpless feeling of a powerful gust front pushing me up towards the town of Bourg is one I would prefer to forget. But that's another story. Any real progress made in my flying skills was a direct result of scratching for height above Westbury, learning the rudiments of thermalling technique and watching the better fliers. Cross country was still a bit of a dream but on one memorable day in late September I finally left the sanctuary of the hill and drifted back in a sweet thermal to land near Eddington. Sadly that was that for 2004 and it was back to ridge soaring.

In the spring of this year I was finally starting to feel more comfortable when the air was rougher and I felt that I wanted a bit more out of my wing. I had 16 hours flying in my log book and I decided to trade my Z-One for the new Firebird Spider DHV 1-2. A really terrific wing I should say. Thus armed I was ready to go XC. It was not long before I had enjoyed some great thermalling up towards the clouds above Westbury but I was still not going anywhere. I jealously scanned the pages of the

Avon cross country league as the flights came in and I noticed that no one seemed to be getting away from Westbury. Well pretty obvious I suppose with the MOD behind but after my little jaunt in September I had hoped at least for a few chances to circumnavigate the danger area. By June I was getting desperate so I e-mailed club chairman Tim Pentreath for advice (not that you have to be desperate to e-mail him I'm sure). The advice was pretty simple. If you want to go XC then try South Wales. Or if you put it another way 'Don't be lazy, get in your car and try further afield.'

A few weeks later I met Tim whilst parawaiting at Westbury and as luck would have it he was heading up to South Wales the next day for a BCC comp. 'Why not come along if you like,' says he. Well I certainly was in luck as the weather gods were out in force and that was the day that of 60 or so pilots who trucked up to the top of the mighty Blorenge near Abergavenny virtually all got away on XC's. A flight of 16.9 km and with a maximum height of 5300ft was a watershed for me, and I had really got the bug. A week later I had joined the South East Wales club and was back in Wales, this time at Pandy, for a more modest 9.5 km. In August I spent a weekend camping at Crickhowell to explore other flying sites. I visited Hay Bluff, Methyr Common and flew at Fochriw before finally making a 20.5km flight from the Blorenge on the Sunday in a light northwesterly to land between Cwmbran and Newport.

September arrived and it was back to work after the summer hols (as an underpaid art teacher). Was this the end of XC's for 2005? Well not quite. On Tuesday afternoons I have some time off scheduled on my timetable in lieu of weekend work, and on the first week of term the weather on Tuesday looked good for a nip out to Mere. I arrived, rigged and after barely a minute or two in the air followed an Aspen into a strong thermal that worked us up above the radio mast to base in as many minutes as it had taken me to get airborne. I lost site of the Aspen as we approached the wispies and I made my own way over Long Knowle and off towards Nunney Catch. I came down nearly as fast as I had gone up and by Trudoxhill was scrambling around at 300-400ft. This game of scrambling in an out of probably perfectly good thermals went on for quite a long time until I had clawed my way towards Nunney Castle, never getting above 700ft. By then I was really fed up with the thought of decking it and I started shouting at myself to get stuck into those little cores. It seemed to work and instead of checking the fish stocks in the castle moat I finally found a cracking climb back to base and headed on to Peasdown. From then on it was pretty much downhill to Bath and with only a few hundred feet left to explore possible lift over the metropolis I opted for a safe landing at the edge of the city between Twerton and Englishcombe for 31 km. I felt chuffed with myself until a call to Tim revealed that the pilot flying the Aspen was a

Wessex member who went on to cover 75km for a new site record! *!*! Down to earth and I felt like a beginner again.

So here I am and there is still a little time left before the flying season draws to a close. I am wondering if there is any hope that I can increase my postings on the club XC of 79 km for the year to 100km. Morning prayers start with 'Please weather Gods arrange for ideal weather conditions for XC flying when I have time off work and I will be truly grateful'. www.xcweather.co.uk has had more hits on my laptop than Google and I am in awe of those pilots who regularly fly huge distances. I realise now the amount of experience, planning and commitment that it must take.

What have I learnt so far? Well mostly the kind of things I have read in other peoples' articles but have had to learn through getting out and flying:

- Be prepared, because there may only be one or two chances to get away, even on a decent day.

- Don't leave lift unless you are sure you have better lift to go to.
- You can always fly back to a good cloud if you realise you have left it too soon.
- When close to the ground think hard about triggers. If you find a blip ask yourself where it's coming from and then commit it to memory for future reference.
- You have to work real hard to get those low saves.
- Talk to other pilots and ask a lot of questions.
- Never forget that safety comes first.

For me cross country flying has got to be classified as a class A addiction (my wife Victoria has already suggested rehab) and I feel privileged to be on its road of discovery. Despite the frustrations it can bring I am a happier person knowing that I have many wonderful flying experiences to look forward to.

Online forum

Did you know that you can stay in touch with what's happening in the club, and have your own say, by registering on the online forum at www.smartgroups.com/groups/avonhgpg? Reproduced below is one of the recent discussion threads. I'm sure you'll agree that it's essential reading!

Subject: Left behind at the Mere Bash

Anyone claim this...?

Tim



I'm sure I saw Cathy drinking the meths out of it!

Nev

Also...

We have a mallet that isn't ours. And we left our Bop-it behind, Staff did you find it?

Amy

and.....

I have a funnel. Staff?

Tony

Martin,

Could be my mallet as I do not have it (black rubber head, metal handle flattened at one end with a hook). I have one glass about 10 cm high, kind of squarish, probably from the Friday night.

Mark

Yep we have your mallet, and that sounds like our glass. Do you a swap at the next meeting. Perhaps we can have a lost and found section.

Amy

Yep got the bop-it, did leave a message on your voice mail.

Cheers,

Stafford

Cont. on p.94...

British Clubs Challenge report - rounds in South Wales on 3rd, 9th and 10th July.

The British Clubs Challenge (BCC) is an informal competition that is designed to encourage paragliding and hang gliding pilots to improve their flying and cross-country skills in a friendly, yet competitive, coaching environment. Teams from clubs across the UK compete against each other in a series of rounds during the spring and summer months. The competition culminates in a finals round which determines the winning UK club. Any pilot with a Club Pilot rating is encouraged to take part; there is no limit on numbers, each club can enter as many teams as it likes. Last year, Avon's Martin and Amy Stanton re-invigorated the competition by updating the rules and building a website through which the competition is managed. For more information, go to flybcc.co.uk. Here Ken Wilkinson, captain of the Avon A team, reports on two of this year's rounds.

It was a really disappointing season till these competitions came along. Avon had offered 2 or 3 competitions and always we had to cancel. June, our midsummer had proved to be a real damp squib. This was all to change with two wonderful weekends, the second of which must have been the best BCC ever.

The philosophy of the BCC has always been to keep it simple, and to use the low pressure competition environment to foster XC skills. No preset days, just go out when it looks good. Martin and Amy Stanton's revamping, including a Smartgroups and Website has proved easy to use, and allows easy transfer of information. When Thames Valley posted an invite for a comp it was up to 12 teams in a couple of days when everyone knew the forecast was good.

3rd July (Sunday), was at the invite of the Joint Services hosted by Sean Simmons. We decided on Merthyr Common, on a windy day with a beautiful sky, already forming streets. Spies already there said it was flyable, but no one was flying when we arrived. Blown out, or off to the south, what was the problem? It turned out our wind checkers had all gone XC! One Avon pilot (Martin Nichols) did a personal best (PB) of 40k, leaving him late for the competition.

We briefed quickly and declared open XC. Gaggle after gaggle were hoovered up, to a base of around 4500ft, and many bombed out up to 18km. The valley north of Abergavenney is a bit of a sink hole but loads of gliders managed to cross it. Having bombed out myself I confidently filmed Avon's Mike Andrews on a 'final glide' only to see him get a low save to land the other side of the Malverns for 83k, a new PB. There were so many PBs that day, John Trewartha (Kernow) 73k, Ian Mckenzie (Avon) 58k, and the Dunstable lot who weren't even in the comp but rolled up anyway, got 95km, 73km, and 50km! Many others scored over 35km. Eventually Avon won the round, with best 4 scores of 182k. Many other teams were close. Could it get any better than this? Oh yes it could!

9th July (Saturday), and this time it was Thames Valley organizing, John Terry in charge. We decided on the Blorenghe and an excellent forecast, a cloud base of around 5000ft and admittedly strongish North East winds boded well. Again it was full house with about 60 pilots. Open XC was called and the prospect of the coast stopping flights after 50km was a dream that would soon be realized. We really must provide a bucket and spade for those like Rob Kerslake (Joint Services) who actually landed on the beach at Port Talbot for 54km. (Organisers please note!) Lift was over 5m/sec at times, with nicely spaced clouds. There were dozens scattered around the Welsh valleys, with many flights over 40km, and many personal bests and first XCs scored. There was a happy atmosphere in the campsite and pubs that night! When all the scores were tallied, Thames Valley won the round with Avon A and Wessex close behind. One fly in the ointment was Dean Naylor's broken wrist, after landing in a turbulent area. The briefing had warned of this and we all need to be careful! Could it get any better? Well dear readers, let's continue!

10th July (Sunday), and an almost identical forecast (with slightly lighter North East winds) saw us at the Blorenghe again. Clouds starting to build at about 4500ft at 11.00, blue sky, just soarable ridge lift, does it get better than this? (no). Guess what, open XC again with the prospect of getting in a sea breeze front towards Carmarthen after 50km had many mouths watering. Many would never have dreamed of this but with so many having beaten their PB's by massive margins the sky (as is so often the case in paragliding) was the limit! Again strong lift was the order of the day, I recorded over 6m/second and later in my flight (before contacting sea breeze air at Neath and trying to avoid this by going north) got cloudbase at 6300ft!!! There were some big gaps but thermals could be found low (if 3000ft is low?) and they were smooth, massive and strong. Many pilots flew over 40km, with several being stopped around Bridgend by encroaching sea air. We will have to leave the Carmarthen trip for another competition! The only problem with this site was the natural 'limit' of around 50km. Many teams are reporting significant doglegs, trying to avoid the sea air that was spilling up the Neath valley, killing the day.

This weekend will live in the minds of many for many a year. That little 'nudge' to go over the back rather than stay in the comfort zone of the hill is provided by the competition. We have a natural playground here when the weather plays ball, big sites, reasonably easy retrieves, and few airspace problems mean a great time can be had by all. Long live the BCC!

Mouth-watering centrefold



Open Championships in Mayrhofen, 29 May – 4 June 2005. Flying south parallel and to the east of the Zillertal valley. Ahead is the sharp edge of the Gerloss, with Mayrhofen below and behind the peak of it at the right. Beyond that peak is the Tuxer valley. Centre picture is the Ahornspitz and behind it the higher peaks mark the Italian border. Task: 75km triangle.

Photo: Pete Douglas

Flying away

In this new column we hear from members who are living overseas. In this issue Simon Kerr updates us on his new life with Edie in St. Johns, Newfoundland. You can contact Simon via pubsuck@yahoo.co.uk.

Well, it looks like my life of leisure may soon be coming to an end. The provincial government over here have finally agreed to accept me on their Provincial Nominee Program. They are now going to sponsor me with my application to the Federal Government for residency, and they are also going to obtain a work permit for me. This means I should be working before Christmas if all goes well. Ah well, I suppose I've had a good run. I quit work back in March last year and since then I have been doing a lot of travelling. Last winter to the beaches of Mexico and Ontario for the XC skiing, plus Bulgaria three times and France twice. I have also spent a lot of time thoroughly exploring this new island home of mine. The most recent trip to France was to St Pierre et Miquelon, two small islands just an hour's boat trip south from Newfoundland. It's the very last French stronghold in North America, and is actually a department of France, not a colony. Kind of strange to find distinctly European French culture and all that goes with it so nearby. The food was fantastic, particularly the good baguettes and croissants, not to mention the cheap plonk. The islands have a great history of smuggling, particularly during the American prohibition period, when Al Capone used to be a regular visitor. Now I wonder what business he had over there? :-)

Anyway I suppose you could say things are looking up over here, but I have to confess I am not looking forward to sitting back at the bench and I'm still looking for something else to turn my hand to. I have recently started a short stained glass making class which is a bit of



Simon at Gourdon, (mainland) France

a laugh, but I don't expect to get into that other than for my own pleasure. If my investment in Bulgaria bears fruit over the next year or two maybe that will lead to something different, I guess I'll just have to wait and see. I know one thing for sure, I am using my jewellery skills to get into the country, but do not intend to sit at the bench for many more years. So the hunt for an alternative is always present.

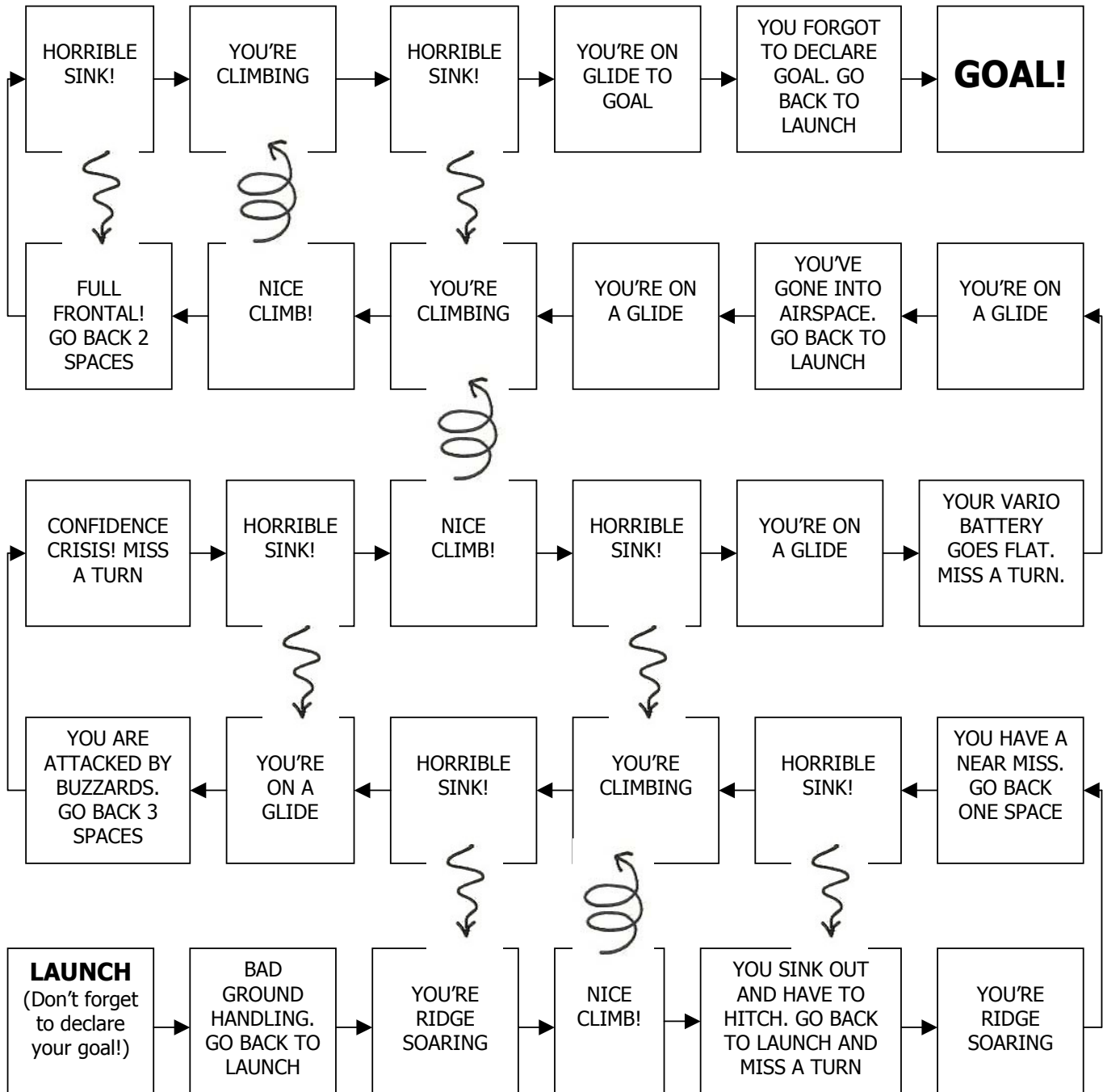
We are off to the Caribbean for New Year, two weeks in Aruba where Edie has a timeshare apartment on the beach. Sadly I guess that will be the last holiday for a while, as I have to start making up for all the money I have spent over the last 18 months of leisure. Mind you we will be heading back across the pond at some point next year. I will need to visit Bulgaria, and I am not going to do that without also stopping off in the UK for a week or two. Hopefully I will get a chance to catch up with some old paragliding pals. Who knows, maybe I will even get the chance to take to the air again myself. Now there's a nice thought!!!!!! :-)

I am still being frustrated by the islands weather and geography. Not to mention all the bloody spruce forest, which generally stretches as far as the eye can see from any hill that looks flyable. Landing options are definitely few and far between, and that's always assuming you can find an un-forested hill to launch from in the first place. I have started to find a few likely places elsewhere on the island, but they are mostly about 8 hours drive away on the west coast. Somehow I still can't bring myself to ship my glider over. Although the weather is quite good in general, it is mostly too windy to give many flyable days, and given the distance I would have to travel to a flyable site I don't like the odds for actually getting airborne. Guess I'll just have to get back into rock climbing instead, there are piles of great sea cliffs everywhere. And before you say it, YES they are forested on the tops like everything else out here :-)

Safe landings,
Simon.

XC Hound - the new game from Nova Enterprises!

Now that the clocks have gone back, and it's wall-to-wall gales and lashing rain, you are going to need some way of keeping your XC skills up to date so that you are in tip-top form come springtime. To help you hone your skills during the winter months, Nova has developed this fantastic game, XC Hound. It's a bit like snakes and ladders – whenever you land on a "Nice Climb!" space you take the thermal upwards to speed you on your way to your declared goal, and whenever you hit "Horrible Sink!" you quickly descend, and you have to work your way up again. Like all XC flying, it's best done with friends, so why don't you make that Saturday morning round of phone calls just like you do in the summer, but instead of going flying invite your friends round to play XC Hound!



Open Season

Richard Zaltzman has been flying for 6 years, but his flying only really got off the ground when he and Diane moved to Bristol, 3 years ago. He left for Piedrahita this year with 120 hours in the log book and a PB of 45km (set in Piedrahita last year). He is pilot rated, and had his first proper XC season last year.

Richard learned to fly in the South of France and then on the Isle of Wight, and he still enjoys flying there. Most of his UK flying has been in Avon and SE Wales, although the glider normally gets thrown into the boot when he travels in the summer. He has also flown in Spain (Piedrahita and Hotel California) and Crete.

He is a big fan of DHV1/2 wings and flies an Airwave Sport 2, with no intention of getting onto anything spicier. He got a great deal on a Cocoon harness a few years ago, and now loves it. He uses a Flytec basic vario and a Garmin 76 GPS.

Outside of flying, Richard runs a small IT and management consultancy based in Bristol, and keeps the adrenaline levels up in winter with a bit of mountain biking and skiing.

"Competition is the best way to improve your flying" they said, "you'll learn so much you won't believe it". This was the general gist of the sage words from the experienced competition hounds in the Avon club, and they had gradually filtered through my shield of fear and inexperience.

Finally, towards the end of 2004, I decided to go for it. The British Open was to be held in Piedrahita in July 2005, with the Dutch Open the week before. If it had been the Alps, I would have squawked my way back to the chicken coop, but I had flown Piedrahita twice before and loved it. In for a penny, in for two weeks of back-to-back comp flying in the height of the Piedrahita summer rough stuff.

First off I had to meet the entry criteria. I felt like a kid at Alton Towers taking a deep breath and standing tall to get through the height restriction, but after some careful negotiation, and with the promise of a place on Steve Ham's training camp during the Dutch, I was accepted.

Bad weather and a series of weddings seriously hampered my intended training regime, and I found myself with less than 10 hours airtime for the year and only one XC under my belt as the comp approached. I was travelling out



**Take off, Task 2 of the British Open.
Photo: Diane Zaltzman**

with Alex Coltman, who had achieved a succession of superb UK XC flights, and was buzzed up after the awesome Mayrhofen round of the Open. His assurance that "it will all be fine" fell on deaf ears as panic started to set in.

Yet another wedding the weekend before we were due to fly out, and all I could think of was how little I'd flown this year. I consoled myself with the thought of spending lazy afternoons eating

ice cream in the classically Spanish square having enjoyed brief flights to the bottom landing field.

Alex and I flew out a few days before the Dutch open started, to get acclimatised. Having crawled into town at 1.30am, we woke to a classic clear blue sky and light winds. My nerves and jetlag were beaten back by the prospect of a good day's flying, and soon we were on top of the hill waiting for the wind to pick up a bit.

So began three days of practice flying, working up a bit of courage in the strong thermals and learning to fly my Sport 2 in rough conditions. It taught me a few things very quickly, such as the use of speed bar when entering rough air is not advisable, and on the more positive side,

that you really can just put your hands up and let a DHV1/2 sort itself out.

The first day of the Dutch Open competition dawned blue. We were staying with Steve Ham for the week, which gave us the advantage of a leisurely breakfast briefing and advanced weather forecast, not to mention a ride up the hill in his minibus, rather than the far too early coach. Steve was particularly excited by the prospects and was talking about big distances.

We got to the top of the hill to find the wind blowing strongly over the back, but this did not deter the task setting committee who set a 150km task, out of the valley, past Avilla and into uncharted territory. My first task, and I felt I'd be lucky to complete 10%! In the event, we spent the day dodging the scorching sun in what little shade there was on takeoff. The wind never let up, and the task was eventually cancelled.

Well, that was easy, 1st equal after one day. Sadly I was going to rapidly lose my coveted top spot, and settle down in the tail end of the field. The busy, rough air took a lot of getting used to, and my nerves were getting well fried in the hot sun. I experienced my first "event" as a large asymmetric developed a life of its own through a series of entirely unintended collapses. To make matters worse, all I could hear over the radio was "Pilot Down, Pilot Down", "Reserve Deployed" and instructions to keep clear of the helicopter coming in for casualties, as a succession of pilots threw reserves or crashed into the mountains. Luckily there were no serious injuries, but listening to the safety frequency was not for the faint hearted.

By Task four I was in 113th place, and getting a bit lardy on ice creams. The task was a 97km race, out of the valley to a castle near Avilla, back over the pass to a turnpoint on the plain, and then into the goal field. For those who have not had the pleasure of flying Piedrahita, the pass is at the end of the main ridge, and requires some careful negotiation to get across to the Avila plain beyond. That was my first goal, and I decided to let others do the hard work and wind dummy for me.

Patience proved to be a virtue, and I shamelessly waited while others threw themselves at the pass only to go down or end up scraping the hills. A decent climb took me up into the mountains, and from there I could work my way up and over. The climbs were getting very strong, and the cool air above the inversion chilled the sweat running down my back nicely. Hanging on for dear life in cores that topped 8m/s was certainly a good learning experience, as was understanding that the principle of "what goes up must come down" also means very strong sink.

I made the turn point at just over 41km and knew I was pretty close to my personal best. The conditions were still good, and there were plenty of small gaggles pushing

back down the mountains to the pass. The climbs seemed to be getting stronger if anything, but as we got close to the pass I was starting to contemplate my rather low altitude. I spotted a vulture circling tidily ahead of me and went straight for it. I am sure he must have been taking the piss, as I hit a monster of a thermal that sent my wing cringing off behind me. The vario went mental and my ears popped as I rocketed up. By the time I dared take my eyes off the wing I was 2000ft higher and climbing fast, having left an Aspen way below me, when we had only been a few hundred yards apart a minute before.

Recovering from that, I had to decide how to get to the next turnpoint. I had tried to take in the theories of convergence which might have told me where to go, but in the end I simply decided to head straight down the valley because I was too knackered to fight my way down the ridge again. I could see the turnpoint from about 20km out, and it seemed to take forever to get there. However, the valley worked a treat, with gentle lift of zeros pretty much all the way.

7km to go. It was getting pretty late, and I really did not want to screw up. I took a steady climb whilst others ran straight for home, only to get low on the last hill before goal. Easy does it, keep climbing and do not be a numpty. As I cleared the last hill and could see the goal line, I finally allowed myself to think that I could do it.

I crossed the line with a few hundred feet to spare, and gingerly came into land. I had pictured my first goal field as a riot of spirals dives and wild cheering. As it was I let out a croaky whoop and crawled out of my harness desperate to empty the tanks after 5½ hours in the air. I was utterly exhausted, and staggered back to Steve's place, where for once I was not the first glider in the hall.

I'd broken every personal best – distance, flight time, height gain, and made goal. In a very tired way, I was absolutely ecstatic and managed to stay awake long enough to have a few celebration beers and check out the results – 38th for the day and into the top 100 overall!

The remainder of the Dutch was mostly spent laurel sitting. We had one cancelled task, and I bombed on the last task. I was reasonably happy, I had managed to stay in the top 100, and was still smiling from making goal.

There was one day of rest before the British Open kicked off. With wives and girlfriends coming out for the week, we left Steve's place and the enforced sleep deprivation courtesy of the bar next door, for a quiet house on the hill, overlooking the town. The rest day allowed us to recharge the batteries, watching as all the new arrivals charged up the mountain and enjoyed another good day's flying.

We ended up flying for four days in a row, before the wind blew in from the South and brought the fun to an end. During those four days, we had some excellent

tasks, and made the most of the weather. The lessons from the Dutch started to sink in, and focussing on consistent flying and not racing paid dividends.

As my flying improved, I learned more from other pilots. Flying in gaggles with Boomerangs, Omegas, Aspens and all sorts gave me a really good idea about how different wings behave. Some of the comp wings skitter their way across the sky like aggressive Geordies on an ice rink, the wing snapping back and forth. The reserve tally continued with eight pilots giving the "Boomerang Salute" in 4 days. One of those was Pete Taylor who was staying in the house with us, and unfortunately crushed a vertebra on impact, the curse of the Bleiriot team continuing to take its toll. Even from his sick bed he was dispensing helpful advice such as "beware the wing that likes to play hide and seek with you".

As the week progressed, I recovered steadily from a bad first task, to make my way slowly towards the middle of the field. On Task 3, I finally beat my demons and managed to stay up whilst going West towards El-Barco, having become far too familiar with the walk out along the back roads a few km from take off. Having kicked the bushes at one point, I found a climb that took me up to 3,800m. As my fingers went numb under the clouds I did think that maybe I would not be shaking so much if I had worn a few more layers.

The final task was a 119 km race to goal, past Avilla. Steve Ham warned of strong conditions and cloud suck in the briefing, but over-development killed it off, leaving people throwing themselves off launch only to lawn-dart at the bottom of the ridge. As the window neared it's close, I took off with a few others in a small patch of sun. There was not much to keep us up and we ended up heading for the valley, where a growing crowd of gliders were desperately trying to stay up. Luck was on our side, and it lifted off to give a smooth climb that drifted the right way down the valley. More cautious climbing took us over the pass and on towards Avilla.

There was some lift, but it was totally overcast, and the conditions were weak. There were plenty of gliders to share the work with, and we climbed and glided for 40km or so to Avilla. The reserve toll continued, which given the calm nature of the day was rather odd, but luckily both pilots landed relatively unscathed. Watching one pilot float down from 4000ft or so was quite unnerving, but the safety frequency worked superbly well, and the rescue teams were there pretty sharply.

As we passed Avilla, luck ran out and fatigue overcame judgement. I left a zero to go for a patch of sun on a ridge, which turned out to be much further away than I thought. I ended up landing without a blip of the vario from about 4000ft, in the same field as several other pilots from the gaggle. We walked to the road, jumped

on the waiting retrieve coach and sat back for the ride home. I was happy with 78km and 52nd place for the day, not knowing that it was our last flight and my target of one goal in both comps was not going to happen.

By the time we left four days later, the buzz was still strong, even though we had not flown again. I ended up 74th overall, just off half way. I had flown around 400km in two weeks, logged over 30 hours and broken all my personal bests. I had also met a great crowd of pilots, all of whom were helpful and encouraging, even when they had not had the best of days.

The wise comp hounds of the Avon Club were right, competition flying had taught me more than I could possibly have learned in several seasons at home. I had scared myself stupid, been as happy as a pig in poo, had an excellent time and come away with a renewed desire to keep flying better and further.

It certainly worked for me. If you are wondering what it is like to take off with 130 other pilots on an adventure covering hundreds of km over an adrenaline packed week, go and have a quiet word with your local comp hound, they might just talk you into it.



Evening flight from Pena Negra: Piedrahita town at the top of the picture

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Avon PGXC League 2005

Tim Pentreath runs the paragliding XC league for the Avon Club, entering flights, and keeping track of personal bests, total distances flown etc, and updating his excellent website so everyone can see what the competition is doing. You can find full details of all this year's flights at www.avonpgxc.co.uk and also all the flights from several previous years. When the new seasons starts, enter your flights by emailing the details to Tim – anything over 3km counts! Below Tim summarises an outstanding year of XC flying.

Well, what a year it's been! 4,918km flown by 32 pilots in 156 flights. That's 730km more than last year, and 158km more than in 2003, our previous best ever year. It's a shame we didn't quite break the magic 5,000km mark, but we have to have a challenge for next year! We've had four new pilots in the league, and no fewer than twenty-two personal bests including Alex's 174km and Wayne's 124km flights. The full list of PB's is below:

Alex Coltman	174.1
Wayne Seeley	124.6
Mike Andrews	82.1
Ken Wilkinson	80.2
Mike Coupe	68.0
Iain MacKenzie	58.1
Robert Kerslake	57.3
Graham Richards	56.7
<i>Andre Odinius</i>	48.5
Richard Danbury	43.7
Howard Woodward	40.9
Martin Nichols	40.1
Pete Douglas	39.1
<i>Paul Whatley</i>	34.9
Hugo Makin	32.8
<i>Nick Somerville</i>	31.5
Morgan Nicholas	29.2
Richard Zaltzman	28.3
Tim Dent	22.1
Paul Guilfoyle	21.2
Mike Rossdale	20.6
<i>Sarah Ward</i>	5.7

***Bold italic =
new XC pilots in 2005***

Flying a flight of more than 100km is something that everyone dreams of, yet this year Alex has flown two 100km+ flights, and Wayne three! This really is an incredible achievement and it puts them at 4th and 5th place in the national league respectively – well done chaps! But these aren't the only cracking flights – Mike's 82km from Merthyr and Ken's 80km, also from Merthyr, stand out, but really any PB however long or short is a great achievement to the pilot concerned, so well done all.

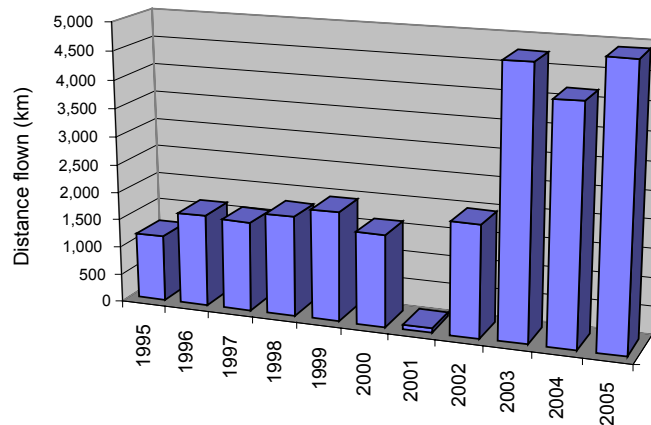
The season started off slowly with only a handful of flights in March and April, but in May it really came alive with some great days, notably 11th May when 12 pilots got away from the Malverns, flying a total of 502km! Of course this was mid-week so it pissed off a lot of us 9-5'er desk jockeys!

June wasn't bad, but we had the best ever July with 1,648km flown. In particular the weekend of the 9th and 10th was fantastic, with 938km flown from the Blorenge during a BCC weekend. (See Ken's report in this issue.)

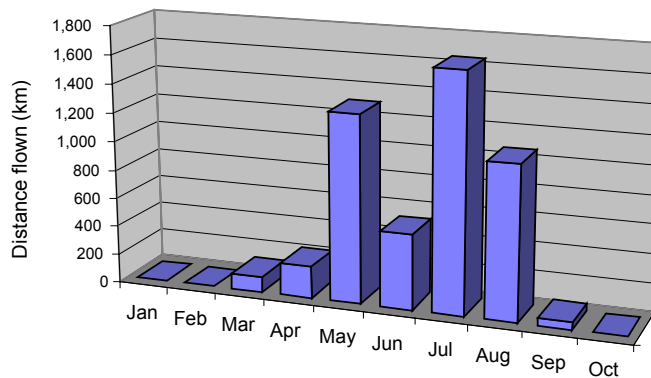
And then August wasn't too bad either, with the second highest August total. Sunday 7th was the best day with 375km flown including Alex's epic 174km flight from The Lawley in Shropshire to Andover.

And then it all went downhill rapidly after that with only a couple of flights in September, and none (so far) in October... and as I write this on Thursday 27th on the train up to London it doesn't look like there are going to be many more unless anyone gets away today!

Distances flown 1995-2005



Distances flown by month, 2005



So, all in all an excellent season, although as you can see from the graph above it was very much limited to the four summer months. I don't know what 2006 will bring, but you can be sure there'll be lots more great flights in the Avon PGXC league!



**Demo / Glide angle contest early 2006, watch this space!
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Diary of events

Don't forget the following hot dates:

Nov 10th - Ken, Staff, Mike et al talk about their trip to Bir, India.

Dec 9th - The Christmas Party at Bongi Bo's, Bath. See the advert in this issue!

January - No meeting

Feb 9th – To be confirmed – Talk by a pilot from Nympsfield gliding club.

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