

**SOUTHERN HANG
GLIDING CLUB**

WINDSOCK

Q4 2018



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1. Introduction

Welcome to the Q4 2018 edition of the SHGC Windsock. The editorial team hope that you will find it interesting and informative. We would welcome any/ all contributions large or small, for inclusion in future editions, so please don't be shy!

Turnover of membership at the SHGC is particularly high with newly qualified CPs and experienced pilots regularly joining the Club whilst others leave. As a result, much of the 'history' of the Club may not be well known and particularly not by newer members.

The Windsock editorial team thought it would be helpful to begin this edition with a short history of the Club, and free flying in the highly experimental, 'early days'. We thought it would also be useful also to include a short section on the Club itself and how (and why) it is organised in the way it is.

All Clubs survive by the willing help of volunteers, and the SHGC is no different. Anyone reading this edition and would like to help; coaching, social or the Windsock editorial team, would be warmly welcomed. Please get in touch.

2. The early days of the Southern Club [and free flying]

The Southern Hang gliding Club was formed in 1974 to informally regulate free flying activities. There was a concern that if hang gliding [no paragliding then] didn't have a strong, unified, responsible, voice then pilots could, and probably would, lose the goodwill of the farmers who agreed for pilots to use their sites and, in extremis, for the fledgling sport be banned completely. Since then, the Club has continued to grow [currently 600+ members] and fully embraced the emergence of paragliding [in all its variations] within the foot launched aviation community and, in recent years, seen resurgence in hang gliding too, with an active aero tow section too.

From the Archives...

Early hang gliders were very rudimentary (and most often home-made) pilots could take off and land [sometimes even land safely] but they couldn't go anywhere with them. It was, however, a period of very rapid development with newer hang gliders, offering better performance, manufactured, and launched (pun intended), every 6 months or so. Then, like now, keen pilots would invariably upgrade to whatever the best hang glider was at the time and these new gliders were able to use thermals to good effect.

In the early days, if pilots glided out from the hill and the glider went up it was called magic lift. One day at Bo peep Johnny C took off on an experimental glider. He flew out from the hill, and undertook a series of 360-degree turns; the ground just disappeared below him. He was at about 4000' with no parachute, and flying an experimental glider, it was [he says] a combination of being extremely scared and elated all at the same time. When he landed, pilots on the hill said he went out of sight for a while. Hang gliders had stepped over from being able to do no more than take off from a hill, and at best, offer an extended flight to the bottom, to become true flying machines and able to stay up in a band of ridge lift for extended periods, and that could climb to thousands of feet.

At that time, the 'top' hang gliders had a best glide ratio of around 4.5 to 1 and the sink rate of a grand piano. To stay up reliably pilots needed about 18 mph of wind

coming straight up a steep ridge. In those days success was measured by how long pilots could stay up for. Since most flights ended up at the bottom of the hill, pilots were considered experts if they could ridge soar for any length of time.

The first HG duration record was established in 1972 at seven and a half minutes. By July 1973 the hour record had been broken, to be quickly followed in December by a new record of 1 hour 18 minutes. In May 1974, three pilots each logged flights of over 2 hours on the NE face of Hay Bluff with the longest being 2 hrs. 20 mins. A SHGC pilot then flew for 3 hrs. 38 mins at Beachy Head only to take it to 8 hrs. 26 mins, flying at Rhossili Down the very next month. In August 1976 the UK duration record stood at 12 hrs. 15 mins.

The world record went to over 15 hours, but by that time it was recognised that duration flying only proved that, in some parts of the globe, strong winds blow reliably up cliffs for long periods of time and, perhaps more importantly, pilots needed to have strong bladders. There were other flying challenges that were much more interesting and were better tests of flying skills. Accordingly, height and distance became the new goal. The first was a flight from Ditchling to Offham out and return. A pilot followed a cloud street out from the Dyke up to 2000 ft. and along to Ditchling. This was only 4.5 miles but pilots had never left the Dyke before. One pilot climbed to 4000 ft. above the Dyke and performed forty consecutive 360s. It was reported that a pilot had flown 12 miles to Abergavenny and the Tredegar record-breaking flight was reported as 20 miles. A pilot flew from Beachy Head to Cuckmere Haven trying to repeat the out and return flight recently completed by a group that included Johnny Carr.

Then two pilots completed the Newhaven to Brighton cliffs out and return for the first time. On 1 June Johnny Carr, and two other pilots flew from Ditchling Beacon to Shoreham Airport, Worthing, and Steyning respectively, overflying the Dyke en route. On 26 June a pilot flew the 11.5 miles from the Dyke to Peacehaven topping out at 4650 ft. It was an exciting time and free flying would never be the same again!

3. The Club's Constitution

The Club has a Committee and a Constitution and operates with the following objectives:

- To encourage the practice, promotion, development, participation and preservation of the sport of amateur hang gliding and paragliding in the South of England.
- To provide facilities that can be used by members to ensure the safe development of all pilots' flying skills.
- To negotiate for and / or acquire flying sites in order to provide suitable facilities for hang gliding and paragliding for its members.
- To organise Club events as appropriate for its members.
- To organise teams to represent the Club in championships and leagues and in other such competitions as the Committee shall decide.
- To engage in such other ancillary activities in connection with the sport of hang gliding and paragliding as is considered necessary."
- The Club is entirely non-profit and it's only source of revenue are from individual member fees and fees charged to schools and commercial operators for their use of the Club sites.

Legally, the Club falls under the somewhat ubiquitous legal collective of 'Clubs and Associations'. There is a provision, within the Club's constitution, for the Club to become a Trust, with Trustees. This would be necessary in the event that the Club acquired property and/or a site or sites.

4. The role of the SHGC Committee [from the Club's Constitution]

- The affairs of the Club shall be managed by the Committee.
- The Committee may include a Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer, Membership Secretary, Safety Officer, Site Liaison Officer (dealing with landowners), and a Chief Coach together with such other members or officers as shall from time to time be co-opted or appointed by the committee or elected in General Meetings.
- The Secretary shall take Minutes of every full Committee meeting. The Membership Secretary has the specific duty of maintaining contact with all schools registered with the SHGC and informing them of current rules and regulations. All SHGC registered schools will liaise with the Safety Officer on all site matters, if required. The Safety Officer shall organise the safe flying conduct of the membership and co-opt such assistance from the membership as he or she sees fit in order to comply with BPHA rules and regulations. NB. BHPA rules dictate the specific duties and qualifications required for the positions of Safety Officer and Chief Coach.
- All members of the Committee shall be elected at the Annual General Meeting of the Club. They shall go out of office every year at the end of the Annual General Meeting but shall be eligible for re-election.

5. The Current Committee Membership

President – Johnny Carr.

The inimitable, irreplaceable, and irreplaceable Johnny was one of the founders of the Club and a great ambassador for the sport not just in the South East of England but nationwide too. He is the Club's life President.

Chairman – Dave Massie.

Dave is a stalwart long-serving member of the Club and the Committee and is qualified to fly hang gliders and paragliders. On any flying day he will be found on a Club site. As a technology wiz, he also maintains the SHGC website and also is responsible for the excellent NOTAM's website.

Secretary – Chris Aegerter.

It is my responsibility to take care of the business end of the Committee, which includes but is not limited to meeting agendas, minutes and correspondence a pivotal role to capture the information that we discuss at the monthly committee meetings.

It is also my role to deal with the annual BHPA membership Audit and chase up any SHGC members who don't have BHPA membership [it happens often] and to chase new members who don't pay their initial membership subscription.

I send out welcome emails to all new members and invite them to attend an induction meeting, an important part of being welcomed into the club and essential to allow the new members to receive site details, relative wind directions map and a written assessment of each site including its dangers as well as any specific rules.

I share the responsibility with the Chief Coach [John Turczak] to provide the induction meetings at Glynde and hand out the new member packs and helmet stickers, this proves to other members that a new pilot is a paid up member of the Club.

It also includes posting an information pack to those who elect a London induction which Matt Pepper kindly hosts. I amend the Sites Guide and Coaching documents, as required, print and bind them.

Chief Coach – John Turczak

It is my responsibility to manage the Club's coaching team and for them to provide the expected levels of support to all members. Coaches need to be 'current' and so must attend a BHPA coaching course for training and as all of the coaching team are trained first aiders, they must have the relevant certification.

I passed my paragliding CP in January 2010 and, since then, have clocked up around 800 hours of airtime. I took my Senior Coach rating in 2014 and took on responsibility for the organising the monthly coaching evenings and helping out the Chief Coach. XC (Cross country) is my passion and it's the reason I fly for and I actively encourage others to do the same.

I now hold the Chief Coach position in the club. As part of that I organise;

- The monthly coaching meetings.
- Coach training events.
- I invigilate the Pilot Exams.
- Provide inductions for new members.
- I help out with the Red Ribbons when Phil needs a break and generally help out pilots on the hill who need some coaching.

You can spot me on the hill fairly easily with my now distinctive orange helmet and white and green Artik 4.

Treasurer – Steven Nicholls

In 2010, ahead of the AGM, I volunteered for the vacant position of Club Treasurer. My role is:

- To mirror the activity that happens at the Club's bank, HSBC. I record all income received and pay expenses the most obvious one being the sites.
- To manage the site fund
- To report all financial matters to the Committee and to the Club membership at the AGM.

If my start year and end year figures equal the figures at HSBC then my job is done. Clubs and Associations are normally required to pay Corporation Tax on bank interest and other income [excluding membership fees] but the SHGC has been granted an exemption by HMRC.

The Club has supported the work of the Kent, Surrey, and Sussex Air Ambulance with donations. They provide an excellent service and some Club members, who relish free flight, have experienced, first hands, the joys of powered flight. The Club has also made donations to the team at Newhaven Coast Watch.

Earlier this year I helped introduce a GDPR compliant regime within the Club.

Safety Office – Steve Purdie

It is my responsibility for oversight of all matters of safety at the Club. Accident reports and detailed analysis of incidents [including feedback to all parties involved] are key parts of this position.

The Club has two very skilled and experienced pilots helping me as assistant safety officers, Hugh (Miller) and Luke (Nicol).

It is part of my duties to liaise with the police should it be required and the BHPA too, to deal with incident reports and chase up missing information on relation to near misses and accidents.

I first flew with a homemade Rogallo in the 70s and learned to fly modern hang gliders in 1992. I learned to paraglide in 1991. I have been Panel Safety Officer for the PG Nationals in late 1990s and early 2000s. I won the nationals in 2000. I was British Team Captain in 2001 and IIRC in 2002. I broke my back at the Dyke following a sea breeze front induced low level deflation but was flying again within five weeks.

Assistant Safety Officers – Hugh Miller and Luke Nicol

Having witnessed some bad accidents in the last three years on our sites Luke and I wanted to do something to help turn things around. I am organising the safety bulletins and am part of the safety sub-committee. NB. If you have any queries about sites and safety, please do talk to any of the club coaches, John Turczak, Luke Nicol, Steve Purdie or me; we would be glad to help, as will all the experienced pilots in the Club.

Airspace Officer – Tim Cox

Airspace is constantly under threat from the pressures of big business and the military. We all have to be vigilant as private flyers and put pressure on our democratic representatives to ensure our freedoms are not side lined and ignored. The fight back by Lasham gliding club against the seizure of airspace around Farnborough is a good example of what can be done. As airspace officer my role is to offer support to campaigns such as this, but also to ensure that we do not infringe controlled airspace ourselves. I have flown hang gliders since the 1980s and paragliders since their first introduction.

Social Secretary – Steve Hope

It is my role to organise the social aspects within the club. In 2017, I organised the summer BBQ in the space of 3 weeks, which was a challenge but it was an excellent evening, with a turn out of 50, or so, members.

In 2018, the summer BBQ was a bigger success with over 80 people, next year (2019) I would like it to be even bigger. The Club has 600+ members so whilst good, 80 attendees is still a relatively small number. I know we can do better, together!

I try to engage and encourage pilots to get together to be sociable and have some fun in and amongst our flying careers, I organise the Christmas events and awards ceremony for our XC leagues. Plans for 2019 include monthly or quarterly quiz nights, trips out to comedy clubs, and arranging pilotage evenings with our chief coach.

Steve H writes; “if you have any ideas please send an email to me. I would be grateful for help and if you can be involved in organising and attending that would be great too”.

Membership Secretary – Mariusz Macias

I take responsibility for processing yearly membership renewals and for chasing all the forgetful members so everyone who flies our sites can be a proud owner of beautiful SHGC helmet sticker. As a pilot I am devoted to spend as much time in the air as possible. [Windsock editorial team – “And a site record holder too!”]

Sites Officer – Dave Lewis (AKA Hairy Dave)

long term SHGC pilot, tandem instructor, and local Firlie resident. I've been sites officer for a couple of years [Chief Coach before that] and try to bridge the gap between the Club and the land owners/ farmers who tolerate us [to varying degrees] and allow us to use their land.

Mostly my role concerns the relatively trivial matters of oiling padlocks, fixing fences, and pacifying complaining local residents who [quite rightly] grumble about pilots leaving gates open, making noise, generally disobeying Club rules, and/ or behaving inconsiderately.

So long as everybody is happy then negotiation with farmers is relatively straightforward and mostly limited to trying to keep fees at least in line with inflation and issuing liberal apologies for all misdemeanours on behalf of the entire Club membership.

If everyone keeps to the agreed rules and are nice to the locals then my job is easy. Any problems, politically or if you (or someone else) just flew into a fence and broke it, please tell me straight away.

NB. David Watts [AKA the Mad Farmer] undertakes work on all of the Club sites maintaining and mending 'stuff'. This is a very valuable, and welcome service to the Club. It is reported that Dave also makes a cracking mug of tea!

Red Ribbon Section – Phil Ettinger

Phil runs the RR section. This is a vital part of the Club's membership. It helps bridge the gap between a pilot leaving the 'safety' of the school environment [where decisions are typically made for them] and being on their own' a position everyone has been in. The RR section provides new CPs with reassurance and helpful advice.

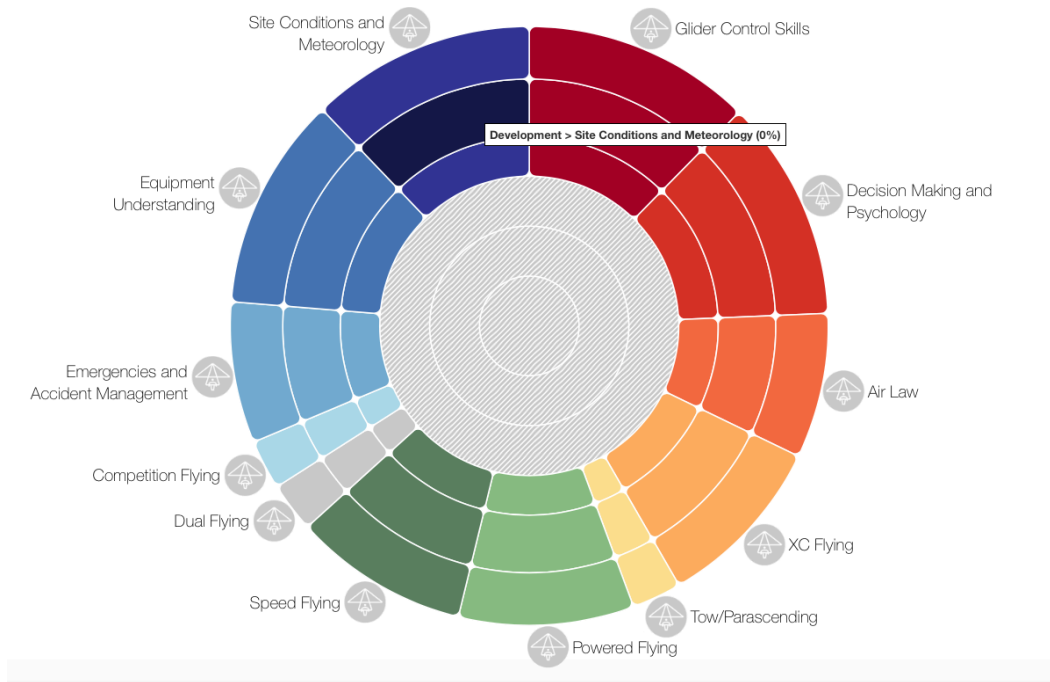
Aero Tow Section – Steve Marnier

There is an active HG aero tow section within the SHCG and so HG pilots have the opportunity to launch from places other than busy Club sites. The Aero tow section is ably represented by HG pilot and Club member Steve Marnier.

6. BHPA Pilot Development Structure [PDS]

This BHPA's 'new' Pilot Development Structure is an interactive facility [you should have been sent log-on details by the BHPA] and helps all pilots to develop and manage their flying careers. [www.bhpa-pds.com].

From the BHPA PDS Website. This is a web-based structure, which defines every single aspect of paragliding, hang gliding and parascending into clearly defined skills, each with an exercise for the pilot to demonstrate that they have “mastered “ the skill - i.e. that they are confident that they can do it consistently.



These skills are arranged in 3 layers:

- **Foundation** - aimed at pilots who have just completed their Club Pilot (Novice) and those in their first season in the club environment)
- **Development** - for pilots who are beginning to develop and widen their flying experience.
- **Performance** - for experienced pilots who want to develop further in their chosen areas of the sport.

The skills are grouped into modules, each covering a specific aspect of the sport (e.g. Glider Control, Meteorology, Site assessment, Decision Making, Equipment, and XC Flying)

Each of the wide variety of skills is described in a consistent format, which includes;

- A description of the skill
- Exercise to demonstrate that the skill has been mastered
- Specific site/ met conditions required
- Links to available resources – (articles, videos, books etc.)

Each of the skills has accompanying “**Guidance for Coaches**” notes, which are available to all coaches and instructors, containing tips and advice on coaching pilots in that particular skill. These are collated from coaches and instructors from all our flying community.

The Pilot Development Structure (PDS) is designed to be easily extended as new topics are identified, so it will always be growing. New skills are being added every day, and the hang gliding Structure is being constructed.

Each pilot's view of the PDS will be personally customised to reflect their stage in the development of their flying skills, knowledge and experience. This happens in 2 ways;

1) Each pilot has the opportunity to "introduce themselves" to the PDS by completing a few multiple-choice questions to describe, "where they are" in the sport, and their interests and aspirations. This re-scales the Dashboard to magnify the Layer and Modules most relevant to them.

2) When an exercise is completed, the relevant area of the diagram becomes hatched and the percentage complete displayed. To reflect each pilot's currency, each exercise has an "expiry date" and the pilot will receive a message prompting them to confirm [to themselves] that they are current in that skill. So the Dashboard on each pilot's front page of the PDS illustrates their personal stage in development and currency - Their own "Experience Profile".

7. Safety Bulletin

All members of the SHGC Committee are extremely concerned that the number of accidents recorded on Club sites is [too] high. This is due, in part, to the high numbers of pilots using the sites but there seems also to be a chronic absence of basic safety awareness.

If any of the landowners/ or farmers 'called time' on our use of a site not only would their decision likely be final, but it would not matter on whether the person involved was experienced or inexperienced, and whether they had 1 hour or 400 hours!

Working with the Committee, the safety officers Steve Purdie, Hugh Miller, and Luke Nicol are determined to help foster an improvement in the Club's safety culture. In the first instance the team have introduced a monthly Safety Bulletin [the first edition - October 2018 - was posted on the various websites and sent by e-mail to all Club members]. There are further safety initiatives being introduced. These VERY important to everyone so please watch out for further editions of the safety bulletin.

8. Climbs in foreign Climes

The editorial team hope to make this a regular feature and would encourage and welcome any first hand experiences of flying trips taken abroad [ideally in the same format as below] which would help, inform, and encourage other pilots wishing to plan similar visits.

Guide to Bir, India – XC Magazine Travel Guide [& amended].

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

Bir offers a fantastic and relatively safe introduction to flying in the biggest mountains of the world in an adventure that immerses you in one of the most diverse and fascinating countries and culture on the planet. India is an explosion of people, colour, food, and sound; a true sensory experience. A flying trip to India will never be forgotten.

Bir is a small Tibetan colony that sits at the bottom of the first ridge of the Himalayas. The ridge runs continuously for almost 100 km and offers a great out-and-return adventure on even a half decent day.

The take off is at Billing a 40-minute taxi ride away at a beautiful grassy meadow served by a chai shop where food and refreshments are available. Top landing is simple, but nevertheless take care, as you wouldn't be the first to crunch in a bit too hard. Some Indian hospitals are as appealing as a dose of typhoid and to be avoided as much as possible – although the big cities have top-class facilities.

The main route heads west, with a choice of soaring the higher back ridge or hopping spine to spine along the front. Every flight is accompanied by a flock of vultures that peer curiously at you and your wing.

Behind the main ridge the high mountains glisten and gleam, painting the horizon with an inspirational backdrop, reinforcing the feeling that you're flying in the Himalayas.

Most pilots head west towards Dharamsala (50 km away). Whether you make it that far or not, you can ride the afternoon westerly back to Bir with much greater ease than the journey out.

The landing in Bir is large and open and often crowded with kids all keen to pack your wing for a few sweets, and then it's a two-minute stroll into town for a chai or a beer and a bite to eat.

FLYING CONDITIONS

Classic big-mountain flying in good thermals that form on almost every spine, with a cloud-base that's normally around 4,000m, but often drops during the day as the moister air from the plains is drawn in. The plains out front are very stable and harder to fly in.

Heading northeast towards Manali offers fantastic but committing flying in high mountains with difficult retrieves on foot or by mule.

WHEN TO GO

Pre-monsoon in March through to May when it's stronger, higher, but less reliable. Post monsoon in October through to November when it's more stable but very consistent (and cold!).

ALTITUDE

Cloud base: 4,000 – 5,000m + [these are big mountains]

Launch: Billing 2,428 m

Landing: Bir 1,525 m

HANG GLIDER ACCESS

Taxis will take HGs to launch, and the take off is suitable.

LANDING OUT

This is going to happen, without question. As with any out landing the most important thing is to look for a large flat field, several hectares in size would be ideal, without any buildings or other pesky obstacles in the way, and, once found, land in it. When flying in India you should look for such a landing site. Unfortunately, a cursory examination of the topography, from the air, will reveal that such a place does not exist [unless it is a cricket pitch], so best give up and move on to plan B.

Fields viewed from above reveal themselves to be terraced, paddy fields, and are often flooded. Across the fields will inevitably be high-tension electricity cables, and running from these will be progressively smaller cables that will be at any/ all angles. Set yourself up over the 'obstruction' and choose the best and safest landing you can. Then work out how to get home by bus, train, or taxi. Good luck!

MUST BE FLOWN

Dharamsala and back for a simple but satisfying 100 km out-and-return. Cross the high mountains to Manali – wild and committing, but a flight of a lifetime.

DANGERS AND ANNOYANCES

Overdevelopment has led to several accidents here with pilots going missing and very real [and hungry] wild animals. Treat big clouds in Bir with great respect.

Don't over fly the Dalai Lama's residence in Dharamsala, and the soldiers at the Yol military base nearby get a bit shirty if you land there.

Be very careful going over the back as the terrain is committing with gorges, big walkouts and often-strong valley winds.

ACCOMMODATION

There are several cheap Indian and Tibetan lodges and some rooms in local houses. Better accommodation is found at the Colonel's Resort www.colonelsresort.com, a traditional local-style place in a tea garden. Half an hour away is the Taragarh Palace, a stunning ex-Raj residence owned by the Prince of Kashmir. www.taragarh.com.

GUIDES AND COURSES

All-inclusive guiding 'holidays' are available and will take responsibility for many/ all of the 'on the ground' logistics. Several of the local schools here in Sussex have been organising trips to India for many years and are highly experienced in the delights and vagaries of Indian life. It would pay to ask them and also other members for their recommendations and experiences.

TAKE THE FAMILY

Trekking, horse riding, hot springs, monasteries and temples and all the other crazy cultural experiences India has to offer!

RAINY DAYS

Visit Dharamsala and meet the Dalai Lama, or wonder at the temples and monasteries nearby.

WEATHER INFO

You're on your own here. Look out of the window and make an assessment or try a local pilot.

GETTING THERE

From Delhi international airport it's a 14-hour bus ride to Mandi, followed by an hour and a half in a taxi. Some buses have bunks. Flights may also be available to Amritsar international airport, about five hours' drive from Bir.

Dharamsala has a small airport and there are connecting flights from India's major cities. Or take the train to Pathankot and a four-hour taxi ride.

9. Pilot Skills Workshop

Fast track to being a better pilot [by Toby Colombe]

Pilots often ask what the best way to improve is. Some want to be able to stay in the air longer. Some are trying to master the black art of thermalling. Others want to achieve big cross-country distances. Some simply want to be able to land without falling over!

The flying mantra goes something like this; "the best pilot is the one having the most fun". Whilst this underscores magnificently the freedom that is paragliding, the best pilots are also the ones not putting themselves (and others!) at greater risk than is necessary in a sport that might already be considered inherently risky.

In watching and observing clients over the years, I have seen some pilots improving and progressing much faster than others. Luck? I don't think so. Good pilots display certain habits and even attitudes that seem to get them to that place of real confidence or mastery in a few short years (rather than never at all?). In this article I'll give you some tried and tested techniques for getting "there" sooner.

Most of these ideas won't be new, but hopefully at the very least they'll underscore an approach that you can use to becoming a better pilot.

Want to learn?

Just occasionally I have the challenging task of trying to help someone that has nothing to learn. When things go wrong it's the air, when they crash launch or crash land, there was rogue thermal, or a tree "appeared", ...again! Very occasionally such excuses are valid, but all too often this attitude can mean that a serious accident is in the tealeaves. Most of the time I'm very fortunate to spend time guiding and coaching pilots open to improving their techniques. Just as with anything in life, hunger leads people forward. So, if you've read this far it's looking good!

The Two Aspects of Flying

I often like to consider paragliding as having two personalities. First of all there's the "chess player". He's reading the sky, making calculated decisions based on a thorough understanding of how the medium (air!) is flowing. Secondly, there's the "surfer" epitomised by the screw-loose (?) acro dude. The surfer knows how to "pilot" his wing, how to put it where he wants it, rather than the other way round! Both chess player and surfer dude personalities are essential if you want to fly well. Let's have a look at each one in turn.

The chess player

To improve your knowledge of the air, by all means read all the books and all the articles (and I thoroughly recommend Burkhard Mertens' Thermal Flying by the way); but there's also something else you can do to accelerate your learning, something you can do when you're out there in the air. And it's just as important as reading the books. Here it is: When you go flying, take the "explore attitude" with you.

Explore the air for a better understanding of what its doing. Explore the ridge lift. Push out in front. Sniff upwind. If you've been boating about happily for a while and it's clearly easy to stay up, why not explore a little? As you're coming into land and you see an obvious (or not so obvious) thermal source scoot over and have a look.

From the comfort of the hill or your lift band, you can also explore using other pilots. At least there's now one advantage to having lots of pilots in the air. If there are lots of pilots you get to explore lots of Watch where they fly; did they find lift or sink, smooth air or something else? All the time you will be refining your "map" of how the air is flowing, and that's what this chess-player stuff is all about, refining your map. And even once you've landed you can keep refining: the learning is far from over. In fact, I sometimes think we learn even more *after* the flight than during. Talk to others that flew. If you're on a local hill, how was it different from last week? Why? Theories and ideas are great, but be sure to keep them open, that way you'll develop them, refine them and synthesize them. There was definitely an inversion! Definitely? Sometimes keeping your theories loose and open is the key. Remember, what you experienced is just that and only that. Five minutes later was the wind blowing from an entirely different direction? Or was that change in wind direction due to a rather large thermal kicking off? Understanding how the air is moving is as much an art as it is a science. Keep refining your map and you'll get better at the chess game.

The surfer dude

Some pilots tend to shy away from this stuff, at their peril. Yes, folks. Guess what! It's ground handling! If you like it, it's usually because you're good at it. Otherwise you tend to ignore it. Of course it can be difficult to find the time and inclination, but if you can do a little here and there whilst that's good, it's the attitude with which you attack it that counts. So rather than building a wall, collapsing it and starting again why not use your ground-handling to try out new techniques. Anything is possible. Acro pilots even practise the "helicopter" on the ground. As with "fly exploring", the key to learning from your ground handling is to be "playful". Try launching with new techniques, try changing your weight shift (yes, on the ground!) If your wing collapses try to rescue it, before it hits the ground. There's really a lot to get into here, but most pilots benefit enormously from some time spent playing on the ground.

The other (more exciting) way to improve your "surfer" skills is to be playful (that word again) in the air. Now, if you're not in the environment of a properly organised wing control course with life jackets, boats, motors and so on and so on, then there are obvious limits to how "playful" you can be. However, there are a few things you can still "play" with. Try, for example, experimenting with your turns. Notice how weight shift affects the responsiveness of your wing. How does adding some outside brake feel compared to having no outside brake? I urge against experimenting with increased inside brake as too much and too sudden and prolonged an input can

cause a wing to spin, something you don't want to be trying out over the ground for the first time! So since there are limits and particularly if you're up for mastering the thermic air, find yourself a decent wing control or SIV course. You'll make a huge leap forward!

Final word

It never ceases to amaze me that more people aren't attracted to the adventure that is paragliding. Mankind has dreamt of free flight since the beginning of time. The moment has arrived. Free flight is here – in our lifetimes! And although it's true that paragliding requires no small amount of dedication, I'm afraid that the final key to "fast tracking" your skills is to fly as often a possible. So, good luck with that one! Make sure you focus on improving both your chess game and your surfing skills and you'll fly far, high, upside down or just comfortably, whatever you're up for! Then maybe the best pilot really is the one having the most fun.

Toby Colombé is a Tandem XC distance world record holder and current British Team Member (2014 and 2015), an Advanced Pilot and professional Tandem Pilot. He is a BHPA Instructor and has guided and instructed all over the world. He founded Passion Paragliding in 2004

10. Notices

A. SHGC Christmas Dinner and Awards Evening

15th December 2018

The White Horse Hotel

Marine Drive

Rottingdean

BH2 7HR

Tickets cost members £20, which is a subsidised amount. Numbers are limited to 60 people maximum [fire regulations] so don't delay in booking. You can pay with PayPal using the links on the SHGC website. NB. You must select from the menu choices ahead of time. Details are on the website. Contact Steven Nicholls 07717420117 / sbnicholls1@gmail.com to place your menu order.

B. Pilot Lectures. John Turczak has begun the series of pilot lectures held at Glynde that may culminate in you sitting the pilot exam. Look at the SHGC website for details.

C. AGM March / April 2019 in Glynde.