

MIDLAND GLIDING CLUB NEWSLETTER

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Chairman's Column

Jon Hall

It is exactly a year since the committee published our first five year strategic plan. It encompasses the period up to the end of 2012. On the first anniversary it seems appropriate to review the objectives of the plan and see what progress we have made in that time.

We highlighted a review of the club's constitution as a priority, aiming to review our current legal status and investigate any suitable alternatives before making recommendations to the membership if a change is warranted. Any such changes would be aimed at making it easier to open doors to public funding and rationalising the club's VAT liability. Under our current constitution we are limited to the number of Social Members we are allowed. Keith Mansell, our President, is actively pursuing this and hopes to bring forward recommendations before this year end. We have de-registered for VAT which has had some marginal financial benefits.

Membership will always be an issue as the more we have the better off we are and the more we can do. At the same time growth has to be managed or we find ourselves unable to service a sudden and large input of new members all wanting to fly and use the facilities. Getting new members is just half the story, keeping them being the other. We set out to reduce the churn rate - the number of members that fail to renew each year - to below 15% by 2012. Over the last ten years the churn rate has averaged 22%. At the end of September this year it was 17%.

Trial lessons remain a substantial part of our revenue stream and we aim in the plan to increase the numbers we fly each year until we reach capacity and to increase the price until the take up reduces. The downturn in the economy has hit trial lesson sales hard. To the end of September this year sales were down almost 30% from the year before. The committee intends to maintain the current levels of spend on advertising as we run up to Christmas which has always been the best time for sales but we may have to face up to reduced revenue from trial lessons for some time.

We identified a need to standardise the briefing procedures across all Basic Instructors and commissioned a local video producer to make a short film on DVD that is now used for all trial lesson briefings. The same producer is now working on a more popular film about membership of the club that trial lessons can take home with them.

The club needs a serviceable fleet with which to operate and we recognised the need to think critically about the use of the Pawnee. The committee is actively looking at the launch system as a whole and seeking a viable alternative to the Pawnee that would be cheaper to buy, cheaper to run, cheaper to maintain and would survive our testing airfield - no mean feat. We also recognised the need to brand the gliders which has been done with the addition of the web address on most of the two-seaters.

Training is a large part of what we do and we said we would seek to improve value for money on the weekday courses and review the operation of weekend training to meet the changing needs of members. We have started to trial bookable weekend courses and are looking at the merits of extending them further. The CFI is actively working towards an alternative to the flying list.

We stated that we would try to operate the club in such a way that members can, within reason and with notice, fly any day of the week throughout the year. We have changed the winter week to include all day Thursday and Friday as well as weekends and the Winter Flying Group under the encouragement of Richard Bennett (FVP) has established an on-line forum that makes it easier for enough people to get together on other promising days. We have also welcomed our hang glider and paraglider neighbours to some joint social events and offered them trial memberships. Some have become full members. We held the second gyroplane fly-in earlier this year and having learned some lessons from the previous one it was expertly managed on the ground and in the air by volunteer members. Careful route planning is essential if we are to avoid complaints from valley dwellers but this time we had none.

Catering at the club remains one of our core activities. We stated that we would review the operation of the concession, actively promote extra events that would generate more revenue and consider the viability of allowing members of the public to use our catering facilities. We have seen a significant increase in member led events at the club, such as birthday parties and special themed nights which have

undoubtedly brought in some extra custom but we have also seen fewer people coming to the club at weekends and staying over. This year's dreadful weather has not helped at all. Members however are vociferously unwilling to allow the public into the clubhouse and a proposed scheme to do so was, after consultation, abandoned. We continue to review the situation and are currently drawing up a new contract that will seek to satisfy the needs of the members and the revenue requirement of the concession.

Somewhat optimistically we aim to develop a phased and costed plan for improvements to all the buildings within the next twenty years. Considerable time has been spent over the last twelve months trying to work out what needs to be replaced, what can be repaired, how much it will cost and where the money is coming from. The club owes a huge debt of gratitude to Mike Witton for his efforts in planning a replacement for the workshops (phase one) and to extend and improve the clubhouse (phase two). We also stated that we would enter into dialogue with the local authority and planning agencies. We have had meetings with the National Trust, AONB, the local tourism agencies and the local authority planning department and so far have met with a considerable level of support.

We have been seeking to re-route some of the footpaths that pass across the south end of the airfield. Negotiations continue but we are optimistic of a successful outcome. At the same time we have been evaluating the benefits of re-routing the main access road to the west and removing the existing tarmac road completely. The Shropshire Way has recently been re-routed along the Starboard Way.

One of my imperatives on becoming Chairman was highlighted in the Strategic Plan, namely the need for robust financial planning and procedures that will give the committee timely management information at least on a quarterly basis. The Treasurer has been working hard towards this ambition and anticipates presenting capital and revenue budgets for the next financial year very soon.

Finally we planned to design a new range of merchandising before the start of the 2008 season which we did and it sold very well. Subsequently we have agreed a deal with a local supplier to enable us to have our logo embroidered on any item in their very comprehensive range, ordered by the customer direct for which we receive commission, saving our cash flow and offering a much greater range.

I have to thank a very dedicated and hardworking committee for the achievements of the last twelve months and the support and encouragement of the members, many of whom have given freely and generously of their time and contributed ideas by the bucket load. Keep them coming.

Shropshire Way *Keith Mansell*

The Shropshire Way is not itself a legal right of way but comprises a linked series of walking routes that follow existing roads, bridleways, footpaths and permissive paths.

Hitherto the Shropshire Way has crossed our land from the gate southwards along the Portway bridleway. The route has been changed by Shropshire County Council (SCC) so that the Shropshire Way now follows our Starboard Way permissive path. SCC has erected appropriate signs at our gate and at the southern end of the airfield together with marker posts at intervals along the Starboard Way.

This re-routing of the Shropshire Way does not change the legal status of the Portway nor of the Starboard Way but it should aid the efficiency of our operations by encouraging use of the Starboard Way rather than of the Portway by walkers, cyclists & horse riders **all of whom still have a right to use the Portway if they so choose.**

However, unauthorised motor vehicles (including motor cycles and quad bikes) do not have any right to be on the airfield or on any of the tracks or paths that cross it. Authorised vehicles include those of farmer Mr Alan Jones, Forestry Commission, National Trust, bona fide visitors to the club and club members.

CFI's Bits

Paul Stanley

My first year in the hot seat as CFI has been an interesting one, to say the least. I took over as CFI in the same week as qualifying as an aerobatic instructor (power), of which more elsewhere in this issue, and entering my first aerobatic competition. Three flying milestones passed in a week.

On taking over as CFI I identified the urgent need to train more instructors. This was necessary largely for demographic reasons, something which is an ongoing factor. My aim was to train somewhere between five and eight Assistant Category instructors in my first year. In the event we achieved six new assistant cat instructors, with some going from a standing start - i.e. not becoming BIs first. This 'experiment' worked I'm pleased to say, and will be the standard way forward for instructor training at MGC from now on. The credit for success of this is due to the hard work of the candidates and, pre-eminently, Simon Adlard and Mick Davis, without whose input this level of progression would not have been possible. I'm sure you would wish to join me in thanking and congratulating all involved. A similar, though smaller scale effort will take place in 2009.

I'm often asked what my criteria are for selecting instructors. My base line in terms of flying is that the prospective candidate should be an active cross country pilot and will usually have competed, or had a serious attempt at, a 300 km flight. Other qualities include; a keenness to teach, the ability to fly accurately under pressure and still have spare capacity, and above all - the correct attitude, as in disposition.

One of the key aspects of instructing is the ability to set a good example and act as a role model. It is not easy to define 'correct attitude' especially in writing, suffice to say that I know it when I see it (as do most of you) and if still unsure then take a look around at those who are instructors, or training to be so. I'm sure that you'll agree that we learn best off those whose demeanour we respect. I can teach people to fly, and teach people to teach people to fly. The disposition to be an instructor can't be taught, but may, I'm sure, be adopted, by those keen to progress along this route.

In order to make progress in flying, as in life, it is essential for a couple of factors to be present. Firstly to have goals, and the requisite persistence to attain them, and just as importantly to have appropriate support for one's endeavours. This can be of the nature of a supportive spouse parent friend, but also often needs a 'professional' input. In flying terms this latter comes from training and coaching.

For some time I have identified some shortcomings in the way we train glider pilots. This is informed by various perspectives; my 'day' job, my former position as a course instructor at Lasham, the other day job teaching PPLs and aerobatics. It is my ambition to address these shortcomings over the next year or so and in so doing make the teaching/learning experience more enjoyable and less frustrating for students and instructors alike. To this end I've formed a small working group comprising the chairman, myself Neal Clements and Mark Sanders. First goal? Do away with the flying list. Watch this space.

From the Flying Field

Mark Sanders

29 September - A five and three-quarter hour marathon gave Luke Sanders his Silver duration in the Discus - and he missed a Silver height gain by just 15 feet - ouch! Congratulations to Ian MacArthur, chosen to represent Team GB in the 2009 Club Class European Championships in Orel, Russia - anyone for a whip round to get his LS4 re-gelled, comrades!?

4 October - An interesting talk in the clubhouse (which made up for the rather dismal weather all weekend) from the para-glider club about their trip (led by Simon Yates, the one who cut the rope in "Touching the Void") to climb Aconcagua (at 22841 feet the highest mountain outside of Asia) in the Andes and then to float back down.

10 October - Official SW Wave Heaven Day. 10,500 feet QFE for Tony Danbury in 288, despite some recalcitrant avionics; James Fisher took his Ventus to 11,000 feet QNH and JS to over 10,000 feet in the K21.

12 October - James Fisher and Mark Sanders are now Assistant Instructors. The temperature on the hill today was over 20 degrees C - a few more days like that over the summer would have been nice! The field was busy with a group from Ringmer and a gang of pilots over from Ireland learning how to winch (from BOTH ends FTFF understands) so that they could take the knowledge (and a second-hand winch) back to the Emerald Isle.

18 October - Over 50 launches on a day when the ridge is working and most flights are over an hour is a busy day - today was just that. Positive squadrons of gliders out - DG300 wing; Peter Cope, Steve Gunn-Russell and Mark Wakem in FWM; Steve Tilling in 206 (he is syndicating this glider - jump in while you can); Fran Aitken in 405. LS4 wing; Charles Carter in JEP; Denise Hughes in HKX; Ken Screen out in HNX; Dave dArcy and Mark Sanders in 288. 445 (LS6) was hardly out of the sky with Jon Hall, Paul Shuttleworth and Jon Roberts all taking turns. Chris Harris and Steve Male both flew in the Vega (DZM). Most people who took a morning launch contacted the wave to around 3-4K QFE; the best reported height was 6000 QFE for Clive Jones in the ASW19 (882), venturing further north than most towards Shrewsbury. New syndicate partner Clive Crocker took his first flight in his recent purchase - a share in the Duo Discus (494) with Mike Greenwood along for the ride. John Parry turned up relatively late to fly the Pegasus (FVP); he didn't contact the wave but had a lot of fun trying! Plus of course all the "usual suspects" flying in the club kit and as a bonus our CFI turned up with his new toy - a Pitts S2A - amazingly compact if you've never seen one in the flesh, as it were, and very capable. "2" refers to the number of seats, so if you fancy a go... form an orderly queue behind me!

19 October - 20/25 knots from the south-west - more wave heaven? Richard Bennett (Pegasus - FVP) and Jon Hall in the LS6 hoped so and both had speculative launches from the winch, but it really needed an aerotow and the Pawnee is poorly at the moment. New member Ray Li, Joe and Charlie (juniors on next week's course) and Colin Troise (a visitor from Sutton Bank) all had fun wrestling with the conditions in the two-seaters; for Charles Page, the K23 was the weapon of choice.

We welcome new members Sue Bloor, Malcolm Bursnall, Nigel Lassetter, Ray Li, Roger Maddott and Adrian Venour.

Wave Flight

James Fisher

Friday 10 October 2008: wind SSW 15/20 knots.

There's nothing more annoying than being told about a great day that you missed out on (I should know) but I have been asked to give an account of the fabulous wave day many of us experienced on Friday 10 October. I hope the account that follows is the first of many as it was certainly a good start to the Mynd wave season.

The weather was showing an approaching frontal system over Ireland but with a fairly brisk south-south-westerly airflow and importantly nice straight isobars giving a fairly constant wind direction with increasing height. Also there was an unstable thermic layer up to about 3000 feet AMSL, (RASP charts) with a marked inversion and a more stable layer above that. I'm no met genius but this seemed to tick all the right boxes for wave.

I flew on the previous day and managed to float around for 55 minutes at 700 feet over Wentnor in my Ventus working a really weak area of lift. On landing I spoke to a couple of other pilots one being Luke Sanders and we were all in agreement that the next day should be windier but with essentially the same airmass and wind direction.

So Friday arrived and initially it looked overcast and a bit soggy aloft, but my trepidation was unfounded and by the time I'd finished off my flying start breakfast and a cup of tea the cloud was already breaking nicely. Walking out to my trailer I could already see the scruffy edge of a large lenticular setting up into the wind at 90 degrees to the ridge running pretty much from Wentnor on a line over Linley Hall out towards Church Stoke. It occurred to me later on that this wave system was probably the same one I'd dabbled with the day before at 700 feet over the valley and had been slowly increasing in amplitude as I slept.

Excitedly I rigged and by the time I had got my wings and tail on, the DG505 was already at the launch point with Luke strapping in ready to go. Being lazy I elected for an aerotow and as I did my checks I could see Luke in the DG working the edge of the lift over the valley.

The aerotow was sporty to say the least but once up through about 1500 feet it was completely smooth and I even had time to collect up all my things and put them back in the side pockets. I pulled off at 4000 feet over Linley and much to my dismay I floundered around and lost 500 feet before I got myself together and had a proper look at the sky.

As I worked back along the edge of the scrappy lenticular the L-NAV was giving a wind of 210/25 knots and slowly the vario eked to 1 knot. After 10 minutes it increased to 2 knots as I arrived back over the bungee meadow. There was a steady 2 knots now passing 5500 feet QFE but the cloud gap above me started to fill in, with the DG and the two K21s with course members on board in the vicinity, a cheeky pull-up through the thin cloud layer was probably not the safest option so I broke off and pushed into wind at 80 knots losing over 1500 feet as I reached the next area of lift. This area of lift was just over the south end of the Mynd and so I reckoned the wave had a length a little over 2 miles. Now in steady lift I continued to climb up to 7500 feet QFE and could see several other Mynd gliders below me in the system, the lower cloud was now starting to melt away a bit with much larger gaps so I tried to study the sky upwind looking down on the lower heaped banks of clouds to try and pick my next jump. I think the wave was coming off the Brecon Beacons but was also being triggered by the high ground to the south-west over Radnor Forest/Presteigne. One thing that struck me was that it wasn't cold, my OAT probe never dropped below 7°C. Whilst I was daydreaming and contemplating my next move Luke in the DG caught me up and promptly out-climbed me and that was the last I saw of KAW (anyhow he had more wing area than me!). Eventually reaching 11,000 feet QNH (wind still 210 degrees now 34 knots) I increased speed to 85 knots, went to negative flap and pushed forward to the next wave bar, the visibility was now excellent giving me a great view of the Severn estuary and there was a beautiful silky smooth lens sat over the centre of the Beacons at what I'm guessing must have been 30,000 feet, maybe higher. Reaching the next cloud west of Shobdon I started to wonder just how

far could I go?

Working this next area of lift I spotted Hay-on-Wye through the cloud gap and also the distinctive ridgeline running from Hay Bluff towards Talgarth and so I set off towards it, maybe Talgarth out and return was on the cards?

This is where I lost the plot a little, there was a subtle change in the wave system and the I ran into a large area of 6 knot sink pushing me impressively downwards towards the cloud sheet below, the next cloud edge didn't work at all so I checked the wind readout, no it hadn't changed maybe the Brecon wave was out of sync in this area and suppressing the lower system? (Something else that occurred to me afterwards.) Not wanting to descend into cloud over the hills I gracefully retreated back to the steady smooth lift near Shobdon reaching 10,500 feet QNH and at this point I'm afraid the 'thinking mans' wave flight ended, into full negative flap 120 knots, I set off for Montgomery running the edge of the lenticular to the west then jumping the gap to the downwind bar and rounding Montgomery church still at 120 knots back across the valley to the east still at 7000 feet rounding Craven Arms then back overhead the airfield still at 3500 feet.

I'm sure if I had managed my potential energy reserves better I could have gone much further but it put a smile on my face anyway and served as a great reminder of why I love flying gliders on my days off.

By the way if anybody feels inspired by my tale there's a share for sale in a fabulous wave glider (Open Cirrus "18") currently in the workshop being extensively renovated. Price negotiable.

Change your Attitude: Fly SKNT

Paul Stanley

My auntie always used to say that "if there's anything you really want to do then it's best to do it before you're dead."

With this in mind, and just prior to a 'significant' birthday, I went to fly a Pitts Special. Something which I'd only been meaning to do for about 15 years... Why do we do that? Anyway, suffice to say the experience didn't disappoint.

I went on to learn to fly aerobatics in the Pitts, safely if inelegantly. And to land the little sod, inelegantly and just about safely. Then to learn how to teach on it, and to gain my aerobatics instructor's rating with On Track aviation at Wellesbourne. This latter some of the most interesting, challenging and rewarding flying I've done to date - on a par with the IoW excursion with Rodders or flying in the mountains. In short I was smitten.

Only one problem. I'm sure that God designed me to be independently wealthy, (along the lines of Billy Connelly's Tobogganist) only wasn't paying attention to detail upon my creation, omitting the small but important detail (wealth). But only after hard wiring my tastes. I'm sure many of you will identify with this phenomenon.

Anyway, to cut the story short, a year ago I was landed with lots of time on my hands in the form of gardening leave from work. So, the devil taking over and making work for my only partly idle hands I developed a business plan, found a plane and raised the finance to buy it. So I'm now the proud owner of a very nice yellow Pitts S2A, which an Irishman sold me in a bar. I knew it was mine when I saw the registration: G-SKNT.

G-SKNT and I are available for type conversions, trial lessons, aerobatic and advanced tail wheel training. You must know someone who needs a Pitts in their life this Christmas. Do buy them a little go, it could change their life. It has mine.

A Flying Member for Fifty Years

Keith Mansell

The editor has asked me to set down the gist of my speech at the 12 July party at the club to mark my fifty years continuous flying membership of the Midland Gliding Club. My theme was the comparison of the club 'now' with 'then' i.e. as it was when I joined in 1958.

All those years ago (where has all that time gone?) I was a lad of 23. I had my first Mynd flight on 14 June in a (closed cockpit) T21 with Jack Minshall (the club's first professional instructor). Costs were about 2% of today's. Annual subscription was 7 guineas (£7.35), flying 12 shillings (60p) per hour and a winch launch 3 shillings (15p).

Whereas now the club owns the whole of the airfield fifty years ago it owned only the area around the clubhouse to fifty feet east of the hangar doors. Then the two-seaters were a T21 and a T42 (Eagle). Single-seaters were two Prefects, three Olympia 2s and a Skylark 2. There were only two private gliders (both Skylark 2s). Now there are more than forty!

Most instructors were not really trained. There were BGA courses for budding CFIs and professional instructors. The training syllabus was somewhat vague. I was sent solo without experiencing a spin or a cable break! No stage system, pilots were graded according to the best solo glider for which they had been cleared. Hence 'Oly pilots' and 'Skylark pilots'. No tug so no aerotows. Glider performance was considerably inferior to today's hence virtually no cross-country triangles or out and returns. Gold distance aspirants aimed, downwind, for North Denes airfield at Great Yarmouth and the retrieve lasted until the next day. The committee then did not really encourage cross-country flying once one had flown Silver distance.

Launching was by winch or bungee but no aerotows. The main winch (the Roder) was German but with a Humber engine. There were no professional winchdrivers. We all drove it - being checked out for winch driving was necessary to progress beyond the Prefect. No weak links and no retrieve winch. Retrieving by vehicle - an old Morris chassis or Jeep. The Jeep was fun and some younger members learned to drive on it.

The clubhouse (built in 1954) was much as it is now but there was no mains electricity. Lighting was by 24 volt batteries charged by the rather noisy windmill on the whifler tower. No central heating but a coal fire in the lounge. This was OK if you had a seat close to the fire but you would lose your seat if you left the room for any reason other than refilling the coal scuttle. The wall separating the pool table from the lounge had not been built.

The men's two bunkhouses were in what is now the MT workshop, the northern end of which was demolished to make way for the present bunkhouse built in 1963. The west bunkhouse had iron hospital beds, the east had two-tier wooden bunks. The ladies small bunkhouse was where Roger Andrews' office now is. Blankets and mattresses were kept in the blanket store that was where the bar now is. The loos were Elsan based in a tin tabernacle (corrugated iron shed) about ten yards east of the workshop building. The loos niffed somewhat in the summer. Each lady member had a key to the ladies that was kept locked to keep the public out.

There were no showers. The ladies bunkhouse had one cold water only wash-basin to which hot water was transported from the kitchen in a large enamel jug. Men used the two wash-basins that were in the lobby where the pigeon-holes now are.

Jack Minshall was the professional instructor and lived on-site in a gypsy caravan. The glider engineer was Teddy Proll (ex Polish air force) who lived in Church Stretton whence he drove to the club in the club's rather aged Land Rover that was also used for retrieves by those members who did not have cars suitable for towing trailers. There was no office - course bookings were handled by a volunteer course secretary, John Harnden, via his home address.

The kitchen was where the TV room now is. It was manned by ladies employed by the club; the 'Fairies', who, together with the milk, had to be fetched from the valley each morning. They provided breakfast, lunch (often a roast), afternoon tea (bread and butter with fish paste, jam or Marmite if you were in Peter Clay's Marmite syndicate). Supper was nearly always sausages and bubble & squeak left

by the Fairies for us to cook and to “wash up before morning”. A weekend ticket for Friday and Saturday night’s bunk and all Saturday and Sunday meals cost £1.50!

Then, as now, the club’s committee met once a month on a Friday evening not at the Mynd but at the Grand Hotel in Colmore Row in Birmingham (reflecting the Birmingham origins of the club and the fact that nearly all the committee members lived within or close to the city). The chairman was ‘Uncle Bob’ Neill and the CFI was John Hickling. In 1961 I took over from John and from Bob in 1967 only a few weeks before the 1967/68 foot and mouth outbreak during which I was both chairman and CFI. Once flying resumed after the foot and mouth Ernie Ainscough became CFI.

A few words about my treatment on my first visit to the club in the hope that these days we are rather better at welcoming new members. I arrived on my brother’s 500cc Triumph Trophy motorbike. A distinguished looking older man was watching hangar unpacking. (I didn’t know he was Uncle Bob, the chairman, but I might have guessed - he was watching not helping!) Introducing myself to him I asked if someone could show me round. Somewhat imperiously he called, “Oldershaw, Mansell - show him round!” Bob Oldershaw did the honours and led me to the bungee point where a glider was about to be launched. Bob said, “This is the red Prefect, I fly it and” (rather condescendingly said) “one day you may fly it!” Some three years later I was CFI and Oldershaw was still only on the red Prefect! I really did wonder quite what sort of club I had joined.

Uncle Bob was chairman for fourteen years and did much good for the club but seemed rather autocratic to a youngster like me. (Neither of us could have guessed that I would succeed him.) My serious point is that today if you see a stranger at the club speak to him or her, explain things and make them welcome.

There are today some members who were members when I joined but who have had a break in their flying membership. Peter Clay and Bob Swift were established Skylark pilots. Bob with ‘Wilbur’ Wright and Mike Randle (Alison’s father) accepted me into their little group and although I was warned that they were ‘bad company’ we’ve remained friends ever since without coming to grief! Tony Adams - an instructor on the first page in my log book.

During that flight with Tony I felt queasy and asked him to take me down. I thought that gliding was not for me. So I might have given up and missed it all! However later that day John Hickling sent me solo.

The club has been a big part of my life and I have enjoyed all fifty years here thanks in no small way to the friendship of members over those years. Lastly my thanks to Christine for being for fifty years a gliding widow.

My Task Week

Thomas Edwards

Ann and John Parry invited me to come and join the Mynd Task week 2008. Not having flown a true task-week since Yeovilton (RNAS Heron) in 1982, I thought it was about time I dipped my toe back in the water.

I was meant to arrive on the Saturday, but Ann and John had advised that the weather would not permit task-setting that day or Sunday. When I did get there I found the Mynd in the clutches of indifferent weather and no internet. Holly Cottage had no internet either, which I'd found out even before I left home as John had phoned and asked me to look up the weather for him.

Undaunted (and comfortably installed at Holly Cottage), I thought I'd show willing on Monday and rig before briefing whatever the weather. The briefing was not too encouraging weather-wise, so a modest task of castle-hunting-in-the-rain was set. Off I went a-hunting. Lovely winch launch - straight onto the ridge which was working. Looking to see if any of the clouds might generate lift I saw the first two showers approach the Mynd, one for each end of the ridge. I thought - get away to avoid the rain; so I set off to skirt the shower to the north, thinking I could return to castle-hunting to the south a bit later. Wrong! I explored Stitt Hill, the ridge running north from Bridges towards the col on the way to Pulverbach. It was working - but coming back via the front of Adstone Hill I convinced myself I was too low to do a sensible beat in the not-very-enthusiastic hill lift and thought I'd try to get back to the main Mynd ridge itself. Within ten seconds I realised the only sensible remaining option was a field landing, and the nice green one on the back of Dangerous Hill looked just great. Out with the gear, on with the speed, down with the wing and I lined up and landed up-hill in the lee of the hill. The bad news was that my day's flying was over. The good news was that it was only a short walk to Holly Cottage to announce my misdeed to my crew who was still packing for her stay up at the Mynd.

Unwisely, it seems, I justified my lousy decision making to those who asked back up at the club by declaring that I had been trying to get to Montgomery Castle via the Stiperstones. "Via the what? There be dragons there! You can't ridge soar the Stiperstones safely as there aren't many landing fields there." My curiosity was awakened. I'd soared the Stiperstones in my Oly 463 a few years earlier and couldn't remember seeing the dragons. Since the next day was a non-comp day I got in the car to see if I could track down a dragon or two. I found no dragons, but did encounter two BT vans by a telecoms pole. Perhaps they were looking for dragons too, the sort that infest telegraph poles and chew up internets. One could only wish them luck. I did find some lovely fields though and came back much encouraged.

On task day two, Nick and John set the ultimate defined area task (= anywhere in the universe further than 10 km away - and back). Armed with my new information about Stiperstone dragons, I took off as early as I could and set off to try and reach Welshpool via, you've guessed it, the Stiperstones and Corndon using ridge lift. The Stiperstones worked nicely and I thought there was a fighting chance I could get into the ridge lift up-wind on Corndon. If I made it I would get the required 10 km away and there was a juicy bonus for getting back too. Unfortunately I misjudged my glide to get to Corndon. I decided to go over the high ground to the north and then turn left on to the main hill - going round Corndon to the south would be too far. As I approached the saddle between Corndon and Mitchell's Fold, I could see it was all getting rather marginal. Not to worry - the saddle itself looked landable, which is what I opted for. I stopped just short of the brow, at about 1150 feet asl. End of day two for me. And all of ten feet short (height-wise) of being able to ridge soar Corndon. The wind on the approach to my field was 17 knots - perfect for the ridge. Kneeling by the nose of my glider I could still see the Welsh mountains - I was that close to the brow. However, a track and a barbed wire fence a hundred yards over the brow suggested I had done the right thing.

Sister Ann and our Dad kindly came to collect me and my glider. No need to derig, my Dad announced. We can launch you from where you are. He had his bungee with him in the back of the Discovery, and in true enterprising fashion suggested a bungee launch would save a lot of hassle for the crew. I was tempted. Would John notice the two-hour gap in my logger trace where there was an absence of flying speed in an otherwise continuous-looking trace? Would I get points for enterprise, or more accurately

would my Dad and Ann get credit for the niftiest retrieve of the week? Sadly, the track and fence stopped our little game - but it would have been fun.

Two days of tasks, two out landings, and not much else to show. Perhaps I'd not learned much since Yeovilton. But, I was having fun (I think!?).

On the third task day, Ann encouraged me to rig and go fly, and was kind to me despite my two land-outs so far. Suitably emboldened, I got into the air and enjoyed gliding to the east in variable weather. I reached some of the turning points on the list available to us, but not others. At least I went to the right part of Worcester! I had the rewarding experience of flying alongside Nick Heriz-Smith in FVP for quite a while on the way back. We had similar glider performance but he then slid off south for some inexplicable reason. I was focussed on just getting back (please, not three land-outs in a row, sister will kill me!). Later I found that Nick was collecting Ludlow. I plain forgot, so keen was I to get back. And get back I did which was a wonderful feeling and a tremendous boost. I even had 1000 feet to spare, so perhaps I could have bagged Ludlow. Nick got back too, of course.

Day four and more indifferent weather apart from the very first climb to the west of the Mynd before heading east. The cloud was big and 6 knots was to be had - but never again for the rest of the day. With the task to the east again, I felt like a veteran over familiar terrain. Climbs were weak to middling but were far apart and there was heavy cloud spread-out to deal with. After turning Stourport and Ludlow I headed back east for more but soon decided better as the day was collapsing. I dashed for the Mynd only to find that I wouldn't make it back on top. Should I round the southern end and try to ridge soar? Or go for the only patch of sunlight and cu well to the north of Church Stretton? Sunshine it was. Fortunately Wenlock Edge helped sustain me while looking for thermals. I found one but it was scrappy. No good hanging around in it as it wouldn't get me back. I needed another roll of the dice - that one over there will do. And bingo - it provided very nice lift. The lift was so nice that I was joined by someone else hunting for that last climb - Julian Fack and Johnny Roberts in a massive aeroplane that filled the whole sky a few hundred feet above me. Wow! I want one of those when I grow up!

They left and got back comfortably (all that ENERGY). The thermal wobbled, went soft and then died. I gulped and set course for the Mynd, having drifted some way with the thermal. I called long final and made it very clear there would be no circuit by me. Memories of trying to fly up the back of a hill a couple of days ago filled me with dread - would I make it? Plan B this time was to peel off and land in the Church Stretton valley somewhere.

Plan B was not needed and I made the field with a straight-in approach across the top of Yaspel Bank on Packetstone Hill. Jubilation, I got back- AGAIN - two flights in a row! This much fun is addictive.

The last task day I could not fly as I had to return home to prepare for work duty the morning after. But I understand further soaring fun was had to the north of the Mynd.

To end - thank you to all at the Mynd for a great task week that I really enjoyed. My indifferent experiences at Yeovilton's task week all those years ago were well and truly expunged. I hope to be back in 2009 for a bit more of your welcoming spirit and sense of fun - if you'll have me of course.

553 and 493

Peter Clay

It was a coincidence to read in September's newsletter that Paul, in his CFI's bits, urged us all to fly the Discus. I did that just a couple of weeks back.

After morning briefing, I approached Chris Alldis who was on duty, for permission to convert to the Discus. Yes he said, but first take a couple of trips around in EVV then he would give me a run down on the Discus.

The day was mostly blue sky with light winds from the SW, so by late afternoon I had fitted in a couple of circuits and a thermal flight before I was able to nobble Chris. He gave me an extensive briefing on the Discus, explaining that the approach should be flown faster than in some of the other types I had flown, then by way of rounding off the briefing remarked that he had only flown it once and that was about five years ago.

Eventually I was sitting ready at the launch point having found a seating position which, if not perfectly comfortable, enabled me to reach the rudder pedals and still see the compass. Guy came over with the flying log to ask my name and membership number. Peter Clay I said and 533. 553 he exclaimed. How did you get a number like that, mine's got millions of digits, or words to that effect.

It was at this point that Den's voice rang out across the field. There's nothing good about that, it just means he's an old git! What she said is unfortunately true so I couldn't think of a snappy answer. Anyway Denise, look after yourself and one day you may achieve the same status, albeit with a bigger number.

However, back to the ranch - sorry, launch. While waiting for some walkers to clear the area the stress of having to remember all the information imparted by Chris caused the canopy to mist up creating another hold up, but after this slight delay we were off. Wow! Good acceleration and we were nosing up into a climb despite a forward trim setting, so a little forward pressure held her down until we had a comfortable height.

I cast off at about 1100 feet and no sooner was the trim set than there was a welcome surge of lift and this was where the delight of flying the Discus kicked in. The sensitivity of the ailerons and the rate of roll was brilliant so I was able to make use of this rather scrappy evening thermal. I had been circling for about 10 minutes, slowly gaining height, (how else would an old git do it?) before three little wisps of cloud began to form in the blue above. I was over the forest by this point, so when it fizzled out I headed west to try my luck over the valley. No dice, but the thermal had given me the chance to get a feel of the Discus.

Sliding back in from near Wentnor, the Mynd was lit up by the orange glow of the evening sun and the paragliders formed a vivid multicoloured pattern on their green field. The large airbrakes gave easy control on the approach and landing.

I thoroughly enjoyed my first trip in 493. Paul, I think you might be right about this glider.