

SAILPLANE & GLIDING

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Stalling and Spinning

Soaring on Blue Days

MY KIND OF WALES

Vic Carr knows Wales as well as any glider pilot and has exploited its wave on countless occasions. In this article he points out some of its possibilities

Gliding at its best is an exhilarating sport. One way is to engage in competition. Another way is to explore difficult territory using skill and knowledge to expose yourself to tasks others might consider foolish but, with pre-planning and step by step approach, can be exciting and safe. This was an alternative that chose me when I moved to Wrexham in 1972, buying a new Kestrel 19 in partnership in 1974.

My Scottish experience in the late 1960s, using a Dart 17, gave me the grounding. It was a year or two, however, before I was able, flying from Shropshire, to venture west of Alpha 25 at all, let alone with confidence.

The low lying areas downwind create a minor föhn effect

The ingredients which make Welsh wave are both geographical and meteorological, giving a relatively unique situation for much of the year. Wales is fairly low in latitude and to the south-west is unprotected from the Atlantic and the Gulf Stream. The result is a warm and wet airmass leading to much moisture over the mountains themselves. But with the low plain of Shropshire, and in some circumstances the north coast of Wales, the low lying areas downwind create a minor föhn effect.

The second characteristic most noticeable all over the area is that although broad waves several miles wide occur, there are many more minor wave systems which are often no wider than 800 yards, even though the wave length may vary from two or three miles up to ten or 12 miles, with the best around six to eight miles. This narrow front wave is not easily dealt with unless you expect it and adopt the Phillip Wills' knitting technique, ie work strictly up and downwind, circling if necessary to maintain precisely the same position in the system.

With the minor föhn effect on the Shropshire plain reducing cloud amounts such that it is possible to get above the main cloud sheet, an airfield like Sleep, 275ft asl and 30km from the

line of high ground, has proved to be an excellent place to start from and even more to the point, to finish at.

To yo-yo without going further than 30km from the airfield, it is often possible to climb above 20 000ft. However, the yo-yo soon bores. With all those mountains to the west, the Conway valley and the Ruthin-Denbigh valley are particularly attractive and powerful. With the airway based at 6500ft, and hill soaring available by Ruthin, the most effective way to progress is the low route via Chirk and Llangollen into the Clwyd valley. The Berwyns, south of Llangollen, whilst going up to 280ft in a rugged fashion, seem most times to produce a lot of wave muddle.

The airway is a limiting factor, intimidating for those unfamiliar with the nature and roughness of the terrain below. Once a few miles west of a line from Wrexham to Welshpool, the fields available for landing a decent glider are few and far between. There is a real need to know the ground from the ground. I am serious when I say that until you get to the coast where there is the odd airfield and the odd estuary at low tide, there is almost nowhere to have even a respectable crash. The problems are sharply undulating ground, with those half a dozen planned fields often full of sheep.

That's the ground. You have no doubt heard that few people going to Wales actually see the peak of Snowdon. The bad news is that few other peaks are visible either with precious few identifiable places in between. Nevertheless it is possible to enjoy high wave soaring in the north of the principality if you can position yourself by the views that are open. These are often the Lancashire coast, the Mersey and Dee estuaries, Anglesey, the coast of Ireland and the southern part of Wales to the south-west.

Since I started flying wave west of the airway I have had to land there only once. That was last year in the Twin Astir 258.

The Shropshire plain, which is downwind of the activity most of the time, produces the most benign environment.

In the beginning visual navigation into Wales was the sole method. Later, with a VDF facility at Sleep, recovery to the airfield by the more experienced pilots was routine. Now Deccas, VORs and Area Navs make everything possible. Of course Sleep is unique in that the ground is



Peter Foster photographed Vic and Frank Humphrie Horseshoe pass is in the immediate foreground with stretching all the way to Rhyl and the north coast of

low and flat for 40km around, and much further in a due easterly direction. So wave soaring west of the airway with close to 100% cloud cover is exciting, but unlikely to be terminal. The west coast of Wales is at most only 100km to the west.

Peter Foster, describing how he took the photograph from a Cessna 150 flown by Alan Fowles, said there was a high pressure system building up to the west. "After setting course for Ellesmere, Alan handed it to me and when we reached Bangor-on-Dee we saw a wave slot overhead and noticed the climb indicator was showing ten up.

"I immediately eased the column back and the Cessna shot up through the hole and we levelled out over Llangollen under the airway.

"We saw Vic in the distance and warned him by radio of our position. As they were hanging in wave I was able to take some photographs, this one as we drew alongside."



in the Sleep Twin Astir over Llangollen in wave. The the Clwyd valley containing both Ruthin and Denbigh Wales.

Other traffic there is in Wales. During the week you can often count up to six Hawks skating about above the main cloud cover. At the weekend, except on Valley air days, the only traffic is likely to be gliders from Sleep.

Well, that's my sort of Wales. How grateful I am to have had the opportunity to explore it from Llandudno to Brecon in these last 16 years. Of course now that the Rodney Witter site has opened at Denbigh (see the December issue, p339), it will give many the opportunity to enjoy what I have enjoyed, starting right close to the centre of the action and away from that Alpha 25. I wish all who sail from there every good fortune. The UK height record will be taken from there one day.

What about those who went before? Bill Crease and Jacques Cochme flew in wave in North Wales back in 1947, from a bungy launch (see October issue of *Picture Post*). Ric Prestwich began exploring in the late sixties, but he gave up until 1988. Now he has started again with us at Sleep. Perhaps the chap who really saw the potential was Black Jack Harrison, who wrote in *S&G* about wave in Wales in the 1960s and said that opportunities would be enormous. He was right!

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TRAVELLER'S TALE

AUSTRIA

Ernst Specht writes about his visit with Frank Stevens to Trieben in Austria last May where they flew their Vega

The field lies in a valley flanked on both sides by mountains of over 2000m, there is an 800m runway with grass on both sides. Navigation is easy and there are a number of outlanding fields nearby.

I took the Vega and had a good scout around - 3hrs 15min. The mountain tops glistened with snow. Thermals were strong, 5-8kt, and cloud-base rose to 7000ft.

During the next flight I explored a little more. Conditions were superb with strong thermals and a touch of wave which took me to 12000ft asl. I sat bathed in brilliant sunshine and savoured the view.

The next day, May 5, began with clouds over the home mountain. The club pilots appeared

Ernst took the photograph below of the mountains with the valley behind him.

early and 750 and 500km flights were declared. I decided I would follow them and see what the day would bring.

I was in the air by 11am. The lift was a bit scratchy and it took ages to get to 6000ft over the field, but once there things improved. I followed two DG-300s to Turnau. More than once I considered turning back when they crept over mountain passes with very little air between them and the hard rock surface, but they knew the area well.

From there I went on to Niederoblam, was at 8000ft at Grimming, 8900 to Stoderzinken and was then above 8000ft all the way to Zell am See. Visibility was good again and navigation no problem. In six hours I covered 538km. This was the highlight of the trip but days which didn't seem promising developed to give good soaring for hours.

On the last day I was advised to land because of an approaching thunderstorm and arrived at the field at 4000ft - and then the fun started. I hit lift and I opened the brakes, which are powerful on the Vega, but I still had 6kt. Out came the undercarriage, but I was still rising. I was 10km from the field before there was any sink. This flight was a reminder that mountains must be treated with respect. They are all beautiful but also dangerous at times.

(Aerotows to 500m were £12 and to 1000m, £19. There is a 50p landing fee for the glider and for £2.50 a day you can leave it rigged in the hangar. They flew a total of 56hrs in 12 days, with time off for sightseeing.)

FLYING IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Glider and motor glider pilots are invited to the Czech Aero Club's courses at Vrchlabi airfield, site of many of their Nationals in the Giant Mountains 130km NE of Prague. For more information of the courses contact the company who are running them in co-operation with the Aero Club - Ing. J. S. D., Strážné 129, 543 52 Vrchlabi 5, Czechoslovakia. Tel 0438 34103, fax 0438 34104.

