

Towline Times

Tampa Bay Soaring Society Newsletter

September 2007

Flying in the French Alps

by Georges Kaufman



Georges at Sisteron Aero-Club

In June, I went to the Sisteron Aero-Club to fly in the lower Alps. The airfield has side-by-side landing strips, grass and tarmac, aligned 18/36. The club has a dozen high-performance gliders in a hangar, and more outside. It is in a large valley with ridges all around, 10 – 20 km away in every direction and orientation, so no matter where the wind is from, something is working somewhere.

At 9:00 am the ships are assigned to whoever is there (reservations don't seem to count for much), and everyone pitches in to get them out of the hangar. That's something to see. The gliders have been put in there origami style; only the instructor is allowed to touch the wingtip, so he can maneuver each glider out while helpers just push or pull on the fuselage. Next comes a thorough meteorological briefing by the chief pilot, displaying various charts and forecasts off the web on a projection screen. The briefing is in French and English, and one day also in German. Three different forecast sources are used, and they often do not agree; you pick the one you like. Strangely, the Thermal Index was shown only once, and referred to as "an American system".

Serious flying seems to only get started after noon. The week I arrived they were hosting the Two-Place championship. Gliders line up in three rows, so the two tow planes always have one to pick from. Those are serious tow planes, but I forget what they're called. Until I got used to them, I had trouble staying high enough on tow.

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Nimbus



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Altimeters are set to MSL, and they pay attention to pressure density, which they call QNH. Before flight, pilots are preparing their charts. They seem to prefer a 1:250000 road map over the aero chart, because it shows local features and ridges better. The club provides a small booklet showing about 30 preferred landable fields, with aerial photos. Unless you're going really far, you can plan to be within range of a field almost anywhere in the area, even if you can't see it. You just have to know where you are. That's why I only flew as "passenger" while there.

My first flight was a two-hour Discovery offering, in a ASK-13. The instructor did not seem to need to refer to maps; probably has every ridge and altitude memorized. Lift was not strong so he kept moving along the ridges to find a location that worked. That took us quite far, into canyons I never would have thought of venturing in. I was afraid to look back, knowing there would not be a likely landing spot visible. But he knew he could just hop over a col to find one, or head back down the valley, which fortunately slopes down as you go, at a steeper rate than your ship. We wound up over a ski resort. When he did find good lift, he then circled in it. You haven't lived until you're circling and heading for a cliff face and banking 90 degrees. His maneuvers were much more forceful than I'm used to. Going along the ridge was fun too. He didn't actually get too close, because the faces were irregular, and maybe to keep from scaring me too much. When we landed and were moving the glider, I finally took notice of how loong those wings are on a 15m, and when you seem to be not close to the cliff, your wingtip is a lot closer than you think.

The next flights were with my cousin at the helm, in a Duo-Discus (wow). He's chief instructor for Israel, and has been to Sisteron 6 times, so I was in good hands. The next day did not seem promising, with high overcast and lower clouds with low ceilings, just above ridge level. But wave was possible, so we took off. We struggled, but managed to reach cloud base under a ridge, then left it toward the center of the secondary valley to find wave. We Didn't and retreated to the ridge. Leaving the cloud base, I was flying between and almost through clouds, maneuvering toward the lighter blue openings. Great fun, though not recommended. But every ship there carries a FLARM device, a small GPS-based anti-collision system. So with that and constant communication with the other gliders on that ridge, the risk was small. Still not recommended. They installed FLARM last year, after a tow plane released a glider and dove into a two-place; three fatalities.

We wound up with 3 hours on a "bad" day. Next day rain, so we drove to look at a couple of landing sites. We had coordinates but no directions, so were trying with not much luck to find one of them using flight GPS units. "It's about one km south of us; can you take that dirt road, maybe it leads there". Nope. I was driving, and finally put the coordinates into my TomTom car navigator, which took us right there.

Next day looked better, and at the briefing the chief pilot put out a suggested task, about 300 km. Maps were plotted, but by the time we took off conditions had worsened, and we were told to stay "local", which is still a large territory. Got shot down after one hour, but went back up for four more. I drank very little water, not having ever flown so long. Worked a

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combination of thermals and ridge the whole time, going from one ridge to another with no effort. In the Discus, going at 110km/hr with a 40:1 slope, you can reach almost anything you see. Spoils you for anything else, unfortunately.



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My cousin stressed the importance of using the McReady speed ring to achieve max distance, especially on a long low final. We should consider installing them. He also prefers to work every source of lift, no matter how tight, rather than just go back and forth along a ridge (my style). Four hours of this, and my abs were sore the next day. I hope to go back next year. They have a week-long Mountain Class, at three levels. You get five hours flight time every day, with an instructor, picking what you want to work on. I'm told the three levels are not formal, more of a Chinese menu.

On the morning of the last day, I approached a newcomer who'd been pointed out to me as another American. As I got close, I notice a blue tag on his hat. Closer, I saw it read Tampa Bay Soaring Association. It was Dick Enright, a fellow member, from Palm Beach. Small world.



Dick Enright, another TBSS member

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September Tow-Pilot & Line-Chief Schedules

by George McKenna & John Ellis

Day	Date	Tow-Pilot	Line-Chief
Sat.	1	Don Thomasson	
Sun.	2	Bruce patton	Carl Buehler
Wed.	5	Bill Brewis	Dan Loveday
Sat.	8	Don Thomasson	
Sun.	9	Karl Bambas	Joe Burley
Wed.	12	Bill Brewis	Michael Major
Sat.	15	Don Thomasson	
Sun.	16	Karl Bambas	Roger Francis
Wed.	19	George McKenna	Al Pernell
Sat.	22	Don Thomasson	
Sun.	23	Bruce Patton	Matt Dion
Wed.	26	Bill Brewis	Lee Ellis
Sat.	29	Don Thomasson	
Sun.	30	George McKenna	

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Safety Corner

by Jim Watts & Dennis Dix

In the October issue, an article will appear in this section on airspace safety at Zephyrhills Airport. It will focus on the interaction of glider pilots with sky dive operations. There was a fair amount of banter about this issue recently. Some of the input was factually insightful and good food for thought. However, some of the views expressed were not consistent with a common interpretation of the regulations. In the interest of safety and of being good neighbors, next month Safety Corner will clarify the regulations and appropriate club procedures. As always, situational awareness and a readiness to implement alternate pattern and landing strategies are essential components in this process.

Octoberfest 2007 at Chilhowee

The Octoberfest is at CHILHOWEE on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, October 5, 6 and 7. If you would like to attend and fly the club's sailplane(s) you will be expected to help with disassembly, assembly, disassembly and assembly of the sailplane(s). You will also be expected to share the expense of transportation to and from Chilhowee. If you are interested in attending Octoberfest 2007 please contact Bruce Patton or Bud Vacey ASAP.



Editor's Note

The deadline for officer nominations on the TBSS Board of Directors election ballot is October 30th. More information about this will be posted in the October newsletter. However, feel free to start campaigning early if you like. Candidates must be members in good standing and must be at least part-time residents of the planet earth. Third and fourth party candidates are eligible.