

North Wales Hang-Gliding & Paragliding Club

Newsletter ~ February 2010



Evening flying at Thurstaston. Photo by Brian Dillon

From the Chairman & Editor

I'm glad to see that some of you have not been put off by the cold weather this winter. Website reports of the flights you have made make very interesting reading and the photos add to the enjoyment: I'm really envious! Alas, so far this year, my availability to fly has not fitted in with the good flying days! But if you visit the members' forum regularly and look at the Youtube video clip posted by Brian Dillon on 13th February, you will have noticed that not all those flights were without incident – but it wasn't just turbulence. Steve Hogan explains what happened later in this Newsletter: a tree landing was probably the safest thing to do in the circumstances!

A recent BHPA Club Bulletin contains a reminder about the importance of current BHPA membership and the third party / public liability insurance cover that it provides. Our secretary has recently compared notes with BHPA HQ and will have reminded some members that their BHPA membership has lapsed. It may become necessary to check on the BHPA membership status of visitors to our sites. Some of these matters will come up at the Club AGM at the end of March.

Pat Dower from DSC gave a very good illustrated talk about SIV to those who attended the February Club Night: I sense that some members may be tempted to try it! Whether SIV is for you or not, stand by for spring thermals, due any time soon. Let's enjoy them – safely!

NEWS

Notice of Club AGM: You are formally advised that the Club Meeting on Monday 29th March 2010 will be the occasion of the NWHGPC AGM. Should any member wish to stand for election to the Club Committee or have any matters they wish to be discussed, or motions to be considered and voted on at the AGM, would they please submit their intentions / subjects (with the name of a seconder in the case of standing for committee) in writing to me, the Chairman (Secretary Ian Home is abroad between 18 February and 23 March) the by 28th February. This will give time for such matters to be circulated to Committee and Members before the AGM.

Recent Club Committee Meeting: Your Committee met on the 1st February, to look ahead to the AGM and to review recent Club activities. Membership currently stands at 117, and there area a few lapsed members who we see on the hill from time to time! (You can expect a call from the Secretary!!). Sites Officers have made their Christmas 'Whiskey Run' to the landowners of our sites and I am pleased to report that none have any problems with our presence on their land: let's keep it that way.

Our Webmaster, Tim Salter, reported that almost every member has access to the Members' Forum, and that some 3000 visits are made to the site each month. It just shows how important the website is to us all: it has become the main means of communication among members.

The Safety Officer's only concern was occasional lapses of adherence to air law that had been observed or reported to him. With the season about to get under way, it would be a good idea for all of us to review these matters in the 'Pilot Handbook'. Failure to adhere to 'Rules of the air' can lead to accidents. Are we all up to date with BHPA's advice for handling and reporting any accidents? Another matter to revise in the 'Pilot Handbook'.

Parachute Repack: This event, held in late January, went very well, with some 20 flyers taking part. It is worth repeating the 'golden rules' that you can try for yourself at any time (or with help from a Club Coach), to ensure that your reserve will work if needed:

- While sitting in your harness as if in flight, check that you can you reach and grasp the parachute release handle.
- Pull the release handle (*remember, Velcro opens by pulling the two strips **apart** from each other*) which first releases the pin(s) that hold the emergency parachute bag in the harness, and then as you continue to pull, draws the parachute bag out of the harness.
- Most important, once the parachute bag is clear of the harness, do the 'dangle test' to check that the parachute lines slip freely from the 'throat lock' of the parachute bag: they **must** do so if the parachute is to open and inflate.
- **If you cannot reach the handle, if the pins don't release, or if the 'dangle test' fails, your emergency parachute cannot function.**

New Club Coach: Well done, Les Bibby, who has qualified as a BHPA PG Coach. While on the subject, let me remind you that NWHGPC will pay the Course Fee for any member who wishes to attend a BHPA Club Coach Course.

Radio frequencies: It is usual for HG and PG pilots to use different radio frequencies, but there may be times when it would be helpful if each could talk to the other, especially in the event of an incident / accident. Would all who use radios try to memorize both frequencies and if any problem, glider in difficulty, etc. is noticed, to call in on both channels.

National HG and PG Competitions: members should be advised that organisers of national competitions have requested permission to use our sites for their events, if wind directions dictate. Their requests have been approved in principal: watch the Members' Forum for news.

FEATURES

Llangollen Tree Landing Society re-opens membership!

Steve Hogan

Saturday, February 13th dawned clear and promising, with a light to moderate north-westerly forecast: ideal for getting in some much-needed flying time and trying out a newly purchased harness. I had bought a virtually unused Woody Valley Smoking Race 2 harness a couple of weeks ago, and would be flying in it for the first time.

I had already familiarised myself with it while hanging in the garage and had adjusted the shoulder straps and leg loops so the harness was comfortable to be in and easy to zip up when prone. I hadn't altered anything to do with the hang-strap and backplate, assuming the previous owner had these at an optimum or reasonable position.

Having arrived at Llangollen and rigged, I did a hang check for height on the bottom bar, and found I had to use a shorter hang loop to give me a fist between the bottom bar and my chest. However, having carried forward and standing at take off, I found the shorter hang strap and harness bridle length combination stopped me lifting the glider up high enough to hold it comfortably in control on the uprights. After a little head scratching and pondering, I decided that the only thing to do to overcome this was to lengthen the leg straps.

After several adjustments and hang checks, I'd lengthened the leg loops to 85% of their full stretch but at least I could stand at takeoff with the glider feeling right! Steve Armstrong was my wireman and duly stepped clear after my command to '*Release!*', and I pulled in and took off cleanly from the hill. Having taken off I found that I slid down the harness so far I couldn't easily get a leg in to it, but just managed to catch the zip with my heel and getting my feet in that way, went fully prone.

I flew around for about 30 minutes, getting used to the harness and trying to suss the flying conditions, coming to the conclusion that the usual out-of-phase wave was in abundance and making it difficult to find any meaningful thermals. When I decided to land, I burned off height from about 500ft to about 200ft above the front; 180°d back, getting some lift over the field, turned over the road and was tracking at 45° across the field towards takeoff to land. Then I dropped out of prone - and it all went wrong!



I think I got hold of the left upright OK but then couldn't reach the right one after letting go of the bottom bar. At the same time, a gust of lift hit the right wing and that didn't help! The combination of not being able to shift my weight correctly and a lifting wing put the 'Kiss' into a high-banked left hand 360° that took me back over the centre of the roadside trees, followed by another that made me decide what I should try to do as it was going through its first 180° of turn.

The only options that seemed available were:

- To try to get hold of upright / bottom bar and level up, then fly downwind behind the trees, across the field and attempt a very low level flat RH or LH 180° turn to land ... or
- Let the 360° carry on and see how it I ended up - either middle to top of the trees or with my wingtip hitting the ground in the rotor at the back of them, with the glider at 90° to the ground.

I think I consciously went for the second option, as I gauged that any unsuccessful attempt to regain control may also have left me in the rotor at less than tree top height behind the trees. The decision time probably precluded the first option anyway, and the pictures on Youtube show the end result!

The second 360° ended and I found myself stuck in the trees, through the A frame and wondering whether the glider was going to slide back from the trees and drop about 25 feet to the ground. Having pulled myself up over the LH nose wire, I managed to grab hold of a all too slender branch with my left hand, kicked my legs free of the bottom bar and got ready to try and grab anything else I could reach with my right hand if the glider started to fall out of the trees.

Gathering my breath and analysing my options, I found that:

- I was hung in the middle of two trees with nothing but a drop of about 25ft beneath me.
- If the glider was securely lodged, getting out of my harness was the only way I could get to a tree and climb down - but attempting to do that could have caused the glider to fall out of the trees.
- Getting out of my harness using only one hand was going to be far from easy and would probably end up with a nasty fall!

So there I am, deciding that it is probably best to remain holding on to a slim branch and hoping the glider stays lodged in the trees until help arrives - which it did very quickly. Steve Armstrong came running along behind the tree line and shouted up to me, asking if I was alright. My reply being something like "I'm not hurt, other than a severely dented ego, but can't do anything else but hang on here until you can sort something out".

More pilots arrived very quickly and then the first to climb up the tree I was holding on to and reach me was Wyn Roberts. He stayed to stabilise the glider while someone collected a climbing rope from Wyn's Landrover. Then Dave Shields climbed up the tree that the right hand A frame corner was resting in, and Miles Kynaston climbed the tree next to it. Dave assessed the situation and a plan was formulated: to stabilise the glider as much as possible and then use Wyn's rope to take my weight, and after cutting the hang-strap, lower me down to the ground.

After a few more minutes, the rope and other straps had been found and passed up. One was tied around the LH nosewire and secured to the tree I had been holding; while another secured the RH A frame corner to the tree Miles was in. Then the climbing rope was passed up to Miles and he climbed higher and passed it around the tree and over a bough, then it down to Dave who clipped its karabiner to mine. Once clipped on, the slack was taken up on the rope and I took my weight on the bottom bar and nose-wire, and waited for Dave to cut the hang-loop.

Once it was cut, the rope tension and my grip on available supports were enough to prevent me dropping no more than a foot, and then to be suspended in my harness. The lads on the rope slowly lowered me the 25ft to the ground. Then the rope was re-attached to the glider and once the securing straps were released, it too was brought gently down and out of the trees.

All in all, a text book rescue operation carried out with great calmness, skill and ingenuity by the pilots involved, whom I will never be able to repay fully, except to give them my heartfelt thanks - as well as lots of beer the next time we are in the pub!!

In retrospect, I am confident in the belief (and this is supported by other pilots) that it is the peculiarity of this harness' 'backplate hanging' system which caused the incident. I am undertaking a full investigation of the way this harness works and to figure out the safest adjustment and setup method, in order to minimise the likelihood of anything like this happening in the future. This will be published in the next newsletter. *Meanwhile - fly carefully – FLY SAFE!!*

Humbled, and yours sincerely - Steve Hogan

WHAT'S ON?

Monthly Club Meetings assemble from 7.30 onwards at Broughton Wings Social Club at Airbus UK, Broughton, Chester CH4 0DR. Talks or whatever start at 8.15pm

Monday 29th March
Monday 26th April
Monday 28th June

Club Night at BWSC – **Club AGM**
Club Night at BWSC - To be arranged
Club Night at BWSC - To be arranged

Speaker / topic has yet to be arranged for April meeting and will be announced on the Club Website and Members Forum. If anyone can suggest subjects or speakers for any of our meetings, let me know!

'Last weekend in the month' PG Comps will resume again soon!

Club News and Information; contact details for all Club Officers, and a Membership application form, can be accessed on the Club Website at **<http://www.nwhgpc.org.uk>**.

All paid up members of the club who provided a valid e-mail address at renewal time should also have received an e-mail invite to join the "members only" area. If you have not received an invite and you feel you are eligible, please e-mail *webmaster@nwhgpc.org.uk*

Contributions to this Newsletter are welcomed from any member. Ideally, please submit copy as a Text File or MS Word File on CD to Jerry Hazzard, Mill Cottage, Mill Road, Bronington, Whitchurch SY13 3HJ or by Email / Email attachment to jerry.hazzard@btinternet.com If you are unable to provide text in these formats, the editor is willing to type up your scripts from longhand! The editor reserves the right to correct grammar, syntax and spelling, and to trim articles to fit page layouts.

This Newsletter is published quarterly, on/about the 1st of February, May, August and November. Articles / copy for inclusion in a Newsletter should reach the Editor two weeks before publication date.

The views expressed in this Newsletter are not necessarily those of the Club Committee or Newsletter Editor, and any products advertised are not specifically endorsed by the Club. No part of this Newsletter may be reproduced without permission.