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A stunning flight

In the depth of a Scottish winter, on my desktop computer I have a picture of *Barre Des Ecrins* (4102 metres) taken last July when I was soaring in the French Alps to keep the spirit of gliding alive within me and a constant, pictorial reminder of one of the finest flights in my life that I have had the privilege to enjoy.

Since first flying in France in 2002 - and trailing a glider there since 2009 - I have harboured an ambition to soar through *Massif Des Ecrins* to the north of *Gap*. However, ability, weather, other tasks have conspired to deny me that experience until last year when the opportunity was there and I had to "hitch up my skirts", "gird my loins" or more simply just "go for it!"

Not for me, thanks!

So although I completed some 2400kms during my holiday the 750 was not going to happen and I turned my attention during my flights to exploring areas where I

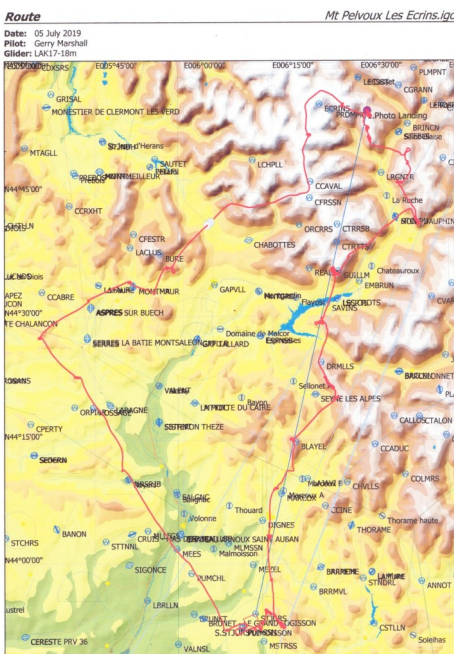


had not been before. *Massif Des Ecrins* beckoned.

The *Massif* stands proud and clear, rising to nearly 14000 feet, snow-capped even in the heart of summer. Serrated ridges cut the skyline, weaving their dark way across the landscape with towering peaks and massive, sheer, rock walls. It is a national park and a haunt for climbers with gliders restricted in access to set corridors, following specific ridges with minimum vertical clearance in other areas. (1000mts agl)

On the 5th July, due to weather conditions north of *Briancon*, I abandoned the set task and crossed the valley to the eastern edge of the massif. Conditions were blue and previously there had been a difficult inversion all the way east and north and in particular in the valley area around *St Crepin*, which forced me to stick pretty close to the rock most of the way. Hot and hard work with other pilots also fighting for available lift. So there was some luck and searching in finding a really strong ther-

With the success of a 500K flight in 2016, I was planning during our three week holiday based at *Puimoisson* to attempt a 750 based on the 500 route. 2019 weather had other ideas, and although it was possible to complete many 300 / 400km flights, extended journeys north towards *Aosta, Italy* and the *Matterhorn* were plagued by explosive thunderstorm cells, which separated many pilots from direct routes home; forced some to land at other airfields and on one day had many arriving back at base in torrential downpours.



mal to give me the entry altitude to allow me to join the ridges which run through the massif crests.

However, fortune smiled and I had a good climb to over 11000 feet that let me join the ridge to the north of *Barre Des Ecrins*, and I used ridge lift convergence to scoot along as the mountain grew in size to my left and I paralleled the massive glacier. Vertical

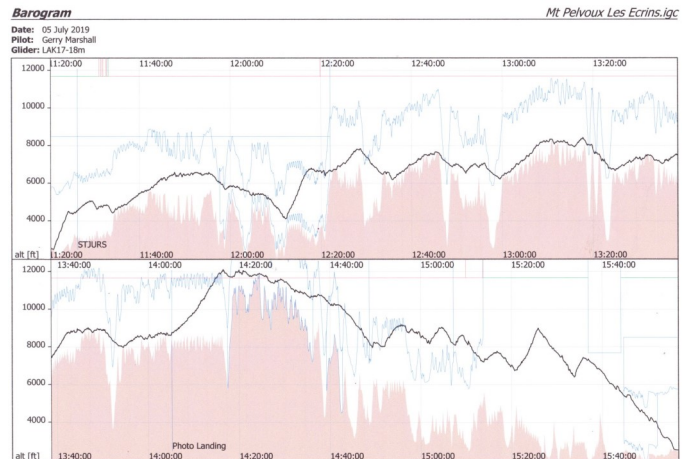


separation on the ridge can be quite tight at times (see Barogram) but you have a fantastic view as you speed along!

Naturally, I kept a good eye on the variometer and wind direction with a view to dropping out but this can be difficult if things become too marginal. But it was worth the increased work load.

Rounding the northern face of the mountain, I could only look out with awe at the view of this giant looming above. The whiteness of the snow; the darkness of the rock contrasted with the deep blue sky that filled my view through the perspex canopy. A quick photo or two and then across the col to turn south following the ridge line. I was committed now.

A little "comfort" climb was taken before *L'Ailefroide* (3953 metres) to allow me to pop over the summit but it wasn't really necessary. All I had to do now was



stick one wing either side of the ridge and go for it.

I was fulfilling a 17 year ambition and I was elated as I flew south for the next 20 / 30 kms breaking right to follow the designated route to the western edge.

Stunning. A little beep from the Mountain high system. Remember to breathe!

I could only think how fortunate I was to be able to experience such a flight and zoomed off westwards to have some fun on the *Pic de Beurre* and across the *Durance* valley to the hills on that side and then, south and home.

What a day. It wasn't a 750 (315km triangle achieved) but it was much, much more.

Over the remainder of the holiday, I went back several times from the west, south, doubling back and forth, but always, always spellbound.

Barre Des Ecrins is my screen saver shot. Every day I fly past that mountain. *Bliss!*

Gerry Marshall



A cautionary Tale

As an instructor at Kirknewton a long time ago I was flying a Cadet when we had a launch failure (Not a cable break but a Winch failure, it was not uncommon for the old WILD Balloon winch engine to stall.)

I immediately took control and lowered the nose, then knowing the cable was still attached and drag-

ging us down, reached for the release. Even at that time early in my career I must have released several hundred times, this time my hand missed the knob. I looked for it then up, to find the ground rushing up towards us. I tried to round out but was too late and we had a very hard landing. As I was sitting above the

wheel which took the major impact the plywood seat broke but I still suffered a compression fracture in my lower spine, which still bothers me to this day. My pupil sitting forward in this slightly flexible wooden glider was totally uninjured and I hope the incident did not put him off gliding, I never found

out.

For the rest of my gliding I always launched with my left hand on the release and taught others to do the same.

Brian Cole-Hamilton

Tom Davidson's Hut

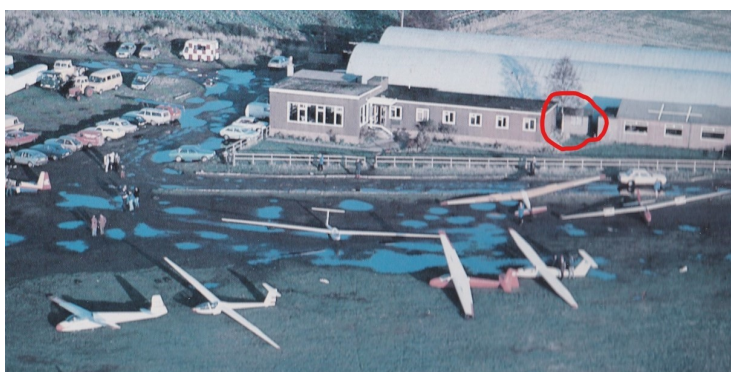
Tom Davidson was CFI of the SGU from 1946 to 1965, a stretch of duty unlikely to be ever equaled. A tall, slender gentleman with grey hair and moustache, he was unfailingly courteous – but his word was law! To those of us who were teenagers in the early 1960's, he seemed immensely old – and even more so when one realized that the wings on his grey flying suit were not RAF - but were Royal Flying Corps! Yes, Tom had flown SE5s in the First World War, and had even survived being shot down by a stray rifle bullet, which severed a control wire. He then spent several months in a POW camp. In the Second War, I believe he mainly flew a desk, but reached the rank of Wing Commander.

He had one or two little idiosyncrasies. He would stand on the field, watching some hopeful in a Tutor or Swallow who was trying to soar Bishop Hill, and remark "Tut tut, he's below that bush". The so-called bush was actually a mature tree, even in these days, and still stands on the slope above the golf course at about 700 feet above Portmoak. Or you would fly with him in a T21b, and would suddenly be startled by a loud buzzing. This came from a small timer he wore on his wrist, and you had now come to the end of your twenty minute allocation!

Tom had erected a small garden shed beside the south end of the clubhouse bedroom wing. This

served as his office, where he undertook the demanding task of making sense of the flying log sheets [nothing changes!], and writing up fair copy in a ledger.

In addition to his desk and chair, the hut also contained a narrow, steel framed single bed, although I



don't think he ever used it very much. However, the story goes that Tom arrived at Portmoak bright and early one Saturday morning, and when he opened the hut door, he discovered the bed being used by a pair of that week's course members for a purpose he had not envisaged! Ever the gentleman, he merely said "Oh, I beg your pardon!" - and closed the door again!

Bruce Marshall

Our Staff

As the largest Scottish gliding club we have a number of staff to help with the successful running of the club. However, we still rely heavily on volunteers. Our staff, be it in the office, instructing, at the winch, all work well above and beyond their duties, helping out wherever they can. As club members we don't often appreciate the amount of work that goes on behind the scenes to keep things running. Tow trucks and winches require maintenance and repair, the field must be kept in good shape, visitors need to be welcomed and there is always something needing done around the airfield to make sure we can get flying.

Our staff work hard and we may think that's their job, but often it's work beyond their duties and hours they are paid for. So please, help with keeping the club going and when you see some work being

done, e.g. maintaining roads, grass, etc., don't assume it's the staff's job. Be courteous and helpful to our staff and treat them with respect as you would anyone else around the airfield. We do have a Code of Conduct – a copy of which is on display in the clubhouse – and expect and require all members to comply with this. Our staff are entitled to be treated with respect in their workplace and anyone giving any staff member abuse will be dealt with severely. We don't want to lose anybody because they get fed up with the environment they are working in due to the behaviour of any club member.

The recent start of volunteer Fridays (or other possible volunteer days) showed how we can all help to make this a better club. So let's all pitch in and help.

Alastair Mutch / Wolf Rossmann

UK Mountain Soaring Competition 2019

In the absence of an engine, we glide. In absence of the Alps, we have: *The UK Mountain Soaring Competition*.

Cross-country tasks are set according to the erratic Cairngorm weather. Prediction is hard and by running both Cross-Country and Height Gain competitions in parallel, the available weather is maximised.

The tarmac runway at Deeside Gliding Club is famous for conflicting arguments from its two wind-socks and a somewhat treacherous response to south winds.

Nothing quite prepares one for the Cairngorm Mountains, viewed through narrowed eyes with your mission in mind, indignantly waiting for your first move.

September 2019 and over the week, 4 tasks were set with three flown. Wet weather, wind and low cloud are common here and variations on these themes eventually scrubbed 3 days out of the 7.



Task 2, Thursday finally launched. The haves and have-nots were divided by a northward task and deceptive blue-wave. Taking off a little later was definitely favourable with day winner Bob Bromwich somehow finding the KM before motoring home. Saturday evening cop-show duo Naylor and Tait pulled a cheeky landout into their home field at Easterton, knowing they could aerotow home just before sunset. This was a day when crossing the start-line was fifty percent of the.

In between scrubbed tasks, surreptitious height gain flights tempted some into gap-hunting. Watching the tracker website had some hastily leaving the café to get back in the saddle.

An enormous Assigned Area Task set on Friday for Task 3 favoured a high performance machine. Aboyne to Crathie Bridge maybe, but onto Killin, Grantown and back to Aboyne? Even when the turn-point areas were "relaxed" considerably, a powerful Northerly flow made flying a backwards quite feasible and pushed many southward onto the Ballater

ridges. And not all the Ballater ridges are ridges...

Even so, the combination of hardy Pilots and performance gliders had the task completed by several. When even the cheery yet formidable Alastair Mutch is only pulling 35.96km it is obvious that the skill and luck required for Dave Latimer to win on 242.6km was in the extreme. Serious skills were often not enough and many returned with small distances on this day.



Task 4 on Saturday upset the appletart with a slowly blueing out thermal day. It started so logically, just like in the soaring books. But the book doesn't include the Dee Valley. Crossing the start line at Aboyne Dinnet and heading west for Loch Seilich seemed intimidating on paper without trying to fly it. There's a lot of open mountain west of Braemar and only blue sky was to be seen. Crossing Ben Macdui toward Grantown was definitely a pie in the sky of my own flight.

Motors were started and gliders could be seen winding down valleys toward isolated flatish fields. Somehow, Roy Wilson completed the task with Bromwich so close behind. Bare knuckle boxer Tony Brown awaited his trailer after a serious bout. Results evidence suggests the order of the day to be one of some esoteric combination of luck, judgement and no doubt, flying straight toward whomever appears to be gaining! Which is what I did.

A week-long battle against the weather to get up and then the weather to get along. Rain, ice, wave, thermal, ridges and wind. Conditions that favoured either the sturdy, naive or the café. In 3rd place overall, Naylor and Tait. Second was Dave Latimer and winner Bob Bromwich, but the results sheet can't convey the personal trials had by each pilot.

Every kilometre an epic. Each day a pleasure. Thanks Deeside Gliding Club!

Matt Roberts