

# The Dunstable Hang gliding and Paragliding Club

## December 2005 Ups and Downs

### Biggles to Tibbles in One Fell Swoop:

Extreme sport; extreme carelessness; extreme embarrassment!



The British Open Hang Gliding Series had not been blessed with epic weather this year and the final round had proved to be no exception. The final day arrived with another less than sparkling forecast: very light south-westerly backing south-easterly; not much sun on the ground and a hot, humid air mass. With only one task being (just) validated in the preceding four days, John Aldridge was keen to at least try to squeeze a task out of the day. After some deliberation at the morning briefing, Wind Bank was called as it was the only possible site for the conditions that day that was available for competition use. The prospect of about one hour's drive and a monumental carry-up to get to takeoff had persuaded several of the pilots to cut their losses and run but a sizable core including myself were tempted to give it a go.

On arrival at the hill it was clear that for once the weather forecast had been entirely correct, but the faint prospect of a glint of sun on the ground was enough to see us all rushing to offload our kit for the long carry up. The great scarp of fell that lay above seemed to be rather inappropriately named that day as it was clearly rather bankrupt in the wind department. With no tame Sherpas to help me up and only the merest zephyr to support my not inconsiderable bulk I stripped my kit to the bare minimum to lighten my load before heading off up the slope. Thinking that the hearty breakfast I had had that morning and the can of pop I had had en route was enough to sustain me for the day I had only allowed one 330ml pack of isotonic drink in reserve. The best part of an hour later and 500 feet higher I arrived at the top of the hill, drenched in sweat and gasping for breath, my reserve ration already exhausted, to be closely followed by the camera crew filming an article on Richard Lovelace for local TV, in a similarly disheveled condition to myself: John wasn't kidding when he said this one was only for the super-fit!

The camera crew sat for a while to recover while we all rigged. The task was called; the launch window opened: nobody launched; the camera crew filmed some background footage; the start window approached: Gordon Rigg and Justin Needham launched; both scratched; Gordon top-landed; Justin got low; Justin got back up; Gordon re-launched; Justin top-landed; Gordon bombed. No one else launched and we all waited sweltering as the already light breeze slowly ebbed away, with the few fleeting glimpses of sunshine there had been deserting us completely, moving away to surrounding hills to torment us just beyond our reach. Finally about half an hour before the launch window was due to close and with no likely prospect of anyone getting above hill-height, John announced that he was going to can the task and sounded the horn to end the day.

We now had several dozen pilots and a camera crew at the top of the hill with nothing to do and all the kit to get back down. A few pilots had already been talking about holding a spot landing competition but John did not think it would be right to make it part of the scoring tasks and left it to the pilots to organize for themselves after the window closed. Will Greenwood, who had got the measure of the day very early on and opted not to carry up in the first place, checked out a few fields in the valley and set an empty fertilizer sack in the middle of one on the far side of the valley, directly in front of the takeoff. The field was bordered at either side by conifer plantations and appeared to slope quite steeply up and away towards a road at the far edge but looked doable, even if it was a little cramped.

Although light wind spot landings are good practice, spot landing competitions normally seem to be a very good way of bending aluminium, especially when cameras are present. Cowardice and common sense at my by then low physical ebb were telling me that I should de-rig but the thought of the carry down let laziness get the better of me. I toggled up, clipped in and joined the queue for launch, dressed for cloud base and perspiring heavily as I waited. The very light wind was by now mainly cross-slope and with the takeoff being part cliff, many of the pilots rather nervous and were taking their time to launch; several half stalled as they galloped off and fell over the edge. Richard's BBC entourage announced that they would walk down to film his landing, easing my nerves a little with the thought that I should be able to beat them down, but the queue crept forward at a snail's pace. I was beginning to think that I would have reached my ideal clip-in weight by the time I reached the launch when the radio crackled to life to announce that the film crew were in place so we all had to step back for Richard to oblige his waiting audience. With the camera aimed directly at him Richard was in no hurry to launch either, but his eventual parting left a space in front of me and after checking that no one minded I jumped in quickly to fill the gap.

I paused only briefly for Richard to land and start to carry clear then cracked a brief joke with John to calm my nerves and I was off. I had expected the motion of flight to cool me a little in my dripping cloths but such relief was disappointingly absent. Not being a great fan of cross-slope landings my flight plan was to come in low and fast directly up slope with the wind so light, despite most others taking the into-wind approach. While winding off the height I kept an eye on the landing field and the flaw in my plan began to reveal itself: the landing field was actually nearly flat giving a very high risk of overshooting if I stuck to plan. Not being terribly high and out of position for the diagonal approach, my options were fast running out; with no other safe fields in range I turned down wind away from the field planning to fly along the valley before putting in a quick 180 onto final approach below the end of the trees. All appeared to be going well but heat and dehydration had taken its toll on my concentration and with the landing field behind me, I was unaware that had lost track of my position. I think that I must have lost my wits as well because whether I did not clear my next turn or I had acquired a mark-one eyeball (the type that looks but does not see); it was with great surprise that the view that greeted me was not the soft welcoming grass some way off, but a host of spiky pine trees right in front of and below me.

"Mummy!" I cried (or perhaps some other expletive more appropriate to the occasion) as I frantically tried to turn away but the trees were having none of it, with my sink rate increasing sharply, this quarry was within their reach and they were not going to let me go. Skimming through the upper twigs I grabbed hold of the biggest armful of tree that I could find then for a moment all was still. My wing began to slip down between the branches and, threatening to pull me from my precarious perch; I scrambled to a more secure position, pulled my webbing cutter and cut the wing free. For the moment I was safe but I was not yet out of trouble; stuck at the top of a fir tree like some unseasonably early Christmas decoration with no way down as the few branches on the lower half of the trunk were dead and too weak to support weight. I was considering trying to shimmy down the

trunk, kicking off the branches as I went but was told to stay put as the fire brigade had been called. Dumping my harness to lighten the load I secured myself for the wait, trying to forget that I now had twenty or so pilots and a film crew all aiming cameras at me to further heighten my embarrassment: this gaff was not going to wash easily.

While I waited I pondered my position; it's odd the type of thoughts that go through your head at times like these: -what call should a hang glider give to attract a mate to his chosen roost; -what sort of nest should be constructed; -how am I going to get my glider out of these blessed trees?!! Then hearing the fire engine approaching I wondered how they would rescue me: would they use a ladder; would I have to jump into a net or would they try to tempt me down first with a saucer of milk like some little old lady's cat:-Here Tibbles, Tibbles Tibbles? It was a shock to see the first fireman on the scene carrying only a very large axe, followed by relief as the second two brought a ladder, then a further shock to see that they had brought a second film crew with them, filming a fly on the wall documentary about the fire brigade. Unfortunately for me, they had not brought all the safety equipment they needed so I was left to squirm a little longer in my undignified position with the cameras running, waiting for a further fire tender to arrive.

Finally back on terra firma I had been hoping somebody would provide a blanket for me to hide under but there's no such mercy in hang gliding circles. I was goaded into removing my helmet for the cameras, and then giving a bow to my audience I thanked my rescuers and hobbled off to the ambulance for a check-up.

My grazes dressed and a reasonably clean bill of health given, I hobbled back to deal with my glider but while I had been gone the fire brigade had been less than gentle with my wing. Not knowing the workings of a hang glider, their rescue attempt had involved spearing the previously almost unblemished sail with a pole axe, then all of them tugging on the handle until the cloth ripped, trying to remove it from the trees (I was now very thankful I had been able to climb down the ladder!). Fortunately seeing this sacrilege, my fellow pilots had fought them off and took to retrieving it themselves to avoid further damage.

Aside from an ego that will probably never recover; my only injuries were a badly bruised and grazed leg that went through all shades of the rainbow over the following weeks before healing. The total damage to my glider was a bent base bar and a cracked inner leading edge plus the aforementioned rip in the sail.

The reason that I chose to share my embarrassment is that this incident could have easily ended up very much worse. By reading this I hope that perhaps any other pilots finding themselves in a similarly impaired physical and/or mental state will recognise their condition first and refrain from flying. For any pilots out there who don't have a hook-knife webbing cutter – get one (and attach it to your harness with some cord or elastic long enough to give you full reach in every direction so you don't drop it)! Despite it weighing almost nothing I had very nearly left my cutter in the car that day and I doubt I would have got away so lightly if I had.

I should now also confess that this is my second tree-landing; the first one being several years ago when, just after takeoff on a new site, I flew into a bowl in leese side sink and blocked from turning by taller trees, I sank into the small ones on the hillside. On that occasion I was only suspended a few feet off the ground but with no help at hand, and unable to pull myself up to unclip, my webbing cutter saved me then as well. Now I don't know if this one makes me a serial rooster but I think I should state here for the record that if I ever find myself again frolicking amongst the foliage I will trade in my flying kit for a leopard skin loincloth and take up yodeling!

My sincere thanks go out to those who took time out from pointing and laughing to help me in my time of need, including Gordon Rigg and several others whose names elude me plus the lads and lasses from the emergency services for coming to my rescue. Thanks also to Dave Bluett and Markus Kinch for providing the photographs for this article and special apologies to Richard Lovelace for bringing his 15 minutes of fame to such an unseemly ending.

(The Arboreal) Greg Leveridge, Loiterer of the Leaves

**From Flo:**



Pity the poor retrieve driver – we have a hard life. On those cold, windy days, when it is risky to get the wing out of the car, let alone contemplate taking off, some of us have to suffer the discomfort of being the retrieve driver. Forced to sit in a warm car, with a flask and a magazine. Or on sunny days, there's the pressure of holing up under a crag, out of the wind, identifying the pretty flowers, watching circling birds, and in my case, studying the rocks – more enduring and reliable than the wind!

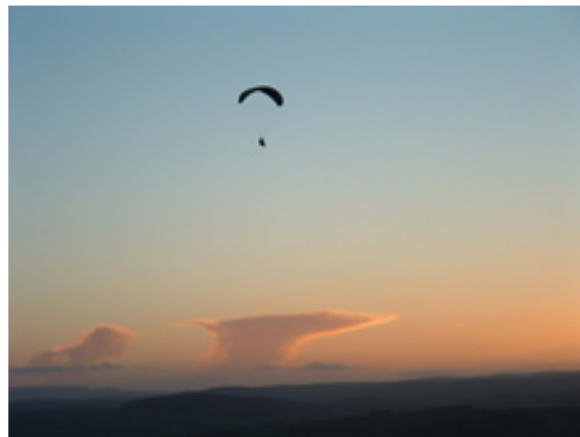
And when the phone rings? Well, then you get to explore the lovely deep lanes of Wales, and wash up at a nice little pub, or pull into some charming village, to collect the poor, exhausted pilots. In between, there's the banter, always fun to listen to, and after the day is over, you get bought a pint by anyone you rescued or who might want to be rescued the following day.

Yes, it's a hard life being a retrieve driver.

flo



'And I just gave him a bit of a shove, then...



Sunset at Long Mynd



Just follow the smoke signals



T shirts at the bbq



Taz flying at Dunstable



Team banana at Dunstable



Into the sunset



It's a hard life

## Club dates for your diary:

<p><b>DHPC XMAS DINNER 2005<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub></b></p> <p>Dunstable Cricket Club : Totternhoe</p> <p>Friday 13th January : 8pm</p> <p>Smoked Salmon Platter or Crispy Coated Camembert</p> <p>Butterfly Chicken breast, with Lemon &amp; Tarragon Marinade or Braised Lamb Shank, with a Red Wine and Rosemary Sauce or Spinach and Mushroom Filo Parcel</p> <p>15 GBP / person (subsidised!)</p>	<p><b>The Small Thin RePack</b></p> <p>Dunstable Cricket Club : Totternhoe</p> <p>Wednesday 8th February : 8pm</p> <p><b>AGM</b></p> <p>Dunstable Cricket Club : Totternhoe</p> <p>Wednesday 8th March: 8pm</p>
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### Christmas do Highlights include:

Prize-giving for notable flying achievements.  
(Presented by our very own MC, Mr Matthew Moore)  
Prize-giving for slightly less noble flying exploits.  
Party Poppers, hats, streamers and fun suitable for all ages  
Fine Food, Fine company and erudite conversation  
A short speech by our esteemed Chairwoman.  
The Bar will be open

All for only 15 pounds per person !!  
(Contact Kenny if you need another menu form.)

### volunteers

Over the course of the year we have had requests from local newspapers, radio and from other clubs for interviews and talks about our club sites. We are looking for someone who enjoys public speaking or would like to raise the profile of the sport locally. We need a volunteer to give a brief talk to the London Wing\* on flying the Dunstable sites and the coaching scheme.

\* A group for HG & PG pilots who meet socially in London for discussion and symposia. Sessions are at a Central London location, usually a pub where we may have a separate meeting room. We also have a program of visiting speakers, or set topics for discussion. <http://www.smartgroups.com/group/group.cfm?GID=2745874>

**Important:** Who do you think the trophies should go to this time?  
Please send in your suggestions before the **Christmas do**. (Thanks)  
To Helen - [chairman@dhpc.info](mailto:chairman@dhpc.info)

Trophies: (Any other suggestions?!)

<b>Clubman</b> (Contribution to the club)	<b>Chris Ellison</b> (Longest distance from Dunstable)
<b>Club pilot paraglider</b> (Most improved)	<b>George Farley</b> (Bent aluminium)
<b>Club pilot hang glider</b> (Most improved)	<b>Torn Nylon</b>
<b>XC para</b> (Longest distance)	<b>Tree Hugger</b>
<b>XC hang</b> (Longest distance)	Any other silly ones.

Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> Dec - An email from Keith Clapson to Adam Stanfield:

Yo Wrinkly Ninja, how did you get on at the Mynd on Sunday?

There was some flying to be had at Dunstable but only for a few hours around lunchtime. It soon got very light as Taz found out (see piccies). I'm sure that it was about this same time last year that he did something similar to earn him the Tree Hugger of the year award then. It was such a shame to see this after Taz had demonstrated some perfect takeoffs, landings, touch and gos, flying and last week even kiting his glider from the lower side of the fence, all the way through the kissing gate onto take off above the fence without so much as a flutter. Nevertheless, there is always an up side. And in this case, it served to prove to our newcomers Martin and Fran that landing in the trees at Dunstable is, although not good for the glider or clothing, typically an unpainful event. And also what happens if you try to soar in nill wind conditions ;-)

We seem to be having great trouble deciding who to give the Tree Hugger award to this year for PG (Greg and HGs excluded). And we can't give it to Taz two years running. I was wondering if it would be much simpler to give out awards to people who have flown all year **without** landing in a tree at Dunstable? (Taz = Thickset Assault Zeppelin. See t-shirt above. Ed)

CK

PS John - photos for newsletter? Kenny, maybe you could, in your role as safety officer add something relevant. I'm afraid I just can't think of anything at all serious. 8o}



#### Club committee:

Chairman -	Helen Appleton -	07970 404036
Secretary -	Tanya Ephgrave -	07971 522192
Treasurer -	Pete Large -	01844 214854
Membership -	Keith Clapson -	0779 3818875
Safety -	Kenny Eaton -	01908 604621
Webmaster -	Adam Collis -	01582 629594
Newsletter -	John Cardiff -	07870 374021
PG Coach -	Graham Ballard -	07742 598636
HG Coach -	Andy Scott -	020 8959 8117
PG Comps -	John Cardiff/ Keith Clapson	
HG Comps -	Gary Freedman -	01923 858287
Dunstable site liaison -	Greg Leveridge-	01525 715656
Sharpenhoe site liaison -	Martin Sims -	01525 633536
Chinnor Site liaison -	Markus Kinch -	01296 434714

## Send 'em in

If there is anything in particular that you want to see in this magazine or have any inspirational flying or holiday stories you would like to share, or place your WANTED and FOR SALE ads, please drop me a line at:

[newseditor@dhpc.info](mailto:newseditor@dhpc.info)

**Please note: All current Small Ads will last three months until the next newsletter unless you let me know that you want to keep it until the next time. Cheers**

Skyline Phase Paragliding Harness – Nearly New & In Perfect Condition.

- harness is designed like a bucket seat
- side covering with bags
- side chest strap runs through carbine; this, combined with the DAS (= DiagonalActiveSystem) results in a much more solid behaviour of the whole harness
- side chest-straps adjustable with flat latches
- Free-sliding shoulder straps allow the pilot to move in a comfortable upright position and different seat positions in flight without tiresome adjusting
- free-sliding shoulder straps are adjustable by flat latches
- ergonomic stitched foam layers on back (1,5 cm foam)
- integrated Speedsystem
- seatboard extension goes over rolls
- "Falling out"-Protection by Safe-T-System
- **Five-leaf container**, installed under seat (IRC); low and central centre of gravity; very short handle(short connection between container and handle)– all common rescue chutes are suitable!
- 18 cm special foam protector



Rolls Royce of harnesses - great to fly - responsive and supremely comfortable. This is simply the best harness money can buy. Cost £495 New. Will except £245 .

Tom 07863 5627690 or [kane73@supanet.com](mailto:kane73@supanet.com)

## Safety Matters:

**REMINDER:** Would people PLEASE remember: there is no landing allowed on the LGC field. If you land there in an emergency, pack up at the edge of the field, and PLEASE see an official to apologize. Most of the LGC members (who pay a yearly fortune) rightly see us as trespassing on private ground. Help us to keep our good but fragile relationship.

All safety issues should be reported to the Club's Safety Officer, Kenny Eaton. 01908 604621

## DHPC Coaching Scheme

The Dunstable hang Gliding & Paragliding Club has an active coaching scheme which aims to help new low airtime pilots in a club to gain enough experience to safely fly unsupervised on any site throughout the UK.

The main coaching done throughout the club is just to come out flying with either the club coaches themselves or talking/flying with more experienced pilots. It's no use just sitting at home every weekend with the ink still wet on your Club Pilot certificate, just waiting for someone to phone you to come flying. **You** must get in touch with the coaches on a Thursday or preferably Friday night, after the evening weather forecast, to find out where everyone is going at the weekend. We leave it entirely up to you to get in touch with us!

By flying regularly this is the only way you are going to progress in this sport - the majority of low airtime pilots joining our club drop out in the first year. We never see you at the top of the hill on good flying days! Where are you? You have spent over £2000 on lessons and a new glider, yet you never come flying. Why?

Lesson 1: Contact the club coaches on a Friday night

Lesson 2: Meet the following morning

Lesson 3: Travel with a more experienced pilot/coach who can take you to other sites that he/she knows well.

Lesson 4: Spend the day flying!

Lesson 5: Try to wipe the grin off you face that evening after a great day!

**Contact any of the club coaches listed below, they will be only too pleased to give any advice needed.**

<b>Paragliding Club Coaches:</b>	<b>Graham Ballard (Lead Coach)</b> , Milton Keynes	<b>Mob:</b> 07742 598636	P
	<b>Kenny Eaton</b> Milton Keynes	<b>Mob:</b> 0794 970 9097	P
	<b>Tanya Ephgrave</b> , Milton Keynes	<b>Tel:</b> 01908 201194 <b>Mob:</b> 07971 522192	AP
	<b>Pete Large</b> Thame, Oxfordshire.	<b>Tel:</b> 01844 214854	AP
	<b>Vince Wakefield</b> Welwyn Garden City.	<b>Tel:</b> 01707 890741 <b>Mob:</b> 07968 320564	AP
	<b>Helen Appleton</b>	<b>Mob:</b> 07970 404036	P
	<b>Steve Meadowcroft</b>	<b>Tel:</b> 01234 720012 <b>Mob:</b> 07836 756810	P
	<b>Keith White</b> Bushey, Herts	<b>Tel:</b> 020 8386 7841 <b>Mob:</b> 07968 900068	CP
	<b>John Tring</b> Hitchin, Herts	<b>Tel:</b> 01438 833215	P
	<b>Vince Fenlon</b> Dunstable, Bedfordshire	<b>Tel:</b> 01582 667332 <b>Mob:</b> 07831 216411	AP
	<b>Hugh Ginty</b> Edgeware, Middlesex	<b>Tel:</b> 0208 906 1640 <b>Mob:</b> 07773 293594	AP
	<b>Richard Greaves</b> Totternhoe, Beds.	<b>Tel:</b> 01525 221283 <b>Mob:</b> 07776 346086	AP

<b>Hang Gliding Club Coaches</b>	<b>Andy Scott</b>	<b>Tel:</b> 020 8959 8117
	<b>Paul Seminara</b> Chalfont St Peter, Bucks	<b>Tel:</b> 01494 873888
	<b>Matt Moore</b> Enfield Middlesex	<b>Tel:</b> 0208 367 8068
	<b>Bill Bell</b> St Albans, Hertfordshire	<b>Tel:</b> 01727 858698 <b>Mob:</b> 07768 028899
	<b>Gary Freedman</b> Radlett, Hertfordshire	<b>Tel:</b> 01923 858287

Graham Ballard  
Lead Club Coach

