

UK Gliding challenge 2006

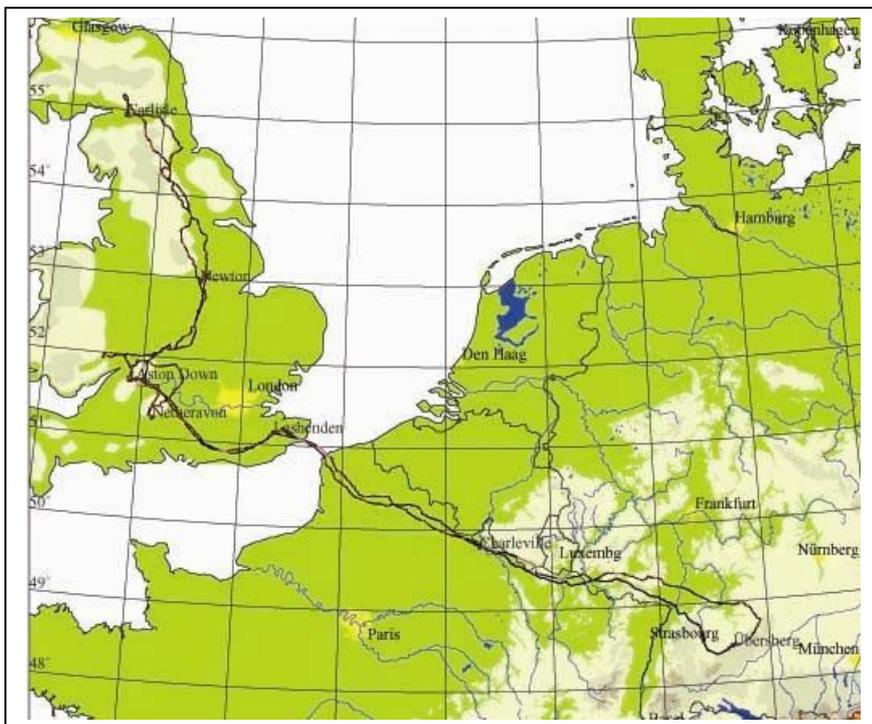
Why would three German glider pilots, only equipped with three self-launching gliders, no crews, no trailers, all their luggage stored away in the gliders, come up with the idea of flying to England, a country which is not exactly famous for brilliant gliding conditions?

Well, there are at least three good reasons:

1. Hartmut Hummel (that's me) has done 16 gliding expeditions of this kind since 1989, visiting virtually all European countries – only the UK was missing.
2. We thought to ourselves that the British gliding conditions can't be all that bad; after all, two of this year's World Champions are British, and the British team is consistently one of the top teams in the world.
3. The British are known to be very much individualists, so we thought they would probably take quite an interest in this kind of gliding challenge.

Two steps to UK

On the 15th of July 2006 Albert and I set off as planned from our home club in South-West Germany and fly to Marpingen in Saarland where we are planning to meet up with our third man Günter. The conditions aren't brilliant as the warm air only produces weak blue thermals. Just before 4pm we make radio contact with Günter, we meet up near Saarlouis and fly via Thionville and Sedan to Charleville Mezieres. We set up camp and have a restful night in our three single rooms (tents) next to the gliders.



Step two

16th July 06: Take-off at 1pm, we fly along the Belgian border to Arras and on to the coast at St Inglevert, where we arrive at 800 m (2500 ft). We fire up our little helpers and climb to 1800 m (5400 ft). Halfway across the Channel we switch the engines off and glide to Lashenden-Headcorn, where we land at 5.20pm.

We are surprised to find that it's very busy at Headcorn. All types of recreational aviation apart from gliding seem to be going on at the same time here, lots of visitors on the airfield, and in the middle of all this is an amazingly laid back man in charge. We are impressed.



17th July 06: Our first long flight in England:

Take-off at 11.51 local time. We take a Western route along the coast to avoid the Gatwick TMA, and we find surprisingly good blue thermals. Then we go North, zigzagging around all the restricted airspace via Lasham and Husbands Bosworth. Near Syerston the thermals begin to die and we decide to land here, even though the airfield looks deserted from the air. We carry on to Newark, which according to our maps is also a gliding site, but we realise that it seems to be a disused airfield. That makes our decision easier: We land at Syerston. Günter is the first one to touch down and tells us that he can see the letters

RAF on the tower. Albert and I land anyway and have a good look around the airfield, but we are a bit uncertain about what to expect the following day.

18th July 06: New day, new luck:

We receive a very friendly welcome from the Air Cadets and their commanders and witness a perfectly organised flying operation.



We take off at 12.06 pm and are happy to inform the Cadets that we are climbing at 2.5 m/s. Today we want to fly to Scotland. At first the thermals are quite good, but further North, in the area West of Leeming, conditions begin to deteriorate. Our attempt to get into the Western hills of the Lake District fails miserably. We have to retreat and climb away inch by inch. When we reach the first lakes the thermals get better, and we even see the first cumulus since our departure from Germany.



Unfortunately this doesn't last long. We run out of lift approx. 25 km North of Carlisle and we decide to land at Carlisle. A fellow glider pilot had watched us from home, he rushes to Carlisle airfield and is a great help to us on this "commercial airport".

19th July 06: Only an attempt

Very warm and very stable conditions. Take-off 12.23. We don't find any usable lift. We need to use the engine-generated thermals for the second time. We try to find some lift when Albert tells us that his engine has suddenly stopped during the cooling-down cycle at low revs. He can't retract the engine and has to land in Carlisle, which he reaches with only a few metres reserve. We land as well and examine the engine. Unfortunately it's a major engine failure, which can't be repaired locally. So for Albert this means the end of his journey.



20th July 06: After a rain shower in the morning we accompany Albert to Carlisle train station. He has booked a flight from Manchester to Stuttgart and will then come back with his car and the trailer to pick his glider up.

21st July 06: No flight to Scotland

We are about to take off when an airport employee tells us that we can't fly to Scotland because of bad weather. We had already changed our plans anyway and based on the weather information we got from the Internet we are now planning on flying South again.

Under good clouds we climb Eastwards and on to Shildon. Past Darlington and then down South again.

As we look over to the Lake District we are surprised to see that over there it's blue again, even though the tree-less hills with their dark rock surfaces should produce better thermic conditions. We fly East past Leeds and Bradford and carry on between Manchester and Sheffield. At 6.21 pm we reach Husbands Bosworth, our goal for today, and receive another warm welcome.

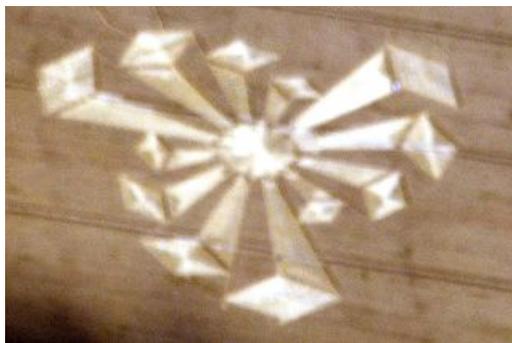
Hus Bos are hosting a regional competition, and of course we can already see a band of clouds in the West on the horizon.

The next two days are rest days for us, the competition pilots go through two rigging and gridding exercises. The second day also brings an impressive storm. On that day we are the guests of Philip Sturley, an ASH 26 pilot and friend of Günter's. He picks us up from the airfield and we have a lovely afternoon at his house. Back at Hus Bos we realise that dramatic things must have happened here. One dented trailer and the damaged Wilga bear witness of today's weather. Fortunately our gliders have survived it all well, only our tent rods are bent and our accommodation now comprises ponds.

24th July 06: Sightseeing flight

We want to fly to Wales today. We take off before the competitors and fly West in very good thermals - which go blue and weaker the further West we go. South of Hereford we turn around because the ground is higher towards the West and our height band seems too low for comfort. We fly South to Upavon, then to Oxford and around Weston-on-the-Green, and finally via Gloucester to Nympsfield, where we land after 430 km of sightseeing.

Another friendly welcome from the local glider pilots. We pitch our tents and retire to a pub nearby.



25th July 06: Around London

The undulating airfield is a bit iffy for my little 30bhp engine, so I take a winch launch. We launch at 12.12, which is a bit early as it turns out.

I don't quite manage to contact the first thermal off the wire and need to gain a few feet by use of the engine. We fly through the narrow gap between Kemble and Fairford and on in a South-Easterly direction. Thermals are excellent, so we make good progress via Newbury and Lasham. The last good thermal however seems to be just South of Lasham - the sea breeze has set in and stops any further thermic development. A very long glide to Parham follows. Here we need to start the engines, but at Ringmer we find lift. From here we easily make it to Challock. The conditions are perfect.

Cloud base is just under 5000 ft. We fly towards Folkestone for a bit and take in the dramatic coastline and the general views. Landing at Challock.



26th July: Back to the Continent

We issue the flight plan via telephone and leave the UK at 2.17 pm, climbing via Folkestone. Visibility is rather poor so that after a short while all we can see is water and a few ships. The horizon can be determined through weak inversion lines. 20 minutes later we cross the French coast and shortly afterwards we find the first French thermals. We progress fast in strong continental thermals and change our flight plan to the new destination Charleville Mezieres. It's over 200 km away and it's already 4.30 pm. A bit bold - but we get there! We arrive with the last evening thermals at 7.10 pm.

27th July 06: Going home

The sky is overcast. No sun = no thermals. The meteorologist in the Météo France office is not very hopeful as a front is rapidly approaching from the West. We either have to set off soon and get away before the weather gets here, or we are stuck for 1 to 2 days. We decide to set off. Three engine lifts are necessary to get to the better weather, which starts at the German border. We find some thermals again near Merzig in Germany, and Günter can get enough height for a final glide into his home club Marpingen. He lands there shortly afterwards, eagerly awaited by his wife.

I need to cover another 200 km, in very unstable conditions with Cu Nimbs growing at an impressive rate around me. I manage to get to within 24 km of my home club, but then I have to use the engine one last time as the 30 m above glide would not be sufficient in the pouring rain I'm flying through. I arrive back home at 4.11 pm and let the journey pass before my eyes as I sit the rain out in the comfort of my glider.

We saw the best side of England and its gliding community and are impressed with the level of gliding activity in the country.

Translation: Claudia Büngen and Nick Hill

Statistics:

Total distance according to OLC: approx. 3000 km

Total flying time: 52 hours

Total time running the engine: 2:15

Total for nine take-offs: 1:00

Crossing the Channel: 0:30

Escape from bad weather: 0:34

Lift from Parham to Ringmer: 0:11

See also: *Sailplain & Gliding* February – March 2007



Günter

Albert

Hartmut

The pilots: Hartmut Hummel, born 1945, approx. 7000 hours, Ventus CM D-KDHH
Günter Fritz, born 1951, approx. 6000 hours, ASH 26 E D-KEGF
Albert Kiessling, born 1946, approx. 6000 hours, Ventus 2 CM D-KFAA

Special thanks to: Claudia Büngen, Dipl.-Fachübersetzerin (FH) for translation