

## Cerdanya April 2004

‘The most fun I’ve had with my clothes on in years!’

The intended CGC trip to Cerdanya, Spain reduced to one person so the contact was made directly with the organisers of the European Soaring Club, Brian and Gill Spreckley. Their deep experience in running these events, their supreme competence as glider pilots and special knowledge, particularly of the uniquely favourable microclimate of the Cerdanya valley in the Pyrenees, all contributed to make the two week gliding holiday a stunning success.

Feeling somewhat over-awed in such auspicious company with my low airtime in single seaters (15 hrs.), the first day started with a two hours familiarisation flight with Brian in the Duo Discus. Watching the maestro throw this wingy ship around close in to the mountain valleys was an absolute delight to watch, but my flaw was to lightly follow-through on the stick rudder and trim, so when it was my turn to fly, I made the dumb mistake of trying muscle the glider around like *him* (ha ha fat chance). Anyway it was vastly informative and I really related to Brian’s ‘go-get-em-and-take-no-prisoners’ way of attacking lift and traversing terrain.

But make no mistake, the Spreckley operation is run by pilots, for pilots. If you are there just for the social aspect, the pace will quickly leave you behind. This is not a school for gentleness and soft stroking of people’s feelings. If you screw up, Brian is not backward in coming forward with a sharp comment, but always done in the interest of safety and improvement. I guess it all depends how steep you want your learning curve raised. Personally, it got so steep as to prompt the first words of this article and I personally wouldn’t have it any other way!

I got 40 hours of flying in; 11 out of 13 days were flyable; got two hour soaring Cross Country endorsement done; Silver 5 hour duration; Silver distance; Gold Height; flew in wave on two days to 18,000’ amsl; gained the confidence to punch through vicious rotor in order to get to the wave; thermalled close and tight to the mountains soooo many times; cruised over the ski lifts and pistes; made many good friends with like-minded glider pilots and was just stunned every flight by the unbelievable beauty of soaring in the snow-capped Pyrenees.

For example, start the Silver 50k at 14,000’, bomb along a wave bar at 100 knots, hop over to the next downwind wavebar and finish the leg at 11,000’. It must be one of the fastest Silver distance legs submitted! “Cheat!”, I hear you cry, ok ok I promise to do it to HusBos soon!

An easy route down meant head down for a good sleep on the overnight ferry to Le Havre, then with two of us spelling the driving we easily made it to Foix, with just 100 km left to Cerdanya, all in one day’s driving. By noon the next day, we were in the air.

Rigging usually starts around 1000 and is easily done on the huge tarmac apron, then the all-important briefing is at 1100. At this, Brian, or occasionally Gill, will discuss the synoptic charts and ascents with the particular relevance of flying in Cerdanya and the surrounding mountains and valleys. An analysis of the previous day’s flying and tips and observations about ways to improve and enhance your flying are punctuated with some harmless leg-pulling. After dispersal, gliders are towed out to the launch point, with most of the getaway aerotows occurring between 1230-1330.

Flying will go on easily beyond 1930 with some of the best occurring later in the day, leaving ample time for the serious X-C pilot. However land-out sites are few and far between in most areas, so this is a go-carefully zone.

During my time we used combinations of punchy thermal lift, wave, valley convergence, lee-side rotor and evening anabatic wind to get aloft. Loggers, GPS plus artificial horizon are *de riguer* and we were always wary of being high in wave and the valley clagging over under us. Brian was a great watchdog for potentially threatening conditions, although I fortunately did not see it pan out that way once. They don't call him 'Mr. AWAC' for nothing!

The Dunstable mob were there *en force* on their annual pilgrimage and they proved good company, often right there upon landing with your tow-out gear, ready to help you clear the runway.

The German Club were also very much in evidence, always jolly and laughing and having more fun in their K-7 than a barrel-load of monkeys. Like our Capstans, wherever you went, it was there!

Although I towed my own Mosquito to Spain, the Soaring Club welcomes private flyers, but has a number of good gliders besides the Duo Discus, which include three LS4's, an Astir, Pegase, K-21, LS8, etc... One option is to fly to Toulouse and an easy train to Le Tour Carole, near the field and then use their gliders.

Gill organised all the accommodation for us, which was just fine. The area lays in the 'Y' of the borders between France, Andorra and Spain, very much in Catalan country, so there are so many choices for accommodation and eating out. Family members have plenty to do in the area, such as caving, horse riding, hot springs, skiing from many areas. If they ski at La Molina, you have the opportunity to fly over them, not too close naturally, as none of the glider pilots would *ever* want to beat up the ski slopes, would they?

Many thanks to Brian and Gill for a splendid fortnight, Dave the tug pilot (always in safe hands there), David the airport manager (perfect English, or rather American and very helpful), but particularly to our Rod Ward, mentor and nice guy, who sold me this wicked glider and gave so much encouragement.

Now, my vote for next year is to take a Club K-21 down there, plus a gaggle of CGC owners and their ships. Diamond height anyone?

If these photos don't juice you up, then I can't think what will. Jeez, I still can't get the grin off my face just thinking about it all.....

Have a look at <http://www.soaringclub.com>

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