

On midsummer's day with a forecast of a high pressure and light winds I headed for the Lake District. True to it's usual form the Met. Office's definition of 'light' was a bit different from mine. I flew for a short while in the strong north-westerly wind at Clough Head but kept finding myself disoriented and quite worried. After landing and having a chat with some others I pulled myself together and took off again at about one thirty. A little experimentation revealed that in the somewhat bumpy conditions I had been looking up quite a lot, a habit to do with observing clouds. Of course, when I looked down, I found rather larger mountains than I had flown for nearly a year gyrating about below me. By making myself look down most of the time and periodically looking up instead of vice-versa the problem went away.

Working my way southwards along the ridge I noted that several pilots had climbed to the main ridge crest. Considering the wind strength (and being a bit of a wimp) I decided to stay farther out towards the valley where a couple of other gliders kept me company. Perhaps my view of the mountains was not as spectacular as it might have been at the crest but I had the advantage of Tornados and Harriers flying along the valley to maintain my adrenaline level and encourage me not to sink out.

The main ridge of Helvellyn consists of alternate ridges and cloughs and I hopped from one ridge to another until I got to Lower Man, just before Helvellyn. There the component of the wind along the hill became much stronger making me sort of slip along Helvellyn Screes rather lower than I would have liked. Fortunately the lift improved and somewhere near Whelp Side I thermalled to a height above that of the main ridge. I had now lost the gliders that had been with me and was unsure what to do next. Looking around I spotted another glider flying between Dollywagon Pike and Seat Sandal, across the tarn and onto Great Rigg, a spur off Fairfield. The pilot immediately found a good thermal which, of course, had finished by the time I got there. Possibly a little impatient I took a lesser thermal and hopped onto Heron Pike. This was not a good move as this hill was uncomfortably off the wind and I felt in danger of turbulence from Stone Arthur, a spur off the ridge I was soaring.

Sinking and slipping towards Rydal Water in the valley stimulated enough brain cells to make me look properly at the sky instead of the nasty rocks, other gliders and jets. There was a dark messy looking cloud somewhere over Grasmere that I thought might indicate some sort of convergence. My nerves were a little frayed by this time so I decided to go for it and accept that I might have to land if things didn't work out. Fortunately they did and soon I was drifting towards Ambleside, sinking a little after a short climb but at least in better lift. The RAF must have realised I was getting a bit low because as a further encouragement, in addition to their own jets, they thoughtfully sent a Sea King helicopter to circle over Ambleside and threaten to climb up underneath me.

Enough was definitely enough. As the thermal died I glided to Wansfell where a pilot was packing a canopy just below the crest. I learned later he had nearly been blown over the back. In the stronger wind I had to be very careful soaring the hill but after some work a small thermal took me to the next ridge, Applethwaite, behind Troutbeck. Like Wansfell it was in full sun but not working very well. Was this the effect of sea air? Stretching my doubtful IQ to the limit I again came up with the bright idea of looking around properly. There, smirking at me from higher up along the ridge over Yoke and High Street, was another dark messy looking cloud. When the exhausted penny finally dropped I moved towards it along the ridge and was soon drifting downwind towards Kendal at cloudbase. This was fine except that my cloud was quite isolated and drifting towards Carnforth on the coast. Inland the clouds looked better and there was one particularly convenient cumulous drifting parallel to my cloud a

few kilometres to the east and slightly downwind. I glided to it and had just reached cloudbase again when the cloud developed in a big spread out mass, apparently becoming incorporated into a large area of convergence. Expecting to stay in a widening area of lift I moved inland under this cloud but the lift soon diminished and I began to sink. In retrospect I probably should have moved seawards hoping convergence would take me farther south but instead I decided to try for the high ground south of Sedburgh. Sink soon put paid to that plan and scratching around some sunlit ploughed fields in the Lune Valley was to no avail either. I finally landed at about five o'clock behind the Middleton Fell inn on the road from Sedburgh to Kirkby Lonsdale.

It had taken three and a half hours of quite hard and nervous flying to cover forty six kilometres. Interestingly, Tony Shepherd flew from Eskdale to Keswick that day taking off at six thirty in the evening. It's a funny old game.

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