

Long Mynd Soaring Club

Skills – Things to do on the ridge

By Geoff Minshull

I remember, when I was a beginner many years ago, Len Hull, a very well known pilot from the Peak District, telling me that there is always something you can learn from every flight, and that there is no such thing as “boring soaring”. At the time, I was just starting to go XC, and was a bit dismissive of what he said – what’s the point, I thought somewhat arrogantly, of just beating up and down a ridge?

Well, the longer I have flown, the more XCs I’ve done, the more countries I have flown in, I’ve begun to realise he was right. A good pilot – or a pilot who wants to become good – will make the most of, and learn from, every flight.

Ridge soaring the Mynd is a good example. If it’s not possible to go XC, or if you don’t want to go XC, or if you feel you haven’t enough experience yet to go XC, there’s still a lot of challenges you can set yourself on the ridge, whether you’re a paraglider or a hang glider pilot. For example....

- Get away from the comfort zone of always being able to top land back at launch; go further down, or up, the ridge than you have done before. If you’re on a paraglider, you can often slope land anyway, and probably relaunch (after getting all the bracken out of your lines!). And it’s always less crowded – and safer - away from launch.
- See how many times you can go from one end of the ridge to the other, and how quickly you can do it. Practise using your speed bar.
- Fly along the ridge and look at the terrain. Work out which bits of the ridge would be working better if the wind was slightly off to the north or south.
- How far out in front can you get, and still get back to the ridge? Set a goal of a particular field, or house, or other landmark.
- How high can you get? See if you can beat your personal best.
- Practise your thermal ling by getting to a set height (say 1000’) three times in different places on the ridge. Keep trying until you achieve this.
- Practice banking in thermals, so turn tightly, then flatter. Try to thermal in a smooth 360°, then more of an oval shape, as if you were searching for the core. (Do this preferably when you are on your own – you might get in each other’s way if you do this in a gaggle).
- Practise your top landings.

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- Practise slope landing.
- Try spot landings, either on top or in the bottom field, putting out some sort of marker to aim for.
- Try different landing approaches (especially on top landing). If you always use S-turns, try out an aircraft approach, and vice-versa. See how close you can get to your intended landing spot with the different approach.
- Practise your ground handling, something you can do whether it's strong wind or light winds.
- Practise killing a paraglider wing different ways on landing, for example, pulling your Cs or Ds.
- Practise your forward launches.
- If it's very light wind, launch anyway and see if you can stay up. Learning to scratch effectively, and safely, is a key skill. Be one of the first to launch, not one of the last. Again, PGs can easily slope land for another go – something which HGs can't!
- Build up your strength by flying for a long time. If you're thinking of starting going XC, you may well need to be in the air, on the ridge, a long time before you get away, so use the non-XC days to build up your tolerance. Once you have been in the air for a long time in one flight, if you get uncomfortable, you can work out what adjustments you need to make to your equipment (harness settings, flight deck position, glove thickness, etc.).
- Practise using your instruments, e.g. looking at an air map, adjusting your GPS (BUT only if you are well away from other gliders, and not too close to the ridge!).
- Practise using your instruments by programming in a ridge run, with proximity alarms, waypoints, etc. and then flying it.
- Practise reaching for your reserve handle. Touch it each time you fly, so knowing where it is becomes instinctive.

And, of course, you can just boat around and enjoy the flight – something which is particularly nice to do in the evenings, and which I really enjoy doing. But whatever you do, make sure you do it safely! The best flight is the one where you launch safely and land safely, not having taken too many risks, and not having scared yourself silly.