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ABGC wings

A FEW weeks ago, an old regular at my local told me that he had been briefly involved in gliding when serving in Germany. He was based at RAF Grugan and in 1954 was supporting the British team at a competition at Schfoldendorf (?). Apparently the Brits did very well. Badges were handed out to the UK crews, which had the letters "ABGC". He thought it might mean "Association of British Gliding Clubs" but I have never heard of it. Can anyone throw any light on the origins of the badge?

Peter Davies, via email

Tertiary wave...

BRENNIG James's judgement that the Conwy Valley and its environs is a superb wave playground is correct (*Unexplored, the UK's best wave*, December 2005-January 2006, p8). Rod Witter subsequently asked why Denbigh pilots have never been able to reach 25,000ft-plus in the primary wave to their west (*More on Welsh wave*, February-March 2006, p7). In my opinion the answer to Rod's question is that when the Conwy Valley is at its fantastic best, pilots from Denbigh are probably denied access due to the wind direction and/or cloud cover. The latter can make a Denbigh start unlikely, if not impossible. Occasionally I have spoken to Rod on the radio, when overhead Denbigh airfield above full cloud cover.

My explanation after nearly 2,500 hours soaring over North Wales from Sleap, in Kestrel 41, is that narrow steep-sided valleys, similar to Conwy, only work well when the wind is skewed so that the geographical contour comes closer to the natural wavelength of the airmass. In the Conwy Valley I guess 10 or 20° south of west is about an optimum wind direction.

In another context it is a mistake to believe that all significant wave in North Wales is related to Snowdonia or the Conwy Valley. There are plenty of sources from Aberdovey through to Rhyl. Another influence, often present, is the residue of wave from the Wicklow Mountains across the Irish Sea, reinforcing or interfering. I have soared in the dregs of wave west off Holyhead, which came from this source.

My highest climb was nearly 28,000ft, climbing at 500ft/min, adjacent to Llanrwst, which was terminated by oxygen equipment failure. I have the photographs and the old-fashioned barograph trace of this flight. The aerotow start from Sleap was 800ft.

On another occasion in a much more powerful system, there were only two holes visible in the total cloud cover right across North Wales. Starting at 18,000ft just west of Corwen I reached the downwind hole of the two, which was the secondary of the Conwy system, below 14,000ft. Cloud tops were in the order of 9,000ft; the wind strength had denied me the primary. To my surprise, visible in the hole was the Llanddulas gravel-loading pier sticking out to sea. This suggests a wind south of 250°. Climbing



Can you tell us what ABGC (see left) stands for...?

through 22,000ft at 600ft/min, and the time 14.00hrs GMT on November 2 with sunset due between 16.00hrs and 16.30, I had no choice but to scuttle for home. As there was no GPS or Decca, the descent was quite exciting. Again I had missed the promised 30,000ft, which had been my personal goal for some time.

In conclusion, my opinion remains that the best access to North Wales' waves, including Snowdonia, is Sleap airfield on the Shropshire plain. If you have an hour or two to spare I will attempt to explain how and why!

Vic Carr, via email

French Glider Pilot's Licence

AS one of three Brits in our club (Tarn et Garonne, about 60km north-west of Toulouse) who have French licences I read with interest Les Beale's article in the February-March S&G (*Getting licensed the French way*, p48). He seems to have had, for various reasons, far more problems than us. In my case the whole process took less than two months.

In France every pilot must pass a medical, either a DGAC Class 2 carried out by an approved French doctor or a JAA Class 2, which can be carried out in the UK. With hindsight it would have been better if Les, having some minor problems, had gone down the second route in first place.

I go to a French doctor nearby who charges 40 euros, including a cardiogram.

The sub at our club is 152 euros and in addition every pilot pays 151 euros to the FFVV (French equivalent of the BGA). This second item, called a *licence assurance*, pays for, among other things, third party insurance (*responsabilité civile*) giving cover up to 4.5 million euros for each pilot anywhere in the EU. With the current problems with insurance in the UK, the BGA should consider this system. With a medical and insurance, a pilot (at the CFI's discretion) is allowed to fly solo in a French-registered glider as a student pilot, that is, local flying only. Only if you wish to fly cross-country do you need a licence. So having passed his medical, Les could have flown solo locally during the rest of his epic struggle with French bureaucracy.

To obtain a licence a pilot needs a certain amount of solo flying and soaring (not much), pass a flying test and pass a written theoretical exam. Since this is in French this is the real hurdle for British pilots. The exam is based on the *Manuel du Pilote Vol à Voile*, which is the French training bible. It consists of all the advice and theory a pilot needs,

starting from basic pre-solo to reach cross-country standard. There are 10 chapters and at the end of each there are 25-30 multi-choice questions in simple French to test your understanding, answers at the end of the book. Any moderately experienced British pilot should be ashamed if he cannot answer the majority of these questions correctly. The exam for the licence consists of 50 multi-choice questions all taken from those in the book, so you will have seen all the questions and answers beforehand. We achieved 100 per cent.

Les's experience should not deter British pilots resident in France from joining a local club, where as he says you will meet a lot of nice and helpful people as in most clubs the world over (and the flying is cheaper, 15-20 euros for an aerotow in our club).

Incidentally, two of us are private owners of a French-registered glider and with the help of the locals we have sorted out the system and have been approved to carry out all the maintenance work.

Bernard Davey, via email

Watch out for the bored bears

LIKE most people who subscribe to S&G, for me a great day always changes to an 'awesome' one whenever a shiny new issue drops into our mailbox. OK, it may be six weeks old by the time it reaches us, but Hell, this is the frozen north where mail arrives by huskies only after out-running an assortment of bored bears.

Imagine my surprise: *Gliding in Canada* (February-March 2006, p32). I could hardly turn to the relevant page fast enough.

Soaring Western Canada – gee, my own back yard! Now Canada is a big place and Canadian glider pilots number just over one thousand spread across this vast country, so it's hard to get a handle on what's going on here. It's true in Alberta we get some great summer prairie flying days and the winter lee waves coming off the rocks are countless. But the undisputed Western Canada soaring jewel is Invermere and the Columbia valley BC. During the summer months many pilots migrate to the Invermere Soaring Centre (www.soartherockies.com) from all parts of the world, including the UK. But by far the biggest contingency consists of weekend pilots from Alberta!

My club, Canadian Rockies Soaring (www.canadianrockiessoaring.com), based at Invermere, has several 1,000km to its credit and every year many 750km flights.

There is something else worth noting: the Invermere Soaring Centre is open from April to September, seven days a week, and has gliders for rent, it's world class mountain soaring in English!

Martin Jones, CALGARY, Alberta

Please send letters (marked "for publication") to the editor at editor@sailplaneandgliding.co.uk or the address on p3, including your full contact details.

Deadline for the next issue is **April 11**