

Thermalling Soaring @ Nympsfield

BGGC Notes are articles produced by experienced Club instructors and pundits. The articles provide topical and informed views on a particular feature of the flying at Nympsfield. They are not intended as substitutes for formal training or detailed instructor briefings.

Early in the day.

Good thermal soaring days in the UK generally have winds of less than 15 knots between West and North East. This is excellent for Nympsfield, because the first small thermals of the morning are carried up the ridges and encouraged on their way upwards by the hill lift. Most club "pundits" are very happy to winch launch early in the day when the thermals are coming off the local ridges, cloud base is low and thermals are close together. Unless you are full of water getting away is almost guaranteed. Thermals generally get wider and stronger as they rise. Being on top of a hill has the advantage that thermals that have started on the valley bottom have an additional 500 feet to organize themselves by the time that we launch into them.

After it has been soarable for a few hours

When the cloud base is higher the thermals are further apart, it is often worth taking an aerotow. Don't just blindly tow to 2,000'. If the tug pilot is any good you will be taken under every active cloud in the area so that you can release in lift. It is much better to be at 1,500' in lift than at 2,000' in sink.

Mid to late afternoon

On a light wind day, and sometimes much earlier if the wind is south westerly, the sea breeze sets up from the south west and Nympsfield becomes locally unsoarable. It is almost always possible to glide in from Cheltenham, Cirencester, Swindon or even Hereford, but remember that the wind below 2,000' will often be 15 knots SW, it won't be soarable and the ridges won't work. You thus need a good margin of height to glide in and to cross the north ridge, which may be producing strong sink. People have often got back at 8 o'clock or later, but it takes care. With a NW wind the Cotswold edge from Broadway to Cheltenham often produces lift late into the evening with sun and wind helping the evening thermals. If the wind is NE to SE of any significant strength then sea air is not a problem and it generally remains locally soarable as late as anywhere in the country.

Long Tasks

For a very long task it is necessary to use all the soarable day. If the first useable thermal appears at 10.00 am and you winch you will be lucky to start a task before 10.45. A 4,000' aerotow and a dive across the start line at 10.00 means that you can be 20 to 30 miles away (hopefully climbing) by 10.45. Especially if it becomes soarable earlier along your intended track than at Nympsfield, then a high tow can make the difference between success and failure.

Many 500 Km flights have been flown from Nympsfield, both in competitions and individually, including one in a Ka 6CR. Four 750 flights have been flown, including the first in Standard class in the UK. The lowest performance glider that has flown 300k is a Ka 7. Peter Scott once flew to near Edinburgh in an old wooden Oly 419. Many UK records have been flown from Nympsfield and BGA trophies been won.

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