

LET'S BE CAREFUL OUT THERE!

Sarah tackles the wave at Feshie, September 2006

Friday: It poured all day until 5pm, at which time I discovered that Sarah's trailer sidelights didn't work. It took me until dusk to sort it out. Finally got on the road soon after 10pm. The ALIENS in the old white Mondeo were even more disorganised than we were, and didn't get started until much later.

Saturday: It was a nice dry night with no wind, and we made good progress driving up the tube. The ALIENS passed us at the Scottish border after having been stopped by the Police, who were apparently disappointed at not finding any bald tyres etc. Arrived at the airfield about 8:30am under sunny skies and interesting wave clouds. I don't fly on the first day after an overnight drive, however. Shopping for provisions, then spent the afternoon relaxing at the house and listening to the radio. The best height I heard was 13,000ft. *Score so far: Wave 1, Sarah 0.*

Sunday: Rain all day. Called in at Drake's Nursery for tea and cakes, and watched the woodpeckers and squirrels just outside the window. Picked mushrooms, made bread, made popcorn, spun wool, while the ALIENS did jigsaw puzzles and made lots of noise. Lovely.

Monday: Pleasantly warm sunshine with little wind. Wave bars coming and going in various directions. Spent some time pushing gliders on the airfield and waiting for a check flight in *Papa Kilo*. Unfortunately by the time my turn came round the sky had mostly over-convected with ragged cumulus and it was consequently rather gloomy. Bob Forrest and I had 37 minutes gradually descending on the hill in slackening wind, then failing to find any useful thermals over the Bear's Paw. The ALIENS went to see a castle at Stonehaven on the east coast but it was closed when they got there, because they stopped for too long at Aboyne on the way. *Score so far: Wave 2, Sarah 0.*

Tuesday: Misty and still in the gloaming. Never known a week here that was so calm and so warm. Some of the ALIENS went bike riding, some came with us for a walk up to the waterfall. Crossing a plank bridge over the stream, beloved crew fell in up to the knees, but disappointingly she wouldn't do it again while I held the camera. The weather continued flat calm and overcast. The locals were doing circuits off the winch in the Puchacz, landing in the opposite direction to takeoff. Brian and Lorraine Evans came for dinner and stayed overnight.

Wednesday: Much more wind and low cloud. We took Brian and Lorraine around the wildlife park at Kinraig, then relaxed at the house during the afternoon. About 5pm a wave gap suddenly opened to the south of the airfield, although rain was threatening in the distance. Several brave souls rigged in a hurry and were towed up into the short-lived hole. The best height for the afternoon was almost 15,000ft but most pilots had to descend through cloud and rain. I wimped. *Score so far: Wave 3, Sarah 0.*

Wednesday PS: One of the ALIENS wrote off the white Mondeo on the Insh road at dusk. There was a coming-together on a narrow bend with a van from the Water Sports centre. No injuries, though. Let's be careful out there!

Thursday: At first the weather looked very good indeed with a wave gap over the river and a clear defined edge of cloud over the hill. Crew and ALIENS were busily retrieving gear from wrecked car in McCormack's garage at Kingussie, while I ended up last in the aerotow queue. Before I launched several other gliders had already been over 12,000ft and were on the way down again. I reached 3,500ft in hill lift, but a big rain shower was imminent and six other gliders were diving for the circuit below me. The Feshie discipline of radio calls and taxiing off the runway works well, though, and the strip was clear for my approach. Against my entry in the daily log the CFI wrote: *Last of 7 to land in 7 mins with excellent airmanship by all.* We hung about on the ground waiting to see if the wave would re-establish once the squall line had passed, but the wind had died by 4pm. Biked around Loch an Eilean later, followed by venison crumble dinner at the Club. *Score so far: Wave 4, Sarah 0.*

Friday: The wind had reversed somewhat, with the cloud over the valley and interesting gaps over the hill. Crew were busy taking delivery of hire car and ferrying ALIENS from A to B, but I was determined not to be last again and rigged early. In fact I foolishly agreed to be guinea pig and launched first. The aerotow was extremely rough, and when I released supposedly into the wave, I could only barely stay up. The wave was being very elusive, and obviously my performance didn't inspire the onlookers, because no-one else bothered to launch until well into the second hour. In between fleeting bits of wave I was using some rotor/thermal stuff over the valley which was choppy and exciting. After the third hour it was apparent that cloud amounts were increasing and the gaps were closing up. Several other pilots all dived away through the last hole, but I took my chance and soared through, finding a decent climb to 7,000ft. All alone under a hazy blue sky with an endless white desert of dunes and ripples below. Wonderful, but how do I get down again? Let's be careful out there! I checked the Colibri for position, and switched on the horizon for a descent through the bottom of a valley, heading west towards Loch Insh. Broke cloud at 3,500ft over the loch, and the wind conditions on the airfield were flat calm again by the time I landed. *Final score: Wave 5, Sarah 1.*

Saturday: Packing early and driving home from about 10:45am. The hire car was entrusted to the ALIENS for the day. Let's be careful out there! Early fog at Feshie cleared to sparkling sunshine over the Pass of Drumochter. Trouble free journey with stops at Anandale Water and Killington Lake. Chinese takeaway in the evening.