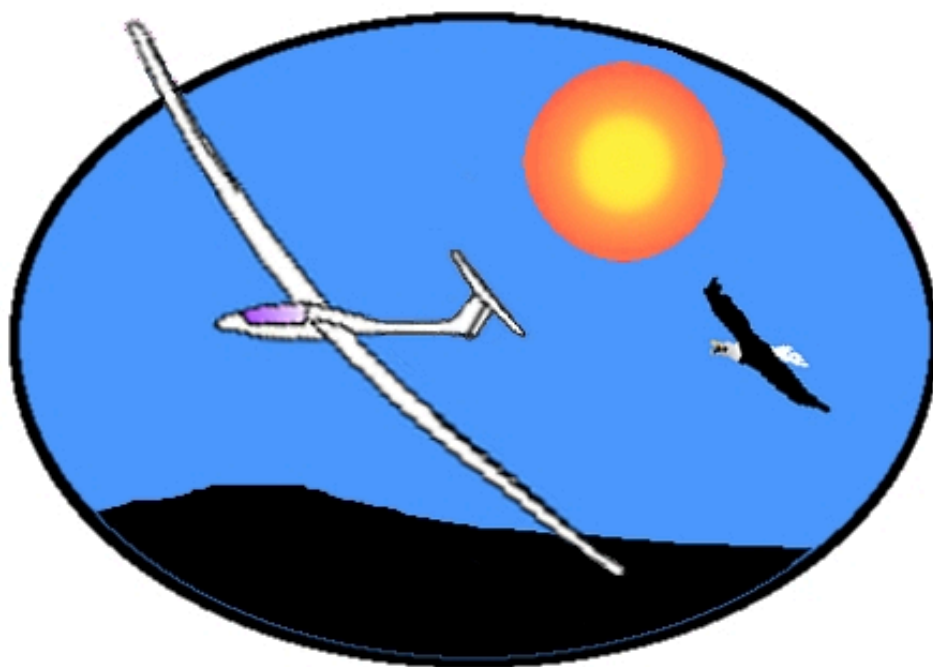


# Howick Gliding Club 2010 Annual



*Howick Gliding Club*

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## **From The Chairman**

The year started rather slowly with lots of rain and low cloud mainly on the Saturday and Sunday, our flying days. It improved going into February and March and pilots began to ratchet up some flying hours. Beginning of April saw the club heading off to Harrismith for our Easter Camp and better flying conditions.

We were joined with members from Magalies Gliding club and Brits Gliding club who arrived with their hot machines, much hotter than ours anyway. The conditions were fantastic with Justin Collins and I completing the silver Cs (5 hours, 50Kms and 1000m height gain). Tex Impey and Mike Hancock also had great long flights and a number of the students had two or more hours. The Magalies and Brits guys disappeared for the whole day every day.

The evenings were great social affairs in the Harrismith airfield bar with pilots of the three clubs comparing notes and feats over a few (too many) beers. The food prepared by Kathy Scott was fantastic and added to the enjoyment. Compliments to the chef.

On the Tuesday after Easter we reluctantly headed home for the quieter conditions of Howick and its winter conditions.

In August the club was once again invited to Underberg Gliding Club for a four day long weekend to experience flying in the mountains. The conditions although good were not as good as the previous year but as always the highlight of each day was talking flying over a few beers beside a fire in the club house.

A number of students went solo during the year and two of them Barend Booysen and Trevor Scott splashed out on a second hand K6 which will soon be in the air.

Sadly December saw the passing of one of our instructors and great friend, Carl Botha. Fortunately we were able to celebrate his life at our annual Christmas function at the club a few days later. The function once again was fun with great food by Kathy again and the fire roaring even though it was December and summer.

Roll on 2011

## **Estcort & Back**

Saturday the 6<sup>th</sup> of February 2010 saw conditions rather un-common to the Natal Midlands booming overhead the Howick airfield. Climbs were averaging up to 4m/s with a cloud base of 11'300ft over the field. Many pilots had a chance to experience lengthy soaring flights locally, with a few venturing slightly further afield, one of these was our dashing CFI, Tex in his ASW-15 (ZS-GGY).

At about 14:00 Tex took a winch launch off runway 16, straight of the wire Tex found himself in a very strong 4m thermal over the club house, taking the ride to the top Tex left the thermal at 10'00ft over the Northern edge of Mphopomeni, he made a radio call to Mike H. in his Libelle (GLL) inviting him to explore the soaring potential out towards that iconic, hairy reclining breast that is Inhlozane. Our dashing duo set off in the by now exceptional conditions, by porposing they manage to loose less than 1'000ft en-route. Upon reaching Inhlozane Mike decided to turn back towards the field, Tex however decided to venture further in land towards the Little Berg where a brother in law has a farm on the Kamberg Mountain. Tex decided to follow the ridge which was working nicely, with thermals averaging 2m/s, taking another thermal to 12'000ft over Inhlozane herself, he reached cloud base set off towards Kamberg, continuing to porpoise in any lift encountered on the way. In this manner he reached Kamberg without a significant height loss. It was at this point that Tex, having noted that the patchwork pattern of the clouds was still indicating very good conditions in land and behind, decided to attempt to reach Estcort.



*Approaching Estcort Town*



*Turn Point Wagendrift*

Setting off Tex continued to stay in the Little Berg overflying the stunning Highmoor wildlife reserve and approaching Estcort from the West. Kamberg to Estcort had cost Tex only 1'000ft even so while holding in a well place thermal to photograph his chosen turning point (the Wagendrift dam wall) Tex climbed to 11'000ft before wandering off to take a gander at the town of Estcort its self and conduct some high altitude surveillance of the goings on of the Escort gliding club, finding nothing out of the ordinary (i.e. no gliders, no members other than some disheveled livestock) our dashing aviator swung his craft around and set a bearing for home and an eagerly awaiting partner (who had spent the last couple of hours muttering about thermal gods, Murphy's law, Bloemfontein etc.). As the saying goes it was all down hill from here, in straight flight the trip from Estcort home cost Tex only 2'000ft of altitude arriving over the field with about 5'000ft in reserve. Without loitering about he looses this height with the intention of relieving his now straining bladder and ridding us all of the constant groans and moans of his un-named partner. Downwind and quickly our man goes through his checks; water ballast – no, undercarriage – down and locked, flaps – no, security – straps tight (but not to tight due to afore mentioned bladder) all loose objects stowed, speed and trim – set for landing, lookout – circuit is clear and finally landing area, ah here is a problem the earth bound club members are trying to get an aircraft into the air to capitalize on the still good conditions, they request our man to hold while they get the aircraft off, not a problem, as there is a patch of lift late on downwind, quickly Tex retracts the wheel to clean up the aircraft and makes a couple of turns to allow the launch to take place. Once the club aircraft has cleared our man quickly lines himself up on finals and brings her in rock steady, airbrakes half out speed control right where it should be, landing spot selected as just past the numbers, careful round out, bleed off the speed, feel for the ground and ah, shit, touch down, the ASW-15's new skid allows her to come to a very quick stop.

Chatting to Tex some time after the flight Tex has only two regrets, one not taking his logger (incidentally it was in his car on the airfield) and not redoing his downwind checks or running through the W's on finals (Wheel, Water, Wind, Wadio). The whole flight used only four turning thermals, the rest of the thermals were porpoised through, this was Tex's

longest flight out of Howick. Well done to Tex for a great flight, the last recorded time a Howick member flew to Estcort was Nick Methley in 1988, hopefully it won't be this long before another of our members does the trip, as for the wheels up they say there are those that have and those that will.

## **VFR into IMC in GIA at FAHS: Don't Do This!!**

By Barry Bredenkamp

The following is an extract from Barry's expanded logbook where e records interesting points on his more uh interesting flights.

Arrive Harrismith about mid-day and set about rigging GIA and getting winch going. By late afternoon we're ready and take winch and GIA out. Weather's not great, some fairly dark clouds to the SE with rain clearly falling between Harrismith town and Bakers Kop. Get in with Dave H for check flight. By the time we're ready to go (positives etc.) rain is much closer. Having personal doubts about launching but decide what the hell, Dave is P1 so it should be ok. Launch goes ok and release straight into strong lift. Circle in it going up like a rocket - 5+ m/s! Very quickly reach cloud base (8'500ft) and now run NE at high speed to stay below cloud - doing 150km/h and STILL going up! Dramatic stuff! Go a bit beyond Loskop and now away from cloud. Turn onto reciprocal course and can now see that airfield is just about obscured in a grey curtain of rain. Radio call from Ground confirms heavy rain on field. We cross the N3 and turn NW to see if we can perhaps fly round the shower and land after it has passed the field. Fly into patchy lift and sink so prospects of that don't look good. Rain now seems to have intensified over field and runway is completely obscured by dense grey curtain of rain. Can see N3 so can guess where field is. Decide to commit to landing - Dave agrees. Still quite high so open full airbrake and head for where we imagine runway 15 to be. Very soon run into VERY heavy rain: lots of noise, *can't see a thing!!!* Fly like this for a few seconds and now shout to Dave that I can't see any thing. He responds a few seconds later that he can see the ground through clear vision panel, so I give him control. We are still too high so we turn 360 and land on 15, in what is definitely big-time IMC !!! I am very shaky as I get out of cockpit and remain this way for an hour or two. Not a very clever thing to have done. Illustrates vividly the old saying: "Take-offs are optional, landings are mandatory!" Hindsight says:

a) Don't get in the damn plane.



b) If you do get into this sort of trouble, landing out is the way to go. The airfield other side of N3 was in clear during the whole time this scenario played out.

### **Cable breaks. How not to handle them.**

There we were on a nice spring morning at runway 34, Howick Gliding Club. I am nearing the end of my training schedule and am really looking forward to my solo flight. The instructors are now starting to throw the book at me and put me into all sorts of difficult if not impossible situations to check my flying and decision making prowess.

“What haven’t you done?” says Fred, one of our instructors. “Have you done Stalls?” says Fred. “Yep” says I. “Low level Flying?” Fred once again. “Yep, with you” Says I. “Cable breaks. You haven’t done cable breaks with ME.” says Fred with the sound of eager anticipation in his voice. “Nope” I say, not really looking forward to this. “Well in you get” says he and proceeds to give all sorts of complicated instructions to the winch driver.

“Now, says Fred, The instant you feel the power fade from the winch, I want you to push the stick FIRMLY FORWARD, give two pulls on the cable release and establish flying speed.” That’s how he said it, FIRMLY FORWARD. Who am I to argue with a man of his experience. I mean he has flown everything from motorized grasshoppers to Jumbo jets.

I think sometimes that the instructors tend to forget that in my misspent youth I used to race motorcycles on tar and as such my reflexes are still pretty good. Any case up we go and no sooner have we established ourselves on the climb, when bang goes the power on the winch. “Got this” I reckon and slam the stick over whilst given two pulls on the toggle. Well people you should have been there. I slammed it over so quickly that we pulled negative “G’s” and all the dust in the cockpit floor came past my eyes on the way to the canopy. We had a portable radio in the rear seat pocket as the onboard radio was acting up that day and this came out the pocket and floated past Fred level with his face. “Oh Sherbet” or words to that effect says Fred. “What the hell are you doing?” grabbing for the radio before it falls through the floor. By this time both of us are laughing so hard it became quite a challenge to land the K13.

Next time I did it firmly but gently and all was well. Needless to say Fred has never asked me to demonstrate recovery from a cable break again. All the new students get told “Don’t do it like the Geko Pilot”

## **Gariep Gliding, Tales of a “tuggie”.**

By Iain Rennie

December 2009 saw me begin two months of tugging and gliding in the party filled, action packed, desert town of Gariep. Now Gariep as many of you may not know is a bustling metropolis with two proper shops a petrol station, two pubs and a hotel. It is truly a one horse town, where the horse is a donkey and died when the dam was still Hendrickvervoed, not the now PC Gariep, or God-dam to many of the pilots. So what’s the attraction? Well to 90% of people there isn’t one, however there are a few who find the stark rugged land scape alluring and beautiful (I am in this category) and there is another group of people who come here for the fantastic soaring (I am in this category to). Gariepdam is rated as the second best thermic soaring destination in the world after Bitterwasser in Namibia and just ahead of Tempe, Bloemfontein (although some may not agree). The majority of my two months was spent hauling other pilots into the sky for some truly fantastic flights. The duration of a launch lasted anywhere from four minutes take off to touch down all the way out to over half an hour (at R55.00 per min these were not popular). With temperatures reaching in excess of 50 degrees density altitude was a issue with the takeoff rolls being long and the climbs laborious until lift was contacted where after a turn or two the glider would released, then time for a steep engine on (to prevent shock cooling) decent to a strait in approach (forget those pretty circuits they teach during ab intio). Average



*A Karoo storm passes over the airfield*



launch time 10min. During my time I had a couple of truly memorable flights for all the right reasons, towing a Janus C out of Aliwal North after a land out at sunset, hauling SA team member Mannie Mclauchlan into the sky in a Duo Discus again late in the evening while dodging Karoo showers and rainbows, dropping skydivers for the first time and and and.... the list goes on and on. There were also a few flights that are etched in memory for all the wrong reasons, which illustrate just how dangerous glider towing can be for all involved. The worst of these was the crash of former world champion John Coutts. A problem with the tow hook on the 182 I was flying, or the way the glider was hooked up (we will never know) caused the rope to release from the 182 as we became airborne and cleared the end of the runway. This put John into a nightmare situation, low, fully laden with water and with no where clear ahead to land he started to make a turn back to the field, realizing he was not going to make it and was in danger of stalling he put his beautiful ASW-20 into the ground wingtip first, in a text book "how to crash your glider as safely as possible" maneuver, as a result he walked away from the accident unhurt except for a few bruises, the glider was written off and has since been brought by Albert of Vryheid. (Incidentally I towed John again at the Harrismith camp, it was great for me to put this nasty incident in the past). This was not the only scary incident during my towing, others including near air to airs, being pulled "over the falls" (when the glider either pulls up sharply or starts to "winch launch" behind the tug forcing

the tug into the vertical), fortunately at altitude and one or two other far to exciting moments. Despite these "nasties" my two months at and above Gariep were truly fantastic. The real cherry on top was the gliding I did. Despite all the hot ships lurking about most of my gliding was in a Blanik owned by camp director Martin Lesle. In this ship I went solo on aero tow for the first time, and very nearly landed out, did a



Duo Discus dumping water over the airfield

200km cross country with Martin, flew open cockpit for the first time and flew with a German Pilot who could not speak English (the I have control you have control was very interesting, I am still not sure if anyone was flying for certain stages of the flight). The only flying I did in a glass Ship was in Dutch airline captain, Max Leanders', Nimbus 4DM we were only up for 10 min as he wanted to do some video of a beat up of the club house (nearly 300km/hr.) and other bits and pieces. During the launch the Nimbus is noisy as hell even through headset but is incredibly quite as soon as the engine is off and stowed, this is due to things like Mylar seals on anything which may leak air and a vacuum dropping the pressure of the fuselage so as to prevent air leaking out. With its 24m wingspan the Nimbus is surprisingly responsive and feels rather slippery to fly, all in all a fantastic aircraft with a glide ratio of greater than 60 to 1 its a seriously mean machine and very very different from our beautiful K-13's. Gariep remains one of the most scenic places I've been, with some very different people I can't wait for a chance to get back for some more gliding, perhaps as part of a club expedition?

### **A Daughters take on the merits of a radio license...**

A short message that came from my daughter in Aussie when I told her Kath and myself were getting our radio licenses.

Wow – it sounds like you guys are really busy at the moment, with the flying and Radios and moving! Now whilst I am happy that you and mom are doing the radio course, I would however suggest that it is not quite as simple as you had hoped! May I remind you that some people need a lot more help than a simple, "Little Yellow plane, wait your turn while the big white one comes in." For starters, the guy driving the Little Yellow plane could in fact be color blind and have the Ego of most Yuppies who have just bought a plane to impress their friends, and think that his little yellow plane is the bestest and biggest little plane on the earth and though he has been told by the sales mans and his bitchy wife that it is in fact Yellow, he thinks it is a beautiful shade of Sunshine Beige, and therefore ignores all direction given to the little yellow plane's Pilot because THAT is so obviously NOT him! Well that, or he could just be stupid! Hence I would suggest that you perhaps use the following communication techniques:

Example: Plane AFK375 (a small blue plane) needs to stand by while a commercial plane lands.

ATC: "More Oom – wat tall praat jou? Good morning sir, what language do you speak? Eish, does you speak The Mother tongue?"

Pilot: "Eish Baas, I speeek Eengleish."

ATC: "Jolly good old chap. Right-o shall we commence instruction?"

Pilot: "Eish, not that type of Eengliesh!"

ATC: "Jamma bru. Confirm your plane number please"

Pilot: "Skeis?"

ATC: "The number wat is painted on the side of your little blue plane, what is it?"

Pilot: "Ek dink dit is A for A Goat, F for Fiezel my cousin, K for Cow – 3, like the number of white people in the Bafana Bafana Team, 7, like the number of illegitimate children I have and 5, like the number of chicken pieces you get in a dinner box from KFC"

ATC: "Shoej bru – that was a mouthful"

Pilot: "Ja, I like KFC!"

ATC: "Ok – wag 'n bietjie where you are because daar is a moerse big fockin' plane coming to park here, ok?"

Pilot: "Ja Baas, what time do I have to wait for?"

ATC: "Well, if you want your klein blue plane to be squashed like the person who gets in the taxi first and then has all the people pile in after them, then go now!"

Pilot: "But I do not want that!"

ATC: "Then stay put like I said for as long as it takes bru! – OK"

Pilot: "Yees Baas"

## **SOUTH AFRICAN GLIDING NATIONALS 2010 WELKOM.**

By Nikola Gradinski

I had decided some time earlier in the latter part of 2010 to participate in the 2010 gliding nationals in South Africa. Being based in the United States, this posed some logistical and practical obstacles that needed to be overcome. By some maneuvering and reorganization of various events and responsibilities as well as some well-appreciated assistance from South Africa, I was finally on a flight from New York to Johannesburg in early December. I had only just over a day to recuperate from the voyage before setting out again to meet my friend Jon Cross in Johannesburg, pick up the gliders we were flying and tow them to Welkom, a four hour drive into the farming heartland of the Orange Freestate and the location of the contest.



*N.Gradinski getting airborne at the 2010 Nationals, photo courtesy R .Atkinson*

I was eagerly anticipating getting there as I had not taken part in a contest of this scale before. The drive was not without incident and we were forced to stop along the way as one of our trailer's tires blew out. With some improvisation using stones we found on the roadside we were able to lift up the axle of the trailer and replace the tire, with another which was also in a questionable state.

Driving at a slightly reduced speed we were approaching Welkom in the afternoon, which had been pleasant and warm, although had started to show signs of over-development. By the time the airfield was in sight the sky had already darkened and a large storm was developing. We arrived on the practice day hoping to get a flight in but were in time to join a retrieve mission to pick up one of the gliders that had landed in a field not very far away from the airport, or so we were led to believe. We took a local road passing the large yellow slag heaps piled in vast ziggurats near the airport left over from years of gold mining operations in the area and started towards the reported location of the glider. The storm was growing and heading at speed towards us, we did not have a lot of time to locate the glider. We passed several fields but were unsure of which was the right one, as they

were all fairly similar, ploughed orange soil with few distinguishing markers except for the odd solitary wind mill and occasional concrete water reservoir. The storm was upon us, and soon were driving in heavy rain and strong winds, fortunately, in cell phone contact with the pilot, we were met by a local farmer who had kindly undertaken to direct us to the correct field, which I'm sure we would never have located without his help. At this stage, the fields were being drenched with torrents of water pouring through the furrows and flooding the roads. We found the glider well landed near a road and close to the farm house, and immediately set about preparing to de-rig. The rain was being driven hard by the wind, which was gusting as the storm passed over us. We had no choice but to accept the farmers offer of hospitality and wait out the worst of the storm in his house before de-rigging the muddy ASW-27 and heading back to the airport. Welcome to Welkom.

December 13. The rain from the day before and throughout the night did not create the conditions for a promising day. The day begun with the sorting of paperwork and observing the fine print of required bureaucracy. Once officially registered as a participant in the club class, it was time to rig the ASW-19 (34) and prepare for the first flight. A 2 1/2 hour assigned area task (AAT. On the grid, the conditions seemed very inconsistent and with the unsuccessful flight of the sniffer, the club class day was cancelled, with some opting not to fly while a few of us decided to go up anyway. This was to be my practice day as I had not flown the day before. It took a little time to get used to flying a new glider for the first time with an unfamiliar navigation system so the time in the air was most appreciated. The tow took me up to 1600' AGL which was the standard tow altitude for the contest. Getting orientated in new surroundings was also important and I tried to familiarize myself with local landmarks. I ended up having a pleasant flight, making it out as far as the start gate, some 10km away from the airfield, and getting up to 8500' MSL, which was around 4000' AGL, the flight lasted 1h20m. The ground was very wet, and the usually dry farm fields seemed like swamps from the air, further incentive not to take any risks on the first day and land in a muddy field. Fortunately, the soil in this region is very sandy, and the water drains away very quickly, or so we were told. This turned out to be true enough later on, although not for the next few days as we were about to find out.

I was not to fly again for the next three days, as the weather became worse with our usual pilots meeting being held daily at 10:00AM with continuing dismal prognoses due to a large system of moist air covering most of the country. We spent the rain days getting to know each other and



*Flying under a heavy sky. Photo by R. Atkinson*

watching movies, notably some gliding classics like

The Sunship Game, in the control tower which had become a makeshift base of operations for the club class and associates. We had sunshine on December 15th, with the entire fleet on the grid, unfortunately already by 11:00AM there was a storm cell developing to the north. The storm was growing at an unnerving pace, most opting to de-rig gliders as the possibility of hail was very real. A few pilots decided to launch and fly the storm front. I was intrigued by the notion and of course the idea of new challenges and a type of flying I had not yet experienced, however I had a feeling that this one wasn't the right one to try to learn on. Two of the pilots headed into the storm, the white forms of the slender wings slowly receding into the advancing blackness of the storm. The Ka6 that had launched was back on the ground, after landing on the cross runway as the wind was picking up. It was at this point I decided to tow back to the trailer and de-rig myself. This was done with some haste, we were right to hurry, hail and ferocious winds tested the tie downs of the aircraft that were not put away. Some hours later I was called upon to retrieve one of the gliders, Jon in the ASW20, who had flown the storm but landed out at a crop sprayer strip at Hoopstad. The intense rain again created the conditions for another retrieve adventure. Almost getting stuck on a dirt road, and finally finding the strip. Fortunately the glider had been pulled into one of the crop sprayer hangars, and we were able to carefully take it apart inside the hangar with the assistance of one of the pilots, who was the owner of the operation and former glider pilot, and some of his staff.

December 16. Initially not very promising the day started clearing, and we were on the grid by noon, with a 2 hour AAT with three areas. The day was eventually cancelled for club class, so another well needed practice day. I ended up flying around in the start gate area and went west, where



there was some decent lift, reaching 9500' initially and then up to 11,500'. Winds aloft were fairly strong so that made things somewhat more challenging.

December 17. The first club class contest day. The club class was set a 238.7km speed task. I was unfamiliar with this task format, which was to cost me some points later at scoring. The consensus among the more experienced pilots was to start as early as possible given the risk of thunderstorm development later in the day. As would be the nature of the weather for the rest of the contest, things would be very unpredictable. I had a good start initially staying with one of the ASW27's for a good portion of the first leg. Lift seemed to be good up to around 10,000' and the clouds were lining up along the course line, which gave me some confidence and I pushed on. The clouds seemed to disappear as I came up to about 2/3 of the first leg, that combined with the landing out of another of the club class called for caution ahead. It was at this stage that I was faced with the decision to go over the river upwind, into the blue, or deviate to some better looking clouds downwind. I made the latter choice, which was to cost me. Being blown downwind and off course I lost significant altitude trying to reach the clouds. Arriving there fairly low, I spent a while regaining altitude and until I got there was considering the possibility of having to land out myself if the clouds weren't working. By the time I got back up I was 20km from the first turn and 20km towards the second. My confidence that I had earlier began to erode as I was faced with the realization that I now had to fly 20km back to the first turn and then another 20km to reach the point I was at. The extra 40km would be catastrophic for my average speed. To make matters worse I watched other club class gliders fly over me heading in the opposite direction. I finally reached the first turn and was back on course. The second leg was to present further challenges as it passed downwind of Bloemhof dam. There was a blue hole that had to be crossed. I was at 1200'AGL before I encountered lift again. I had to once again spend a long time climbing back up. Once back on course I reached the second and last turn point with good altitude and did not have too many problems after that, starting final glide from 50km out. I knew that my detour at the beginning of the flight had ensured that I would have a poor placing for the day. My score was further reduced when the GPS trace revealed that though I had gone round the turn points, I had not in fact flown through the 500m radius cylinders, incurring a 100 point penalty, I would not repeat that error. Task time was 3h41m.



*A full grid waiting to launch. Photo R. Atkinson*

December 18. The day looked good, although the forecast still warned of unpredictable weather for later in the day, once again it seemed pragmatic to start early. The task was a 3 1/2 hour AAT, distance 205.5km/329.2km. The first leg

was long and into the wind, later in the leg the terrain became less hospitable and more vigilance was needed, although there were no points where I felt I got too low. I did not go too far into the first cylinder, instead opting to go further into the second, which was possibly an error as some of the best lift was in the first cylinder, I myself finding a 4m/s thermal taking me up to 13,000' on the second leg. The third leg proved to be more challenging, as the clouds began to break up and provided weaker lift which resulted in slower going towards the finish. I was also mindful of some rain that was lingering in the general area of the airport, but fortunately it had moved off to the east by the time I got there. Crossing the finish with height and speed, I was relieved that the task was successfully completed.

December 19. The day begun with the usual uncertainty in what the weather was going to do. The two sniffers that were sent up were having some difficulty, one managed to make a low save and started climbing out in what appeared to be a moderately strong thermal. It was at this point that task D was selected for the club class, a 141.7km racing task. I was unfortunate that my first tow took me directly out west, where I was to find no lift and was forced to turn back to the airfield, flying through heavy sink I was barely able to make it back and landed down wind. I had to wait a while before I could be slotted in for a re-light. The delay meant I started the task much later than the rest of the class. A good initial climb under a quickly developing cloud, which was to turn to rain shortly thereafter got me a good start. The day was to turn out much better than forecast, which meant a bit of over cautious flying by me in the beginning. The first leg was into a strong headwind, and later I realized I had taken a

few too many climbs on the upwind leg, staying high. After the turn the strong headwind became a weaker tailwind, although that didn't matter much as I only took one climb for the remainder of the flight, making an excellent average speed on the last leg. On the finish I noticed another club class glider in a field just before the airport, this turned out to be the day's winner, who had crossed the finish line but not quite made it back. A satisfactory day, although a more aggressive strategy on the first leg was required for a better placing.

December 20. A weak forecast called for caution. Club class was issued another racing task of 284.0km. The first leg was down wind and decent clouds went along more or less with the course line. At the first turn the choices for the next climb were not so obvious, although a few good climbs got me well onto the second leg. I was joined by another club class glider and we were to stay together for the rest of the second and part of the third leg. The second leg was most enjoyable with good climbs and fast glides. Once again we were faced with a blue hole at the dam. I opted to take one last climb getting some altitude before flying into the blue for the second turn, losing a substantial amount of height before getting out of the sink. I felt as if this was the best flight I was having the whole contest and the third leg looked good. I was able to get up to cloud base and started heading towards the last turn. It was at this point that the conditions begun to change, the way ahead was no longer clear, the air became darker and a significant haze started to appear. Remembering my error from the previous day I decided to ignore a climb and go for the next cloud. Another error, as I unwittingly passed through some sort of inversion and could not find any lift to climb back up to cloud base. As the clouds and haze thickened I decided to try the clouds that were still in the sun and deviated off course. I was to spend forty minutes in five kilometers, trying to regain altitude, not high or close enough to start final glide, and still a good third of the last leg to go. I slowly progressed towards the finish in some disbelief as my best flight of the contest was turning into a catastrophe. As my fifth hour in the air elapsed, I was tired and trying to figure out how to get back, the haze was now dissipating, along with the clouds in another incredible shift in conditions. The air became smooth, and I was still too low and too far out to make it back in one glide. A solitary cloud started to appear in the wrong direction, but it was in close proximity to a landable strip, and at this stage my main concern was to try to stay up. The cloud worked and I was able to regain the altitude that I needed to make it home. The sun was already low when I crossed the finish, and I was fortunate to get probably one of the last thermals of the day. I was lamenting not taking that last climb as it could

have meant a much better score, but such is flying. The next day the air cooled and it rained, the day was cancelled, in a strange way I was relieved as fatigue was building up.

December 22. The last day of the contest. The long duration and afternoon struggle of the previous flight still affecting me, we were faced with a weak day, rumors were that a short task may be set. We were assigned a 174.7km racing task. The initial launches did not go well, many took several relights, I remained in the air but struggled gaining height being blown downwind, losing it again coming back to the airfield and continuing in the manner for a while. At two hours in the air, I half expected the day to be cancelled as we were all having difficulty staying up to say nothing of reaching the start gate. The day was not cancelled and I would be up for three hours before even starting the task. This did not bode well for the rest of the flight. Nonetheless, once we started my enthusiasm began to increase again as the weak conditions seemed to be sufficient for the course. Fighting against a strong headwind the whole class practically went ahead together into the blue. I felt good as many of the others were getting low and I forged ahead higher than they were towards the first turn. I thought I had the rhythm of the clouds with me, but curiously every cloud I went to was not working. Against the wind I started to make less headway meandering around the clouds to see if one had some lift, having to settle for mediocre thermals in order to maintain what little altitude I had remaining. Already in the fourth hour of the flight and still not making any headway to the first turn I started contemplating landing in a field as exhaustion was setting in. Reports from some of the others who had chosen an alternate route over the river and made it closer to the first turn was that there was no lift up ahead either and that they were looking for fields. At this point I decided to try to go at least to the second turn, maybe finding some lift there and getting back home. So I turned downwind and headed for the second turn point at Bultfontein. I was also aware of the fact there was a good landing strip there and that it was closer to the airport. A storm to the west was growing and the sky was getting covered by the expanding cloud high above. I noticed two other gliders already on the ground there, but lingered in some strange lift hoping to encounter some kind of phenomenon related to the storm that I could use and get back home. This was not to be as I was slowly being pushed downwind. Having the landing strip comfortably in range, after being in the air for five and a half hours, I decided it was time to land. The wind direction and distance of the storm made me believe it would be blown south and not affect us. I

was wrong. Soon after landing I and the other two pilots were pushing our gliders towards the brick hangars of the airstrip.

We pushed the last glider at speed towards the hangar as the rain started coming down. Soon we were bracing for the impact of the storm. We were soaked by a torrential downpour and strong winds, the temperature had dropped rapidly, and we were cold. Thunder accompanied the wind and the gusting rain. The hail came soon after. Through the wall of water coming down from the sky I could barely make out the figure of my compatriot hunched over his glider with his jacket stretched out in a vain effort to protect his canopy. We had no choice but to endure and wait it out come what may. The worst of it passed. We and our gliders had survived. We were in a foot of water, and soaked. We had called for retrieval, but were told the roads to this town had been partially washed away, and had to wait. It was dark by the time we started to dismantle my glider and another storm was heading towards us. Standing in the dark and in the water with lightning striking all around and getting closer made us quicken the pace. Once we were secure I was glad to be on the way back to the airport.

There was no way we were going to make it back in time for the final dinner and closing ceremony of the contest, although we did eventually arrive albeit a bit late. The dinner and accompanying drinks were welcome as utter exhaustion had set in. The entire class had landed out. Slowly we started to relax and the awards were handed out. I had fully expected the day for club class to be cancelled due to the land outs, and so did not think to bring my flight record for scoring, I have not yet been able to get hold of it, even now. My slow relaxation process at the dinner was further augmented by the completely unexpected announcement that I had won the airmanship award. This was truly a very pleasant surprise, and I was honored and very appreciative of having earned it.

## **HOW I GOT RAMMED AT THE AIRFIELD.**

By Corrie Verbaan

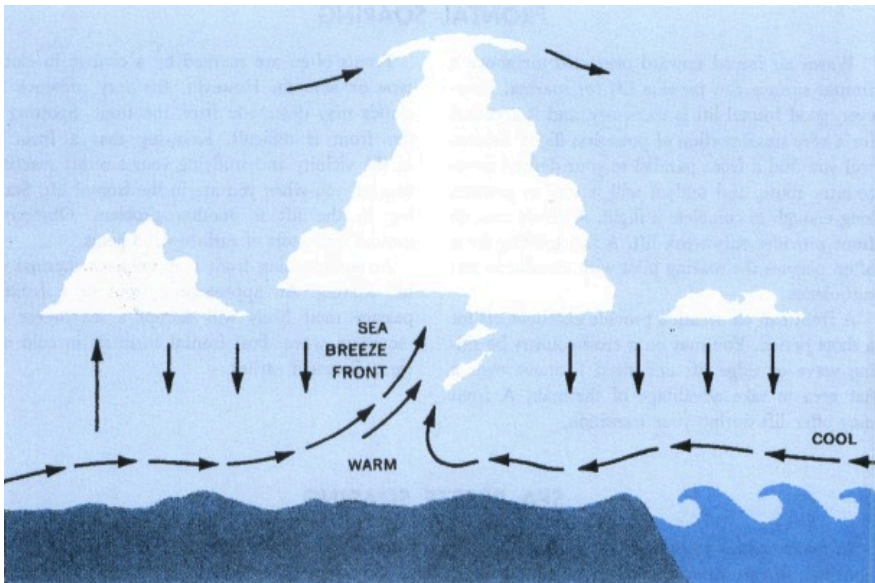
How pleasant to arrive at the a/f, welcomed by a warm sunny morning after weekends of overcast and rain. In addition to the usual sprinkling of hard-core flyers, the pastoral scene was further enhanced by cattle grazing contentedly, a gang of goats without much to do and a flock of sheep quietly mowing new spring grass. Real farmyard stuff. By early afternoon the sheep had reached 34 where the winch was located. While waiting to do a cable retrieve, I noticed a large sheep munching its way towards the winch. Ever full of the joys of spring, I wandered over to it, I say "it" because until I noticed the avocado sized goolies swinging gently in the undercarriage I had no idea whether it was he or she. To reinforce my perception, he started urinating, a steady macho stream that splashed his feet for a good two minutes. I politely allowed him to finish before I (thinking he would appreciate a little unaccustomed human affection) started stroking his forehead with a little scratch now and then behind an ear. I also noticed how ugly he was, his horse-like mandibles offset by large blue eyes with lashes that Naomi Campbell could only dream about. He gave me the lazy eye and in a softly sentimental way (not quite misty-eyed though) I began to feel a rapport developing - human and animal meet on common ground, almost fraternally. Puzzled by the three or four steps he then took backward (must be a sheep thing), he lowered his head and charged. Instinctively I managed to deflect his head with my hand. This resistance seemed to encourage him and he reversed again, but this time doubled his effort. I just had time to brace myself and take the impact on outspread hands. This protected my own goolies but placed me flat on my back feeling extremely disadvantaged. What's next, trampling? Goring? I leapt to my feet and beat a retreat to the far side of the winch. Evil Pete, meanwhile no doubt enjoying this al fresco cabaret, lurched into action by yelling "Quick, get into the winch.." I warily kept the winch between me and the beast and to my further mortification, he strolled casually up the winch and started scratching his neck parts on the stabilizer jack. This was clearly a moment of triumph for him and after gloating a little longer, he ambled off. The shepherd was still 100 meters off and I made a semaphore display of my displeasure with flailing arms (he quite possibly thought the mlungu was suffering a nervous attack - which in a sense I suppose I was). Well I guess I was rammed good and proper. The bastard.



## **Convergence Line Flying**

Adapted from article by Jon Cross

The 2010 Harrismith Easter Camp was very successful with exceptional weather on two of the days and flyable weather on the other two. In two



flights I flew about a thousand kilometers (in a rather roundabout manner) and nearly twelve hours of flying.

One cross-country point worth mentioning was the use of a convergence line which developed on Sunday. Luckily John Coutts attended the camp and spotted it otherwise

*Diagram of Sea Breeze Front*

we would probably have continued flying without even knowing it was there. The convergence line was similar to a sea breeze front (see diagram). The difference was that the cooler air was as a result of the

escarpment rather than the sea breeze. On the lower side of the escarpment, the air is warmer at ground level but at the same level as the escarpment it has cooled adiabatically to a lower temperature, hence forming a cooler air mass which can undercut the warm air over the higher side. This undercutting sets up a moving convergence / front line which slowly progresses inland. John saw the line early on and flew all the way along the escarpment to about Volksrust



*Picture of convergence line*

and then back down to the edge of Lesotho. I think he did about 550km. I joined with a few other gliders much later and managed to do about 200km. The best part was not turning to thermal once in those 200km! John recons a 1000km flight is probably possible along the convergence line so that's a really exciting prospect. An identifier of the line was the wisps of cloud that form along the convergence line (shown in the photo). The trick is to be on the leading edge of the wisps and the lift line appears to extend at about 45 degrees up towards the cumulus band above. This was really fun flying. Lower down you could soar along the cloud wisps as if you were flying along a ridge of cloud and higher up the lift was smooth and continued for kilometer after kilometer.

## **2010 in Pictures:**

The gliding year as it happened for the Howick club members



January: Iain R towing gliders out of Gariep, Gliding Mecca of South Africa.



February: Tex Impey does Estcort and back in ZS-GGY





March: Scotty & Mike begin extreme make over winch edition, and what a job they do through the year! (Before and after above).

April: Harrismith gliding camp, Dave Hall and Justin Collins do complete silver c's in one flight.



August: Underberg  
gliding camp,  
plenty of ups and  
downs.



December: The year finishes  
with a rush of thermals and  
sink, we bid farewell to  
Carel Botha long time  
instructor and great friend,  
Nikola G and Jon C compete  
in the nationals, Nick M  
makes 80 and Kathy  
mothers us to a fantastic  
Christmas party. What a  
year!







## **DANCING WITH CLOUDS**

By Corrie Verbaan

Surrounded by giant white Michelen Men - towering heaps of fleecy meringue - I had an irresistible urge to look further. There a gap, and there a tunnel, over there an archway – clouds below, clouds above and a diaphanous mist ahead. WOW!

Not satisfied with providing an other-worldly milieu, now the variometer tells me that we're going up for a closer look.

At quite a rate.

A black dome overhead, becoming blacker. The air offers a coolth not to be found on the scorching earth a mile below. Tattered tendrils trailing all round.

Hang on, better shoot off to the side, ah yes, there's the airfield, all ok.

Solid but insubstantial watery shape-shifters, never the same for two successive minutes, every one totally unique. Look, a poodle stretched out, a giant head with cauliflower ears. To the south, a massive C followed by his younger brother, breaking waves of nothingness.

Am I drifting? Yes the Rorschach shadows are sliding effortlessly across the countryside and I must follow.

Heaven.

Riiiiiiiiingggg..... the infernal alarm snaps me out of my dream, and naturally, my coffee is cold.



## Parting Shot...



*And I promise to clean her, and love her, and look after her, and take her out when ever she wants and and and.....*