

Laragne with Viv Williams

After several trips to France now, I have to say that Laragne has got to be one my favourite flying sites. That's what I like to share with you, a bit about the place, so if you're thinking about a trip to escape the southern hemisphere winter you've got another place on your list of considerations. Laragne is in the Durance Valley about two hours south of Annecy in Provence.

Why do I like it so much – because it's so easy to fly there: great terrain, excellent flying infrastructure, pretty consistent weather, or least enough options to deal with most weather conditions, and there always seems to be a lot of other people, of all sorts of levels to fly with. On top of that if it's not a fly day, there are lots of other activities to do: via ferrata, canyoning, swimming and/or kayaking in the rivers, mountain biking, walking, lots and lots of sport climbing.... And the icing on the cake: the bakeries are to die for, the cheese selection fantastic, pizzas are delicious, the pubs numerous and friendly. What more could a pilot want?

The main take off in Laragne is Chabre. It's about a 40 minute drive up a now entirely sealed road. A ridge running east west, there are numerous take offs on both the north and south sides. Usually the thermals flow up the south side where there is always enough room for all the paragliders and hang gliders to set up and take off from. There are two bomb outs below launch so if you don't get away you only need to do half the trip up the road to get back up again.

Once you're in the air and high, one of the key advantages of the sites shows itself, you can fly down wind in every direction! The immediate area around takeoff is mountains and wide valleys, lots of flying options going from point to point and running ridges. Landing options for both paragliders and hang gliders are everywhere. About 50kms out the terrain starts to change, especially to the north and east where you begin to fly over the Pre Alps. The mountains are higher, more committing, and the valleys narrower, but you are rewarded with some of the most spectacular mountain scenery around, big distances and epic flights.

Getting back home isn't too bad either. As always if you have got yourself in with a group that's going to be easiest, but in case you're all along way from home hitching is very easy. (Just remember "gee vou dray a lure Laragne" -I'd like to go to Laragne) If you're landing close to one of the cities like Grenoble, your best to land near the outskirts rather than the center, unless it's by the train station to catch the 6pm train back to Laragne. There are numerous



Sue Wheelhouse over Ajour

buses and trains that come back through Laragne from all over the place.

For accommodation the local Laragne campground is very popular. As campers are mostly pilots, their friends and family you are bound to link up with others to fly with. They print out the local weather every morning around 10am and there is a van service taking pilots up the mountain. Allez Up Holidays is another favourite for those wanting something a bit more luxurious or if there is a group of you. They provide rides up the mountain, have a huge amount of local knowledge about the place, will probably go flying with you, can pick up from where ever you land and have a pool –excellent as it's hot down south and it's great for your non flying buddies. And they're pretty nice people.

I've got some great stories: my first 100km, flying over the 2700m high Peak de Bure, skirting along the side of the obelisk Mont Aiguille, crossing the limestone eroded Vercors Range, all too much to mention here. But feel free to throw any questions at me. Geoff Wong, Gavin Zahner, Antje Daehler, Helen Moriarty and Craig Collings were all there this summer. Sue Wheelhouse, Colin Page and Basil, the buggers, are still there – any of us can no doubt regale you with enticing flying tales



Basil gazing longingly after Sue

attempts to hit us is followed by dinner and of course some more wine.

That was yesterday, now what will I do today?



Laragne was originally known as a hang gliding site, but as paragliders have improved in glide the area has really opened. Both hang gliding and paragliding competitions are held in the area every year including the very popular Chabre Open.

For more info check out:
<http://www.flylaragne.com/>
<http://www.allez-up.com/>

Enjoy!
 Viv Williams



Yesterday with Sue Wheelhouse

Bleary eyed after another night of one too many wines we arrive at launch. The wind is a bit on the strong side with storms predicted in the afternoon. We decide to go for a quick skirt around the valley.

The north launch at Chabre drops away steeply and is a bit daunting on first appearances.

Watching what happens for a little while we take-off and quickly climb to 2300m. Meandering onto the next peak we are now at a nice 2600m.

The allez-up Gite is opposite an old roman fort, and despite having flown here a lot I had never flown over the top so today is the day. Climbing out over the fort I watch the circle patterns formed on the ground. First the round fort, followed by the roads circumnavigating the fortress and lastly the village that rings the outside. (I really did drink too many monacos last night.) As the whole circle thing, including my thermalling threatens to overcome me I glide to a solitary cloud in the valley. Normally we fly the ridgelines and peaks so today was perfect for a bit of exploration. It is incredibly peaceful floating around the valley after the strong thermals on the pointy bits.

A bit of a climb allowed me to get back to the landing for a nice little triangle, grateful, as I watched a cu spilling in the distance.

Having collected everyone, including the infamous Basil, we head onto plan B, the boulangerie for cakes and the bar for coffee. A swim in the gorge as the storm

2006 European Hang Gliding Championship

June 16th – 29th

Kvarner – Istra, Croatia

By Carol Binder

Few pilots would dispute that Michael Friesenbichler, the 15th European Hang Gliding championship winner is now one of the best pilots in the world and few were surprised by his win. Croatia is a very technical place to fly due to the regions vicinity to the Adriatic coast.

The event pulled a challenging 9/12 tasks with 1 rest day, 1 day cancelled due to stable conditions, 1 day cancelled due to a air space violation and the last day canned, with perfect flying conditions and a base of 2800m. Why? Due to the outcome of the protest! The comp director decided that a fair task was no longer possible due to cloud base being higher than the legal limit of 2100m.



Pushinggg!!!

The repercussions of the protest were huge. Both the individual and team results changed dramatically after the protest was upheld. The Swiss team in particular were, to say the least, bitter with the outcome after the team dropped into fourth place shifting the British team into third. Arguments, accusations, finger pointing, tears and shame fell over launch.

Although it was disappointing for all not to have a finale with the last two days being cancelled, on a positive note we did find a great champion. However, on a critical note the organisation was not quite up to the level required for a cat 1 event and the competition was unfortunately let down by rules, regulations and some questionable bad sportsmanship.

It seems to me that simply running comps in fun mode doesn't work anymore when you have to select a national, European or world champion. Competition organisers need to enforce rules, create a better system and simply have back up plans in place in addition to trying to bring back the spirit of competition. We have to try to prevent this unfortunate situation from occurring again.

Event organisers - do your home work and learn from others mistakes.

Pilots - cheating by breaking the altitude restrictions is simply not on. Why jeopardise everyone's flying by shooting up into orbit just for fun.

For full results go to www.homo-volans.hr and for full story pick up the next addition of Cross Country mag.



Geoff Wong in Europe

This year's trip to France had its roots at The Royal Hotel in Manilla, back in March. A bunch of Norwegians showed up for the Kiwi Open and the Pre-Worlds, they seemed like a friendly bunch and one of them, Stein-Tore, was organising the Nordic Open. I was convinced, with a number of other aussie pilots to sign up for the Nordic Open 2006; which was to be held in Annecy (France). Apparently the weather isn't too reliable in Norway!

While the weather for the competition itself wasn't fantastic, only three tasks were completed, the weather overall in France this year was awesome for flying. Record heat waves seem to be a good thing for paragliding. The Nordic Open was reasonably well organised: the lunches were good, retrieves were patchy (best to land at goal!), the French have barely heard of vegetarians, and they wanted you to download and

email in your own tracklog at the end of the day. Still, it was friendly, and the flying around Annecy is gorgeous. Craig Collings was the best placed aussie, finishing 17th. It was great to fly with so many other excellent pilots in unfamiliar terrain, plenty of learning to be done. It was also fun to hang out with all the other aussie pilots there: Antje,



Les rogues

Craig, Enda, Gavin, Richard, Sue, Viv and Wortho. Who says Australian pilots never go overseas to get experience? After the Nordic Open I headed down to Sue's second home with Antje, Gav and Alex (Canadian pilot) to fly at Laragne. We had a few great flying days in yet more unfamiliar terrain. High peaks and long ridge lines, but generally much more open flying than around Annecy. Plenty of cloud suck to be found on most days too! Did I mention plenty of long retrieves too? After that we headed back north to Geneva and dropped in on Patrick Roser, now living next to a paragliding landing field at Seleve. Gavin and I then went on to check out the European Championships, where Craig, Viv and Enda were, at Morzine.



Gavin on ice

Morzine is yet another amazing flying area, a complex set of ridge lines and valleys which feed into each other. Local knowledge is a huge advantage in this area!

Before the Euros started Gavin, Enda and I found a day to head off to Mont Blanc and fly off Aguille du Midi. This involves a trip up in a large Telecabine (oversized cable-car) from Chamonix to about 3800m. From there you need to walk down a knife-edge ridge (45% slope, huge drop off on each side) in the ice and snow down to about 3700m where launch is located. When we arrived at the actual walk down to launch, Enda decided discretion was called for and declined to walk down. Gav & I eventually clambered down

and then had the joy of a nil wind launch in the snow. Still it was well worth the effort, the view from in front of Mt Blanc and above the glacier is totally spectacular. Anyway, we flew down to cloud base (3200m) and headed out of the valley. Eventually, after trying to fly back to Morzine, we ended up landing going backwards in howling valley winds which weren't really noticeable until you got down to 200m above ground level. An exciting day!



Annecy

Back to the Euros. Great to see all of Europe's top pilots, plus a few Korean & Aussie ring-ins, all in the air together. You know the competition is really tough when the lead gaggle at the end of 1st task consisted of over 40 pilots! And, contrary to claims on

[AustParaComps], Gin Seok made goal on that task too, he just had problems with his GPS. As Morzine is located in the higher mountains in that area it tended over-develop during the competition so quite a few tasks were canned in the air. And then the pilots had to try and land in the strong valley winds below! Gav &

I decided to head south away from these big storms and fly a little in Italy and then back to other launches in southern France for some more great flying. I'm sure Gav would love to relate his 99km flight and subsequent hitching experience, at some stage.

Overall, it was really fantastic not to be suffering in Melbourne for 5 weeks! It would've been better to stay for another month; but I guess most of us have to work sometimes!



Preparing for the start



To become a Champion

After returning from 7 weeks in France training and competing in paragliding competitions Craig Collings shares an opinion on what it take to become a champion in the international paragliding arena.

Competing in the 2006 European Paragliding championship in Morzine, France provided an opportunity to fly with and observe the best pilots in the world. These pilots are normal people like you and I, so it left me wondering what it takes to become a champion. Below is a brief summary of my observations.



Luca Donini - European Champion

Experience competing at the top level

Many of the world's top pilots have more than 15 years experience at competing. There are some good pilots with less experience than this (about 8 years) but their experience is concentrated by competing in FAI Cat1 competitions, Swiss Cups, French A competitions and Paragliding World Cup events. Experience teaches; it highlights the differences between your current ability and that of the top pilots and shows you where to improve. To perform when required, you need to train at the same level at which you expect to compete.

Equipment and support:

The better your equipment the harder it is for others to fly with you. Put another way, the poorer performing your equipment the better you must fly to keep up with the others. In the 2006 European Championships there were only five DHV2/3 gliders flown by the 134pilots competing. At the other end of the spectrum there were many prototype competition gliders. The first 6 places in the competition were flying prototype gliders. Having good equipment is very important if you wish to become a champion at this level, however is should be emphasized to a large degree it is the pilots' ability to extract performance from these high end gliders.

Confidence and Pilot ability

Flying in high-level competitions will often involve a lot of gaggle flying. To master the gaggles a pilot must be in good command of their glider; they should be able to climb well especially in broken thermals and thermals close to the terrain. Good technical ability will see the pilot flying with the gaggles and starting well; add good tactical ability and this will see the pilot remain in a leading gaggle during the race, and then a pilots' ultimate confidence in their own flying skills and this will see them winning tasks and competitions.

Commitment to Succeed

This internal quality is often hard to observe directly in pilots, but can be seen indirectly through observation like: pilots' attention to detail in equipment preparation; pilots enthusiasm for flying and sharing knowledge; pilots dedication in time and money to attend competitions. To win you need to be dedicated. You must be resolved to do what it takes to make improvements in your flying to be successful in competing against the world's best. Looking at the joy on the face's of many pilots, this journey can be enjoyable and one of self discovery.



Prototype Boomerang



Mystic Park Developments

In case you're not aware the Club is in the process developing Mystic Park with the assistance of some outside funding. Our objectives are to make the park safer and friendlier for pilots, spectators and other users. We want to level the land so there is more available landing space at the north end, introduce off street parking, provide increased shade and importantly build toilets and a BBQ area. We have been working extensively with the Alpine Shire Council on the project. After talking with us about our needs they produced a concept diagram which you can see on the club website under the Projects link.

We have earmarked \$30,000 with the VHPA, secured \$20,000 from the local Shire and have the informal OK from Regional Development Victoria (RDV) for another \$130,000. Total project costs will be around \$180,000.

Already there are ever growing piles of dirt in the north west corner of the landing paddock. Once we get the

formal OK from RDV, the Shire, who will be in large managing the project, starts the process pretty much immediately. All going well that means this summer you see earthworks as the northern end is leveled and later in the season the appearance of toilets and BBQ area. As we are all keen to fly as much as possible over the summer, we don't envision any of this adversely affecting our ability to fly.

We do have one possible sticking point. We need to have long term tenure over the land to secure the RDV funding. Hancocks who we currently hold a lease with, have stalled after originally agreeing to divest the land around launch and at the landing paddock to DSE, who in turn have agreed to lease to us. Hancocks may now wish to lease the land directly to us. However if this doesn't occur before the next RDV funding round meeting the project could be out the window. We are currently in the process of negotiating with Hancocks on this .



If you can read the fine print your doing pretty well - see it on the website under Projects

From the President's desk.....



The New Club Year Unfolds.....

With the new financial year having started, I welcome all of you (back) to NEVHGC.

I wish to pay my respects to the outgoing committee. Thank you to

Heather Mull who helmed the club so ably last year, and whose presence brought in a sense of balance as regards HG and PG interrelations. Thank you to Brian Webb (Secretary, Communications and SSO), Isla Christian (Treasurer), Simon Taylor (Memberships), Viv Williams (Committee Member) and Carol Binder (Committee Member).

Thank you also, to Jo Rainczuk, for his role as an excellent interface between ourselves and VHPA.

If you care to look at the project report on the NEVHGC website, you will see the many issues and tasks the committee was dealing with over the last year, and will continue to do so for this coming year.

Our annual general meeting saw the election of team with a lot of new blood. I welcome Ed Barber (a local PG pilot) as Secretary, Tony Kenney (a Melbourne based HG pilot) as Treasurer, Rod Oldfield (a local PG pilot) as our Membership Officer, Michelle Baptiste (a "transplanted" Belgian PG pilot) as a committee member.

Brian Webb (communications) and I comprise the remnant of last year's committee. Former committee member Viv Williams, whilst not actually a committee member this year, is also on hand and providing valuable input.

Our contact details are on the NEVHGC website. Feel free to contact us if there is anything that we might be able to do for you.

Membership

Rod Oldfield has started contacting pilots to encourage them to renew their NEVHGC memberships for this year.

Membership of NEVHGC is compulsory for anyone wishing to fly our main site, Mystic Hill. Revenue from membership pays for the lease and upkeep of the launch and landing areas as well as of the access track to the top.

It is also legally important to the club, in that it confers constitutional protection on the club as a whole as regards legal liability. Please, everyone, support this concept and encourage pilots wishing to fly Mystic to obtain a club membership, what's good for the club is ultimately good for you as pilots.

We have also addressed the legal issues of non-commercial tandem pilots who wish to take non-HGFA members for a fly. You can either enroll your passenger as a member of HGFA (at \$10.00 per person, the paperwork is available from Alpine Paragliding or from Active Flight), or there is

a new NEVHGC membership category (the pilot pays \$5.00 for this when obtaining their NEVHGC membership, and obtains a "Tandem Pack" containing instructions and indemnity forms). These Tandem Packs will be available at all outlets where NEVHGC membership is available.

Driving Issues

When you become a member of NEVHGC, you undertake to conduct all operations in a way that doesn't inconvenience, endanger or otherwise annoy any other user of our sites.

The club considers driving vehicles up and down the launch access tracks as part of those operations.

In the past, there have been complaints that some people are driving the tracks in a dangerous manner (usually through excessive speed).

Having been made aware of this, the committee is obliged to respond; otherwise it will be held partially responsible if/when an accident occurs.

Dangerous driving is risky to you and to other users of the site, and dramatically increases road maintenance (which the club has to pay for).

The committee concedes that speed limit enforcement is not feasible (we don't have radar guns, and the speed limit is 100 km/h anyway).

Therefore, the committee will judge a given person's driving behaviour based on feedback from their peers.

In plain English, don't annoy anybody else while you are driving on the road. Repeated complaints about your driving will lead to loss of your access to the flying sites.

Please also consider other issues such as raising dust, especially through residential areas, and on launch.

The Mystic Park Project

Former committee member, Viv Williams is continuing last year's role as one of the main driving forces behind the Mystic Park Project.

This consists of off road parking, toilets, barbeques, tracks and landscaping at the corner of the Mystic landing paddock nearest Dougherty's Bridge.

Through Viv and Brian's efforts, the club is moving closer and closer to securing a substantial grant (combining Local and State Government based funding) which will finance these works. Not just NEVHGC, but the community at large will benefit from this.

Site Maintenance

The club has engaged the services of Steve Thompson, another local PG identity, to perform and co-ordinate necessary works, especially at Mystic. Steve has also done a number of jobs at other NEVHGC sites, thanks Steve, and thanks to VHPA for providing some funding for the non-Mystic sites.

If you see anything that is busted, or looking a little seedy, please contact any committee member, and they will have it assessed and get it fixed as required.
 A maintenance program is being devised for all our sites, and we would welcome any input.

General Flying

With the (to date) mild winter, we have been getting a surprising amount of flying in. Although the heights are far less than summer, there have been days of abundant lift that have allowed sustained flights and valley crossings.
 Even in these gentle conditions, it never pays to get complacent.
 Also, spring is just around the corner, with its characteristically broken conditions. We haven't had any real incidents over winter (touch wood), please let's continue the trend.
 Cheers!

Karl Texler

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Mystic Access Road signage

The Mystic track can be a busy and potentially dangerous stretch of road. Pilots rushing up, looking more at the sky than the road. Retrieve drivers, unfamiliar with dirt roads cautiously trying to find their way down.
 We are working towards introducing a system (a la Manilla) for vehicles driving on the road. We propose that drivers will use UHF#25 to declare their journey up and down from launch. We intend to mark key stretches of the track; the intention is that drivers can announce which part of the track they are approaching to oncoming vehicles to take particular care.

