

Introduction From 50K or Bust!

50K or Bust was intended to address the particular difficulties paraglider pilots encounter when learning to fly cross country in British weather conditions, something which seemed to be missing from other literature. It originated from articles written mainly for the Derbyshire Soaring Club magazine, and was made possible by the introduction of “print on demand” publishing which enabled me to publish with little financial risk and to update the book almost at will.

After five years in print I substantially re-organised the book. Paragliders are now much better and many more pilots are flying cross country. The most important key to flying cross country is thermalling, so if a pilot can thermal well, he can probably learn to fly cross country by following other pilots. I have, therefore, started this revision with the section on thermalling followed by the section on cross country techniques themselves.

The safety section, which had grown and was threatening to dominate the book, has been moved, as a bunch of articles, to the 50k-or-bust.com web site leaving only a short bit in this book. I will keep adding to the safety section of the web site as and when I can, so please make use of it. The idea is to create a reference of straightforward safety material that is easily understood. Current online resources are generally rather messy and I hope to make something a bit simpler.

50K or Bust? Why not 100K? It is quite possible to fly up to about 20K in one thermal taken from the launch area. Getting further usually means some kind of transition between lift sources and good decision making. 50K is a long way. If we can fly 50K then it is mainly a matter of application, tenacity and luck to fly 100K. I've flown 100K

only once in the UK and consider luck (call it probability or divine assistance if you wish!) to be a significant factor. If you don't think luck is necessary you probably don't need to read this book! Most of us cannot devote more than a limited amount of time to our flying. In the UK good cross country conditions are rare and one of the aims of this book is to enable pilots to get the most from the time they have available. For myself, I now seem to have reached an age where achieving distance seems less important than simply having a nice day flying!

This book is specifically intended to help with "flatland" flying in Britain rather than alpine type flying. My health has mostly restricted my flying to Britain although I now fly regularly in Piedrahita thanks to excellent support provided by Steve Ham. There are an increasing number of books available covering alpine flying.

I have tried to arrange the chapters to cover the most basic elements of cross country flying in approximate order of importance to the developing pilot. My hope is that if you treat each chapter as a step you will find yourself 50K from your launch before too long. Having said that, everyone is different, flying conditions vary tremendously and it is not that simple. You will not be able to practice things the weather will not allow so be prepared to be flexible. In some areas there is also the chicken and egg conundrum. For example, we cannot go cross country unless we can navigate and we cannot easily learn to navigate without going cross country.

The ideas in this book are only one person's view and my own flying has many limitations which I will try not to hide from the reader. If something seems either very obvious or very obscure then remember that cross country flying requires many different skills and abilities. This diversity is, of course, one of the great attractions of cross country flying and a pilot with a weakness in one area may well excel in another.

In the UK controlled airspace heights are specified in feet and will also be in this book. Distances are in kilometres as is usual for paragliding and kilometres per hour for speed. For rates of ascent or descent I use both metres per second and hundreds of feet per minute.

This book is not intended to replace the British Hang gliding and Paragliding Association (BHPA) pilots manual or other books about paragliding in general. Pilots intending to fly cross country in Britain should study for their 'Pilot' rating and this book assumes that the reader will do so.

I started paragliding a long time ago and my early learning experience was very different to that of new pilots today. For new pilots I recommend "Prepare to Fly" by Simon Blake which gives a modern, thorough, look at the process of learning I could not write. Like this book it can be found on www.lulu.com .

Another new resource is the workshops Pat Dower recently started giving. Pat is an expert at getting stuff across to pilots. He will probably encourage you to fly faster than I would. He may be right! This book intentionally emphasises staying up rather than making glides. Pat's web site is www.patdower.co.uk .

Fitness is important for cross country flying. My health is not wonderful and I cannot do many of the things I used to. (You will see hints for the older pilot at various points in this book!) I have seen pilots of my age suffer serious injuries trying to do things which are really beyond them. I, myself, recently had an accident I should have been able to avoid. On the other hand there are older pilots who are still going strong and able to see off pilots half their age. Do what you can, but try and recognise when enough is enough. If you are not enjoying yourself flying it may be that you are tired and need to land.

As well as flying paragliders I have a few years experience

of flying sailplanes. I tried hang gliders but found them far too heavy. How much of this book is relevant to hang glider pilots I am unclear. I hope it is of some value.

I very much like to hear from readers as to whether this book helps (or hinders!) them in their attempts to fly cross country and am happy to try and clarify anything. Such correspondence is of great value when trying to improve the book. If something in the book is wrong or ambiguous I like to know about it so I can fix it in future revisions. I may be contacted through the www.50k-or-bust.com website.

I should like to thank all the pilots I have ever flown with (and a few more besides!) for the ideas which have enabled me to write this book. In particular Kelly Farina has kindly allowed me to include his method for learning to handle a paraglider in thermals.

A pilot has a responsibility not to endanger him or her self or others. If you find anything in this book which you think conflicts with air law then you must comply with the air law.

Keep your safety margins wide, especially when you are flying in unfamiliar conditions. You can reduce your safety margins a little as you gain experience.

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