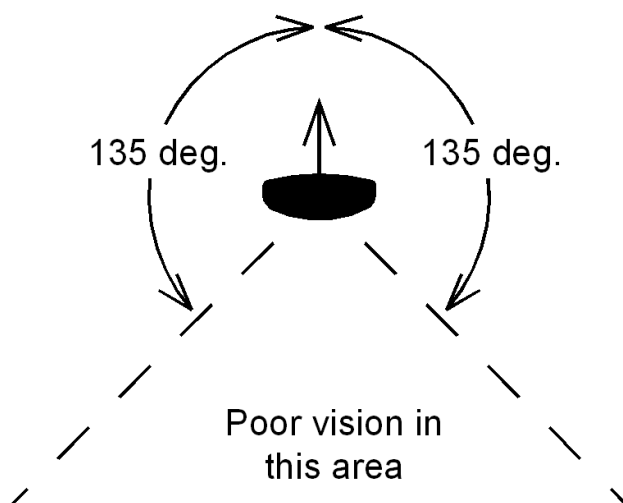


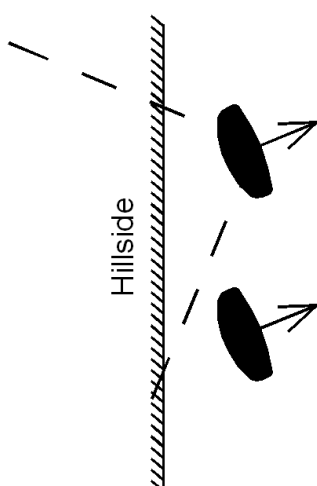
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Following On The Ridge - Nigel Page

How far can you turn your head around to see behind you? I think my neck is fairly good in this respect. If I try I can probably just see something directly behind me (at 180 degrees) from the corner of my eye. If I rotate my shoulders from a seated position I can see something behind me a little better, but still not properly. I reckon most paraglider pilots cannot observe properly more than about 135 degrees each side in flight, leaving an area behind poorly observed.

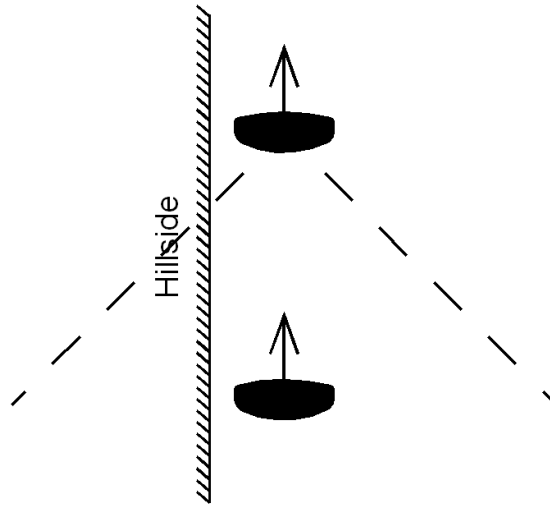


If we are soaring a hillside in a fairly strong wind we will be “crabbing”. Our groundspeed will be quite low and our view along the hill will be good in both directions. We can easily see gliders behind us.



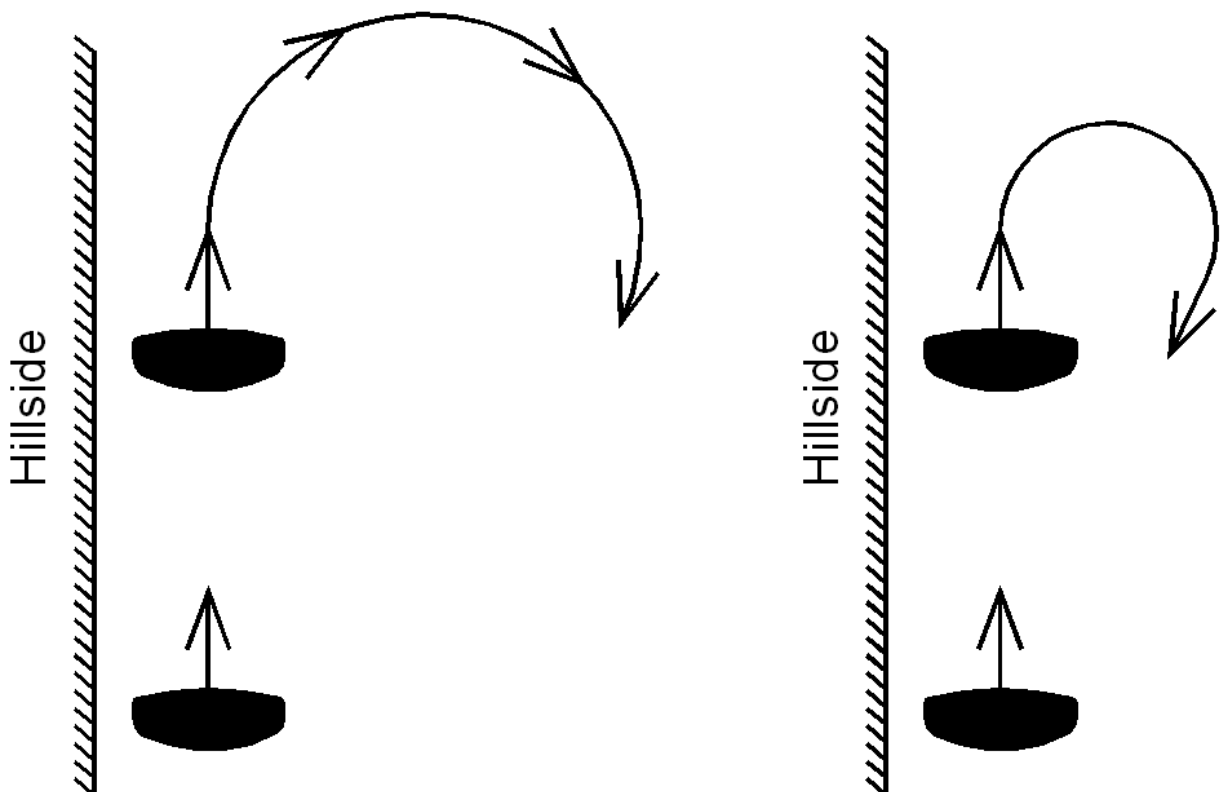
If the pilot in front slows down the pilot behind can easily turn a little more away from the hill which will quickly reduce his groundspeed along the hill. When the pilot in front turns at the end of his beat the pilot behind can usually deal with it easily.

However if the wind is light our lift will probably be mainly thermal lift even though we are soaring the hill. We are no longer “crabbing” significantly.



Our view behind us is now much worse and our ground speed is higher as we are not “crabbing”. When things happen they will happen quicker. A pilot too close behind another now has to make a sharp turn if the pilot in front slows or manoeuvres. It also sometimes happens that the pilot behind finds he cannot easily fly as slowly as the one in front and gradually creeps up behind. Getting too close behind someone is extremely dangerous and we must turn away well before this happens.

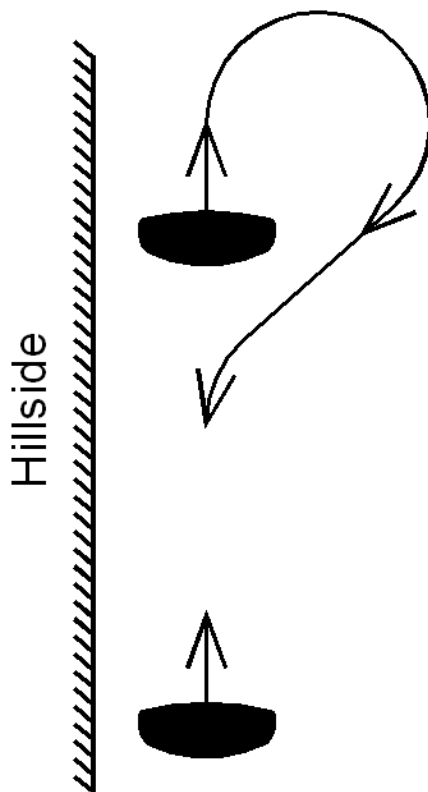
So, our intrepid pair are nearing the end of the ridge and will want to turn back before the lift drops off. They have been flying close to the hill on their left and, believing the lift is strong only close to the hillside, they will want to make the return beat close in too. The pilot in front may well not have the same confidence in the lift extending as far along the ridge as the pilot behind thinks it does, and he decides to turn rather sooner than the pilot behind expects. The pilot in front will probably choose one of two options for his turn.



A wide turn gives the pilot behind the option to pass between the pilot in front and the hill and fly further along. A tight turn will create serious difficulties for the pilot behind. The pilot in front must not make a tight turn into a space he has not been able to see clearly before he turns. If he cannot see properly right behind he must not turn tightly. A third option, if he cannot see behind well, is to start a wide turn and tighten it once he has turned enough to see properly. It is worth remembering that tight turns are not always the most efficient, even on the ridge. Turning wider may very well lose less height and may also reveal that the lift further out from the hill is better than we think.

So does this exonerate the pilot behind from responsibility for what happens next? Of course not. He knows full well that the pilot in front will want to turn at some point and the closer he is the more difficult he will make it for the other pilot. The pilot behind must keep his distance or turn early. Both pilots each have a duty to look out for each other. If there is a collision it is unlikely to be solely the fault of one pilot. If they are both very lucky they can argue about it afterwards from adjacent hospital beds.

Another thing we hope the lead pilot will not be considering even if he is a bit further ahead. He might make a tight turn knowing full well that there is a pilot behind, but on the assumption that getting the ridge on his right will give him "right of way".



As well as being bad airmanship, selfish and potentially dangerous, a pilot intentionally placing himself in someone's way in this manner is in breach of air law.

OK, I hear you say, we've sorted that out. What about when a third pilot is somewhere nearby? Yes, it all gets more complicated. If it seems complicated to you it is getting crowded and you must do something to give yourself more space.

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