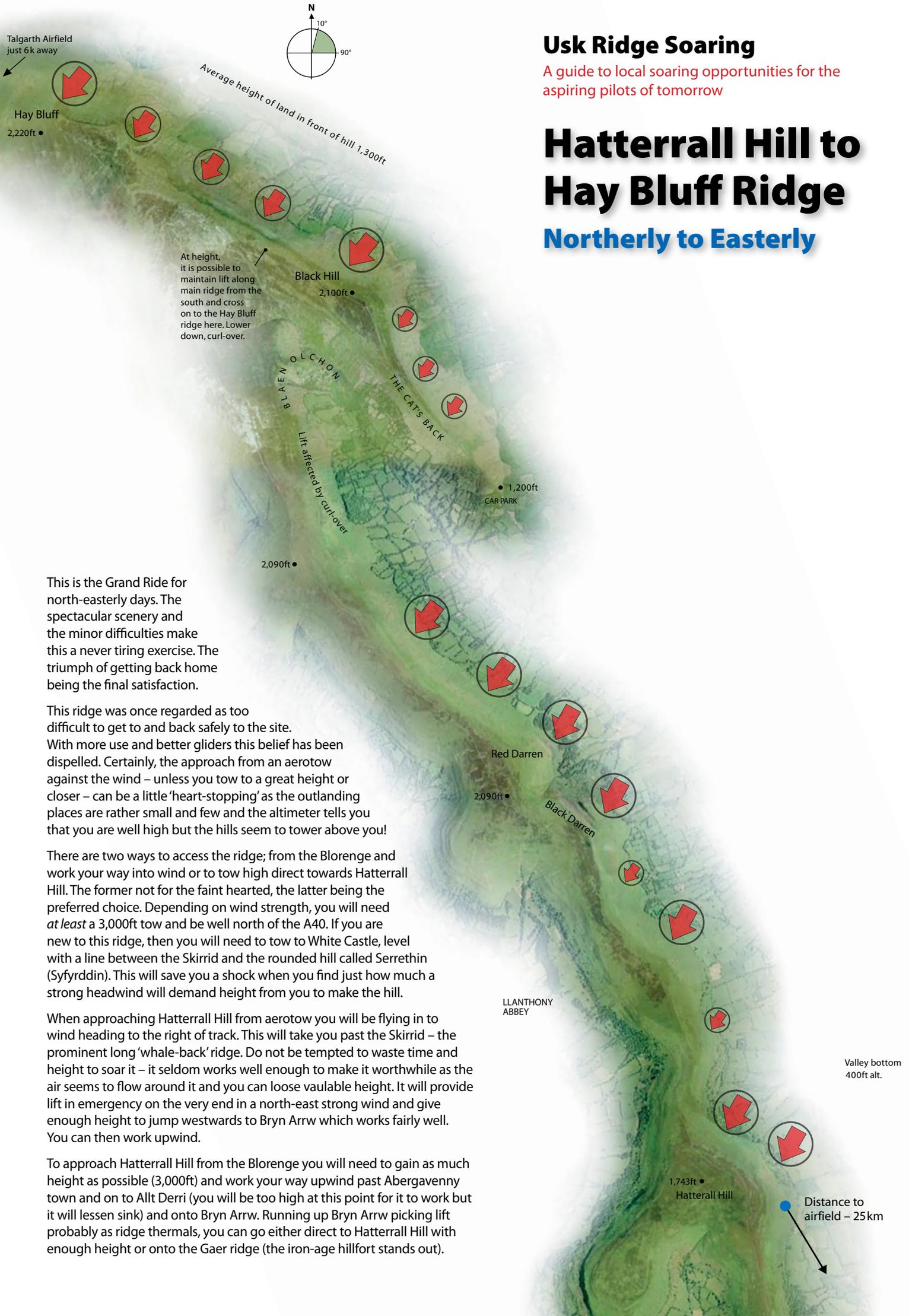


## Usk Ridge Soaring

A guide to local soaring opportunities for the aspiring pilots of tomorrow

# Hatterrall Hill to Hay Bluff Ridge

## Northerly to Easterly



This is the Grand Ride for north-easterly days. The spectacular scenery and the minor difficulties make this a never tiring exercise. The triumph of getting back home being the final satisfaction.

This ridge was once regarded as too difficult to get to and back safely to the site. With more use and better gliders this belief has been dispelled. Certainly, the approach from an aerotow against the wind – unless you tow to a great height or closer – can be a little ‘heart-stopping’ as the outlanding places are rather small and few and the altimeter tells you that you are well high but the hills seem to tower above you!

There are two ways to access the ridge; from the Blorenge and work your way into wind or to tow high direct towards Hatterrall Hill. The former not for the faint hearted, the latter being the preferred choice. Depending on wind strength, you will need *at least* a 3,000ft tow and be well north of the A40. If you are new to this ridge, then you will need to tow to White Castle, level with a line between the Skirrid and the rounded hill called Serrethin (Syfyrddin). This will save you a shock when you find just how much a strong headwind will demand height from you to make the hill.

When approaching Hatterrall Hill from aerotow you will be flying in to wind heading to the right of track. This will take you past the Skirrid – the prominent long ‘whale-back’ ridge. Do not be tempted to waste time and height to soar it – it seldom works well enough to make it worthwhile as the air seems to flow around it and you can lose valuable height. It will provide lift in emergency on the very end in a north-east strong wind and give enough height to jump westwards to Bryn Arrw which works fairly well. You can then work upwind.

To approach Hatterrall Hill from the Blorenge you will need to gain as much height as possible (3,000ft) and work your way upwind past Abergavenny town and on to Allt Derri (you will be too high at this point for it to work but it will lessen sink) and onto Bryn Arrw. Running up Bryn Arrw picking lift probably as ridge thermals, you can go either direct to Hatterrall Hill with enough height or onto the Gaer ridge (the iron-age hillfort stands out).

If it is a day with thermals there is not a big problem. On the days with no thermals and ridge soaring is the only option, this route is not really suitable unless there are at least some incipient ridge thermals.

The ridge will work in both light and strong winds from about north-north-east to east (10° – 90°). On light wind days without thermals, reaching home will be very difficult as the closest hill to the airfield will not provide enough height. On strong wind days it can be rough with strong lift – very rough low to the ridge tops. Most days the lift is mainly both incipient and true thermals which will take you to cloudbase – even if it is not soarable elsewhere.

On light/medium wind days – you will be using the ridge all way with paragliders and hang-glidors. Keep a good lookout. Your turning circle is larger than you think and it is very easy to find oneself frighteningly closer than intended to a little man waving!

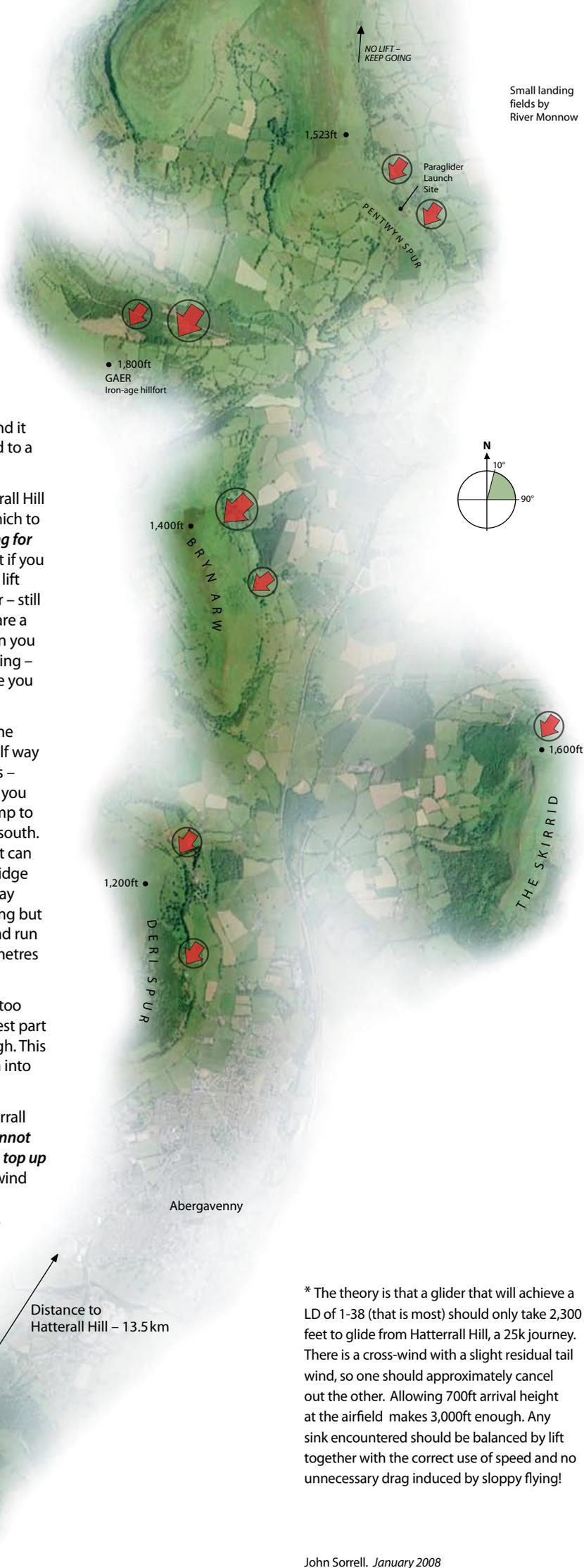
Both routes of access from Usk converge just south of Hatterrall Hill where there is a small ridge, used by the paragliders from which to launch. This produces a little lift if you are low. **You are making for the bowl around the other side of Hatterrall Hill.** To reach that if you are at 2,000ft or lower you will have to run into wind with no lift along the east facing side of Hatterrall Hill, around the corner – still no lift and quite worrying, press on, do not turn back (there are a few small but good fields down below by the river) and when you turn into the NE bowl you get one of the best feelings in gliding – a smooth steady climb with the hill dropping away alongside you as you progress up the hill at an angle.

After Hatterrall's bowl work your way up, gaining height all the time, to Red and Black Darren, a prominent scar and bowl half way up the ridge, this will give good lift – especially the two spurs – and progress along the slope towards Blaen Olchon. By now you will have a lot of height and will have to make an upwind jump to Black Hill and the Cat's Back, the conspicuous ridge running south. Make the jump early and not behind the Cat's Back ridge as it can be rough with sink from the curl-over. Aim to turn onto the ridge over the car park for the walkers ridge path and work your way towards the white trig-point. The lift can be a bit disappointing but reappears strongly as you turn Black Hill's protruding spur and run towards Hay Bluff (2,220ft). At Hay Bluff you are now 38 kilometres from the airfield.

The Hay Bluff section of the ridge sometimes does not work too well. This is because although you may be at 2,500ft the lowest part of the terrain is now at 1,300ft and the ridge is not all that high. This becomes evident on turning the Bluff as you now look down into the Wye valley some 2,000ft below you to the north.

The run south is easy with no problems. Gain height at Hatterrall Hill to fly straight home. You will need 3,000ft plus\*. **If you cannot get enough height you will have to return via the Bloreng to top up height to 2,000ft or more.** The run to the Bloreng has a tail wind component (fly a little slower) and following the ridges (Bryn Arrw and the Deri spur of the Sugar Loaf) reduces sink.

This indeed is a Grand Ride and once having soared this ridge a few times you are ready for the Ultimate Ride – the Brecon Beacons and beyond.



\* The theory is that a glider that will achieve a LD of 1-38 (that is most) should only take 2,300 feet to glide from Hatterrall Hill, a 25k journey. There is a cross-wind with a slight residual tail wind, so one should approximately cancel out the other. Allowing 700ft arrival height at the airfield makes 3,000ft enough. Any sink encountered should be balanced by lift together with the correct use of speed and no unnecessary drag induced by sloppy flying!