

Usk Ridge Soaring

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

Kilgwrrwg/Model Farm Ridge

Northerly to North-Easterly



The only local ridge when the wind is from the northerly quadrant and blowing at least 15 knots.

The run is only 1.8 kilometres and the ridge slope does not seem very high. But it is 450 feet from top to bottom at the best bit. It always works and has the great benefit of being within easy glide of the airfield.

The wooded spur of the Gaer-fawr (2.6 kilometres from the airfield south-east) has the first lift encountered and usually gives a limited but good burst of lift, travelling east crossing the model farm below (X shaped buildings built in the 19th century as an example of 'new' agriculture) keep well against the hill fields if low – it does look a bit terrifying but the air should be good. Do not be put off by the apparent lack of spectacular vario readings, this hill like so many only works well at a certain height above where the higher band of air slides over the more turbulent air close to the ridge. You will notice that the **lift is always concentrated over the tiny wooded spur in the centre**. The ridge then runs on up to a tight little wooded cwm towards Devauden. This sometimes does not work very well depending on the wind direction (too much east in it) or too little strength.

On poor days it pays to stay between the Gaer-fawr spur and the little central wooded spur by Newchurch and work the thermal ridge lift hoping to ride one high enough to be a true thermal flight. The minimum working height range should be around 1,100 to 1,300ft.

On good days the whole ridge works up to a holding height of around 1,400ft or more and also produces ridge triggered thermals that go higher.

Do not be tempted to fall back over the hill or to use the bowl and spur of the north-westerly ridge (Golden Hill) as it will not work very well unless you are very high (thermals).

There is a fear expressed that the hill will not hold a glider of any sort high enough to get home. This is a fallacy, it may look a long way but is only 4km. To glide back from the Gaer-fawr spur one follows good air and heads for our northerly facing ridge above Gwernesney (south-east) where you are in good air and on your crosswind landing leg already – it pays to fly at a higher speed than normal*. The average height loss for the trip from the ridge taken as an average over many years of flying, is between 300 and 400ft. If a reasonable performance glider leaves the ridge at 900ft, it is in circuit at 500ft. So making a rule to oneself of a minimum of 1,100ft to leave the ridge gets one back into circuit with a big safety margin.

For the more advanced or brave, 'beat-ups' along the ridge can be quite fun and improve a pilot's handling skills and knowledge of the glider's flight characteristics, BUT remember two things. Mishandling a glider low could be fatal and so could not keeping a good lookout if there are more than one of you on the ridge. Living a long life and having a good flying career depends on how a pilot performs and vigilant he is. **The two main things if nothing else to learn on a ridge are to avoid aerial collision and inadvertent downwind low speed turns.**

This ridge makes a good thermal source in the summer in a north-east to north-west light wind and is the place to flee if getting low or failing to soar from an aerotow.

* This information is for gliders with a 'normal' performance at speed and with reasonably good in-to-wind penetration. So pilots flying K8s need to get the duty instructor's briefing first.