

Usk Ridge Soaring

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

Wentwood

North-Westerly

The main local ridge and almost certainly the ridge that gives a pilot's first experience of ridge soaring.

The main ridge is 13.5 km long extending from the Celtic Manor golf course at Caerleon to Graig-fawr east of the airfield. The best and steepest section of 5 km being the afforested part above the A449 where the ridge averages 570ft at the south and 850ft at the north. The prominent large bowl at the north end (Bertholau Graig) is 960ft. The river height below is just 25 ft!

Although not always as reliable as the Blorenge, it is basically a safe ridge with good air all along. Its major benefit is that even if the ridge fails to hold a glider high enough for the pilot's peace of mind, flying along the hills towards the airfield the ridge lift will always bring you home.

The main section of the ridge is dominated by Wentwood forest. The highest point of 1,013 ft is by the communications mast and overlooks a rather good bowl which always seems to give good lift and is a good thermal generator. From there the ridge runs south following the trunk road to terminate abruptly at Cat's Ash with a prominent prehistoric earthworks on the ridge top at Pen-toppen-ash.

This section of the ridge works very well in a brisk north-westerly wind and generates thermals along the its length but primarily at both ends with some the usual mixture of sink and lift along the centre section. On average the ridge will hold at 1,600ft to 2,200ft. This section has few problems other than the major consideration of keeping a good lookout. The visibility heading south is usually bad straight into sun and other gliders are difficult to see. It is essential to keep a tally in your mind of how many other gliders are to the north and south of you and their approximate heights and positions as you last saw them. At the risk of becoming boring, it is still worth reiterating that aerial collision forms one of the most serious potential dangers to two of you.

Before going on the lesser hills either side, it is worth noting that other than thermals, this section often is 'in-phase' with wave, so keep a good lookout above for signs of wave. These signs are notoriously difficult to see

from below and it is often better to look up either side along the ridge for the tell-tale signs. Climbing as high as possible and penetrating upwind will be the best way of catching the wave.

Extending south towards Caerleon the ridge drops a lot lower and it is easy (in the right wind strength) to travel right down to the M4 at Newport overflying the large golf course of the Celtic Manor (good landing sites, but you would not be too popular – these people pay a fortune to keep their grass good). Strangely enough, the air always seems to be good and the loss of height minimal. On the way back, however, the lift

vanishes and Wentwood looks very high. Fear not, as you descend you meet the new 'holding height' and as soon as you meet the main ridge, up you go.

Between the east of the airfield (Graig-fawr) and the main ridge at Bertholey, there is what would be a very good ridge if it was not for the lumpy hills in front which break up the airflow. This is all soarable at a lower height than Wentwood with the spurs working better than the bowls, particularly Golden Hill. This is the way to and from Wentwood ridge. If one is short of height when returning to the airfield, this ridge is the one to follow all the way. It averages 700 – 850ft. Do not be tempted to take the shorter more direct route.

All these ridges join up to make a distance of 13.5 km. It is quite possible on good strong wind days to fly from the M4 right up to the Kymin above Monmouth and beyond, a distance of 30 km.

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