

Report on 2005's British Club Challenge (BCC) paragliding competition.

Mark Ashton Smith

As this bulletin goes to press, the KHPA 'A' Team are in second place with 4044 points in the 2005 British Club Challenge (BCC) out of 20 competing teams. Avon – the winner last year - is currently in first place with 4802 points. The upcoming final is to be held in late July / early August, and Kernow is a strong contender for overall victory.

Ken Wilkinson, event organiser and stalwart captain of the Avon team, told me that Avon didn't bother to come to Cornwall because it wouldn't be 'serious' flying. This attitude shows up what makes our team's rating so remarkable – up there with the Avon 'Skytribe', and beating the likes of Thames Valley, South East Wales, Wessex, Malvern and Derbyshire, when we have only one little-flown and gnarly XC site to fly from, and compared to other clubs very little paragliding XC experience. The Avon 'Skytribe' for one is based in the very heart of XC flying in Britain (look at the UK map of national XC league logged flights to see what I mean). So that's awesome. And the other thing that's inspirational is the motivation. Over a four week period our boys made the 4-5 hour trip to SE Wales to compete three times, while many clubs couldn't find the time. The consistent turnout of Kernow on the results page of the BCC website (<http://www.flybcc.co.uk/results.asp>) shows this outstanding motivation - and how it's paid off.

Here's what some of our guys have done over the past few weeks: Pete Coad flew his first XC on a paraglider from Talybont on June 19th, doing over 16 km and getting the second best distance of the day. (As Pete says, you've always got to judge your flight distance relative to others on the day.) Two weeks later on the 3rd July John T. flew an incredible 73 km from Merthyr to beyond Hereford, his personal best for the UK. On the same day, Chairman Dave flew 30 km from Merthyr to Abergavenny, part of the way in cloud. He tells me his previous best was around 6km! The following weekend on Saturday July 9th, Pete flew 48 km from The Blorenge to Bridgend and the next day flew *another* 50 km taking a similar course from The Blorenge - his personal best on a paraglider and just short of 100 km in a weekend! On the same day John T., Mark B. and Dave also flew to within a few miles of Bridgend. Sea breeze inevitably brought all of them down. John had taken a more roundabout route, going first south to near Cardiff and then following the coast west, staying clear of the sea breeze. He was in the air five hours, mostly at cloudbase. Dave and Mark took a direct route to the same destination and were only in the air about an hour! All three of them flew over 40km on this epic day, a personal best for Dave who has gone from strength to strength. Al – also relatively new to big distance XC flying - made an impressive 39 km, a personal best for him. Cloudbase was between 4000-5000 ft ASL and at this height the views must have been unbelievable! For some photo galleries of our team in action over these competition weekends, follow the links at www.paraglidingblog.com.

Kernow 'B' team pilots who participated in the BCC competition included Mike Abbott and myself. Both of us enjoyed thermalling to well over 1000 ft ATO above the spectacular scenery of the Brecon Beacons. Over three weekends I made half a dozen or more attempts at 'going over the back' circling in drifting thermals, mostly losing the lift and heading back to the ridge. I managed two small XC flights: 4 km from Talybont, where I thermalled up to over 800 ft ATO and feeling frustrated with not being able to read the broken thermic air, head off on a glide downwind, landing 4 km later after nothing but sink. I started in the same

thermal as patient Pete, who went on to do 16 km. At The Blorenges I did much better. Taking John's advice not to leave the hill in *sink* but in *lift* and Pete's advice to *be patient*, I worked a thermal for a good half an hour, staying well above 1000 ft ATO, and drifting back slowly and patiently, gradually gaining height. Just when I thought I was well established in the thermal and was looking at the distant horizon, I found myself in sink which I couldn't escape from. I tried flying over metal roofs and dark surfaces in the valley for a low save, but only got a blip or two which I couldn't turn in. I landed 6 km in a random grass field downwind (on tip-toes), feeling like the actual distance didn't match up to the experience at all. Given all that work, all that height, surely it was at least 10 km? But it was my best flying experience yet. Flying from St Agnes to Portreath runway at the first BCC round gave me a great sense of freedom, but doesn't compare to the sheer scale of thermal flying at height looking down at 100s of square miles of hills and valleys. Being among seasoned XC pilots in sometimes challenging thermal conditions in Wales was an intense learning experience, and the flying was exhilarating. I'll be looking forward to getting back up there this summer for 'the big one'.

The BCC website says: "In past years many pilots have flown their first cross country in the BCC, and it is important to note that it is designed primarily for lower airtime pilots seeking to improve their piloting skills. It is generally also very good fun." Judging from the credentials of the Avon team - and the overall quality of pilots I saw vanish into the clouds in gaggles (see picture below), I wouldn't agree that the competition is 'primarily designed for lower airtime pilots', but the rest of this claim is spot on. I would recommend it to anyone who wants to fly in thermals, no matter how inexperienced.



Tim, Al, John and Dave. June 19th, SE Wales.