

Wave flying in Scotland 2015

By Moritz and Maria



Should the gliding season end in October? Definitely not! And should we also ignore the south of France? What?? Exactly the point. This report for our club magazine describes how two Werdenfels club members made a small expedition to Scotland. For Maria it was all new, but not for Moritz as he had been hiding in Scotland for several years and had found that the soaring in the far north is a lot of fun. After the trip Maria was also very enthusiastic about the country, the people and the many opportunities for gliding.

Our destination was the small, beautiful airfield at Feshiebridge, normally shortened to Feshie. It is located in the Highlands in the middle of the Cairngorm National Park. At the beginning of October a flying week is organised for visitors, which is known as the Oktoberfest.

Just east of the airfield is the Cairngorm range which includes the second highest mountain in Scotland, the 1309 metre high Ben Macdui. To the west flows the Spey, a river well known for its salmon fishing and the many whisky distilleries in its lower reaches. A tributary of the Spey, the Feshie river, which often changes course in its bed each year, is without a doubt the most beautiful in Scotland, with many old Scots pine forests. The airfield is located there, in the otherwise rather deforested highlands.



Feshiebridge and the Grampian Highlands

The journey to Scotland via Luxembourg, Belgium, Calais, Dover and then east of London up to the north of the UK was smooth. It was 20 hours of driving plus the ferry crossing and breaks as necessary. We left our airfield in Ohlstadt on Friday at seven a.m. with the Duo Discus ACM in the trailer.

Even with 12 year old Volkswagen technology, we made good progress, with few stops or delays. We therefore arrived at the port in Calais earlier than expected but without any problems or extra cost we were able to take an earlier overnight ferry. We continued next day with short breaks and arrived in the early afternoon.

After the obligatory cup of tea on arrival, we rigged the Duo, which somehow seemed a bit more difficult than normal. This was possibly a side effect of the long car ride. On Saturday Maria had a familiarization flight with Nick, an Englishman and former Bristow Training Captain. This was a good choice because the Scots speak English in the same way as the Bavarians speak correct German. Aye right!

Maria was pleasantly surprised that even at the low wind speed the ridge lift was beautifully smooth. For the next day more wind was predicted and it would probably be rougher. The Duo was dressed for its first night in the far north. Then we ate together in the clubhouse and there was beer at the nicest gliding club bar in the world, together with a little briefing about local conditions and peculiarities.



The Feshie bar

On Sunday morning everything was made ready for flying. We put together the new oxygen system and installed it in the aircraft and so we were not the first at the launch point on runway 21. We got the message that the house ridge, the South Bowl, was not really working as wave was destroying the lift. Nick advised us that we ought to be towed into the valley, upwind and higher than the usual 2000 ft to get directly into the lift. We were lucky. At the usual position the vario on tow was showing very good lift. We released at 2000 feet and we were in smooth lift. Now it was up to ourselves to use these conditions for the rest of the day. Due to the low height of the mountains, the waves move around, especially at the lower levels where the valley wind systems are partly against the prevailing wind direction. Again and again we found better lift than the others. That day they saw the Duo almost only from underneath. Already on its first day our Duo wanted to be the real Highlander – there could only be one!

Unfortunately, there was no wave over 12,000 ft and so flying too far away from the airfield would have been a bit risky. But the six hours in the air were not boring for one minute. In the evening there was another delicious meal in the clubhouse. The vegetarian dish was again the better choice – so Maria said. The day ended with a late social session, with an unmissable “wee dram”!



Ready for takeoff at Feshiebridge

The next day there was a little more wind from the south at ground level. However at height the wind speed was less and more westerly. Yet again the conditions were not ideal for higher wave systems to develop, but they were enough for good local flying!

This time we released on the house ridge and made a couple of figure eights and circles in the rotor. Above that we found smooth rising air which took us to 1800m. From there we hopped to the south into the next system. In this wave, we climbed to 3500 m. No matter how hard we tried in the areas of strongest lift which were marked by impressive lenticulars, on this day the higher wave systems remained unattainable for all gliders in Scotland.

In the lower wave we could easily fly in the smooth lift and admire the scenery. We flew over the watershed between the River Feshie and the River Dee, looking to the east into Royal Deeside.



Above the clouds at Feshiebridge

Soon we heard a deep penetrating voice on the radio. "Rainbow One Romeo" was calling Aboyne while on approach to Balmoral Castle. A helicopter with royal passengers was inbound.

A little later we were away from the royal security area in 1-2 meters of smooth lift in Upper Deeside. When we were just west of Braemar, about 30 km east of the airfield, we lost the wave or it collapsed and the light lenticulars were more indistinct. In heavy sink we went downwind over the higher mountains towards the windward slopes. We were in 5 m / s down as we were still much too high for the hill lift to weaken the downdraft.

The entire south side of the Cairngorms seemed to be overlaid by a large area of descending wave, or was it another atmospheric phenomenon through the southern section of the Grampian Mountains between the valleys of the Dee and Feshie and the Tay? Our glide ratio declined to single digits and we were worried whether we would get back to the airfield. The ground approached, but no lift. At last we arrived low at the airfield, despite having tried circling in rotor at Coire Garblach. In the end we were too low to do anything except land.



Flying on the house ridge in late afternoon

But we arrived in time for 5 o'clock tea. Because of the good conversation we changed seamlessly to beer at 6 o'clock and finished up with whisky at midnight. We heard that Mike Morrison with his Ventus B had the same problem as us and came back even lower. Paul Myers in his Ventus 2C chose a route to the north of the Cairngorms but also could not find any more lift over the mountains. Today the sky had truly fallen on our heads.

Ordinary people work 8 hours on Tuesdays. Ordinary glider pilots fly 8 hours on Tuesdays. The wind was a bit weaker than the previous day. The waves were neither high nor were they identifiable by wispy clouds.

Days with bright blue skies are rarely seen in Scotland. If you're flying at Feshie in a bit of wind you always have the possibility of climbing on the ridge and then go looking for wave.

If you don't find wave, then you simply go back to the ridge. So we spent 8 hours and 27 minutes doing that, and set a new record for Feshiebridge airfield with a task speed of 21.93 km / h. There have probably been faster flights so our record was only for flight duration!



Braeriach

On Wednesday the wind was on holiday. In two short flights with nothing but reduced sink we could barely extend the flight time much beyond the time on tow. In the evening there was both meat and vegetarian haggis.

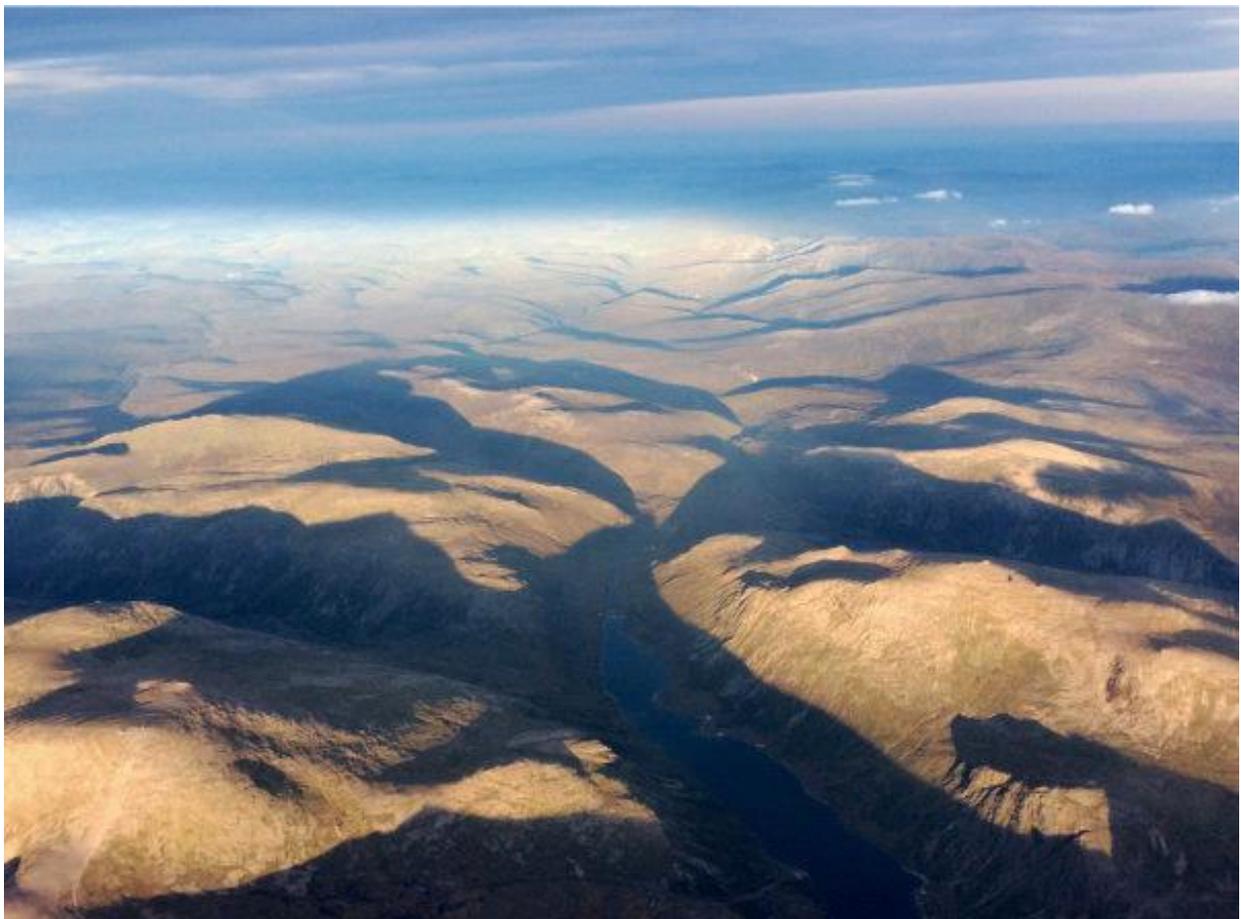
Thursday was again windless. A few people wanting aerotow practice continued with the same game as the previous day and flew anyhow. The longest glider flight including the aerotow time was 29 minutes. We took a trip on Loch Ness and drove to the west coast. On the west coast the mountains fall directly into the sea, forming impressive fjord-like Scottish sea lochs.

No wonder that the Harry Potter films were shot in this picturesque landscape. From a distance we saw Ben Nevis, which is the highest mountain of the UK with a height of 1344 meters. The weather was very unusual, beautifully warm in a cloudless sky. These weather conditions, resulting from pronounced high pressure are very rare in Scotland at this time of year. Unfortunately, such weather is useless for gliding, but it is very good for sightseeing.

On Friday morning, the sun again laughed in our faces and was telling us that the high pressure had barely moved. There was not a cloud in the sky, but there was light wind from the southwest. This was enough to maintain height on the house ridge but the wind direction and strength was not good enough for wave and other

forms of lift. The wind was just too weak. On this Friday, there was a ceremony to spread the ashes of a prematurely deceased Club member. For this the wind was unfortunately too strong and coming from the wrong direction. The ashes did not go into the Feshie river but blew back towards the audience. From the ashes of a genuine highlander, Maria flew with Nick in the ASH, registration FWW - short for F****ing Wide Wings? This is fun, said Maria and the ASH didn't land for some time. When flying with an airspeed indicator, scaled in mph, an altimeter which displays "feet" and a variometer which represents the rate of climb in knots she reverted to flying by colours and kept the needles in the green segments. Moritz clung to the hillside in the Duo and gave lessons in converting units the other way around.

On Saturday there was no wind again. So we made the best of the day. We went shopping, helped at the aerodrome and explored the surrounding area on foot.



Over Loch Avon

On Sunday, the wind finally freshened. An easterly wind is not good for the airfield because rotor from the eastern Cairngorm range can occur directly above the runway. We were able to observe how the lee slopes of a rotor cloud line and stationary cloud lines rose steeply upwards. We resisted the attitude of the highlanders 'let's have a cup of tea first' and argued vociferously and with Germanic certainty that the wave would be working and that we wanted to fly. Can we have a

tug pilot please! We were looked-at suspiciously by the locals. The Duo was ready to fly, but suddenly the Puchacz and ASH were in front of us at the launch point. Sneaky highlanders with their polite restraint! One must not underestimate them! Differing from the ASH we did not take a 3000ft tow to the fluffy rotor zones in front of us but instead first tried our luck with the beautiful autumn thermals further out in the Spey valley. The tow was 6 pounds cheaper. We flew in thermals for one hour and climb rates of 2 meters per second and more on the integrator were not uncommon, in autumn and in the far north!

In the lee of the mountains more rotor cloud was always forming and we worked slowly in front of it, in shreds of rotor and thermals. The more rotor, the worse the thermals. The transition was always exciting. Would the cumulus cloud base be high enough to allow us to fly upwind wind to the wave lift? After the second attempt and together with Nick's ASH we found the wave entry point. The wave was not higher than 1900 m MSL as the wind reduced with height and so we could not climb higher. The weather changed and the wave stopped altogether. Instead, there was now a large area of turbulent rotor. We had great vario swings up and down, but the height gains were not significant. Overall, we could barely stay up. We made various forays and ultimately found widespread smooth lift again. The logger indicated a west wind, but on the other hand the clouds to the east over the Cairngorms had a clear south-east movement, shooting an enormous cloud waterfall over the mountains from the east. That had to be a good convergence area. The line was now clearly marked by a cloud band, where we found good lift and we could have been able to fly until sunset. However we wanted to derig the Duo and treat ourselves to a little socialising.



Loch Erich

Unfortunately, the Oktoberfest was over at Feshie. For the next week there would have been no way to get a launch. That's why we moved to Aboyne, a larger airfield with " professional " tow pilots and flight instructors which is located on the eastern side of the Cairngorms. There are two paved runways with an economical Scottish width of about 2 meters.



On the road to Aboyne

From the air, you can think that you are over a big airport and wait to see an airliner on the take-off clearance. But there are " only " gliders that are towed into the vastness of Royal Deeside by two Piper Pawnees and a Remo. Since it was raining and low clouds made flying impossible, the day was just right for driving. Aboyne offers accommodation in the clubhouse and we therefore stayed there.



Pawnee tug at Aboyne

On Tuesday it rained. Again we drove along a breathtaking winding road back to Feshie and on the way bought a couple of thank-you gifts for Phil and Fiona Hawkins. We had invited them to dinner in the Cairngorm Hotel in Aviemore to thank them for their hospitality.

On Wednesday the weather was no better. Aboyne is not far from the east coast so we took a trip there and visited Stonehaven and Aberdeen. The sea was stormy and the waves were very impressive and fascinating, even if they were “only” water waves. A ruined castle at Stonehaven which is very exposed, on a cliff surrounded by the sea would definitely have been a questionable place to live.

The cost of touring the ruins was too much for us and so we only looked at the collapsed walls from the vicinity of the entrance area. Then we went into the oil capital of Aberdeen, which Moritz knows well from his professional work.

Maria found it difficult to imagine living in one of the grey granite Aberdeen houses, built for small people. Weather grey, grey houses, grey streets, grey water, grey ships. Aberdeen still has a lot to offer, for example, the most sunny days in the UK, but unfortunately on that day it was hard to believe.

Later it became soarable, and the rather small Scottish mountains were below cloudbase. The English guests from Lasham told us that had to go to fly and could not help us, so the two of us rigged the Duo in record time. Luckily the plane took pity on us and especially on Moritz's back. In five minutes, the pins were in. Tips for rigging with only two people: when there are size and strength differences in the rigging crew, it makes sense after inserting the wing root to swap positions: strong and big changes with small and not quite as strong from the root to wing tip, then everything is easier. Unfortunately, the wind was too weak for wave to form. In Aboyne one is dependent on wave, since there is no ridge in the immediate vicinity

of the airfield. Fortunately thermals formed in the afternoon and we were able to have a nice afternoon flight in the area around the airfield.



Thermalling over Aboyne

Unfortunately Friday was our last day in Scotland. The wind had strengthened a bit more and we launched with about 30 other aircraft in the early morning. There was an area of rotor lift, but unfortunately only a single wave. All the gliders were playing in it. The evasive manoeuvres were interesting – the visitors from Lasham probably wanted to revive the Battle of Britain, as we were attacked from all sides in the intermittent and narrow areas of lift. The wind slowed down with altitude, this wind shear caused the wave to roll over backwards and upwind there were strong downdrafts next to narrow chimney-like zones of lift. It was easy to fly out of the very good lift of up to 5 m/s. Nevertheless, this difficult flight was a great finish. Two weeks gliding in one of the most diverse, the most varied and scenically impressive flying areas in Europe. Sometimes all types of lift can be experienced in a single flight, from ridge lift, rotor, wave and thermals to convergence, particularly in sea breezes. Another impressive feature is the sensation when flying high above the clouds, which is due to the low cloudbase and the lack of scale in the scenery.



In the wave over Aboyne

Shortly after landing, we moved out of the accommodation, paid our bill and left towards the south the same evening. After 2000 km we arrived at Ohlstadt on Sunday afternoon and were warmly welcomed by Norbert Schummer who made us coffee. We're back home, but it is here really the most beautiful? Och aye, would be a Scottish response. Yes mon!

We, Maria and Moritz and of course, the Duo ACM D - 7408 had a very relaxing and exciting two weeks. The crew coordination went very well despite the two of us spending a total of 35 hours in the narrow cockpit. Control was intuitively exchanged in flight.



Scottish Sunset