

RETRIEVAL!

The (black) Art and Practice of Getting Back



About two years ago, Pat Dower carried out a survey focused on what prevents pilots from going xc. Near the top of the list were the hassles and fears about getting back. I can well understand this, as few of us have a willing retrieve driver prepared to chase us down, or with much desire to fully share our post flight elation. In my early years as a hang glider pilot it certainly put me off, as having retrieved yourself you then had to go and retrieve the glider. Retrieves could be a big enough pain to act as a real deterrent to any next time. This was also the pre smartphone, pre tracker age and even knowing quite where you were on landing without knocking on a door was common; on first acquaintance we must have appeared a little mad posing that question. Thankfully, things have got much easier with a paraglider, a smartphone and a credit card. I would even go so far as to say that I now actually enjoy the getting back, it's part of the challenge, provides some great mini adventures in places and with people you would never chance across normally. Everyone seems to have memorable retrieve stories and often they eclipse the flight in one's memory. Nowadays, it's retrieval made (fairly) painless so it's less of an excuse to hold you back.

Some people have a real knack for getting home easily I'm getting better, but still fairly average. I don't have the advantage of being young, female or handsome, so have to resort to guile, charm and experience. If you fall mostly into my category you may find the following useful; if it's the former then you may have a different problem on which I couldn't possible comment.

Where you land *(1 km in the air is easier than 1 km on foot)*

Some pilots are just km hungry animals! Call it age but, like a warm fire and a good bed, I prefer a decent road that carries traffic (hopefully even a bus), a village and some nice clean grass to enjoy the post flight pack up. Some will really push it, but the consequences of trying to squeeze that extra bit could be a remote valley, bad walking terrain and hiking time that matches every minute of flight

time. If it's a nice day and you're feeling fit it can also be a pleasure – but you don't have to make it harder than you wish. A further point is that although quiet we are fairly noticeable and our landings are still a rare event for most people. Any landing near populated areas, on playing fields, picnic sites etc, draws attention and some curious, friendly soul will often approach for a chat. This is really good news and you need to switch into friendly, charming mode with a hint of helplessness – a lift to the nearest station can easily result.

Jonny no mates (*or is it better to be with company*)

Two parts to this. We all have mates (don't we?) With a bit of pre-flight thought given to the getting back part it is possible to leave cars at strategic points. Most sites have that killer last bit that is off the beaten track. Last year I got back from near Masham to Hawes fairly easily – to then be faced with a long walk up to take off for my car. Dodd Fell would have been even worse! Generally, with that sort of walk I knock on a door and ask to leave my glider. It's always easier to work the retrieve with mates, but try to avoid being the tail-end Charlie who (it's assumed) will fly the shortest distance; establish a ranking in the pecking order and question your popularity. The downside to pre-flight planning is that in our eagerness to fly we neglect it or it is at best sketchy.

Fly with others; land with others. Easier said than done. A small group trying to get back makes hitching difficult unless you split, however, it allows cost sharing if you choose a taxi. It's also likely that someone is better prepared than you and has done some pre-flight legwork. You may even hear those magic words, "My wife's on the way".

Hitching (*where you learn a lot about human nature*)

I used to be so bad at this I carried a mirror and comb and got complexes. Now I realise it ain't only what you do, but the way you do it. A lot is common sense. Even if it means a little walking first to pick a good place. I try to imagine it from the driver's perspective. Driver's need to identify who and what you are clearly and with good thinking time – or they are past you. A BIG sign (at least A3) identifying you simply as a pilot and with a 'please' is enough forget thumbs. You also need to make it as easy as possible for them to make decisions that favour you and guide their actions. Fast roads aren't good, but stretches offering good advance visibility are; choose places with decent, safe pulling in spaces. Level is better than uphill or downhill; the steeper the gradient the worse it gets. Big smile, eye contact (but don't look like a stalker) and no dark glasses. Avoid the pitiful look although I have sunk lower than that.

Once you get a lift it's generally with a person who is the 'right sort' to chat and build relationships (platonic) with. Three times last year it resulted in getting taken right back to my car despite it being well out of the way. Now that is a result! Some regions are easier than others the English are shy, retiring and reserved, but better the further north you go; the Welsh too suspicious for their own good, so hope for a passing Englishman hailing from north of Manchester, whilst the Scots don't



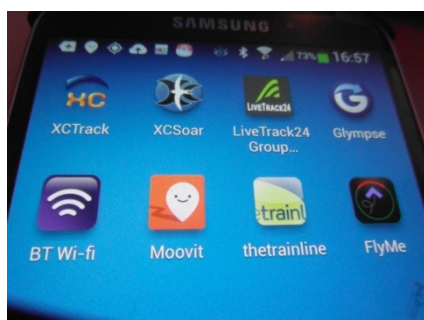
seem to have forgotten the Clearances or Culloden (and I don't blame them). Generally, I find it easier abroad, but get your sign translated before you leave.

Comforts (*keeping it civilised*)

The only time I tend to feel hungry or thirsty is after landing – never feel either in the air. I find it useful to carry a drink and a few snacks and once packed away they are useful in those restful 'planning' moments when trying to formulate a plan for getting back. Always carry a credit card of some sort for fares, meals and the unexpected – access to money is always useful. If your smartphone is also doubling as a flight instrument ensure you have thought out the power drain or even carry a small external battery for emergencies. Switch off non essentials like wifi when airborne to prevent it hunting. Get to know the deadspots for your particular network. Reliable communication provides options. Use whatever tracking app (Livetrack24/Skylines) you wish or just send a Glympse message if you think you may go down and before you get denied any signal. One final point it has been known to rain in the UK, even at the end of a good xc day. If you think this a possibility some lightweight waterproofs are worth carrying.

Options for getting back (*know your infrastructure*)

With time and practice I've got to know the train/ bus routes but also using useful apps like:



- the trainline
- Moovit

Just a few of the many examples for smartphones. I believe there are now some which will give you the location/distance from you and availability of local taxis.

Generally speaking the most difficult parts of any retrieve are the first (getting established on main transport routes) and the last (making the final kms back to where your vehicle is parked). One way to look at it is as a challenge – the aim being to get back as quickly and cheaply as possible. Many pilots fly xc each year and I can't recall a single one that is still out there someplace or had a close encounter with an armed nutter; that said many have some great tales to tell.

To put all the above into perspective and show I don't always practice what I preach. This year past (2012/13) I have:

- Got caught the wrong side an ice cold, Scottish river – and fallen in trying to cross in stocking feet. (*Was the extra 500m worth it?*)
 - Found myself dodging from tree to tree out of Coverdale in a rainstorm. (*Carry waterproofs*)
 - Happily accepted a ride in a smelly fishwagon. (*Sometimes it's worth being smelly*)
 - Been mistaken for a 'real' pilot because of my airmap. (*Accepted the insult for the lift*)
 - Refused a lift from two young ladies in a Smart car (*There are limits*)
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Coaching News: Next month's Skywords will have the new, updated list of coaches plus some guidance for both coaches and their role and what the coached can expect in terms of support.

There will also be a 2014 coaching registration form to help form the 2014 coaching list. This will appear on the website under the coaching section from about mid February.