



With the NCT series moving into its third season and only a few weeks away from the open date (1st February) it may be useful to provide some background, and the thinking behind what it's designed to offer pilots.

Background

Partway through my time as DHPC Chief Coach it seemed to me that pilot coaching needed to be more focused to make better use of the limited time we had on sporadic coaching days, and that pilots needed something to take away with them so they could have things to work on themselves. The first attempt involved the use of A5 task cards ... based on simple, twelve step skills that gradually increased in difficulty. I think the idea was OK, but it rather fell down due to the herding cat's syndrome ... and possibly it seemed a bit too bureaucratic for free spirits.

Next came setting simple, ridge- based tasks or challenges for pilots who were into their consolidating CP stage – in other words, the basics were established and a higher level of task was needed. The result was challenges that started to explore the limits of the ridge plus the area out front ... and get into thermalling if conditions allowed. This seemed to strike a chord with some pilots ... so the initial half dozen challenges, morphed into **Defined Flying Challenges** (pub. Jan 2013) over 60 short tasks (with maps, diagrams and downloads) spread across the whole north of England. *(Note the term, 'challenges' as a more generic and gentle term than tasks. Essentially, they come down to the same thing, but I discovered early on that the term 'task' equalled competition which was anathema in the minds of some. But I tend to regard the two terms as fairly interchangeable).*

By 2017, Chris Foster, had **xcmapp** up and running, together we discussed the possibilities of using it to host tasks, mapping, scoring system and a league. It also tied in with my strong belief that due to the nature of our sport (weather), pilot convenience (family and work) and pilot development (coaching challenges) that we needed to offer easily accessed opportunities regardless of pilot level, availability and ambition; and across the whole season. It also seemed the case that because paragliding has splintered into individual disciplines and as we live in a hilly area, then hike and fly challenges become a featured aspect sitting in parallel to the main series.

The current position is, that as we enter 2020, the **MAIN** series (hill based tasks with the odd xc) stands at 14 tasks; whilst the **HIKE n' FLY** series totals four spread across the Dales and Lakes.

There's lots to go at.

The AIMS of the NCT series and how to use the tasks.

Essentially there are two main AIMS.

The COACHING / PILOT DEVELOPMENT element

Firstly, the NCT has its roots in coaching. At its core it's a vehicle for coaching and improving pilot skills. This could be as part of a formal coaching day, under the direction of a coach, more informally with a coach or even as something you set yourself for the day. The tasks are specifically designed as ridge based (except the Hike n' Fly) to allow CP rated pilots to access them and remain close to support. They provide a great introduction to instrument navigational skill, from the setting up a route to flying it. Hopefully, they also lead into it becoming habit forming and learning to design one's own tasks to suit a site/conditions. In other words the concept is open ended and xcmapp allows you to design and store your own. You can find this under 'My tasks' in the menu.

Similarly, the Hike n'Fly tasks, especially the two shorter ones, are good introductions to this type of challenge, involving more individual planning, a reasonable level of fitness and a higher degree of personal responsibility.

The COMPETITION element

More experienced, or competitive pilots can enter their tracklog of a task and will get scored in pretty much the same way with any comp. The scoring is based on degree of completion (and if goal is achieved) time. Obviously, by the flexible nature of the task no lead out points are involved – simply distance and time. Many pilots accept that competition can lead to accelerated learning – this is a stress free way of learning the skills involved; from using you instrument and trusting it, to learning how to fly faster.

When you enter a flight for the first time you'll be asked to nominate a Club, any scores will then go into the separate club league. Everything is set up to be as uncomplicated as possible, as flexible as possible and help is on hand from Chris Foster via email if you have any problems.

That is the NCT series in a nutshell. It's designed to provides an added focus, enjoyment and satisfaction to your flying with the developing CP pilot in mind, yet also offer some spice for the more experienced P rated pilot. It is NOT just another, bolted on competition ... it's far more than that with broader aims.

Give it a try in 2020, you may be surprised how flying a defined course can become quite absorbing ... and that's what it's about, making you think.

Ed Cleasby

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Fuller details, instrument downloads, guidance notes etc can be found via xcmapp links

<http://www.xcmap.net/>