

OFF-AIRPORT LANDINGS

An inordinate number of accidents occur during off-airport landings, which is regrettable as I am convinced the majority are attributable to pilot error and could readily be avoided by proper training.

Luck plays a surprisingly small role in successful field landings. Ninety-nine percent is know-how, preparation and skill.

I am reasonably qualified to address this subject having made, at this point in time, 169 off-airport landings and have probably picked ten times that number of fields. Consequently, most of the following material is based on personal experience including that in the “Must never do” category. Naturally, it is impossible for anyone to have been exposed to all possible scenarios, even in a lifetime of cross-country flying, so some of the material is derived from other pilots encounters.

Warning: There will be a test sometime after this course. The time and place will be at your first field landing and failing is not an option.



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WHY YOU SHOULD BE PREPARED

If you are a glider pilot, X-C or not, you should know how to safely perform a field landing.

Although you may not deliberately set-off cross-country, an off-airport landing is always a possibility when flying a sailplane. When flying locally, unless you always fly directly over the airport, there is the potential for misjudging the wind, or encountering excessive sink, thus finding yourself too low and too far away to get back to the airport. Selecting a field and landing safely, while there is still plenty of altitude to do so is much safer than attempting to stretch a glide to the airport with marginal height.

Even if you don't stray very far from home there is the chance of a rain or snow shower engulfing the airport, reducing visibility to below minimum. Selecting a field in the clear, rather than risking a landing in hazardous conditions at the airport is a much better option. Be especially vigilant of snow showers, they can be treacherous, reducing visibility to near zero in less than a minute.

Many years ago we were selling our KA-6. A fellow showed up and said he was interested, could he fly it? We didn't see why not and gave him a tow. Just then a snow squall moved in. He disappeared and did not return. This was somewhat disconcerting, this fellow whom we had never seen before had vanished with our glider. An hour or so later we got a phone call. He had taken the proper course of action and landed safely in a field, in the clear 9 miles away.

CONTEMPLATING CROSS-COUNTRY?

There are many pilots who deprive themselves of the joys of cross-country soaring because of their anxiety regarding off-airport landings. This is needless and regrettable. Cross-country flying is really what soaring is all about. Of course, it is possible to venture away from home with minimal risk of landing out other than at an airport by using the method of "Airport hopping". Nonetheless, serious cross-country flying cannot be done without the occasional visit with a farmer.

LEVEL OF RISK DURING A FIELD LANDING

Unquestionably, landing in a farmer's field does entail a higher level of risk than landing at an airport, but with proper preparation it can be done with an acceptable level of risk.

PREPARATION

It's not possible to practice all the situations we may encounter on our field landings, but we can envision a lot of the problems we may be faced with, and in our mind work out how we would deal with them. This is a very useful exercise and I strongly recommend it. Also, read all available material on the subject. Learning from other peoples experience is a lot less trouble than learning from your own.

Fortunately, some of the flying skills and judgment needed for safety in out-landings can be practiced right at your home base. Take full advantage of those opportunities — be prepared and stay safe. *(See page 17)*

SPIN PROFICIENCY

When the work load is at an unaccustomed high level, such as during an off-airport landing, that is the time you are most at risk of an inadvertent spin entry. You cannot afford to be ill prepared, recognition and correct control input must be intuitive. If you have to think about it, you will run out of time, recovery has to be intuitive.

Thorough spin training should be mandatory for all glider pilots, but to make the correct recovery procedure intuitive, spinning need to be practiced at regular intervals.

To be meaningful it is imperative that the training is done in a sailplane with similar spin characteristics as the sailplane you normally fly.

Spin training in a glider resistant to spinning, such as a Schweizer 2-33, is completely counter productive as it will only serve to demonstrate that spins are nothing to worry about. Gross miss application of controls will only result in a half hearted spin entry from which automatic recovery is instantaneous, regardless of control input. This sort of demonstration will lull the student into a state of complacency regarding spins, and leave him/her totally unprepared for the real thing. I do not know of any single-seat glider that will not enter a spin inadvertently, given the right conditions.

A significant portion of spin-ins occur during off-airport landings when a high work load diverts attention away from the task of flying the glider. No doubt many of those spin-ins are attributable to insufficient exposure to spins. Very few pilots recover from low level spins. So, practice, practice, practice — don't become another statistic.

THINKING AHEAD

Your mind must always be ahead of the sailplane, e.g. “If the present course is maintained and the present conditions (sink rate, ground speed, etc..) persist, where will I be, one, two, and ten minutes from now?” Unless conditions are 100% reliable, be sure a safe place to land is with reach.

Always remember you fly a glider with your head, not your hands. Never let the glider take you somewhere your brain didn't get to five minutes earlier.

SERIOUS HAZARDS

Now that I have told you how safely this can be done, I'll highlight the hazards. Thought I would cover this while I have your attention.

The most dangerous hazards associated with off-airport landings are:

- **WIRES**
- **SLOPES**
- **FENCES**

Learn to cope with slopes, avoid wires and fences, and chances of ever causing serious damage to the glider or yourself are minimal.

WIRES

Wires are by far the greatest hazard, and the most often cause of serious field landing accidents. Every so often, there will be wires on the approach which cannot be seen in time to avoid them — wires, the invisible menace.

When we look at wires from the ground they appear quite visible. So, what are we talking about, "The invisible menace?" The problem is that when we are in the process of landing we are not viewing wires with the sky in the background, but against trees, earth, crop, etc. which tends to camouflage wires very nicely, and when the angle of light is unfavorable they do indeed become invisible. To assure we never make an unpleasant discovery, we must pretend there are wires where they are likely to be, and make the pattern and approach accordingly.

I have on several occasions skirted imaginary wires, and to my astonishment discovered them to be real — after landing.

There are likely to be wires:

- Between two poles.
- Between a pole and a group of trees, or a single tree. It is not uncommon to find a telephone pole hidden by one, or a cluster of trees.
- Between a road and a house.
- Above any road.
- Going to any kind of a building.
- A narrow field with trees on one side and wires along a road on the other side, or a field with trees along both sides may have wires crossing anywhere along it's length. Avoid such fields if at all possible. The advice of landing well into the field is not applicable in these situations.

The safest assumption is to pretend there are wires around the entire perimeter of every field.

When crossing the boundary of a field pretend there is a wire there, then fly the approach high enough to provide plenty of clearance. It is not advisable to fly under a wire or wires as there could be a wire half way up the poles.

If you must make your final approach over high tension power lines, be sure to allow for the thin ground wire above the power cables, which may not be visible. This thin wire can be as much as 20 ft. above the power cables. Beware, the heavy-duty power cables will tend to focus your attention. The safest tactic is to make the approach above the height of the adjacent pylons.

The best way to minimize the potential for having an unpleasant encounter with wires, is to pick a field out in open country, away from roads, trees and buildings.

SLOPES

Obviously, the best way to deal with slopes is to avoid them.

In our part of the country (The Finger Lakes Region in New York State) we pick fields in the valleys as the terrain on the high ground tend to be hilly. Fields in the valleys, for the most part, are reasonably flat and level, they also tend to be bigger. Furthermore, when selecting a field in a valley you will have more altitude available in which to find a thermal.

As much as we try to avoid landing on a slope, there may come a time when there is no other choice. When flying directly above a field, slopes are undetectable. Fields should be viewed at an angle of 30° from the horizontal. When viewed from 30° , terrain features are considerably more evident. Flying directly above a field which you are contemplating landing in is a complete waste of time and altitude. In spite of viewing a field at an angle of 30° , any detectible slope will be steeper than you think, and too steep for a down-hill landing. You must land up-hill, regardless of wind direction.

Landing up-hill is tricky business, and as with so many other skills we talk about, one that we don't have much opportunity to practice. Yet, it is imperative that we get it right, and the only hope to get it right is to be well acquainted with the proper technique and the pitfalls.

Here are the fundamentals of an up-hill landing:

- During an up-hill landing it is crucial to pick up extra speed on final so as to be able to fly up-hill parallel to the ground, prior to flaring. The main objective is to avoid flaring into the hill, people have sustained serious injuries from during this.
- The final should be started at the same place in the pattern as you normally do and at the same height (providing your normal height for starting the final leg is 300 ft.) then get the nose down to build up extra speed. What makes this maneuver even more challenging is that a strong illusion comes into play. When looking at an uphill slope on final, you will get a distinct impression that the glider is more nose-down than it is. Be sure to monitor the airspeed indicator.
- Go easy on the spoilers, chances are you may not need them at all. The speed will dissipate in a hurry once you start going up-hill.
- Do not use landing flaps, doing so will make the pull-up somewhat mushy which is precisely what you do not need.
- Landing uphill, into a stiff breeze is especially demanding, having the additional challenge of coping with heavy sink due to curl-over, wind gradient and turbulence.

Landing across a slope is not advisable. However, you could be faced with a situation where there is no other choice. If you must land at ninety degrees to a slope, keep in mind that the glider simply will not fly straight with one wing down. Landing from a conventional, straight-in approach will most certainly result in a vigorous ground loop and a broken glider. The only hope is to make the final in a turn to match the slope — easier said than done. The touch down must be on the upward portion of the slope so as to avoid rolling down hill.

FENCES

We are not so much concerned with wooden fences or fences with wooden posts, not that we want to run into them, but because they are quite obvious and should be readily avoidable. The type of fences we are concerned with are the single strand electric fences with thin steel posts, they can literally be invisible and deadly. Not that I want to over dramatize the subject, but some unfortunates have been decapitated. To avoid ever encountering this hazard:

- **Never land or roll across two different crops.**
- **Never land or roll across the boarder of dissimilar textured surfaces.**

A slightly different textured surface in one section of a field may indicate the presence of a fence. In many cases, such difference in texture is a result of grazing cattle having been confined to one section of a field by an electric fence – never cross such a boundary.

If you are approaching a fence or other obstacle on the rollout, and you realize that you are not going to be able to stop in time, the best course of action will be to ground-loop the glider. Remember to push the stick forward to lift the tail off the ground at the same time as you put one wing down, this will prevent the fuselage from breaking.

Life is simple. Eat, sleep, fly.

WIND DIRECTION

Check wind direction periodically during any flight. Knowing in which direction you will want to land will be one less thing you need to sort out when you get down to the level where you need to look for fields. Here are some means of checking the wind direction:

- Drift when thermalling is a good indication of wind direction and strength.
- Smoke is the best indicator, but there are not as many smoke stacks as there used to be.
- Pond or lake surface. A wind shadow (calm area) will be next to the upwind shore.
- Drift of cloud shadows across the terrain. Keep in mind that there often is a difference between the wind direction at the surface and at altitude.
- When hunting on a ridge, hawks tend to hover directly into the wind, making an excellent weather vane.
- Waves in high crops, or grass.
- The wind in a narrow valley between two ridges will be parallel with the valley in spite of the wind direction being at 90° to the ridge at the crest.

FIELD SELECTION

- Do not rely on small private airports.

The width of a mowed runway of a small private strip is often only wide enough for a tricycle landing gear, but too narrow for a glider with a 50 ft wing span. If there are fully grown corn, or fences on both sides, you will be in big trouble.

There is a certain amount of risk in relying on a landable waypoint in your GPS, unless you are familiar with it. Supposing you are at about 1,500 ft, and it looks like you will be needing a place to land. You dial-up landable waypoints. Sure enough, there is one a mere 6 miles away. You arrive with 500 ft in hand. “Oh shucks! Too narrow. Now what?”

- A cut hay field is the optimum choice.
- Use visual judgment — not the altimeter.
- Be conscious of the terrain at all times.
- Look for a group of fields when down to 2,000 ft. Never rely on a single field in the midst of hostile terrain, always have some options.
- Retrieve convenience should never be considered when selecting a field. Always select the best and biggest field within reach regardless of convenience of roads, gates, restaurants, bars, etc.
 1. There are enough prerequisites to be met when selecting a field, no need to add any more.
 2. If the farmer can get his equipment into the field to cultivate it, you can get the sailplane out.
 3. Never compromise your choice of field for the sake of an easy retrieve. Even a ten hour retrieve is insignificant compared with a damaged sailplane.
- If spotting a high-tension wire pylon, look for the others. You want to be sure you know where they are.
- At 1,500 ft, turn the radio off.

The radio will not help you to land or stay up, and those are the only two things that matter. Even listening to the radio is distracting. Getting low away from home is the most stressful situation you are likely to encounter in your soaring career, and the tasks at hand will require your undivided attention. (*See page 22*)

- A field must be selected by 1,200 ft.
- Once a field has been selected, do not change your mind.

Once a field has been selected, stick with it. This is not the time for indecision. On closer scrutiny you may discover some obstacles or troublesome features you did not notice earlier, but your best course of action is to make the best of it. Do what needs to be done to accommodate whatever difficulties you may be faced with. Trying to find an alternate field at this stage would be inviting disaster, this is not the time to change your mind. From 1,000 ft you only have about one minute until it is time to start the pattern.

- Once a field has been selected, you can consider it your base of operation and look for lift, but be sure you can reach the I.P. with comfortable altitude.

- On your first few off-field landings do not attempt to prolong the flight below 800 ft. Once you reach that level consider the flight over and concentrate on the field and making a safe landing. Thermalling low over unfamiliar territory, with minimal experience is definitely not advisable.

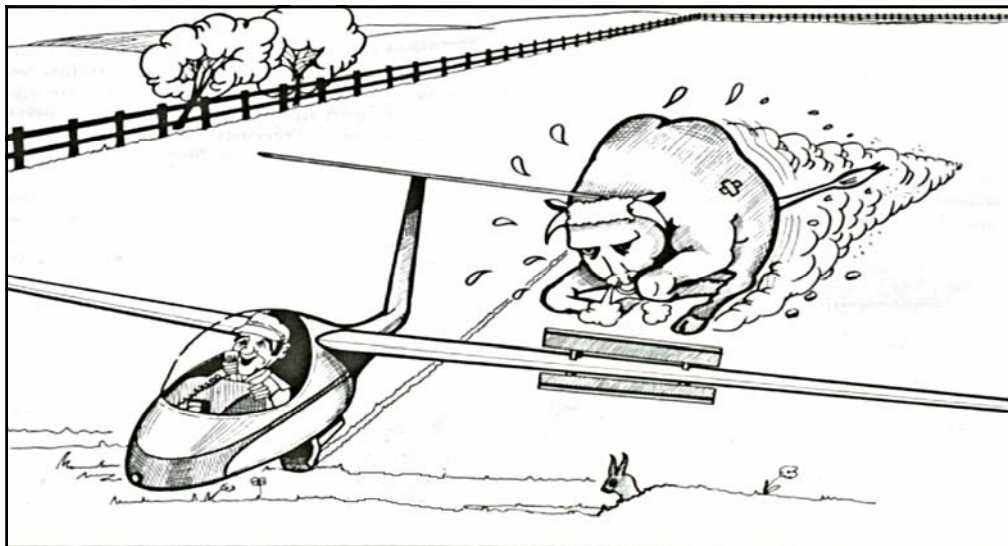
CROP & SURFACE

- A freshly mowed hay field (without haystacks) should be your first choice.
- Low crops may be O.K. Land parallel with the furrows between the plants. If you cannot see any ground between the plants, or you can see wind waving the crop, it is too high.
- High crops should be avoided, especially fully grown corn.
- If you must land in high crop, pretend the top of the crop to be ground level, and flare accordingly.
- Cultivated fields (raked) or freshly seeded fields will be soft, but the advantage is that all rocks and holes are readily visible.
- Plowed fields with deep furrows should be one of your last choices, in other words, when desperate.

However, should you have gotten yourself in a bind and wound up in an area where all the fields within reach are too small, a plowed field may save the day, as the roll-out will be extremely short. The question whether to extend the gear or not is debatable. One claim is that an extended gear offers more protection for the pilot. On the other hand, an extended gear may cause damage to the under carriage and will bring you to a stop very fast exposing the glider to high “G” loads.

- Use pastures only as a last resort.

Pastures are a poor choice, not only because they are probably not cultivated, but animals can be a real problem. Horses are unpredictable and may get excited. Cows are curious, difficult to keep away from the sailplane and likes to eat it. If you must leave the glider surrounded by cows, leave the radio on with the squelch turned off and the volume up, they don’t like noise. If there is a single cow in a field, it’s probably a bull.



FIELD SIZE

- As a rough idea, if there are no obstructions on the approach, 500 ft. may be adequate, but if you need to clear 70 ft. high trees, you will need about 1,000 ft. and if your speed control is less than perfect you may need more. But adequate size depends on a number of factors, such as:
 1. Slope.
 2. Wind direction and strength.
 3. Obstructions.
 4. Type of surface.
 5. Type of sailplane.
 6. Level of skill and experience.
- Another glider in a field may not necessary mean it's suitable for you.

It was a national contest and a lot of us were coming back to earth in the same area. A fellow competitor had landed ahead of me and invited me to join him, but I declined. The field had been more than adequate for his ASW-20 but there was no chance of me squeezing in there with my heavy Schueman Libelle, with it's ineffective dive brakes.

- Your best bet is to pick the biggest, flattest field within reach.
- Visual illusions:
 1. A narrow field will appear to be longer than it is.
 2. A wide field will appear to be shorter than it is.
 3. A long field will appear to be narrower than it is.
 4. A short field will appear to be wider than it is.
 5. If you have been low for a while, all fields will appear to be bigger than they are.
- A longer field is needed if there is a lot of wind and turbulence.

When the wind is at 20 kts or more, you need plenty of speed throughout the pattern, right down to the round-out and hold-off. Consequently, you will need a little longer field than you normally would.

PATTERN AND APPROACH

- A conventional pattern during any field landing is paramount.

Just because you are away from home, and the critical gaze of your fellow club members don't get the idea that you don't need to worry about a pattern. A proper pattern is more important during a field landing than at the home base.

If you ever make a straight-in approach to a field and it doesn't scare you half to death, you don't understand the problem.

This is not the time for the type of pattern we see from time to time, where the down-wind leg is much too close and too low such that the base leg is replaced by a 180 degree turn

from the downwind leg onto final, and the final leg is virtually obliterated as that final turn is completed at a mere 50 ft — this is known as a ‘button-hook’ pattern.

It’s a good idea to get in the habit of making proper, well defined patterns with the downwind leg adequately spaced to allow for a proper base leg and high enough to enable you to start the final leg at about 300 ft, positively no less than 200 ft. The pattern can be either right-hand or left-hand whatever is optimum, pending wind direction and terrain. If there is a crosswind component, make the base leg into the wind, if there are tall obstructions on one side fly the downwind leg on the other.

- Do not start the downwind leg too high.

Some people have the idea that starting a little higher is better, but it isn’t. If the correct altitude is 700 ft, then 1,000 ft is simply wrong. A correctly spaced, downwind leg is a critical element for a safe field landing. This is the only chance to scrutinize the field for rocks, holes, etc. so as to select a touch-down and roll-out area, and you’ll be surprised how much detail you are going to miss from just a few hundred feet further away. Starting too high will also get you out of position for the rest of the pattern. Maintain proper distance during the down-wind leg so as to better evaluate the field and to leave plenty of room for a well defined base-leg.

- Don’t rush the pattern.

Your first land-outs are likely to be a stressful experience and you may feel an urge to get it over with. Don’t worry, the glider will come down in due time.

- Plan to land well into the field. (*For exception, see page 5*)
- If possible avoid making the approach over tall obstructions.
- If landing on a hill when the wind is 15 kts. or more, expect plenty of turbulence, and strong sink at the brow on the downwind side; do not extend the downwind-leg beyond the brow.
- Good speed control is imperative.

Do not confuse a low energy landing with a pattern flown at minimum airspeed. There is a lot of impetus on low energy landings. While it is true that modern gliders are slippery and we need to be extra careful concerning speed control, it is not advisable to fly the pattern at minimum speed. Always increase the speed in the pattern. You may be at the proper position and altitude, but if your airspeed is marginal the situation can deteriorate in a hurry should you encounter some heavy sink. With a little extra speed you are better prepared to cope with the unexpected.

The accidents which are caused by excessive airspeed are attributable to loss of speed control. To my knowledge no one has crashed because of approaching at an extra 5 or 10 kts. Be sure your speed is adequate to cope with the prevailing conditions, such as wind, turbulence and wind gradient. Select a speed that will make you feel comfortable and in full control. If it’s an exceptionally short field, minimal speed may be necessary on the final leg.

- If too high on base leg use the ‘Reverse Pattern Technique.’

If you should find yourself hopelessly too high as you are about to turn onto final, implementation of the ‘Reverse Pattern Technique’ will save the day.

Accidents due to overshoots are rare. Nevertheless, they do occur from time to time, which is a shame as they can easily be avoided. “Ah! This will never happen to me,” you may say. It’s not as unlikely as you think. Supposing, on one of your first cross-countries you are committed to a rather smallish field, you are surrounded by unfamiliar terrain and perhaps you have not been practicing landing without reference to the altimeter as often as you should have. Also, there is a tendency to be conservative and fly the pattern a little higher than normal during your first field landings and there you are — much too high. What to do?

The worse action you can take is to make a 360 degree turn, as it is difficult to predict the loss of altitude, and there is a real danger of becoming disoriented, especially in strange surroundings. Never lose sight of the field when in the pattern.

With the ‘Reverse Pattern Technique’ you can salvage the situation without stress or strain. You simply continue the base leg to the other side of the pattern while edging slightly further back so as to make room for a ‘180’ which will lead you on to a perfectly normal base leg from the other side. During this entire maneuver you can apply spoilers as required while constantly keeping the landing site in full view.

If you are not familiar with this ‘Reverse Pattern Technique’ talk to an instructor, it may come in real handy some day.

- Landing diagonally across a field to increase the length of the landing area.

Providing the surface is suitable, if the field is short but wide, landing diagonally across the field will add considerable distance to the landing area. In a field 300 ft wide and 500 ft long, a diagonal approach and landing will add approximately 100 ft. Be sure to “clock” the pattern around to match the direction of the approach.

- Be flexible.

Although a standard pattern is important we must also be flexible. Supposing, while on the down-wind leg you notice the field has an undulating surface with 10 ft high crests, 50 to 100 ft apart diagonally aligned with the field. The prudent thing to do, irregardless of wind direction, will be to clock the pattern around such that you will be landing in line with and on top of one of the crests.

If you are short of altitude do not insist on a full pattern. In those situations the prime objective becomes to plan your flight such that the turn to final will be no less than 200 ft.

- Lower the gear.

If the sailplane is equipped with a retractable wheel, don’t forget to lower it. This should be done at the same place in the pattern as you normally do, e.g. when entering the down wind leg. Then check it when on base.

WHEN TO OPT FOR A DOWNWIND LANDING

When the wind is light it may be advantageous to land downwind.

- As stated previously, if landing on a slope you must land uphill no matter what the wind direction is, whether the wind is minimal or otherwise.
- It may be better to land downwind with no obstructions on the approach than into the wind over tall obstructions.

- It may be a better choice to land downwind in a quality field than into the wind in a marginal one.
- If you are landing close to sunset do not land into the sun, regardless of wind direction, you will not see much of anything if you do. Fortunately, by that time there is seldom much wind.

On downwind landings there will be a significant increase in ground speed versus an into-the-wind approach, even in light winds. Prepare for a longer final by placing the base leg further back, so as not to get cramped.

LANDING

- Direction of landing.

The decision should be yours and yours alone. Another glider may have landed shortly before you got there, but don't let the direction in which that glider is pointed influence your decision making.

Years ago I made a field landing during a contest. The field wasn't the greatest and the landing resulted in a 180° ground loop. Another pilot arrived and did the same thing, so we were both sitting there facing in the opposite direction from which we had come. A third pilot prepared to join us. He assumed we had landed in the direction in which we were aimed and approached accordingly, going through some wires at the other end, ripping off the undercarriage. Of course, he blamed us for leading him astray.

- Be sure to stick with the touch-down and roll-out area you selected while on the downwind leg.
- Good speed control is imperative.

Be sure to maintain whatever airspeed you have determined to be optimum for the conditions, all the way to the round-out and flare.

- Always do a complete flare on every landing.

Since energy is proportional to velocity squared, even a small difference in speed at touch-down makes a significant difference in kinetic energy. Assuming a glider with a stalling speed of 40 kts landing at 45 kts. The extra 5 kts of speed would result in 26% additional energy to be dissipated upon contact with the ground. This number would go up to 56% if the glider was forced on the ground at 50kts.

If landing in high crop, be sure to flare completely above the top of the crop as if the top of the crop was the ground. If you are flying a sailplane with spoilers on the undersurface of the wing (fortunately, there are not too many of those left,) close the spoilers just as the glider is about to settle. If you do not retract them, inevitably the spoiler on one wing will contact the crop before the other, causing a vigorous ground loop. If you are flying a glider equipped with flaps, leave them in the zero position if possible.

- Once on the ground, apply full wheel brake.

Immediately after touch-down, apply the wheel brake to shorten the roll-out as much as possible. The longer distance you roll, the greater are the chances of encountering rocks and holes. Don't try to be clever and roll up to the gate for convenience, it won't look very clever if you roll in to a hole and wreck the landing gear.

- Forgot to lower the gear?

If you realize you forgot to lower the gear as you are about to flare — leave it alone. Attempting to extend the gear at that point in time can easily lead to pilot induced oscillations and a broken glider. It is next to impossible to cycle the gear with one hand and remain totally steady with the other, and any slight twitching of your “stick-hand” will result in P.I.O.s. Worse, if you didn’t succeed in getting the gear down and locked you will be more susceptible to injury. On the other hand, a smooth and gentle landing on soft ground, with the gear up is likely to cause very little damage, if any.

QUALIFICATIONS

So when will you be ready to tackle off-airport landings? Aside from being thoroughly familiar with the content of this booklet you need to be comfortable with the glider you are flying. There are no set minimum hours, it is the number of flights that counts. If you recently have moved up to a new type of glider a good rule is, 10 flights before going cross-country. Another factor to take into consideration is the difference in flying characteristics between types. Once you get into the higher performance gliders, the handling between types is very similar and the 10 flights rule may be overly conservative. The bottom line is, don’t go cross-country until the task of flying and landing the glider is intuitive.

AFTER LANDING

- If you have landed at a private strip be sure to move the glider out of the way immediately so as not to block the runway.

During a Region III contest a competitor landed at a small private strip, abandoned his glider in the middle of the runway and left to make a phone call. The owner came back from a trip, was not able to land at his own airport and had to land someplace else.

This little airport is used extensively by the local glider pilots. We are very fortunate in having such places with friendly owners to resort to when the need arises, but let’s not test their tolerance. We must be courteous and considered to the owners, or these oasis may not be available to us in the future.

If you are flying in a contest and have landed in a farmers field, there is a good possibility that if you can’t stay up, there may be others with the same problem and you may get company. Before doing anything else, move the glider off to the side.

- Keep in mind that you *are* trespassing.
- If landing in a field with crop, next to a busy road, try to keep spectators out of the field as they can cause considerably more damage to the crop than your landing.
- Always contact the owner of the field if possible.
- If there may be a question of crop damage, take pictures of the landing path to defend any potential insurance claim.
- Be courteous, and respect the farmers property.

Ask the farmer for the best way of getting the sailplane out, and to get his permission

before driving the car and trailer into the field. If you cannot locate the owner and there is crop in the field, do not drive in there, use some other means of getting the glider out.

I landed once on an Amish farm in Pennsylvania and I was puzzled over the cold reception I was getting from the otherwise friendly appearing farmer. Come to find out, a glider pilot had landed on his property some ten years before. that pilot had driven his trailer through a field of crop without bothering to ask permission. The memory of that pilot's crude behavior was quite vivid even after ten years. I did finally manage to convince my host that all glider pilots do not necessary behave in the same manner.

- Prior to making the phone call, write down the directions to be sure they are complete and clear. Also, it is crucial to include the telephone number of the people you are with – enabling the crew to contact you in case they have any problems.

At first the farmer may very well view you as a rich city playboy (which may be entirely true) who has landed his expensive toy (also true) on his humble plot of land with complete disregard for other peoples property (hopefully, not true.) Here are some suggestion as to how you may conduct yourself to win him over:

- Be polite and courteous. Be sure to show appreciation for all his help including the use of his phone and don't forget to pay for the call.
- Impress upon him how fortunate you were that his field was there, enabling you to avoid a crash, and how happy you are not to have caused any damage.
- Emphasize how, in these rare emergencies, we always strive to avoid landing in any kind of crop.
- Show an interest in his farm. Ask questions and talk less about yourself.
- Take pictures of him, his family and kids next to, or in the glider.
- Don't forget to get his address so you can mail him copies of the pictures and perhaps a soaring calendar at Christmas to show your gratitude.
- Remember – you are an ambassador for the soaring movement.

The manner in which you conduct yourself will be a reflection on all glider pilots. A discourteous pilot will make a lasting impression on the locals, and future visiting glider pilots will be treated accordingly. You may have had a bad day but don't take it out on the farmer.

A superior pilot is one who stays out of trouble by using his superior judgment to avoid situations which might require the use of his superior skill.

Arne J. Boye-Moeller

ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL FIELD LANDING

- **RADIO OFF.**
- **EARLY DECISION TO LAND.**
- **VIEW FIELDS AT ABOUT A THIRTY DEGREE ANGLE.**
- **PICK THE BIGGEST AND FLATTEST FIELD.**
- **DISREGARD CONVENIENCE OF THE RETRIEVE.**
- **BE SURE SLOPE IS TOLERABLE AND LAND UP HILL.**
- **SUITABLE SURFACE, LOW OR NO CROP.**
- **TALL CROP, LAND ON TOP.**
- **ALLOW FOR WIRES AND FENCES.**
- **BE HEEDFUL OF THE AIRSPEED.**
- **AVOID LAST MINUTE INDECISION.**
- **WELL DEFINED PATTERN, RIGHT OR LEFT HAND.**
- **BE DISCIPLINED, YET FLEXIBLE.**
- **SELECT A SPECIFIC TOUCH-DOWN AND ROLL-OUT AREA.**
- **LAND WELL INTO THE FIELD.**
- **FULL FLARE.**
- **SHORT ROLL-OUT.**

**I would rather be in my glider
And think about God,
Than be in church and think about my glider.**

Arne J. Boye-Moeller

PRACTICE

Off-airport landings require many skills. Skills are acquired through practice. Fortunately, some of the skills essential to successful off-airport landings can be practiced without going cross-country. The more we practice, the better chance we have in getting it right when the time comes.

PRECISION PATTERNS

Get in a habit of making well defined patterns. Of course, that may not be possible on every flight. If you get back to the airport too low or encounter excessive sink in the pattern you must have the flexibility do whatever it takes to avoid making the last turn below 200 ft. Do not to start the pattern too high just because you got back with plenty of altitude. Get down to the correct altitude at the I. P. before starting the downwind-leg.

PATTERNS WITHOUT REFERENCE TO THE ALTIMETER

As frequently as possible enter and fly your patterns without reference to the altimeter. When it's time to come down, while still at 2,000 ft. or higher, tape a piece of cardboard over the altimeter. This is a worth-while exercise as when the time comes for the real thing, the altimeter will be useless. This is in conformance with the FAA as you can lift the cardboard to take a peek anytime if need be.

LESSEN YOUR DEPENDENCE ON THE AIRSPEED INDICATOR

When the time comes to make an approach into a strange field there will be many other things requiring your attention.

PRECISION LANDINGS

Do not be satisfied with anything less than precision landings on every flight. Strive for perfection in speed control and spot-landing.

FLARE COMPLETELY ON EVERY FLIGHT

Complete flare with minimum touch down speed must be practiced on every landing. When flying an SGS 2-33, do not get into the habit of pushing the stick forward, jamming the skid on the ground to stop. In a normal landing at the home airport, there is seldom any urgency to bring the glider to a stop, no great harm done by rolling another fifty feet or so. Habits are hard to break and can resurface without warning. This habit could sneak up on you during a stressful field landing in a high performance glider. Modern gliders do not respond well to that kind of treatment. Be sure you develop the right habits from the beginning.

To ease the construction of the flap actuating mechanism on my HP-14, I reversed the operation of the flap handle such that "forward" was "flaps down". This worked fine for the nine years I flew the '14' — no problem.

Then, years later I traded up to the Schueman Libelle with conventional flap operation. Being heavy, and with somewhat ineffective air brakes, field landings were challenging. Once I made a tense landing in a marginal field in S. C. On final, I was going like a bat out of Hell. What in the world?! Had the wind changed in the last minute? Getting out of the ship at the far end of the field I happen to glance at the flap handle. You guessed it, the flap handle was full forward, I had landed with full negative flaps — old habits never die.

PATTERNS WITHOUT REFERENCE TO GROUND FEATURES

Do not rely on terrain features such as barns, houses, etc. for establishing the pattern. Use only the landing area for reference.

Whenever the traffic allows, land at some other location on the airport. Doing a few of these before setting off into the unknown is well worth it. It gives you the opportunity to experience a pattern over terrain with different ground features than you are accustomed to. Remember, when landing out the *only* reference you will have is the spot where you plan to land. Another helpful experience is to fly at another site.

EVALUATING FIELDS

Don't let the drive to the airport go to waste. Although the vantage point is not quite right, it is still worth while to contemplate potential scenarios, e.g. which field would be better, how would you handle obstructions, consider various wind conditions, what would be the best approach, etc.

Practicing field selection can also be done while flying local. When down to 1,500 ft near the airport, pick a field. After landing, go over to the field and check it out. You will be surprised what it looks like up close. Such exercises are well worth the trouble.

The soaring site I operated at for many years has an eight hundred foot high ridge next to the airport, a perfect set-up for students to practice evaluating fields. You can pick a field on top of the ridge, fly part of the pattern, land at the airport, then drive up to the field to have a closer look. As you might have guessed, no one else bothered — too much trouble.

By practicing as many of the skills and simulating as many of the various hurdles which may be encountered when landing out as possible, we can significantly reduce the stress and work load when faced with the real thing. The objective is to have as few new challenges to cope with as possible on those first off-airport landings.

FLYING IN ANOTHER PART OF THE COUNTRY

When driving to another site you are not familiar with make it a point to look for features in the terrain which may be different from your home area such as, crops, slopes, fences, wires, etc.

On the way to a Region 6 North contest in Ionia, Michigan, known for its exceptionally friendly terrain, I made an interesting discovery. Whereas in other parts of the country, wires along roads are spaced at about 20 feet from the road, on many roads in the Ionia vicinity the poles are located several hundred feet into the fields. This is useful information to have before hand. In case you are about to set-up for a landing with the approach over a road, better plan for the field being considerably shorter than it looks.

**Glider pilots talk about yesterday,
And dream about tomorrow.**

Helga Gertsen

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

- **Landing in lakes.**

If there are no fields in sight, lakes are preferable. Land parallel with the shore. Providing the canopy is either side or front hinged, unlatch it before landing, this prevents the canopy from jamming shut due to compression loads on the fuselage. Flaps should be set to the neutral position and the spoilers should be closed at touch-down. Flaps and spoilers were not designed for water loads.

Contrary to what may be intuitively obvious, it is important to lower the landing gear. It has been proven that there is less tendency for the glider to tuck under if the gear is down.

If a water landing is done correctly, the glider may well be flyable the next day. In some parts of Sweden water landings are done on a more or less regular basis as lakes are the only option other than trees.

- **Landing in woods.**

If a landing in the woods is unavoidable, never pick a clearing with stumps. Select a large tree with a full crown. Set a normal pattern, be sure to approach the tree into wind, then stall, nose high into the crown.

- **Collision avoidance.**

If, with the sailplane on the ground and rolling, it becomes obvious that it cannot be stopped in time to avoid colliding with a fence, ditch or other obstacles - an intentional ground loop may be a better alternative. But delay it as long as possible. Be sure to move the stick forward at the same time when applying ailerons, lifting the tail to avoid breaking the fuselage.

Obviously we cannot practice any of these emergencies, but we can be mentally prepared. By envisioning any and all eventualities and pre-planning the optimum way of dealing with them, we can significantly increase our chances of keeping our skin intact if we should ever be faced with unpleasant options. The prime objective is to maintain control of the sailplane, not matter what the circumstances.

- **Maintain Control**

The important thing is to maintain control no matter how impossible a situation you may be faced with. You may not be able to save the glider but the chances of personal injury is highly unlikely.

**I have known a great many troubles,
but most of them never happened.**

Mark Twain

LOW SAVES

HOW LOW IS TOO LOW

Many flights have come to a bad end because the pilot attempted to climb away from an impossible low altitude. Consequently, an in-depth discussion on the subject is prudent.

At contest, we are often enthralled by spellbinding accounts of heroic saves from 97 feet. However, it should be mentioned that some glider pilots have been known, on rare occasions, to stray ever so slightly from the perpendicular truth when relaying their aeronautical adventures. Also, there is an amazing illusion which mysteriously comes into play in these situations, which is this, 400 feet actually looks exactly like 97 feet.

In discussions on the subject of off-airport landings we often neglect to mention that the optimum course of action when faced with a field landing is, not to land; if there is a possibility to safely continue the flight, it makes sense to give it a try. Naturally, there will come a time when all efforts to continue the flight must be abandoned so as not to compromise a safe landing, and that's the big question, when must we commit to land?

Pundits are often asked, "How low is it safe to thermal?" This question hardly ever brings forth a definite response. Most often the question will be evaded entirely. The reason this question fails to bring forth a nice firm, quantitative answer which you can neatly tuck away and have handy when needed, is that there isn't one. The altitude at which the decision should be made to discontinue a flight depends on several factors such as, experience, level of skill, currency, familiarity with the sailplane, and weather conditions.

EXTRA AIRSPEED AND WELL-BANKED TURNS

Low level thermalling should always be performed using well-banked turns with an additional 5 to 10 kts of airspeed. One of the most often causes of stall and spin accidents are circling close to the ground in shallow-banked turns near stalling speed.

In a sailplane, it is far easier to stall and spin from a shallow turn than from a well banked one. In turns of more than 35 degrees of bank, due to the higher stalling speed, the control response remains firm and crisp until the last moment before the stall, and recovery can be made instantaneously without any loss of altitude by simply relaxing the backward pressure on the stick. In straight flight or a shallow-banked turn, the stalling speed is lower and control response get sluggish when approaching the stall. Should a stall occur, greater control input is required and recovery cannot be made without some loss of altitude.

The good news is that using well banked turns is no disadvantage as thermals at lower levels tend to be small, and steep turns are necessary in order to climb. Extra airspeed, also improves the climb as it enhances maneuverability which helps in dealing with low level, disorganized thermals. What's more, when making that first turn in what you think is a thermal and you are concerned about losing too much altitude if it doesn't work out, a 45° bank will get you around with minimal loss of height.

EXPERIENCE AND INSTRUMENTATION

One prerequisite which has to be met before attempting to thermal at low levels is that you must be capable of flying the sailplane with only occasional glances at the instrument panel as 99% of your attention has to be directed elsewhere. Consequently, any attempt to

thermal will be severely impaired if your glider is not equipped with an audio variometer.

Although you may have acquired the level of proficiency outlined above, if you get down to 800 ft on any of your first few cross countries by all means abandon the flight and concentrate on the pattern and landing. Those first off-airport landings will tax your capabilities without further challenges. Do not attempt to thermal below 800 ft until you have a handful of field landings under your belt and begin to feel a little more comfortable in those situations. That is, shear terror has been replaced by just a normal state of panic.

CURRENCY

You made good progress last year and reached new levels of performance; now it is spring and you are all primed to continue where you left off, but it has been six months since you flew last. Not being current is somewhat like being slightly intoxicated. You won't notice the effect till you get in a tight situation, as for example when trying to latch onto a couple of lumps of lift at minimum height over the boonies. So watch out, do not get too aggressive right-off, at the start of the season.

FAMILIARITY WITH THE SAILPLANE

Regardless of the level of experience you may have, if you are flying a type of glider which is unfamiliar to you it is a good idea to fly more conservatively until you get thoroughly acquainted with the glider.

SPIN PROFICIENCY

Inasmuch as we spend a lot of time flying near the stalling speed, proficiency in spin recognition, prevention and recovery should be a prerequisite for flying a glider under any circumstances. But definitely do not expose yourself to the additional stress and workload of low level thermalling over unfamiliar terrain until you have reached the level of spin training and practice which makes spin entry recognition and the correct control input for recovery intuitive. When the work load is high, as it is when trying to latch on to a feeble scrap of a thermal at pattern altitude while scrutinizing your selected field for obstacles at the same time, is when you are most likely to experience an inadvertent spin entry – better be ready.

To be fully effective, spin practice should be done in the glider to be flown, as spinning characteristics will vary from one glider to another.

If you have never spun a glider, be sure you get spin training in a two-seater with a qualified instructor prior to practicing on your own.

In order for this spin training to be of any value, it needs to be done in a glider that truly spins. Spin demonstration in a glider such as a Schweizer 2-33 is detrimental to spin training as it will inevitably leave anyone with the impression that it is virtually impossible to spin a glider, and recovery is instantaneous regardless of control input. Nothing could be further from the truth. I do not know of any single-seat glider that will not spin, given the right conditions. If you fly a glider long enough, sooner or later you will experience an inadvertent spin entry.

WEATHER CONDITIONS

In windy and turbulent conditions you need to raise the minimum altitude for attempting a save. There are days when it is not safe to thermal below 1,000 ft regardless of your experience level.

RADIO USAGE

Needless to say, the radio should have been off long before you get to this stage, if it isn't, by all means turn it off. Scratching around close to the ground, checking your selected field for slope, wires, fences and scrutinizing the intended touch-down area for stones, holes etc. while frantically attempting to center this scrap of a thermal you stumbled into at the last possible moment and, by the way, flying the glider at the same time, is most certainly the most demanding flying you will ever be faced with. Trust me, this will keep your mind fully occupied. The radio will not help you stay up, it will not help you land, and nothing else is of any consequence.

Incidentally, people have crashed because they were preoccupied with the radio. If you should fail to stay-up, any message to your crew can much better be transmitted at your leisure when you are safely on the ground. Besides, there is plenty of time, you won't be doing anything else that afternoon.

Even listening to a transmission is distracting. "KI, this is 1G, I am about 2 miles SW of Loon Lake at 8,000 ft, climbing at 7 knots." This may be interesting information for somebody, but to you, when struggling at 600 ft, it is totally useless. Worse than useless, because it can't help but divert some of your attention from the task at hand at a time when you can least afford it.

Hence, your best bet is to turn the radio off. My policy is to turn the radio off when I get down to 1,500 ft. I suggest you do likewise.

CRITERIA

The criteria I have used for many years is simply this, "If I can afford to lose 200 ft, I will try a turn. If I can't afford to lose 200 ft, I proceed with the pattern." Why 200 ft, you may ask. Well, on the average soaring day it is reasonable to expect areas of sink in the magnitude of 600 ft per minute. It is also reasonable to expect that you will turn in the wrong direction, which could place you very nicely in 600 ft per minute down. The rate of turn will probably be about 20 sec. per 360°. Consequently, you may be 200 ft lower by the time you complete the circle. If you expected this and planned for it, you won't get in trouble.

Let's assume you meet all the prerequisites. You have the experience outlined above, you are current and thoroughly familiar with the glider. You are on another cross-country flight. Things didn't go as expected, you are in the pattern to an apparent inevitable landing in an alfalfa field. You are half way along the downwind leg, and you feel a surge. Should you try a circle? If there will be enough height left to complete the pattern if you lose 200 ft, albeit, a little on the low side, but not uncomfortably so, you can give it a try. Hold off for a brief moment, if it feels solid roll into a 45° bank. With a little bit of luck, you may find yourself going up half way around so that you haven't lost or gained any height at the completion of the circle. Incidentally, this is about the best you can hope for on the first circle as the thermals tend to be small at that level. It is highly unlikely you will gain much during the first few circles. If you didn't lose any altitude, try another circle and if you can keep the variometer on zero, stay with it. The combination of your presence, helping to break the thermal free, and your centering efforts will in many cases eventually improve the climb rate.

However, if you continue to merely hold your own, you must be prepared to abandon

the effort before you drift too far from the field. In case you eventually are forced to give it up, your effort will not have been completely futile as you gained some extra time to further scrutinize your selected field.

POSITION

Your position with respect to your chosen field is as much a consideration as your altitude. Crowding the pattern must be avoided. You should be in a comfortable position, off to the side. The distance to your selected field is all as important as your altitude, you may be high enough to circle, but if a 200 ft. loss will prevent you from reaching the entry point of the pattern at the appropriate height, don't try it.

If you do find yourself too low for a full, standard pattern, don't insist on it. The prime objective is to prevent the turn to final from being below 200 ft.

THE CLIMB

When starting to climb, you need to make a real effort to keep concentrating. There is a natural tendency to heave a sigh of relief and relax just a little when reaching a thousand feet, promptly losing concentration and the thermal.

A cease of climb at a 1,000 ft is not always caused by inattention. It is rare, but there are times when a thermal does not go any higher. Sometimes a thermal draws in excessive amounts of cold air and loses its buoyancy. A thermal may fade away when drifting in to the shade. At times like this, keep in mind that on any specific day, the thermals tend to sprout from the same source. Consequently, if you lose the lift before you get high enough to continue on course your best bet is to go back to the spot where you found it. Chances are there will be another bubble coming along which may have enough temperature differential to continue all the way up to the inversion.

ACCIDENTS

Most accidents occurring during attempts at low saves are attributable to:

- Distracted by the radio.
- Slow and shallow-banked turns.
- Work overload.
- Forgetting to fly the glider.
- Inadequate spin training.
- Not knowing when to quit.

**As I was flying through the air,
I found some lift that wasn't there.
It wasn't there again today —
That's twice I've had to land away.**

FUNDAMENTALS OF LOW SAVES

- **BE SURE THE RADIO IS OFF.**
- **WHEN LOW, USE EXTRA AIRSPEED AND WELL-BANKED TURNS.**
- **AN AUDIO VARIOMETER IS A MUST.**
- **WHEN FACED WITH YOUR FIRST FIELD LANDINGS DO NOT ATTEMPT TO THERMAL BELOW 800 FT.**
- **STAY WITHIN YOUR CAPABILITIES.**
- **DON'T DO ANYTHING YOU ARE UNCOMFORTABLE WITH.**
- **NEVER THERMAL AT LOW LEVELS UNLESS YOU ARE EXPERIENCED AND CURRENT.**
- **NEED TO BE FAMILIAR WITH THE GLIDER.**
- **THE TASK OF FLYING THE GLIDER MUST BE INTUITIVE.**
- **MUST BE PROFICIENT AND CURRENT IN SPINS.**
- **RAISE YOUR MARGIN OF SAFETY ON WINDY AND TURBULENT DAYS.**
- **NEVER TRY A CIRCLE UNLESS YOU CAN AFFORD TO LOSE 200 FT.**
- **YOUR POSITION WITH RESPECT TO THE CHOSEN FIELD IS AS RELEVANT AS HEIGHT.**
- **DON'T FORGET TO FLY THE GLIDER.**
- **DON'T LOSE CONCENTRATION AFTER GAINING A FEW HUNDRED FEET.**

**With grace and beauty,
Strength and cunning
She'll stay aloft — until;
Inevitably — she loses
And must glide earthward
And lie there helpless
Lovesick for the sky.**

Leon Roskilly