

A flight by Martin Grünert

There can be few places in the world that offer the opportunity to soar from rugged inland mountains to equally breath-taking coastal scenery, and then back again to the point of departure. Here on the south western tip of Africa, soaring conditions sometimes allow for just such flights.



False Bay in full view ahead

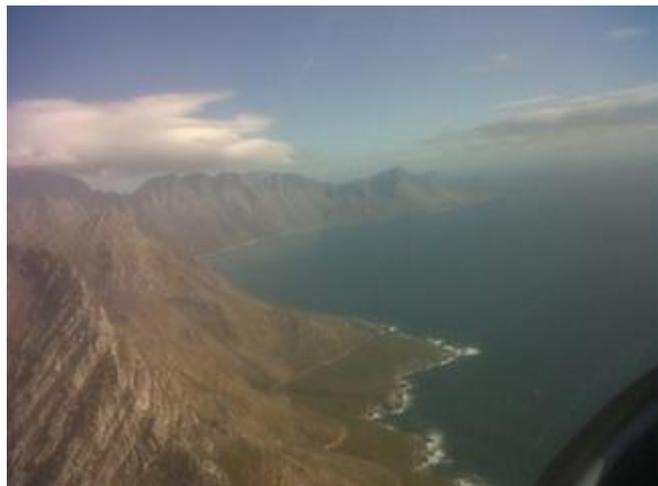
Well established high pressure systems over the Atlantic Ocean on the west, and the Indian oceans on the east of the subcontinent enable a low pressure system to flow towards the south western Cape. This flow generates north westerly winds, which when they reach the mountains of the south western Cape, create the met conditions that support some spectacular flights, flights that traverse both land and sea areas.

The timing of a flight such as that which follows is crucial, as the conditions present themselves only about twice to six

times a year, depending on the *el Nino* or *la Nina* effects.

The flight began from Worcester, where cloud base at the Waaihoek mountains had risen to 4500ft just before 11h00. After the initial climb out, light wave over the valley after engine retraction makes for an easy transition to the Waaihoek mountains heading north, where I encounter orographic wave. The view is now unrestricted towards the north, though unfortunately the clouds on the upcoming Witzenberg range are still low, making me descend to below 3500ft, which is about ridge-top height.

From here the lift conditions are light, though sufficient to continue northward to the Olifants river range, along what is known to glider pilots as the “Porterville Ridge”. Passing the hang gliding and paragliding site of Dasklip, it is clear that conditions are still too weak to keep the paragliders airborne.



South towards Rooiels

However, there is just enough lift for me to reach the first turn point, Renosterhoek, 145km north of Worcester. Retracing my path, heading southwards towards the town of Paarl, the wind remains light and too northerly to be able to increase the speed significantly. At the southern end of the long Porterville Ridge, now down to 3000ft and really too low for the Taurus, I fly into a thermal which allows me to continue southward around the Saronberg.

At last the wind increases, which is visible on the surfaces of the dams below, so I push the speed up significantly. At Paarl I have to decrease the speed again in order to climb without thermaling, before heading across the



North from Rooiels

Franschhoek Valley towards Boschendal at the foot of the Drakenstein mountain. Stellenbosch lies just five miles to the northwest, and I carefully traverse the Jonkershoek valley, expecting strong sink and turbulence. Emerging on the west of the mountains, I have the wide expanse of False Bay in full view ahead.

Descending through rotors caused by the Helderberg at Somerset West, I head southward to the town of Gordons Bay, where some amazing conditions begin. From Gordons Bay southward, the mountains stand with their feet in the sea,

making for some spectacular views. The airflow over the water of False Bay is laminar which allows me to speed up to VNE all the way down to Rooiels, where I arrive at 2000ft.

Unfortunately I don't see any whales there, and climb back up to 4000ft in 6m/s lift, before continuing further south to Pringle Bay to see if there are any whales there. No luck, but I leave a mental greeting before beginning on the return leg northward (I did in fact see them on the 15.12.2011).

The critical phase always begins here and I quickly lose 1000ft, though still have enough height to continue, without turning, to Paarl.

Towards the Hottentots Holland mountains I climb briskly again from 2000ft to 5000ft, in straight flight.

With good speed I pass Dasklip for the second time, where the conditions become weaker, as they often do. The original goal had been to climb during the next 20km northward, then cross east to the Cedarberg and continue to the town of Klaver as the northernmost turn point. However, due to the weak conditions, the third turnpoint has to be cut short to Renosterhoek once more.



Approaching Gordons Bay from the South

Immediately north of Pikenierskloof I meet the Boss Baboon with his troop, who invariably seems to be sitting on the same rock. I laugh to myself as he runs like crazy probably thinking the big white eagle is coming to get him!

After tuning at Renosterhoek, the return flight south to Rooiels goes without problems, and I arrive again at 1000ft over the sea. Here I have to hurry as the cloud-base has begun to descend over the Hottentot Holland mountains due to the humidity of the air. In fact I am unable to



Wemmershoek Dam on my right (Centre of Picture)

continue safely on the intended route due to the low cloud-base. On the previous leg, the turbulence encountered had pointed to wave in that area, so out from the mountain ridge and after a few turns in front of the cloud, the air becomes laminar and I manage to establish myself in wave. At 7000ft (the Cape Town TMA begins at 7500ft) I push the speed up for a return to the Fanschhoek valley, where the air is still clear of cloud, Wemmershoek Dam on my right.

Looking back I see the cloud-base closing in behind me, while in front and to the right it is also becoming lower. I continue

northward, passing Bainskloof Pass to my right, where the air begins to get dryer and more stable, the clouds having disappeared.

To complete 1000km I would need to fly another 55km north. While time may be sufficient, it is unlikely that the thermal at the southern end of the Porterville ridge will still be there on the return journey.

So, turning east across the Tulbagh valley, I reach the Witzenberg for the second time and climb at 3m/s and 150kph in pure dynamic lift. Here I turn north towards the final turnpoint at Groot Winterhoek, which is just north of Tulbagh. From there it is southward and home, where I land at Worcester at 19h00, still an hour before sunset at 20h00.

This is Pure Worcester Magic!