

MID-GEORGIA SOARING ASSOCIATION

A Safer Chilhowee

As we approach another fall, one of the most enjoyable times of the soaring year will be soon upon us – Oktoberfest and the MGSA weekend at Chilhowee. I started out planning to write a stand-alone article on the subject until Hartley offered his excellent past article entitled “How to Survive at Chilhowee.” Not having read it in a couple of years, I was impressed all over again with how thorough it is.

Instead, this short introduction is designed to complement his work with a touch more philosophy and a few more ideas. My perspective on this location is not one as a ‘regular’, but rather a visitor who only makes the trip once a year. For a true regular’s perspective, you probably could not beat sitting down with Gary Carter and a cold one.

Our first challenge, like all our road trips is getting there safely. Guys, our task is to get there and back without dinging trailers, enclosed gliders, or tow vehicles, while not misplacing brightly colored large objects such as tail dollies. As for the drive, throw in navigating through metro Atlanta and we need to be very defensive. Benton TN is a speed trap. The slower speeds extend well past town. Nuff said on past problems on this subject.

Trailer parking and rigging is itself an art at Chilhowee, particularly during the very busy Oktoberfest weekend. When in Rome, do as the Romans, but pay particular attention to having trailer and/or glider not extend too far out into the runway area. We’re already at a slight disadvantage there with our larger twin trailers. The runway is fairly close to the area behind the trailers, much closer than we are used to seeing. Likewise, after rigging, be extremely careful about pushing back further in the grass to ground tow down for launch.

There are large white and black cones marking the edge of the runway now. Stay west behind those and navigate carefully around parked gliders when ground towing. Stop and lower the runway side wing during any launches / landings.

One thing I always like to do at a field I’m not familiar with is to walk the ground. Winds permitting, most of the time it’s takeoffs and landings to the north. I urge everyone to look at the actual landing lane of grass, and note the colors or dirt spots at the touchdown point. Likewise, examine your Plan B touchdown and rollout options. Oktoberfest can be a very busy traffic pattern, so have a plan.

Concerning other gliders in the pattern, resolving traffic pattern conflicts before entering the pattern is always the preferred option. When in doubt, use the radio and ask others their intentions in addition to clearly stating your plan. I like to use the 500 ft above traffic pattern altitude to hold in min sink, or go full spoilers and take the #1 position in the pattern as appropriate. Good radio discipline and a long/short landing plan thought out in advance can go along way in keeping a busy operation less stressful as well.

Knowing where this landing lane is located is extremely important. A little too far to the west at touchdown or landing rollout and your wingtip could be in conflict with a parked glider. Again,

respect the much tighter fit that exists here than we are used to dealing with at Monroe or Cordele.

Finally, the ridge itself. Even when not “working”, it is a glider magnet. Rightfully so as it helps generate thermals and is gorgeous to fly near. Heed Hartley’s advice and review the ridge rules of the road. Years ago, a Georgia pilot crashed in the lee of the ridge near the top. This is a heavily wooded no man’s land that all must be aware of. He was extremely lucky to walk down the mountain leaving his demolished glider behind.

Reemphasizing another point, the ridge at its closest to the field is a mere 2 miles away. It continues on for many miles to the north and south, so be extremely sure of your lift source (thermal vs. ridge lift) before venturing outside gliding distance of the field. Being assured of lift type may seem silly, but I’ve encountered ridge-induced thermals that seem to have some characteristics of both there. When in doubt, stick closer to home even in your high performance single-seater.

Finally, don’t let your guard down on the quieter MGSA weekend.

Overall, this is a wonderful place to fly that just takes a heads-up attitude. Enjoy Hartley’s article.

Scott Anderson
Chief Flight Instructor

This article was written in 2004 but still holds true. Minor edits have been made to address current operational rules.