

*This is set in a time when I knew very little about wave flying and even less about task setting, but innocence is a wonderful thing.*

## **A Vintage Diamond Goal**

**30 September 1980**

*by Alan Mossman*

I had completed a summer as full time course instructor at Feshie and was working at the Wildlife Park to fill in time before I started training as a helicopter pilot. The flying season was over and the club in those days was usually deserted in the winter months, but I was always set up ready to go flying whenever I had a day off. There were never any forecasts back then, and anyway we did not know what to look for, but I guess the two go together.

One fine September morning it all came together, and with the help of just one other person I rigged the Dart which Bill had generously loaned me. Towed out the cable, smoked and signed the barograph, dressed warm, sandwiches packed and was ready by 10am. I cannot recall who gave the launch but probably Bill MacDonald the farmer at Blackmill. We propped the wing on a tower of tyres, having pulled the cable tight by pushing the glider back against it. In those days you climbed in and sat there waiting. With no radio you waited and waited...there was no gentle start as the wing might fall off the tyres or the hook might back release - it was just waiting... waiting... waiting... then *whoosh* you were off, with the incredible acceleration of the Jaguar automatic winch.



The declaration was Feshie - Portmoak- Kessock Bridge - Feshie. A massive 320km. The Kessock Bridge was still under construction at this time.

The wind was NW which meant that I could climb from an 800ft launch quickly up the wooded slopes of the point, and then up the

mountain sides and straight into the wave. It was a classic day and as I worked my way to Loch Tay, the cloud marked the wave and was about 4 oktas. I had previously flown this way in the Swallow for my silver distance so it was not so daunting. There I climbed to about an 11,000ft highpoint then set off for Portmoak. I really meant business so no hanging around.

With the aid of my map I found Portmoak and rounded the turn point taking a photo of the trailer park. Instead of a neat quick fly through of the sector, I flew a mile or so past it before taking the photo, wasting time and distance in what would be gross inefficiency nowadays. To this day I have a huge collection of turning point photographs with a variety of wingtips in them!

Downwind flying is always easy but now the day's challenge started for real. It was then a bit of a struggle into wind but wave bar by wave bar I got back into the Highland wave system. It was of course a totally stupid route to choose as now we know you are supposed to run along the wave bars and avoid crossing them. In a wooden glider a headwind is a much bigger problem so crossing wavebars is even worse, but I had made my choice of route quite arbitrarily as there was no turning point library or experience to draw from. To fly southwards was to go to Portmoak, that's all there was to it!

In later years I assembled a list of turning points that were usually clear of cloud so that the vital photo could be captured. This idea was a bit wasteful as clear wave holes mean strong lift so that tasks were not extended to the working limits of the wave systems. With the advent of GPS we can now push the turnpoints to the edges of the wave systems.

I topped up near Aberfeldy to the day's highpoint circa 14,000ft and then straight back to Feshie arriving at hilltop height. Having your home base on the route means that you have to leave it twice and I nearly gave up at this point. I had already achieved a personal best and club best ever flight. The sky ahead was looking decidedly flat and cloudy and I contemplated landing. I didn't have a car in those days, or a turbo, so failure on the task meant landing in a field, which does hold you back.

Anyway with five or six thousand feet on the altimeter and well above the cloud I wandered off towards Inverness. There were no real climbs

and not much sink so I just crept along and eventually found myself in the Inverness area. Only a vague opening in the cloud was available and through it I could see the runway intersections at the centre of Dalcross. Good enough for a photo, which I quickly took.



*This photo baffles me. If the PZL is showing off the clock sink then why am I flying at 40kt and taking pictures? The electric vario shows nil sink but that is probably not working. Which one is working?*

I was now very worried about getting home so turned tail and glided south in the calm air of the evening. I was so relieved to see Feshie at the end of a flight of more than 7 hours but the Dart is a super comfortable machine and I still regard it as one of the best. Thanks, Bill!

I didn't realise that a turn point photo did not have to include the turning point; it had to demonstrate that it was taken from within the

correct sector which is not necessarily the same thing. I could probably have managed a picture over the Black Isle and gained my first diamond. Ah well, you live and learn.

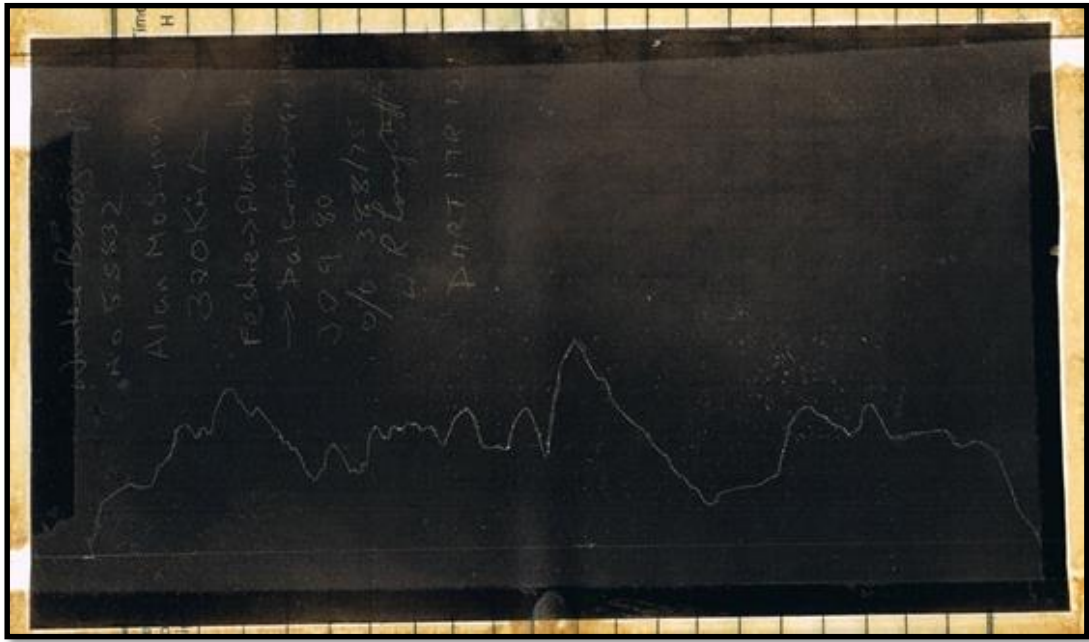
Writing this memory I can see that we have come a very long way from the era of this flight. No clubhouse, tiny hangar and most importantly no aerotow - only the winch. This meant the front hill had to be working before you could get away, a major limitation. I believe this was the first long closed task flown from Feshie, previously we just set off downwind. Glide angles continue to improve, weather forecasting is accurate now, and GPS and other gizmos make the task more efficient.

I have subsequently flown twice the distance at twice the speed but nothing beats the first time. On the plus side, controlled airspace was almost non-existent in those days, and was not a factor at all. I had nobody to talk to during the entire day except that Bill called me up whilst he was taking his lunchbreak and I updated him on my progress. The radio probably only had two gliding frequencies so I could not have called ATC even if I wanted to.

It was to be almost another 12 years before I got my diamond goal from Feshie, and coincidentally it used Kessock Bridge as the turnpoint!



*The colourful gliders of 1980*



*The evidence...*