

Once again, the Cloudbase Slovenia courses have been a great success with two great groups, lots of fun and laughter, and fantastic sunny days with lots of hours flown.

The first week was for the students, and what fun week they had. We had Thee and Chris Hyde back again and newcomers John and Ann Wallace along with Pete and Alison. We also had to contend with the Chuckle Brothers (AKA Nick Valiris and John Morgan!) who were out for warm up before the big flights the following week, and Fi Burgess doing the same.

After a rainy Sunday where we got all the admin and kit setup sorted and a sunny but windy Monday where we were able to get them all practising their ground handling and sorted out all the landing field briefings, the rest of the week was flyable every day. As many of the group had not flown any big sites before, the first three days were spent at Lijak, at 2000ft top to bottom the smallest site we use. It is always daunting the first time you launch yourself from a large and imposing mountain but they all did a great job and it was very satisfying for us to see the big smiles as they all glided nicely into the landing field. Over this period we started introducing CP tasks and perfecting the circuit approach method and John Wallace, an ex glider pilot, managed some useful thermalling.....well done fella! The qualified crew were able to have some useful airtime cruising along the ridge and generally having a relaxing time. There were also many ice creams devoured and lots of laughs along the way.

By the end of day three we decided that they were ready for the bigger mountains, and with a favourable forecast we spent the next two days on the beautiful Stol mountain, a lovely 4000ft top to bottom and a 4km run to the intermediate bottom landing field. There were a few apprehensive faces as we arrived but once again the students all performed very well and had some really nice flights, cruising along the mountain before turning out high above the valley floor and enjoying spectacular views along the way. The conditions were perfect for the tasks and we were really impressed with the way everybody prepared efficiently and thoroughly with minimal assistance from the instructors. During the week we also ran ground school lectures to prepare the students for their CP exam and Alison completed her EP tasks and EP exam with a result of 100%.... well done smarty pants!

By the end of the week, lots of CP tasks had been signed off and for most of the students all that remains is to complete their top landings before they are qualified. So a great first week, and as we waved the crew off on their way home, we had a few welcome hours of relaxation before the arrival of the second week crew.

And so on to week two. The second group arrived on time and it was nice to see lots of familiar faces and ex-students that we just can't seem to get rid of! There was Mike and Tracey, Darren, Jerry the Doc, French Marc and finally the lovely Sarah, the long suffering Mrs Morgan (LSMM) who is the Cloudbase number one groupie and tandem ballast. There was also Alistair, one of our Lanzarote veterans, who would be arriving by train on the Sunday. The next morning we had the usual welcome briefing and outline plan for the week and then it was off to Lijak for a shakedown flight to see how much they had remembered.

At Lijak, we were expecting the wind to pick up during the day so we got the crew away early, and after the usual first day faff they all got away and had a nice easy flight to blow out the cobwebs. The next couple of days were spent in the Tolmin valley flying from Stol and as the week progressed we started to set tasks and get the crew working.

We had once slight disappointment when an Austrian pilot had a little incident on Kobala takeoff just as we were preparing to launch on what would have been a perfect day for the 85km task we had set, and we had to stand down for a couple of hours as the naughty Austrian had a free ride in a police helicopter! By the time we were able to fly the task was not achievable but we still let the crew have a run along the valley towards Kobarid.

Everybody had a nice flight with Fi making it to the landing field at Kobarid 18km along the valley, and John Morgan getting high on the pyramid but romantically turning back to Tolmin so he could land with his wing man Nick (AKA Tex by this time.....yeee ha</p> <p>partner!!)</p> <p>◆</p> <p>The highlight of the week had to be Thursday, where we sat on Stol for most of the day watching other gliders being thrown around the sky in not pleasant conditions, before heading off at about 4pm for a run down to the Kobala launch and back in to Tolmin. The plan was for me to lead the group with Lee and Tracey on the tandem looking after the rear. I took off and waited for the first group of Darren, Nick and John to launch then fed them along the Stol before sending them across to the ◆Boobies◆, where they all climbed out beautifully in the now smooth and buoyant evening air. As I watched them climb out, Lee sent Mike, Fi and Alistair along the Stol and I sent the lead group on their way across to the pyramid before spiralling down to pick up Mike, who was already climbing out nicely north of Kobarid. Mike thermalled beautifully up towards base and I then sent him on his way with Fi, who was also climbing strongly out in front. I watched them glide across to the pyramid after the lead group, and with so much height it was a straight glide to the pyramid, where they all climbed out again and headed off to the Kobala launch, some 27km from Stol.</p> <p>Next in Line was Alistair, followed by Marc and Jerry. Unfortunately my speaker mike decided to fry my radio at this point, so I spiralled off 3000ft to get down to Al and with a mixture of shouting and hand signals, took him across to the boobies, where we enjoyed a lazy then strong and beautifully smooth climb up to base. I could see Marc and Jerry below and Lee was now heading along the Stol with Tracey so stayed with Al while Lee followed the last two across to last chance ridge. Jerry, Marc and the tandem crew all had a nice run to the pyramid before dropping in to the Tolmin landing field for 22km, good work guys. The lead gaggle, followed by Mike and Fi all headed over to Kobala then back across towards the pyramid and into Tolmin for 32km, although if it were not so late they could all have gone further with the conditions and how well they were flying. Al and I took a climb off the pyramid and I decided to try for the ridge behind Kobala. We headed across to the intermediate ridge before Kobala and were rewarded with a strong climb all the way to cloudbase. During the climb I heard Al shouting and looked across to see a beautiful vulture climb up from underneath us then stay with us all the way to the top.</p> <p>No matter how many times you fly with these fantastic birds, it is always a humbling experience to be in the company of the master. After topping out, we headed out to the peak behind Kobala then a long glide back to the Pyramid where we milled around before I took us across the valley to the south side to bag another turn point. It was now almost 7.30pm so we had a final lazy glide down to the landing field as the Soca River glistened in the milky evening sun. I went in first and made a complete hash of my landing, followed by Al who showed me how to do it properly after his first XC flight of 45km!! Tracy really enjoyed her tandem with Lee and learnt a great deal about XC flying and the decision making process, and all the others had flown an intelligent and well paced flight. The group were buzzing for the whole night, although not much celebratory wine was drunk as we had another day ahead...</p> <p>◆</p> <p>The forecast for Friday was for a cold front to move down through the day so we headed off to Lijak for an early flight to beat the front.</p> <p>On launch there was a light southerly flow so we got the guys prepped quickly and after the exertions the day before, we gave them a free flight with the option of an out and return followed by a run to the bridge 8km out in the flatlands if they so wished. I launched first and had to scratch to stay up initially, but as the others launched conditions improved and soon everybody was cruising along the ridge.</p> <p>It was still scratchy at times, but the crew all flew really well, with Tracy especially doing a great job, learning from the

tandem flight the previous day. By now Lee had gone off on the tandem with Sarah, and they enjoyed a romantic cruise along the ridge and back, before heading down to the landing field where Lee celebrated by mounting her on touchdown...you bad boy! I headed off along the ridge to the 10km turnpoint, closely followed by Al and Fi and then back to launch, where Fi stayed to play on the ridge with the others, while I got Al to push out front as it would be good experience for him. He made it to the bridge and almost squeaked in back at the landing field, and would have made it had he not been going for the wrong field!! It was a great effort and he was only 400m short, which gave him a total of 32km, brilliant work on a difficult day. I Landed after watching him go in and Fi finally cruised in to end what was a week of excellent flying and fun. The rest of the day was spent shopping and eating burgers....well, somebody has to do it!!

◆

All in all a brilliant two weeks, we flew 11 days out of 14, and 1000km distance and 90 hours in week two alone. Both groups progressed a great deal and everybody returned a better pilot, except Lee and I who are still rubbish!! We would like to thank both groups for making it a very enjoyable course, and look forward to the next one....watch this space.

◆

Pictures and Video to follow.

◆

Lee, Dave and Fi