

# The Rainier Paragliding Club Newsletter

Serving the Paragliding Community of Western Washington

[www.rainierparaglidingclub.org](http://www.rainierparaglidingclub.org)

September 2008

## The Thermal Column



### France on a Wing

by Jim Harmon

I just returned from two weeks of paragliding in the French Alps, and I knew you'd expect some stories and photos. This has been a dream of mine for years. I've put the bug in Mary's ear every year for the last five years. "Wouldn't it be cool if someday...?" I've left articles about paragliding tours open on the coffee table. I've extolled the virtues of big air flying in the Alps. But the tipping point finally came when our economy weakened this Spring. The cost was the same as last year, but because of a weakened dollar, it made it seem like a bargain. Perverse, yes, but that was the justification I needed. And I had the frequent flyer miles to cover the airfare. When I brought it up again this Spring, Mary said I should just "do it." Thank you, Mary!

### In This Issue:

France on a Wing	by Jim Harmon	Page 1
To Boot or Not to Boot	by Chris King	Page 5
Launch at Saddle	by Mike McIntyre	Page 7

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On the RFC Web Site:      Calendar & Membership Form



*The village of St. Jean de Sixt*

Eagle Paragliding put the tour together. The guides were Nick Greece, Jamie Mesenger, and Kevin McGinley. We also received daily weather updates, flying recommendations, and driving service from Al, the owner of the Chalet Pre Fleuri. These guys were vey helpful, and worked hard to provide memorable flights for a very diverse group. This was the full meal deal: room and board, shuttle services, fly guiding, tandems, everything. We even toured a castle on one non-flying day. Breakfasts started at 8 a.m. We were ready to head out by 9:30 most days. Lunches were packed, and we didn't return to the chalet until around 7 p.m. Dinner was at 8.



*Montmin Launch, above Lake Annecy*

Paragliding in France is centered around Lake Annecy. And it's big business. Most launches are fully groomed, either drive up or chair lift accessed. Visitors come up to picnic and watch the action. I'll never again think of Tiger Mtn. as crowded. The traffic at Planfait, Annecy's main launch, is insane! After my first flight there I realized I never even got a chance to look around. By the third flight I was finally able to settle into the routine and enjoy the fantastic view. But by then the heating had diminished, and benching up to the "teeth" was futile. Ugh.

We flew at least 8 locations. Places with names like Col de Forclaz, Marlens, Semnoz, Plain Joux, and La Chat. The weather was cooler than I'd hoped for, so the XC coaching was minimal. But I did have some personal bests. And I was coached through my first asymmetric spirals - very cool. Other experiences include seeing French tandem pilots proudly wearing neon green jumpsuits, finding paragliding shops everywhere, and incredible food!



*Annecey, as seen from above Semnoz launch*



*Chalet Pre Fleuri*

All meals at the chalet were included, including beer and wine. The dinners were spectacular. Here is one example that I recorded on Aug. 12th:

Appetizer: Smoked salmon & cucumber salad  
Main course: Roast Duck in wine reduction  
Peas, polenta & bread  
Dessert: Baked peaches w/ vanilla ice cream  
Cheese plate  
Drinks: 2 red wines, 1 white

I only wish my palate was sophisticated enough to properly enjoy those meals.



I went for the flying, but the experience really included much more. I woke to the sound of cow bells every morning. I met some very cool flying partners - Americans, French, Swedes, and Brits. And I think I became a slightly better pilot (a heavier pilot at least, thanks to the food). I've heard of places like Valle de Bravo, Iqueque, Manilla. I'm sure they are spectacular flying destinations, and I hope to fly them all someday. But I'm thankful that my first paragliding tour was to the Alps.

*Samoens*



*Mt. Blanc*

*Au Revoir.*

# To Boot or not to Boot

By Chris King



Well, my heel recovery is going well. I will not be able to fly for as long as a year and a half because of the nature of my injury. Now that the bone is healed I have a lot of tender tendons, unsteady sinews, tentative muscles, sore joints and the like that have to get used to moving again. However, that has not taken the wind out of my sails. Instead, I've been doing some research over many subjects. Paragliding is one of them. Most recently added to my reading was safety equipment. Footwear seemed to be the one I wanted to check out the most.

Two of the biggest foot related concerns in our sport are hard impacts and line tangles.

Hard impacts happen. They happen not only during landing, but can also happen during a risky launch and high wind kiting. Other issues include, but are not limited to, having to tread across uneven or rocky terrain or involving yourself in ground maneuvers that suddenly twist and bind your feet, tendons and joints.

The purpose of a good paragliding boot is to provide your foot with a good ankle and foot support system. They also help absorb initial impact energy and help redirect it over the whole of the body's larger bones and muscle groups, not just to the feet. When combined with a proper PLF landing, minimal or no damage can be experienced. Most minor injuries can be avoided with the use of paragliding boots. The use of proper footwear saves the foot from joint injuries, small bone fractures, and severe tearing of tendons and muscles. In major impacts, severe injuries can be minimized. Even with the use of proper footwear, some injuries may still include broken leg bones and some foot injuries. Proper footwear seems to contain the injury rather than having them mashed and spread all over the place. (Gruesome huh!) Even those who experienced the major injuries while using the proper foot wear agree that they would have sustained worse injuries without them.

Line tangles can happen during ground handling and during flight. Line tangles result because of hooks being used to hold laces rather than eyes for bootlaces to run through. There are instances where pilot on the ground have been tangled in their own wings and the wings of others and dragged in moderate to strong winds. In the air, major wing collapses and stalls can drape support lines and dive the wing well below the pilot. Slackened lines have been reported to tangle around the feet of pilots and in the cases of those wearing boots with hooks, pilots have reported lines tangled in the hooks, making it impossible to free themselves. In the water, a line tangle only enhances an already potentially deadly situation.

When you are choosing footwear for paragliding, it is important to choose a boot designed for our sport. They should not have hooks. They should support the foot and ankle well and have adequate cushioning in the soul. Many pilots forfeit good foot wear because of the inconveniences of hiking out in them, bulkiness, having to change shoes later on, having one more set of boots rather than just using one pair of boots that that can fit all occasions such as flying, hiking, and riding bikes. It is easy to allow the opinions of others to help us justify a different choice. Based on what I have experienced and read, make sure you just make up your mind to get the right stuff! I certainly would not replace my reserve parachute with a Hefty garbage bag. Proper footwear should be treated with the same caution and care.

There are a few choices out there. I will mention a couple that are available but it is up to you to do the research and decide for yourself. Many things are there to be considered such as fit around your ankles and foot, and size differences due to different brands and the like.

The most highly talked about is the Hanwag brand. They are durable and well praised for their results in hard impacts.

“Hanwags are the most durable of all the brands - I am about 1/4 of the way through my 3rd pair in 18 years.. and that is using them every day. For most recreational pilots they will last a lifetime - even if hiking regularly (they are designed to be easily re-soled). Hanwags are also the only ones that are fully water proof.”

- Paragliding forum.

Another is Crispis. These are reported not to hold up as well as the Hanwags; however, many pilots are very pleased with them.

“The main difference I see is that paragliding boots are made so there are minimum hooks/protrusions/etc for lines to catch on. Crispis have a nice flap over the top of all that mess.”

- Paragliding Forum

I have been lead to believe, based on the reading I have done, that it would be best to stick to boots that are designed for the sport of paragliding. There are many other types of boots used in other sports such as hiking, mountaineering, snowmobiling, snow boarding, construction work, motorcycle riding etc. These may offer some nice benefits and a low price. However, they may have other features that mean easy line tangles due to bulky treads and snag (where lines can channel and burn into the treads.) Also, other design characteristics specific to their sports may create more risk for pilot safety.

Another idea that other pilots are incorporating is the idea of wearing additional foot and ankle support in addition to your boots. Many options are available. It may be a good idea to search out the paragliding community and find out what is working best for them.

When it comes to purchasing, a good pair of footwear is not cheap. Let's compare the cost results to a recent injury of which I am personally acquainted with. I will report so you can decide.

Hanwag boots run between \$300 - \$350

The injured person I'm acquainted with (chuckle, chuckle, a known tight-wad), invested a total sum of about, \$60,000 into his injury. That's a difference of about \$59,700 dollars.

So...what would you do with the difference? That's a nice down payment on a brand new Ferrari 460!!!! Or you can buy an nice used Ferrari 308 with cash left over.

He is certain that with the proper footwear he would be flying right now, having been able to walk away from an extremely unforgiving downwind landing. So, it amounts to lost money, lost time, and an injury that has the potential to be a life time event.

In conclusion, be smart. Protect yourself with proper gear, including a good pair of boots specifically made for the sport Paragliding.

# Launching at Saddle!

photos by Mike McIntyre



The annual club meeting and elections will be held in November. Nominations for positions can be made online at the RPC website through Nov. 2nd. A ballot will be included in the next newsletter which will be published on Nov. 3rd to allow the completion of the nominations and the inclusion of the ballot.

## 2008 Club Officers

President	Mike McIntyre
Vice President	Steve Messman
Secretary	Jim Harmon
Treasurer	Kathy Smith
Director (Google List)	David Griswold
Director (Safety)	Doug Etter
Newsletter	Jim Baldo

Please contribute your stories and photos to the newsletter. Without your contributions, this newsletter can not exist.

The submission deadline for the next newsletter is Oct. 28th.

The editor would like to thank all that have submitted stories, photos, and articles.