

Ridge running from Worcester. Further and faster.

This chapter describes a method of how to run the ridges for long distance around Worcester. It is not going to show you the basics of cross-country flight or how to soar ridges. It will provide clues for experienced pilots not familiar with Worcester how to get the best out of the area.

In this section we will discuss:

- A few basic ridge running pointers
 - Safe Speed to fly
 - Speed is distance
 - “Listening” to the ridge
- For each section of the ridge
 - Some sort of map with labels
 - Wind conditions in which it is possible, best
 - How to fly it (out & back, gaps)
 - Out landing considerations
 - Bottle heights
 - Effect of wave

1 Safe Speed to fly, Comms and traffic

There is an appropriate speed to fly a ridge, and it should be determined by a variety of factors, viz.: -

- Turbulence (airmass, obstructions upwind)
- Gradient, smoothness & steepness of the slope
- How close you are flying to the ridge
- Roll rate of the glider
- Stall speed of the glider

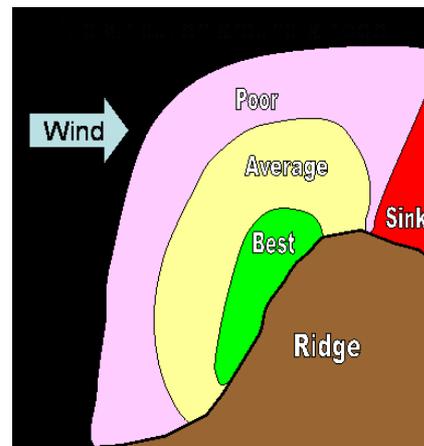
We are not going to explain the relationship here, but if you are unsure, talk it through with an instructor and approach cautiously. Recognize that if you are way too far out, the ridge may not work. We expect all pilots to recognize that ridge runners operate in a narrow ‘road’ and as a result, good lookout is vital, as are communications (see chapter on Radio Procedures) and clear understanding of collision avoidance rules.

Read the section on communications and comply with position reporting and frequencies. Distances are usually given in km from Worcester and this works in all but a few stretches where the ridge is tangential to Worcester (e.g. Front ridge at Groenberg). All heights given here (and in communication while

flying) are assuming the pilot sets 650ft on the altimeter at take off as is the usual practice at Worcester. Bottle heights are given assuming a glider with 40:1 and pilot of reasonable experience, add to the heights if you lack experience, performance or have adverse weather / bugs. Most gliders that are regularly flown cross-country out of Worcester are equipped with FLARM collision warning units which are proving invaluable. Make sure you understand the instrument and the most dangerous situation on the ridge: the double blind spot. The *double blind spot* occurs when vertically separated gliders flying in the same direction overtake one another. If they are not horizontally separated, they end up in a situation where *neither* pilot can see the other, and given how long it can take for one glider to overtake another, this situation can persist for many kilometres

2 Speed is distance: “the sweet spot”

Many pilots are not happy unless they are flying well above the ridge. While this may feel more comfortable (options, turbulence) it is ultimately slower because the lift above the ridge top is usually punctuated by thermals and intervening sink. Moving down onto the face of the ridge and flying in the top half of it is much, much faster – you will experience continuous lift. On some of the ridges (particularly the front ridge) we are often flying at 200+kph for extended periods without descending. The diagram illustrates the area of best lift on an ‘ideal’ ridge.



On some stretches of the ridge it is worth climbing over the top, but as you will see from

the following pages there are not many situations in which this is true of the Worcester Ridges. The key to understanding what height to fly is to observe the territory ahead, and unless there is a general change in height of the ridge, or a specific challenge in terms of a gap, do not be tempted to climb to the top of an isolated peak. Conversely, travelling the ridge too low can be slow as well, and in this situation it is usually worth taking the time to climb into the area of best lift. Recognize, though, that 'low' is relative to the ridge and while 2400ft is more than adequate north of Porterville, 2400ft at Audensberg is sweaty and at Robertson, with a long glide across low hills, only for fools & ETA s (60+:1). By the term "ridge running", then, we mean flying in safe proximity to the ridge in the area of best lift where the route is largely dictated by the contour. We hardly ever thermal, and usually prefer just to slow up in straight line to climb.

3 "Listening" to the ridge

Be constantly aware that the situation is dynamic and that the wind may be changing. Pick up the tell-tales on the dams, feel the places and faces that are working better and map the wind in your mind. A prevailing South Easter does not mean that the wind is blowing SE everywhere. Although there are certain times & places where the ridge lift "shuts off" completely, this is usually a gradual thing and is often signalled by detectable changes beforehand. Also, Worcester gets all forms of lift: ridge, thermal, wave, rotor and convergence. The convergences are worth noting because they frequently occur between Porterville and Piekenierskloof Pass and also overhead Worcester (often running away SE towards Riviersonderend). Wave is most commonly a factor in NWers and we have had flights in wave all the way up to the Cedarberg E of Citrusdal and South to the coast. As yet though, we have not found a way to exploit the wave that enables significant cross-country distances but we suspect it may be possible. A brief word on decision making. Where the ridge is weak, that is not the place to stop. Push on or go back, but warbling about without going up or

down is just wasting time unless you have an expectation that something else is going to change the situation. Unlike the Alps, we hardly ever need to 'park' waiting for a condition to change or recycle.

4 The Worcester Ridges

The ridges around Worcester are oriented in an "L" with the upright running South to North and the cross piece running West to East. Worcester is almost exactly at the corner and is thus well placed in winds that are NW (good for wave in the lee of the "front" ridge), SW (our best conditions) through SE. Fate has a sense of humour: although Worcester is ideally situated to take advantage of the best that the ridges have to offer in most conditions, the ridges immediately adjacent to Worcester are the most difficult to traverse from a cross country perspective, making it difficult for pilots to 'break out'. However, once you have done it there are ridge-running delights for Africa!

We typically tow (if it is not yet thermic in the valley when starting early) to one of three places, a) Vic Peak, b) Jan du Toit's, or c) Audensberg / Quarry. See Map 1&10.

The following subsections describe each section of the ridge and how to fly it, starting with the trip east along the Langeberge, then a trip North (transitioning to the front ridge from Worcester) and a trip up and down the front ridge. We often go both North and East on long flights. The longest recorded OLC distance is 1171 km (Nov 2004).

The numbers in the squares on this map allow you to orient the detail maps of the following subsections in a larger context.

4.1 East on the Langeberge

The Langeberge Mountains run east from Worcester all the way to George (the Outeniqua's) and beyond nearly to Port Elizabeth. The furthest any glider has been to date (July 2006) is 400 km out from Worcester to Storm's River. This ridge works well in anything from SW to SE and, surprisingly, in some NW too.

4.1.1 Waaihoek to Keeromberg (Map 1)

When starting East we often take a high tow and start at the railway station at Botha (see start of

the “Eastbound track” black line in Map1) because this provides valuable extra kilometres, but no lift will be found on either Waaihoek or in Jan du Toit’s and the pilot will have to glide into the Brandwag western bowl which works well in S & SE. Starting at Apiesklip (SW corner of the Brandwag bowl) is another option. It is hardly ever worth entering the Northern bowl between Brandwag and Audensberg because this requires too many track miles and track across the front of the bowl over the ‘horseshoe’ dam usually provides a reasonable run. In cases where a pilot is returning from the North (say in a SW when Waaihoek is working) then it is advisable to climb high (5000ft) at Waaihoek as we often have to glide the 20+ kilometres to Keeromberg before useful lift is regained, and the Brandwag bowl can create severe sink. When crossing the N1 between Audensberg and Keeromberg, it is advisable to have 4000ft before departing Audensberg unless you are certain Keeromberg is working as at lower altitudes you may get to Keeromberg and then struggle to get back to Worcester.

You should be ‘local’ to Worcester at all times on this stretch, and in a modern sail plane 3000ft is a reasonable ‘bottle’ height at which to leave the ridge and search for lift in the valley on your way to the airfield.

The reverse trip (Keeromberg to Waaihoek) in a Westerly usually requires climbing high (6000ft) at Keeromberg or to 5000ft at the East end of the ‘horseshoe’ dam/West end of Audensberg because there is heavy sink in the Brandwag bowl and not much lift en route to Waaihoek. Some pilots prefer to make a large loop to the south to rejoin Waaihoek without going into the Brandwag bowl (see dotted red track), but this is slower and not worth the track miles if you are prepared to weather the turbulence (and explore the rotor!). Joining Waaihoek below 3300ft requires nerves of steel, and if you want to enjoy your flight, try to join it at 3800ft+. Also note that often in a N/Wer the Southern tip of Waaihoek is extremely rough and below 4000ft the southernmost kilometre (south of the small ‘stack’/spur) does not work well and can be very rough. Most pilots should

not attempt the jump to Waaihoek unless they can get 4000ft at Jan du Toit’s.

4.1.2 Keeromberg to Robertson (Map 2)

We don’t usually bother to climb at Keeromberg (to any more than 4500ft and usually don’t stop below 3500ft) because it is higher than the ridges to the East and we will just have to descend back down again. Early in the morning the valley can be inverted and this should be a consideration – staying high can keep you in the lift band which may not exist below 3000ft. If it is working there is almost always a thermal on the saddle joining Bread loaf (26km out from Worcester) to the Langeberge, and if not there are some good fields there. Fischer’s strip is closed and definitely un-useable. If you can get to 3500ft at Bread loaf, the run to Robertson almost always works, but in this next section the ridge is ‘behind’ some extensive, unlandable spurs which imply a long glide out if you fail to maintain and 3000ft is the ‘bottle’ height. You are ‘local’ to Fischer’s field here. The jump of the Robertson Spur can be challenging, especially at lower altitudes. The minimum altitude to approach in a SE is at 3500 (with say 3-4km to run across the crags). You will experience heavy sink and turbulence which is more severe the lower you are (and the longer your track will be) and it is best to try and cross at 4000ft until you are more comfortable with the terrain. It is not unknown to lose 1000ft in the crossing, and it is not possible without tunnelling equipment below 2800ft.

The reverse jump is usually a lot easier because the ridge from Robertson to Ashton is higher and is not in the lee of the spur, so usually pushes you to the top so that the spur is of less consequence when Westbound. Particularly in a Westerly (when we can go approximately 89km out) the return crossing should be handled with care (you are again approaching from the lee) and it is recommended to have 4000ft 3km before the spur. If you are running West from the spur having crossed low, and it is late, there is almost always a broad, gentle thermal about 1.5km NW of the Bread loaf which can provide the height to get home. In addition, when

returning Westbound *in the late evening*, the sun is a significant factor and life is much more relaxing if you have a clean canopy and/or climb above the ridge top.

4.1.3 Robertson to Ashton (Map 3)

Once across the Robertson spur, heading E, it can often not work well until nearly 50km out from Worcester. This is particularly true of a SWer early in the day and it is necessary to slow up and let the ridge carry you. With 3000ft as the bottle height you will be local first to Robertson and then to Ashton (both have good tar, 30m wide strips oriented approx E-W). Once past 50km the ridge becomes smoother and usually works well to the corner where it turns S toward Ashton. It is usually best, if turbulent, at that corner. This corner is notable because there is almost always severe turbulence just as you leave the high ground (above the spur that defines the Western side of the Montagu Gap – marked with a ‘T’ on the map). Track the spur south when jumping the Montagu Gap (be at no lower than 3800ft at ‘T’) until due West of the Gap and cross it directly. Aim to arrive not below 3000ft and expect turbulence if jumping it in a SEr.

4.1.4 Ashton to Meeuklip (Map 4)

Once across Montagu Gap westbound it is worth trying to get back to about 3800ft as you run SE along the Langeberge. It is not worth going higher because there is about 10km of lower ridge running into ‘Swellendam Corner’. The valley at this point is quite ‘hilly’ close to the ridge and the better field choices (if you find yourself out of range of both Ashton and Swellendam) are a little further out into the valley.

The ridge has a ‘step’ which runs for about 12km after Ashton, and close to or below 3000ft you may be uncomfortable to stay on the main ridge and be forced to push out to the step. If this is the case it is time to slow up and try to climb back up onto the main ridge. Consider that even the main ridge may not be working and it may be prudent to turn back (you are still local to Ashton if above the step). Swellendam Corner is often as far as it is prudent to go in a Westerly. You can climb high here and ‘peek’

around the corner but be sure to leave plenty of margin as this corner is often accompanied by a change of wind direction. The corner is usually very turbulent in a S/SE. Part of the reason for this is that the wind in a Southerly become SE between as it blows up the valley to Ashton and this corner is in the ‘lee’. In a SE it is also worth noting that you may need to push some way around the corner (potentially to Meeuklip) before the ridge really works again. We have had days where it has worked well (if low) to Swellendam and then Swellendam is not working well – the ‘quiet’ corner. If you can climb or glide through to get to Tradouw this situation resolves and the wind at altitude re-establishes itself. This is noticeable on days where there is an inversion at or around 5000ft and the peaks at Swellendam are above the inversion but the ridges to either side are not – the wind flows around (E or W) the bulk of the ridge at Swellendam and only becomes ‘on to the ridge’ again at Tradouw.

As you track SE down this section from Ashton it is worth looking over the back towards George – you get a clear impression of whether the Langeberge beyond Swellendam is working if it is capped in cloud and this may help to plan your route.

4.1.5 Crossing Tradouw Pass – Meeuklip to Mitre Peak / Heidelberg (Map 5)

As Reinhold says, if you set off early (9:30 to 10:30) and arrive in Swellendam (107km from Worcester) in an hour or less then it is likely to be a “Day Type 5” – when even the pundits are pushing their boundaries.

The trick heading east from Meeuklip is to jump to the back immediately as the back ridge is significantly higher as you track E and you will be above the high plateau (described on the map area between East & Westbound tracks just W of Tradouw Pass). Importantly, this will allow you to get to 5000ft as you start the jump of Tradouw pass and this is vital if you are going to stay with the best energy.

After crossing the pass, head to the back of the broad rounded spur that describes the East side of the pass. There is a house thermal right on

top of this spur, and you really want 4500ft at this point to be comfortable to pick up and track what is a low ridge at the back of a high plateau. Anything less and you will end up pushing a long way forward in less energy with a big jump to Mitre Peak. 8km from the pass the plateau ends in a large rounded valley cut into the ridge. Continue to track the back ridge until the deep gorge just West of Mitre. Jump forward over the peaks describing the West side of this Gorge– the most Southerly of which has a house thermal, then jump directly on to Mitre. The return journey (Westbound) is slightly different in that you will rarely be high enough at Mitre to jump straight to the back and may have to cross the deep gorge and work to the back through the lower ridges in front of the main ridges just West of Mitre. But it is worth it – in most conditions getting to the back will allow a climb to the top and then a jump to the little ridge at the back atop the plateau before Tradouw Pass and this is invariably quicker. At Tradouw all but the highest performance ships will be pushed forward, not high enough to make it over the plateau which is at about 3500ft. Westbound in a SEr it is important to get high in the run into Swellendam because the ridge will usually not work until well beyond Swellendam Corner. The trick to getting high quickly (as shown on the eastbound track) is to follow the front of the plateau in which a few house thermals will allow you to climb in the glide to 3-400ft above the plateau. Just before the wide flat gorge in the plateau is the point at which to cut diagonally across the plateau. The first time it feels very low, but you can always run out along the river bed to the South (no, not with the wheel down!). The back ridge usually pumps in a SEr so although you arrive almost at the bottom (maybe 2-300ft off the plateau), it should be possible to regain the top of the ridge rapidly and you are set to round the corner with enough height to glide to Ashton if it goes pear shaped.

4.1.6 Mitre / Heidelberg to Vreysrant (Map 6)

From Mitre Peak, although many first time pilots are tempted to jump forward to the low

ridge just north of Heidelberg, it is important to stay on the back ridge, and the run to Vreysrant (215km from Worcester) is relatively straight forward as long as you choose to stay at the back whenever there is a choice. There are reasonably good, if occasional fields along the ridge and there is no real danger of being without options. Take time to slow up and climb as the ridge gradually climbs until about 175km out from Worcester. 25km before Vreysrant (188 out from Worcester), the ridge gets lower and there is again a lower front ridge. This is a good point to turn if you are in any doubt about the ridge working lower down, as when you reach this point again on the eastbound trip you will be much lower and will need to slow up and climb. Also note that in a SWr you will be approaching in the slight lee created by the higher and more southerly ridge to the West and this occasionally causes problems. The last 25km Eastbound into Vreysrant we usually fly well above the ridge because we have come off a long high section and want to get to across the Gouritz and also the ridge beyond Vreysrant is poorly defined. The return is usually without issues if you stay at the back – remembering to jump forward where the ridge becomes higher at 188km out from Worcester.

4.1.7 Vreysrant to George (no map)

We leave for a later version a detailed description and map of the run into George (and beyond). The section of ‘ridge’ immediately east of Vreysrant is very broken, and the motor gliders have proved that the quickest route is to jump back and stay there all the way to George. The problem is that the field selection is appalling (literally) and it is a bold glider pilot that can handle the eastbound track on the back ridge without an engine. Coming back West from George is a little easier because you get through the worst of the ‘badlands’ with the additional height gained on the high ground at George.

4.2 North: Worcester to Citrusdal

The route North from Worcester starts with two tricky sections traversing the Waaihoek bowl and crossing the Tulbagh valley, but then turns

into a racetrack from Saronberg past Porterville, Dasklip and Piekenierskloof to Renosterhoek which is a small conical peak 140km N of Worcester. This section of ridge works well in NW to SW and surprisingly in some SE (but it can be tricky). Special care needs to be taken in a NW that is generating wave because the Waaihoek bowl and the Witzenberg (which describe the East side of the Tulbagh valley) are often out of phase with the wave. The furthest north we have been to date (July 2006) is some 300km (just north of Nieuwoudtville) but the sections North of Citrusdal are not described here. Interestingly, we do not believe these far north sections of ridge to be required to clock up 1250km out of Worcester using OLC rules.

4.2.1 Traversing Waaihoek and Witzenberg to the front ridge (Map 7)

This is probably the most difficult section of the ridges around Worcester. North bound usually in a NW to SW we will start a task to the North. The reason is that the wind usually backs during the day to become more southerly in the afternoon - making the Langeberge a racetrack. The counter argument to this is if you want to get in to George - which should preferably be done early in the day because George often enjoys low cloud in the middle to late afternoon (it is a trapped sea breeze). Tasks to the North are usually started in the Jan du Toit's valley because it usually works in a NW to SW, is the shortest tow leaving no major jumps. Typically one should climb to 4500ft at Jan du Toit's as the jump West to the South end of Waaihoek ("Waaihoek Corner") is usually in sink in any wind from W to NW and arriving at the Waaihoek bowl below 3500ft is not advisable – esp. in a NW as the southern km of the Waaihoek ridge does not usually work (you need to be North of the little spur that is about 1 km from the southern end). Although it is possible to make it back to Worcester from Waaihoek Corner from 3000ft (40:1) in a NW, most will find this a little low, especially given the sink in the lee of Waaihoek. Suggested bottle height at Waaihoek corner is 3300ft.

In the early morning it is often true that only the 'hot rocks' on Waaihoek work, and flying safely

close to the face can be the only way forward or up. But mostly, in SW to NW (wave excluded) Waaihoek is 'gang busters', and by the time you approach the high saddle between Mitchell's Peak and Waaihoek you will have sufficient height to jump it. If you can, cross over the saddle and stay in the middle of the next valley for a while before edging toward the Mitchell's Peak side and then it is a race for the Southern tip of the Witzenberg. If you have crossed the saddle, you will have plenty of height – there is no point in arriving way above the top of the Witzenberg – so burn it off by flying fast across Mitchell's Pass (which joins Wolseley and Ceres) and aim to join the Witzenberg at circa 4000ft. The trip up the first half of the Witzenberg is jagged but simple (watch for double power lines at 35km out from Worcester). If you intend taking the alternate northbound route (dotted red line) cutting across the valley direct to the gap north of Saronberg, leave the ridge about half way along where it drops down sharply to a lower level. This point is usually a house thermal and is the end of a street (usually not marked by cloud) that runs directly to the Saron Gap. The street is usually there in anything close to a NW. If you continue on up the Witzenberg, expect it to be a little weak in the low section abeam Tulbagh and be prepared to slow up and climb at the North end as there is a significant time saving for those who make it into the hanging valley that joins Klein Winterhoek to the Witzenberg. The lowest height you can get into the hanging valley safely is 5200ft and most pilots will want a margin of another 300ft. If you make the hanging valley, change to 131.125 and traverse immediately left around Klein Winterhoek and then jump 24 Rivers to the southern tip of the Oliphantshoekberge (we call it the Porterville ridge) and aim to join at 3000ft 65km out from Worcester from where you can turn north onto the "main straight" of the racetrack to Renosterhoek. An alternative is cross from Klein to Groot Winterhoek while in 24 rivers and jump from the western face of Groot Winterhoek to the Northern most point you think you can make on the Porterville ridge.

Don't do this unless you feel very confident because, if you under cook it you are in for a sweaty time as there are almost no landable fields on the plateau between Groot Winterhoek and the Porterville ridge – your run out through 24 rivers (southwards) is not one passengers will queue for. If you do not make the hanging valley at the top of the Tulbagh valley, track the southern side of Klein Winterhoek (it often carries well even in a NW!) until you get to the Saron Gap where you can turn North and join the Porterville ridge. Later in the day we regularly connect the Porterville ridge at or below 2000ft and it quickly pushes you to the top. Be a little more conservative early in the day.

Southbound starting from the southern end of the Porterville ridge (southbound) you want to have gained at least 3500ft, so make sure you have slowed up passing Porterville and be over the top as you reach this section. Start by jumping due south to the Eastern lip of the Saron Gap where there is a house thermal. If you have not lost much height, continue to track the eastern face of the gap until you are into the Tulbagh valley. Here there is a choice to try and pick up the street direct to the high ground at the southern end of the Witzenberg or turn east and track the southern face of Klein Winterhoek before jumping across the valley to the Witzenberg. The lowest we have successfully climbed away from a low point joining the north end of the Witzenberg is 1800ft, but because the valley floor is much higher here, this leaves few options and requires nerve. Aim to arrive at or above 2800ft if you want to enjoy it. Turn south on the Witzenberg and remember that you want to be close to 5000ft at the Southern end if possible, as anything below 4000ft will make the Waaihoek bowl traversal too interesting. It is usually quickest to pass West of Mitchell's Peak and: in a NW strap in for serious turbulence on the southern side before flying across the Waaihoek bowl and join at the point where the bowl meets the ridge running south to the corner. Alternatively you can track in from the (NW) Witzenberg to the saddle between Waaihoek and Mitchell's Peak but this will cost

time if you do not have the height to clear the saddle.

- In a SW, you should track west around Mitchell's Peak and follow the Waaihoek bowl around and the Eastern face should work. If you are returning to Worcester, you only need the 3300ft bottle height at the southern tip of Waaihoek, but if you are intending to jump to the Langeberge then you are well advised to climb to above 5000ft (5500ft is better) before jumping East across Jan du Toits. (See Map 1 for the description of this jump).

Other options:

Some northbound pilots prefer to jump from the Witzenberg onto the front ridge south of Saronberg (just north of Voelplei) and while this is invariably slower it can be a way for the intermediate pilot to 'suss' out the territory, but will likely require thermalling. It may be of interest to look at the actual log trace shown on map 8 to see some of the routes taken to jump to the front ridge (the two northernmost tracks are northbound).

4.2.2 Saronberg to Renosterhoek (Map 8)

This is the easiest section of the ridge in good weather because it is largely straight, smooth, and if you are prepared to travel at the altitudes required, the fastest. It can be difficult in difficult conditions because it is a low ridge. The southern section is steeper and higher (south of Porterville) but usually works well in anything from NW to SW. Avoid the temptation to warble along above the top if you are looking for a reasonable day-distance. There are a couple of sections where turbulence is 'standard' (Bumpy Peak and just South of Piekenierskloof) but it is as well to ensure your straps are tight anyway. We often traverse significant distances at over 200 kph and this accentuates the bumps!

Here are a few points worth making about this stretch:

- Change gear to fly in the sweet spot (let the weather dictate your speed)
- Allow yourself to be a little over the top passing Piekenierskloof northbound and jump the gap a little slower than the general

conditions indicate or you will arrive very low on the other side of this low-point in the ridge

- Monitor the ridge, there is often a convergence between Piekenierskloof and Dasklip (running out towards Piketberg) and it sometimes does not work well north of this convergence
- In a northerly the last few km before Renosterhoek sometimes do not work at all
- Pay attention to the dams – they give early warning if it is going too Southerly for the ridge to work
- Passing Piekeniers Southbound, try to maintain a minimum of 2000ft as it will make the transition to the ‘back’ just south of Piekenierskloof much easier (see the kink in the trace south of Piekeniers on Map 8)
- Be prepared to slow up passing Dasklip southbound as the ridge top is significantly higher (and you will need the height for the jump to Saronberg or Witzenberg).
- Don’t forget to call Dasklip on 124.8 and warn of your approach. Not below 2800ft directly over the para glider launch site. There are good fields all along this stretch, and a good airfield at Porterville (slopes down to the north). You should aim to travel at 3000ft south of Porterville and transition to circa 2400ft from Dasklip to Piekenierskloof and down to 2200ft until just short of Renosterhoek where you can hardly avoid climbing back up as you turn at 140km.

4.2.3 Saronberg to Huguenot Tunnel (Map 9)

There is a street which usually runs directly from the southern end of the Porterville ridge (65km from Worcester) to the north corner of Saronberg which often allows the crossing of this 7 km gap for the loss of 300ft or less. On reaching Saronberg, curve around the Western face, but do not look for a ‘big kick’ you might otherwise expect from such an impressively sized mountain. Somehow Saronberg never seems to match the day that is happening all around it and is not usually a good place to be looking for a “top up”. One exception is that in a SW where one of the two gullies in the SW face will usually work well. Happily, it is not worth climbing high at Saronberg in either

direction because the ridges north and south are much lower. Rather push on, remember to change frequency (southbound to 124.8 and northbound to 131.125), and stick to the ridge line (which is quite far to the east on the south side of Saronberg. If you are getting low (the ridge drops away abeam Gouda so there should be no difficulty staying above it) there is usually a good thermal on the end of the ridge just before you jump the Gouda gap (where the ridges overlap anyway).

Approaching Voelvllei from the North, anything less than 2000ft will feel low as the good fields are behind you at Gouda. Take the time to ensure the ridge is working and allow it to push you upwards – the ridge ahead is way higher and you will benefit from rising to nearly 3500ft as this improves your land out options and gets you up into the best air, but any higher is a waste of time because the ridge is lower again running past Groenberg and the benefit will be lost.

Leaving the south end of Voelvllei take time to note that there are practically no fields and a good water landing is probably preferable to rough terrain (water: brakes closed, wheel down, ‘fly it on’ and not in the shallows as the glider needs the depth to ‘dunk’ and then come back up). Also note that the technique of issuing position reports in kilometres from Worcester is ineffective on this stretch as the track is 90° to Worcester and you are advised to adopt a different relative reporting point (the Tunnel or Renosterhoek) if you are in close proximity with other gliders on this stretch. The ridge runs east of Groenberg and you should by now be at the top (it takes a while sometimes!). Just south of Groenberg is Bain's Kloof, one of the most beautiful passes in the country, and you can decide to track East onto the high west-facing ridge south of Bain's or jump directly across the pass and join a low north-south ridge which in due East of Wellington. Aim to arrive not below 3000ft (there are field options out in the valley to the West) but this low ridge nearly always works and in a NW is a taster for the short, high, E-W ridge at the south end and which points at Paarl and gives huge kick in a

NW. It kicks in a SW too, but it is all turbulence so a rapid traverse is recommended. The deep gullies and spurs around the corner on the West face always work reasonably (not well) before another little jump SE takes you over Du Toit's Kloof Pass and a short ridge south to the tunnel. Try to start this ridge above 3500ft, but it uniformly works well if you got this far.

4.2.4 South of the Huguenot Tunnel (no map)

In a SW, turning at the tunnel is recommended as the ridges further south are slower and not really optimal for a SW wind. It is possible (if you are sight seeing rather than pushing distance) to climb into the mountains which describe the eastern side of the Wemmershoek Dam catchment area and you can run down to Franschoek, or for the intrepid, the mountains overlooking Theewaterskloof. Expect your average XC speed to be hammered if you choose this option though. On several occasions we have taken pure gliders down through Franschoek to overlook Gordon's Bay and Somerset West from the Hottentots Holland but only the motor gliders have so far (July 2006) ventured down onto the Steenbras ridge to Rooi Els. Airspace is a real consideration anywhere south of the tunnel (even at ridge-top heights) so ensure you pre-brief carefully and understand the local ATC procedures if you intend venturing south of the tunnel.

4.3 South: Worcester to Villiersdorp

The route South from Worcester (starting at Vic Peak) is the one 'house ridge' that offers a much lower risk to explore.

4.3.1 Vic Peak to Villiersdorp (Map 10)

Vic Peak is the standard launch point in a NW for local soaring and also a good choice in a SE as it has good faces in these directions. It is the SE face that provides access to the ridge south to Villiersdorp. The standard bottle height at Vic Peak (10km from Worcester) is 3000ft but there are some fields at the NW foot and away to the SE. On its Northern flank is the Brandvlei dam which has to be crossed (together with the unlandable Breede River flood plain) en route Worcester. If you want to run the ridge south to Villiersdorp (which is

possible in a SE and in lee wave in a NW!) then there is no point in climbing high at Vic Peak as the ridge to the south is significantly lower. Track the summit south along the 4x4 tracks (gear up!) and it rises gradually – usually quicker than ridge is able to push you to the top and eventually you will be forced forward to the SE facing spurs as you track southwards. It is worth noting that the low ridge, or 'step' in the foothills of the main ridge often generates better lift than the main ridge and it can be advantageous to fly over it (even though you will be much higher). A reasonable bottle height all along this stretch is 3000ft as there are plenty of fields, and if Vic Peak is working it is usually possible to make it back and climb up. To actually turn at Villiersdorp town (32 km out from Worcester) requires a jaunt out over the valley and it is best to have as much as 4000ft before this is attempted as there is usually some sink generated by the eastern end of the Riviersonderend Ridge in a SE. On the return trip north, the low step mentioned earlier should definitely be explored as if you are lower it is uniformly a better option than being 'low' on the main part of the ridge.

4.3.2 Villiersdorp to Riviersonderend (no Map)

It is possible to jump east at Villiersdorp onto the E-W Riviersonderend mountains which work well in a SW to SE and are sufficiently high to make it a care-free trip. Again though, this is a ridge for sight-seeing and not one to consider seriously if you are aiming for long distances.

4.3.3 Villiersdorp to Sir Lowry's Pass (no Map)

It is possible to jump west at Villiersdorp in a SE onto the SE facing ridge on the NW side of the Theewaterskloof dam. There are some fields if it does not work and the ridge is reliable if not particularly high. Take care tracking further south into the Grabouw bowl as the terrain here is significantly higher and less hospitable for out landings.

Alan O'Regan

CHAPTER 12 - Ridge Running from Worcester

