

how to fly the Zillertal out and return...

Michele Farina outlines the return sector of one of Austria's most spectacular flights

Last month I explained how to fly the outward sector of the Zillertal flight. We also discussed training your head... and your bladder. With a bit of skill and some luck, most regular XC pilots will have made it to the mouth of the valley without too many problems. If not, the rest would have had easy landings in the many bomb-out fields along the route. In this second and final instalment I'll be explaining how to make it back, and identifying few pitfalls you could encounter along the way.

turnpoint co-ordinates

The GPS co-ordinates for the start, turn and landing points are as follows (set in UTM/UPS on the Navigation page):

Start	Penken launch	32 T 0713377, UTM 5228607 altitude 2000m
Turnpoint 1	Speiljoch cable-car station	32 T 0711262, UTM 5245874 altitude 1900m
Turnpoint 2	Steinerhof guest house	32 T 0717004, UTM 5251561 altitude 1080m
LZ	Bruggerstube	32 T 0717609, UTM 5229423 altitude 620m

First, a word of caution. Before attempting this flight, please check that the weather is suitable. Winds may change throughout the day and over the length of the valley. To fly a distance like this in the Alps requires good thermic activity, which can sometimes be on the rough side. We need to be able to safely use these thermals, but there is no smoke without fire. Make sure that you know your glider inside out, and that it is appropriate for your skill level and will allow you to concentrate on the task in hand. And wherever you fly, flying with someone with local knowledge will better your chances of completing the course,



Turnpoint 1: Spieljoch

Last month we ended up high over Turnpoint 1, the Spieljoch cable-car station (1,900m), where it's very important to not exceed the Innsbruck CTR ceiling of 7,000ft (you can actually go to 2,400m or 7,800ft above Spieljoch itself, and once you start to glide across the valley you leave the ceiling behind). With this amount of height it is possible to make progress towards our goal, the Bruggerstube, by flying back down the other side of the valley.

By now it will be around 14:00. Checking out the shadows of the trees near the turnpoint, you'd have noticed that the sun has definitely moved round. Gliding north-east along the ridge, in the direction of Turnpoint 2, the Steinerhof guesthouse (1,080m) offers a good line with less sink which will be helpful on the 8 - 9km crossing.

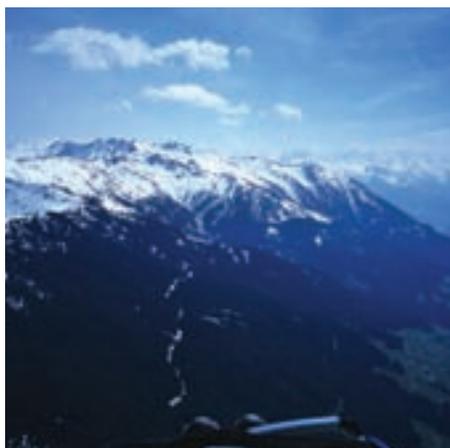


Crossing the Zillertal valley

Depending on the time of year, it's quite easy to get grounded by the lee of the Inn valley flow which runs east to west over the Steinerhof. So when crossing the Ziller valley it's important to aim where the ridge is much higher, effectively

blocking out the Inntal flow. Expect to lose 1,000m on the glide.

Once high here it's possible to make Turnpoint 2, then run back to this lee-side again. If however on the crossing you noticed that there was strong sink, aim further to the right. Only think about going to Turnpoint 2 if you are high (around 2,500m), as you could lose height in the rougher, tumbling air of a stronger Inntal flow.



Above turnpoint 2

As you glide south at altitude, it's important to stay as high as possible along this ridge, as the next obstacle is the Hamberg at 2,080m. Its aspect is south-west but thermals can be disturbed by the lower northerly valley flow which can be as high as 1,700m amsl. Your actions on this mountain should be dependent on the conditions on the day, the time of year and what the upper winds are doing. In any case it's very important to have lots of clearance (200m or so) to cross this mountain. Expect the most active climbs here, at around 5 - 6+m/s.



The approach to the Hamberg

By now it should be just after 15:00, and if it's not a blue day you should be looking for signs of overdevelopment. As you climb on the Hamberg look at the other clouds around you. How are they developing? Is there anything that you're not happy with? Looking back out of the valley towards the Achensee lake can give a good indicator of what the air is, or will be, doing.

If the Hamberg is too much, if the lower valley flow is quite strong or there is a north-westerly upper wind, just glide directly to the next ridge where large fields in the sun should deliver good climbs. If you find yourself low on this ridge, below 1,700m, don't panic! In the past I've managed to just circle in small thermals, drifting

Below: After the Hamberg



and gradually gaining height along the whole of the 10km ridge. And at the end you are very close to goal.



The end of the ridge

If you find yourself in this situation, drift along until you can glide to the north-facing ridge after the small valley crossing. Care must be taken as there are a few power cables close to the hill, but they are not a major problem and you'll see them in good time.

The north facing ridge in front of you can be soared with the valley wind (it's one of the ridges we regularly fly on), and once at around 1,400m(amsl) here you can safely make goal, the Bruggerstube.



Gliding to Bruggerstube

If, however, you found a good climb after Hamberg and stayed high under a cloud street the cross-country possibilities are still huge as the last thermals will die out at around 19:30. It's possible to overfly goal and do the sightseeing tour of the large granite peaks that mark the end of the Zillertal, or complete a 70km triangle. But these will keep for future articles...

If you want to know more you can join our guided groups. Contact info@austrianarena.com or visit www.austrianarena.com.