

# WITH A BUNGY IN THE LAKE DISTRICT

1956

by Lawrence Robertson

So the moment had come. For years I had been dreaming of the joys to be had in soaring among the mountains of our English Lakeland; then last year I had surveyed a fine bungee-launching slope on Latrigg, a 1,200-ft. hill overlooking Keswick town and jutting out half a mile at right angles from the great slopes of Skiddaw, and now here we were at last with a fully organised expedition of three sailplanes and eight pilots from the Derbyshire and Lancashire Club at Camphill.

But it was not turning out quite as planned yet. Driving rain was spattering on the windscreen as I sat in our Olympia drawn up on the edge of Latrigg for the first launch; and grey clouds were scudding along the face of Skiddaw in an unbroken chain, well below the top. Stan Armstrong had given up marshalling the launching crew, who were now huddled beneath the wings, and I waited...

At last the rain eased off, but the wind was very much along the hill. Would there be lift, I wondered? I would soon know now. For the umpteenth time I wiped the mist off the perspex in front, then took a last look at the possible landing fields 800 ft. below, and gave the "thumbs up" to Stan.

The bungee launch was smooth, and almost at once came that blessed feeling of upsurge which means lift enough and to spare. The situation was immediately transformed, and my spirits surged up accordingly. With a few "S" beats I soon gained 500 ft. and moved over to the main south-west slopes of Skiddaw, where I could just hold this height in the sidelong wind.

There would undoubtedly be good lift on the north-west slopes, but to get to them I must first circumnavigate Dodd Fell, a conical hill of 1,600 ft. standing out to windward from the side of Skiddaw. This would

be an operation rather like climbing over an overhanging ledge of rock, but I felt it should be attempted, so I set off in that direction.

There was lift over each minor ridge and sink over each gully as I edged along the face of Skiddaw, but I was not losing much—and now for Dodd Fell! The sink began as I swung onwards towards Lake Bassenthwaite, but it wasn't bad. I crept forward steadily, and the suspense began to build up again. I had a quick look for a landing field in case I struck the violent down-draught I half expected; but this didn't come, and before long I rounded the corner with little less height than when I started. I was told afterwards that a cheer went up at this point from the watchers on Latrigg, who saw their prospects of a good ride improved accordingly.

The new vista now revealed was somewhat awesome, and I felt a sense of loneliness as I looked out at the serried ranks of spiky conifers on Dodd Fell below and to the side, and at the wet black crags of Skiddaw ahead of me towering up and disappearing into the clouds. Fortunately the V-shaped bowl between Dodd Fell and Skiddaw provided good lift without my having to fly too close to either the conifers or the crags, and I was soon at cloud base at 1,800 ft.

The next two hours were spent largely in dodging clouds, which tended to form around one, and waiting as the cloud base lifted painfully slowly.

Towards the end of this period, as I patrolled up and down the beat of several miles, I could see that away over the Solway Firth the sun was shining, and Criffell, across the water in Scotland, was standing out like a great purple pyramid. A magnificent sight, and I nosed out towards it, away from my dank and grey slopes.

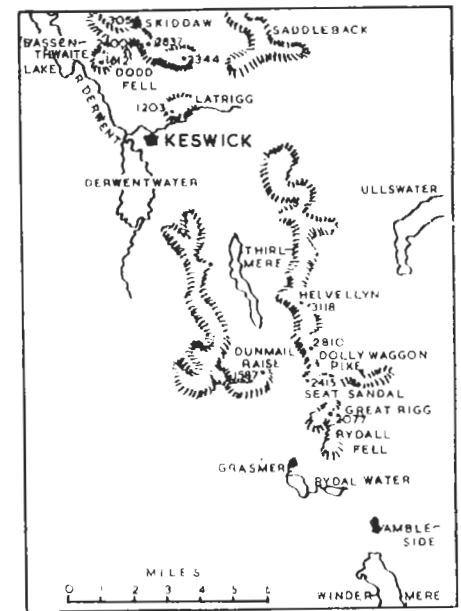
This time, unlike previous occasions, the

variometer continued to show lift all the way, so that when I reached the swind edge of the clouds overhead I was able to give "Peveril" her head, and let her climb up past them. She responded eagerly after being held down so long, and the altimeter needle wound steadily round—2,000, 3,000, 4,000 ft. I was now well above the cloud layer, which had the usual "ciderdown" appearance of a wave formation, and I edged back over the mountains, still climbing. At 4,200 ft. I reckoned I was over where Skiddaw should be, but alas, there was not a sign of it! However, beyond the ciderdown there was much else on all sides to gaze at and admire in the now bright sunshine: a gigantic landscape of lakes, fields, mountains and clouds stretching out and merging in the blue distance. Life was just wonderful!

But suddenly I became aware of a large cumulus drifting up and closing with the wave clouds. I had the choice of diving quickly between them or flying straight through the cumulus on a compass course, as I didn't fancy circling in clouds the bottoms of which were "stuffed with mountains". I chose the second alternative and had a fairly smooth passage through the cumulus, but when I came out at the other side the wave lift had gone, and I sank back to 3,000 ft.

Not long after this Bernard Thomas arrived to keep me company in the "Sky-lark", as I flew along close in to the mountain side again. But the clouds were really beginning to break up now, and soon I obtained just a brief glimpse of a track on a ridge leading up to a cairn, before it was blotted out again. Could that be IT? I made another beat and then came a longer clearance. This time there was no doubt about it! I could at last see the actual summit of Skiddaw (3,054 ft.) standing out dark and bare against the sunny background of Keswick, far below, and I dived in to circle round it before it disappeared again—no doubt to the wonder of those few hardy souls standing around the cairn who had climbed the mountain the hard way in the cloud!

I had been flying about three hours and there was no excuse to stay up any longer now; so reluctantly, but with a feeling of task accomplished, I turned to go and land back on Latrigg, where Stan Armstrong would be waiting for his turn. On the way I



passed Johnny Tweedy coming up in the Sky, and, really, it was like any Sunday afternoon at Camphill—with a difference!

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1956

# MORE BUNGY IN THE LAKE DISTRICT

By J. S. Armstrong



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LAWRENCE Robertson was the first to be launched from Latrigg Fell in our faithful old Olympia "Peveril". This was as it should be, because Lawrence had put in a very great deal of work surveying the site last winter, and organising the expedition. The date was Tuesday, July 31st, and I will long remember it as one of the most interesting and exhilarating days' flying in nearly twenty years of gliding.

After a few beats gaining height over the face of Latrigg, Lawrence set off on what looked to me a most perilous traverse of the south-west slopes of Skiddaw. He was less than half-way up the mountain side in a gusty north-west wind, and with heavy rain-bearing clouds hiding the top of the ridge. We watched "Peveril" creeping slowly in and out of the gullies until it finally disappeared round the corner of Dodd Fell. We next saw it about half-an-hour later as a tiny speck about four miles away and at least 3,000 ft. high. The cloud had lifted considerably and Lawrence was obviously enjoying himself dodging in and out and playing hide and seek with the top of Skiddaw at 3,054 ft.

Herculean labours carried the Skylark II and the Sky through the bog, rigged them and dragged them up to the launching slope, and off went Bernard Thomas in the former and John Tweedy in the latter to join Lawrence. All three were obviously having a grand time, and when Lawrence finally returned to land on the top of Latrigg I could hardly wait to get in and be launched. There was a slight delay while he shouted down to us to clear the sheep (invisible to us on the slope) from his landing run, and then I was finally lined up and ready for off. As there was no one else for "Peveril," Lawrence suggested I should explore as much as I wished and land at the bottom near Keswick in a field we had prospected, or further along near our pub in a slightly less appealing field.

The journey along the slopes of Skiddaw was not at all to my liking, but, once round

the corner of Dodd Fell, the lift was astonishing, and extended to well above cloud base, my best height being 4,400 ft. There was a suggestion of wave in the smoothness and extent; even a mile or so out over Bassenthwaite Lake the lift continued, and the others afterwards agreed that some wave was present. The cloud was breaking, and the sun shone; the view was superb, and life was wonderful.

Bernard had gone back and landed, and Brian Jefferson now came and joined John and me, and for a time we played peep-bo with each other and the mountain top. After a rather close shave I decided to seek pastures new, and from 4,000 ft. set course nearly straight down wind for Great Dodd at the north end of the Helvellyn range. The distance was a good seven miles, and there are no landing fields once past Keswick, but of course my height was ample and I arrived level with the top of Wanthwaite Crag, a fearsome-looking precipice about two-thirds the way up Great Dodd. The lift was good and in no time I was heading south along the eleven-mile range which looks so mouth-watering on the contour map.

The whole Helvellyn range has a rather "hog's-back" contour, with a steep slope up from the Thirlmere valley and lake, and then a gentle slope receding to the top, in places hardly more than the gliding angle of a sailplane. At first I kept out in front of the steep part, especially as cloud was still forming occasionally on the summit of the ridge, and even round me at times at about 2,900 ft. However, conditions were improving all the time, and although the cloud was never less than 4/8, it did lift sometimes to about 4,000 ft., and from this height the view on all sides was almost unbelievable. Away from the higher peaks there seemed to be less cloud, and the westering sun was throwing brilliant contrasts of light and shade across innumerable valleys as far as the eye could see. All the Lake District seemed spread out below me, and the lakes

to the west were glittering brilliantly in the sunshine. I identified fourteen lakes and tarns from my map, all within a radius of fifteen miles.

The Thirlmere valley is quite narrow, and the very rocky ridge on the opposite side is over 2,000 ft., with the result that a certain amount of blanketing occurs. This is very noticeable at the south end of the valley where the pass known locally as Dunmail Raise rises some 800 ft. before falling away again towards Grasmere. The first time I attempted to cross the pass, the ground seemed to come up to meet me so rapidly

that I turned back and gained more height in a further beat to the north. The second time I pressed on and was rewarded with good lift from Seat Sandall (2,415 ft.), Great Rigg (2,513 ft.), and further south still Rydal Fell (2,022 ft.) above Grasmere Lake. There is a possible landing field near Grasmere village, and I was glad to see it, as there is no other for four miles along the valley.

By this time I was flying well back over the summit of the range, but owing to the gentle slope of nearly a mile back from the steep face of the ridge, the lift did not

extend much above the top, and I was frequently within fifty feet of the ground, sometimes with cloud fifty feet above me. I felt rather like the filling in a sandwich! The top of this ridge is extraordinarily bare and lonely, as the bottom of the valley is completely out of sight and there is no sign of civilisation whatever except the deserted track along the top. I felt quite cut off from the world and had a strong desire to see even one human being, or even an animal! On my last beat my wish was granted as a solitary individual appeared on the path between the summits of Helvellyn and Dollywagon Pike. I was only a few feet above him when I shouted greetings and circled round him. I think he was too astonished even to wave, and he was still standing staring when I came back for another look some time later.

The sky to the west was now nearly clear of cloud, the wind was as fresh as ever, and it was obviously going to be a lovely evening for soaring. It seemed a shame to land in the only possible field near the north end of Thirlmere, and waste it in retrieving. The thing to do was return to Latrigg, land on top, and let one of our very hardworking helpers have a ride. But how? It was curious, but in the whole flight I never found a thermal in spite of the sunshine and clouds. Latrigg was  $4\frac{1}{2}$  miles right into wind from Great Dodd, and the difference in height 1,300 ft., so it seemed a doubtful

proposition. However, I trekked back to Great Dodd and tried. The lift extended well out, but the deterrent was the complete absence of landing fields on the way. On the third attempt I burned my boats and of course arrived with 800 ft. to spare! (Personally I find this is usually the case when I am worried about reaching anywhere, and I always apologise to "Peveril" afterwards for my lack of faith.)

We quickly launched Rodney Sneath, who joined Ken Blake in the Skylark on Skiddaw, and they both flew till dusk, landing near our pub in time for us to stroll down and de-rig after a good dinner. Over seventeen hours' flying for the three aircraft! Not bad for a first day of Lakeland soaring, especially as it took anything up to three hours to get a glider rigged and to the launch, owing chiefly to the boggy ground. A day or so later we made a successful launch from a much more accessible field, and this may be the answer to the problem. Failing that, a Land Rover or a Jeep is a "must" for future expeditions.

There is no doubt at all that Latrigg is a wonderful site and much credit is due to Robertson for discovering it. It also possesses a very co-operative owner to whom our thanks are due. The possibilities for hill-soaring are fascinating, the scenery superb, and the folks most hospitable, so even if the landing fields are a little hair-raising, who cares?

Photographed on Dunstable Downs, (id)ying up after Bungy launching are London Gliding Club Members Mike Russell, Ray Stafford Allen, David Jones and David Spicer.



## WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP AFTERMATH

THE Aéro Club de France has sent out a revised list of final marks and placings differing from those which were given out at the end of the Championships, and on which the prizes were awarded. It is stated that mistakes were made in calculating some of the scores for the second contest day owing to errors in reckoning the distances. The table below gives the original and the revised points for the first 15 competitors in the single-seater class. It will be seen that Stephenson and Bar have each been deprived of 177 points which would, if

correct, cause Stephenson to drop from 6th to 11th place and Bar from 13th to 15th.

Pilot	Original	Revised
MacCreedy (U.S.A.)	4891	4903
Juez (Spain)	3806	3807
Gorzalak (Poland)	3576	3576
Saradic (Yugoslavia)	3435	3435
Ivans (U.S.A.)	3289	3366
Stephenson (Gt. Britain)	3142	2965
Ara (Spain)	3097	3097
Nietlispach (Switzerland)	3081	3116