

## A Beginner's Guide to Field Landings

On any flight, when you are out of gliding range of your home airfield, preparation for a Field Landing should always be a consideration.

The purpose of this guide is to give you a few pointers towards 'What and When' you should think about, should the undesired happen.

### **When to start the thought process.**

As you drive to the gliding club, it's always worth while to pay attention to the fields that you pass on your way. Take notice of what crops are in season, the colours and the height. This will help form a picture in your mind once in the air.

Once in the air, its always good practice to take a quick look at the field that you've just launched from. From previous landings, you'll be able to estimate the size of field needed to get you down safely. It's also a good idea to check the wind direction. You will have had some head-wind component in your launch but the launch may not have been directly into the prevailing wind due to the orientation of the runway.

Now you know which way the wind is coming from, you'll be in a better position for selecting a field in the right direction should you have to land out. A good tip here is look up wind and then take note of where the sun is. Unless you're lucky enough to stay airborne for a few hours, the sun should be roughly in the same place, in relation to your selected field. If you do get low, you should always double check wind direction by looking for other clues such as smoke drift or the movement of cloud shadows as the wind direction may change during the day or due to local conditions.

So, now you know the wind direction and a way of judging which direction of field to use. The next set of criteria is when to start thinking about a field to land in. The height at which this should take place will depend on your experience and to some extent, the performance of your glider, but as a good rule, in the early days of your flying, you should be constantly looking for suitable field as 'practice makes perfect'.

Failing that, a good rule of thumb is

1. 2000ft will give you approx. 10 minutes of flight time. Therefore 2000ft is a good point to have a few fields in mind.
2. At 1500ft you should have narrowed them down to two possibilities.
3. At 1000ft you should have made your choice and be satisfied that it meets all your criteria (more on that later).

## What to look for

The next time you're at your gliding club, take a look at the airfield. Most airfields are more than adequate in length, they're generally flat-ish and are clear of obstruction. This is basically what you're looking for when choosing your field to land out in.

To help with this, there is an acronym that covers the key elements. DiSS-SOS.

- Di** – Direction. Is the field into wind?
- S** - Size. Is the field big enough for you to land and stop safely?
- S** - Slope. Does it slope? If so, in which direction?
- S** - Surface. Is there crop in the field? If so, what? Is this a safe option?
- O** - Obstacles. Is the field free of animals, power lines, hay bails etc.
- S** - Surroundings. Is the approach clear? Is there access to the field for your retrieval crew?

**Direction** – Can you approach and land into wind? Landing into wind reduces ground speed and therefore the ground run and also allows for a steeper approach angle. A small cross wind component is OK but be aware of a side slipping approach, weather cocking and dropping a wing on landing. In anything other than the lightest breeze, avoid landing down wind. Be sure to check for clues on wind direction ie. smoke drift etc.

**Size** - Is the field big enough for you to land and stop safely? Landing corner to corner will increase the available landing area.

**Slope** – Does the field appear to slope? Any visible slope usually means that the slope is too steep, especially to land down hill. If attempting to land up hill, beware that extra speed will be required for the round out which will need to finish going up. Check the local terrain, does it undulate? Streams and water usually collects at the bottom of a slope. Whilst doing your circuit, check the field from all sides for slope.

**Surface** – What's in the field? You should consider the time of year and the area in which you are flying. Does the surface appear to shimmer? Some long crops shimmer in the breeze – not great for landing in! Is the field flat or undulating?

**Obstacles** – Is your landing area clear? You should be aware on Power Lines, fences, ditches, hay bails and animals. Never land in a field with horses in or sheep during spring lambing. Cows are inquisitive, so never leave a glider unattended.

**Surroundings** – Your approach should be as free from obstacles as possible. A tree lined field will cause your approach to be much higher than desired and will shorten your landing area. Never fly low over busy roads.

There is a web site dedicated to Field Landings with photos of current crop which is a useful resource for anyone interested. It can be found at <http://www.field-landings.co.uk/>

**Advice when out-landing** (Taken from the Lasham website).

Last year saw numerous cases of difficulties experienced when pilots landed-out in farmer's fields. Such cases are rare but on the increase, primarily due to the increase in commercial balloon flights landing in fields, damaging property and paying the landowner 'on-the-spot' compensation. These practises are extended to the glider pilot when he inadvertently lands in a field and is expected to pay compensation, sometimes amounting to sums far in excess of a reasonable sum for a landing fee or as compensation offered in an insurance claim.

Glider pilots need the co-operation of landowners to maintain the freedom we have enjoyed to date. Their assistance and goodwill is imperative if we are to successfully continue to fly in the way we do now.

What follows is set of guidelines to assist the glider-pilot in dealing with farmers and landowners when they land in their fields and to advise you of your rights.

- The fact is that by landing in a field without first gaining the landowners permission you are committing an actionable civil wrong. You are, in the eyes of the law, Trespassing. With this in mind our initial approach should reflect our position, in other words, be humble, polite and apologetic.
- First impressions count and your being there is going to cost the farmer time if nothing else, bear this in mind when introducing yourself to the farmer. Stress that your landing was unintentional, explain what you were trying to do and why you have to land in his field. Emphasise that you will be as little trouble to him as possible and that you will remove your aircraft with the minimum of fuss and trouble.
- If an aerotow retrieve is required, ask the farmer's permission first and explain what will happen. He probably has no comprehension of what you are taking about so take time to explain it clearly.
- Above all, try to prevent sightseers wandering into the field, you must respect the farmer's property.
- Many farmers are requesting a landing fee for both balloons and gliders. Balloons are mostly commercial ventures and may have up to 20 people onboard, the farmer quite rightly expects a bit of the action. Gliders are different and you are not being paid to be there. If the farmer wants a landing fee do not dismiss him out-of-hand but ask why he thinks it is necessary. If you have done no damage and don't require his services to drag your glider out or to prevent sightseers wandering onto his property then no landing fee should be paid; however, consider offering up to £10:00 as a goodwill gesture for his trouble and hospitality.
- If damage has been caused to crop etc. then your glider third party insurance will cover this damage. Do not offer to pay compensation there and then and do not admit any liability.

The Landowner or Tenant may claim to have estimated the value of damage himself and require you to pay this value. It is very difficult to accurately value crop damage, this is a job for a professional assessor and your insurance company will arrange this. Exchange addresses and insurance company names with the landowner and contact your insurance company as soon as possible after your return, they will send an assessor out very quickly to assess the damage and reimburse the farmer. If possible take photos of any damage, this may help in the event of a dispute.

Several years ago the BGA and the National Farmers Union agreed a code of conduct for glider pilots landing in fields, I have reproduced that code below, it still holds good and recently the NFU have stated that they do not wish to change it. At the same time they set a maximum landing fee for both balloons and gliders of £3:50. Balloons have since exceeded this figure many times over because of commercialisation, the figure was set many years ago and personally I feel £10.00 is about right now.

- If the farmer demands more, refer him to his local NFU representative, you will not know who it is but he most certainly will.
- If anyone threatens you personally, or you feel threatened then call the police immediately. They will not wish to get involved in a case of Trespass as this is a civil case, but in cases where you have been personally threatened then it is a criminal case and they have to.
- Legally the farmer is not allowed to prevent you from leaving his property or from taking your glider with you. He may expel you by force, but no more than is reasonably necessary and not before asking you to leave. He may not confiscate or impound your aircraft, if he does he is guilty of a form of theft.

A recent case in 1998 demonstrated this fact when a court injunction was issued to prevent a landowner from detaining a pilot's aircraft.

- Once the landowner has prevented you from retrieving your aircraft he has effectively taken charge of the safe keeping of that glider. It is amazing how quickly he will agree to your removing it if you explain this to him and point out to him the value of the equipment he has just impounded.
- Regardless of your reception, be polite, do not lose your temper and always return after your retrieve to thank, even the most belligerent farmer for his trouble. Make sure you take a note of his name and address and enter this in the land-out section of the cross-country book, he will be invited to the next farmers evening and you never know he might just come along. In addition, I always like to send a gift voucher for a trial lesson. If you have landed out along way from your home airfield, then get the nearest club to do it for you, obviously you will have to pay them but I think it is worth it. A little extra thank you for what is really a bit of an imposition for a very busy farmer.

Hopefully you will not experience any of the above problems and you will always be blessed with helpful and happy farmers, they are a good bunch if you treat them with respect. Remember we need their help.