

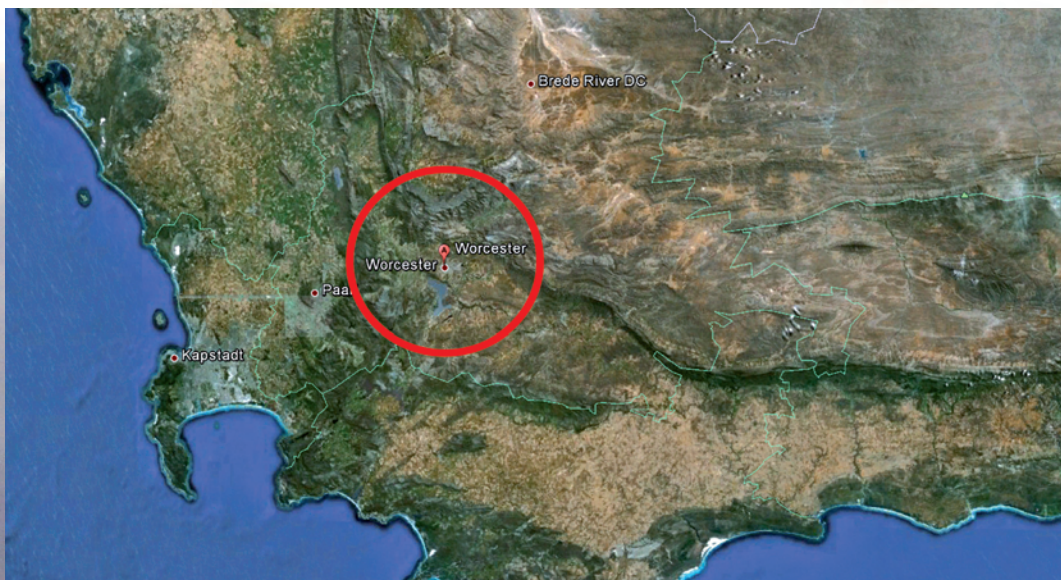
# Flying in South Africa: Worcester is Magic!



TEXT AND PHOTOS BY MARKUS GEISEN

MAP: GOOGLE EARTH

Flying in southern Africa in winter has become a routine operation for many pilots these days, with flights of 1000 kilometers or more being logged next to every day in Namibia. Equally good flights are documented from the well known camp in Gariep Dam, South Africa. South Africa however is different from Namibia in so far as there is a really active gliding scene with lots of clubs around the country which are worthwhile a visit.



*Worcester is located about  
120 kilometers north-east of  
Cape Town*



One place I visited the last winter is the Cape Gliding Club in Worcester which is about one hour driving time from Cape Town and offers good alternatives to the gliding done the semi-deserts. Worcester is situated in mountainous terrain in the vine producing region of the Cape. On the Indian Ocean side the up to 2000 meters high coastal mountain ranges stretch roughly east-west, West of Worcester – and facing the Atlantic Ocean side - the ranges swing to a north-south direction.

The prevailing wind from southerly to south easterly directions together with the topography makes task selection easy: The mountain range from Worcester to George in the east is a 250 kilometer trip, then back to Worcester and up north. Northwards? You might ask: How so in a prevailing wind from southerly directions with the ranges facing north to south? The explanation can be found in a specialty of the meteorological condition called Cape-Doctor. Once the Cape Peninsula is crossed the wind tends

to turn from southerly directions to a westerly flow which allows for working ridges north of Worcester as well. Martin Gruenert, a club member flying a Taurus has frequently demonstrated that flying a 1000 kilometers task in these conditions is possible even in an ultralight sailplane.

#### **Lots of things to do on not flying days**

Some information about the club itself: Since the 1940s the club has operated from various airfields near Cape Town. However, the increasing traffic into Cape Town International did force the club to relocate to Worcester in 1985. The club owns two tugs, an ASK 21, a Twin, an LS 4, a single-seater Astir, and a winch. A great number of members own their own aircraft, quite commonly stored in private hangars. Operation takes place on the weekends, however in collaboration with the local flight school aerotows are possible throughout the week. On top of this there are also a nice camping area with pool and a cozy clubhouse with bathroom faci-

*Ridge running near  
Muizenberg*





## SOARING SITES

lities and the traditional South African must have outdoor Braai – the national symbol of hospitality. The town of Worcester is the biggest town in the area and offers good shopping facilities and hotel accommodation. The area is very touristic, with vineyards and spectacular scenery allowing for lots of things to do on non-flying days.

What is needed to fly in Worcester? The club likes guests and both double- and single-seaters can be flown. The Cape Gliding Club is a non-profit organization and there is no regular glider hire scheme – if you want to fly modern gliders you should get into contact with the private owners if a charter is possible. On the administrative side license validation is required and can normally be solved with a checkflight with the CFI. However, some time ago the authorities have decided to change the rules and it is advisable to check with the club's CFI prior to getting there. Flying from Worcester is demanding, some experience in alpine gliding and ridge soaring is definitely of advantage. Be aware that the whole region sports vineyards and as a consequence a field landing is only advisable on the few farm strips in the area.

Once checked out we are off to some fun in the mountains. A tow takes me to the local ridge which works well and I immediately

begin to feel at home in the LS 8-18 which belongs to my friend Dawid Pretorius. Without circling I am moving fast along the ridges towards the east. In the strong south-easterly wind the ridges work very well, but the humid air coming in from the Indian Ocean causes the cloud base to be roughly at ridge top height. After a short while the airfield of Robertson comes into sight, and pressing further towards the east I meet up with Dawid and Martin, who had launched earlier and turned at Riverdale. As the cloudbase gets lower we decide to turn and explore the west region. Martin shows me some tricks he has learned over the years in this rugged terrain. It is fantastic flying over an exceptionally pretty landscape.

Two days later – and in difficult blue conditions – Dawid and I set out for another exciting flight. After gaining height on the local ridge we move eastwards only to find the weak easterly airflow is not helping much on the ridges. We still keep on the ridge and move via Robertson to Swellendam, albeit in weak thermals. I do not like the high ground north of the ridge which Dawid uses – I cannot see a place to land if necessary so I elect to stay in gliding range to Robertson where I find myself looking desperately for lift. Once climbing I move towards Swellendam again, with Dawid

*Over Porterville Ridge going southbound*





now 15 Kilometers ahead. Near Tradouw Pass Dawid decides to turn and once again we meet up at at my turning point near Montague. With the thermals getting slightly better we now start moving back towards Worcester.

#### Plan turns into ashes

The weather forecast did indicate a change to fly in a westerly wind regime once we get past Worcester and so we plan to fly north via Tulbach, the scenic Agter Windhoek area, and then along the low Porterville ridge. Having crossed Saron the Porterville ridge is in front of us. Judging from our 2000 meter altitude the ridge looks quite small, but smoke from a fire indicates westerly flow. We press forward and start moving along Porterville ridge at hill top height. We now decide to race to the northern end of Porterville ridge, to Renosterhoek, turn there, fly south to Paarl, up again to Renosterhoek and back to Worcester, roughly a 750 Kilometer task. But with the wind dying down our nice plan turned into ashes only a few kilometers down the ridge. We now have to crawl back along our outbound racetrack and just manage to gain enough height to limp back to Worcester via Saron and Witzenberg. Dawid scored 560 Kilometers on this flight and roughly 530 for me.

However this flight was one of the most intense experiences I have made in gliding so far. With the good visibility and the cloudless sky we could easily see the Indian Ocean looking south from Swellendam over the coastal plains.

Later in the same flight we could see the container vessels in the Atlantic Ocean near Saldanha. The scenery is breath taking and changes rapidly in one flight as you change from ridge soaring to thermalling or even wave.

[www.cgc.org.za](http://www.cgc.org.za)



*False Bay, located directly south of Cape Town*



*Worcester Airfield*