

GUIDANCE FOR GLIDER PILOTS FOLLOWING A FIELD LANDING

Glider pilots almost always set off on a flight that will result in a landing back at the base airfield. Occasionally a flight does not quite go to plan and can result in a field landing. Therefore, glider pilots need the co-operation of farmers and landowners. Their assistance and goodwill are imperative for the future of our sport. What follows is set of guidelines, based on a document produced by Lasham, to assist glider pilots in their interaction with farmers and landowners after a field landing. Field selection and how to land in a field are separate topics not covered by this document.

Trespass

By landing in a field without first gaining the landowners permission, a pilot is committing an actionable civil wrong. In the eyes of the law the pilot is trespassing. With this in mind, it is clearly appropriate to be humble, polite and apologetic having landed uninvited on someone's land. Think about how you would feel if someone appeared uninvited in your back garden.

Meeting the Farmer

You must find the farmer or a representative of the farmer – its time well spent while waiting for your crew. First impressions count and your being there is going to cost the farmer time if nothing else. Farmers are very busy people. Bear this in mind when introducing yourself. Stress that your landing in his field was not planned. Explain what you were trying to do. Let the farmer know that you will try to ensure you will be as little trouble to him as possible and that with his permission you can remove your aircraft with the minimum of fuss and trouble.

Retrieve

Almost always when landing in a field, a road retrieve is the only or best option. Aerotow retrieves should be approached with great caution. If an aerotow retrieve is appropriate, ask the farmers permission and explain what will happen. Understandably, most farmers will have no prior experience of an aircraft taking off from their land, let alone two aircraft joined by a rope. So take time to explain it clearly.

Damage to the Field or other Property

If damage has been caused to crop etc, your glider third party insurance will cover any related costs. Do not offer to pay compensation there and then and do not admit any liability. The landowner or farmer may quickly estimate the value of any damage and demand that you pay up. Accurately valuing crop or other damage is a job for a professional assessor and your insurance company will make the arrangements. Exchange addresses and insurance company names with the landowner and contact your insurance company as soon as possible. The insurer will assess the damage and if appropriate, will reimburse the farmer. If possible, take photos of any damage as this may help in the event of a dispute.

Landing Fee...

Farmers have been known to request a landing fee for both balloons and gliders. Balloons are mostly commercial ventures and may have up to 20 people on board all paying their way. The farmer quite understandably expects a slice of the action. Gliders are different – we aim to get back to our base airfield and are not commercially operated. If the farmer wants a landing fee from you:

- Do not dismiss the farmer out-of-hand
- Ask why the farmer thinks it is necessary

If you have not damaged anything, and do not require the farmer's services to drag the glider out or to prevent sightseers wandering onto his property, no landing fee should be paid. Consider offering a maximum of £20 as a goodwill gesture for the farmer's trouble and hospitality. It's worth noting that the balloonists (mainly commercial, remember) recommend a maximum of £80 paid when a large passenger carrying balloon lands in a farmer's field.

If your farmer doesn't accept your offer and demands more, refuse politely, and refer the farmer to the local NFU representative. You will not know who that is, but the farmer most certainly will.

And in the unlikely event of the situation getting difficult...

Legally, you cannot be prevented from leaving a property or from taking your glider with you. You may be expelled by force, but no more than is reasonably necessary and not before you are asked to leave. Your aircraft may not be confiscated or impounded – that is a form of theft. If you have been prevented from reasonably retrieving your aircraft, the person preventing you has effectively taken charge of the safe keeping of that glider. Politely explain this to that person and point out to him or her the value of the equipment that he or she has just impounded.

If anyone threatens you or if you feel threatened, call the police. They will not wish to get involved in a case of trespass as this is a civil offence. But in cases where you have been personally threatened, a criminal offence may have taken place and the police will get involved.

Finally

Regardless of your reception, be polite and stay calm. Always leave the farm knowing that you could land back there again tomorrow. Always consider following up your experience with a thank you.

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