

APRIL - MAY 2009
EDITION 12

PARAMOTOR

INTERNATIONAL MOTORSPORTS AND POWERED HANG GLIDING MAGAZINE



Ancient Lands

RUSSIA, MONGOLIA & KYRGYSTAN - ISRAEL - SYRIA

+ News on the latest Motors and Gliders • Planning your first Cross Country • Glider Lines
Adventure M3 Review • Arizona Flying Circus • World Championships Back On • US Update

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Pilgrimage

Paul Haxby trades British rain for Israeli sun and a historical tourist trip by air

When an opportunity came along to travel to Israel and visit Apco in the dead of one of the bleakest years of weather the UK has seen for years, I jumped at it and was soon packing my paramotoring kit and my passport. The arrival at Ben Gurion airport near Tel Aviv, collection of my paramotor, baggage and fully intact propeller was straight forward with Apco's Adam Weschler meeting me at checkout and adding airport taxi driver and guide to his already long CV of skills. We travelled from the airport to a restaurant to meet Apco Aviation's managing director, Anatoly Cohn, so we could talk business, plan for the week ahead and then visit the factory itself.

Approaching the ancient fortress Masada and the Dead Sea. All Photos: Paul Haxby



Bedouin tribes still live a nomadic Arab life - camels remain the traditional choice of transport

APCO AVIATION

My tour of the factory made me appreciate the manufacturing processes and work that goes into making wings, reserves parachutes, harnesses and other equipment. Until I visited the factory I had failed to realise all the other work associated with producing flying equipment, such as answering customer enquiries, accounting, designing, advertising, testing and sending equipment for certification. Watching the manufacturing process was an education. It's a complex and systematic production method that makes one realise why it takes two days to build a wing. It made me appreciate the work that goes into the design and manufacture of our wings.

Anatoly believes that Apco's success stems from listening to customers and keeping standards and quality high, with the help of what he calls affectionately "the Apco team". The ability to adapt to the changes in the market has been important to Apco. It led them from hang gliding to paragliding production and now, with the increase in powered paragliding, to paramotoring wings. Paramotor wing design is another phase of Apco's rich and colourful history.

OLD & NEW ISRAEL

We set off to our first take off site at an airfield near Netanya. The airfield is mainly used by powered parachutes and, although people do fly with paramotors in Israel, most of the powered flying with parafoil wings is done with big engines on trikes. The site was only a few miles from the coast and we were quickly set up, airborne and heading for the beach. The sandy beach stretched north and south as far as I could see. We headed to the north along the coast and the holiday resort of Netanya, Adam skimming low over the empty beach as the clear Mediterranean Sea lapped onto the shore. Light winds and mostly blue skies give a relaxed flying attitude and the chance for Adam to typically clock up 700 hours a year.

Over the next few days I enjoyed sight seeing from the air and Anatoly and Adam's hospitality on the ground. The heritage you can see from the air when paramotoring in a land like Israel is an experience not to be missed. A flight over the old section of the city of Caesarea, on the coast,

exemplified this. Caesarea, built while Herod the Great ruled over Judea, was named after Augustus Caesar, the Roman emperor at the time. The alliance with the Romans allowed King Herod to maintain his authority and he enjoyed the Roman indulgences such as chariot racing and gladiatorial fights at Caesarea. Nowadays, many of the buildings have crumbled and disappeared along with the history and legends, but in the 1950s excavations led to the restoration of the Roman amphitheatre, hippodrome, aqueduct and a collection of crusader remains. From the air you have the best vantage point and we spent plenty of time over the ruins doing our own historical survey. The combination of an amazing coastline, historical background and paramotoring up close and personal with skilled pilots led to hundreds of photo opportunities and wonderful images that will be imprinted on my memory for the rest of my life. It didn't really sink in until I sat down for an evening meal with Anatoly and Adam, just where we'd been flying and all that we had seen.

DESERT SAFARI

The last flying day needed an early start to reach the flying area before the winter sun created thermals and a roller coaster flying environment. We travelled south to an area of the Judean desert and a landscape far more typical of the region than the green and fertile north. Thanks to the excellent road network we were in a totally new environment within a couple of hours. There, Bedouin tribes still live a nomadic Arab life - camels remain the traditional choice of transport, but most Bedouin still have 4x4s as a faster means of getting around.

We arrived at an old disused airfield where the group of twelve paramotorists quickly got to work with pre-flight checks and fuelling up before briefing. According to Adam, our out and return adventure over the Judean desert would take us an estimated one and a half hours. I was one of the first to get airborne and we spent some time circling over the area before heading off. I hadn't filled Adam's and my own paramotors up completely because I hadn't realised we'd be spending so long waiting for the gaggle to group in the air before setting off for the aerial desert safari. I couldn't warn him of my concerns, as there was no radio

communication between us. I decided to press on and settled in behind a tight formation of three pilots who were doing a low level route while the others scattered around the sky at least five hundred feet above us, even though the Israeli Defence Force was expected to be operating with its military aircraft above 500ft!

We crossed large sections of desert without any signs of civilisation and I realised that engine failure at these sections would result in a very long and hot walk. Just when we were comfortably cruising along in a straight line in a friendly formation, squadron leader Adam would break from the formation and spiral down towards a ravine and fly through it, and with the rest of us not wanting to miss out on the fun we would spiral down to join him. I knew this up and down method of paramotoring uses more fuel, but was distracted by the fun I was having, taking photographs and camel spotting. We had to power up to climb out of the large flat-bottomed valley and get over a big ridge, and finally the Dead Sea came into sight.

We spotted the palace fortress of Masada and descended to do a low pass over this amazing landmark. As we got closer I could feel my heartbeat increase as an almost mythological piece of history became clearer, and what seemed like legend became reality. I'd learned about this incredible piece of history several years ago, and how Herod's palace fortress became a stronghold for a group of 960 zealots comprising men, women and children. In 66 AD they stormed the mountain and took control of the Romans. A siege of biblical proportions followed for the next three years with 10,000 Romans camped around Masada cutting off all water and food supplies and building a wall to prevent escape. Herod had designed the fortress to hold out in the event of a siege and built vast grain stores and water tanks. Eventually, the Romans built a ramp up the side of the fortress and finally regained control. The 300 zealot men knew that a final battle could result in capture and slavery so it was decided that they would kill their families and themselves rather than being taken prisoner. Today the mass suicide at Masada is a symbol of national pride and resistance, and some of the soldiers of the Israeli Defence Force go there to pledge an oath of allegiance. As we flew low over the siege ramp and the fortress ruins, the ground

fell away to the flat and open area to the banks of the Dead Sea and I had an incredible feeling of exposure and height to add to the excitement.

When we turned round and set off back the way we had come, my focus shifted back to the use of throttle and fuel to gain height to fly back over the high ground and over the desert to return to base. I began to circle in any areas of lift as the morning thermals started to kick off, in an effort to conserve fuel so that I would make it back. I needed to stay within sight of Adam just in case I did have to land out on the return leg, but I had a growing suspicion that Adam was also flying very close to his fuel limits as he had started with approximately the same amount of fuel as me. I nearly made it over the last section of high ground and was almost in sight of the town near the airfield when the engine coughed out its last few revs.

Luckily for me I landed next to a group of people from Netanya who had stopped by a roadside tea stop. I sat with them for a while, drinking fresh mint and herb tea. We sat talking as I packed the wing before they continued on a mountain bike tour of the area with their support vehicle driving closely behind them. Adam had spotted my emergency landing but then also ran out of fuel and fell short of the start point too, which delayed my retrieve.

SHALOM

Sat in the airport waiting to board my flight back to the UK I reflected on my time in Israel. Amazing and sometimes extreme landscapes, gorgeous beaches and historical attractions are just some of the many reasons to visit Israel. If, like me, you are used to the cold, wet winters of the northern hemisphere, Israel is a paradise of warm, flyable winter days. Add to that the outstanding perspective on the country and its history that paramotoring gives you compared to the average tourist, and you have a perfect winter paramotoring trip. 🇮🇱

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
Thank you to Anatoly, Adam, the Apco team and all the friendly people that treated me so well during my visit to Israel.

OPPOSITE Exploring the Israeli coast to the North of Netanya

ABOVE LEFT The APCO squadron flying through the Judean desert

TOP RIGHT A reminder of Israel's ancient past, a roman amphitheatre

BOTTOM RIGHT Soaring the low cliffs with the modern resort of Netanya in the background

