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WORLDWIDE PARAGLIDING AND PARAMOTORING MAGAZINE. FOR FREE.



THE PARAGLIDING WORLD CUP BIR, INDIA

From the 21st to the 28th of October 2015 the Paragliding World Cup flew to Bollywood and beyond and, despite initial fears, there weren't too many cases of Bir Belly even by the end of the competition.

By Ruth Jessop



Bir, the setting for the 2015 Asian leg of the Paragliding World Cup, is a Tibetan colony in northern India. Wherever you go you can be guaranteed to meet a monk. However vows of poverty don't seem to cover the latest tablet technology and keeping up with Facebook on your flashy iPhone whilst winging along on your moped sporting go faster stripes. So Buddha went bling bling as Bollywood took over the aptly named Palpung Sherabling monastery in Bir for a four hour long opening ceremony of Bollywood extravaganza laid on by the India authorities.

We had hoped that the competition would then get off to a flying start but instead, sadly, the first two days had to be cancelled due to poor weather; that didn't stop the earth moving for most pilots on day two whilst on a trip to McLeod Ganj where we all felt the tremors of the Kabul earthquake.

The moon coming up over the end of the ridge above McLeod Ganj. Photo by Ulric Jessop





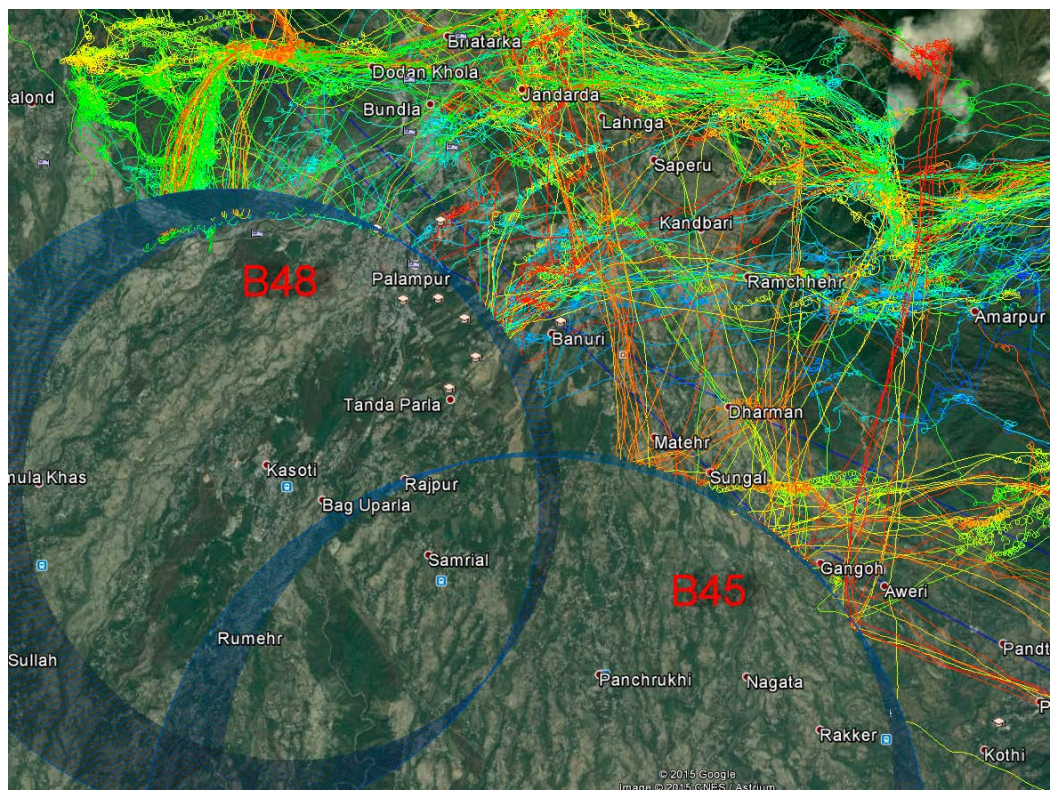
The first task day was on Tuesday the 27th of October. The tortuous forty minute drive to launch took the 120 pilots up through tea plantations lined with brightly coloured houses set amid arid paddy fields with hay drying in the trees. With a Himalayan backdrop of snowy peaks, a 99 km task was set, a race along the ridge with tactical cylinders in the flats.



Competitors flying in the 2015 Bir Paragliding World Cup. Photo Ulric Jessop

97 competitors made goal. French pilot Maxime Pinot won the day. The female winner was Petra Slivova. Unfortunately Ruth Dower had to be retrieved by helicopter but after a check up she was back home smiling albeit encased from head to toe in bandages. (See team photo). There were lots of problems with the live trackers as they were unable to locate to a local network which could transfer their data to the net, a problem which continued throughout most of the competition.

Task two was a very difficult tactical 76 km task using both the ridge and the flats, a day which split the pilots up completely. It was good to see pilots using lots of different route options, for example, 90 degrees of cylinder B48 was used. Cylinders were shaved as cylinders have never been shaved before. See diagram.



A fantastic display of aerobatics by Leo Besombes, Sebastian Khan, Ricky Khan and Marcel Switzweizer kept the crowd in the landing field entertained until the lead gaggle arrived on the horizon in the fading sunlight.

32 pilots made goal. Catalonian pilot Xevi Bonet won the day putting him into the lead overall. The women's winner today was Yuki Sato.

Task three started off as a lovely sunny day. The wind dummies took off into buoyant air led by fourteen year old Nepalese pilot Yukesh Gurung who started flying when he was only twelve years old and already has a fifty kilometre XC flight under his belt. When I asked him whether he was at home or at school when the Nepalese earthquake struck, he grinned back at me and then replied, 'Madame, I was in the landing field at Pokora ground handling'.



Next it was the turn of the competition pilots to thermal up above the evergreen trees in front of launch.

97 pilots completed the 96.3 km task, up to Daramsala along the ridge and back via turn points in the flats, made all the more difficult by cloud cover in the mountains extending out into the flats later on in the afternoon. French pilot Julien Wirtz won the day and Xevi Bonet maintained his overall lead. The women's winner was Yuki Sato.





Task four, back up the windy road to launch serenaded by the constant tooting of horns from the Indian taxi rally drivers, past the start of the walk up to the very holy Hindu statue of the goddess Dehti Mata, better known by modern Hindu pilots today as the 'Thermal Babe'.

Pilots launching from the Bir Billing take-off.
Photo by Ulric Jessop



A fairly conservative 94 km task up and down the ridge was set as the conditions were difficult with very weak thermals. A disappointing day for Matt Senior who thought he was 5 km ahead of the lead gaggle not realising that the task had been stopped after 30 km due to very poor visibility. The maximum score for the day was 205 out of 1000 points. Julien Brung won the day. Xevi Bonet, despite ripping his wing when he caught it on a tree, forcing him to fly down to the landing field, continued to lead the overall competition. The women's winner was Klaudia Bulgakow.



Matt Senior still smiling after a disappointing day.
Photo by Ruth Jessop



A few of the locals enjoying the competition packed lunches.
Photo by Ruth Jessop



A very tense moment when leading pilot Xevi Bonet had a broken line on launch on the last day.
Photo by Ruth Jessop

Task five didn't start off well for leading pilot Xevi Bonet who broke a break line on launch. The rest of the competitors took off to start the 75 km task whilst last minute repairs were being made to Xevi's wing.

Three hours later, the atmosphere in the landing field was tense as everyone scanned the skies for the lead gaggle and the winner of the 2015 Bir PWC. Thousands of colourful Indians filled the terraces to a backdrop of building work and the sounds of Bollywood's best as an enormous stage was being erected for the closing ceremony in the goal field.

As always, Ozone were very prominent. Photo by Ruth Jessop



The tension mounted as the lead gaggle was spotted. As they approached the goal field in Bir, they were forced to drop down a gear as the conditions became much more difficult and they all struggled to make goal. Only 28 pilots finally made it.

Manuel Quintanilla won the day. Xevi Bonet was four and a half minutes behind the leader at the end of the speed section which dropped him down to second place behind the new overall winner, Michael Küffer. The women's winner was Klaudia Bulgakow, with Yuki Sato taking the overall women's first place.



Aaron Durogati coming into the goal field on the last day.

The final scores can be found here:
www.pwca.org/results/results

Goran Dimiskovski, President of the PWCA telling the pilots that the future of paragliding is bright.
 Photo by Ulric Jessop



Goran Dimiskovski, President of the PWCA gave a very 'enlightening' closing speech despite nearly catching fire.



1-The top three pilots of the 2015 PWC in Bir, India.

2-The top three female pilots of the 2015 PWC in Bir, India.
 Photo by Ulric Jessop



It was great to see Mr Gin back and on the podium. British pilots and Ruth Churchill Dower far right.
Photo by Alun Jones

The team podium was a veritable hall of fame with lots of Brits and a grinning Mr Gin centre stage.

At Free.aero we would like to pass on our congratulations to all the competitors and thank the organisers for doing such a fantastic job. In fact the only person not impressed by meet director Debu Choudhury was his own five year old son Manu who confided in me that he would much rather that his Dad was a pirate instead of a paraglider pilot!

As always, amazing footage of the competition was taken by Philippe Broers using his drone which you can see on World Cup TV: <http://vimeo.com/channels/paraglidingworldcup>

Dave Hanning, the PWC's Mr Meteo, very kindly gave me a weather summary of the week, always easier to predict after the event.

'The race in Bir, India came after a spell of good weather and a high base that gave those who arrived early an incredible India flying experience. The first 2 days of racing offered poor conditions for tasking and none were set. Strong East winds were present up higher with over development around Big Face at 4000m on the 3rd day, which brought a great first task with some pilots reporting significant down wind flying speeds and almost everyone in goal. The weather deteriorated as the jet stream influenced by cyclonic depression on the west coast included a weather eddy that allowed high pressure to dominate the region developing low elevation lift and significant haze. A stopped task occurred due to the worst haze day. At the conclusion of the week the weather stabilized as the jet stream split around the Himalayan Mountains offering less than good conditions for flying, but plenty of lift for racing style. Flying quieted down & base remained low as pilots left town. It took a rain event to clear the air and the pressure to drop to bring back higher clouds and good flying. I do hope the next event offers pilots the massive altitudes and generous deep mountain flying that Bir is known for.'



Sunset over Daramsala on day two.
Photo by Ulric Jessop

For further information about accommodation, flying and trekking in Bir please contact:

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