

SEMINAR 2009
By
Lucy Anne McKosky



Photo by Mary Rust

36 of the 48 seminar participants

Imagine soaring high over mountain ridges, a hawk wheeling on your wingtip, the Alps silhouetted in the distance. Imagine an emerald lake, with a fairytale castle perched high above and a mystical tower on a tiny island. Imagine evenings under a cheery tent, an ample buffet spread with delicious local dishes, wine and good spirits in abundance. Imagine warm and welcoming soaring sisters, going out of their way to make sure we have everything to make our stay complete. Imagine all this – and you'll have some idea of the magical experience that was our first international seminar hosted by the Slovenian Women Pilots Association at the Alpine Flying Centre in Lesce, Slovenia.

After two years of intense preparations, everything came together beautifully. Irena Gornik, Nataša Marzidovšek, and Dani Volčanšek Černe headed the organizing team, assisted by Jasna Jerman, Boža Martinčič, Marjeta Rigač, Vesna Stergar, and other members of the Slovenian Women Pilots Association, as well as many volunteers from the Aeroclub ALC Lesce.

By Friday evening, July 17th, more than forty WSPA members had gathered, with several more to arrive in the following days. Twenty made the trip from the U.S. Saturday morning dawned rainy and overcast. After a briefing on airspace regulations and local flying procedures, the weather had not improved, - but not to worry! A bus arrived and whisked us off to the mammoth Postojna Cave, one of the natural wonders of Slovenia. We returned in the evening for dinner at the airfield and high hopes for the next day.

Sunday morning, we were greeted by blue skies and the kind of white, puffy clouds soaring pilots love to see. After an interesting lecture on Slovenian aviation pioneers by Dr. Branko Brodnik, Chief Medical Officer of the Slovenian Air Authority, we eagerly swarmed onto the field to begin our flying adventures. Dani and Irena performed scheduling wonders, providing opportunities for everyone who wanted to fly. In the evening, we shared stories of awesome flights over dinner under the tent.

Monday morning we met Andrej Kolar, the developer of the SeeYou flight analysis software, who discussed his experiences developing and using the software. Later, several participants had the opportunity to fly with him, as he is an instructor at the club. After an afternoon of flying,

we traveled to the nearby town of Radovljica for a banquet at Gostilna Lectar, an inn with its own living history museum – a gingerbread bakery. Each participant received a personalized gingerbread heart to commemorate the event. As usual, a number of awards were presented at the banquet. The Geusen family swept the field, with Anna Laura (age 18) receiving the Lindbergh Award for best cross-country flight and Nora (age 14) winning the limerick contest. To make the evening even more festive, the organizers had gathered a host of prizes, from gift bags of lotions to plane tickets, and many participants went home winners.

Tuesday and Wednesday followed similar patterns. On Tuesday, we visited a plant that produces composite parts for sailplanes and ultralight aircraft and a shop that repairs and rebuilds sailplanes. Margherita Acquaderni stopped by on her way to the Women's World Championships in Hungary, and Gill van den Broek spent two days with us, regaling us with tales of women soaring pioneers and past women's contests.

Five days flew by, and the seminar was over too soon. We parted company with cameras full of pictures, heads full of memories, and hearts full of gratitude for the hospitality of our Slovenian hosts. Our farewell wish to our European sisters – "See you in Reno!" became a prayer that the bonds we have forged will remain strong and that we will continue to share soaring adventures as women of the sky.

Following the seminar a sizeable group of Slovenian, American and German pilots went to the Wasserkuppe to experience the thrill of the pioneer glider pilots.

German soaring was born at the Wasserkuppe, the highest point in the Rhoen region of north central Germany. Here aviation pioneers launched their gliders from the mountaintop and discovered that they could use rising air currents to climb higher into the sky. Now, it is the home of the Sailplane and Modellflug Museum and the Oldtimer Segelflugclub, as well as a modern glider operation.

Readers of *Hangar Soaring* may remember the account of the Geusen family's adventures with bungee launches of primary gliders at the Wasserkuppe, which appeared a couple of years ago. Sylvia Geusen offered to set up a similar trip for seminar participants, and several WSPA's leaped at the opportunity. Sylvia arranged with the Oldtimer Segelflug Club to do bungee launches with their "Schulgleiter" primary trainer on the Friday and Saturday following the seminar.

The day after the seminar, a caravan of Slovenians and Americans left Lesce and made its way north to the Wasserkuppe. We arrived late in the evening to a warm welcome by members of the Oldtimer Segelflug Club and settled into our bunks in the youth hostel. We awoke Friday morning to wind and rain - poor weather for bungee launches, but fine for our visit to the Alexander Schleicher factory. Here we learned about all phases of high-tech sailplane construction and saw the intimate details of some of our favorite sailplanes, like the ASK-21 and the ASW-27.

The weather did not improve in the afternoon, so after a delicious lunch with fixings provided by Sylvia, we visited the Sailplane Museum. Their excellent collection of gliders and models shows the entire history of European soaring, from replicas of Otto Lilienthal's hang gliders to the development of modern composite sailplanes, including many early models never seen in the U.S. When the rain stopped, we explored the mountain paths, and in the evening, we feasted on an outdoor barbecue at the youth hostel.

Saturday morning was still very windy, so we waited anxiously as our host, Wiel Zillen, repeatedly checked the weather briefings to see if conditions would permit any flights. By afternoon, he judged the situation safe enough to pull out the glider, so it was loaded onto its trailer, hitched to the tractor, and pulled to the hillside launch area. The bungee cords were laid out, and Wiel instructed the "rubber dogs" on the proper launch procedure. The club instructor took his seat as the first pilot, and we took our positions and ran with the ropes, following Wiel's

commands. When the people on the tail cord let go, the glider lifted off, flew for about fifteen seconds, and settled back down in the grass. The flight was successful, but the instructor felt that the wind conditions (about 20 kt!) were too severe for novice pilots, so we loaded the glider back on its trailer, coiled up the bungee cords, and hauled everything back to the hangar. At least we had witnessed a primary glider bungee launch.

Seminar participants who made the trip to the Wasserkuppe included the Geusen family (Sylvia, Heribert, Anna Laura, Holger, and Nora), Neita and Mark Montague, Kathy and George Taylor, Dani Cerne, Irena Gornik, Ana Klanšek, Margaret Roy, Lucy Anne McKosky, Sharon Smith, and Monique Weil. In addition, WSPA member Petra Boon and her husband came from Holland to join us, and two families from the Geusens' club in Germany, took part, along with several members of the club from ALC Lesce.

Frauke and Wolf Elber came part of Saturday and spent their time in the museum together with Peter Selinger and his wife Fritzi as museum's guides.

We learned that the Oldtimer Segelflugclub schedules two weeks of bungee launches each summer, which are open to any interested pilots. If you would like to try bungee launches, you can find next year's dates on their website, www.osc-wasserkuppe.de, listed on the calendar as "Schulgleiterfliegen 2010".

The 2009 winning limerick

A young girl in a Blanik
Made the towpilot get in panic
Loops and rolls
She performed while in tow
Hopefully a future expert in aerobatic
Nora Geusen