



Photo: Melinda Weber, with permission from Reutlinger Generalanzeiger

Back row l to r: Horst Adam, Moritz Weisser, Joachim Reichel, Margaret Roy, Uwe Kaiser, Rolf Knappmann, Mary Rust, Manfred Konzi, Heribert Geussen, Anna-Laura Geussen, Vivian Hilker, Nora Geussen, Andreas Bleisch, Fiona Harnischfeger, Christina Kaiser, LucyAnn McKosky, Ruth Naujokat, Kristin Farry, Ute Kaden, Britta Schlenker, Matthias Schleinzer, Erich Naujokat, Shaun Keller, Cathy Keller.

Front row l to r: William Taylor, Heinrich Beutel, Louisa Fischer, Lawson Simpson, Ada Grosser (Limerick-winner) with mom Katharina Grosser, Gail Schipper, Jakob Grosser, Elke Fugsang-Petersen, Cathy Williams, Barbara Kaiser, Elaine Ernewein, Stacy Taylor, Isabelle Zick, Sylvia Sella Geussen, Ulrike Franz

WSPA's 2023 Soaring Seminar was hosted by the soaring clubs based at Übersberg Segelfluggelände, (gliderport) in the Swabian Alb district, a pre-Alps high plateau with ridges dotted by ancient castles near Pfullingen, Germany, July 3-7, 2023. Hosts were Ulrike (Eule) Franz and her husband Heinrich (Henry) Beutel. We had a total of 27 participants (15 from USA, 1 from Canada, 9 from Germany, plus 2 visitors from Germany). The Übersberg gliderport is home to four glider clubs. Many local club members helped make us feel very welcome by serving in roles ranging from flight instructors, pilots, tow pilots, winch operators, flight leaders, cable retrievers, wing runners, and sometimes cooks and bottle-washers.

Most of us from North America did not get German licenses, so German pilot regulations required that we either fly front-seat with a German instructor in the back or back-seat with a German pilot in the front. We enjoyed both. The exception from the US contingent was our WSPA president and US CFI-G Cathy Williams – she received her German “holiday” license the first morning of the seminar, a culmination of six months of effort including an FAA Class III medical. Matthias Schleinzer loaned her his classic Ka-6 (95) to fly for the week. She logged over ten hours in this

beautiful ship during the week. The Reutlingen newspaper did a story on the Seminar and Cathy's first flight as PIC.

Winch launch was the preferred (and cheapest) way to get into the air there, although aerotow is an option. Aerotows in Germany are usually done with “light” aircrafts like the Robin Remorqueur or motor gliders with 100-200 PS. Many clubs, like the ones on the Übersberg are using composite Ultra Lights “UL” with modern, more than 100PS 4-cylinder engines. The novelty of the winch attracted most of us from the US. The winch that launched us was designed and built 40 years ago by our host Heinrich Beutel and fellow students, as his diploma project in Mechanical Engineering. The search for parts and constructions compounds and the actual construction of the winch with the help from club members took almost 8 years.

Winning Limerick

There was a Cathy from America

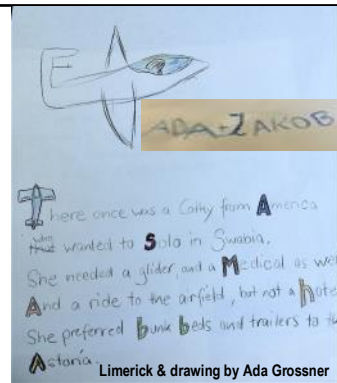
Who wanted to solo in Swabia

She needed a glider and a Medical as well

And a ride to the airfield not a hotel

She preferred bunk beds and trailers

To the Astoria



We all were a little apprehensive about the winch at first. Our German hosts had all learned on the winch and were more comfortable with this method of getting airborne. Winch operators in Germany have to earn certifications and have to be glider pilots. While the winch is much cheaper and faster to operate than aerotow, it requires a lot of people who know what to do and when, working as a team.

The weather was great, so we had many long flights launched by the winch. The landscape of the Swabian Alb is dotted by castles, villages with red-tiled roofs, farms, forests, and limestone cliffs. Flying with local instructors and pilots gave us the luxury of a little sightseeing. Cross-country flying is made easier by the very large number of gliderports in Germany. There are dozens in the Stuttgart (the nearest big city) area alone. It's common to take off on a nice day and fly to another club, visit a bit, and then take a winch tow there to fly home. I got a sense of this when I visited Musbach gliderport in the Black Forest region on Sunday, July 2nd, before the seminar began. Elke Fuglsang-Petersen (our 2013 Anne Morrow Lindbergh trophy winner) dropped out of the sky there in her glider. Her goal was Übersberg, but she didn't quite make it. Still, she had flown across 2/3 of Germany from North to South! Her flight gear included a sleeping bag, and she spent the night in it under the stars before she finally made it to Übersberg. What a classy way to travel to a soaring meet!

On the first day, Monday, we basically flew pattern flights to become familiar with the area and winch tows. That evening, Stephanie Gester, representative of the AMF (Angelika Machinek Förderverein), the German equivalent of WSPA gave an excellent presentation on the goals and operation of that organization, named in honor of Angelika Machinek (five-time German soaring champion with nine FAI records and two Silver and one Bronze medal in World Championships, who found her untimely death in an airplane accident). AMF's mission is to encourage women's cross country and competition flying, including loaning gliders to promising young female pilots. After that presentation we started a move of collaboration between the two organizations. The exchange of experiences after the lecture was very intense, partly due to Stephanie's great performance and absolute excellent English. It was considered to have another camp next summer on the Übersberg and AMF members. Target date is July 15 -20, 2024.



Photo: U. Franz

On the second day we had longer flights. Being the 4th of July and to honor the American participants WSPA members Anna Laura Geusen and her mother Sylvia Sella Geusen baked a Stars and Stripes cake. In the evening, those of us interested in farming were treated to a tour of one of the nearby research farms affiliated with the University of Hohenheim, which has the region's top agriculture school, where we learned about experiments with unusual crops, pork production, and extracting protein from grass – and unfortunately the drought.

On Wednesday, a rainy day, we made a trip to Kirchheim/Tek and the Schempp-Hirth factory, birthplace of many famous sailplanes, where Tilo Holighaus and his whole family welcomed us and where we got a glance what it takes to build a modern fiberglass sailplane.



Photo: U. Franz

Visit at Schempp-Hirth

From there we continued to the town of Grabenstetten to the Streifeneger factory which specializes in servicing sailplanes, mainly Glasflügel ones and its small museum. There Christian Streifeneger treated us to cake and cookies.

In the evening we enjoyed traditional Swabian food at the club, cooked under the supervision of gourmet cook Britta Schlenker, (attended the 2019 WSPA seminar). Uli Schwenk, the German world class pilot and for many years German team member gave a presentation on cross-country flying in the Swabian Alb.

On the last two days we had super weather. Many Seminar participants had long flights to Regensburg, the Black Forest and lake Constance. Cathy Williams had a 6-hour flight in the loaned Ka6E. (One of the very young club members flew his first 1000km flight). Benjamin Scheel, who had grown up in the US and being a relative of Ulrike, was easy prey for a presentation. As an ecologist-biologist affiliated with the Lifthof Biosphere, he explained the unique Swabian Alb terrain, biology and caves. Ute Kaden (WSPA Board) talked about her flying journey from teenager in former East Germany to Alaskan flight instructor, Civil Air Patrol pilot and university researcher encouraging young people to pursue STEM careers.

The final tally of the seminar was: 115 winch tows, 12 aero tows, 94 hours and uncountable cross country kilometers All in all, a fantastic experience: great friends and flying with the bonus seeing famous castles from the air.



Photo: U. Franz

Photo: K. Farry

Cathy Williams in Ka6E on the ground and in the air

Lawsen Simpson, the youngest WSPA participants and 2023 Briegleb Scholarship recipient, wrote the following:



Photo: P. Selinger

Lawsen Simpson (left)

My trip to Germany was the most unique experience I have ever had the fortune of perceiving. Before I start off about my trip I would love to thank the WSPA organization for giving me a scholarship to be able to attend the WSPA seminar in Germany. Without it I would have been unable to go.

So thank you to all of those people. When I got to the Übersberg gliderport I was amazed at how similar it seemed to mine back at home. The kindness and the comradery that was shared among them. Once I started flying, the whole area was so much different. All of the German castles and the Alps in the background were truly amazing. The winch flights were very scary but it was easy to get the hang of them. I thoroughly enjoyed the whole adventure aspect and the other voices of women in aviation.

Thank you to all for a job well done



Our hosts: Heiner (Henry) Beutel and Ulrike Franz

Photo: P. Selinger