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Who can fly cross-country?

Following issues arising from members flying cross-country who did not hold, at least, a Pilot rating, the BHPA has issued the following guidance:

To navigate effectively around controlled airspace, and safely identify and set up a landing in a previously unknown location, a pilot requires a certain level of knowledge and skill. That a pilot has achieved this level is evidenced by the pilot holding the BHPA 'Pilot' qualification. Members holding a BHPA Pilot Rating or higher are authorised by the BHPA to fly cross-country.

If a member who does not hold, at least, a Pilot rating, flies cross-country, then (subject to the two exceptions set out below) he or she will be operating in breach of Rule 9 of the Rules of the BHPA and will not be indemnified by the BHPA's public liability insurance policy.

The BHPA Pilot rating is very accessible, and all Club Pilot (Novice) members are strongly encouraged to work toward achieving this rating and become qualified to enjoy the rewards of cross-country flight.

What is a cross-country flight?

Any flight which cannot be characterised as 'local' is a cross-country flight.

Below are the BHPA's guidelines of what constitutes a local flight. If you are not engaged in a local flight which fulfils these guidelines, then you are flying cross-country.

The principle behind these guidelines is that local flights take place within a known airspace environment and there is no risk of the pilot inadvertently infringing restricted airspace or getting lost.

The guidelines

What constitutes a local flight often depends on the launch method.

For all forms of towed and powered flight, flying locally means that the take-off and landing sites will be the same place or reasonably adjacent to each other, such as neighbouring fields. The pilot must keep the launch and landing site within sight at all times.

For hill soaring, a local flight will involve following a ridge line with the intention of landing back at one of the site's landing fields, top or bottom. With the exception of the very few well known long ridge runs, the pilot will remain within sight of one of the landing fields associated with the take-off used.

In all cases common sense must prevail. Pilots should fly within their proven levels of skill, knowledge and hence, rating.

If you are flying under power on a day with good visibility and can see the control tower, windsock, or hangars on the airfield from which you took off from a few kilometres away, that is local.

A flight during which the pilot is never out of sight of his or her launch is local.

On some hill sites, particularly in mountainous areas such as the Alps, the normal, recognised, landing field for the launch point used may be some distance from, and indeed may be out of sight of, that launch point. Such a flight would still be considered local.

In all the above circumstances, the pilot's intention is to land at the nearby landing field associated with the pilot's take off point.

An unintended intermediate landing, particularly when returning to the nearby landing field associated with the pilot's take off point, does not stop a flight being local.

However, if your planned landing area is unknown, well out of sight of, or distant from, the launch point, or your planned flight, however short, requires you to navigate around, or over controlled airspace, then it is not a local flight.

In preparing these guidelines, the BHPA is well aware that there is scope for a variety of opinions on whether a particular flight is local. Pilots should be aware that when considering this issue, the BHPA will take a very narrow, cautionary, view, and if a flight is open to question, it will be deemed not to be 'local'. There is no scope for clever or fanciful interpretations of this guidance. Pilots are expected to plan their flights in accordance with the spirit of this guidance.

The above guidelines are subject to two limited exceptions.

1. At BHPA sanctioned events where the organisers have arranged a defined cross-country corridor to a goal, and every competitor holding a Club Pilot (Novice) Rating has received and understood a detailed briefing, which identifies any controlled airspace or hazards to aviation en-route and the briefing is documented by the organisers to the satisfaction of, and such documentation is lodged with, the BHPA Office, limited cross-country tasks may be undertaken by those Club Pilot (Novice) rated members.

2. Where an Instructor or Senior Coach is satisfied that a Club Pilot (Novice) is capable of carrying out a defined cross-country flight following a corridor to a goal, and they have provided the pilot with a detailed briefing in advance, which identifies any controlled airspace or hazards to aviation en-route and the briefing is documented by the Instructor or Senior Coach to the satisfaction of, and such documentation is lodged with, the BHPA Office, such a limited cross-country flight may then be undertaken by a Club Pilot (Novice) rated member.

In both cases, those supervising such Club Pilot (Novices) are taking responsibility for them and will be required to lodge with BHPA Office detailed evidence, supported by documentation, in support of the assertion that the Club Pilot (Novice) was properly briefed.

For individual pilots being supervised by a Senior Coach or Instructor, an online BHPA pro-forma to record the briefing will be available to Instructors/Senior Coaches who wish to take advantage of this exception. This must be completed, signed, both by the pilot and the person responsible for the briefing. The completed document must be returned to the BHPA immediately upon completion of the briefing.

For competition organisers, instead of individual briefings, evidence of a group task briefing and log of pilots who attended that briefing will suffice. Competition Organisers should contact the BHPA Office for further details.

All Instructors and Coaches are urged to encourage members to work towards and achieve the Pilot rating at the earliest opportunity. The online Pilot exams are easily accessible, there is plenty of revision material available, and these can be done on separate sessions. If a member does struggle to pass one or more sections, there are alternative re-take papers available. See www.bhpa.co.uk/documents/index.php?doc=Pilot_Syllabus.pdf.