

## ITFORD HILL SLOPE SOARING COMPETITION 1922

**In 1922 one of the key events in the history of gliding took place. It occurred on a little known slope on the South Downs in England, Itford Hill.**

In 1921 and 1922, slope soaring was being discovered in Germany: the ability for a glider not simply to sink down the hill, but to actually gain height in the air rising up the hill. In the UK enthusiasts heard about these developments and organised a glider competition on Itford Hill. The competition took place on October 16-21, 1922.

The Daily Mail newspaper offered a £1000 prize for the longest flight. The newspaper set a minimum flight time of 30 minutes, and secretly felt confident that its money would be safe as no one seemed likely to achieve this duration.

The best German, Dutch and French gliders were brought over for the competition. The Germans had the most advanced gliders in the world at that time. They did not expect great things from the event since British gliding was relatively undeveloped. However, they were used to shallow slopes in Germany, and did not realise just how superior the lift on the South Downs would be. The wind was strong and from the north during the competition, which meant that the 'big lift' slopes between Itford Hill and Firle Beacon were working well. (Of course, at the time no one knew these were 'big lift' slopes - in fact the organisers had been hoping for southerlies so that the very gentle south slope of Itford Hill could be used.)

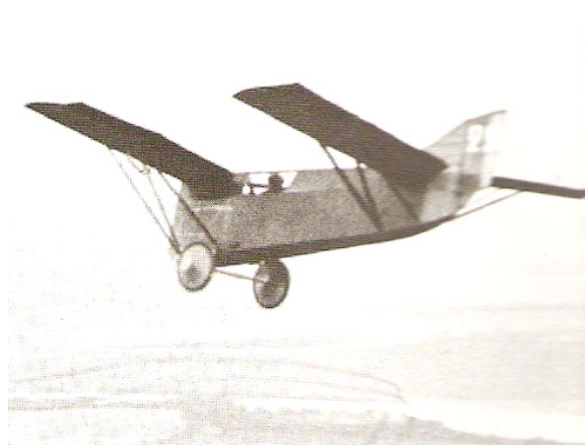
The aeroplane designer Anthony Fokker brought a biplane glider to the competition. He let an Englishman, Captain Olley, try flying it, and was astonished when Olley kept the glider aloft for 49 minutes by slope soaring between Itford Hill, Beddingham Bowl and Firle Beacon.

Many of the gliders were untested contraptions, with the result that many entrants failed to get off the ground or crashed within seconds in the gusty winds. Yet on the last day of the competition German gliders raised the record to over two hours.

The Germans were confident that no one could beat these unprecedented durations, so as the weather declined they packed up their gliders. However, in the closing hours of the event, a new world duration record was set in a French Peyret Tandem glider: 3 hours 21 minutes. The French glider was not as aerodynamically efficient as the German machines, but in the excellent South Downs lift its higher sink rate was not much of a hindrance. In fact the glider could have flown indefinitely if darkness had not fallen. The record was won largely due to the determination of the pilot, Alexis Maneyrol. He launched despite being told by the Germans that his glider was inadequate. He kept flying through a downpour despite being told that the rain would kill the lift. He kept flying as darkness fell. Finally he made a good landing on the summit – lit by car headlights – despite being told that it would not be possible to land at the same altitude from which he had launched.

The Daily Mail awarded Maneyrol his prize money and the Peyret Tandem glider was towed away to be exhibited at Selfridges department store in London.

A report of the competition can be found in this 1922 issue of Flight magazine: [Flight Magazine Archive](#). Old film of the event can be seen in this Youtube video (the Itford section starts 1 minute 10 seconds in): [Itford Film](#).



*The ungainly Peyret Tandem glider setting a world record at Itford Hill, South Downs, England, 21 October 1922*