

# A SYMBOLIC FLIGHT OVER THE RHINE

CROSSING THE FRENCH GERMAN BORDER WITH THE WIND IN HIS SAILS.



A Serbian pilot, living in Strasbourg, has just managed to link the French Vosges and the German Black Forest by crossing the Rhine... A flight that was at the same time both technical and symbolic...

*Interview : Lucian Haas / <http://lu-glidz.blogspot.com>*

*Traduction : Ruth Jessop*

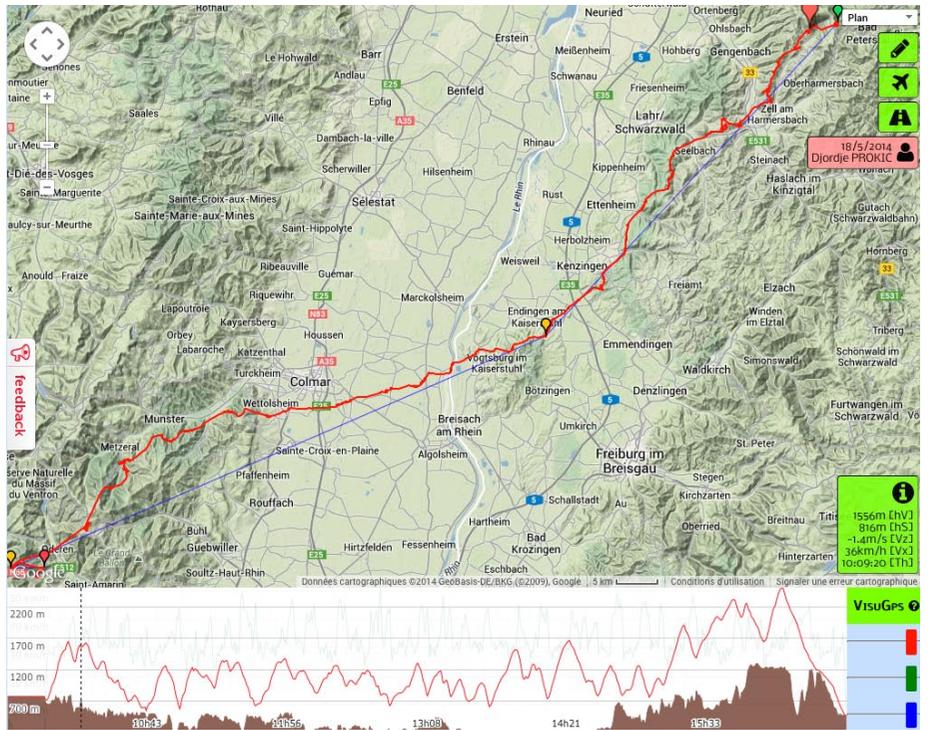
There are flights that everyone talks about, like those of more than 200 or 300 kms in various online competitions (XC contest, OLC,...). But there are also other flights which, although shorter, are no less spectacular. They are feats which score average points, but can demonstrate a passion and planning which is greater than that necessary for many 200 km FAI triangles in the Alps. It's this type of flight that the 31 year old Serbian pilot Djordje Prokic accomplished on the 18th of May this year. On his Axis Mercury, he flew from Oppenau in the Black Forest over the plains bordering the river Rhine to the landing field at Ulbès in the Vosges. It was the first ever flight linking these two massifs, in the upper Rhine region. Djorde recounted to us his preparation and the difficulties involved in this flight.



Djordje Prokic on the 18th of May 2014

**LUCIAN HAAS :** How long have you been planning this flight?

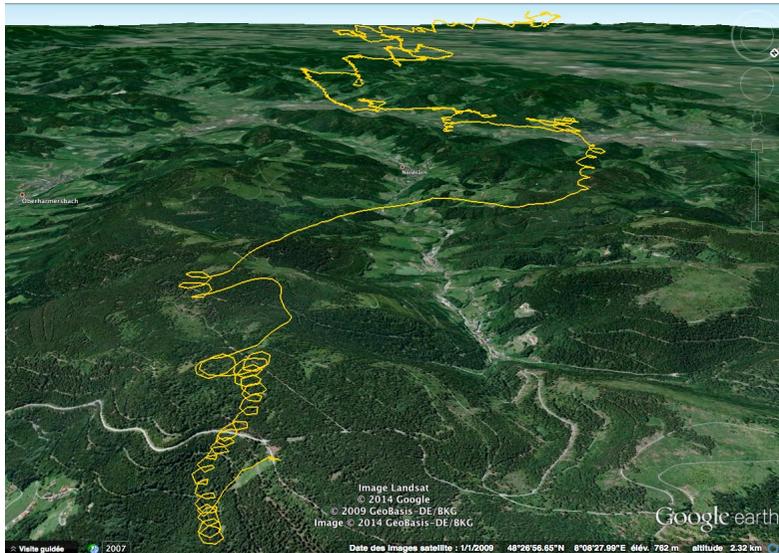
**DJORDJE PROKIC :** I moved to Strasbourg 4 years ago and started flying at the local takeoffs as soon as I got settled in. My first flight was in Oppenau Zugflucht (SW) and I immediately fell in love with the Black Forest massif. As soon as I started flying in the Vosges, I got a burning desire to connect the two mountain chains by flying over the Rhine valley. I asked around and checked the online registered flights and found out that nobody had done this yet. The first idea, around 3 years ago, was to cross from the Vosges to the Black Forest (West to East). There was one German pilot who had taken off at Treh, in the Vosges and managed to cross the plain but landed on the border between the plain and the Black Forest. I managed to do the same with SW winds last year but also landed in Fieburg 800 m from the Black Forest.



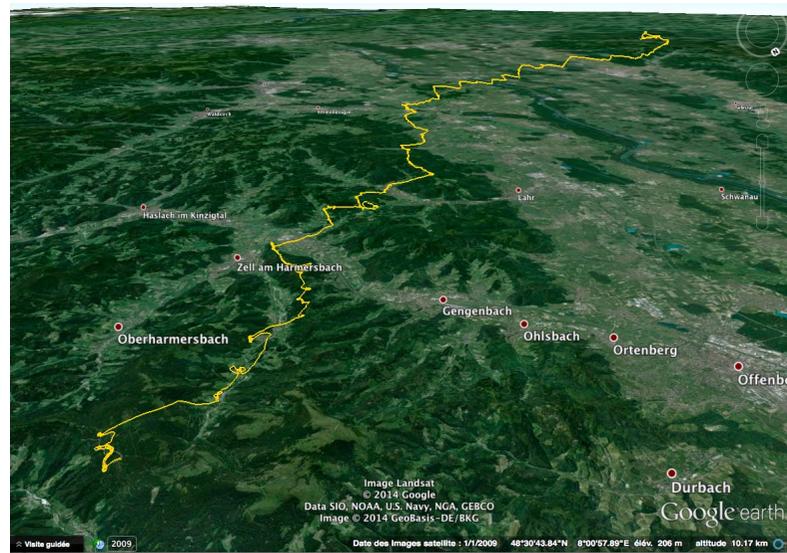
Takeoff: Sunday, 18/05/2014 — 11:31  
 Landing: Sunday, 18/05/2014 — 18:46  
 Maximum height 2506 m  
 Tracklog: <http://parapente.fvfl.fr/cfd/liste/2013/vol/20145405>  
 Wing: Axis Mercury Sport (<http://www.axispara.cz/en/products/167-axis-mercury-sport.html>)

Djorde above the Rhine valley, a wide plain far from the mountains...





The take off east of Oppenau is normally no problem, but on that day, he needed to wait 20 minutes for a window between the northwest winds.



The full flight viewed from Germany.

*“The most difficult part was between Lahr and the Rhine crossing...”*

With the NE winds I saw an opportunity to fly from Oppenau East to the Vosges and so I started planning and trying this approach two years ago. I had around three unsuccessful attempts and then one finally paid off.

**LUCIAN HAAS :**

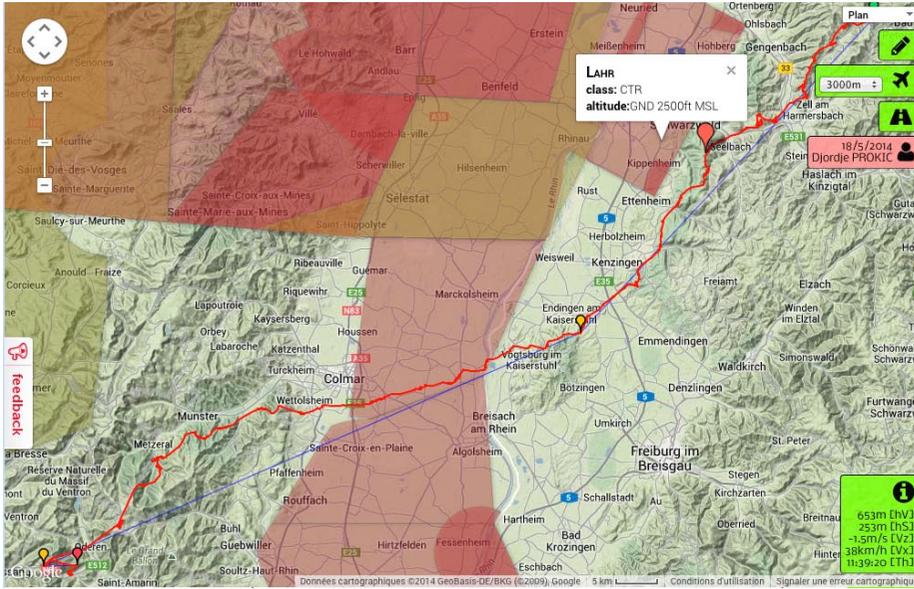
Did you expect to be able to cross the Rhine valley into France?

**DJORDJE PROKIC :**

Yes and no. My previous tries were all foiled by the fact that as soon as you get close to Lahr and the Rhine plain, the wind changes direction from NE to N or even NW at lower levels. This is due to the big picture - convection across the whole of the Black Forest massif. It sucks air in from the plain to replace air that has been heated and risen in the middle of the mountain chain. I knew that if I could cross the Rhine river, my chances would improve drastically, from there onwards I could let the wind carry me as well. The most difficult part was in fact between Lahr and just after crossing the Rhine river.

A large plain with wind slowing progress. The pilot is flying in air affected by the Black Forest.





The route is nearly clear: The Basle TMA which he needs to cross between Brisach and Colmar is above FL 095, above about 2900m (FL limit, therefore variable depending on the pressure that day). On the other hand, the CTR at LAHR needs to be circumnavigated.

**LUCIAN HAAS :**

There are some tricky Airspace restrictions on the way. How did you deal with them (e.g. Colmar)?

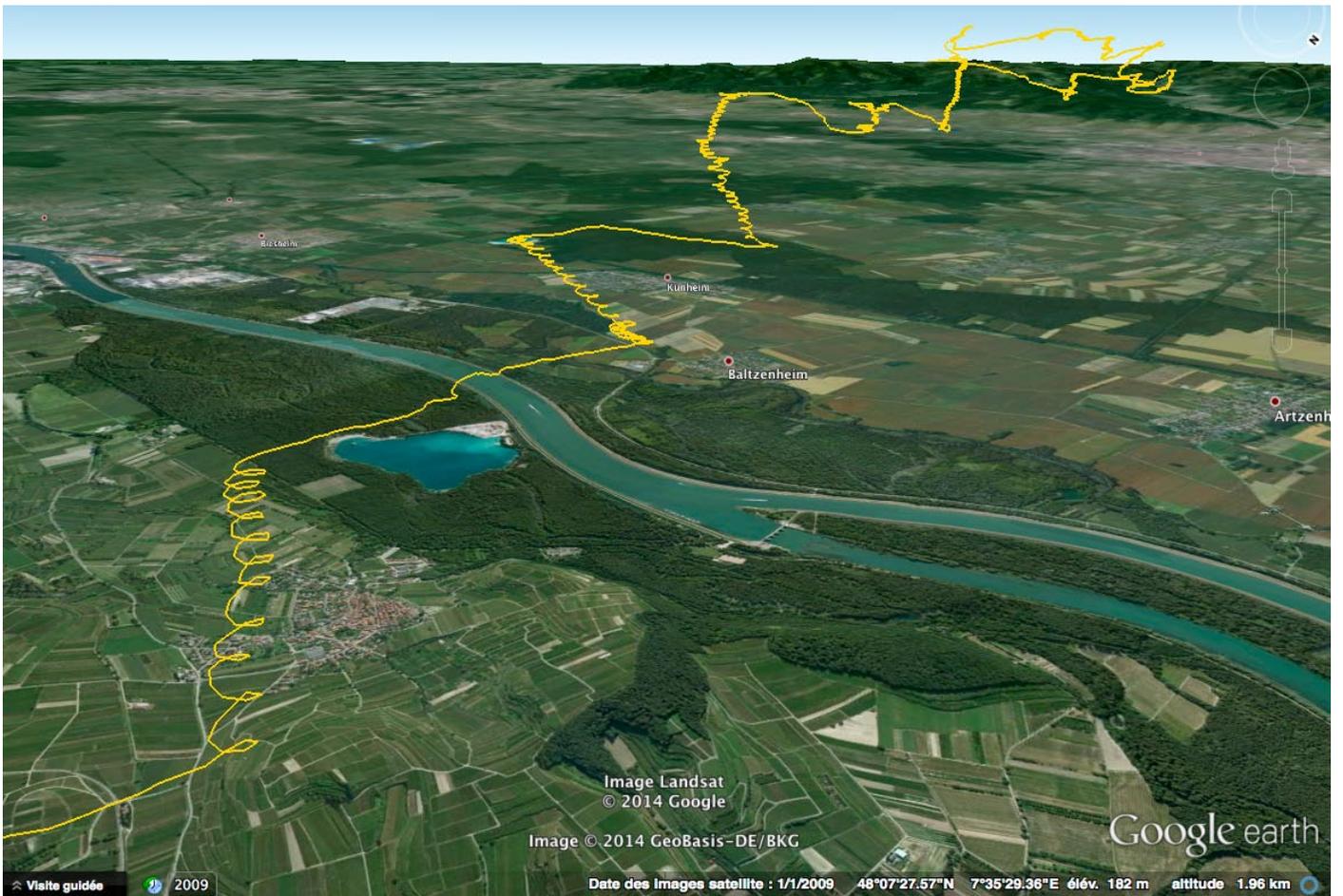
**DJORDJE PROKIC :**

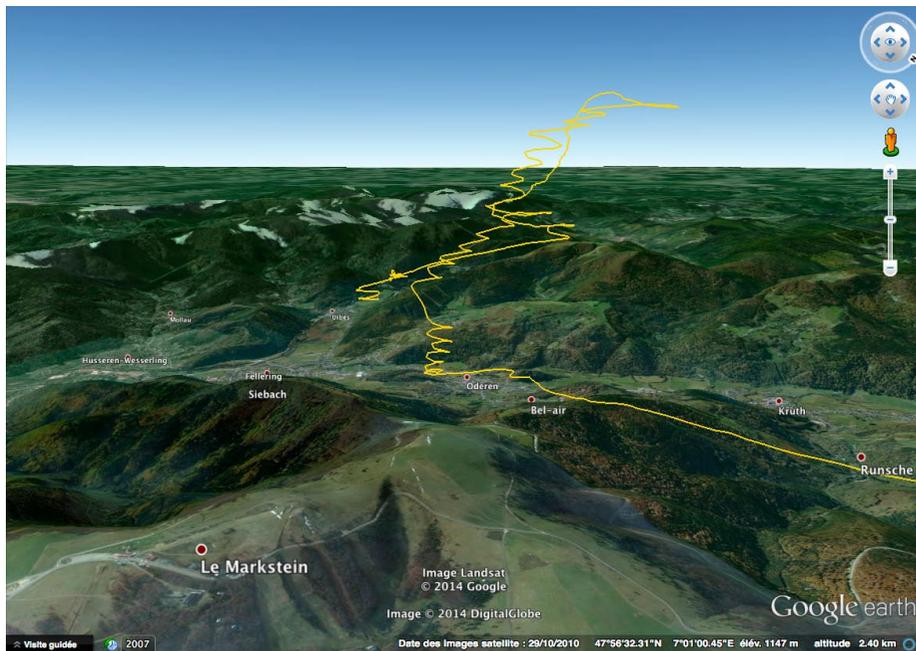
This project was not possible a few years ago; the Colmar airspace was closed due to a military base. Since the military airport closed, a corridor has been opened up between Sélestat and Basel which allows us to cross the plain with a restriction of 2890 m. Another airspace to think about is the one above Lahr. One can choose to fly above it (1000 m+) or to go around it from the bottom. I chose the latter since as soon as I got to the plains the conditions were very bad - the lift band (thermals) were climbable up to max 1300 m.

**LUCIAN HAAS :**

Few people up until now have attempted to leave the Black Forest Area to fly into the Rhine valley flats and cross over to Alsace. Are you proud of this "eye-opening" flight?

A legendary border... Djordje Prokic crossing the Rhine...





Flying over Markstein and Oderen – then heading home...

**DJORDJE PROKIC :**

Since I love to fly in the Black Forest and the Vosges, this symbolic flight to join the two mountain ranges and the two paragliding communities of German and French pilots means a lot to me. Also it's a very technical flight if you do not have the "perfect" conditions.

As you can see from the tracklog, after the initial climb of 1600 m over Oppenau East, the first three and a half hours of the flight was between 700-1300 m which is quite low and the climbs were very bad, chopped up and limited due to the windshear. This difficulty during the flight, which should normally be flown at an average of 25-35km/h but was in fact very very slow, in the end rewarded me more than any of my other flights up to now. Especially considering that this was my dream AND that my friend promised me a beer if I landed at Urbes landing that evening :)

**LUCIAN HAAS :**

Why did you choose to fly Oppenau on that day?

**DJORDJE PROKIC :**

Oppenau-East is a very good take-off. It is possible to catch a thermal much earlier than at other takeoffs in the area. The weather predictions were showing a light North East breeze but in reality as soon as I arrived at the takeoff, due to clouds forming in front of the ridge, the wind turned NW. I had to wait on the take off for 20+ minutes, ready - in full gear, to be able to take off in that one minute when the thermal changed the direction of the breeze. This was not usual but nevertheless I managed to find a thermal straightaway and fly off in the direction of my dream.... ■

“A dream come true...”



A well earned beer at the Urbes landing field...