

## **SISTERON BRIEFING - 2013**

### **Introduction**

This document attempts to give essential information for those flying in the French Alps for the first time. Since much of it concerns safety, it may appear to give a negative impression of the region. It is worth mentioning therefore that by following this advice you will experience some of the greatest gliding anywhere in the world.

### **In advance**

If you do not have a PPL and you intend to fly as P1, you need to get a French document called an “equivalence”. This costs €80 and requires a Class II medical and some photocopies of other documents. See John Bridge’s web site

<http://www.bgaladder.co.uk/FlyFrance.htm>

for the details. You will also have to have a check flight if you have not flown at Sisteron recently. At present you will still not be able to fly a French glider as P1. For this you will need a French licence and further training to fly with someone. It is not difficult to get a full French licence but the imminent arrival of the EASA licence should make this superfluous, and you will be able to use your ratings to fly with a P2 in any glider including a French one.

It will save you time if you input your details for your stay at Vaumeilh on their website before you leave the UK. <http://www.aeroclubsisteron.fr/>

### **Experience needed to fly as P1 in a single-seater**

Probably the minimum experience level needed to fly your own glider safely would be the UK Cross Country diploma and about 150 hours total gliding time. Some time flying near ridges is also essential. Although less experienced pilots could fly in the mountains, there would probably be too many new things at once which would increase stress and so reduce concentration, even if you stayed within gliding range of the airfield. Even if you can fly solo, it would be better to spend some time with an experienced instructor to give you a head start in learning about the area.

### **Maps**

The best map is the Carte Vol à Voile Alpes du Sud specially produced by IGN for glider pilots. It has a scale of 1:250,000 and it is updated annually. On-line suppliers can be found with Google

In addition to the airspace, airfields and fields already on this map, you should draw height circles around each airfield. For a Standard Class glider these circles should be drawn assuming a 20:1 glide angle, adding 1000 feet for the circuit and the height of the airfield. Higher performance gliders can use 25:1. Information such as airfield frequencies, altitudes and preferred circuits can also be usefully added to the map.

A half-million gliding map is also available of the Southern Alps: “Carte De Vol A Voile Dans Les Alpes” from IGN. It shows the airspace and the location of the fields and airfields, but isn’t very clear and the topography is not very detailed. For

example, it does not show the names of all the major mountains, such as Guillaume, which are useful in radioing where you are. In the absence of either scale of map, you could buy the Michelin quarter- million road map (527) and mark it up yourself.

### **Getting there**

Sisteron is 570 miles from Le Havre and 630 miles from Calais, though it is a little further if you take the less-busy A39. The A48 autoroute goes through the edge of Grenoble, becomes the A51 and goes up into the mountains, stopping just past Monestier. There are few overtaking places after this, until the downhill stretch after Col de la Croix Haute. Note that overtaking downhill with a trailer is hazardous!

From the Col it is just over an hour to Sisteron Airfield. You will pass through Apres sur Buech, Serres and eventually Laragne Monteglin. In Laragne take the left turn at the roundabout, D22, probably signposted to Gap (this saves two miles). As you descend from the small hills you will get your first view of the Durance valley. You will then come to a T-junction. Turn right here and go through Le Poet. Just after Le Poet you will meet the D4085 (was RN85) at another T-junction. Turn right again in the direction of Sisteron. After about 3 miles, just after going under a flyover, is the Super-U roundabout. Take the first exit, which will take you over the flyover and after half a mile to a bridge over the Durance. 400 yards after crossing the river, take the first left turn. Vaumeilh Airfield is on the left about 1-2 miles down this road. The first sign you will see at the airfield's entrance is probably for the Janus restaurant.

When parking the trailer, do not put it any closer to the runway than the existing end trailer. There are cables that can be used for tying down gliders. Leaving some tie-down kit in the parking place seems to reserve the place while you are flying, but if you de-rig, you may have to contend with usurpers for the space. There are hangars for private gliders but they may not have space for your glider to be accommodated.

### **The club-house and registering**

The club-house has three doors. The left-hand door is to the briefing room. The middle door is to the office. The right-hand door is the Janus restaurant. In the office Claude Margueritte and Nicole Carton speak good English.

When you arrive, in addition to the equivalence, they may want to see your insurance, airworthiness certificate (ARC), registration document but since EASA's standardisation this is rarer. They will then you give you an account number. At this point it is a good idea to buy a "book of the fields" for each glider.

Note the club-house has free wireless internet and a computer for use by members. The WEP code is on the wall. There is also the old club-house nearby and is useful if you want to lounge about without buying something from the Janus.

### **Briefing**

There is a mandatory briefing every morning at 10am. They will give a detailed "meteo" and correct anyone who broke the rules on the previous day. If there are enough English speakers, they will give the briefing in English as well as French.

After the briefing there is a further briefing for people flying the club gliders. You may wish to fly with a French instructor at times. It is sometimes possible to arrange a flight on the day. Most of the flying staff, if not all, speak English.

### **Airspace**

For the most part airspace isn't a problem, but it is strongly advisable to get a briefing about procedures if you are going anywhere in an arc from the south west (Lure and Mt Ventoux) round to the west. There is a major airway overhead Sisteron, R130, at FL115 and the French Air Force uses much of an area to the south west above FL75, called R71, for training. Sometimes a "window" is opened in R130 which allows climbs to FL195. The opening of the window will be announced at briefing. There are documents at the office explaining the R71 & R130 procedures in English.

The other important zone is a 5km zone around Gap-Tallard airfield for parachuting and a further zone for aerobatics to its west. Do not overfly Gap-Tallard without contacting them by radio well in advance.

The airspace in the Ecrins National Park isn't a problem for glider pilots but you should stay above 1000m from the surface in the Vanoise National Park. There are derogations for Grand Roc Noir and Col d'Aussois (between Dent Parachée and Aiguille de Pecllet. Glider pilots have been prosecuted for flying low in the Vanoise. Danger areas R221 and R222 near Briançon and Col du Galibier are activated by NOTAM fewer than 9 days a year.

### **What to take**

Each occupant must have plenty of water and a sun-hat. Drink copious amounts of water before launch and during flight, especially when it is hot and/or you are flying high, so urination arrangements should be included. The glider should also have an up-to-date book of the fields, and the maps, including one showing the airspace. They also recommend an ELT and that your mobile phone is left switched on, because it could be used to find you eventually. They also recommend taking your passport or a glider pilot licence, a wristwatch, plus a mini-survival kit (warm clothing, mirror, matches, survival blanket and a "cylalume light stick"). In-flight snacks maintain blood-sugar levels and so will keep you alert.

### **Logging**

When you go to into line to launch, you must write your aircraft's G registration on a card (not the competition number). The British use the pink cards for gliders. The smaller cards are for single-seaters and the bigger cards for two-seaters. Red cards of both sizes are used for self-launching motor gliders of any nationality. You also write your name(s), the date and your account number on the card and put it in the "En vol" (in flight) rack. After you land write down your landing time on the card and then you MUST move the card to the "Au sol" (on the ground) rack so that they know you are back. For the next flight for the same glider re-use the same card, until it is full. They write up the real log from these cards and the tug logs.

## **Launching**

There is no grid. You should only go on the runway when you are ready to launch. There are some white markers to indicate how close to the launch point you can park. On truly exceptional thermic days, you might just possibly launch at 11:30 but much more often 12:30 is the earliest at which you can get away, without taking an immense tow. When the wind is blowing, it is possible to launch much earlier. On Mistral days the thermals interfere with the wave lower down, so sooner rather than later is often better on these days, or wait until the late afternoon.

They usually launch towards the north at first, if they can, (Runway 36, trente-six). As the valley wind gets up, they often have to change ends (Runway 18, dix-huit) in the early to mid afternoon. If they change ends, the custom is that the first three gliders in the line can push up the runway. Everyone else should tow along the west side until opposite the new queue and then cross (after looking out for landing aircraft). If they are launching to the south, cars should return by road, using the gate at the northern end of the field.

There is usually a sudden rush to launch and so anticipation is needed to get you airborne at the perfect time, when it is busy. Everyone then lines up, pushing the gliders forward until they reach the front of the line. Generally the CFI likes two lines at the launch point, one for heavy two-seaters which need a more powerful tug.

Tail dollies are usually left together in a pile on an old open trailer. This is used as an additional indication that a glider has not yet returned.

## **How to launch**

Set the altimeter to QNH (1772 feet) and the radio to the Sisteron frequency 120.05MHz. Do not use this frequency for chat, only for launching and landing.

The tugs drop the tow ropes as they land. There are usually more ropes than tugs, so you can often get a rope ready for the next tug before it appears. The two ends of the rope are interchangeable. Helpers have to retrieve the rope from the runway (look out for landing aircraft), attach one end to the tug and one to the glider. If your glider is some way down the grid, *please* help to launch the gliders in front of you. In your excitement do not forget the basic pre-flight checks!

When calling the tug, use the G reg, not the comp number. Contact the tug for a radio check, give the account number and give a place to launch to (sometimes the tug will ask you first.) No further dialogue is needed, though basic aviation English is generally understood. You can say “Hongrie and perhaps Trainon” if you are not sure whether Hongrie will be working. Alternatively you could choose to go somewhere else during the tow. You can even ask the tug pilot what they recommend, since they will have a good idea themselves about where is working.

The tug takes up slack on its own, and the glider wing remains on the ground. The all-out signal is given by a thumbs-up sign to the wing-tip holder who only then raises the wing. The tug pilot will announce to the world in French that he is taking-off and will tow you to your chosen spot. Do not thank the tug after releasing.

### **Where to launch to**

It is best to listen to the radio to hear where everyone else is launching to. Generally a consensus builds up about where is best. The aerotow uses the conventional glider position just above the wake.

During the tow across the plain, you will encounter strong surges. Resist the temptation to release in these phantom thermals. If you do release, the lift will immediately vanish and you will be back on the ground in a few minutes. For 99% of launches, you will release near a mountain.

The most reliable way of ensuring that you release in lift is to wait until the vario shows 4 knots of additional lift for 3-4 seconds before releasing.

The nearest hill to the east is Hongrie. On thermic days it tends to work a little later than the bigger mountains, so an early launch there may be unsuccessful or result in a sweaty struggle until it really gets going.

Further away and so more expensive but generally more reliable is Trainon. This is just visible behind Hongrie from the airfield to the east of the Gache. In between Gache and Trainon is another smaller lump called Gourasse that sometimes works. Note your height as you fly over the cols between Trainon, Gourasse and the Gache. Also note the power wires across the gaps. The lift at Trainon is sometimes up its face but more often it is well past the peak on the far side, where the air comes rushing up the valley. Note that the ground on the other side of Trainon, near Jouère, is lower for an escape. The source near Trainon often pulses so searching around until it restarts is often a good strategy.

The other likely launching destination is Tête de Boursier/Malaup in a southerly. Sometimes the lower hills to the east of the airfield, known as Les Petits Monges are requested. Beyond these hills is Motte du Caire airfield and often its gliders can be seen climbing there, especially on Bramafan, the ridge on the east side.

On days with a stiff northerly, the long cliff to the south, called the Gache, works. The small hill, Baume, to its west, opposite Sisteron town, also works in this wind and is apparently used by the brave for getting a low point for diamond height. Get a briefing about your landing options if you do this.

### **After getting away**

Change to the gliding frequency for the Alps 122.65MHz either until you return to Sisteron, or you have reached the time of the evening specified at briefing for all gliders to return to the airfield frequency. Having climbed to a reasonable height at your launch destination, aim to get above an even bigger mountain. On days with an inversion, this can be a real art. Generally, from Hongrie go to Trainon, then to Jouère or Auribeau/Authon and then Les Monges. After these, Blayeul with its radio mast is a reasonable objective before crossing to La Blanche, though Clot Ginoux and then Tête Grosse is another useful route. Note the location of Seyne airfield. In a southerly, Grand Gautiere or Mont Serieux are jumping off points from Malaup. If you are low near Authon, the ridge running southwest to St Auban called Vaumuse, is a useful escape route.

La Blanche is a ridge which is part of a route known to pilots as the “Parcours de Combattants”. It is a gliding motorway and is often busy especially from Trois Evechées to Dormillouse at its northern end. However the route also runs down to the south, though not so clearly defined, past the Cheval Blanc as far as Mont Dernier near the Lac de St Croix.

Many pilots fly from La Blanche either across the Barcelonnette valley to climb at Grand Bérard or Siguret and then Col de Vars or you can make the small jump to Morgon and then cross the lake to Guillaume or Tête de Lucy. Both routes will get you to the Briançon valley eventually, though the Grand Bérard route usually gets you there higher.

The flight to the south should keep you in range of the airfields at St Auban and Puimoisson and gives you a view of the Gorge du Verdon from above the Pont d’Aiguines. If you fly further south to Fayence, you have to steer a careful course between the military area at Canjuers and the zone for Nice airport. You can encounter sea air round there, so Logis du Pin is often the furthest south you will wish to go.

Other interesting short trips include:

- Pic de Bure which is visible from the airfield due north beyond Ceuse and in easy gliding range of Gap-Tallard and Aspres
- Mont Ventoux, though the field at Sederon should be carefully noted, and this trip needs permission from Salon on most days, though Sundays are usually OK

On wave days get a briefing from the French instructors about where to go at what height and the land-out options. The routine is generally to get as high as possible on the Gache before topping up at Baume and then on to the Lure and running up above the ridge to near the summit before moving forward into the wave over the Jabron valley. Sometimes you must gain some extra height before heading straight back to Sisteron against the strong headwind. There are sometimes useful fields south of Baume at Salignac.

### **Landing back**

You will probably return to the vicinity of the airfield with excess height if you have been flying safely. Depending on which runway is in use, there are two zones for losing height (Zones de Perte d’Altitude). If you are landing on Runway 36, spiral down over the ruined fort at Sigoyer. For Runway 18, spiral down over the village of Valernes at the foot of Hongrie. The runway will often change while you are away, so ask which one is in service or listen for the downwind calls. Before you spiral down, call to say that you are in the Zone de Perte d’Altitude for the runway in use and give your altitude in metres QNH.

At about 3000 feet QNH leave these two zones and fly to the edge of the airfield to start the downwind leg. All glider circuits are on the east side and you should fly the downwind leg along the low hills. Opposite the upwind end of the airfield at 2700 feet (no sooner and no higher), call downwind, either in French or English. For example

“Sisteron, G-CKDN is downwind for runway 36 (or 18). Gear down and locked.” (In French , G-CKDN vente arrière pour le trente-six (or dix-huit). Train sorti et verrouillé.) Then call base leg (eg “DN étape de basse 36”) and, shortly after, call final (eg “DN final 36”).

If you are using 36, you should turn off to the west side. On 18 you should announce whether you are landing on the east side or west side eg “DN final 18 Whisky” You can land on the east side (18 Echo) on the concrete strip, if it is empty and no take-offs are imminent. Whichever runway you use, you must to clear the landing area for the next pilot who may be close behind you. For 18, you should land long (unless you plan to launch again). This will also shorten your walk to the trailer, tail dolly and flight card and reduce congestion near the 18 launch point

Note there is small ravine downwind of the boundary of 18 which can produce some turbulence in a strong southerly. Undershooting is therefore a serious risk if you are trying to land short. Likewise in a strong northerly do not aim to just miss the new boundary fence of 36; instead land beyond the VVV marks. There is no cross-runway, so landings in strong cross-wind must be within your capabilities.

On days when they use their winch, do not overfly the airfield. You should aim to land of the east side when using Runway 18, though if necessary you may have to turn off to the west and roll over the cables. Obviously this will hold up launching, so you will be expected to move the glider clear as fast as possible. When landing on 36, you should still move off to the west, because clearing to the east will block the aerotow. They use the radio during the winch launch so do not speak while a launch is in progress.

### **Flying near mountains**

The sun on the mountains generates strong lift and this in turn pulls in more air from the valley. The thermals and “valley wind” will interact with the prevailing wind and produce strong lift, strong sink and occasionally some turbulence.

About half of the serious accidents seem to be caused by gliders spinning into the terrain. This is caused by turbulence near the ground. For example you can find strong lift under one wing that cannot be counteracted by full control deflections. Gusts can increase the angle of attack and so the glider can suddenly stall or even spin if the airspeed is already low. The lack of a horizon means that you can be unaware that the glider is slowing up. These effects are not a problem with adequate speed, but are serious if the glider is already flying slowly. It is therefore essential that you maintain manoeuvring speed. This means about 1.5 times your stall-speed, say 55 knots, if you are beside the rocks or if you are less than 500 feet above them. Remember the correction for an incipient spin is to move the stick forward. Trying to pick up the wing with just ailerons can sometimes provoke a full spin. If it all goes quiet, push the stick forward ASAP.

Zig-zag up rock faces; do not circle. Circling near a rock face is risky. Part of the circle may be in lift but a tight turn will increase the stall speed, even if not over-ruddered, and the rest of the turn may be in sink. Since the wind will be blowing you towards the face, the next turn may be both lower and closer. The office has a good

booklet in English “Safety in Mountain Flying” explain this, and all the hazards in more detail.

In almost any wind, but especially in strong winds, truly scary sink rates can be found in the lee of mountains. A comfortable margin of height can vanish very quickly.

Powerful thunderstorms can build up quickly in the mountains and the limited number of routes home can be blocked. The storms will change the wind direction over great distances as well as producing extreme local turbulence. If there is a storm at the airfield, consider diverting or at least waiting for it to pass before attempting a landing.

### **Unlandable terrain**

Unlike in the UK, there are large areas where there are no usable fields, and sometimes no fields at all. The fields are often too small, sloping, obstructed, have crop and/or irrigation pipes. The stretch from Briançon to the airfield at St Crepin has just one landable field (the difficult and occasionally unusable St Blaise) at any time of year. This is compounded by the effect that a west wind can have down the length of the valley. In the middle of the Briançon valley in a westerly, it is possible to get continuous strong sink and a headwind for miles.

It is strongly recommended that you stay within a 20:1 glide angle of an airfield at all times. Use the height circles on the map. However the gliding clubs have produced a book that gives you the recommended outlanding fields in the Southern Alps. For each field there is a position, map, photo and some information about surface, slope and preferred circuit direction in French and English. Ensure that every one of the fields in the vicinity is programmed into your GPS in addition to the airfields. Bear in mind that the shortest distance to a safe landing area may not always be available if there is a mountain in the way.

Some of the fields are gliding sites, such as Seyne (No 30) and Motte du Caire (No 31) and are satisfactory. There is also a good landing field at Marcoux (08) though it can be damaged by floods so it is worth verifying its availability. It is about 500m of flat ground that has been levelled for specifically glider pilots and it is very useful if you are coming back from the south or if Blayeul fails you. The alternatives at Marcoux are very much shorter.

Some fields are always difficult eg Le Rosier and some fields are unavailable at some times of the year, even though they are in the book. They can also change from year to year. Information, but not always up to date, is on the Alpes tab in [http://www.planeur.net/index.php?option=com\\_outlandings&task=list&Itemid=200](http://www.planeur.net/index.php?option=com_outlandings&task=list&Itemid=200)

Consequently do not fly by relying on the fields; instead rely on the airfields and regard most fields as for emergencies only. On wet days a trip to some of the closer fields is recommended eg Valenty (26), Mont Gardin (11), Les Crots (old microlight strip) (32), Motte du Caire (31) and Marcoux (08). Espinasses (10) is hard to find on the ground and from the air. Seyne is a long way!



If you are planning on going beyond the Italian border, a trip to inspect St Blaise (extremely difficult) and Le Rosier is strongly recommended. The Bardonecchia valley is completely unlandable, except for a field of dubious permanence. The club regularly warns pilots about the use of non-standard fields.

If you are landing in a field near mountains, you should expect some gusts and so plan a steep approach with some extra speed. Move the glider out of the way after landing.

### **The collision risk**

The terrain is irregular and distracting. It is very easy to miss another glider against the spectacular Alpine background of rocks, snow, forest and sky. Gliders also tend to follow the same routes and congregate at the popular mountains. At the mountains the lift can be in over a wide area with multiple cores. Intersecting circles are a strong possibility. Some mountain ridges, such as Gache, Pracheval (near St Crepin) and Guillaume, where gliders are flying beats, can get busy. Do not fly in another glider's blind spots, eg just behind and out to one side, or just below. A pull-up in a strong thermal can also produce a surprising gain in height.

Fluorescent stripes on the wings improve conspicuousness and are now mandatory throughout the French Alps. All the airfields will refuse to launch you without these. Self-adhesive strips are available from the Sisteron workshop and can be fitted with the use of copious amounts of liquid soap as lubrication (the glue still works) and much smoothing with a credit card to squeeze out the bubbles of surplus liquid as the strips are gradually rolled on to the wings.

Flarm is also mandatory in the French Alps. Consequently it is possible that many Alpine pilots expect that Flarm will warn them of all traffic; however Flarm is only a supplement and should be treated as such. A sudden Flarm alert should not be a cause for panic. Look for the threat and then turn away. A turn without looking could increase the risk of a collision. Ensure your Flarm aerial is protruding well clear of metallic objects and carbon fibre to ensure that you get adequate warning, especially of head-on traffic.

### **Other airfields**

The other airfields are listed at the back of the book of fields. This gives their runways, frequencies, altitudes and preferred circuit directions. They all require downwind, base and final calls. Many are gliding clubs and so you can get a rapid re-light. The cost is phoned through to Sisteron and charged to your account. The following are gliding sites: St Auban, Serres, Gap-Tallard, Barcelonnette, St Crepin, Aspres, Puimoisson, Grenoble Le Versoud, Challes les Eaux, Fayence, Motte du Caire, Seyne and Vinon. While it is good to know there are some many friendly places to land, bear in mind that they also launch large numbers of gliders every day to fly in the same area.

To the north, the Maurienne valley often has different conditions and escaping again to the south over its passes can be difficult. There is an airfield at Sollières, but it is usually not a gliding site. You therefore have to phone St Crepin to get a tow. If the valley wind is a westerly, they will come and get you. Otherwise you may have to

spend the night in Termignon. It is therefore a good idea to take a small overnight kit if you are flying long distances.

The curl-over at Barcelonnette is extremely dangerous if your final approach is even slightly low in a westerly. (It has caused four fatalities in the past 20 years). A strong westerly can spring up quickly if there is a thunderstorm on the Blanche and this will kill any lift on Grand Bérard. Trying to fly out low of the Barcelonnette valley is not recommended. Note that Dormillouse is not easily usable below about 6000 feet and Seyne airfield is at about 4000 feet.

There is frequently turbulence just above St Crepin and Aspres is very turbulent in a strong northerly or north-westerly. Steep approaches are therefore recommended. Note also that Seyne, St Auban, St Crepin, Challes les Eaux and Motte du Caire have winches.

Note the normal landing directions for Seyne (towards the southeast) and Motte du Caire (towards the north), whatever the direction for launching.

### **Where are you?**

Learning the names of some of the mountains is essential to be able to say where you are. Radio works by line of sight, so you will usually only be able to give your position to someone else who is also gliding. This will ensure that if you have an accident, the authorities will at least know roughly where to look for you. Without a last known position of the glider, it is doubtful whether the search helicopter would even take off because the vast area that would have to be searched. Your height and position every half hour on 122.65MHz is sufficient. As a basic set, learn the location of La Baume, Hongrie, Gache, Trainon, Jouere, Malaup, Les Monges, La Lure, Blayeul, Tête Grosse, Trois Evechées, Dormillouse, Morgon, Colombis, Guillaume, Ceuse and Pic de Bure.

If you are the last of your group that is still airborne, try to contact another Sisteron glider to relay your position to the rest of your group on the ground. The club announces a last landing time at briefing. You must follow this, even if it is still well before sunset. This will give them time to organise searches if you do not return. They also announce a time each day after which all gliders should switch back to 120.05MHz permanently and call in to say where they are regularly. Cards still in the “in-flight” section of the racks at the launch point will start to cause alarm at the end of the day.

### **Where to stay**

The Hôtel le Caboulot <http://hotelcaboulot.blogspot.fr/> provides simple B&B accommodation. [hotelcaboulot@gmail.com](mailto:hotelcaboulot@gmail.com). There are also many gites in the area of varying standards. To locate a gite, the best person to contact is Madame Elisabeth Collombon. <http://passerons.pagesperso-orange.fr/> She has four gites within a mile of the airfield, but she also has many local contacts. She is very friendly and speaks good English. For those wanting a hotel, the Hôtel Les Chenes on the main road into Sisteron is reasonably priced. <http://www.logishotels.com/en/hotel-Hotel-Les-Chenes-1256.html>

An English pilot called Bill Brooks and his wife, Christine, have two double rooms in Vaumeilh (about three miles from the airfield) with access that is independent from their house. “Maison Aux Lavandes” +33 676 028 367 [bill.brooks@sfr.fr](mailto:bill.brooks@sfr.fr)

### **Where to eat**

As well as sandwiches, salads and hot food at lunchtime, the Janus also serves food every evening, however you may wish to try further afield at times.

One of the best places to eat cheaply in Sisteron (€16) is the Vietnamese La Baie d’Along near the clock tower. There is also the Crêperie Alkene in Rue Saunerie. There are several places serving pizzas among other things: eg La Villa d’Este (Rue St Ursule), Bistrot de la Mairie and Pizzaiollo (far side of the car park by the Mairie. The Hôtel Les Chenes does a good €19.50 menu as well as pricier options.

In the €24-26 range for three courses, three of the best are: L’Araignée Gourmand in Laragne, Restaurant Vue d’en Haut in Sigoyer (though a very small menu) and the Au Gout du Jour in Chateaux Arnoux (the bistro attached to the Bonne Etape). You should book L’Araignée because it is often full. It is closed on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. At this end of the market there is also Lou Casteu in Mison. It has had a few owners over the years but it is worth having a look.

### **What to do on wet days**

Apart from visiting the outlandish fields, Sisteron’s main alternative attraction is its citadel, which is worth a visit, if only for the views. There are also some museums, a cathedral and the narrow streets behind the cathedral are interesting. Shopping in Sisteron is fairly limited; Digne and Gap are better for serious shoppers. Pharmacies, newsagent, bakers and patisseries are along the Rue Saunerie & Rue Droite. The Post Office is on the opposite side of the main road from the cathedral. Parking can be difficult, and the car park near the Mairie is often the best bet.

The Super-U is the cheapest places to buy fuel by a good margin (10c/litre). There is also a DIY superstore (Mr Bricolage) on the site. The office at the airfield and the workshop are good sources of advice for more unusual requirements. Note that most French shops follow the custom of closing on Sundays. Even the Super-U closes at 12:30. Some also close at lunchtime and on Mondays.

Further afield there is all of Provence to explore to the south, including Avignon, Orange and Aix. The Gorge du Verdon (~2hr) is visible from the road around the rim or from a pedalo or canoe that can be hired at Aiguines. There are ample attractive villages, most notably Moustiers, selling “produits régionaux” such as lavender, wine and pottery.

On a hot day, the Gorge de Méouge to the west of Laragne is good for swimming in a mountain stream, South of Serres are two man-made swimming resorts: [Plan d'eau du Riou](#) and [Domaine de Germanette](#).

If you have been looking at the fields at Mont Gardin and Les Crots, also drive up Colombis for a spectacular view of the lake and the mountains such as Morgon.

**Phone numbers**

If you land out, you must tell the club:

Sisteron airfield      00 33 492 62 17 45 (in France 04 92 62 17 45)

Janus restaurant      00 33 492 62 15 23 (in France 04 92 62 15 23)

Other numbers are at the front of the book of fields.