



THE THIRD WAY

Jason Andrews investigates D-bagging

Most paraglider pilots hill launch and some tow, but for some time I have been interested by the idea of using a deployment bag (D-bag). The D-bag allows a paraglider to be launched in a similar manner to a parachute in a static-line jump. Paraglider wings aren't designed to cope with the stresses of opening during free-fall, so the pilot only falls the length of their lines before the wing deploys (the D-bag remains attached to the aircraft from which the paraglider is launched).

With a trip to Ancey planned for September with my brother Mark (now living in Canada), I decided that I would do a little research about D-bagging before our holiday and hoped I might be able to try it out. Because of the 6,000km between us, Mark and I only fly together once a year. We try to have as much flying fun as possible, usually accompanied by a whole bunch of video equipment so that we can post stuff to his website (www.marksparaglidingpages.com) as a reminder for the rest of the year.

Before I set off to Ancey I needed to get hold of a D-bag, get some advice on how to pack it and use it, and to hook up with a willing tandem pilot to drop me off. D-bags are pretty hard to get hold of and the information relating to their use is even harder to find, but I managed to get my hands on two detailed methods for D-bag packing and a list of safety pointers - and some ideas about what could go wrong. From the paragliding forum (www.paraglidingforum.com) I also had an offer from Geneva-based British tandem pilot Tom Payne, who was willing to meet up in Ancey, and the promise of a D-bag loan from Simon Perriard, a Swiss pilot also living in Geneva.

We stayed at Irwyn Jehu's Maison du Moulin (www.maison-du-moulin.co.uk) at the south end of Lake Ancey, right near the landing field. On the Sunday the forecast was for wind it so we headed into Ancey to find Simon Perriard's hand-made D-bag. With no prospect of any flying we headed back to Irwyn's to work out what we were supposed to do with it. This was the first time Mark or I had seen a D-bag and we wanted to rig it up a few times to be sure that we knew exactly what we were doing.

I had no-one to actually show me how to pack the glider, just a bunch of instructions via e-mail (mostly in Hungarian). We enlisted the help of Graham Payne and Bob Johnston to film some ground deployments and review the footage in slow-motion to see how well they worked. I would highly recommend this process to anyone thinking of attempting a D-bag deployment. Seeing the wing emerge from the D-bag frame by frame allows you to be confident that the packing method does not introduce cravats or line tangles. It is a very good way to test packing methods and instils confidence in your kit.

I used a "mushroom pack". I laid out the D-bag on the ground in a cross shape and then gathered the lines of my wing as if I was "rosetting" it - like you do when you have to side-land, except with a little more attention to holding the lines above the glider and dangling it below, rather than gathering the lines horizontally up to the trailing edge of the wing. Then, I simply plonked the glider in the middle of the D-bag and squashed a lot of the air out, while making sure that the wing-tips were clear of lines and the leading edge was centralised so it would open centre-first. I then folded over the left and right

sides of the D-bag but without Velcro-fastening them. Next I brought the lines out of the bottom of the bag and zig-zagged them into elastic bands. Once the bag is packed it is connected to the pilot by clipping in to the riser karabiners (fig 1).

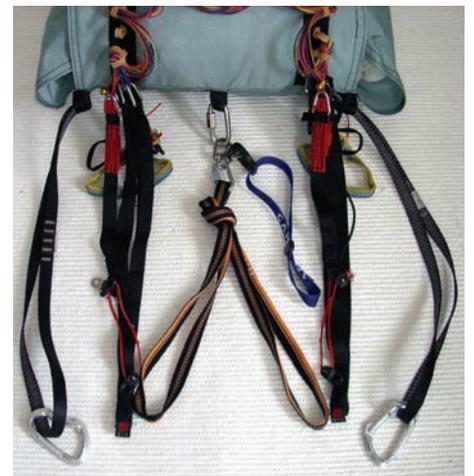


Figure 1: The wing is packed but the side flaps of the D-bag have not yet been "sealed". In the finished packing the side flaps come back out of the bag and Velcro-fasten over the top of the lines to protect them. The outer webbing hoops shown here prevent the pilot dropping if the quick-release shackle is accidentally released. The D-bag shown is a single hang-point version, reducing the need to release two shackles simultaneously. The risers and middle webbing loops connect to the harness karabiners.

It's a bit tricky to explain without a lot of photos. A more detailed view of the whole process is included in the video that Mark and I filmed. It's up on my website at

Jason and Bob Johnston pack the D-bag



Graham Payne and Jason getting ready to do a test deployment



Deploying: Bob (in front) and Graham (holding the D-bag) help me simulate a deployment





www.adrenalinedvd.com/downloads/firstcut.wmv. The video includes the packing, test deployment and footage of a tandem launch and several camera angles covering the actual drop.

After two insightful dummy runs I was generally happy with the mushroom pack but there was one thing that I needed to modify - the position of the quick-release shackle. During my second trial deployment I had noticed a strong yanking force on my right-hand side but didn't have a clue what it was. Reviewing the video, I realised that the quick-release was set up so that it remained with the D-bag. I was detaching from the D-bag and still holding the strap to the shackle, and this seemed like a good way to lose a thumb. I re-rigged it so that the quick-release remained with the falling pilot (fig 2). I texted Simon Perriard to check this and he explained that he'd set it up like this as the shackle required more force to release it in the configuration that I wanted to use. After some thought I decided I'd rather struggle with the release mechanism than have to remember to let go of the strap and risk an injury.



Figure 2: In this picture the D-bag is on the left, the quick release (with the blue strap) is in the middle, and the suspension points to the harness are on the right.

With testing complete we just needed a tandem pilot. On Tuesday we met up with Tom Payne, who bravely volunteered to drop me from his wing despite the fact that neither of us had tried this before. Our main concern for Tom was that at only 60kg he would be well below the minimum wing loading on the tandem once I made my exit, but he was confident that in still air he'd be fine. We spent about an hour in the Plain fait landing field carefully packing the D-bag and working out how to attach it to his tandem with webbing loops and soft spreader-bars before heading to Col de la Forclaz for a sunset launch in still air.

We were alone at the launch as, just a few minutes before sunset, I made my final checks on the mat at Forclaz. To be honest it was nice not to have hordes of onlookers. Tom and I had discussed all possible scenarios and had a plan for every eventuality. Our main concern was the launch. With no wind on take-off it required a committed launch from us both. After all the talk, the moment of truth was rapidly approaching but I felt calm and confident. I was really focussed on making it work, if only to spare Mark from watching me screw up!

"Are you ready?"

"Yup, let's do it"

Tom said, "3 - 2 - 1," and launched the glider, then, "Now run!"

We ran and ran and ran. Tom was in the air and I was running like a maniac underneath him. Then I was past the mat and running over long grass and bushes. As the ground got really steep I lost my footing. Momentarily I felt my harness touch something, and then we were airborne.

Now the "easy" bit. We flew over to the nature reserve and I checked my altitude - about 4 - 500 metres. Tom said he was ready for me to deploy. I paused for a moment, soaking in the beautiful golden sunset and the atmosphere, the anticipation, the sheer privilege of my position to try this. Then, "Release!"

The wing opens beautifully and I'm falling, looking up at it. Within just two or three seconds the wing is flying perfectly without me needing to stall it or make any major brake inputs. I'm ecstatic and let out a whoop of joy. Mark, in hot pursuit, has been filming. We all head to the Doussard landing field to pack up and congratulate each other.

After the excitement of my first D-bag drop, the next few days were spent just enjoying some gentle soaring conditions and the company of other pilots in the evenings. With Tom having to head back to work straight after the D-bag drop I didn't think I'd have another chance to try it, but on the Friday, the last day of our holiday, we hooked up with Sebastian Meier, a professional tandem pilot based in Switzerland. With a lot of pilots at the Forclaz launch I took ages checking and double-checking my equipment. With all the spectators watching me getting ready I was a little more nervous, but was eventually ready for another drop. With a slight breeze the launch went far more smoothly and the wing opened beautifully again.

Now I'm back in the UK I'm keen to explore the use of D-bagging from a hot air balloon. I'm in talks with a number of balloonists that have CAA clearance to drop parachutists - I'll keep you posted with developments. Do contact me if you would like to help in any way.



The inflation is symmetrical and the wing opens quickly with no tangles - good stuff!



Safely on the ground, Jason and Tom pose for the camera.

BHPA members are advised not to consider this technique without seeking qualified advice and support.