



Nestled in the Sierra de Piedrahita Mountains in Central Spain is a paragliding site worth exploring. From Madrid International Airport, a complementary van will pick you up and whisk you 110 miles into the interior of Spain. The terrain reminds one of Central California—rolling hills, craggy granite peaks, and majestic oak trees. The two-hour ride goes by quickly in anticipation of arriving at the village of Piedrahita, which is in the Castille-Leon region of Spain, famous for raising fighting bulls.

Except for your hosts, Steve Ham and Puri Almansa, English is not spoken in Piedrahita, but the locals appreciate even the most awkward attempts at speaking Spanish. Credit cards and traveler's checks are not workable in the village, so you'll need to stock up on some local currency via an ATM at the airport.

The Centro de Vuelo, Piedrahita (or flight center) is operated by Steve and Puri, and features an all-inclusive one-week package (check their website for fee and details.) It begins and ends on Saturdays at Madrid International Airport with comfortable complementary van transportation. The reasonable one-week fee includes: transportation to and from the airport, a room at their guest home, most meals, transportation to launch and retrieves, and a special learning experience from both Steve and Puri.

The flying day usually begins in the late morning and goes well into the late afternoon (on one afternoon, there were 4 trips to the top!) The launch is reached in 25 minutes by a paved road to the summit of Pena Negra at a panoramic 6,080 ft. There are two choices of launch. One is relatively shallow but wide, which can require a brisk run in milder wind; the other is on a nearby steeper, grassy slope. There are a variety of LZs to pick from near the village and most farmers are OK with landing in their fields. The LZs are at 1,000 meters (3,200 ft), and with the 'vertical' of nearly three thousand feet, it would be rare to not reach an LZ, even with a 'sledder,' and even more of a rarity to not get lots of lift and float around in lazy circles above the scenic valley floor. The site is known for its well-developed mountain convergence and cross-country potential.

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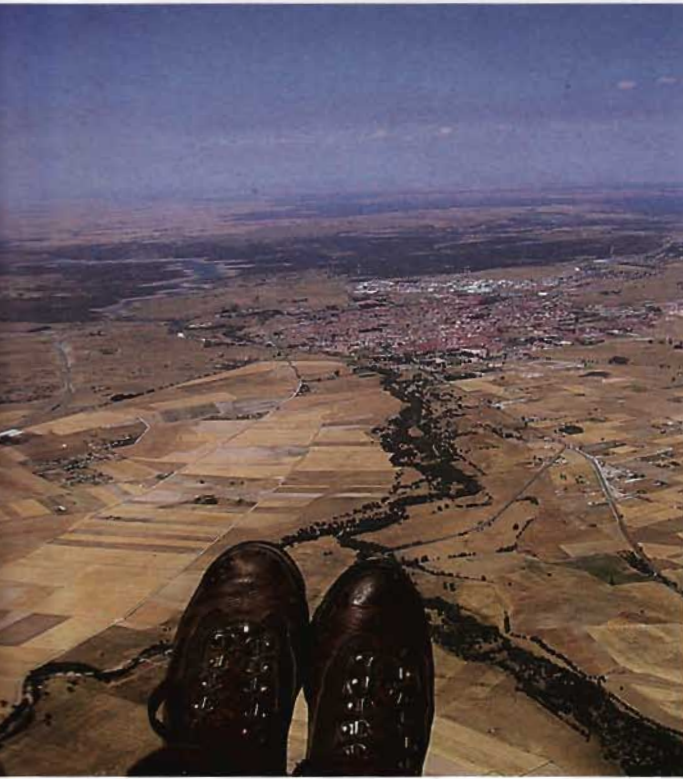
The Possibilities in Piedrahita

by Don Kruse



Local stats

- Longest flight - 246 kilometers (77 miles)
- Longest tandem flight - 119 kilometers (37 miles)
- Longest duration - 6+ hours
- Highest flight - 5000 meters (16,000 feet)
- Flight season - normally March to October



...Possibilities in Piedrahita - cont.

Piedrahita is a well-known site in Europe and has been the host for numerous competitions including the British and Swedish Nationals, the European Championships, and 4 Paragliding World Cup competitions. Steve holds the European record of 162 kilometers as well as winning the biggest PWC competition task of 170km. His 12-year knowledge of the site is extensive, and with the detailed weather analysis and suggested flight plans, he'll give you all the guidance you'll need to make the best of your flying experience.



Another nice aspect of the Piedrahita experience is should there be a non-flying day during your week, there are a few really enjoyable alternatives. Alternative 1: Settle into a restaurant-bar and tell the bartender to keep the beer and tapas coming. Tapas are small, individual dishes of appetizers that come in a seemingly unlimited variety. This is a place where one eats every part of the pig, except the 'oink', and where water can cost more than wine. Alternative 2: Included in the weekly fee, there are possibilities of white water rafting (March through mid-May), kayaking, kite buggy, kite surf,

biking and sight seeing. (Horse back riding and skiing may be arranged separately). There is also a municipal swimming pool not far away.

You can expect Piedrahita (which translates as 'Little Rock') to be very rustic with many of your accustomed conveniences not available, but nevertheless, you'll find the one-week stay refreshing.

But paraglider pilots are not the only sky bound creatures welcome here in this Spanish refuge, storks are quite welcome in the village as well. The Spanish are proud and protective of the large birds that nest here prior to their annual migration to west-central Africa. The nests span up to 5 feet and can be seen topping spires and poles all over town. If you're considering a migration to Spain, you can check out the flight center's website at www.flypiedrahita.com.

