



Picture 3.20 Goms, Valais/Switzerland. On this day the wind was far too strong for flying. Compare the cloud formation to the picture on the previous page.

Lee thermals, in the Alps are either on the south side of ridges near the northern boundary or in the lee of local valley wind systems. In the southern Alps the wind is generally local and south, since the mountains suck in so much air from the flatlands that the wind on the sunny south-facing slopes is almost always on. This means nice windward-side thermals!

By strong winds lee flying must be avoided altogether. It can be extremely turbulent and dangerous.

Standing on launch it is not always clear if the wind we're feeling coming up the face is the "real" macrometeorological wind or just a thermal passing through, see illustration 3.21.

As a rule of thumb we can stipulate that in "real" winds of up to 10km/h it is possible to use the thermal wind coming up the face to launch into, regardless of the wind direction. The thermals will generally not be too turbulent. By stronger winds the leesides should be avoided altogether.

Picture 3.21 The sun is shining from the left (west, afternoon) but the "real" wind is coming from the right (east). The sun causes big, strong thermals to flow up the west face, and it is easy to assume that all is well if we are not careful. But by watching the wind sock for a bit longer the real wind direction should become apparent and warn us that we're subject to lee thermal conditions. St. André les Alpes, France.

