

AGC Weekly News

Congratulations!

At the Central Districts Regional gliding competition at Waipukurau between 20 and 27 February, Auckland Gliding Club members did well, particularly John Robertson. Congratulation to all of you!

Open Class	Racing Class	Sports Class
1 Tim Bromhead	1 John Robertson	1 John Carter
2 Patrick Driessen	2 Alan Marcuse	2 Dennis Green
3 Tony van Dyk	3 David Moody	John Chittenden

Those interested in point scores can follow this link:

https://www.soaringspot.com/en_gb/2021-central-districts-regionals-waipukurau-waipukurau-2021/

Glories of the NZ Southern Alps

Peter Wooley

To see South Island's sprawling ranges for the first time, from a little airliner window at 30 000', is to be struck speechless with awe. Having spent 25 years flying among the rugged sandstone mountains of South Africa's south western Cape Province, I was still absolutely stunned by my first glimpse of the Southern Alps. Surely there is no other sight on Earth to compare?

In fulfilment of a long-time dream I never really thought would be realised, I booked myself in for a week-long mountain flying course with Kahu Soaring, operated by Milán Kmetovics, currently New Zealand's only commercial gliding instructor. Milán, in a small way therefore, fills the void left by the closure of Gavin Wills' Glide Omarama. The experience is similar, except at a fraction of the cost of one-on-one instruction.

Of the seven days I was there, we flew five, all blue except one. Six of the seven days were flyable. At the time, NZ was dominated by a nasty high pressure but even so, we traversed various mountain regions on every flight, the furthest extending to the Tasman Glacier below Mount Cook. Unfortunately, the famous wave eluded us, but it's something to look forward to.

During this week-long period, the thermals, though generous, proved to be consistently small and rough. Nevertheless, some carried up to 11 000', all this despite the typically hazy appearance of stable air. A bonus of flying here is the generous allocation of airspace, quite unlike what we are used to in North Island.

Without wishing to bore with too many names, our flights went something like this:



Razor-sharp peaks and afternoon sea breeze cloud moving in from the west coast

Day one we towed to Mt Cuthbert, also known as My Horrible, because someone once crashed up there. From there on to the Hawkdun Range, and north to the Grampian Mountains before crossing over upper Lake Benmore on the return to base. About 180km in around three hours. An exciting introduction to the area.

Day two we towed to a popular spot that the pilots call Magic Mountain on the Diadem Range – a longish tow but worth it. From there we headed northwards up the Barrier Range as far as Mt Huxley, then south along the Huxley Range along the Hunter River Valley, which leads into Lake

Hawea. Further south we traversed the St Bathans Range and from there returned to Magic Mountain, before heading back home. Approximately 200km in just over three hours.

Day three we again used Magic Mountain, on to the Huxley Range, crossing Lake Hawea and on to the McKerrow Range. From there we ventured north to the Bexley Range before turning south, over the Haast Pass and down the Makarora Valley, where we landed out just above the very top of Lake Hawea. Strange how on an otherwise good day you can just lose it! Just over 115km in a little under two hours. More about this out landing further on.

Day four was another launch via Magic Mountain, then north along the Barrier Range, across the Hopkins River to Mt Glenmary. From there we returned southward along the Ben Ohau Range, past Lake Ohau, on to the Benmore Range and finally a scenic tour of the Omarama area via the Hawkduns, with some low-level ridge soaring on the east side of the Buscot hills. Three hours, forty minutes and approximately 190km.



Day five – the highlight

Day five was yet another launch to Magic Mountain from where we ventured north along the Barrier Range, east to the Ben Ohau Range and into the Jollie River valley, where a serious

struggle took place, Milán getting us out of a hole with patience and skill. Sufficiently topped up again, we continued as far as the Murchison Glacier. From here we had superb views of Mt Cook, the Tasman Glacier with its piles of dark moraine, as well as Lake Tekapo. Returning south over the mountains, we skirted the east side of Lake Pukaki on final glide for Omarama. Even the Duo's long legs failed us in this, and we joined the foothills of the Benmore Range at rather low altitude. Luckily, there was a suitable strip nearby. Once again, Milán saved the day with skill and patience and we made a safe arrival on the lush green grass of Omarama airfield. Four hours forty-five minutes for 300km, but what an amazing flight! The highlight of the five.



Day five - Brian Savage in his ASW19 above the barren scree slopes
Photo Milán Kmetovics

The previous professional Glide Omarama tugs have been replaced, courtesy Keith Essex, with a brand-new Aerospool WT-9 Dynamic, powered by a 115hp Rotax 914 engine. It does the long tows to the outer jump-off points with ease. But we also had tows behind a Carbon Cub and a Super Cub.

Milán proved to be extremely patient. I had not flown a Duo before and was also unaccustomed to an ASI reading in knots. There is a certain style of soaring needed in these conditions where the pilot must sense the initial rush on entering the thermal and turn immediately. After a quarter turn the vario will confirm whether or not you have picked a proper thermal or just a small bubble. If it's only a bubble, move on, but if the vario is up for half the turn or more, stay there and refine your circle. The key is to feel the lift and turn before the instrument registers.

The spread of peaks, ranges, lakes and valleys can be bewildering for a pilot unfamiliar with the area, but each one has its name, and slowly you get a mental picture of the names and the layout of the terrain. It seemed daunting to think about what would happen should you over-extend yourself and find the air in which you are flying

has become somewhat stable. In actual fact, the valleys and surrounding plains have dozens of small strips, most of which can be aerotowed out of – although a road-retrieve can often be a tedious affair, as we discovered on day two.



Barren scree slopes, braided river valley and mountain peaks as far as the eye can see

The land out at Makarora was on the well-known “Piano Field” above Lake Wanaka. This is rather a long way from home, and here I experienced the only negative event during my stay in Omarama. We sadly discovered that none of the gliding folk at Omarama would retrieve us that afternoon. Not to be daunted, we hitched a ride to Wanaka with a most interesting Kiwi gentleman, and prevailed upon Mattias, one of Milán’s mountain climbing buddies, to drive us back to Omarama. Mattias and later their friend Charlie proved to be stalwart friends, and on the following morning we were all on the road at 06h00 with a trailer to retrieve the Duo. By 12h00 it was back at Omarama, rigged, cleaned and ready for launch – not a bad feat considering the circumstances.

Various Duo Discus gliders are available to fly at Omarama, as well as two singles, which I was told are little used at present. The particular Duo we flew in was pristine and belongs to the Omarama Gliding Club. It was recently acquired through Keith Essex from the Barron Hilton setup in the US, having approximately 600 hours on it. It had a nice Sage vario plus an LXNAV S100 system, and was also fitted out to clip an Oudie 2 straight in. As this was my first encounter with a Duo, I found it slow to roll and therefore difficult to coordinate in rough air while close to terrain. It was fortunate having a man in the back seat who has over 2000 soaring hours in this area.

Many of you will remember Milán from his stint at the Drury club. He is friendly, polite and above all, is thoroughly professional in both his practical

and theory instruction. I am planning to fly with him again (as soon as possible) for some local wave flying instruction before venturing out in a single seater to explore this magnificent area.

The costs? Not as much as you probably think. Instruction and glider for a week: \$3100; accommodation bed and breakfast \$60 per day; car rental from Queenstown \$20 per day. I chose a “farm stay” in the Lindis Pass, 10 minutes out of Omarama. Air NZ return costs are variable but generally pretty cheap. Aerotows vary depending on duration and aircraft being used – certainly not cheap (and a lot more than Drury’s supercheap \$60 tows), especially the long ones to Magic Mountain. In retrospect, worth every cent.



Another range, another valley Photo Milán Kmetovics

Just in case you have not been there before, Omarama is a tiny town in Otago’s Mackenzie Basin. Lots of trees and the surrounding mountain scenery make it an attractive place. Most necessities are available and there are all levels of accommodation, plus a Four Square mini-supermarket in case you are self-catering. Raising sheep is serious business in this part of the world, so it follows that the name of the establishment where the best coffee in NZ is served, in my opinion, is the Wrinkly Rams.



The Wrinkly Rams



The Mackenzie basin is seriously sheep orientated!

There is plenty more to do other than gliding. Activities like cycling (Omarama is on the Alps2Ocean Route), walking trails, rock climbing, ice climbing, kayaking, flights to Mount Cook or the glaciers by various types of aircraft from Pukaki airfield or Glentanner Park, scenic drives, e-foiling and much more.

If all this sounds a bit over the top – it is – and I can't wait to go back and fly those awesome mountains again, especially while the airspace is relatively quiet during this Covid period. Once Covid is better controlled and borders re-open, I expect there will be a mad rush of overseas pilots and tourists wanting to experience gliding at Omarama.



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For sale/wanted

ASH31Mi: Accident free, built in 2015, 30 engine hours, 600 hours airtime accumulated 2018-2020, flawless engine performance, five-year check/overhaul in 2020, complete documentation, aluminum Cobra trailer, LX 9070 etc. \$356 000.00. Serious inquiries only to Ross Gaddes +64274789123

Ventus 2a: S/N 10 Equipped with LX9050 with Flarm and control column unit. Maughmer winglets, refinished in 2008. Imported ex USA, no major damage history. Dittel FSG71M com and Trig TT21 Mode S (ADS-B out capable). Aluminium top Cobra trailer, wing wheel, tail dolly and tow-out bar. Re wired with LiFePo4 batteries. My partner Malcolm wishes to sell his share as he is no longer based in Auckland. I will either keep my 50% share or sell outright. This aircraft is one of the best performing gliders in 15m class yet is a delight to fly, even when tanked, and exceptionally easy to handle. They land short and rig in minutes.

MY PARTNER IS VERY KEEN TO SELL HIS SHARE. Contact me - Ross Gaddes - for more details +64274789123

Thanks to all those who have contributed to creating this edition. If there is anything you would like to share with the members via this newsletter, text or photographs, please e-mail me. I will be grateful for any contributions, whatever they may be.

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