



OGC Captain's Log ~ Full Moon 9th August 2025



Abe Kemp gets a mid-winter lesson from Malcolm Wright in Duo UO

The days are getting longer, and the first Westerlies have arrived:

A sure sign we are on the right side of winter and glide time will soon be upon us. In this issue of the Captains Log you will find a few mid-winter flying pics of our 'hangies' (a name given to hang glider pilots) and an interview with Craig Keenan. An insight into the early days of the Omarama Soaring Centre and the building of Omarama Airfield. And a hilarious story from the early days at Killamont Airfield.

Some dates to note in your diary:

University winch weekends: 16th, 17th August and 27th, 28th September. Join in the fun and get some currency flying in. No doubt OMA will be aerotowing too if the flying looks good.

Labour Weekend 25th, 26th and 27th October. This is a traditional OGC weekend when the camping ground comes to life and gliders are returned to their hangars. Our OGM will be at 7pm on Sunday 26th October.

The South Island Regionals are on from 15th to 27th November at Omarama. Come along to compete or join in at the back of the grid and get some awesome flying following our enthusiastic top guns. How about earning yourself a blue duck ~ Phil Plane is sure to be setting some tasks in Whio Glide during the Regionals.



An interview with Craig Keenan:

We all know Craig, many have taken a tow behind him. A witty little chap that has been part of the Omarama gliding scene since the early 1980's. Craig has never missed a summer holiday in Omarama since then. There are so many stories and so much flying history ~ Omarama has been a different journey for each and every one of us. Craig is a long-standing committee member of the Omarama Soaring Centre (OSC) and I wanted to pick his brain about this old organisation and the formation of Omarama Airfield Ltd. This interview is by no means a biography, nor is it intended to be an accurate record of the gliding history in OA. It is simply a story about gliding in paradise from a good bugger's point of view.

Craig was born with 'Spondyloepiphyseal dysplasia tarda' which left him crippled. He overcame his condition and has done heaps of flying all his life. Craig's teacher told him he will never be a pilot because of his eyesight. He found out glider pilots can wear glasses and learnt to fly at Wigram, gained his 3 diamonds in 1988 and represented New Zealand at the World Junior Gliding Championships in Cambrai, France in 1989, was a founding member of the syndicate that operated the first New Zealand owned open class glider, a Nimbus 3DM, this syndicate joined GNZ's membership as Rangiora Advanced Soaring Club, we had 9 members and one self-launch glider. He then moved on to power flying, sitting his PPL, CPL and eventually a power instructors rating. A two-season working holiday in England found him instructing at the Booker Gliding Club, Wycombe Airpark and Nympsfield, (Bristol and Gloucestershire Gliding Club)

For many years Craig was a small engine mechanic running his own business in Cashmere Road. At one point he had 97 lawn mowers for repair! He then spent some time at Rangiora Airfield repairing planes with Ross Marfell. Dave Tillman turned up and asked Craig: "Do you ever get sick of talking to spanners? Why don't you join me in the mortgage broker business". And that is what Craig does these days. Check out the cool pic!

The Omarama Soaring Centre was formed in 1971:

Craig kindly sent me a copy of the original OSC constitution where the objects of the association were established. 3a ~ "To provide airfields and the facilities for the furtherance and greater enjoyment of the gliding and other flying in New Zealand." It is a good read if you can find a copy. Craig told me this constitution is currently being rewritten. All South Island gliding clubs and the Wellington club became OSC members. Since then, several clubs have changed name, closed or amalgamated and the Auckland club has been added. Several different airfields were used in the early days: Berwin, Killamont, Wardell's (Sometimes known as Tara Hills) and even an old town strip directly behind the Omarama Memorial Hall. An original wind direction arrow from the old town strip can still be found on top of a lamp post there!



3.

Canterbury and Wigram members would stay at the shearer's quarters at Berwin Station and later Omarama Station. The Killermont airfield was formed and a club room shifted on site. Eion Coutts, Hugh Martin-Levenson (Hugo's Elevator is named after him) and Wayne Wilson from the USA along with many others were the driving force behind establishing these club rooms. Sue and Mike Banister installed the glass control tower. Rob Fisher and John Dickson built the Deck. This building is still on site today! Wardell's airfield is where the South Canterbury, North Otago (Hakataramea) and other clubs flew in summer. It was named after Dick Wardell, owner of Omarama Station who allowed gliding families to build huts along the irrigation stream. These huts are still standing today. Both these airfields eventually closed when Omarama Airfield became the primary airfield. An old house was shifted onto Omarama airfield as a general club rooms while the airfield was being developed. That house is still standing and is now the Pink Glider Café.

The terminal building was an old hangar owned by the Omarama Aviation Club. It housed a Cessna 172 and a Blanik. The hangar was not included in the deal with the Waitaki District Council, so Bill Walker did a deal with the aero club to build a new 5 space hangar if they gave us their old hangar. This deal was honoured and that's how we secured the Terminal Building.

The 1995 Worlds were centred at the Country Time Hotel. Trees were planted where the hangars are now to give competitors gliders shelter. Craig said they used petrol powered augers to dig the holes for these trees. He remembers Terry Delore and Doug White were sent flying when the auger hit a rock and the whole motor started spinning! All these trees had to be removed to build the current hangars! Nigel Ackroyd, Herb Familton, Tony Colins and many others were involved in building the original hangars and terminal building. The camp kitchen and amenity block were built by Greg Buckland and his team in 1993. Building Omarama Airfield was a huge effort by all concerned.

An email from Craig : 21 July 2025

The following is the text from an email Craig recently sent to OSC secretary Laurie Kirkham and OSC President Warren Dickinson. It encapsulates how Bill Walker, in 1987, registered Omarama Airfield Ltd and secured a 50% shareholding for the OSC. Thank you, Craig, for giving me permission to use this email. And a BIG thank you to all the people that put in the effort to create Omarama Airfield ~ a world class gliding destination.

"Good afternoon, all, I do go back that far and give you the broad details of what occurred. As you are all aware the facility we now have at Omarama was the brainchild of the late Bill Walker, Bill managed a deal with the Waitaki District Council (WDC) under the umbrella of OSC, for OSC to "acquire" a 50% ownership interest of the Omarama airfield. I attended that meeting at the council chambers in Oamaru along with several others from OSC's member clubs, Bill wanted good numbers at the meeting to prove the OSC had the capacity to meet the commitments it was intending to enter into with the council. There were two speakers putting OSC's application to the council, they were Bill Walker and Herb Familton (Herb was a WASC member and senior DOC employee so knew the council ways and protocols) The core of that agreement which was passed by council and agreed to at that meeting was that OSC would improve the value of the airfield to double its current value in return for its 50% ownership.

A joint company was subsequently formed with OSC and Council, it was a LATE – (Local Authority Trading Enterprise) This was later changed to the current ownership model as Council rules changed over time requiring the council to remove LATE's. (I'm not privy as to why that all had to happen – no doubt just bureaucratic stuff)

So OSC's member clubs (The members themselves) spent literally months and months and months tripping down to Omarama to attend Bill's working bees to create the increase in value agreed to and the facility you see today. A significant partner in all of this was Theo Newfield, Theo with his drainage business was a key player in Bill realising his vision, they were great mates and Theo just spent months on his digger laying all the pipework and electrical cabling for the whole venture. I can well remember Theo in a deeper trench for the airfield sewer line using his spade to remove the loose dirt that kept falling into the trench as the Omarama dirt is pretty much just dust and the sides of the trench kept caving in - I said what are you doing – Theo replied – "I'm a dirt artist"

4.

We had a lot of fun but boy it was a shit load of hard work for us all, when I say us all it wasn't a working bee of 10 or so they were 30+ and every weekend for ever – well it seemed that way at the time. The monies required to actually pay for all the bits required came from the wider OSC membership, many will remember buying a slot in the campground or buying a runway sprinkler, I rather suspect there was a shortfall of \$\$\$ and that between Bill, Theo and David Speight the financial gap got covered? Someone who also has extensive knowledge at that time is Bill's daughter Sonya – very much worth a chat if you see her at Omarama.

So the answer is the current \$209,000 is the number that got put on it all at the time the whole thing started, obviously the current value of the OSC 50% would be some 7-figure amount.

Regards
Craig”

Any words about the future for Gliding in Omarama?

“Billy Walker had a vision for Omarama.”

“A new vision for Omarama can only be achieved if we take the will of the membership with us.”



Craig showed me a photo of Omarama Airfield in 1995

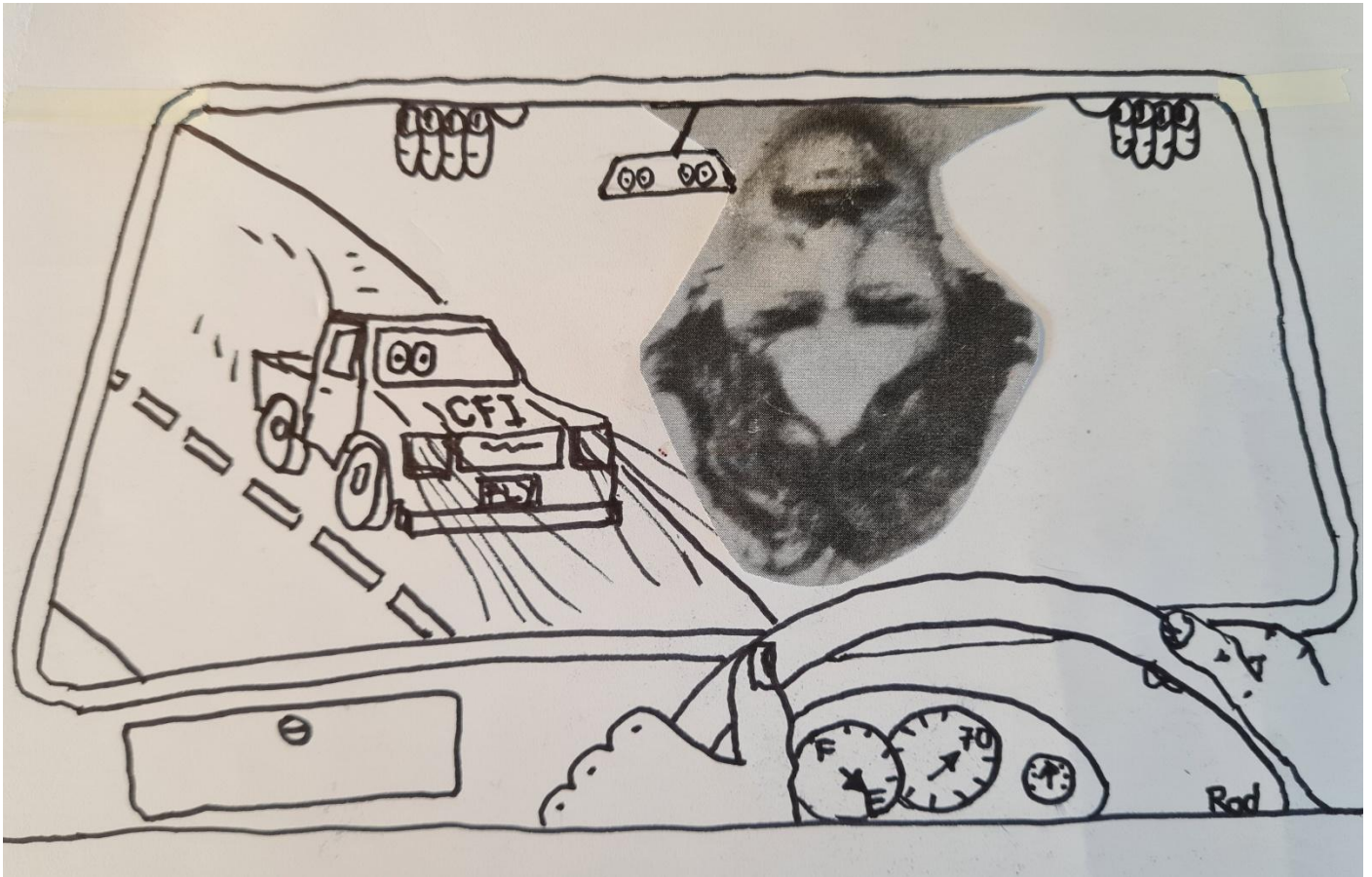
Trees where hangars are now. The Pink Glider building was the airfield club rooms. Some Chalets and the Camping Ground are built and the old hangar before it became the terminal building can be seen.

5.

Can you give us a funny story from Omarama gliding history?

YES! Was Craigs quick reply.

The story of retrieving John Dickson after flying 50kms in a K13 from Killermont to Windy Ridges was told.



“We nearly shit ourselves!” My sketch of what PT and Craig saw!

Craig, Peter Turvey and Brian Read (Roger’s brother) set off in Johns single cab Hilux Ute with the K13 trailer on tow. It was a difficult derig but eventually the K13 was in its trailer. The four of them squeezed into the cab and set off for a well-earned beer at Tekapo Pub. John was chatting up a flash looking blond in the pub and the night grew long. At some ungodly hour they set off driving back to Killamont. John and Brian needed a pee so they stopped on the side of the road somewhere near Little Ben just before Omarama. For a joke PT and Craig decided to drive off and leave them on the side of the road to make their own way home.

A few kms down the road Johns head suddenly appeared upside down looking straight through the front windscreen into the Hilux cab. “We nearly shit ourselves!” John had run after the rig and managed to climb into the rear of the glider trailer. He crawled along inside the trailer, through the front hatch and onto the Ute tray. Hanging on by his fingernails he managed to climb over the cab and give an evil stare while hanging upside down. At that very moment Roger Read, the CFI, was driving towards them with lights on full beam. He had headed out to try and find them. What a scene he drove into!

They all headed back and found Brian hobbling along the road with a twisted ankle. He had failed to mount the moving K13 trailer! Eventually they all arrived back at the shearers’ quarters safely. Next morning Roger had them in the club rooms at Killermont reprimanding them for being irresponsible with club equipment.

6.

Pictures by Marney Holthouse at Killermont Airfield around the same time as Craigs story ~ early 1980's.



Roger Read, Ray Lynskey and Peter Turvey



Neal Irwin, John Dickson and Craig Keenan



Rob Fisher and John Dickson

7.



Killermont Airfield's new Club Rooms and Coutsie's 'Monolith' he drove over Omarama Saddle.



The new deck at Killermont.



Shifting rocks in the hot sun ~ a favourite gliding past time in Omarama years ago!

8.

Mid-winter flying with the Hangies in Omarama:

Not a cloud in the sky, not a breath of wind and exactly no lift ~ just beautiful ice smooth air.



Hangies Abe Kemp, John Smith, Hagen Breuggeman and Rod Stuart enjoy some mid-winter flying.



John Smith took a tow to nearly 6000' over Totara Peak.

I studied his track on Weglide and calculated his climb rate behind OMA was just over 600 fpm (6 knots).
His glide down in still air averaged 150 fpm (1.5 knots) He flew for 30 minutes.



Hagen enjoyed two flights in ND and can't wait to fly his ASW20

8.



Rob Mieli was our tow pilot for the day in ZK-OMA. He made an awesome Facebook video this day. Check it out here: <https://www.facebook.com/reel/24123713067237168>



Terry Jones had two test flights in Hagens ASW20 and says it flies in perfect trim.



Malcolm caught CNC arriving in Omarama today. Our back up tow plane is here!



The gliding huts beside the old Wardell's Airfield still stand today.

Thank you Fiona Chamberlain who took this very cool (-5°C) sunrise shot, Monday 4th August 2025

Hot News!

CNC has arrived in Omarama. Just in time for OMA's annuals currently being carried out in Wanaka.

Plans for the season ahead are in place and the Omarama weather is sure to play ball.

Time for you to prepare and plan for some fun days on the airfield this summer!

Happy landings

Rod

Links:

Email: flying@omarama.com

Check out our website: <https://www.omarama.com/>

Check out our Facebook Page and 'follow': <https://www.facebook.com/Omarama.gliding>

Check out our Airfield Calendar: <https://www.omarama.com/general-8>

Here you will find flying weeks, course dates and competition dates.

Check out the OGC Planner: [Click here to view the OGC planner](#) See when club gliders are available.

A new booking system is currently being developed and will be implemented before the season starts.

Join our club WhatsApp group: Omarama Gliding Club ~ All current members can add others to this group.

Text your first name to Rod 0274344822 ~ ask and I will join you. Please keep your posts and pics on topic.

Get our weekly email newsletter: <https://www.pilots.omaramaairfield.nz/Pilots/OmaramaMailing>

Note: Our weekly email is currently having a winter holiday. The Captain's Log and emails will keep you informed.

Download the Omarama App: Search for **Omarama App** in Google Play or Apple App Store

