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from the editor

february–april 2014

I am very excited about this issue of the magazine. We have so many interesting stories to share. We've even gone out on a limb and printed two stories which aren't even about gliding – well not our sort of gliding anyway. Ultralight gliders, as reported by Klaus Burkhard may or may not be the start of a trend, but they do look fun and their low cost and ease of launch will make them very appealing to some. The real 'not gliding' story though is the epic 'bivouac' paragliding adventure of Thomas De Dorlodot and Ferdy van Schelven. It's not our sort of gliding, but it's unlikely that we'll ever have a flying adventure like their one. When I heard of their length-of-the-South-Island challenge a year ago, I just knew it was something I wanted to cover in *SoaringNZ*. The new format makes this possible.

Thank you to the people who sent feedback on the new magazine. We have taken your comments on board regarding font size and colour and general readability, and have taken steps to improve this. Let us know how we are doing.

We have lots of our sort of gliding adventures in this issue too. Jim Payne has written about his 2700 km flight in South America and in a literal high for *SoaringNZ*, we have the report on Sebastian Kawa's attempt to soar the world's highest mountains in the Himalayas. Despite all the Kawa team's effort, they only managed to get one decent flight in before they had to leave, but the story of the history of flights in the region is a really good read. The team is heading back to Pokhara about the time this magazine goes to press. We'll be able to bring you that story in the next issue.

We've got local contests too, the Nationals of course, along with the Youth Soaring Development Camp and my son Alex's report on Joeyglide – the Australian Junior Nationals. Our young people did really well and are setting themselves up nicely for the World Junior Nationals in two years' time. We need the country to get behind them and help support their efforts.

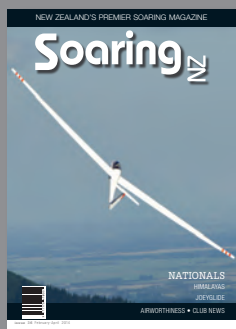
Just when everything seems fine, we are reminded that gliding can be dangerous. January 19th was a bad day for New Zealand gliding. We lost two people to accidents. In Auckland, Trent Miller died when he crashed on the Drury Hills, while earlier in the day, Martin Lowen died in a tow plane accident while flying out of the Canterbury Gliding Club's Springfield site. It hurts. It just feels tragic and awful. The New Zealand gliding community is so small, we're like a family and to lose



On top of the world.

people like this is dreadful. Our hearts go out to the families and close friends of these two men, who are hurting so much more than we are.

SoaringNZ and the GNZ executive wish to point out that the CAA investigations are underway and that we do not know, or are likely to know, the causes of these accidents for some time. People are talking about these accidents and potential causes, so we have responded to this with a safety article on towing upsets and have one in the works on low speed stall/spins. These are valid safety concerns which we are following up. Our goal, of course, is to make our pilots safer.



Canterbury's Janus soaring over the Springfield ridge on Waitangi Day. Photo John McCaw.

next issue

Next issue: Club Class Nats, Central District, Drury contests and a Himalaya expedition.

revised magazine deadlines

Deadline for Club News, articles and pictures is 31 March and 10 April for advertising.



Photo: Sebastian Kaywa



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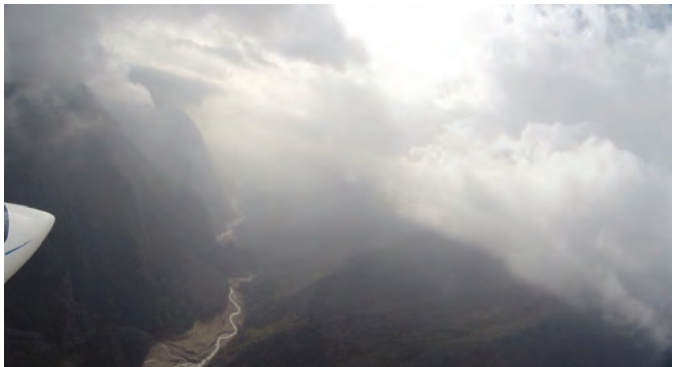
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We need you to come home in one piece. Do your checks. DI your 'chute, run through your 'Eventualities' drills for all stages of your flight. Stay alert, think ahead, drink water, use sunscreen, wear a hat.

I'll stop now, I'm sounding like your mother. Stay safe.
Jill McCaw



On top of the HIMALAYAS

BY TOMASZ KAWA TRANSLATED BY MARTA NAJFIELD
PHOTOS SEBASTIAN KAWA

Last year was extremely successful for Polish pilot Sebastian Kawa. He started the year winning the World Championships in the windy mountains of Argentina. During the European summer, following a dramatic flight in the Alps, he became European Champion in the 18m Class, which was followed by his win in Standard class in Ostrow. He is now in possession of 15 gold medals from the main world gliding events. He finished the year with a stunning achievement – he climbed the Himalayas in a glider!

While Sebastian has blogged extensively about his Himalayan adventures, they are written in Polish, meaning most worldwide gliding enthusiasts haven't been able to read them. Although he only managed one successful flight, the story of the expedition is fascinating. This report, written by Sebastian's father Tomasz is an exclusive to *SoaringNZ* and is one of the first to be published in English.

Human nature is characterised by exploring new frontiers and reaching for goals set in our dreams. One of these goals was inspired years ago by a documentary exposing impressive wave clouds in Patagonia. Back then, Sebastian had no chance to face this challenge. Some others did though. It was only three years ago when Sebastian was able to make his dream come true and enjoy exploring the highest mountain waves in the atmosphere. Nothing was ever to be the same again, and his dreams turned to the Himalayas.

HISTORICAL ATTEMPTS TO FLY OVER THE HIMALAYAS

It is not a coincidence that not even birds attempt to fly over these rocky giants and no human being has ever tried to reach the top of the world in a glider before. To think about trying it could be even described as arrogant. No one has ever flown over these mountains without the assistance of an engine. Analyzing maps and satellite images alone creates a feeling of fear. The scale and wildness of the gigantic barrier between freezing Tibet and Siberia, and the hot and moist Deccan and Indian Ocean induce fearful respect. There are numerous topographic and meteorological traps hidden in the shapes of the rocks. The very first powered flight over Mount Everest was conducted in 1933. The purpose built Westland PV-3 with 630 HP engine was flown by Lord Clydesdale. During his first attempt, extremely strong downdrafts pushed him several hundred meters below the tops. He was forced to try again from the other side and finally succeeded. A second pilot who was preparing for the challenge pulled out, even though the winds were only about 100 km/h.

The French organised a gigantic and extremely expensive trip to the Himalayas in 1979. They engaged 1400 locals to carry 25 tons of equipment to the summit of K2. It all resulted in Jean Marc Bovin's hang glider flight down from 7600 meters. Ten years later the same pilot flew down from Mount Everest in his paraglider.

Another attempt took place in 2004, when Angelo Arrigo

was towed in his hang glider up to about 8700 m. The turbulence encountered during the summit approach broke the towrope.

In 2011, paraglider pilot Pokhary Bobu Sunuwar together with his guide Lakpa Sherpa, climbed Mount Everest on foot and flew down, covering the distance of about 35 km to Nouché Bazar.

A successful helicopter flight over Mount Everest took place in 2005. No permission had been issued for that flight and the landing on top of Mount Everest caused a huge avalanche and some damage to the summit rocks. The controversy surrounding this event caused a lot of trouble for us when we tried to gain permission for our attempt.

Polish paraglider pilots had already been exploring the rocks in the Pokhara region. One of them made it all the way up to the snow line, where he landed and was planning on continuing higher the next day. It didn't work out though. There was a problem for him as well as some climbers on a nearby mountain. The wind picked up and took parts of their equipment, including the paraglider, with it. There is no mucking around up there!

Several flights have been attempted with motor paragliders, resulting in many fatalities. The biggest price is still being paid by rock climbers though – over 1100 fatalities on Mount Everest so far.

THE POTENTIAL OF THE MOUNTAINS

Most of the year, good updraft conditions for powerless flights can be expected in the northern parts of the Himalayas. The huge rocky barrier stops the moist summer monsoonal flows from the ocean and can therefore create mountain waves over Tibet. Because of generous sun activity, good thermal conditions off the rocks are also to be expected. Unfortunately, the Great Wall was built many years ago and even today that area is not accessible.

The southern part of the Himalayas disappears in moist monsoonal cloud cover and thunderstorms from May until the



"Someone has to be the very first one to step on the ice cover and check if it can carry the load."

end of summer and re-appears again in October for the cold part of the year. In the peak of the winter season, the jet stream descends all the way to the tops of the mountains. The lower parts of the mountains are hidden in freezing fog and low cloud for weeks at a time. Upper winds are blowing parallel to the main ridge from the west to the east. One thing is for sure – there is no chance for Patagonian conditions here. On the other hand though, the ridges perpendicular to the wind create massive rotors and waves reaching very high into the atmosphere. The sunny exposed rocky parts should generate decent thermal updrafts and ridge soaring conditions. It could create a fascinating alternative for winter flying and a spectacular arena for gliding competitions. No one had ever explored it.

BE THE FIRST ONE

"Someone has to be the very first one to step on the ice cover and check if it can carry the load." Still, we were short of financial means and tools. There are no tugs in Nepal, so we needed a self-launching glider. We didn't have one and this was the reason for our dream remaining a dream for a bit longer.

Last autumn, a German businessman agreed to lend us his ASH 25 with a 50 HP Wankel engine. At the same time, Prince Alvaro de Bourbon offered Sebastian his motorglider 'Taifun', in which he had made it to Nepal years ago but because of weather conditions couldn't get any closer to the rocky giants. He and his co-pilot had been trying to approach them but every time were pushed back down and caught in massive turbulence which, in the end, stopped them from further attempts. Sebastian's goal though was getting up there without the help of the engine, so he passed on the Prince's offer and decided to proceed with the German ASH 25.

Because chances like this one do not last long, we had to get going immediately before the mountains were overtaken by hurricanes. We started the whole project with next to nothing and the help of Krzysztof Trzesniowski and Slawek Piela and a few others. We had to organise financing and sponsorships, transport of the glider and obtaining all necessary permits from the Nepalese government. Fundraising and sponsors covered one third of the costs, the rest was up to the participants. We kept moving forward like a blind man in the forest, because none of us had any idea of the politics and bureaucracy in that part of the world. We were getting very imprecise and conflicting information from numerous sources. We ended up having to tap into diplomatic circles to be able to move on with the project. At this stage, we'd like to express our huge appreciation to the paraglider pilots and contacts arranged by Polish instructor Tadeusz Franaszczuk, who was instructing Nepalese pilots on M28 years ago. One of his former students is now the leader of the Nepalese Flight Squadron.

We had many problems to face. The glider had to be equipped and modified for high altitude flying. We had to develop our own portable oxygen refilling equipment and organise medical assistance. Sebastian had to create his own navigation systems containing self-generated satellite maps and arrange for meteorological coverage developed by J. Elmer



ASH 25, at last in Pokhara. Photo: Avia Club Nepal



Machhapuchhare. We made it! Lift from the rock and rotor behind it.

from Estonia. In all this Sebastian benefitted from good relationships with experts and friends established over the years. Only hours before loading the glider container on the ship I decided to build a ramp for loading and un-loading of the container. The ramp saved us lots of hassle in Nepal, where there were no cranes available to unload the containers.

IT HAD BEEN EASIER BACK IN MARCO POLO'S TIME

Transport turned out to be one of the biggest challenges. The Silk Route is extremely dangerous these days. Air transport is out of the question. The only remaining way is by sea, but you still have to use 800 km of crowded Indian roads and then 300 km of roads in Nepal to get from Calcutta to Pokhara. Covering such a distance with a glider trailer in Europe is a piece of cake. After a deep analysis of road conditions, we came to the conclusion that even if we managed not to get run over, to dodge holy cows and other similar obstacles, there would not be much left of a glider trailer and the insurance company would not be happy. The easiest way would be hiring a truck full of hay and sand bags and transporting the glider in the middle of it. We were not sure what the insurance company would think about that. We could have used train transport but the rails end before the Himalayas. In the end, we decided to leave the glider in the container and get the whole container delivered. We figured that was the safest way of transporting the fragile glider.

We were extremely disappointed with the delivery company. The first estimate was to have the glider delivered at the end of October. For some reason, the container went via Singapore and ended its journey in Calcutta. We had to organise everything from the beginning again and finally got the glider to Nepal by Christmas. It was a nightmare.

Before we departed for the trip, Sebastian managed to obtain a permit to fly in Nepal, beginning in November. Natasza Shrestha, a Russian lady who married a Nepalese doctor and is now living there and running Avia Nepal Club in Pokhara, was a huge help to us. Natasza and all her staff took very good care of us. The permit was approved only because she decided to extend the club's profile beyond paragliding, hang gliding and GA, by adding gliding to their activities.

And then a tragedy occurred. Natasza's son Stefan was killed in a fatal aircraft accident. Things got worse. Nepal was in the middle of an election campaign and because of some political disagreements the country basically stopped. Bombs were exploding, people were protesting, the military was ready to go against its own citizens, as has happened there before.

No one in Nepal had ever seen a glider and they didn't want to believe that flying without an engine was possible. The expectation was that we would never leave the airspace sector provided for paragliders. We started fighting for permission and nobody was able to get us through the documentation. The political situation in the country wasn't working to our benefit either. We had to admit that it was as abstract for them as it would be for us if someone claimed to be coming from the Russian border in a space ship and wanted to fly over the Polish mountains without an engine, taking off from hundreds of kilometres away. It was a miracle that we finally managed to find a way up the political ladder. It tested our patience and diplomatic abilities to the very limits. We were finally in possession of all the required documents at the beginning of December. This was when we received a call from Prince Alvaro de Bourbon from Spain, who was monitoring our misery, to let us know that it took him over six months to get everything organised back in the days when he went to fly in Nepal, even with the support of Nepal's king.

The Mountain Wave Project organized by Klaus Ohlmann and his team faced a true disaster. The plan was to examine the condition of the glaciers, measure the level of impurity in the atmosphere and explore the dynamic currents over the Himalayas, using two purpose-built and equipped motor gliders. They invested huge amounts of money with numerous institutions, including the head of the country. It all looked perfectly prepared and sealed, with a document folder of over 500 pages. As soon as the whole team reached their destination and Klaus Ohlmann and his wife Sidonie brought their gliders to Nepal, they found themselves stuck at the border. Disappointed with frustration from hitting the brick wall over and over again, most of the team members gave up and returned home. The very determined Klaus Ohlmann stayed and continued fighting. A few days after us, he also succeeded and obtained his permit. He brought his motor glider to Pokhara and joined us. We became friends.

No one in Nepal had ever seen a glider and they didn't want to believe that flying without an engine was possible.

THERE IS NO POLISH – GERMAN WAR

The very complicated history of Europe will always cause someone to try to stir up the situation. This is the reason some of the media were trying to portray the fact that Sebastian and Klaus were in Nepal at the same time, as a Polish – German battle over the Himalayas. The facts couldn't be further from this. A glider and a motor glider are two totally different categories. Sebastian was flying a German ASH-25, rented from a German pilot and equipped at the German factory. The engine enabled him to self-launch but nothing beyond that. Sebastian's goal was to explore meteorological conditions in the Himalayas for future soaring possibilities. On the other side, Klaus and his team were there for scientific reasons, utilising Stemme S-10 motor gliders, coincidentally built in Poland. Because of the trouble experienced getting in, the Mountain Wave Project had been delayed. To give the whole journey meaning, Klaus decided to stay in Nepal and explore the mountain wave conditions. He is undoubtedly the wave master, and was in possession of a motor glider that enabled him to reach any mountain in the area using the engine and get back to the airfield. He could also switch the engine on and off as much as he needed it. This ability is essential in the Himalayas, where rotors seem to work only from very high altitudes and contacting them without the use of an engine is very complicated.

CHRISTMAS MIRACLE

The joy of having all the permits didn't last long. We still didn't have the glider and it arrived at Pokhara exactly three days prior to our departure. To make it even worse, the weather wasn't co-operating at all. It was drizzling and freezing fog filled all the valleys. Despite all that, we rigged the glider on December 19th, 2013 and Sebastian and I went up for a pioneer flight over the Himalayas. We took flowers with us and dropped them out of the little window for all those who paid the highest price for their love and passion for the mountains. It is incredible how many people have stayed there forever...

The next day was raining again, so we just had a short flight to practice the procedures and taxiing. The whole procedure of getting the glider on and off the runway couldn't take more than one minute and although the glider only has one wheel, the officials demanded that all the ground manoeuvres should be done with no assistance. We convinced them to compromise: Aleksiej Maksymov was allowed to run the wing, plus one person was allowed to put on or remove the tail dolly.

On the last day, we met the officials and media one more time. The sky started clearing up a bit. We were not expecting any great, high flights, so Sebastian and his student Krzysztof Strama jumped into the glider without even putting proper clothes on and off they went. In the meantime, a tiny gap in the cloud cover appeared, revealing the nearby hills. Some ridge soaring was possible. Sebastian flew along for about 30 km and approached the high mountains. It was like playing with fire because the gap could close at any time. The frustration and desperation were strong and removed the remains of his self-preservation instinct. Keeping in mind the wind direction, Sebastian didn't fly directly towards the rocks. Any downdraft there could have pushed the glider to the point of no return. Instead, he spotted a little 'bump' in the stratus clouds. It was spot on. The lift was either coming from a rotor, or a ridge

hidden in the cloud and took him up to 3800 m. He could now allow himself a cautious approach towards Macchapucchre. He decided to head towards a sharp rocky edge and again moved one step ahead; he contacted the ridge. That was it! He first got very close to the slopes using ridge lift and then got a brutal kick from the rotor. The next rotor made all the variors go off the scale.

Annapurna was testing the structural strength of the glider and reminding everyone that she has kept half of those who have ever dared to step on her slopes forever. It was about time to leave this brutal and unfriendly environment and head for the calm wave areas. The wind was picking up with height and reached 170 -180 km/h, gusting to 200 km/h. Despite the hurricane, the increased true airspeed of the glider at high altitudes enabled Sebastian to penetrate into the wind over the wide Kali Gandaki valley. The valley was full of clouds being carried from Tibet and travelling at high speeds. It was getting cold...freezing cold. The electronic instruments stopped working. Even the altimeter froze – it is a winter altimeter. The ice was covering the canopy and the oxygen systems were only working on and off, and required warming up under the pilots' arms. The temperature dropped down to -30°C and then -40° and the boys were wearing casual pants and sneakers.

Dhaulagiri peak, for a long time considered the highest



Everest under our wing.

It was getting cold ... freezing cold.
The electronic instruments stopped working.

mountain in the world, welcomed the glider with excessive turbulence and Sebastian decided not to explore the rotors, which were forming a line behind the mountain at 10 000 m. They turned back and the ground speed was showing 400 km/h. The visibility was incredible and allowed the view of the whole Himalayas and huge areas of Tibet. From that altitude, Tibet's mountain ranges looked like an accumulation of sand dunes in the Gobi desert. Mount Everest was just 30 - 40 minutes flight away but Sebastian had to obey the flight sector rules. The view towards 'home' was bad. All the clouds had merged and were now forming a thick, steady layer.

In the meantime, I was experiencing fear beyond belief on the deserted airfield. We'd lost radio contact with Sebastian about fifteen minutes into his flight and could observe the hills becoming more and more obscured by low cloud and even fog in proximity to the ground. Being aware of the risks, my imagination was generating the worst possible scenarios. I got Sebastian back on the radio in the evening, as he reported

he was descending from 19,000 ft. My world was beautiful and bright again. Almost like we had ordered it, the sky opened up for a moment, creating a little hole over a nearby mountain. The glider could safely come down. Before I even got the confirmation from Sebastian I sent the message out to the world: "He made it!"

Klaus and Aleksiej also flew on the same day. They climbed through the clouds up to 5000 m using the engine and contacted the rotor off Annapurna. They shut down the engine there and continued until they hit a horrifying downdraft that was right on the structural limits of their glider. It rearranged the whole cockpit interior and damaged the oxygen system. Klaus managed to fix it in-flight but lost so much height that they were forced to start up the engine again. Sebastian passed information on to them about a gentle wave area giving 10 kts of lift.

Our team is heading back to Nepal in the middle of February 2014 to finish off the exploration project.

Sebastian Kawa is the first person ever to climb the Himalayas in a glider and Klaus Ohlmann is the first pilot to explore the top of the world in a motor glider!

SoaringNZ will bring you the report of the 2014 expedition as soon as Tomasz writes it for us.

