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# from the editor

may-july 2014

**O**f all the special things I have discovered about the sport of gliding in the thirty plus years I've been involved in it, I think one of the best is that every single time I have met one of my heroes, they have turned out to genuinely nice people who have been equally as pleased to meet me.

Terry Delore was a gliding legend long before I met him. Now he and his family are some of my closest friends. Likewise, my meeting with women's world record holder Yvonne Loader has developed into a lovely friendship. Some of my best soaring flights have been with either Yvonne or Terry and I have spent many happy hours in their company, on the ground as well as in the air. I met Steve Fossett when he was here and liked him immensely. At events I have met world record holders, world champions, famous authors, their helpers and supporters and all the rest of everyone involved. There is something about gliding people...

The gliding community has farewelled two exceptional members in recent months. I never met Wynn Craven but I bet we would have got on like a house on fire. Not only would we have had gliding in common, but we had the magazine. Wynn was the man who started New Zealand's original gliding journal, the *Gliding Kiwi* back in 1955. He was extremely proud of what GK grew into. *SoaringNZ* has built on the platform of the *Kiwi*, providing regular articles on gliding events here and overseas. I would have like to have met Wynn, to talk about how far we've come.

Dick Georgeson was a huge gliding legend. In fact, I don't think you could get legends much bigger than Sholto Hamilton Georgeson. His daughter said at his funeral, that a man with a name like that had to be larger than life. I probably met Dick around the time I met Terry and Yvonne, back when I was first involved in the Canterbury Gliding Club in the mid '90s. Dick's own flying was starting to taper off but his interest in the sport didn't. Once I started *SoaringNZ*, I could count on a phone call from him within days of each issue coming out, to discuss the articles and talk about what was happening in gliding around the country. He would always start and end the conversation with assurances of what a great job I was doing. I have to say, I liked hearing that.

When we started Youth Glide, both in Canterbury and later nationwide, Dick was passionately interested. He wanted to



Dick Georgeson with Jerry O'Neill at the opening of the Canterbury Gliding Club's new Springfield glider field last year. Jerry and Dick were two of the three men who funded the original project. They all 'helped'.

know what the young people were doing and he delighted in hearing of their achievements. He wanted to know how he could help. When the Canterbury Gliding Club needed a new home, Dick stepped up and helped. With gifts of money, with his time and his interest, Dick helped.

Dick's early flights into the wave over the Mackenzie Basin were responsible for creating the sport that we know today. When Dick first did it, no one had any concept of what the wave was, or what it would do to a pilot and his puny craft. Dick went (to borrow a classic quote), where no man had gone before. He didn't even know if the glue holding his glider together would



Frank Saxton over Lake Station, Nelson Lakes. Photo Frank Saxton.

## next issue

Next issue: Grand Prix, Sisteron, France. Our team at the Worlds, Lezno, Poland. Sunseeker Duo.

## magazine deadlines

Deadline for Club News, articles and pictures is 10 August and 20 August for advertising.



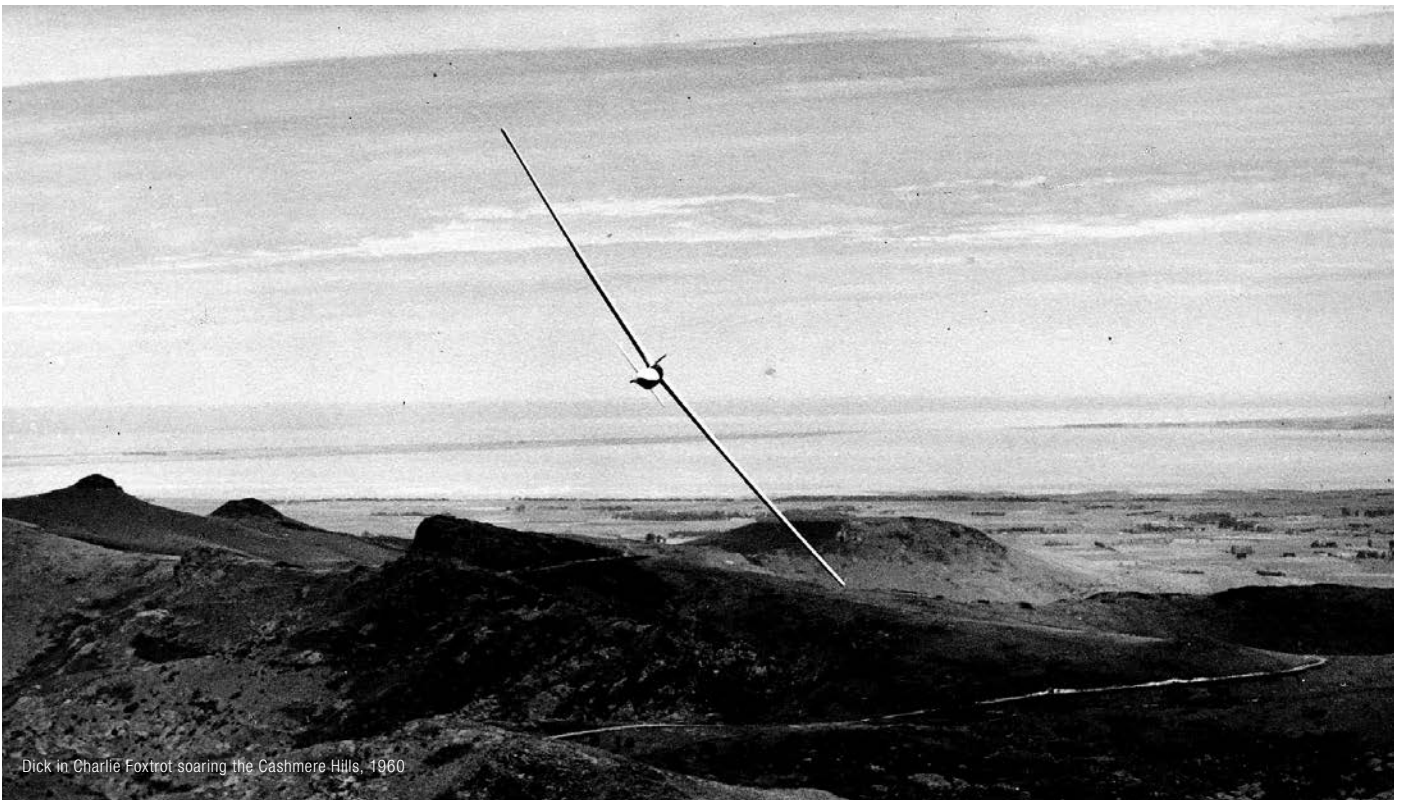


# DICK GEORGESON

Sholto Hamilton 'Dick' Georgeson MBE

7 MAY 1922 – 27 MARCH 2014

BY GAVIN WILLS



Dick in Charlie Foxtrot soaring the Cashmere Hills, 1960



Yachting became a late blooming passion for Dick and his family.

Dick Georgeson passed away in March after a long and fulfilling life. The following article is adapted from the eulogy read by his cousin and friend, Gavin Wills, at Dick's funeral. Dick's funeral was a rare event – a funeral for an elderly man that was standing room only; a funeral that was a happy, celebratory occasion and didn't involve a single prayer. Dick would have loved it.

Flying from Wigram in his Kestrel – 1970s



Dick was an avid motorcyclist.



With Helen at Wardells in Omarama

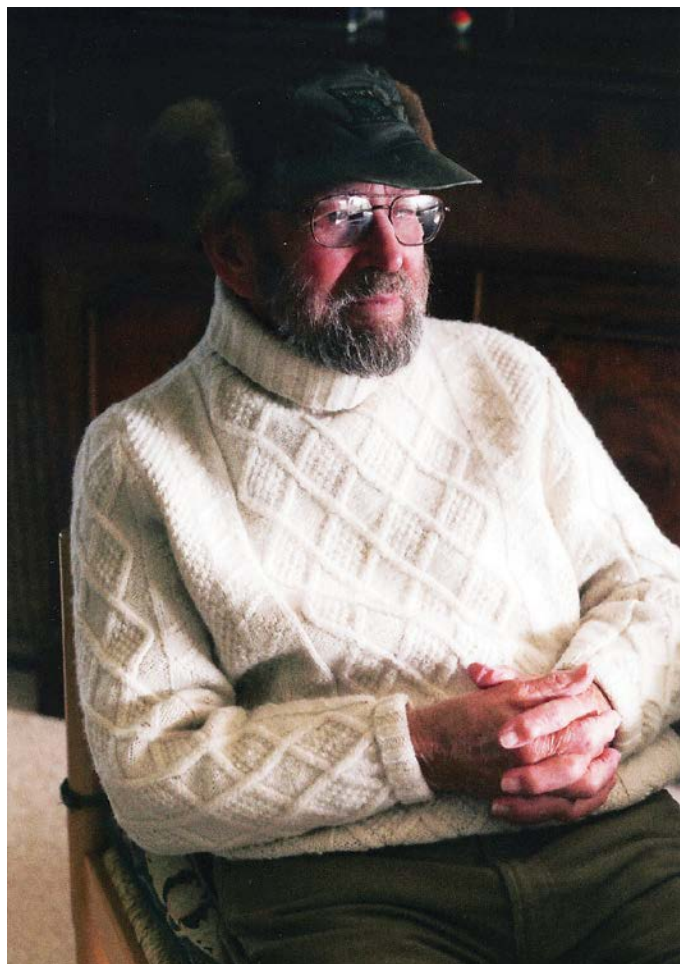


Just about to take off for Taieri and new Absolute Altitude, Gain of Height and Distance records, March 1953

## Winning, for Dick, was a great motivator,

but it was the adventures he had and the people he met along the way that for him, counted more than just winning.

Soaring with cousin and fellow gliding legend Gavin Wills



**D**ick Georgeson was a lucky man because he had a dream. It was a childhood dream of flying, born under the lenticular wave clouds of his native Mackenzie Country, in the centre of the South Island.

When Dick returned home to his Uncle Bill Hamilton's Irishman Creek sheep station in 1948, having learnt to fly gliders in England, his dream became a mission: to explore the atmospheric waves that he now understood formed the great lenticular clouds of his childhood. These clouds are what we call the Nor'west Arch.

We now know that these atmospheric waves can be monsters over 90,000 feet high and that they can stretch for thousands of kilometres. In 1950, Dick had little idea of any of this. Worldwide, the number of people who knew anything about atmospheric waves could be counted on the fingers of one hand. Aeroplanes had been around for 40 years but they rarely flew above 10,000 ft. Exploring wave in engineless gliders was unheard of and had not been considered by anyone else.

So it was in 1950, when Dick imported the second glider to be registered in NZ and the first to be based in the South Island. It was a tiny wood and fabric thing called a Slingsby Prefect. Restored, it now hangs in the foyer of the Queenstown airport. This little open-cockpit glider would be Dick's first tool of wave exploration.

Dick was prepared to fly by himself and without an engine, into an unknown, harsh environment that was oxygen deficient, low in pressure, and dominated by gale force winds and bitter cold. In fact it was an Antarctic-like environment but without breathable air. Dick knew that his goal of soaring successfully into the waves over Irishman Creek would be a test of equipment

design and reliability, as well as his own skills and judgment.

It was this mission and this opportunity that led him to a life in gliding; a life where he reached the extreme leading edges of his chosen sport. I want to briefly outline how gliding was shaped by Dick, and how gliding in turn shaped the man.

First of all, it was one hell of an adventure. As it was for those explorers who set off from Europe to prove the earth was round not flat, there was a lot to learn. Dick had to figure out how to safely launch the glider on which his life depended, how to fly it alone like a hawk and how to manage and repair the frail craft when back on the ground. To do this, he needed help from all kinds of people – a lot of help. Such was Dick's enthusiasm for gliding other men and women joined him on his journey and then they found themselves soaring like eagles or working like beavers, or often both. Indeed, the newly formed Canterbury Gliding Club, inspired by Dick's exploits, began to blossom and to grow during these golden years of gliding.

Dick's inspirational enthusiasm for gliding transferred into his everyday life. His enthusiasm for life and the joy of living was a notable trademark that he exhibited right to the end.

In 1950 he was 28 years old. Think of him in his open-cockpit glider being blown up the steep slopes of Mount Edward near Lake Tekapo and then, connecting with wave for the first time, soaring to over 10,000 feet high, where he was blown backwards in freezing cold, gale force winds. Realising he could not get home to Irishman Creek against the head wind, he had a stroke of genius. Ever keen to impress a lady, Dick turned downwind to land at Fairlie, where his then girlfriend, Sheena Elliott, was throwing a party. Although he landed nicely in the adjacent paddock, the wind was so strong he couldn't get out of



With his second wife Anna Wilson



Dick spent time with Steve Fossett when the Perlan project was in NZ.



Dick and friends



Early gliding camp in the Mackenzie at Simons Hill, Christmas 1950.



Jetboating was the family passion, invented by Dick's uncle and adopted father Bill Hamilton.

the glider and had to wait for an hour and a half for the party to break up and for help to arrive. Perhaps Dick realised then that gliders might be of limited use for attracting girls!

Dick really was a world pioneer of distance flying in wave. In the US, Dick's friend, meteorologist, Dr Joachim Keuttner, had used wave to climb to great heights before turning downwind to gain distance before landing. Dick knew that if he did that in NZ he would end up floating in the sea somewhere near Chile. So, he figured out how to surf the waves across the wind, like dolphins riding the face of an ocean wave.

His first demonstration of this was in 1953, with his second glider, the pre-war Weihe which he had bought from his mentor and friend Phillip Wills. Climbing in waves up to 22,000 feet, he surfed this beautiful and delicate craft from Christchurch to Dunedin. The three hour flight was hailed by those who knew as the world's first wave flight to be made cross-wind instead of downwind. It opened the door for more record flights from Dick and eventually the way for glider pilots around the world to make flights of over several thousand kilometres long.

By now, Dick was excited - he knew he was on to something and that right here at home was the place to do it. This was the beginning of adventure aviation as we now know it. Dick was the chief adventurer, the one to aspire to and the one to beat. Gliding was as competitive then as it is now, and before long there were records to break and races to be won.

Winning, for Dick, was a great motivator, but it was the adventures he had and the people he met along the way that for him, counted more than just winning. He never forgot someone who helped out with his exploits and many who did became lifelong friends.

Dick achieved his first world record in 1960, by reaching an altitude of 36,100 ft in his Skylark 3f. Here he demonstrated courage in the face of great danger, determination and his extraordinary tenacity. At 17,000 feet he entered cloud and for the next hour slowly climbed higher using primitive cloud flying instruments and a recycled WWII oxygen system.

In the cloud he saw nothing and it was wet, as well as windy and cold. At 27,000 ft, still in cloud, the lift died and he stopped climbing. Not high enough - so what did he do? He dived forward at speed into the cloudy unknown. Losing 10,000 vertical feet in the dive, he broke out the front of the cloud onto the leading edge of the Nor'west Arch, directly above the high mountains of the Southern Alps. Here the wave was lifting and he climbed again. After 15,000 feet soaring up the face of the cloud he reached 36,000 feet to make his world record gain of height. However, the outside temperature was minus 57° C and the controls of the wet glider froze. He needed to stop going any higher by opening the airbrakes, but the airbrakes were also frozen shut. Luckily, after a struggle he got them unlocked and began his descent. Otherwise who knows where he may have ended up?

Courage, determination and tenacity were strong attributes in Dick's character and they served him well in business and in his life outside of gliding.

By now, he realised that facing the unknown as he did, required more than just guts to survive and that he needed the best equipment, good planning and knowledge. He was always researching and trialling better instruments, new radios and, whenever possible, upgrading his glider for more and improved performance. He loved this aspect of research, planning and



The first soaring flight in the Mackenzie Basin at Simons Hill, 29 December 1950. The stubby wings and struts of the Prefect show its elementary design.



A statesman for gliding

new gadgets. In later life, this love for technology coupled with his thirst for knowledge allowed him to embrace the age of I.T. At 90 plus years, he thought that his iPad was the best thing since sliced bread. This one gadget allowed him to do two of his favourite things - he could learn about new stuff on the web and at the same time communicate with his many friends.

His favourite world record was the 1978 distance flight from Lake Te Anau in the south to Hicks Bay, on the very tip of the North Island's East Cape. It was almost one thousand three hundred kilometres of engineless flight. But talk about tenacity, it was his 27th attempt that was finally successful! He launched in the company of Dave Speight and Bruce Drake but made some mistakes and got left far behind. But Dick had determination. At 3 o'clock in the afternoon, with more than 800 km or two thirds of the flight still to go, he was only at Hororata, 800 feet above the ground and seemingly about to land. However, the fact that his mates were ahead, coupled with his first wife Helen's colourful encouragement on the radio and a scrap of lift, gave him the determination to continue and the patience to dig in. The rest was history. He managed to reconnect with the wave, got height and raced on across Cook Strait, to land at Hicks Bay to meet his buddies, just before sunset.

During his 65 years in gliding, Dick made seven World gliding records, countless NZ records and competed in two world championships as well as in many Regional and National gliding contests. The world gliding community recognised him as a guru of wave exploration, and our wider society recognised his contributions to aviation with prestigious awards: the international FAI's Gold Air Medal and Lilienthal Medal, and by making him a Member of the British Empire.

If Ed Hillary was our hero in the mountains, and Peter Blake our hero on the seas, then I suggest that Dick Georgeson deserves to be our hero of the skies.

In his later years, he supported gliding in many ways, including setting up scholarships for youth to learn about wave flying, and in helping the Canterbury Gliding Club make their recent move to their new site at Springfield.

I am quite sure that Dick would say that his life in gliding was only made possible by the all the people he met who helped him. While this may be true, we know that everyone who helped Dick did so because they loved the man. He inspired and enthused us, he listened generously to our tales and he encouraged the best in each of us. Helping Dick turned into friendships that crossed barriers of age, gender, race and creed. And Dick's friendships, young or old, were always enduring.

I was honoured to take him on his last glider flight. He was nearly 90 and almost blind. After releasing from the tow plane above Omarama, I said, "You fly," and he gently took the controls and proceeded to circle the glider in a smooth thermal. Like the expert he still was, he climbed the glider high to look out across his beloved Mackenzie Country to Lake Pukaki, Irishman Creek and to Mount Cook shining in the distance. We cruised around in silence for an hour or so, then, as the sun set, we did a couple of loops and landed gently home. As I levered his frail body from the cockpit, he stretched up and took my hand in his still vice-like grip and with a twinkle in his eye and that mischievous grin of his, he said "Thank you. That really was a jolly good flight."

Dick, now it's our turn to salute you one final time, to thank you for an inspirational life that you lived to the full.

Dreams are definitely worth following. You were indeed a lucky man.

To learn more about Dick's gliding history, one should read his fascinating book *The Leading Edge*, well-written by Dick and his wife Anna. To purchase contact Anna Wilson by email at [wilson.georgeson@gmail.com](mailto:wilson.georgeson@gmail.com) or phone 03 322 8190.

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