



Glider Generations - The old and the young

Contributed by Jill McCaw

DICK GEORGESON is the grand old man of New Zealand gliding. Dick was the pioneer pilot who discovered the potential of the Mackenzie Country mountain wave system. The first pilot who tried flying the awesome waves of air that can take a glider to 10,000 metres, Dick learned and mapped out the characteristics of the system. Dick set a world height record on 16th December 1960 of 10,484 m (34,396 ft) in his wooden Skylark 3F glider, ZK-GCF.

A further world record followed for Dick and the Skylark known as Charlie Fox, an out and return of 543.74km from Omarama to Hanmer Springs in January 1962. Dick went on to set more New Zealand and world records for another twenty years. The little wooden Skylark was retired, superseded by fibreglass ships with greater wingspans and higher glide ratios.

A creative upbringing

Dick had grown up at Irishman Stream in the Mackenzie basin, the long lenticular clouds overhead a familiar part of his childhood. One of the Hamilton clan of Hamilton jet boat fame he and his cousin Jon Hamilton built, invented and played in the well equipped workshop of the isolated station as they were growing up. They also turned their enquiring minds to the sky. Both took up the sport of gliding and both went to work for Hamiltons. Jon was to later take the business over from his father Bill. The utilitarian jet boat designed to navigate shallow rivers grew into the speedy racers and leisure boats we see today. The primary gliders the boys had lusted over in picture books evolved into sleek craft like Dick's Skylark. No one could have imagined the heights or distances that Dick would take that glider to. Modern gliding owes a great deal to Dick Georgeson while Dick himself is in awe of modern distance records of over 2000 km set by his friend Terry Delore.

Supporting Youth Gliding

Dick Georgeson thinks he owes something to gliding. The old Skylark has been restored and Charlie Fox is again flying in the Mackenzie Country skies. Dick has made his glider available to young pilots through the Youth Glide organisations and Young Vintage Kiwi.



A fully restored old warrior pulls out in front of its modern counterparts.



Dick Georgeson (at right) is pleased to pass the use of his vintage record breaking glider on to the younger generation such as Alex McCaw (standing) and Toby Read (seated). Roger Read is in the cockpit preparing to for a test flight.

Another group of young people have grown up under the wide skies and lenticular clouds of the Mackenzie. They are predominantly children of Canterbury Gliding Club members and have holidayed in the area all their lives while their parents have flown. Picking up the mantle of those who have come before them Abbey Delore, Alex McCaw, Nicholas Oakley, Paul Tillman, Toby Read, Matt Aldridge and others are determined to make their mark on the sport and Dick is right behind them.

Abbey and Alex, with the support of Gavin Wills of Glide Omarama and Roger Read of Youth Glide Canterbury are organising a training camp and

development squad for New Zealand youth pilots. The camp is to be held in December, is open to all New Zealand glider pilots under 25 and Dick, through the Gliding New Zealand Dick Georgeson Trust is a major sponsor of the event.

Many of these young pilots have already shown their mettle. Toby Read was the

recipient of the Inaugural Steve Fossett Memorial Trophy in 2008. Alex McCaw is possibly the youngest pilot ever to complete a Diamond 500k goal flight. Toby has also flown a 500km Diamond Flight. Abbey Delore has flown long distance flights with her father and is a credible cross country pilot in her own right. Nicholas Oakley flies not just gliders; he is New Zealand's youngest holder of a balloon pilot's license. They all have ambition and they want to be world champions.

In the meantime, playing in Charlie Fox is good training for them. Gliders were much more basic and harder to fly back in its day. After flying it Alex McCaw commented, "I don't know how he set records in it. I lost two thousand feet in two kilometres. I couldn't make it turn." Dick laughs, "It's just what you're used to."

Dick is challenging the young people to better any of his records flying this glider. He is gifting money alongside the glider to be used as incentive. Logistics are still being worked through but possibly the most meritorious flight in the glider

each year will receive a prize. Charlie Fox is providing a completely different gliding experience for the Youth Glide pilots and reminding them of their gliding heritage while showing them how skilled the pioneers of their sport really were.

More Information

For more information on gliding, the Youth Development Squad Camp (which is looking for more sponsors) or on Youth Glide organisations around the country see the Gliding New Zealand website. For subscriptions to SoaringNZ, New Zealand's premier soaring magazine email: soaringnz@mccawmedia.co.nz