



contributed by Jill McCaw

In Praise of Local Flying

MY gliding stories often involve amazing feats of derring-do and awesome records broken – gliders going higher, further, faster. I am worried that readers of my column will get a skewed idea of what the sport is all about.

“The joy is in the flying. Where you go or what you do while you are flying doesn’t matter one little bit.”

A while ago I got involved in an email conversation with a Taupo Gliding Club member, Warren Pitcher. That sentence above is his words and I couldn’t have said it better myself. I am a local pilot myself. I only rarely fly cross country, and even then it barely rates as cross country flying compared to what some of my friends and family are doing. I tip-toe away from the airfield and if I’m out of glide range of my home airfield I’m a little bit nervous and I won’t do it if I haven’t got complete confidence in the weather conditions and know that I can get home again. I’m not saying I couldn’t land out. I know the land out areas around Omarama and Springfield where I do most of my flying and I’m quite confident I could land in any of them safely. I just really don’t think it’s worth the bother.

I do fly cross country with other more experienced pilots and it is a glorious experience. I’ve flown hundreds of kilometres and climbed to lofty heights with legends and friends. I’ve even had ‘epic landouts’ on some of these trips. (An ‘epic landout’ is one in which the retrieve is more of an adventure than the flight – for instance landing on the surf beach at Raglan and taking 5 hours to get the glider back to the airfield 2 km away.) The thing is I don’t want to go through any of that on my own. I like just pottering around in the air. I don’t need to go a long distance to enjoy my flight.

Warren described it perfectly in his email and I’ll going to leave the rest of the column to him.

“I really enjoyed getting away from the home strip on the odd few occasions I flew cross country. But if I am truly honest, the hassle of retrieve crews and all the extra work, not to mention risk taking, higher stress levels, etc of that sort of flying meant that I enjoyed my flying far more if I could spent the flight close to home base in familiar territory, knowing I would be safely tucked up in my own bed after just a brief walk back from the hangar to my tent.

“I remember a flight in Taupo; I flew over four hours, always

in sight of home and chatting happily to Christchurch control most of the time, as I mooched about high above Lake Taupo, well above seven thousand feet. I could have gone in any direction for miles, but the place was so beautiful and the lift that day was weak wave, silky smooth and simply delightful. When I finally landed I was met by many stories of cross country flights that had ended far away in paddocks with many folk involved in long dreary retrieve drives. I had had a wonderful time and ended up back home with my glider beside my tent and my un-driven car collecting dust under the tree the other side of my tent. Such contentment!

“Never feel you have to apologise for flying locally, when you may have been able to fly many miles cross country in some other person’s opinion. I know lots of pilots with a great many hours in their logs and far better pilots than I’ll ever be, who have never flown away from home base, they are all just as much in love with gliding as the fanciest cross country pilots. Each to his/her own I say.”

Thanks Warren. I enjoy my thermals and my familiar view of the world from on high, every bit as much as those who have made it past the curve of the earth. Gliding is an amazing sport that really does provide something for all pilots. If you’d like to give it a go, get in touch with your local club. Find the details on the (newly upgraded) Gliding New Zealand website. www.gliding.co.nz

I’m Jill McCaw. For aviation, gliding and rugby photos, plus subscriptions to SoaringNZ see our (also new and upgraded) website:

www.mccawmedia.co.nz



Sometimes all you want is a nice safe view of your local airfield (Omarama).



Landing on the beach at Raglan was no big deal but created an epic retrieve.



Airborne above Lake Taupo is a very scenic place to be.

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