

Autogyro Adventures in New Zealand

The humble gyro is in fact a far more capable aircraft than many people realise. Though enormous fun for patch flying, they (along with moderately intrepid pilots) are quite able to also tour the length and breadth of the country. Mountain climbing and glacier expeditions aren't out of the question either. In this article we profile some noteworthy gyro adventures and adventurers over the last few years.

Sid's Circumnavigation of NZ

FIFTEEN YEARS AGO, Sid Lane was flying his Brock KB2 autogyro (named "Kiwis Can") and dreamed of completing "The Mission", which was to be the first person to circumnavigate the outer coast of NZ by autogyro. Though he knew his small KB2 would not be up to that task.



Sid Lane.

By 1999 he had a new single seat gyro on the drawing board. That didn't eventuate however and it was almost ten years later when during a visit to Colin Alexander of Solo Wings at Tauranga, Sid also met Tony Unwin of Gyrate NZ. Within a week, Sid had bought a new Eagle autogyro with Rotax 914T engine to be fitted by Colin and the mission was scheduled. Another setback awaited however when not long before departure date, Sid was diagnosed with throat cancer. The treatment and recovery of this delayed the dream almost another 12 months.

- Day 1:** Taupo to Flat Rock
- Day 2:** Flat Rock to Invercargill
- Day 3:** Invercargill to Hokitika
- Day 4:** Hokitika to New Plymouth
- Day 5:** New Plymouth to Dairy Flat
- Day 6:** Dairy Flat to Taupo

airfield of Taupo in the Eagle to fly the Mission at last. This had never been done before in a gyro.

Sid's Mission (covering some 5700km) took six flying days and 40 hours of flying time. His longest single day flight was 1152km in 8 hours and 50 minutes, which was from Flat Rock on the east coast of the North Island, across Cook Strait and all the way to Invercargill - "Man was I beggared after that day". The completed Mission now stands as a record, and Sid notes with satisfaction that "dreams can come true".

The trip wasn't without its challenges however. The Eagle gyro has only a partially enclosed cockpit and Sid found himself in poor weather and "wet through" on more than one occasion.

All of the planned legs were long ones and there was only one enforced rest day due to weather. Sid was justifiably exhausted when he landed at 7:45pm during the Flying Proms at Taupo's Centennial Park Airfield. He was met by a crowd of supporters including Taupo Mayor Rick Cooper and celebrated with a glass of champagne. That was followed by a hot bath, bowl of steaming porridge, and the best nights sleep for a week.



Sid Lane in his Eagle Gyro. Bill Lowry picture

Topping Taranaki

A FEW years back, the Autogyro Association held a Fly-in on Queen's Birthday at Hawera. It was a time of clear blue sky and freezing temperatures while a big winter high sat over the North Island.

In between giving rides to visitors and enjoying the local scenery, Michael Norton wondered about attempting a trip over the top of the mountain, something no-one had tried in a gyro before.

Michael's Dominator gyro is an open frame design (which makes 8500' seem a lot further up than from an enclosed cockpit) and even though he added two extra layers of clothes for the trip, it still took quite some time to defrost back at Hawera. The resulting grin lasted for weeks afterwards.



Dominator Gyro RAQ resting at Hawera.



Mount Taranaki summit from 8500'.

Glacier Explorers

AT EASTER

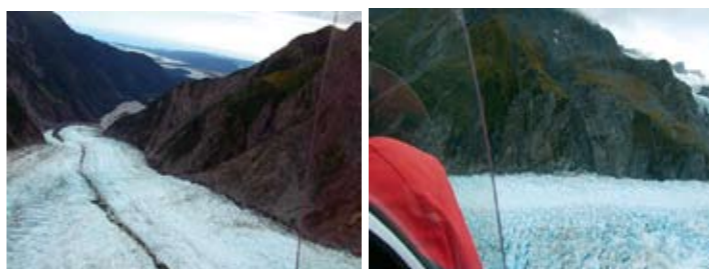
2008, Tony Unwin was offered a demonstration slot for his Eagle gyro at the Warbirds over Wanaka airshow.

This necessitated a trip down from Tauranga which was made in perhaps the best flying weather of the whole year. The first day of the trip saw Tony, passenger and aircraft all the way to Timaru, transiting Taupo, Foxpine, Omapere and Rangiora on the way. Once at Wanaka, the airshow display went well and much interest was generated amongst spectators. The trip home was via the west coast to Franz Joseph then Greymouth, Masterton, Picton, Foxpine, Taupo and Tauranga.

Stopping at Franz Joseph, Tony was helped by local pilots with a briefing to fly to the glacier the following day. Mixing it with a constant stream of scenic helicopters at 4500' over a glacier was going to be a memorable experience. Tony explains "The cliff face is close on the right as you approach the frozen river of ice, then at a prudent point a slow 180 degree turn is required to take you across the face of the glacier and back out through the narrow gorge. Only as you look out away from the hill do you realise the sharp fall that the ice field makes heading for the valley below?"



Tony Unwin and his Eagle are based at Tauranga.



The view of Franz Joseph Glacier from the back seat of an Eagle Gyro.

Cook Strait Commuting

THERE ARE some fly-ins that you just don't want to miss and for Stephen Chubb and his Magni Gyro, the annual Murchison Fly-in has become one of them. Stephen lives at Hawera and has flown his gyro south across the Strait on several occasions to catch up with a bunch of fellow enthusiasts and great friends. The most recent trip was in March 2009 when Stephen followed his normal track from Titahi Bay to the Tory Channel. He describes the view from his partially enclosed gyro as "360 degrees times two".



Crossing Cook Strait has become a common event for this Magni Gyro.

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