

THE NATIONALS

Jan 2015 | Waikerie | South Australia

Not That Great

Gliding is supposed to be a very exciting experience - or so Chad tells me. It's made even more exciting when you actually get to FLY. So far, over the first 5 days in this competition there has been only one day of competitive flying. While the rest of this state (and northern Australia) suffered a huge deluge of rain, the area surrounding Waikerie had to put up with mainly gloomy overcast conditions. Definitely no soaring!

Friday and Saturday were a complete wipeout due to drizzle and the next few days were not looking good either but, as this was the Nationals where all the hot shot pilots were gathered the organisers were adamant that there needed to be competition even if the conditions were only marginal. And so Sunday arrived. The weather appeared improved - the forecast showed some flyable options and possible cumulous cloud buildup at mid levels. Pilots and crews were asked to grid gliders and get ready to fly. We waited from 11.30am but late in the afternoon the organiser finally scrubbed the day. It can get quite frustrating hanging around doing bugger all.

Monday looked not that much better but tasks were set for all classes nevertheless. This was likely to be yet another no fly day. The clouds set in and the day looked worse than ever. Chad spent his time overflying and filming the gliders on the grid with his drone. Task A was replaced by Task B - 2.5 hours with 3 turn points. Liftoff. Chad was only 60ft in the air and was told the start gate was opening in 15mins - barely time enough to get to any reasonable height. It started to rain around the airport and the sky darkened to the east and north.



Peaceful rural scene

Aluminium Man

Landing in your farm paddock is one thing but coming across an alien in your paddock is another. Chad landed alongside Mak, a pilot from Japan, yesterday and watched in amusement as Mak put on a respiratory mask (for medical reasons) and then promptly donned his aluminium hooded poncho to keep out the rain. His poncho completely wraps around his body and head. He looked like a doctor treating abola or some sort of an aluminium alien. You can imagine the reaction he got when the farmer's wife drove up to greet him with a couple of little kids in the back of the car. "Where are we?" Make asked. "On earth" was the reply. Chad could not stop laughing as they were driven to the farmhouse. Chad flown over the farmhouse on his dissent but thought it was abandoned - surrounded by junk. Inside was no better. It was as though someone had exploded a bomb. Yuk!!



Drone aficionado



Sexy tow plane



Typical Waikerie weather



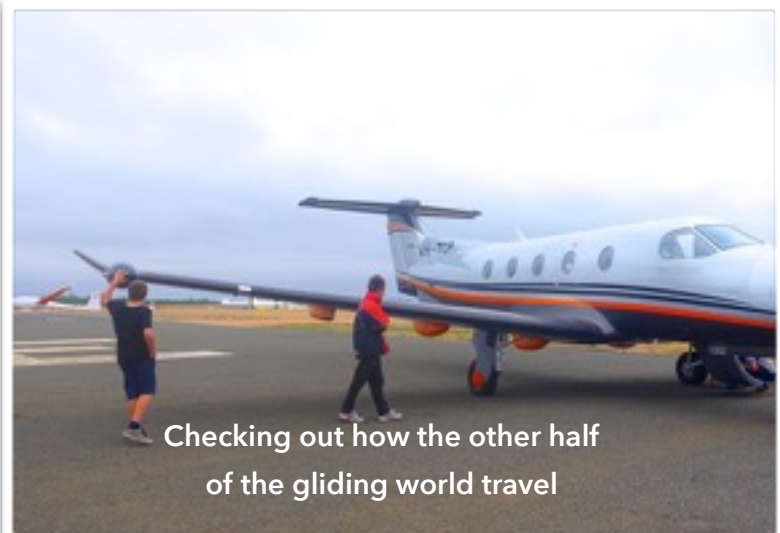
A Wing and a Prayer

I retired to the clubrooms where I kept an eye on my computer watching Chad's spot points appear on the map and I watched the weather map on screen. It was not long before the first out-landing reports started to trickle in. Gliders were dropping like rocks out of the air. The whiteboard listing all out-landings was filling up. Retrieval crews were scurrying about comparing notes and swapping GPS settings prior to setting off. A convoy of trailers were already on their way. My god, even the most experienced fliers were going down!

I thought I heard Chad's voice on the radio calling in for a landing so I hopped into the car and drove to the tarmac to watch him touch down. I waited a few minutes searching the sky as other gliders came in but no Chad so I went over to the command centre and asked if he had landed. No. It started to rain even more heavily. This was not good at all.

I went back to the clubrooms quite concerned. His spots showed him moving to the south and away from the course trajectory. South? Then I got a message from him - "experiencing really foul weather". His next SMS suggested I should get the trailer ready. I alerted the organiser that Chad would soon be on the ground and got a surprising comment. "Is he still up there? There are only 5 left and he is doing ever so well to be still up in the air in these horrible conditions." Wow!

It was some minutes before I got the next message. "Get ready - I expect to come down somewhere near Loxton". That was about 80kms away. Then no communication for what seemed like an eternity. I started to worry and alerted Deakin to get some food and drink organised too. I hooked up the trailer and waited for the call which did not come. Where was he?



Checking out how the other half of the gliding world travel

Finally an SMS arrived which thankfully told me he was safely on the ground. Mak had also landed next to him in an open paddock. Thank god. Chad tells me often that when you do outland its good to be with friends. Chad's spot pinpointed his exact location and, with Mac' wife following me with her trailer, we headed for Loxton. My eyes are not the best so it was great to have Deakin working on the case. He had to pinpoint an exact location on the computer based on Chad's spot location. Chad rang in and said he was right next to a good dirt road. Deakin used my iPhone and Mac Air laptop and quickly used these to give me turn by turn directions. I was most impressed and told him so.

It took a little over an hour to get to the location and almost an hour to dismantle both gliders and stow them in their trailers. It took longer because we were forced to use Chad's 4WD in the very

soft paddock. Mac's 2WD car would not have made it. Then it was home and a late tea. Chad was one of the last fliers home. After he logged his trace it became obvious that he had won the day. The irony is that because no-one had finished the task, any points on offer were heavily devalued. Normally the winner of a day gets a score around 1000 points. Chad only scored 99 points. Nevertheless it was very satisfying to watch him give his summary after being presented with the winner's bottle of wine the next morning at briefing time. Chad is currently in 4th place overall but is only 1 point behind 3rd position. Tuesday was declared a no fly day but the three days after that are looking very flyable. Well done Chad. Hopefully his confidence and skill will ensure consistency and therefore a chance of finishing on the podium. 3 days of flying should sort that out.



Waiting ,waiting, waiting for the weather to improve.

Chad's Report

Well today was the type of day that, and reason, some people don't go to nationals, and others, who like some adventure, cherish in the memory banks. With the number growing ever smaller the comp committee is keen to chuck us up in anything that looks soarable. Today was one of those days. The day was to be low, scratchy and with over development, high cloud and rain later on. As launching started, cloudbase was below 3000QNH and 0.8knot climbs were reported. With showers expected later on I was keen to get going since I had a 2:30 AAT but being last on the grid in my class and a strong headwind to get to the start gate it took rather long to get ready to start. While doing so I saw the main pack, which I was trying to join, sail over me as they started at cloud base. I started soon after but at 1500QNH but found a 1.5knot whooper soon after, so re-started at cloud base with Terry Cubley. Not long after, Terry missed a climb I jagged and fell below me.

Realizing I had to do the rest of the task myself and with rain already falling everywhere I continued on. I was happily surprised at the first circle when I came over the top of the lead gaggle about 1000ft higher. At this point I played tactics and just let them do the work since I had picked up about 15minutes on them if I could stay with them I would win the day. It was about this point that the sky opened up and at one point our gaggle was completely surrounded by rain and it became apparent that completing the task was no longer an option as Waikerie was complete cut off by a 100km long band of rain running east to west and tracking south towards us. Whilst hearing a few desperately trying to return to Waikerie I noted to myself that the day would be a distance day and sent an appropriate text to my waiting ground crew. It was not a very positive text :)

As time went on I watched and listened as the low gliders and big name pilots, one by one, found paddocks until it was just me and Mak. We took pretty much anything to stay airborne until the rain started to cut us off from our second TP

so we climbed as high as we could and glid into the rain until the ground caught us both in the same paddock south of Loxton. My landing caught the attention of the farmer's wife who took us back to their house to wait somewhere drier while it rained and our crew arrived. I must point out that I finally have met "the farmers daughter"! After de-rigging both gliders and arriving back at the club at 8:30 I logged my flight and looked at the stats to see the following.

Total distance=118km out of 196km min distance
Average speed=42km/h
Thermaling percentage=53%
Average climb rate=1.2knots

The scary thing is those stats jagged me first place for the day. Because it was a de-valued day I managed to get a total of 99 points for my efforts. Ahh, nationals flying it's something else. I'm currently in 4th and only 1 point from 3rd.

Below are some quick 360 deg photo shots from my iPhone when I caught the lead gaggle of the task area just after the first turn. It gives you an idea of the conditions. Note the picture of KYF in the paddock with Mak's glider behind and the weather I had flown through to get there in the background. That easily counts as one of my more challenging flights and one that will stay with me for a while.

I need to mention that no one completed the task in any class so "everyone" had an out-landing, technical or real (a few abandoned the tasks early and flew home before the rain cut Waikerie off). This was the first time in a nationals that this has happened in 25 years apparently. It was funny because the two motor gliders abandoned the task and flew home early because they knew they wouldn't be able to start their engines in the rain.

Oh and today was cancelled. I didn't mind as I need to catch up on some sleep. I managed to catch up on some during the pilots meeting :)

