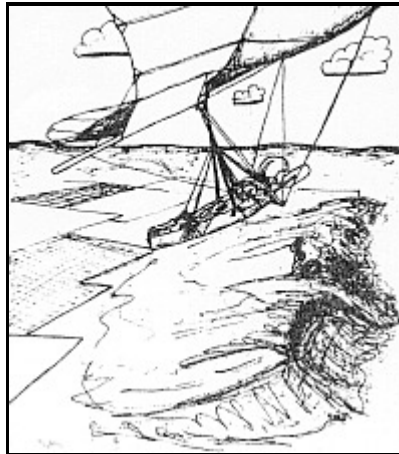


# The Day Bakewell Boomed

By Ray (Mal) Chatfield



It was 9am when Mole called after yet another hard night out. He wanted to know if we were going flying today, and although neither of us wanted to, we did. By 10.30am we had picked up Viv Scottford and our driver (drunk driver) Steve Edwards and arrived at Penguins house to meet up with Russell Brierly and Peter Howlett. The conditions outside were hot with light winds, making the prospect of Bakewell working relatively low.

We sat and watched the cricket for an hour before Russell decided to give it a miss and go windsurfing. The remaining six of us set out for the 1.5 hour journey to Mt Bakewell, 100kms away. On the way Peter worked out the temp trace and predicted thermals to 10,000'. Bullshit Peter! Apart from once when conditions were over the back, no-one had ever gone above 7000' and a typical flight would peak out at 5000'.

By 1pm we were ready to launch. Mole (feeling much 'better by now) was first off and I was last at 1.30pm. Conditions on the hill were poor and rough. After gunning around for another half hour, Mole, Peter and I dribbled over the back in a tatty thermal that peaked out at 4000'. Three thermals later we were over Grass Valley, east of Northam and had still only reached 4000' in rough, bullet type thermals. Mole and I started laying into Peter over the CBs about this 10,000' prediction.

The next thermal we hit was marked by a dust devil. It was the smoothest yet and it produced a steady 1000' per minute climb. Before long Mole and I had to apologise to Pete as we peaked out at 10,000' AGL. From here on ground was travelled quickly. At the 70km mark, Mole and I were very low and we started fighting for lift in another rough thermal. Mole won and was back up to 10,000' within half an hour, whilst I dribbled around for another hour before getting back up to height. Peter was about 10kms behind at this point.

At the 100km mark, Mole made contact with Steve our driver. He was at Northam 80kms away, with Penguin and Viv picking up a carton of supplies for the long trip ahead of them.

By the time we reached the 140km mark, Bim's 3-year-old 115-mile (185kms) WA distance record was in sight. Mole and Pete started playing dirty. Mole radioed that he was to my right and scratching, but I couldn't see him. He was actually 10kms ahead at 10,000'.

At this point I reached the maximum height for the day of 12,500' AGL and then rode a blue thermal street for approx. 40kms never getting below 10,000'.

After two hours of flying without seeing Mole or Peter, I spotted Mole on the ground. He had set a new WA record of 132 miles, but only held it for 10 minutes. At 7pm Pete flew past me 3,000' below. It was the first time we had seen each other for 3 hours and we both knew that whoever flew the furthest today would hold the new Australian distance record. Pete was making his final glide into Perenjori and I went down a 20km dead end road north of Perenjori. I thought I had him beat until

I looked behind and saw him working a weak bubble off the township. Pete told me he was going to tack towards the main road and I knew I was done.

At the end of the dead end road at 1000' I turned into the wind, which had picked up to 25 knots and landed. The pick up crew, who were all totally drunk by now, picked me up at 11.30 and we proceeded with the 450km trip back home.

Pete had a big smile on his face, meaning he had beaten me and Mole backed him up. Naturally I was in a shit all night until Mole told me next morning that Pete had actually landed 5 miles short of me.

The final distances were Mole 132 miles (212kms), Pete 175 miles (282kms - longest in the world for a Fledge) and mine 180 miles (290kms). Without a doubt these distances were handed to us on a plate. All three of us flew twice as far as we had ever before and the driver was twice as drunk as normal - he had to be relieved of his duties.



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