

# MEMORIES OF OMARAMA

By Roger Fothergill

In 2012 Jess and I went to New Zealand to see our second daughter Heidi who was living in Wellington at the time. I had a terrific time gliding there, firstly at Taupo (North Island) where I managed to get a flight in the club's Standard Jantar. I flew very late in the day, because when I arrived in the morning I was presented with a tin of paint and brushes and told to paint the clubhouse furniture - no flying until it's done! Maybe we should try this on our visitors at Feshie?

Then we toured the South Island with Heidi (who hadn't yet been there) and when we were in Queenstown I had two days gliding at Omarama, courtesy of Chris Street, one of the members there. The first day was a check flight in the club's Duo Discus, and the second day I got a fantastic 1½ hours in the club's LS6. It was the first day in the Duo which was the flight of a lifetime, though. Sorry Nick, just slightly higher than with you at FL190 in the Ash over Ben Nevis, but that was terrific too!

Chris and I had a two-hour drive to Omarama from Queenstown. All the way we observed wall to wall blue sky with not a hint of a lenticular, and Chris saying "I'm very sorry Roger but it's not going to be a particularly interesting day." Soon after our arrival the Duo was ready and we got in, with 100% blue sky as our canopy. We launched in the direction of a bowl in a hillside where Chris said there was usually some sort of thermal activity.

Sure enough we started one of those procedures we often have at Feshie - a bit of up and some down with the cycle being repeated on each rotation. But eventually we gained altitude in the bowl and got to a point when Chris said "Right, we are high enough to cross the valley, and there will be lift the other side of that ridge."

We flew across the wide valley but arrived slightly below the ridge so there was only one thing for it - back to where we started and purchase some height again. This we did the same as before, but when we turned to cross the valley, above us was the smallest of smallest lenticular wisps and Chris exclaimed "Aah!" We were just about underneath it, and sure enough started to procure some credit in the altitude stakes - it was definitely wave. The climb rate increased and before I knew it Chris told me to don my oxygen mask, whilst locating Mount Cook on the horizon about 60 miles away to the North.

In what seemed like a short time we were at 16,000ft right over the famous summit. I really wanted to fly close to the summit ridge but Chris said that at 12,000ft that would be *too low!*

We then turned south and ended up over an easy-to-remember place called Piano Flats. On the flight south we noticed lenticulars like Jacob's ladder, over Piano Flats about 36 miles SSE of Queenstown, and we climbed there to 20,500ft with outside temperature at minus 18 degrees. By now we had been in the air 5 hours and the sun was sinking lower in the sky, so it was time to head back to Omarama. Even with full airbrake and the wheel down the Duo was very reluctant to descend.

Chris very kindly did a video of the flight which is still on YouTube, click [here](#)

The following day we arrived at Omarama mid-morning, and the first question fired at me in the clubhouse was "Have you ever flown a flapped glider before?" A negative answer from me drew the comment that another check ride was required! After a tedious wait we got the check flight squared away and proceeded to the hangar where my quarry was waiting. With no obstruction between the glider and the hangar door we pushed it straight out - which proved almost impossible as the tyre was flat!

Trying to pump it up didn't alter the situation and the only way to raise the glider to remove the wheel was to get its trailer - around the other side of the airfield! This we did, removed the wheel, and proceeded into Omarama township where the local garage mechanic (a club member) proceeded to find the puncture and fix it.

Ten minutes later we returned to the airfield, remounted the wheel, lowered the glider and pushed it out to the launch point. About half way there pushing the glider became increasingly difficult again, and looking underneath to our distress the wheel was flat once more, which did not give me unending joy! By now it was about 4pm and Chris said to me "This is all going pear shaped - why don't we abandon it?" to which I replied "I've come about 13,000 miles to fly this glider, I'm not giving up now!"

So: back to the trailer / wheel off / back to the garage / huge apology as there were three more punctures in the wheel / back to the airfield / wheel on and out to the launch point. Well, my sunset flight was ample reward for the determined effort! Lovely machine!

Big thanks to Chris Street without whom it would not have happened.