GLIDING AUSTRALIA

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AUSSIE JUNIORS IN POLAND

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS: BERYL HARTLEY, MARTIN RULE & TOM HOWARD.

Director Piotr Haberland of the Poznan Aeroclub and seven times world glider aerobatic champion Jerzy Makula extended an exciting opportunity to me to invite four Australian junior glider pilots to visit Poland to attend an autumn camp with student glider pilots from the Poznan district.

ABOVE: The Aussie juniors, (L-R) Peter Werda, Sophie Thomas, Martin Rule and Tom Howard, gather at Poznan Aeroclub.

The camp was to be held at the historic gliding site of Bezmiechowa, the birthplace of gliding flight in Poland. This beautiful site in the mountains of south east Poland is now an attraction to gliding visitors from throughout Poland.

The Australian Joeys requested young pilots in Australia to apply and created a selection process for choosing the four participants. Initally, two boys and two girls were chosen, however, due to the demands of final exams one of the girls was unable to attend, allowing the next pilot in line to take her place. The final four were Sophie Thomas, Tom Howard, Peter Werda and Martin Rule. The four juniors and myself were sponsored by the Poznan Aeroclub.

We arrived in Warsaw after a short stopover in Bangkok and were met at the airport by Wes Mysak, the agent for Polish gliders in Australia, and Jan Makula, one of the Polish junior team members. I was delighted to find gliding friends after the long trip. We were introduced to our guardian angel of the trip Tomasz Kaczmarczyk who was to be our driver, instructor, interpreter, tourist guide and friend during our stay. The club had supplied a new 8-seater VW vehicle for our transport. We were welcomed by the Makula family and stayed two nights in Warsaw at a new, Venetian palace-style hotel. We toured the local museums and palaces and then set off for a 400km drive to the mountains.

The spring and autumn camp run by the Poznan aeroclub members undertakes training for students participating in the aviation course at school level. Bezmiechowa is famous as a mountain ridge site and we were hoping for good strong seasonal winds. The gliding site and the school in the village are named after the local gliding hero Goda who achieved the second Diamond badge in the world and was the first winner of the Lilienthal Medal. The site is owned and operated by the Polish University.

During our stay we were invited to attend the local primary school where the children sang a song about the flight of Goda, presented us with a spread of local foods and lined up to get autographs from our juniors and Jerzy Makula.

The new building has been built in the style of the old 1930s structure and sits on the top of a long grass strip which is 600ft above the landing point at the bottom. Modern student style accommodation includes an excellent restaurant and bar and all the facilities required for large groups of gliding pilots. The launching is by gravity, gently pushing gliders on the ramp, winching up the mountain, bungee just for fun, and aerotow. In company with 45 other juniors, numerous instructors, visiting world competition pilots, a group of senior soaring pilots from Poznan, local pilots and crew, the Aussie juniors joined in the fun. The fleet of aircraft includes a number of Bocian, Puchatek, PW6 and the new Perkaz which was delivered from the factory for our juniors to fly. Jerzy Makula came to fly with our juniors for a lesson in glider aerobatics. With Tomasz as instructor, the juniors flew in all the two seaters with all the methods of launching from Bezmiechowa and from the site at Wienamein on the other side of the valley.

The weather was cold. Although two days were sunny enough in the afternoon for the locals to strip down to T-shirts, the Aussies were rugged up in thermal underwear, woollen socks and hats with warm gloves. The ridge lift

was weak but the days were all fine and we were able to fly each day. The Aussies went exploring with Tomasz and the local gliding guide Monika Bobula and travelled though the mountains bordered by the Ukraine, Belarus and Slovakia. One day was spent with the group visiting a large lake and hydro dam. The autumn colours were spectacular. The area has a very small population and is a wonderful place to go mountain trekking.

After seven days in the mountains we headed for Krakow to visit the Polish Aviation Museum, the old city of Krakow and the huge salt mines, which contain an underground cathedral. We then travelled on to the home site of our Poznan hosts. Up until this time the juniors had been part of the gliding community, however, the Poznan club is more than gliders. Many of the talented young pilots who have passed through the school system have gone on to become aerobatic champions and our juniors were about to discover this thrill. The club arranged for the trainer of the aerobatic team, an ex F16 pilot, squadron leader and commander of the local NATO base, to take each of the juniors for a lesson in aerobatics in the Extra two-seater. They quickly suited up and for the next few hours a constant airshow of every maneouver possible filled the sky with the roar of the aircraft and the trails of the smoke markers.

Just as we thought it could not get any better we climbed into a helicopter and C-172 to fly over the city through the NATO and main international airport airspace to a private house for afternoon tea, set on a large lake with a 1000' grass strip and hangar in the back yard. Our host was very gracious and, after taking Sophie for a drive in his super sports car, we arranged to meet him the next day when he would be the interpreter during our meeting with the Mayor of Poznan.

Our trip was rapidly coming to an end. The next day we attended the meeting with the Mayor in the beautiful town hall in company with the Sport Minister, Director of Schools, Directors of the Aeroclub, young pilots from Poznan and from Australia. I was very pleased to present the Mayor with gifts from the Mayor of Narromine and to express our appreciation for the generosity extended to us by the members of the local club. After a tour of the city we headed for Warsaw for the final night, attempting to pack all the gifts from our new friends and meet the luggage weight requirements for the trip home. Jan Makula came along for a sad farewell to Tomasz.

SUMMING UP OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

The juniors had a chance to fly gliders, powered aircraft and helicopters. They used winch, gravity, bungee and aerotow launches. They flew with world champions and from a number of interesting sites, and met gliding friends I am sure they will keep.They experienced another culture and saw beautiful old historic cities and interesting museums, including the huge Polish Aviation Museum. They were a credit to themselves, their parents and the gliding community of Australia. The Polish pilots were amazed at how well they related to each other though they had never met before. As Tomasz said to me, "They are like brothers and sister."

TOP Peter Werda joins Tomasz Kaczmarczyr in the cockpit.

LEFT: Pilots line up their gliders for a gravity launch.

For myself, I met old gliding friends, made new ones, was treated as a celebrity, and enjoyed the tours and the history of Poland. I particularly enjoyed the friends who came to visit with me during the week at Bezmichowa, from the senior gliding group of the Poznan aeroclub and from the women in gliding. I renewed old friendships and made some wonderful new ones. I am definitely going back.

The four juniors are deeply grateful to Piotr Haberland, the Makula family and all the members of the Poznan aeroclub who arranged our trip and were so generous with their time, aircraft, accommodation and friendships. I would like to thank Barbara Grzeskowiak-Bocian, Witold Milewski and Pawel Frackowiak for their company during our stay.

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LEFT: Martin Rule takes a flight with Jerzy Makula in the new Perkoz.

MARTIN'S ADVENTURE

WORDS: MARTIN RULE

TOP: Martin and friends bungee launch the Salamandra.

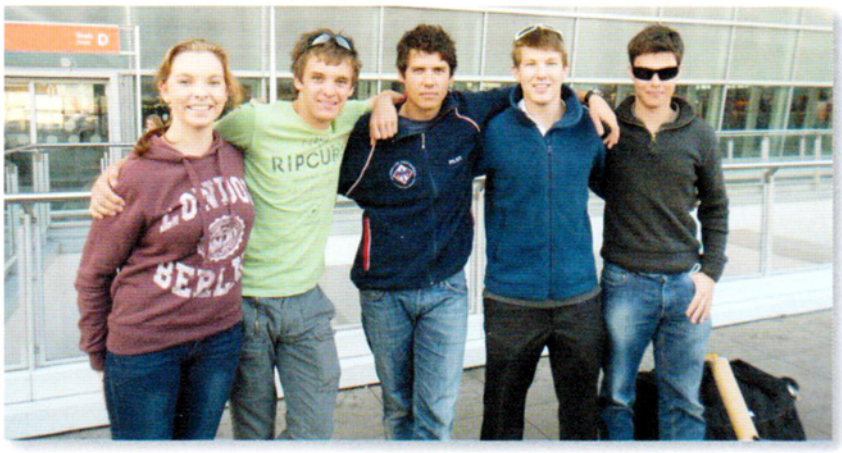
RIGHT: Martin Rule waits for his turn to be TWANGED off the mountain.

I was lucky enough to be one of four selected out of all the juniors in Australia to visit Poland as guests of the Poznan Aeroclub. We departed Australia on 17 October on what was sure was to be an adventure. We had come from locations across Australia and all met for the first time in Sydney. It was great to be going with people we didn't know and we quickly became good friends. We also made contacts with pilots from different parts of Australia and around the world.

When we first arrived in Poland we were greeted by Wes Mysak, Tomik our driver/instructor/tour guide, and the Makula family. It was pretty cool to be going to the home of a seven-time World Glider Aerobatic Champion and seeing all his trophies and memorabilia. Jerzy is a fantastic guy and by the end of the trip we knew he was a very special pilot.

After a few days of sight-seeing we set off for Bezmiechowa, a small gliding club in the south east of Poland. The club was very well set up with a hotel and restaurant on site where we ate and slept. It has a massive hangar full of 16 sailplanes ranging from the Salamandra to the new aerobatic trainer made by SZD, the Perkoz.

BELOW: The Aussie juniors pose with Tomasz Kaczmarczyr, the team's 'angel' in Poland.



The first day was overcast, foggy and visibility was poor. We spent the day rigging gliders and familiarising ourselves with the club. After coming from Mildura in NSW where the days are hot and the ground is flat, the mountainous Polish terrain took a while to get used to.

They use very different launch methods and it was strange sitting at the bottom of the hill with the winch on the top, waiting to be launched up the hill instead of over flat ground. The first launch was an unusual experience for me. I've never wished harder not to have a cable break.

Another launch method we used was the gravity launch where the glider rests on top of the mountain and two people simply push you down the hill until you reach flying speed. Once airborne the idea is to turn straight into ridge lift. Sadly, the week we were there the wind wasn't strong enough and with temperatures at around 10°C, thermals were unlikely. So it was mostly up and down flights with Poland's beautiful autumn scenery below us. I've never seen a more amazing sight, looking out at the wing tip with multi coloured trees above the level of the glider.

Another very different launch method was the bungee launch. Eight people run with a massive rubber band attached to the glider which is attached to a tree by the tail at the top of the mountain. When the people pulling gain the right amount of tension, the rope on the tail is released and TWANG! The glider accelerates forward and

TOP: Spectacular view from the gravity launch point

is usually airborne after about 5 metres. This was an amazing sight and we were lucky enough to experience a bungee launch although it is physically rather demanding.

The only problem with all these fancy launch methods is that they start from the top of the mountain while the gliders land at the bottom of the mountain. So someone has the painful task of holding a wing while being towed for 20 min up a 30° hill.

After the two days of cloud and poor visibility, the sky finally cleared and the sun came out. However, there was still no wind, so the flights were short. We had a briefing every morning in English, and classes every now and then teaching us the theory of wave cloud, rotor effects, ridge soaring and so on.

During the week we were treated like royalty and driven all over by Tomik to visit various tourist sites. The last day in the mountains was spent at another small gliding club called Weinvin. Each of us took an aero tow to 3,000ft AGL behind a huge Yak 19 with Jerzy Makula in the new Perkoz, a variant of the Puchacz. We all had the ride of our lives doing some awesome aerobatics. I pulled 5g in a glider before and it was very cool.

Before long our week in the mountains had come to an end and we sadly derigged the gliders and said goodbye to everyone. We departed for Poznan, where we were to meet the Mayor, and had a little surprise. My eyes lit up when I saw my dream aircraft, an Extra 300L, the Red Bull air race plane. We were all lucky enough to get a flight in this 315hp beast. Not only did we go for a ride, the pilot let us fly. He asked me to do a loop so like a typical glider pilot I pointed the nose at the ground and pulled back hard and high speed stalled the Extra. I heard a voice reminding me, "We have an engine be gentle." The Extra was lighter than a Libelle to fly and with a role rate of over 360degrees per second it was by far the best flight of my life. We did snap rolls, inverted flat spins, tail slides EVERYTHING that has been invented. Pulling +8g and -5g was something that I think I wouldn't do again unless I had a g-suit. It was the best day of my life!

I'd like to thank everyone that made this trip possible, Poznan Aero Club, The GFA, Beryl Hartley, Anita Taylor, and Andrew Maddocks for helping me apply. Thanks to everyone. It was an amazing experience perhaps has made me a better glider pilot and someone who will never forget how magical the sport of gliding is! **GA**

TOM HOWARD

I believe that all of the Juniors attending this trip would agree that even though the weather was not all that conducive to ridge soaring, we all had some of the best times of our lives. This was predominantly due to the hospitality of all the people we stayed with, as well as how many extra and unexpected activities they had prepared for us. Personally I made some great friends and I hope to stay in contact with as many of them as possible with the view of heading back to Poland in the Future. On behalf of the Juniors who attended this camp, I would like to thank the Poznan Aeroclub and the Polish people who were so hospitable to us. Many thanks also to our 'team captain' Beryl Hartley for helping us with so much, Anita Taylor, the GFA and everyone else who made this trip possible.

Left: Sophie Thomas in the Extra 3001