

100 Years of Human Flight in Australia – A Once in a Lifetime Celebration

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In 2006 the Australian Gliding Museum undertook its most ambitious project up to then: to construct three replica Taylor gliders for the purpose of recognizing the first human flight in Australia on 5 December, 1909.



Historians have long argued about who was first but it is now generally conceded that it was George Taylor who sustained the first free flight. On that day in 1909 there were approximately 30 flights undertaken. All but the last flight were tethered, much like a kite. On the final flight that afternoon the glider broke free of the ropes and George Taylor flew across Narabeen beach and landed in the surf. Lifesavers from the nearby club sprang into action and assisted in his return to the beach.

Others to fly on that day included Hallstrom and both his wife and Taylor's.

The Australian Gliding Museum was contacted 12 months prior to the anniversary and asked if they could provide one of the replicas for a display to be held at Narabeen. Geoff and I put our hands up to transport and set up the replica as we both have a penchant for history and we figured there couldn't be much more history than this. In some respect we thought the trip could be done quite easily but events almost stopped the celebration from going ahead.

Now most of you know that for anything aviation to proceed we need to introduce politics to ensure that anything that can be done to stop things happening is done. The Narabeen Council was concerned about the public liability of having a glider on the dunes and started requesting huge public liability cover then introduced some really quite unrealistic procedures. Discussion between the organizers and Council resulted in an impasse. Luckily neighbouring Pittwater Council put their hands up and offered to allow the show to continue. At least the glider was in sight of the Narabeen sand dunes.

Something else that would be interesting was how the glider would travel on the trip. In order to keep rigging time down the tailplane was removed from the fuselage and the bi-plane placed leading edges down onto an open trailer. The tailplane was then strapped onto the front of the trailer. In order to stop any chafing there was no cover to flap around. At the replica's first outing from Bacchus Marsh to Avalon Airshow, it became apparent that the very light construction of the tail may cause some problems. That was only 25 kilometres; what about a trip of 2500 kilometres?

It didn't take long to find out. After a few of the FBT's went past, the tailplane slowly started to fall apart. Luckily, we had taken the station wagon so we introduced controlled failure and stuffed it into the wagon. The wings travelled better than we had expected and weren't affected by anything the weather, or highway, tried to throw at it.

We had made the decision to travel overnight and after a remarkably pleasant 13-hour trip we arrived at Pelican Point, Pittwater. Geoff reckons that I prefer to travel at night so I can't see what's happening on the trailer. Probably so.

After settling in and having a short snooze to recharge the batteries we started to rebuild the tail. No problems with some super glue and clear tape and it was soon back together and this certainly made us feel much happier that all would be well for the next day. Parking a glider trailer in any public space usually creates interest with the public, but nothing like we experienced there. People appeared from all around and we spent some considerable time explaining what it was and what we were doing. It really created a talking point.

Start-up was set for 7:30am when the trailer had to be at "Rat" park. This was pretty easy as we were next door and in a short time the wing was undone and laid onto the ground. We were introduced to the main players for the morning by



Bernie Mckussy, including the local ACT cadets, and actors who were to play the parts of Taylor, Hallstrom etc. Australia pioneer aviation expert Laurence Hargraves was played by David Craddock, author of some very fine Australian aviation books including gliders. Another actor was John Tribe from the GCV who played the part of Halstrom. These guys looked great in their period outfits and this helped set the scene.

An excellent production was started with an overlay tape introducing everyone and giving a commentary of the events leading up to the day. Crowd-wise I can diplomatically say that it was small, but very enthusiastic. This was a major disappointment to all of us, given the efforts that had gone into the production. After the formal part was over the crowd spilled onto the ground to inspect the glider and spend a fair bit of time talking about what had taken place. The interest was very high and the thank yous for what we did were most gratifying. A large amount of GFA and Australian Gliding Museum promotional items were snapped up by the crowd.

Much too quickly it was all over, leaving only the packing up to be done and saying goodbye to the people who made it all happen.

We headed off to Camden to stay overnight and test fly a K-13 I had repaired in the weeks before. The Taylor glider certainly created interest there as well and the members we met made us feel very welcome. Thank you.

We were back on the road mid-morning and arrived back in Melbourne around midnight, finishing a trip that we considered to be both an outstanding success and personally gratifying; and that we were involved in something we won't do, nor see, again. Finally a very big thank you to all the people at the Australian Gliding Museum for having the foresight to build the replica gliders, the GFA, VSA and other gliding people who donated their time and money to help in our trip of commemoration. One hundred years is a long time.