

Paragliding

Conquering the Sky





OPPOSITE PAGE: Paragliding pilot Steve Roti and photographer Tyler Roemer take flight at Pine Mountain, a popular takeoff point for Central Oregon paragliders. ABOVE: A wing is folded up for the night. BELOW: Roti, left, and Roemer at Abern Rim in Lake County.

Story by VALERIE CLARK
Photography by TYLER ROEMER

For thousands of years, mankind has looked to the sky with reverence and awe, and wondered how he could soar through the clouds like a bird. Since ancient times there has been constant evolution in the science of flight, from the first crude airplanes to crafts that could land on the moon. But in spite of all the technological advances that have taken humans into the sky and beyond, maybe the purest form of flight is also the simplest.

True to its reputation as a haven for outdoor recreation of all kinds, Central Oregon has become a popular location for paragliding. Unlike hang gliding, which utilizes a rigid-frame glider, paragliding uses a parachute-like structure that glides on rising air currents. The sport as we know it today started in mountainous areas of the United States and Europe in the late 1970s,





LEFT: A safe landing at the end of a flight at Abert Rim. TOP RIGHT: A pilot preps for takeoff at Pine Mountain. BOTTOM RIGHT: A bird's-eye view of the wilderness around Pine Mountain.

according to the U.S. Hang Gliding and Paragliding Association. Gliders climb to a high point of a mountain, strap themselves into their gliding harnesses and simply step off the slope, floating into the air and controlling themselves with lines that make the wing rise or descend.

"I expected to work harder to actually get airborne," said Adam Clark, who tried paragliding on a tandem flight at Pine Mountain earlier this summer. "It was just three steps and we were airborne. It happened so fast; we just surged high into the sky. I couldn't believe we were that high so quick."

Clark took a tandem flight with experienced paraglider pilot Steve Roti, who has been involved in the sport for nearly 20 years.

"My wife Tina and I got into paragliding through mountaineering," Roti said. "Back in the 1980s climbers in the Alps were flying off the top of peaks like Mont Blanc and that sounded like fun to us. That, and flying down

sounded a lot easier than walking down."

Paragliding pilot Wade Holmes said he got into the sport to unveil more of the world's natural beauty.

"I've always loved to get out and see the world from a different perspective," Holmes said. "Flying was a natural extension to everything I loved about getting outside, it just made the 2D surface of the earth accessible in 3D, and exploded the expanse of terrain visible. The views are second to none, the power of the atmosphere, convection, and simple rules of fluid dynamics continue to demonstrate how naive I am as a terrestrial organism."

With its many scenic mountain peaks, Oregon is the perfect location for paragliding, Roti said.

"Oregon has spectacular scenery at the coast, in the Cascades, and in the high desert, and a paraglider is an ideal vehicle for taking in the sights," said Roti, who often hikes up Mt. Bach-

elor or Pine Mountain and paraglides down.

Aside from the beautiful views, Roti said, the biggest reward of paragliding is the feeling of flying like a bird, "without the noise of an engine, using the power of the sun and the wind to stay aloft for hours."

"There was a tranquility about it, seeing the sun set over the Cascades," Clark said. "It was scary and exciting at the same time. There was a sense of being in control, but totally not being in control at the same time because you're controlling your glider, but the wind is controlling you. You're so dependent on Mother Nature and the updrafts."

Roti said the sport is also a great way to spend time with his family.

"My daughter is nine years old and she has been on four tandem paragliding flights with me," he said. "When we fly together she tells me how high she wants to go and how long she wants to stay up. She's braver than I was



A peaceful flight above Lake Abert.

at her age. Because my wife flies paragliders too we can all be up in the air at the same time waving to each other and enjoying the views together.”

And paragliding has allowed his family to spend quality time around the world, he added.

“Paragliding is a travel-friendly sport because all the equipment fits in a backpack that can be checked as regular luggage on airline flights,” Roti said. “We’ve taken paragliding trips to eleven foreign countries: Canada, Mexico, France, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Slovenia, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. The Alps are my favorite destination, but we’ve had fun in all the countries we’ve visited.”

Holmes has traveled the world as well, in search of the perfect flight.

“I’ve traveled more with my glider than anything, or anybody, else,” he said. “I’ve soared in the Alps, thermaled across Mexico, and covered most of the western states in only a few years. Flying abroad is fun, but getting a ride back home after you land is where the real fun begins - you meet such wonderful people when you land near their camp or church parking lot, or just hike by with a big goofy bag. Curiosity must be an ingredient to kindness. There is no part of the world I don’t want to fly.”

The kindness of the paragliding community, Holmes said, is a big part of his love of the sport.

“It doesn’t have many cultural, economic, or social boundaries,” he said. “We have pilots that are painters, computer geeks, doctors, unemployed and trusties, 16 years old, 76 years old - you see it all, I’ve never met a pilot I didn’t hope to see again on launch. Everybody gets along, has a great time and is incredibly welcoming.”

For anyone interested in getting into paragliding, Roti and Holmes recommend first taking a tandem instructional flight.

“Paragliding is a serious form of aviation and requires a substantial amount for study and training in order to become a safe pilot,” Roti said. “I’ve been flying paragliders for 18 years and I’m still learning new things every year.”

He said there’s an initial investment of about \$5,000 for basic equipment and training to get into the sport.

“Training with a USHPA-certified instructor takes you through the novice (solo) pilot rating, and after that it’s a good idea to join a local club to meet other pilots to fly with,” Roti said. Central Oregon’s paragliding club is called the Desert Air Riders.

Holmes pointed out that paragliding is “high-commitment,” requiring lots of time, effort and patience. He advises relying on a trusted and experienced paragliding pilot to help you shop for your equipment.

“Supplies are generally sold through instructors; avoid eBay until you are familiar enough with the gear to know exactly what you need, how to inspect it, and know enough people in the sport to have references on the seller,” he said.

Information: www.desertairriders.org, www.ushpa.aero ☀️



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