

From: billarras@hotmail.com
To: desertairriders@googlegroups.com
Subject: DAR: In the beginning...
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Some of you might enjoy a few photos and the story behind my first paraglider, primitive as it was.

These first two shots were up in Broken Top bowl. Flights were made from the west side of Ball Butte, or from high in the center of the bowl, from the moraine or in that area.





This next pair of photos was on the north side of Cape Kiwanda. The glide was so bad I couldn't make it to the beach below, but instead landed back on the lower part of the steep slope.





In January of 1980, I started hang gliding. In 1986, I started flying hot air balloons. I like to fly. So, upon reading a story and seeing a photo of a paraglider in a magazine in the very end of 1986 or beginning of 1987, I immediately got on the phone and called a number of people in the hang gliding community until I was able to track down somebody who knew how I could get one. I committed to buying one over the phone and sent off a check for the full amount that same day. It took about a month before the paragliders arrived in the US and I got mine. Individuals had brought paragliders to the US from Europe, but mine was supposedly one of a dozen in the first batch imported commercially.

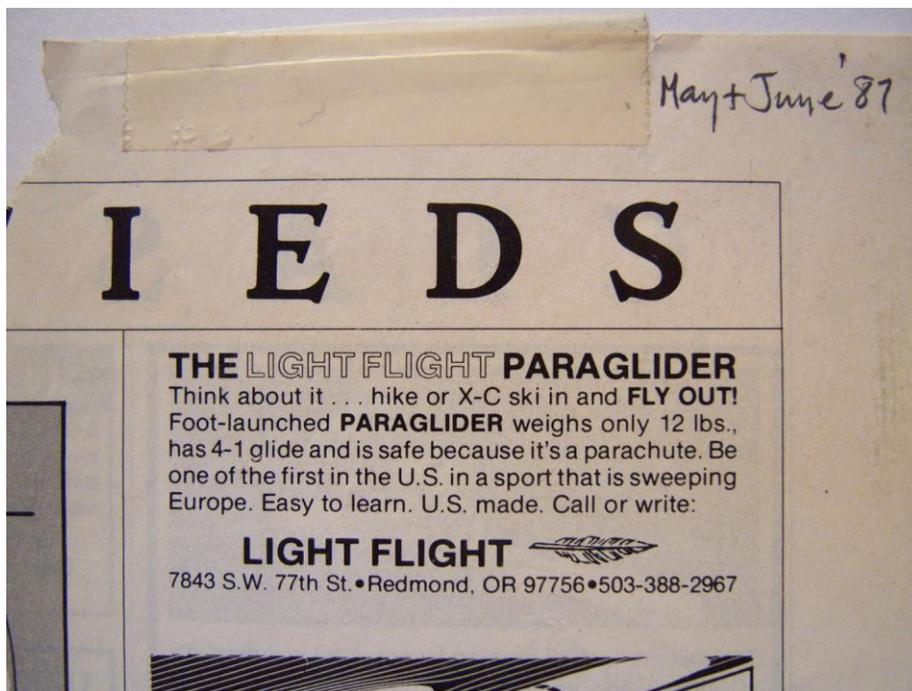
Of course, the first paraglider did not come with instructions of any kind, let alone a manual. After unpacking it, I took it out into the pasture and played with it until I was too beat up to do it any more. Then again the next day, and the next. The most 'fun' was one day when the wind was a fairly steady 15-20 mph. I came up with the bright idea of tying myself off to the truck with about 50' or 75' of a heavy duty balloon tether line. As soon as the wing was inflated, it jerked me straight up to maximum height, then slammed me down on one side, then the other and back again, like a cartoon rag doll, caught in a repeating lockout. It was only luck that kept me from breaking my neck before getting the wing collapsed.

After surviving the above episode, it seemed like a better idea to play with the contraption on snow, in free flight. There were a few trips up to Broken Top Bowl and Moon Mountain, with varied results but no injuries. It was fun to get airborne by starting on skis.

Next, I graduated to a trip to the beach, which is always fun. One day the wind was blowing about 20 from the NW and a hang glider pilot friend asked why I wasn't flying the paraglider. My response was that it was far too windy. He thought otherwise. Against my better judgement, I let him talk me into borrowing my paraglider; he was going to show me it wasn't too windy. There were two other hang pilots there to help him, while I stood off to the side to watch the fun. This was on the north side of Kiwanda, he was about halfway up the side of the dune. As soon as he started to inflate the wing, it yanked him into the air. The two other guys each grabbed a leg. All three of them got dragged up and over the dune and out of sight! Things wouldn't have worked out so well without the quick response of the two leg grabbers.

I had purchased the paraglider with the vision of flying it from the tops of mountains I'd climbed, especially South Sister. From the beginning, it was clear the new wing was really just a slightly modified parachute, but the design and performance could easily be improved. So I took mine completely apart at all the main seams, enough to make a pattern from it. Then I bought two sewing machines (a single and a double needle) and 100% of the materials and tools which would be necessary to build twelve complete paragliders of the exact same design as mine. When all the materials and hardware was assembled, I made one duplicate of the paraglider I'd purchased.

Once that was done, I placed advertisings in Hang Gliding and Outside magazines (note the amazing glide!):



The ads ran for two months, during which time I received more than 400 inquiries and sent out information packs, along with what was probably the first instruction manual for paragliders, at least in the US.

LIGHT FLIGHT, INC. 



INTRODUCING THE
LIGHT FLIGHT PARAGLIDER



LIGHT FLIGHT, INC.
7843 S.W. 77th Street • Redmond, Oregon 97756 • (503) 388-2967

LIGHT FLIGHT, INC.
INTRODUCTORY NEWSLETTER

Dear Outdoor Sports Enthusiast:

Thank you for your interest in the LIGHT FLIGHT, INC. PARAGLIDER.

The PARAGLIDER is a relatively new air sport development. 1986 saw the widespread introduction of this modified Ram-air foot launched parachute in Europe with an incredible response. LIGHT FLIGHT, INC. now offers the first PARAGLIDER made in the U.S.

The LIGHT FLIGHT PARAGLIDER offers you the pleasure and thrill of non-powered manned flight with a lightweight, compact and simple "wing." The portability of the LIGHT FLIGHT PARAGLIDER allows access to launch sites inaccessible to other foot-launched wings. Combining paragliding with hiking and cross country skiing will add a new twist to your back country experience.

Although some substantial duration, distance and altitude gain records have been and continue to be achieved in this new sport the major attraction is basic flight. An example of the endless possibilities this wing offers is the paraglider flight from 26,000' Gasherbrun 2 (a peak in Pakistan) last year by Pierre Gevaux while his fellow climbers spent 2 1/2 days hiking down!

This winter I have personally enjoyed cross-country skiing in the Oregon Cascade Mountains and using the LIGHT FLIGHT PARAGLIDER to fly from mountains and ridges. This summer I plan to have lots of fun climbing familiar peaks and flying to the meadows below. Can't wait!

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The full manual can be seen by going to this link (it's worth it for the specs and chuckles):

http://balloonbill.smugmug.com/Other/Light-Flight-Paraglider/36655099_4QkmdX#!i=3048080484&k=c59Z2kS

I had no doubt that the paraglider would evolve and become popular, I just didn't know how quickly it might happen. My idea was that if even just one person bought a paraglider from me (for \$1175) as a result of the two months of advertising, then I was seriously in the business of paraglider development and manufacturing. Any early buyers were promised free updates of wings within the first two years of purchase, with new improvements, to entice them to take the plunge and buy a wing at this early stage. I was willing to subsidize the development, but only to a certain extent and only if there was at least minimal interest shown - one purchase!

Alternatively, if there were no sales, then almost all of the equipment and materials would be used to make lightweight hot air balloons of my own design.

What I learned as a result of testing the market was that no one who saw either of my ads and no one who requested more information was anywhere near as impulsive as I was! Hmmm ... that probably says something about me.

In the end, I didn't make any more free flights with the first wing ever again, although we had a barrel of fun using it to tow behind a boat. Or I should say that everyone had fun who watched me get dragged through the water and almost drowned whenever the wind messed up my inflation at the exact moment the boat driver

gunned the engine. It was amazing how many times that happened. Of course I had no way to cut loose from the tow line, but was at the mercy of the driver. At the end of each ordeal I wasn't quite sure whether or not he got the boat stopped as quickly as possible; I thought maybe his reactions were delayed by his raucous laughter caused by watching me be a human submarine.

Anyway, I wasn't in on the ground floor of paragliding. It was more like I was in the basement! After my initial taste of paragliding, it was a couple years before the sport really made it to the ground floor and literally started to take off.

As paragliding finally gained the interest of the masses, I was busy with other adventures, including the building of experimental balloons, built with the paraglider materials. Over the years, I dabbled with paragliding on and off. My most serious on times have been of the more "gentil et civilisé" variety of flying, in France especially, where one can take a tram high into the Alps, enjoy breakfast, lunch or an espresso in a restaurant, then casually launch from a perfectly sloped grass launch, fly in a spectacular setting without getting slammed by dust-devils, then land in or next to a really nice French village. Am I biased?! In the rougher western US mountain and desert conditions, flying the hang glider still generally suits me better than the paraglider. To each their own.

But, in spite of expressing the above sentiment, it seems about time for me to get back into paragliding again. Jill Rosell's fantastic photos of a bunch of you flying from the top of Mt B this past weekend definitely encourage me to do more flying, including at Mt. Bachelor.

Happy landings to all!

Bill