only available maps were ONC charts that hadn't been updated for 20 years – maps that featured large white areas marked "relief data unreliable." Lots of time went into scouting the estancia or ranch airstrips, landable roads, fields, etc. and marking them on their own charts. The computers and internet connections had to be set up, the web site brought on line, turn point lists uploaded, and a host of other details had to be handled before flying could begin.

On November 11, after a morning of interviews by local television and newspaper reporters, Martin Just and Wolf-Dietrich Herold took off from Chapelco and encountered what would become known as the house rotor off the north end of the runway. They climbed to 14,750' in wave and had their first opportunity to take in the incredible Andean scenery. Some areas resembled the fjords of Norway. Others were more like the Swiss Alps. High mountain lakes shimmered everywhere. To the east, they could see the vast empty pampas. Just recalls, "seeing such a lonesome countryside and wide landscape, that was really different from flying in the Alps. You have big contrasts here. In one area, there were active and dormant volcanoes; 50 km away it looked like the moon...Patagonia is really a place you have to see to believe." Later that afternoon, Ohlmann and Heise made some low-level exploratory flights, spotting and cataloging various landing strips, fields, and even roads. Their work paved the way for the cross country flights to come.

The following day, November 12, Ohlmann and Michael Meyn made another exploratory flight around the area. After taking off about 8:00 am, they contacted the house rotor north of the airfield at about 1,300' AGL. Although the winds were weaker than expected, the rotor was working. At about 7,900', they left the lift and began to meander to the south, where they hoped lift would be stronger. Around noon, they encountered heavy sink, got lower, and decided it would be wise to start the engine. When they did, however, their oil pressure gauge read dangerously low. Quickly, they shut down the engine and considered their options. They chose to head toward home and were fortunate enough to climb in wave to 13,000'. However, 70 km short of Chapelco Airport, they found themselves once again too low to make final glide home. They would have to land at the busy Bariloche Regional Airport and hope they could fix the problem. Fortunately, the ground personnel at Bariloche were friendly and helpful. Meyn discovered the problem – a kink in an oil line – and came up with a temporary fix. Before leaving, they were informed that as glider pilots, they would not have to pay a landing fee, but they would be required to file a flight plan. At last they took off for home, arriving about 8:00 pm, just before dark.

This engine trouble raises the controversial subject of whether it is fair to be competing for open class records with a motorglider. When asked about this issue, Just said, "After eight hours in wave, that engine is just a block of ice. There's no chance to restart…our strategy was always to land somewhere and try to warm up the engine on the ground. There was one time when sunset was approaching and we couldn't restart. The battery had enough charge from the solar panels, but the circuit breaker kept popping out because the engine was just too cold. So we landed at Bariloche and stayed there overnight." Having the S10-VT with its robust engine made the project more efficient — the operation was self-contained, which made logistics simpler. But relying on the engine for "saving" a flight over unlandable terrain was never an option. The pilots viewed the aircraft as a sailplane and flew with a glider pilot's mindset.

In the first few days, the anticipated monster wave did not materialize. While the group waited for optimal weather, they made more measuring and scouting

The World's Longest Glider Flight

by Klaus Ohlmann

We took off from San Martin de los Andes at about 6:30 am, a bit late considering our declared task was a world record attempt of 1700 km to the south. Conditions were right for good lift. About 500 km out on course, however, the weather began to deteriorate considerably. We abandoned the original task in favor of a free flight around three turnpoints. The world record in this category stood at 2045 km and was owned by Terry Delore of New Zealand. By about 1:15 pm we had made it back to San Martin and had already flown 1050 km. The sky to the north showed diffuse clouds, with increasing overcast due to an approaching cold front. A deviation to the leeward side of the mountains looked possible.

After a long glide, we climbed under a rotor line over the town of Zapala. This was our springboard into the wave system from Mount Loncopue to the Cordillera del Viento. From there, we continued along in the lee of the range, over the Barrancas valley and the Rio Grande, always staying above 16,000'. Around 4:00 pm we turned to the south. If we could make it home, we would have 2100 km in the bag. About 120 km from San Martin, we decided instead to make the most of the excellent conditions in the north again, instead of flying through the ever-worsening weather in the direction of home. This turned out to be a wise decision — a Brazilian DG-500 that had been flying with us ended up taking forever to cover the last 70 km to San Martin.

Our ground speed rarely dipped below 250 km/h on our northerly course. But the most exciting moment was yet to come. We had a crucial choice to make: should we pick a turnpoint as far to the north as possible and then land at Chos Malal? This would sacrifice a lot of potential distance. Or should we fly as fast as possible to Malargue airport, which this late in the day would be the only feasible landing option. We would run the risk of landing too late. In order for a landing time to be legal in Argentina, you must land no later than 20 minutes after sunset. It was now 8:10 pm. Sunset would come at 8:34 pm. We had 180 km to cover in just 44 minutes. This was not an easy decision, but we took the risk and headed toward Malargue. The fact that our groundspeed was about 300 km/h encouraged me to fly on. Just two minutes before last light, our lovely bird touched down in the ice-cold Andean wind in Malargue, after 14 hours, 20 minutes.

FLIGHT SUMMARY:
Pilot: Klaus Ohlmann
Co-Pilot: Alois Urbancic
Glider: Stemme S-10 VT
Takeoff: San Martin de los Andes, Argentina 26 Nov 2000, 6:30 am
Turnpoints: NO Lago Fontana, Rio Grande NW of Malargue, South Zapala
Landing: Malargue Airport 8:50 pm
Distance: 2463 km
Duration: 14 hrs 20 min
Average speed: 172 km/h