

flights were just marvelous. You could fly 1000 km for fun, and the scenery was incredible.”

On December 13, 1999, Klaus Ohlmann and Argentinean glider pilot Mauro Zaldua set a world record for free-out-and-return distance of 1406 km. Ohlmann rose at 3:30 am, grabbed a quick breakfast, and joined Heise and Lindemann who were already poring over the latest weather reports from Berlin. All agreed that a task to the south would be the best bet. The S10-VT took off from Chapelco at 5:45 am. Ohlmann chose to make a relatively low start – to allow a low return in the evening – and quickly climbed in the house rotor to 13,500’. Some strong rotor at Bariloche gave them incredible 17-knot climbs, but conditions soon deteriorated. Around 9:00 am they had put 300 km behind them, but then Ohlmann was lured by some promising looking clouds to the west, over a valley south of Corcovado. After struggling for an hour, they were just barely hanging on at 5,200’ over the tree-tops. It looked like they would have to land just to the east at Corcovado airport. On the way there, the wind picked up and they found themselves in some violent rotor that lifted them to 14,750’ again. Bolstered by this climb, they pressed on southward. They reached Lake Fontana, where Ohlmann had already flown with Martin Just. Beyond that, he was in new territory. The gaps between clouds became smaller, making navigation trickier, with the unsettling reality that mountain peaks were hiding in some of those clouds. Relief came as they neared Lake Buenos Aires, where the cloud gaps widened, and as Ohlmann wrote, “Lake Ibanez, with its luminous green waters, combined with the dark blue of Lake Buenos Aires, which reached almost to Chile. To the south, all looked clear again, and I found it difficult to turn around here.”

They did turn northward, toward home, at Lake Buenos Aires. It was just before 3:00 pm with 700 km to go. Good climbs of 9 to 13 knots just north of the lake took them to 26,500’. Strong southerly winds kept their ground speeds as high as 330 km/h. They covered the 200 km to Lake Fontana, rarely falling below 16,500’, and making good time. South of Futuleufquen they rode another wave to 22,000’. Across from the mountain of El Maiten, only 200 km from Chapelco, they had another climb to 23,000’, and they were on final glide for

home. Ohlmann described the scene: “To the left, lay the beautiful massif of Tronador, to my right, the semi-arid Pampa landscape, ahead lay Huapi, just visible west of Bariloche... The iridescent lakes of the Siete Lagos region shimmered in the evening sun, while wind-furrowed cloud bands showed us the way. West of Chapelco, I wove my way along the rust-colored hills, past Lake Meliquina, toward our goal in the dark basin of Lake Lacar.” They landed at Chapelco Airport at 8:00 pm after 14 hours and 1,406 km, a new world record.

On December 14 the submission of another outstanding flight was foiled by a malfunctioning flight recorder. Although Ohlmann outdid his previous day’s world record by 20 km, only the first hour of the flight was recorded.

Ohlmann flew even farther on December 16 – a 1,550-km free out-and-return flight – going as far south as the city of Ushuaia, on Isla Grande de Tierra del Fuego, the southernmost city in Argentina. With six flights of over 1000 km, around 400 hours of flight time and enough data about wave to keep the meteorologists busy for some time, the Mountain Wave Project 1999 was declared a success. And this was just a small taste of the great promise of soaring in the lee of the Cordillera de los Andes.

When Ohlmann returned to Argentina with the S10-VT in November 2000 in hopes of building upon the groundwork from 1999, the other members of the MWP team had to stay behind in Germany due to work obligations. They supported their teammate with long-distance meteorological and technical help. In the first week, Ohlmann flew a free three-turnpoints distance flight of 1309 km with an average speed of 169 km/h, and a 1,550-km out-and-return. Then, on November 26, 2000, he blew these distances – and the standing world record of 2,049 km – away with a 2,463-km free three-turnpoints distance flight (see the sidebar with his report). His world record claim is pending. He makes flights of this magnitude seem routine — during his three-month stay in San Martin, he flew at least eight flights of over 1,000 km.

A word of caution to readers who may be considering packing their bags for Argentina: flying in these undeveloped areas is much like serious mountain climbing – highly technical and potentially hazardous. There is little existing infrastructure

to support glider pilots, so everything must be brought in: spare parts, equipment, aircraft, and someone to fix the aircraft. As Martin Just says, “You can’t go only for a vacation. You need a small support group with lots of different abilities. I know this sounds kind of dramatic – it is a civilized tourist area, where we were able to get internet services, and so on – but you need a skilled group to make it work.”

Their time in Argentina left an impression on these seasoned pilots. They flew alongside Condors, over volcanoes, valleys, and lakes that few pilots have ever seen. Each day held surprises, like the rainy afternoon in 1999 when Just and Heise were flying through rainbows during their entire flight, only to find upon landing that a full double rainbow had appeared, framing the Stemme on the tarmac at Chapelco Airport. Klaus Ohlmann flew as far south as Tierra del Fuego, a turnpoint few glider pilots can claim. It is safe to say that the members of the Mountain Wave Project are hooked. They are planning another expedition to San Martin this fall, in pursuit of more knowledge of the Andean wave.

For more information about the Mountain Wave Project, see www.mountainwave-project.de. To find out more about the area described, see the San Martin website at www.sanmartindelosandes.com.

All flight reports were translated from the original German by Susan McAllister. The author wishes to thank Martin Just, Klaus Ohlmann and Rene Heise for their assistance with this article.



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