



# GLORY DAYS – PART ONE

Simon Plint

MY EARLIEST RECOLLECTION OF THE MORNING GLORY WAS PROBABLY AN ARTICLE IN SKYSAILOR (NOW SOARING AUSTRALIA) PUBLISHED AFTER THE FIRST NON-POWERED HANG GLIDER PILOTS FLEW IT. THAT WAS 10 YEARS AGO WHEN CMAC, AL GILES, BILLO AND PK MADE THEIR FIRST PILGRIMAGE TO BURKETOWN.

Road Train  
Photo: Jason Hunter

I saw my first picture of a Morning Glory on a website called Dropbears.com. The pages at [www.dropbears.com/brough/] had been authored by a powered sailplane pilot who had been flying the wave since 1989. This site is an excellent source of information and images of the Morning Glory and a lot more.

My interest and subsequent reading of all the Morning Glory pages at Dropbears was the result of finding out that Billo and Al were organising a 2005 expedition to Burketown in memory of CMac. Apparently there was a spare seat. As it turned out this was all part of Billo's cunning plan to get me to drive his second car and to video the event. I had been singled out as having some sort of a knack with a video camera and an editing suite after the success of the Dalby DVD.

I just had to convince my wife and family of the value of this once in a lifetime experience. This was not going to be easy since there was no guarantee that the Morning Glory would even come in and JOD's itinerary was going to see us travel some 8,000km. This alone would cost a fortune in petrol.

To my delight and the envy of my work mates my wife, Tanya, was very understanding.

She would have to run the house and look after the kids for four weeks without me. She does that anyway, come to think of it.

None of us wanted to think about the fact that we may not even see a Morning Glory; we all had to sign on knowing that our trip could be Morning Glory-less. At least we would get to see parts of Australia that most people don't. We were to drive from Newcastle (NSW) to Hawker (SA), and from there we would get on the Birds-ville Track to take us through to Queensland then up to Burketown, our final destination in the tropical north of Australia...

Jason arrived to pick me up at 6am and my sleepy family watched in amazement through the front window as we managed to fit all my gear into an already overloaded Subaru. This was Billo's second car that he had bought for the trip to tow his Buzzard trike. In the weeks leading up to our departure Billo put in a lot of work so that we would be able to have two trikes in Burketown and thus have the best chance of getting on the wave.

We made our way to Rutherford to fuel up, zero the trip odometers and take a group shot. We nicknamed Billo's Subaru Christine because she had a mind of her own and communicated to us with beeps and flashes when we left a door open or the keys in the ignition. Billo had his Hilux and was towing the XTC 582 on the trailer he built. His passengers were Greg and Young Shane. JOD was in his Subaru with Al Giles (Dr Death), aircon and a fridge. I was with Jason in Billo's Subaru and as the others wheeled away from the servo Jason got on the radio to request a jump-start as our battery was

dead. Was this an indication of our readiness to face the harsh centre of Australia?

I took a photo of Jason and Al jump-starting the car. Little did I know that was to be the last I saw of my camera until Burketown – the car was packed so tight it wasn't till then that I was able to find the bag into which I had placed it.

The day started off drizzly, then cleared to blue skies. We made our way west in high spirits. Jason and I needed another jump start in Merriwa, and by Gilgandra Jason had had enough and found an auto electrician who installed a new battery. Billo missed the turn to Gilgandra but caught up with us in Nyngan after visiting Dubbo. It was quite a distance between Merriwa and Nyngan, and as we speed across the plains under beautiful cloud streets I was impressed by the thought of Scott Barrett's flight from Denman to Nyngan, a valley record of 340km.

Selmsey and Shane had left the day before to do a flooring job in Moree. Shane worked as a labourer to cover his petrol costs for the trip. We found them in the pub with the longest veranda in Cobar. Come to think of it, we always found Selmsey in a pub. We stocked up with beer and food and headed out of town to make camp half way between Cobar and Wilcania in a rest stop.

The next day we awoke to a beautiful moonset and sunrise before making our way to Broken Hill. The McDonalds billboard on the outskirts of town was an indication that even though we had travelled so far we still hadn't got far enough. We stopped to get petrol and Selmsey made his way to the wreckers to find a radiator; he'd had enough of driving with the heater on to keep the engine cool.



Cobar Pub

Photo: Shane Colledge

Broken Hill was the point at which we headed south towards SA. The roads were getting longer and straighter and the scenery on each side more sparse. Flat for as far as you could see. We turned north at Peterborough while Selmsey and Shane headed to Port Augusta to continue the search for a radiator having come up with nothing in Broken Hill.

At Hawker we got petrol and more supplies and turned our noses up at the expensive fly nets you put over your hat, before heading into the National Park at Wilpena Pound.

We shared a campsite at Arkaroola with two or three busloads of school kids. The showers were hot but there was a line up and quite a wait as each kid thought he was back home. This concept was compounded by the fact that back at the buses there was a large screen set up with a DVD playing. Right. We had a nice fire and cook up, but still a ways to go to really get away from it.

Come morning and Billo gave us all joy flights over the Pound until the thermals picked up. Then we made our way towards Lyndhurst, but not before returning to Hawker and buying up all the fly nets. No one told me about the flies. Unbelievable.

The convoy had split up with JOD and Selmsey taking the more scenic route while we followed Billo on the bitumen. We were all to meet for a pie at Copley, but the others couldn't wait for us and left a message with one of the local kids whom we ignored as he ran down the street waving at us as we passed through the sleepy town at sunset.

We found the others in Lyndhurst, in the pub. This was to be the point at which Billo would start flying the XTC 582 over the dirt roads, but he didn't communicate this very well to the others and since they did not want to stay in Lyndhurst and Billo did not want to break up the group we made our way to Marree on the dirt.

JOD and Al stayed in the Marree pub while the rest of us camped by the old railway line at the end of town. Jason and Billo were getting quite good now at cooking a



Selmsey turbo towing

Photo: JOD

“mash-up” in the Trangias. I was suffering from a head cold and Jason was getting over a sore throat so it was an early night. Besides, I was to be first passenger in the trike flying the Birdsville Track the next day.

G-forces pressed me back into the seat as Billo increased the throttle and pushed the bar out to bank the trike up and around as we left the dirt road below and circled back over the guys at camp. We buzzed the pub and started up the Birdsville Track. Unfortunately Billo had mixed emotions as we made our way through the beautiful morning air. Here we were in this incredible setting, but the XTC 582 had taken a beating on the dirt road in spite of the beer cartons we had taped onto the spats. There were chips in the fibreglass and dints in the rear stays and in the Rotax radiator.

The view below us was like a moonscape with the polished red stones of the Stony Desert creating a mirage effect. I was still suffering from the head cold and could not stop my nose from running. Once the sponge microphone cover was saturated, snot started to whip up inside the full face helmet in the eddy currents.

We were heading for Cooper's Creek to pick up the next passenger. I assumed that Billo would have loaded the waypoints into his GPS, but when we landed at a homestead and he waved his GPS at the owner saying, “I have a GPS so I know exactly where I am... lost”, I knew that he hadn't. We had landed at a homestead called Etaduna and we were treated to cups of tea and as much vegemite toast as we could eat. They had a broadband internet connection and Billo was able to get a weather report before we launched again. We circled up above the homestead while the men went back to work and the kids waved



Somewhere on the Birdsville Track. If there's a hill we'll fly it  
Photo: JOD



The hot pool at Mungerannie

Photo: JOD



Billo and Young Shane

Photo: Jason Hunter

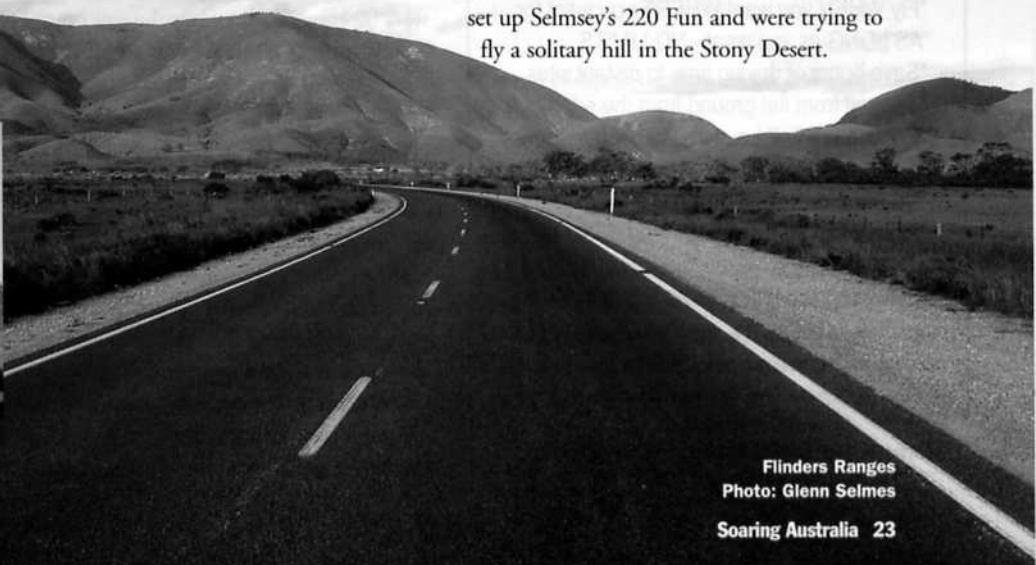
goodbye. Billo made the comment over the radio that his windscreen needed a wipe. He'd put my helmet on by mistake and I prayed that he did not get my cold as this could jeopardise the towing in Burketown.

The going was rougher now and the XTC 582 was starting to burn more fuel. We'd missed Coopers Creek and the last radio contact we'd had with the others was to hear that they had set up Selmsey's 220 Fun and were trying to fly a solitary hill in the Stony Desert.



Make sure you get off the road and stop for road trains  
Photo: Glenn Selmes

December 2005



Flinders Ranges  
Photo: Glenn Selmes

Soaring Australia 23



Birdsville Pub  
Photo: Jason Hunter



Billo in the XTC582 over the Birdsville Track  
Photo: Glenn Selmes

We pushed on until we saw an airstrip where we landed again. This time it was glasses of cold water. It was so dry. We were at Mulka and Billo refused their kind offers of fuel as he knew that landowners round here did not have much to spare. Anyway, we weren't far from the Mungaranie Pub.

We landed at Mungaranie and taxied up the road to the petrol bowsers to fill up. It was my shout at the bar and I can tell you the first two stubbies did not even touch the sides and the egg and bacon roll was the best I think I've ever had. The others soon arrived but the track had taken its toll and we set about fixing the damage to trailers and cars. After that we grabbed some beers and jumped in the natural hot spring pool before heading off to find a campsite and a place for Billo to land.

That night we built a big fire and JOD invited us to dine in his billion star restaurant. The chef's special was jaffles, and, thanks to JOD and Splint's efficiency, everyone had an elegant sufficiency in quick time. The night sky was amazing as we watched satellites speed through the Milky Way. This was to be the first night that I rolled out a swag instead of a tent and slept by the fire. We were far enough away from the city now.

Day five of our trip so far and it was Jason's turn in the trike. I filmed the XTC 582 as Billo warmed the oil in the orange glow of a rising sun, then as he took off and climbed and banked in a 180° turn to fly across the setting moon.

I now had Christine to myself and we headed up the track with Greg and Shane in the Hilux not far behind. Although there were patches of water on the track it was pretty dry and not really a problem to drive on, but I would not do it in the wet. I was able to get some good footage of the other cars on the track and Selmsey found a sand hill to

soar. We found the trike parked under a tree in the centre of Birdsville with two sleepy heads lying in its shade. We were all dry so we hit the Birdsville pub. More good tasting beer and a bar full of hats stuck to the rafters.

Shane was next in the trike and flew with Billo to a private airstrip just short of Bedourie. Billo was not happy to leave the trike there and so Shane joined the ground crew and we set off to find a suitable landing for Billo, who took off into the afternoon sun. As the light faded the dust from JOD's car ahead seemed to suddenly lie flat on the ground like a fog as the katabatic conditions took effect. Billo was on the radio complaining about heavy sink while Al was trying to find a patch of road that did not have a SWER line running next to it. He found one, a flat stretch of road between two crests in the road with sand hills on either side.

We parked cars on the crests at each end and lit the road with our headlights. The drone of the XTC 582's Rotax overhead broke the eerie quiet we were listening to as we manned our stations. We were all concerned for Billo's safety as night landings can be dangerous. I watched as the lights from Christine blinked. Not because we'd left the door open but because Billo had just guided the trike over her roof-top and onto the road for a perfect landing. He rolled the trike off to the side of the road and that was our camp for the night.

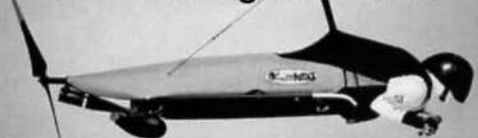
Next morning Billo was up with the cockatoos and flying away against another sunrise and moon set. We met him at Boullia where we put the trike back on the trailer. It would be bitumen from here to Gregory Downs, just 120km short of Burketown. We camped in another rest stop just past Mt Isa, and as my sinuses started to clear Billo started blowing his nose and chanting the mantra, "*Splint must die!*"

Day seven was another long day of driving, but our reward was a swim in the river at Gregory Downs. A tranquil oasis and the first time some of us had washed in a week. I grabbed the esky from the car and dropped it on the riverbank.

Unfortunately we indulged for a little too long and by the time Billo was back in the air he only had enough light to make it to Brookdale, a homestead about 40km short of Burketown. Billo put the Cruze wing to sleep under the veranda and we picked him up and continued on to Burketown where Donny was waiting for us at the Burketown pub. He'd flown in two days before. We kept the celebrations brief, as tomorrow morning we would be up at 4am to fly the Morning Glory.

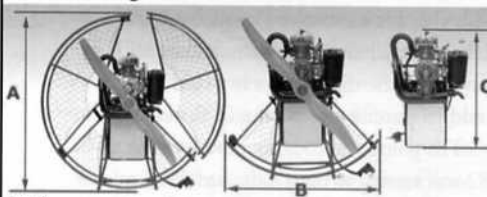
*Glory Days continued next issue...*

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# GLORY DAYS – Part 2

Simon Plint

MOST OF US THREW OUT A SWAG  
FOR OUR FIRST NIGHT IN BURKETOWN.  
WE WERE UP AT 4:30AM AND OUT ON  
THE SALT FLATS. RUNNING OUT CAR  
TOWING ROPES AND MARKING THEIR  
POSITION WITH A GPS. THERE'S ABOUT  
25KM OF SALT FLATS SPREAD OUT BETWEEN  
BURKETOWN AND THE OCEAN. IT'S PERFECT  
FOR CAR TOWING. THERE ARE SOME  
SMALL SAND HILLS AND SOME MUDDY  
PATCHES, BUT WHILE YOU'RE ON TOW  
IT'S EASY TO SEE AND DIRECT YOUR DRIVER.  
SO ALL WE NEEDED WAS A MORNING GLORY...

Splint, Donny and Grob flying the Morning Glory

Photo: Glen Selmes

Unfortunately none came through, so by mid-morning we were back in town. After seven days on the road it was a relief to set up camp knowing we wouldn't be breaking it down for seven days. By midday we were done and flat out in the shade sleeping. When we awoke at 2pm it was "Beer o'clock", due to Burketown's "Beer Light Saving". We moved from mattress to deck chair. Dinner was a mash up around the gas stove, a barra burger at the take-away van, or a meal in the pub. Then it was off to bed, for the gruelling Burketown routine to begin again.

On the third morning I woke an hour before the alarm and put my hand outside the tent, running my fingers through the grass. They came back wet with dew. I hopped out of the tent and Donny called me over to check out the wet footpath near the toilet block. Dew was dripping off the hang gliders on the cars and everyone was a little more excited today. Dew is the telltale sign that there is enough moisture around for a Morning Glory to form.

Out on the salt flats there was no sunrise – it was blocked by a Morning Glory. The aero tow crew was ready and waiting for the trikes to arrive. When they did, Jason was first away behind Billo, but JOD had to wait

while Al tried frantically to connect the cable through the crankshaft to the makeshift multi-grip release mechanism on the Buzzard. Billo returned after Jason broke a weaklink without enough height to reach the wave. JOD jumped on the dolly and Billo yanked him into the air while Donny unclipped and went over to help Al. I endured two frustrating release malfunctions behind the Buzzard before Billo returned and announced that the wave had stalled off the coast and would probably soon dissipate. To make matters worse, Al discovered that the Buzzard's lack of wheel spats had allowed salt and mud to flick up into the props and they were starting to disintegrate.

The wave was still a long way off and JOD had also fallen short of it, landing in a boggy area some distance from the car tow team. Billo suggested I get in the back of the trike to fly out to the wave and at least get some video of it. I grabbed Billo's camera and headed for the trike, surprised at the look of disbelief on Donny's face as I jumped in the back seat.

It was a long flight out to the wave, but with every minute it became more and more awesome. No picture or video can do it justice. You have to be there to fully comprehend the size and majesty of "The Wave". It was hard

to believe what I was seeing as I slowly panned from one horizon to the other along this magnificent mountain range of cotton wool.

When we arrived on the wave Billo throttled back the engine and pointed to the climb rate. Finally I was able to put the camera in my lap and sit back in the seat to try and take it all in. I almost couldn't.

One soon runs out of superlatives when it comes to the Morning Glory. It's just as well I have a thesaurus:

**surreal** [adjective] – having the qualities of surrealism; bizarre, unusual, weird, strange, freakish, unearthly, uncanny, dreamlike, phantasmagorical: a surreal mix of fact and fantasy, a backdrop of surreal images.

**phantasmagoria** [noun] – a sequence of real or imaginary images like that seen in a dream: what happened next was a phantasmagoria of horror and mystery. Derivatives: phantasmagoric [adjective], phantasmagorical [adjective]

**majestic** [adjective] – having or showing impressive beauty or dignity: watching majestic eagles soar along the Mississippi.

**unreal** [adjective] – so strange as to appear imaginary; not seeming real: in the half-light the tiny cottages seemed unreal.

Take your pick, they all apply. But they still don't convey what it was really like.

As Billo and I floated around on the wave I tried to think of how I would describe this experience. The only thing I could relate it to was paddling out in the biggest surf I'd ever ridden (though not scary surf because the wave never breaks and you don't have to fall down its face). However, the wave is many, many times bigger than the biggest surf anyone has ever ridden. This is where, for me anyway, the gravity of what we were doing sunk in. Flying the Morning Glory in a hang glider is where tow surfing was not that many years ago and now it's considered an extreme sport and sponsors are investing a lot of money. The more pilots that go to Burketown and fly the Morning Glory, the more the knowledge base is expanded and the greater the success rate.

In terms of hang gliding I guess it's like having climbed out in a thermal till you're on top of a huge cloud street, not under it. The cloud does actually run for as far as you can see east to west, and there are secondary waves of similar size. It's all backlit from the rising sun. The sun reflects off the Albert River, and the dark brown sandy colour of the salt flats provides a good contrast to the pure white of the cloud. The cloud bubbles and churns as it rolls backward under the invisible layer of surface air. This is what generates the lift in front of the wave.

Looking down on this amazing phenomenon from the back seat of the trike I could think of only one thing better, and that was to be in my hang gliding harness. But even if another wave did not come through, I figured I could live with this.

I tapped Billo on the shoulder and yelled into the opening in his helmet, "Thanks, this alone is worth the price of admission!"

Billo nodded, but he was concentrating on something else, and as I looked down through the skirt of cloud that precedes the leading edge I knew what it was. The cloud was on the move. It was devouring the Albert River and the salt flats on either side. Billo stepped on the throttle and pointed the Cruze wing back to where Donny was waiting in the dolly. Donny knew all along that the wave was gonna' come in.

We flew over the car tow crew where Jason had landed. JOD was further out and walking his glider. We landed and I jumped out of the trike and hooked on the rope. Donny had already clipped on to his end of the rope and as I turned to see if he needed a hand he dropped into prone and waved to Billo and he was gone. Things got a little crazy after that. I didn't know whether to keep filming or get in my harness. I ran for my harness, then turned back for the camera, then the harness, no the camera, and then I saw Billo and Donny coming back under

the wave. It wasn't nice and fluffy anymore. It was dark and there was a strong wind now. Billo had circled around just ahead of the cloud and as they passed overhead the cloud caught up with them and they disappeared. I heard Donny hooting over the radio, "This is awesome, it really does roll backwards! Thanks for the tow, Billo."

Billo turned his engine off and was flying the wave with Donny. Then to my surprise I heard Al. With the damage to the prop on the Buzzard, Billo had sent Al back to the airstrip, but being a veteran wave rider Al took off again when he saw the wave coming in. Billo warned Al not to turn the engine off as he would not get it started again. I had to laugh as Al got back on the radio and announced that he had switched his engine off and was soaring the wave. The Buzzard was the first trike to ever soar a Morning Glory back in 1997, and Al was the pilot.

The three of them flew about 60km down the road towards Gregory Downs. Billo re-lit his Rotax and climbed high to fly back over the secondary waves while Jason and I went to pick up Donny and Al.

By mid-week the mornings were getting dryer, and although a few more waves had come through we were unable to catch them. One came through as clear cloudless air, and another came through in the dark while we were still setting up. Apart from Donny, the rest of us were starting to worry that we might not get a wave. The reality of investing so much time and money and not getting to fly the wave was causing the mood around camp to change. This was compounded by the fact that the Buzzard's prop was still being repaired and Billo did not want to tow off the salt flats so the aerotow team had to find another tow strip.

With fewer aerotow options, Jason felt that some of the aerotow pilots should go on the car tow team. No one offered, including myself, so Jason re-rigged his tow bridal for car towing and Selmsey and I set up Christine (the car) for towing.

That night around the BBQ the talk from powered glider pilots was that it was very unlikely there'd be a wave tomorrow. JOD had aggravated an old shoulder injury on the long tow earlier in the week and, as fate would have it, asked that he not be woken in the morning. Al made the same request unless there was a sufficient amount of dew. As it was, JOD's itinerary had set aside Wednesday for a day trip to Lawn Hill Gorge, so we went to sleep pretty much resigned to spending the next day sightseeing.

We got up at 4:30am and there was not much dew, but enough that we thought it was worth waking Al. The response that came



Line 'em up Huey

Photo: Don Gardner



The Glory chasing a glider

Photo: Don Gardner



Wingman

Photo: Don Gardner



Shane

Photo: Don Gardner



Donny on the Morning Glory

Photo: Glen Selmey

back from behind his cabin door was, "NOT TOWING TODAY!" This was a problem for me as my radio and camera were being charged inside. It was even more of a problem for Jason, as Al had volunteered to be his driver. But before long Al was more awake and had joined us.

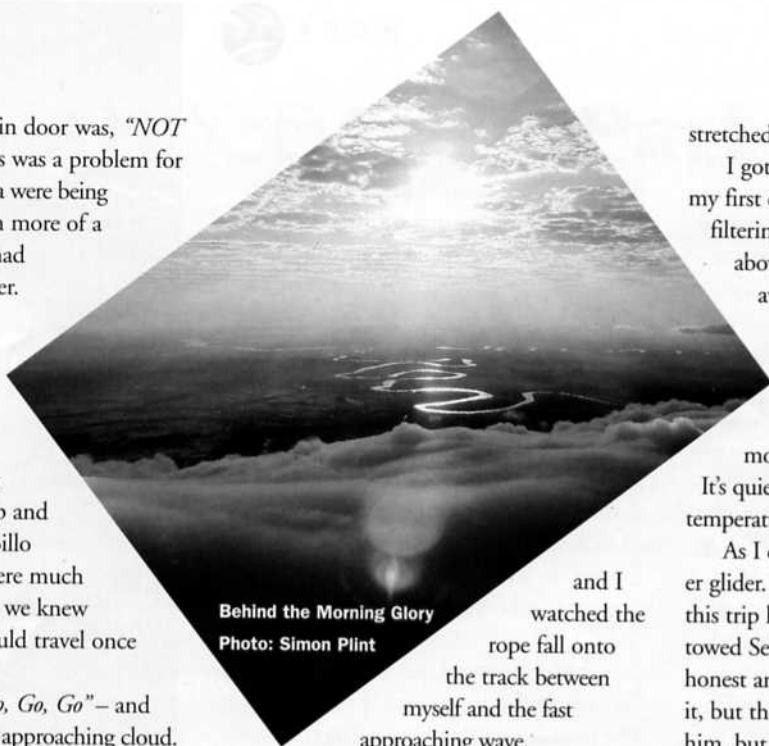
On the salt flats, to our relief, the dawn revealed another Morning Glory. Donny and I set up and I jumped in the dolly as Billo arrived in the trike. We were much more hurried this time, as we knew now how fast the wave could travel once it hit the land.

I gave the signal – "Go, Go, Go" – and started hurtling toward the approaching cloud. Just as I considered the fact that I might actually be going to ride the wave, the release on the trike malfunctioned and I watched the rope fall below me.

That left me on the ground and Donny in the dolly hooked onto the spare rope. As he flew over me on tow behind Billo I had to laugh at the irony. It could have been Jason.

I had to carry my glider, still in my harness, a kilometre. The morning was starting to heat up and it was very humid with the wave approaching and I was out of condition. I would not have made it all the way, but Greg was nearby checking the end of the car tow rope and ran the dolly the rest of the way down to me. It took all my energy to get in the dolly and turn it around. I drank nearly all my water. I didn't think I was going to recover. At one point I actually considered getting out of the dolly and giving it a miss.

Billo's voice on the radio stopped me as he said, "Splint, you're only going to get one go at this!" The trike came in over the top of me



Behind the Morning Glory  
Photo: Simon Plint

and I watched the rope fall onto the track between myself and the fast approaching wave.

I prayed the releases would hold this time as I hooked on and yelled, "Go! Go! Go!"

It seemed to take forever to get to the cloud, and when we were nearly there Billo started circling. I never asked him why, but I believe it was that he did not want to take me over the river. If the release malfunctioned again I would be stranded. He was waiting for the wave to catch us.

He came out of the last turn and we were at half the height of the cloud. Up to this point the tow had been perfect. In fact, it was my best tow ever. I stayed level with the trike and there were no PIOs. Then, suddenly, I was all over the shop. I nearly locked out in each direction. I felt the weak-link would break for sure. It was the turbulence before the wave which I had been warned of.

Billo's voice came calmly over the radio, "Good flying Splint... stay on tow."

I returned to level flight as we left the turbulence. Then the vario started going off and I pulled the bar in thinking I was getting out of shape again, but when I sighted up the rope to the trike it was going up too. We were in lift and I thanked Billo for the tow and pulled the release – I WAS FLYING THE CLOUD!

My dreams had come true. Here I was on the cloud and I could not believe it. Billo's voice came over the radio and said, "Way to go Splint!" as he flew in front of me with the tow rope

stretched out behind.

I got out in front of the cloud and did my first cautious 360. The beauty of the sun filtering through the secondary waves above the Albert River took my breath away. In some places the cloud was smooth and looked like a mountain of snow, while in others it looked like steam rising up and riding over a long mountain range on the ground below. It's quiet too, and a comfortable temperature.

As I completed my turn I noticed another glider. It was Selmsey. Greg, who before this trip had never been a car tow driver, had towed Selmsey onto the wave. I have to be honest and say I didn't think they could do it, but there he was. I wanted to congratulate him, but the car towers were on a different radio channel so I just did a "Yeee Harr!" in his direction.

The first thing you notice about flying on the wave is how smooth it is; a lack of thermal activity and no wind, just lifting air. It is truly serene. The movement of the cloud is hard to detect unless you look down on the leading edge and watch it relative to the ground. Relative to the cloud it's just like soaring a massive ridge of snow, its leading edge like the steam clouds that rise from trees or the ground early on a summer morning.

In fact, it's misleading to say that the cloud moves. Yes it rolls, but it's not actually moving forward. Consider leaves on the surface of a pond after you've thrown a stone in the middle. The stone creates ripples that pass under the surface as indicated by the fact that the leaves move vertically and not horizontally. The same is true of the moisture laden air lying on the surface of the land as the solitary wave pushes under it. Like the leaves it rises up and the moisture it contains turns into cloud, and as it falls the cloud disperses. So it's not the cloud that moves at 60km/h, it's the solitary wave beneath, creating cloud as it goes.

When I say solitary wave I don't mean there is only one (there were three more clouds behind the one that I was on). The term solitary stems from the physicists' description of the wave cloud as a soliton, a quantum or quasiparticle propagated as a travelling non-dissipative wave that is neither preceded nor followed by another such disturbance.

There are a number of theories put forth as to what causes this soliton to form. One is that massive amounts of air stack up near Cape York and then fall, but this does not account for the Morning Glories that have come from the south. Another is that opposing seabreeze currents collide. Personally, I think Huey (Aussie weather god) gets



Billo over Albert River  
Photo: Glen Selmes

bored in the early hours and throws the equivalent of a huge stone into the Gulf of Carpentaria, the resulting ripples generating the Morning Glory.

Flying the Morning Glory was amazing. In the Sting I had to keep the bar well in to keep up with the cloud, which, according to my GPS, was moving at 60km/h. But since it was so smooth I was still able to relax and take it in. The cloud was ever-changing. Sometimes the surface was smooth and curved concentrically from front to back. Sometimes the surface developed mounds and peaks like meringue, while in other sections it was more like cauliflower. But everywhere it was white.

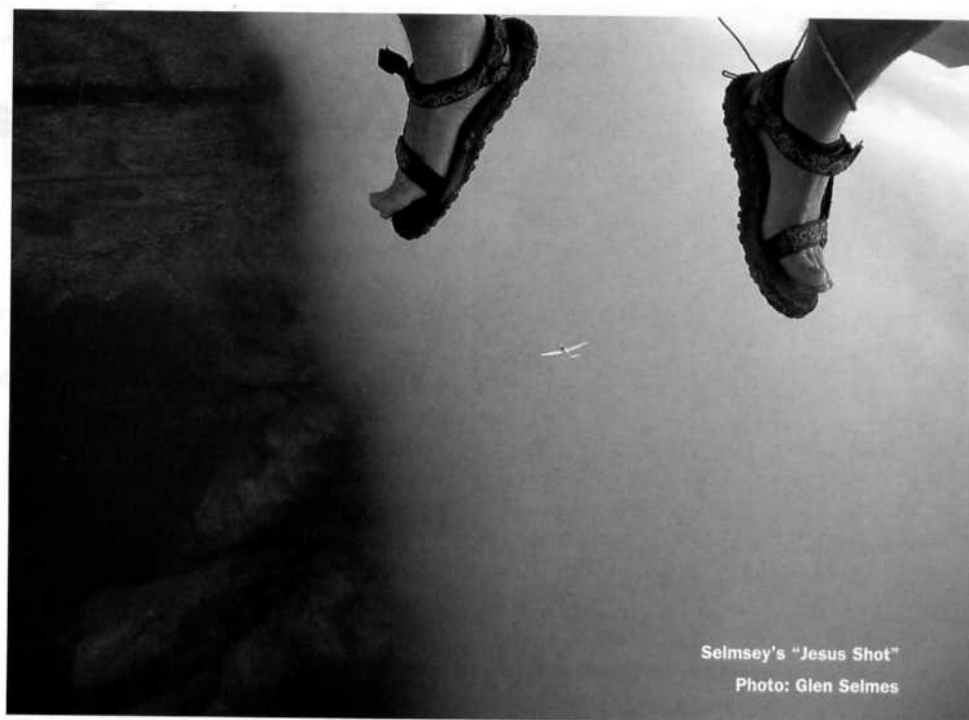
The next thing you notice about the Morning Glory is the awesome landscape over which it passes. Thousands of kilometres of brown and scared land. A beautiful majestic river with man-eating crocodiles and a single road to follow. At times fingers of cloud stretched out from the Morning Glory along its length and curved thousands of feet down to ground, and you could visualise the enormous sheet of surface air that was being lifted by the wave.

We played on the wave for about 45 minutes. Selmsey dropped into hang to get what I call his "Jesus shots", pictures of his sandal-clad feet against the heavenly backdrop of the cloud. The three of us went crazy with our cameras in still and movie mode, taking shots of each other and the cloud. By now there was a bit of traffic. Billo kept passing by, engine off, and the powered gliders were doing laps up and down the cloud.

Once the wave had gobbled up Burke-town and the airstrip I kept close to the road. The wave started to break up to the east. I looked behind me and Selmsey was heading back towards the secondary wave to land into the wind in front of it. I flew on to the Doomagee intersection where I descended through the wispy remnants of the cloud. Donny matched his speed with the cloud and held it as the cloud dissipated. The clear air wave kept going and carried him another 30km down the road.

I was picked up by the convoy of cars travelling to Lawn Hill Gorge. It was only 10:30am. Selmsey, Donny and I were ecstatic. Jason was driving, and although he was happy for us, he had had another weak link break and his frustration was beginning to show. To make matters worse he was now stuck in a car for hours with three pilots who did get the wave and they were going on and on about it. The last straw for Jase was when Selmsey swept his arm across the scenery and pronounced, "This is beautiful! See that tree? That tree is beautiful."

"Oh, come on Selmsey!" Jason said. "That wasn't a tree. It was a crappy little cactus thing."



Selmsey's "Jesus Shot"  
Photo: Glen Selmse

*And that's the same dry bloody scenery you've been looking at for weeks. And now it's beautiful! Give me a break.*" We all cracked up and agreed to stop rubbing it in.

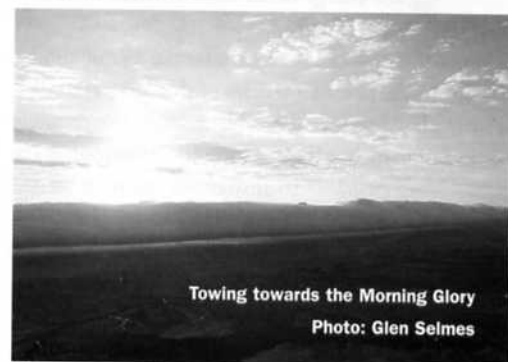
Not long later we were canoeing up Lawn Hill Gorge between majestic towering red cliffs. I thought to myself, "Does it get any better?"

Though the next day was another missed chance for Jason (the wave came through before Billo had even left the strip), Friday was a different story. The moon shone down on us in the pre-morning darkness as a pre-Morning Glory fog rolled in only six feet off the ground. As the first indigo coloured light of sunrise appeared, we could see the shape of the Morning Glory approaching. Much action ensued (a good deal of which I was able to capture on video) resulting in Jason, Al and Donny getting onto the wave via Billo's trike, and Shane getting on via car tow from Selmsey. When the four hang gliders finally landed in a paddock by the side of the dirt road, a road train rattling through the dust under the secondary and tertiary wave clouds overhead, we congratulated each other with hand shakes and hugs. The reality of what we had achieved started to dawn on us. Shane was the last of us to get a fly on the wave, yet he was only the tenth non-powered hang glider pilot in history to soar the Morning Glory.

On behalf of the Glory Boys of 2005, I would like to thank a few people. First, Russ White and Rob Thomson who were the first pilots to fly the Morning Glory. To Cmac, whose memory inspired this trip. To Al, for towing and driving and going to the back of the queue in order that us newcomers got first crack at the wave, and also for being the first pilot to fly the Morning Glory in a hang



The Morning Glory over Albert River  
Photo: [www.dropbears.com]



Towing towards the Morning Glory  
Photo: Glen Selmse

glider. Finally to Billo, for his never-ending endeavours to see the reputation of hang gliding lifted as high as possible.

On a personal level I would like to thank my wife and children for supporting my dream of flying the Morning Glory. Now I'll keep my end of the bargain and start painting the house.



*Author's note: I am working on a DVD that will be available in mid 2006 for \$25 plus postage. I will keep the following URL updated with information about the DVD and trailers: [http://thanks.com.au/hanggliding/morningglory/].*