

NATIONAL

Gliding on to a world record

JEFF TOLLAN and EMMA BAILEY - The Timaru Herald Last updated 05:00
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"Bloody freezing", but triumphant; Terry Delore and John Kokshoorn battled temperatures as low as minus 35 degrees Celsius to smash a world distance gliding record using Steve Fossett's old plane.

The Christchurch pilot touched down in Omarama at 8.55pm yesterday, having glided 2501 kilometres since 5.30am, smashing the previous record by Klaus Ohlmann by about 80km.

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Somewhat reserved about his achievement – after four failed attempts during which he "didn't get very far at all" – Mr Delore said: "It was a nice day and it was good to complete the flight.

"We set all these times where we would be, Cook Strait at 2.30pm, we were there at 2.30pm. It was a bit scruffy in places, but it was bloody great to do it with my mate John."

Mr Kokshoorn, originally from Christchurch, lives in Australia and came to New Zealand for the sole reason of two days of gliding.

Still thrilled with the outcome, Mr Kokshoorn joked that his role was less about flying and more about the culinary side of things.

"I made the lunches, I'm the chief sandwich-maker.

"We shared the flying and Terry does all the technical stuff."

Flying at 28,000 feet for most of the way, the pair's water bags froze solid during the record-breaking flight and neither was short of clothing to try to stave off the worst of the cold.

They relied on "electric socks, hand warmers, three hats, polyprops, three shirts, gloves and all that sort of thing", Mr Delore said.

In the process he also broke his own 2205km record, set in Argentina in 2004 with Mr Fossett, whose Ash 25 plane Mr Delore was flying.

Mr Delore purchased the craft from Mr Fossett, a millionaire adventurer who died in a light plane crash in the Nevada desert two years ago. Between 2002 and 2007, Mr Fossett and Mr Delore set 11 world records.

Mr Delore's wife, Wendy, said her husband's achievement was "fantastic". She kept track of his journey using a website, which showed him take off from Omarama, fly to the tip of the South Island, back to Clyde, near Alexandra and then back up and level with Taihape in the North Island, before turning around and landing at Omarama. The website stopped updating over the Cook Strait and didn't track him for the final four hours of the journey.

"I panicked and rang a friend who is an air traffic controller.

"He wasn't working but rang air traffic control and they were still tracking him."

As the crowd watched the glider pierce the towering clouds skirting Omarama, Mr Delore lived up to his reputation, performing some celebratory aerobatics before touching down on solid ground again.

During the trip, the pair hit speeds of about 200kmh, but a rough patch over the Canterbury plains slowed the glider to about 80kmh.

With the years of planning now behind him, Mr Delore was not sure what was next on the horizon.

"I don't know, I haven't thought that far ahead. There are still some speed records to do, but I will cross that bridge when I come to it."