

Flying Maui

Text by Rich Parry

Abstract - This paper describes flying experiences in Maui, Hawaii. It addresses the unique flying conditions that are endemic to Maui and the need to have good forward launching skills. A description of the Poli Poli flight park on Maui is provided along with conditions one is likely to find there. A short history of Chuck the duck, the flying co-pilot is included along with several pictures of the flight park.

"Where are we going on vacation this year", my teenage daughter asks. "Grandma's", I answer with authority. "We go to Grandma's every year", I add to stress the point that my mind is made up. "Let's do something different, let's go to Maui", she replies. "Sorry, we're going to Grandma's and that is all there is to it". A heated discussion ensues. A few moments later I walk away from the argument showing that I am indeed head of the household ... we're going to Maui.

Having decided on our destination, the planning phase of the vacation followed. I found Maui has something for everyone. Traditional activities include hiking, swimming, surfing, horseback riding, deep-sea fishing, golf, tennis, and mountain biking. For the more adventuresome, Maui offers SCUBA diving, snorkeling, ocean kayaking, rafting, kite surfing, windsurfing, parasailing, and of course, hang gliding and paragliding.

I asked a few pilots at the Torrey Pines Gliderport in San Diego, my home base, if they had flown on Maui. Several had been to Oahu, and recommended it, but none had been to Maui. When I looked in Paragliding magazine, the articles I found discussed only Oahu. The information was useful for general Hawaiian flying conditions, but lacked specific first hand accounts of flying on Maui. Turning to the classifieds section of the magazine, I found Proflyght Paragliding. I gave them a call and spoke to flight director, Dexter Clearwater. He gave me directions to the site and welcomed me to join him and the locals any day of the week. Just show up at the LZ, fill out pilot registration forms, pay the site fee of \$10/day or \$45/month, abide by the site rules, and enjoy.

POLI POLI FLIGHT PARK

The Poli Poli flight park is operated by Proflyght Paragliding. It is about 25 minutes from the Maui airport. Proflyght Paragliding is a full service organization, offering daily instruction for pilots from beginner to advanced. They are a retail dealer for paragliding equipment and offer tandem flights to the many tourists that visit Maui each year. The flight park is a popular spot for paragliders, hang gliders, and RC pilots.

Poli Poli is located on the Haleakala volcano. The Kaonouli Ranch owns the land the flight park uses. The ranch is home to a large herd of cows. I met many of them as I traveled the five-mile winding road to launch. During my stay, I got used to the idea of waiting for cows to get off the road, after all I was on vacation.

The site rules require all pilots to hold a current USHGA P3/H3 rating or better. P2/H2 pilots are welcome, but additional site orientation is required. Although I met the advanced pilot requirements, I was grateful for the site-specific information Dex provided.

The summit of Haleakala is 10,023'. The LZ is located at the 3,500' level, which is at the bottom of the flight park's training hill. Echoes, located at the 4,500' level, is the name given of the launch site at the top of the training hill. This hill provides excellent training opportunities giving pilots a gentle 1,000' vertical drop to the LZ. As students progress in ability, they can launch from higher and higher elevations. During the entire flight from Echoes to the LZ, the pilot may be a little as 20-30 feet off the ground due to the slope of the hill. The main launch site for advanced pilots is "Ferns", located at the 6,500' level.

I found landing on the sloping LZ different from my previous landing experiences. Since the LZ is located on the side of a mountain, it has a significant downward slope making spot landing a little difficult. Normally as you land, you sense the ground is moving up toward you. However, when the land slopes

downward, the ground appears to be continually moving away from you. It was like trying to hit a moving target. The slope makes landing different, not difficult.

Although my flights were limited to extended sled rides, it is possible to catch thermals, fly above launch, and fly for an hour or more. The Poli Poli flight park is the main flying site on Maui, but there are other sites as well.

MORE ON MAUI

The top of the volcano is home to several advanced optical telescopes and military projects. NASA, the Air Force, and the University of Hawaii each have equipment located there and actively conduct scientific research. A portion of the Haleakala National Park is also located at the top. Both the park and scientific areas are off limits for flying. However, hiking along a trail brings you to a launch site called, "L" which is located on state owned property not far from the crater rim. This site is strictly for the advanced pilots due to the dynamic air you will find there. Extended flights lasting an hour or more with trips to cloud base are common. However, the site is flyable just a few days each month. I understand the early afternoon is the best time to fly this site and flying with someone familiar with it is highly recommended. Launching from nearly 10,000' should give you one heck of a flight, even if its just a slide ride. I didn't get a chance to try it; I'll have to leave that for a return trip.

Coastal ridges near Lahaina offer additional flying opportunities. From there you can enjoy good thermals, but high winds often shut the site down. I was told there are sites on the northern portion of the island near Ka'napali and others north of Wailuku on the eastern side of the island.

I found the locals friendly and helpful and a good source for flying information. The Hawaii Paragliding Association web site at <http://windlines.net> is another good source. The web site concentrates on Oahu flying, but information on other islands is provided along with useful links and people to contact during your visit.

FORWARD LAUNCHING

Maui lies in the path of the trade winds where the prevailing winds blow from NW to the SE. Moist air blows in from the ocean and rises over the mountains causing rain to fall on the leeward slopes. These slopes would be ideal for ridge soaring if it were not for the thick vegetation and jungle-like foliage. Although not ideal for flying, the area deserves a visit. If you have time during your stay, I suggest the 50+ mile trip to Hana, a small town at the eastern end of the island. The road snakes through tropical valleys where you will find streams, waterfalls, pools, and lush green landscape reminiscent of visions of the Garden of Eden. As you travel along the coast, you'll come across both white and black sand beaches. Don't pass them by, it is the trip that is rewarding, not the getting there.

At the Poli Poli flight park, it is common to find light winds at launch, which makes forward launching the preferred launch technique. I couldn't recall the last time I forward launched, but I was ready to give it a go. Ironically, I had the July 2003 issue of Hang Gliding and Paragliding magazine with me, which had an article on forward launching by Dixon White. The information served as a reminder of forward launching. At the launch site, Dexter was good enough to give a quick refresher course on the finer points of forward launching. He stressed the importance of laying out the wing properly, clearing the lines, and positioning paraglider cells to accept air and load the wing quickly during the early stage of the launch. These are important considerations since a forward launch can make it difficult to examine the glider for symmetry and cleared lines before launching.

I watched several of the locals launch and then it was my turn. It was like riding a bike. The launch went without a hitch. As I look back, I think I could have reverse launched, but since everyone else was forward launching I thought I would go with the flow. When in Rome ...

MORNING PEOPLE

I had never been to Maui, but had seen enough Magnum PI and Hawaii Five O to build up some erroneous beliefs about what I would see and do there. Besides flying, I had planned on SCUBA diving, ocean kayaking, and snorkeling. I soon learned that these sports and most other outdoor activities began and ended early ... very early.

There are good reasons why I was up before 6 AM most mornings. A typical day in Maui begins with mild breezes and minimal cloud cover. However, as the day progresses, wind speeds pick up dramatically. This obviously affects flying, but other sports as well. Ocean kayaking, SCUBA diving, and snorkeling, also begin and end early. Ocean white caps can be seen everywhere on the ocean by late morning, making boating difficult, if not dangerous.

Clouds are also a consideration. I was amazed at how quickly they moved. I remember Dexter launching and suggesting I launch soon since clouds could be seen moving towards us in the distance. When you launch from 6,500', clouds are "below" you, which makes your awareness of clouds more important than usual. I launched less than five minutes after Dex, barely making it through cloud layer before conditions changed making launching hazardous. Some local pilots routinely fly with a compass to be prepared for unexpected cloud cover. Although clouds are a significant factor, they are not continuous. Breaks in the clouds occur during the day providing flying opportunities for those experienced in parawaiting.

Due to the wind and cloud conditions late in the day, most pilots meet at the LZ at 7:15 AM. I was up before 6 AM and out the door shortly thereafter to make it to the LZ on time. You might want to think twice about going to Maui if you're not a morning person.

CHUCK THE DUCK

During my stay I met several locals and visiting pilots, but one deserves special mention, Chuck the duck. I saw a duck following Dexter wherever he went. He told me Chuck was his co-pilot. I didn't respond to the comment, thinking that he was joking. However, later that day as Dex launched, Chuck ran along side and a moment later, both were airborne. I stood there, watching in near disbelief. I couldn't help but be reminded of the movie, "Fly Away Home" in which Canada Geese performed a similar feat.

When I landed at the LZ shortly after Dex I asked how he had trained Chuckie. He said he got Chuck when he was one day old, and essentially became Chuck's surrogate mother. Over the course of many months, Dex slowly bonded with the duck and put Chuck through flight school. He said he spent more time with the duck than most students.

Training began with Chuck walking along side Dex. When Chuck got used to the idea, Dex progressed to running. Eventually it was time to introduce Chuckie to a paraglider. Dex ran with canopy inflated letting Chuck get used to the large bulky object. The spacious training hill at the flight park provided ample area for this portion of training. Chuck eventually graduated from flight school and now routinely flies with Dex.

Chuck is an interesting topic of conversation for the locals and tourists. I expect a bright future for Chuckie. I also expect it won't be long before you see him on Animal Planet. In fact, during my stay, I turned to one of the local TV channels and found a short documentary on Chuck and Dex.

CONCLUSION

Although my flying was limited to a single site during a two week period in early August, this short description should benefit anyone considering flying in Maui. When I asked one of the locals, what they liked most about flying there, they said Maui offers consistent year round flying.

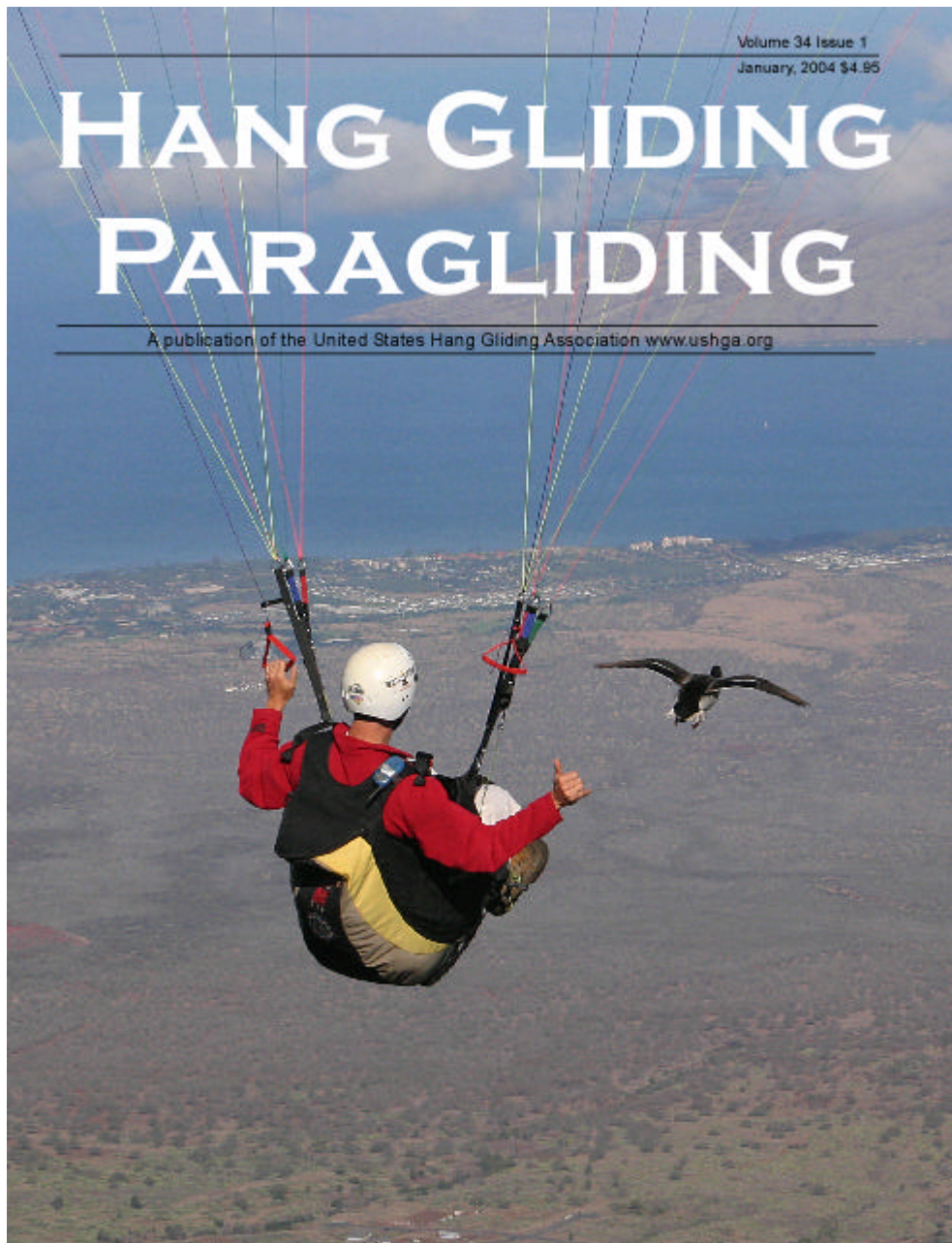
If you are looking for epic multi-hour flights or setting new personal best distance or altitude records, Maui may not be the ideal location. However, we fly for many reasons. Flying a new site is often its own reward. Meeting new people, and learning new techniques required by a site are challenging and satisfying.

I had a good time during my visit and recommend you bring your equipment if you are going to Maui. There are few places where you can launch from a volcano, look down on thousands of acres of sugar cane while overlooking the Pacific Ocean and other Hawaiian islands. It is certainly the only place that you will have a duck as a co-pilot.

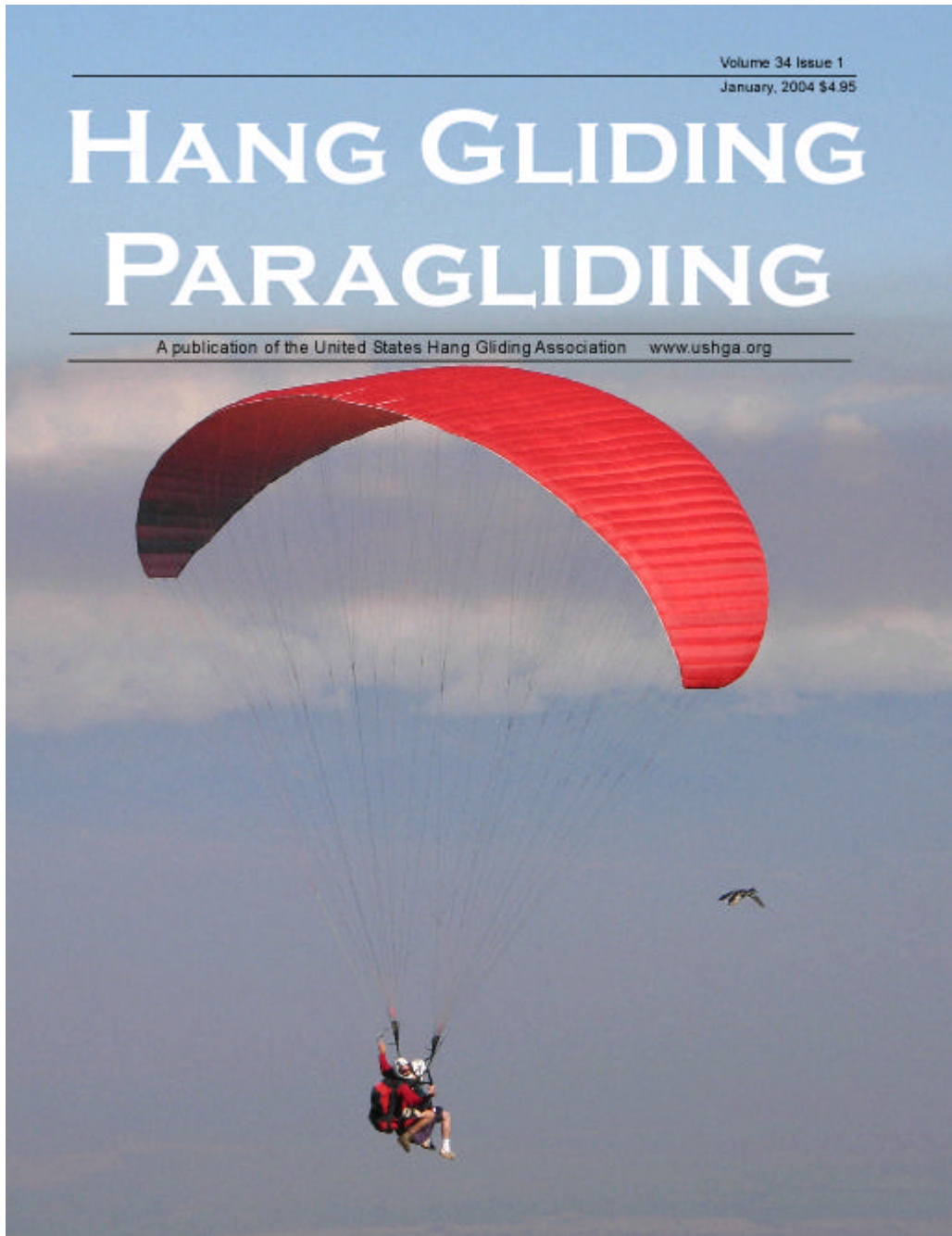
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to Dex for making me feel at home and the forward launch refresher course. You can contact him at 808-874-5433 or visit **Proflyght Paragliding** at <http://www.paraglidehawaii.com>. Additional photo's from my trip are available at http://w9if.net/cgi-bin/ImageFolio31/imageFolio.cgi?direct=Paragliding/Hawaii_2003.

Thanks also to Dotty and Dawn for shuttle rides to launch. I never thanked a duck, but in case Dex teaches Chuck to read, I'll thank him also. Special thanks to Michael Zanger for sharing his experiences while flying in Maui. Lastly to my daughter, Megan, for suggesting the trip and to my wife who got me started in paragliding and remains the wind beneath my wing.



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