

THE 2001 WORLD GLIDING

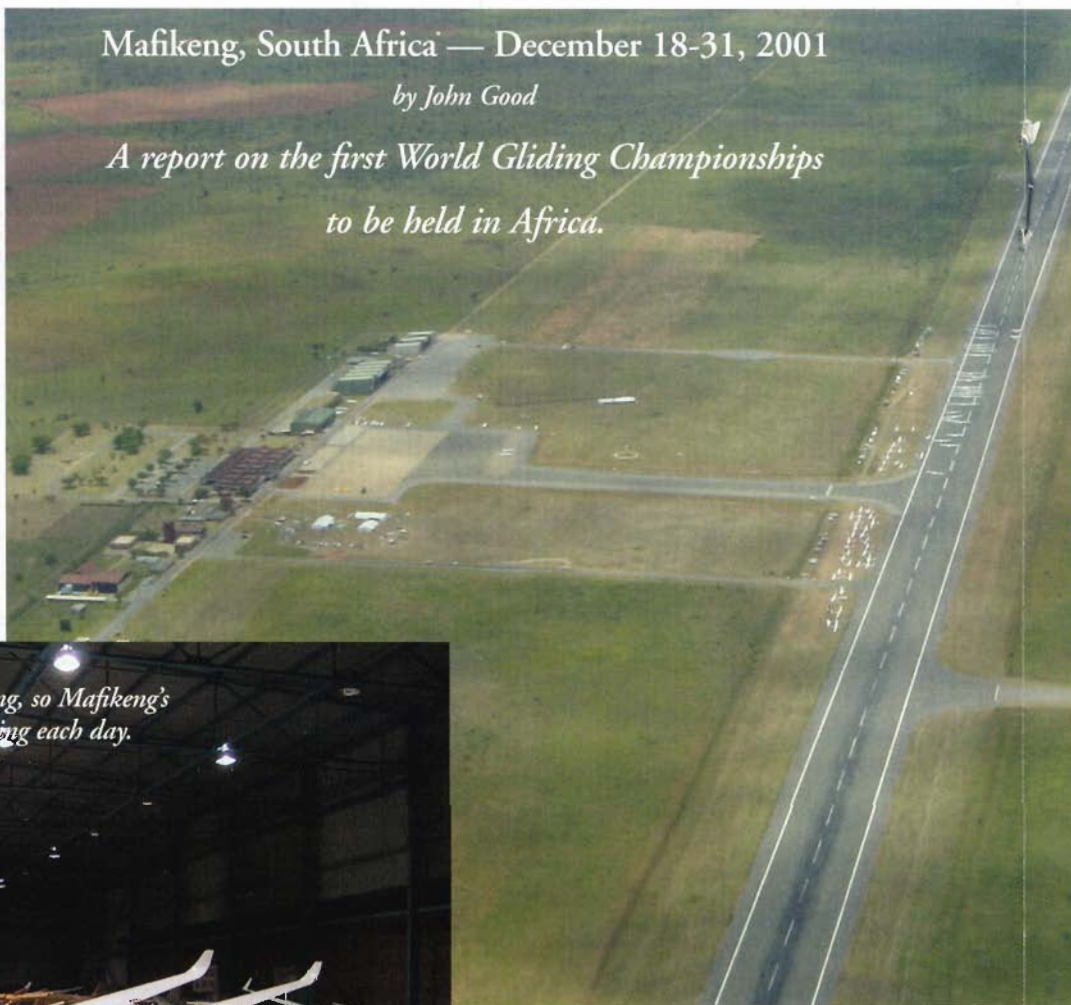


An Open Class glider thermals just west of Mafikeng. Note the flat terrain, large fields and generally good landability. Photo by Gary Ittner.

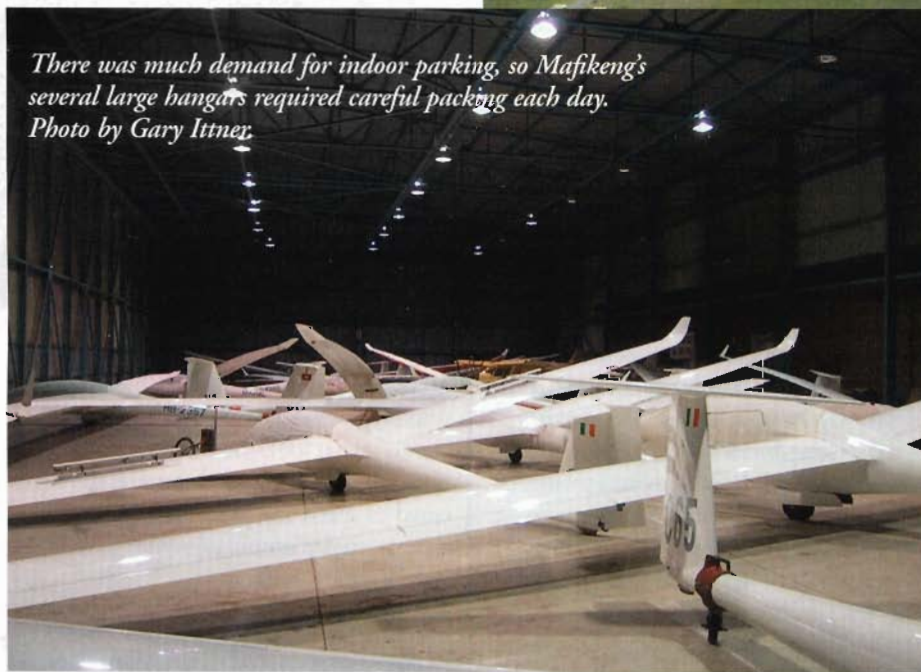
Mafikeng, South Africa — December 18-31, 2001

by John Good

A report on the first World Gliding Championships to be held in Africa.



There was much demand for indoor parking, so Mafikeng's several large hangars required careful packing each day. Photo by Gary Ittner.



Mafikeng is a city of about 110,000 located in north central South Africa, about a 3-hour drive west-northwest of Johannesburg. It sits in flat and normally dry terrain, about 10 miles southeast of the border between South Africa and Botswana. It's a long way for most of the world's soaring pilots, and might seem an unlikely location for a World Gliding Championships. But Mafikeng was indeed the site for the 2001 version of this con-

test, held in December.

There are several reasons. Brian and Gillian Spreckley of Great Britain (she the current Women's World Champion, he a former World Champion) have for several years run a soaring operation in Mafikeng during the northern winter. From this the place has acquired a good reputation for the quality of its thermal soaring. The airfield is something amazing. It has a tower, a large terminal building, a number of hangars ranging from sizeable to huge, and

what is surely one of the largest runways in the southern hemisphere: 150' x 14,700'. South Africa is a friendly country with a relatively small but enthusiastic group of soaring pilots, not the least of which are Dick and Brenda Bradley who volunteered to help run a World contest at Mafikeng. Dick served as Competition Director, with Brian as his Deputy and task advisor.

You would think that with a small population of glider pilots spread out over a large country, South Africa would be hard

ING CHAMPIONSHIPS



The Mafikeng airfield, looking northeast. Gridding is underway. The contest made good use of the hangars and the Terminal building west of the runway. Photo by Walter Striedieck.



The view from Gary Ittner's cockpit, 4000' AGL. Note the lady's gardening glove to protect his stick hand from the tropical sun. Photo by Gary Ittner.



First one home — Doug Jacobs arrives at the finish line. Photo by Brett Eloff.

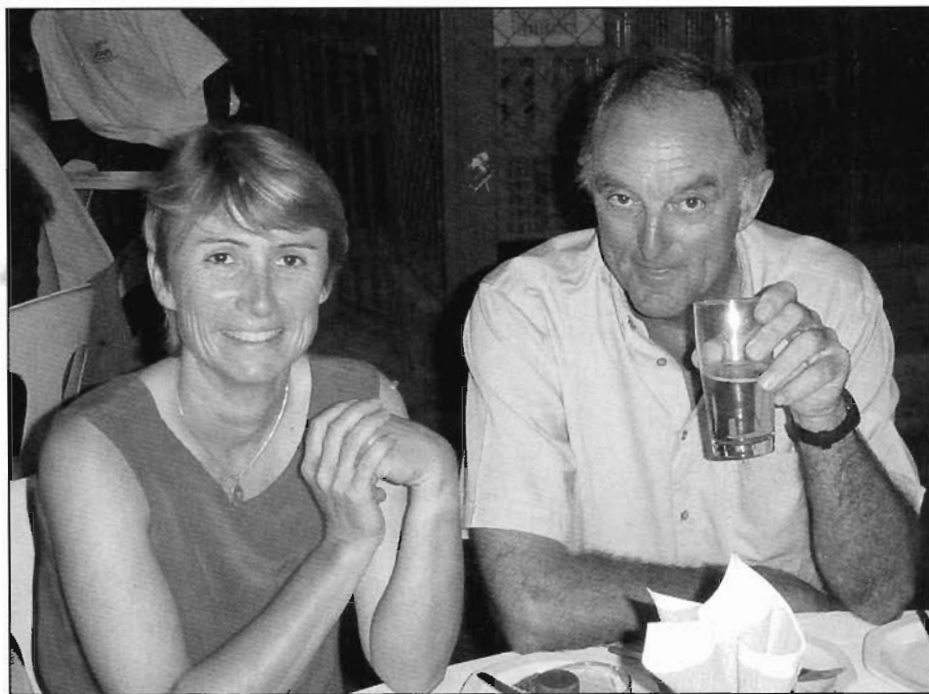
put to staff and run a World-level contest. There were challenges, but the South Africans rose to them and did a superb job — Mafikeng hosted one of the best-run contests in any pilot's memory. Low-key and competent would be the best way to characterize things.

A total of 70 pilots were present - 20 in Open Class, 22 in 15-Meter Class, and 28 in Standard Class. This is significantly fewer than in recent World contest held in the Northern Hemisphere, no doubt due

to the high cost of shipping gliders to South Africa, and a relatively high entry fee. Against this was the very low cost of nearly everything once we arrived. A year ago the exchange rate was 7 Rand to the Dollar, making things very cheap. This year, the rate was around 11.5 to 1, and prices were absurdly low. In a good restaurant, a fine meal ordered from the top of the menu with wine would run around \$8. South Africa would be an excellent choice for a sightseeing and soaring vaca-

tion just now.

Not everything was ideal. We had our answer to the question of weather early in the practice period. Mafikeng should look like Hobbs — flat, brown, hot, very dry. Flat it was, but there had been much rain and the landscape was a pleasant green. Temperatures were generally warm, but, despite a strong tropical sun, seldom hot. You don't make booming soaring weather from this. We were hoping for 10-knot thermals to 15,000' AGL. We'd settle for



Gillian and Brian Spreckley.

great variability in the weather, with 3 - 5 knots to 4,000 - 6,000' AGL being typical.

And thunderstorms. Plenty of them. Often big, occasionally mean. They were frequently seen in the distance, their blowoff drifting across parts of the task area. Sometimes they were closer, and had more to say about the day's results. Only a few days were entirely free from the threat of storms, and some were profoundly affected. We saw spectacular lightning displays on several evenings, sometimes running well into the night.

It was occasionally a tough contest for crews. There were a great many landouts for a World contest — on some days nearly every pilot hit the dirt, and there were several spectacular examples of pilots who'd won a day and held the overall class lead being among the landouts the next day. Fortunately, the task area featured many large, flat agricultural fields. In a total of almost 200 off-field landings, damage was generally limited to scraped bellies and a few mangled gear doors.

But retrieves were often difficult (and

sometime nearly impossible - see the sidebar "A Retrieve to Remember"). Access to downed gliders was typically via obscure dirt roads that turned quickly to mud in late afternoon rains. Plowed fields were almost always soft and frequently muddy. Many teams had saved money on the cost of shipping by bringing only one or two trailers, to be shared among several gliders. Arriving back at the field at 11 pm with a muddy glider and trailer is grim. Knowing that you must unload the glider and set off into the dark and rain on another retrieve is discouraging indeed.

The U.S. Team pilots had many good task results, including 7 daily wins. But with one exception, they suffered from the same problem that affected most pilots at Mafikeng - inconsistent results in inconsistent weather.

The exception was Gary Ittner. He gave notice early in the contest, when he was the only 15-Meter Class finisher on the second scheduled contest day (and, to that point, the only finisher in any class among the best pilots in the world). He was certainly not immune to the problems that the weather posed for all pilots, and fell out of the top position with a landout on Day 4, when the class had just 7 finishers. But other high-ranking pilots were having their share of troubles, and Gary's excellent results on Days 6, 7 and 9 propelled him to the overall lead by a single point with two scheduled days remaining.

We'd had a spell of weather in which thunderstorms had been much less threat

A Retrieve to Remember

Ray Gimmey's landout on Dec. 22 is none for the record books. He was close to home but the day had died. With the airfield in view but rising on the canopy, it was time to start the engine of his ASW-22BLE. He may have got the sequence of switches wrong, or perhaps a limit switch malfunctioned - in any case, the engine did not extend and he was forced to land in a cornfield.

He phoned (cell phones worked well in most areas) to report his status (pilot and glider undamaged) and his position (it worked out to be 15.4 miles west of Mafikeng airfield). He also reported that he'd seen no useful roads leading to his field, and noted that his glider had no trailer - one would have to be borrowed.

This was quickly arranged and a tow pilot willing to do some aerial scouting took off toward the setting sun.

It was clear that some serious manpower would be needed for this mission. Fortunately, a consignment of U.S. Air Force Academy cadets has just arrived to assist the U.S. Team. It would have to be a baptism by fire - four unsuspecting cadets were stuffed into the crew van along with Ruth Gimmey and crew chief Kenny Price, and they departed the airfield just before sunset, trailer in tow.

The tow pilot directed them, in all flying a couple of hours, most of it in the dark. The route followed a gravel road, and then a primitive track through high grass and thorn bushes; navigation would

have been well beyond impossible without aerial vectors. Visibility was rarely better than 20 feet, with thorn bushes scraping the sides of the van. At one point a trailer wheel fell into an aardvark hole, damaging the fender; but they were able to drag it out and continue their slow progress.

Meanwhile, Ray had hiked through the soft, sandy field in the direction of home. He came to a barbed wire fence, which clearly marked the limit of all driving. He had the foresight to make a mark in the dirt as a departure point for re-locating the glider. Around 9 pm the van and trailer came into view. Seven pairs of hands now faced the daunting task of moving a huge glider the best part of a mile through a soft sandy field and across a barbed wire fence at night. It was about this time that the rain began.

than earlier in the contest. The rate of landouts was way down, and we were hoping that Mafikeng's weather had settled into a pattern more suitable for a World Championship. Alas, it wouldn't hold. Day 10 was one of the toughest in the contest.

Tasks for all classes were set to the east. The forecast called for buildups and thunderstorms early, but at launch the sky looked fine. Yet before long the nice-looking cu were building ominously, especially to the east. The second turn was set as a 40-km-radius cylinder, in the hope that this would be large enough to allow pilots to find a route that avoided storm cells. This worked for the Open and Standard Classes, though just barely — two cells were developing rapidly within the turn area, and would soon join. By the time the 15-Meter Class got there, the storm had filled the entire cylinder. Gary was among the leaders, flying north just outside the west edge of the cylinder, looking for a way in. Cloudbase and visibility were lowering, forcing the gliders west, so Gary decided to give it a try. He reached the cylinder and was able to escape west to sunlight, but not to lift. He landed in a good field that soon became a quagmire of mud, as the storm overtook him. Meanwhile, some of the other pilots continued north and then found a route with lift that got them in and out with enough altitude to reach soarable conditions again. These pilots got home. Gary's landout dropped him to 4th overall.

The final scheduled day was Dec. 31st,

They moved the glider in pieces — first the wingtips, canopy and horizontal stabilizer, then each wing. The fuselage was enormously heavy with its useless motor, and could be moved only a few feet at a time. It required 2 1/2 hours to get it to the fence, and another 30 minutes to get it over the fence and into the trailer. The rain continued through all this, with plenty of wind and lightning.

The remaining task was to retrace the rough track back to the dirt road, about 5 km. In an hour and a half they were back to navigable territory, and in another 30 minutes back at the field to drop off the trailer. They were in bed by 5:30 am, and up at 8:00 to get the plane ready again. Such is the glamorous sport of racing sailplanes.

Contest Results

OPEN CLASS

Place	Score	ID	Name	Country	Glider
1	8625	AS	Oscar Goudriaan	South Africa	ASW-22BLE
2	8509	22	Michael Sommer	Germany	ASW-22BLE
3	8414	TM	Alberto Kunath	Brazil	Nimbus 4
4	8341	HM	Laurens Goudriaan	South Africa	ASW-22BLE
5	8325	X	Holger Karow	Germany	Nimbus 4m
6	8293	VB	Tassilo Bode	Germany	ASW-22BLE
7	8262	EC	Eric Napoleon	France	Nimbus 4t
8	8209	FM	Ingo Renner	Australia	ASH-25e
9	8121	N1	Peter Harvey	Great Britain	Nimbus 4t
10	7846	IQ	Schmid & Keller	Switzerland	ASH-25
11	7842	7V	Ray Gimney	USA	ASW-22BLE
13	7816	HW	Jim Payne	USA	Nimbus 4

15-METER CLASS

1	8867	WM	Werner Meuser	Germany	Ventus 2ax
2	8779	1R	Steven Raimond	Netherlands	ASW-27
3	8619	VP	Janusz Centka	Poland	ASW-27
4	8599	P7	Gary Ittner	USA	Ventus C
5	8467	EX	Axel Horn	Germany	Ventus 2ax
6	8405	EW	Frederic Hoyeau	France	Ventus 2a
7	8309	ACH	Henri Romeijn	Netherlands	Ventus 2b
8	8221	VS	Stefano Ghiorzo	Italy	Ventus 2a
9	8203	5A	Hwnrik Breidahl	Denmark	Ventus 2a
10	8148	721	Ed Johnston	Great Britain	LS-6
15	7784	KS	Karl Striedieck	USA	ASW-27

STANDARD CLASS

1	8609	DA	Laurent Aboulin	France	Discus 2a
2	8596	57	Mike Young	Great Britain	LS-8
3	8592	EF	Jean-Marc Caillard	France	Discus 2a
4	8455	232	John Coutts	New Zealand	LS-8
5	8215	80	Andy Davis	Great Britain	Discus 2a
6	8153	LB	Riccardo Brigliadori	Italy	Discus 2a
7	7989	X1	Makoto Ichikawa	Japan	LS-8
8	7808	SB	Baer Selen	Netherlands	LS-8
9	7793	C64	Paul Crabb	Ireland	LS-8
10	7650	UG	Tom Claffey	Australia	LS-8
13	7539	DJ	Doug Jacobs	USA	LS-8
16	7296	W3	Chip Carner	USA	Discus 2a



The U.S. Team. From left to right, Ray Gimme, Jim Payne, Gary Ittner, Gary Kemp (Captain), Chip Garner, Karl Striedieck, Doug Jacobs.



Chip Garner, ready to launch. Mary Lattimore is in the background, well protected from the sun. Photo by Brett Eloff

A safe landing in a large maize (corn) field — a common event at WGC 2001. Photo by Brett Eloff.





One of several rain squalls that visited Mafikeng during the contest.

and the whole U.S. Team was looking forward to Gary's chance to avenge his Day 10 landout. But once again the weather wouldn't cooperate. The day was hot, blue and very stable. The Open Class launched and were able to stay aloft, but could never climb much above 2500' AGL. One by one the classes' tasks were scrubbed. The contest was over.

Oscar Goudriaan of South Africa took first in Open Class. He comes from a famous South African soaring family and is an experienced competitor, but probably would not have been listed among the favorites prior to the start. Yet he flew consistently when many others didn't, and picked the right moments to press hard. He is the first South African ever to hold the title of World Champion, and his victory was very popular.

Werner Meuser of Germany probably would have been listed among the favorites in 15-Meter Class. He won the contest with consistency and especially with placings of 2nd, 1st, 2nd and 1st on Days 4 through 7, when plenty of

others were having difficulties.

There's little question that the outstanding pilot of WGC 2001 was Laurent Aboulin of France. He'd won two of the first three days and had a big lead on Day 4 when disaster struck: not merely a landout, but a landout straight out of the gate, for a distance of just 17.5 km and a score of 55 points. Conventional wisdom said there's simply no way to recover from a day like that — he'd do well to crawl back into the top 10. He shrugged this off with placings of 3rd, 1st, 6th, 3rd, 6th and 2nd for the remaining days, to finish first by 13 points. Had he merely had a bad result on Day 4, he'd have won by a huge margin.

Tapio Savolainen of the IGC said it well in his remarks at the closing ceremonies: Many people assumed that South Africa could probably run an acceptable contest, with some help from the outside. Few realized how well the contest would run without outside help, and how much outsiders could learn from studying what was done here. I'd say that the ideal way to organize a

World contest is to have a small group of experienced competitors who've seen both good and bad examples get together without any excess of funds or volunteers and let their ingenuity cope with the problems they encounter. This approach produced a good contest at Mafikeng.

Detailed contest results and descriptions of each day's flying can be found on the SSA website: www.ssa.org.



About the author:

John Good has been flying gliders since 1980. His current glider is a Discus 2a. He has approximately 1,500 hours and holds a

Commercial Glider rating. John has instructed for several years. John has served as SSA Regional Director from Region 1 and as Chairman of the Contest Committee. He is now the Associate Editor of *Soaring Magazine*.