

# Hailey pilot sets new paragliding record

## Scales soars over Southern Idaho for 126 miles

by *TERRY SMITH*

When Nate Scales launched his glider off Bald Mountain last Sunday, he knew it was a good day for flying. Six hours and 40 minutes later, he landed east of Dubois, after flying 126 miles.

A friend from Australia met up with Scales when he landed and the two celebrated the accomplishment with cold beer. There was good cause for celebration; Scales had just set a new Idaho paragliding distance record.

Scales' accomplishment was particularly timely. It occurred exactly one week before the start of the U.S. Paragliding National Championships, which are using Bald Mountain as a launch site.

"I'm really excited. All my buddies are coming here to my flying site," said Scales, a 34-year-old carpenter from Hailey.

Scales will be competing in the event, along with Australian buddy Brian Webb, the guy who drove the chase car during Scales record-setting flight. Some 100 paragliding pilots, the world's best, are expected for the competition.

One of those is Honza Rejmanek, a Czech native who is a flight instructor for Fly Sun Valley, a local paragliding business. Rejmanek held the state distance record at 117 miles until Scales stole it in his epic flight Sunday.

Scales expects Rejmanek will be gunning for him now, as Rejmanek did a year ago when he broke Scales' state record of 92 miles.

Scales describes himself as "a complete rank amateur—I do it only for fun."

"Flying is magic," he said. "We live in a place with the best flying in the world, and everyone should try it. There's no better way to see the mountains where we live than from above."

Scales hadn't planned to fly last Sunday. His wife was preparing to leave town for a few days and he was planning to spend the day with her.

"When I got on my computer, it looked like a really good day for flying," Scales said. "She said 'why don't you go? If you stay here you're going to be miserable all day.' It wasn't hard to talk me into it. I grabbed a peanut butter sandwich and was out the door."

Scales launched from Baldy around noon with several other pilots. The rest of them grounded shortly after takeoff because of rough winds. But Scales decided to ride it out. Flying northeast, he ran into more



Nate Scales, a 34-year-old carpenter from Hailey, stands proudly in front of Bald Mountain after setting a new state paragliding distance record. *Photo by Willy Cook*

turbulence over Trail Creek and had second thoughts about continuing the flight.

"I got so scared my lips went numb," he said. "But there was no place to land. I fortunately found a little thermal and it got me up and out of there."

Cruising at about 8,000 feet, he caught several more little thermals that took him into Copper Basin, "where I got my first good climb that took me to 18,000 feet, and I realized it was a really good day."

At that point, "Brian called my wife and told her I wouldn't be home for awhile."

From Copper Basin, Scales flew into the Big Lost Mountain Range, catching more rising warm air and reaching higher elevations.

"At that high it was really cold," he said. His drinking and ballast water froze and the two-way radio he used to stay in contact with Webb went dead.

"So I lost contact with my driver—up high in the mountains—so I jammed the radio into my jacket hoping that would warm the batteries. Although I was on my own, I definitely wasn't going to come down and land," he said.

Scales explained that pilots use pull levers to control ascent, descent and direction of flight.

"It's never a problem to get down—getting up is the problem."

Scales said he carries a cell phone for emergencies, but never uses it when he's flying.

"It requires all your concentration all the time," he said.

His radio warmed up enough about an hour later so that he was able to contact Webb. "It didn't have much power so I just shouted 'Dubois'," he said. By then he was about 40 miles west of the town. He ended up landing 13 miles on the other side of it.

Webb had heard him and showed up about the time Scales landed.

"I flew until the last possible minute," he said. "And Alan was waiting there with cold beer."

Glider pilots often don't have chase cars, Scales explained, and end up hitchhiking home. But to Scales, that's all part of the adventure.

He carries a sign with him that says: "Glider pilot needs ride."

[Copyright © 2006 Express Publishing Inc.](#)

All Rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part in any form or medium without express written permission of Express Publishing Inc. is prohibited.

*The Idaho Mountain Express is distributed free to residents and guests throughout the Sun Valley, Idaho resort area community. [Subscribers](#) to the Idaho Mountain Express will read these stories and others in this week's issue.*