



play hard



PHOTOGRAPHY: NATE SCALES

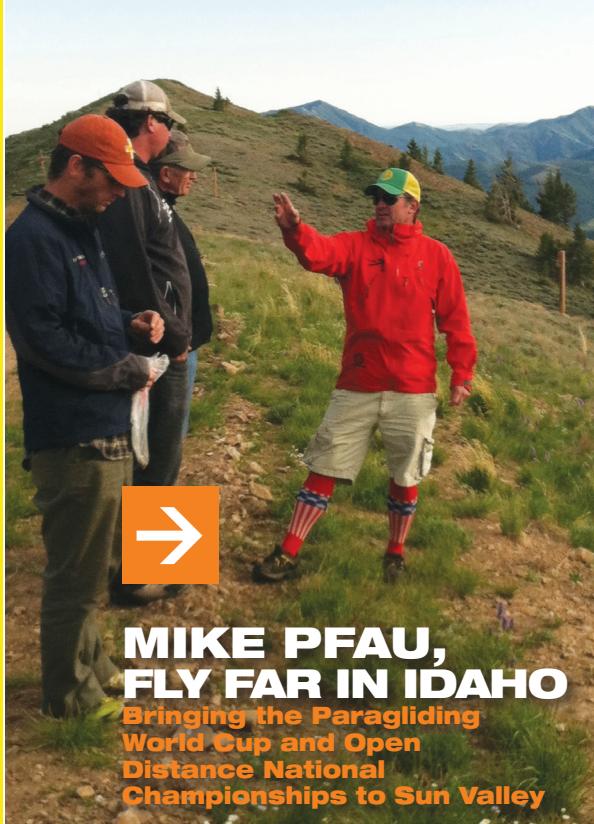
**ON BEING A**

BY KIM FRANK KIRK

# bird

If you look up over the Wood River Valley during the last two weeks of August, you are sure to see hundreds of bright color flashes dotting the Sun Valley blue sky. The wings of competition paragliding pilots from all over the world will be soaring over mountaintops from Baldy to Stanley and beyond. Join *SVPN*'s Kim Frank Kirk as she meets some of these adventurous pilots and throws caution to the wind to launch off of Bald Mountain on her first-ever flight.

ABOVE: Matt Beechinor flying in the Sawtooth Valley.



play hard

# MIKE PFAU, FLY FAR IN IDAHO

## Bringing the Paragliding World Cup and Open Distance National Championships to Sun Valley

Ever since he was a little boy growing up in the Wood River Valley, Mike Pfau watched paragliders launch off Baldy. "I was the kid who would take a sheet on top of the house and jump off," he says. In 2005, Mike met champion paragliding pilot, Nate Scales, while working construction. When Nate described the line he flew across the Smoky Mountains into the Boulders, across Galena and into the Sawtooth Valley, Mike was dumfounded. "I didn't know that type of travel was possible. To fly over all that terrain that I'd been skiing on all my life...unbelievable. A month later, I signed up to learn how to paraglide."

From launching with linens to organizing one of the biggest competition paragliding events in the world, Mike's enthusiasm and love of paragliding has taken off in all kinds of directions. "My wife would tell you I'm obsessed. There is no feeling like breaking the bound of terra firma—feeling the enormity of the sky. When you catapult yourself into the atmosphere, you feel that whole power. It's amazing."

A certified tandem pilot for Fly Sun Valley and the president of Sun Valley Paragliders, the local club whose membership boasts several current and former national champion pilots, Mike's involvement with paragliding is far-reaching. The local club pilots, through Fly Sun Valley, work with non-profit groups such as Wounded Warriors donating tandem flights, promoting the sport, and giving back to the community. Mike's organization, Fly Far In Idaho, is responsible for bringing both the 2nd annual Open Distance National Championships and the Paragliding World Cup to Sun Valley. For two weeks at the end of August, pilots from around the world will be launching off from Baldy, competing for both national and world titles and celebrating the colorful, accessible, and unique sport of paragliding.

## SUN VALLEY PARAGLIDERS CLUB OR EVENT INFORMATION

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Fly Far In Idaho: [www.flyfarinidaho.com](http://www.flyfarinidaho.com)



## PARAGLIDING WORLD CUP: AUGUST 18-25

Don't miss this worldwide annual event! Only the second time in North America, the Paragliding World Cup is only open to the world's top pilots who qualify. Among the competitors are two Ketchum locals: Nate Scales and Matt Beechinor (see profile). **Rules of the Game:** The World Cup is a race-to-goal event. The committee assesses conditions for the day and sets a task. GPS is loaded for each competitor at race start. Pilots must tag each point until the finish. (For example: Baldy, Griffin Butte, Galena, Stanley.) This is a timed event.

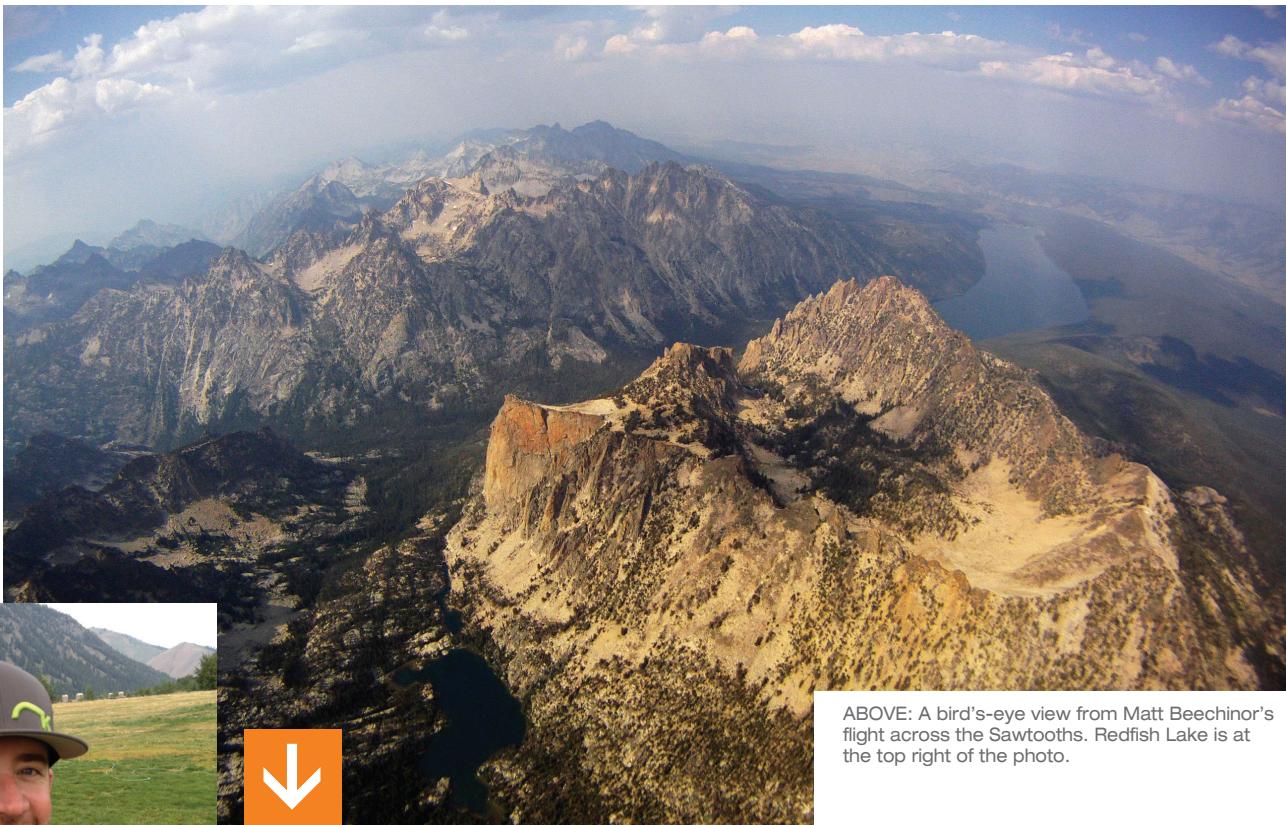
## OPEN DISTANCE NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS: AUGUST 26-SEPTEMBER 2

Taking place immediately after the World Cup so pilots can compete in both events, the Open Distance Nationals test pilots' ability to fly the longest distance possible. The Task Committee assesses the conditions and sets a general direction with a series of controls and waypoints. There is no set finish and pilots must be on the ground by sunset.

## PARAGLIDING WORLD CUP AWARD CEREMONIES: AUGUST 25TH 6PM

Come out and celebrate post-World Cup at the Ketchum Town Square. DJ and awards, followed by music from the Lower Broadford Boys and Old Death Whisperer. Food and beer by Power House Pub! **Sponsored by Hayden Beverage.**

For more information, contact the Office of the Vice President for Research and Economic Development at 319-273-2500 or [research@uiowa.edu](mailto:research@uiowa.edu).



PHOTOGRAPH: MATT BEECHINOR



## MATT BEECHINOR National Distance Record Breaker

On June 30, 2012, Ketchum paraglider Matt Beechinor launched off Baldy and flew 187.5 miles in 8.5 hours, landing in Anaconda, Montana breaking the national distance record for foot-launch cross-country paragliding. I caught up with Matt for the brief time his feet were planted on the ground before his next adventurous flight.

**KFK:** Tell me about the distance record you just broke.

**MB:** I didn't set out to break any records when I launched, I just wanted to fly some cross-country on my paraglider with friends. The conditions for the first few hours of the flight were very challenging; the thermals were small and hard to climb in. My buddies didn't manage to make it out of the Wood River Valley, landing just north of Ketchum. After crossing Trail Creek Pass I continued toward Borah Peak in the Lost River Range on my own. As the day progressed conditions improved; the thermals were getting stronger and I had a nice tailwind that helped me achieve good ground speeds, a factor that is important in big distance flights. It took me about six hours of flying headed northeast to cross the Pahsimeroi, Lemhi, and Beaverhead mountain ranges. Typically we use oxygen when flying at these altitudes, but my system had failed on launch and I flew without O2 all day. The views were incredible and the flying was intense.

Cross-country flying consists of climbing as high as you can in thermals (columns of hot rising air) and

then using that height to glide to the next place you expect will produce more thermals—climb, glide, repeat. Once I crossed the continental divide I ran into a small problem. I have a 3-D relief map of Idaho hanging in my house that I've been studying for years to learn the area for my cross-country flights. Suddenly, I realized I'd just flown off my map. I was a little clueless about where I was. When I crossed the divide and flew into Montana it felt like flying into the unknown. I flew north through the Beaverhead Mountains for the remainder of the flight landing right beside Highway 90 just east of Anaconda, Montana. My flight lasted 8.5 hours. I reached altitudes close to 18,000 feet and set a new Idaho state distance record in the process, 187.5 miles. The previous state record was held by my good friend and Ketchum local, Nate Scales, at 148.5 miles. Later I learned that I broke another record, the longest foot-launched paraglider flight in the U.S. (previous record held by another great friend, Bill Belcourt, at 173.6 miles).

**KFK:** What motivates you to paraglide and compete?

**MB:** I paraglide because I love flying and adventure. I compete because it gives me a chance to hang out with and test myself against the best pilots. Competition pilots are a fantastic group of odd characters, some of the best people in the world.

**KFK:** Can you tell me about an incredible moment flying and what made it so special?

**MB:** So many great memories. One of the more recent experiences was traveling to Ghana in West Africa this spring for a paragliding festival. After the event I traveled to a small village in the country of Togo. There were mud huts and no power or running water. I stayed there for a week and took kids from the village tandem flying with me. It was such a beautiful experience I was moved to tears. Sharing my passion with people who would never experience it otherwise is very special to me.

**KFK:** Dream flight?

**MB:** I've always wanted to fly the biggest mountains in the world. The Himalayas are calling my name.

**KFK:** How did you celebrate setting the cross-country flight records (Idaho and National)?

**MB:** By the time I hitchhiked to Butte and found a hotel for the night it was pretty late; I managed to find a pizza place that was just closing up for the night. My celebration was sitting on the side of the road in Butte drinking a few beers and eating cold pizza while fielding phone calls from all my flying buddies congratulating me.

**It took seven hitched rides and 13 hours for Matt to get back to Ketchum. "Getting home is a big part of the adventure!"**