



**EXPERIMENTER**  
FEATURE





# SETTING RECORDS

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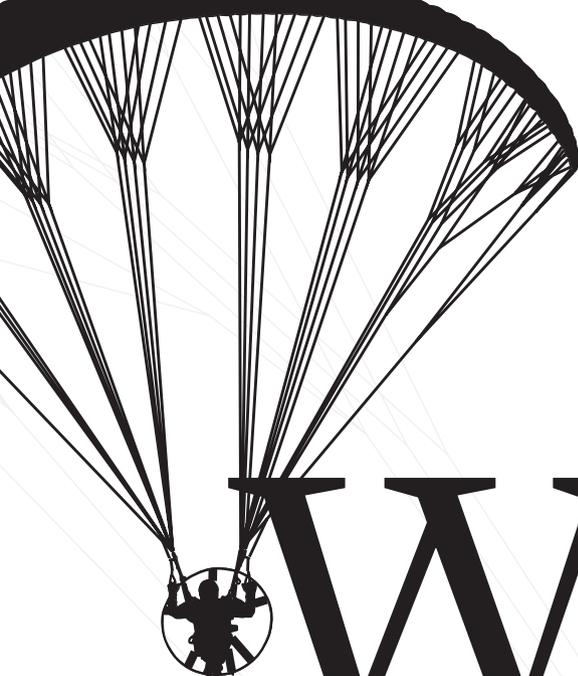
# TAKING NAMES

**STORMING THE U.S.  
BY PARAMOTOR**



BY CHRISTINA BASKEN

**HARLEY MILNE**, EAA 1377610, moved to the United States from South Africa about 20 years ago. Since then, it has been Harley's top priority to see as much of the country as he could.



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hile traveling through Asia, Harley discovered paramotors and was immediately fascinated. Not long after returning to California, Harley got in touch with his local paramotor community and got involved with the sport.

Today, Harley has about six years of flying under his belt. While wrapping up business school, Harley decided it was time to plan a road trip and finally see the country.

“I figured if I’m going to do a road trip around all 50 states, I should certainly see it from the air as well as from the ground,” Harley said.

## 50xCHALLENGE PARAMOTOR TOUR

After a considerable amount of planning, Harley came up with what he calls the 50xChallenge.

The goal of the 50xChallenge was twofold. One, to fly in all 50 states, and two, to collect money for charities by raising at least \$1,000 per state.

The plan was to drive to a state, spend time flying and exploring that state, and then head to the next state to fly and visit until he had all 50 states crossed off the list. He’d fly a BlackHawk Kestrel V3 with a Vittorazi Moster engine and Dudek Snake 1.2 (59-foot/18-meter) wing.

“I wanted to be able to have something good come out beyond just my own personal goal of getting around the whole country,” Harley said. “My goal was to try and raise a thousand dollars toward local charities in each state. The idea is to inspire people. So, I did not select a specific charity. I really wanted people to see what paramotoring was about and to be inspired to help others and to pick a charity that’s close to their heart and for them to pay it forward.”

In November 2019, Harley set off to tackle the challenge, starting with Hawaii.



## TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

Even with ample planning, there always seems to be too much to see and too little time. While each state was special and memorable in its own way, there were certain destinations that stood out more than others.



### IDAHO (STATE NO. 5): BASE JUMPING

While in Idaho, Harley had the opportunity of a lifetime to try BASE (building, antenna, span, earth) jumping for the first time and later fly his paramotor along the Snake River.

The jump took place at Perrine Memorial Bridge, the only bridge in the United States you can legally BASE jump from without a permit.

### FLORIDA (STATE NO. 19): FLIGHT SCHOOLS & NEW FRIENDS

Harley admitted to spending more time in Florida than any other state due to the many opportunities to visit and learn from the multitude of paramotor schools located in Florida.

Harley wasted no time in Florida. Upon his arrival to Pensacola on Sunday, January 19, 2020, he made arrangements to meet with Fly High Paramotors and iFlyPPG, but he didn't stop there. Harley also stopped by Happy Thoughts PPG in Live Oak, Aviator Paramotor (both locations, Lake Wales and Dunnellon), CloudBase PPG located in Zephyrhills, One Up Adventures located in Lake Wales, Four Winds PPG in Avon Park, and Aerolight LLC located in Miami.

Harley was also stoked to meet Bo Feldman while in Florida, a young man who flew a paramotor cross-country from Florida to Oshkosh for AirVenture 2019.

### SOUTH DAKOTA (STATE NO. 45): FLYING MOUNT RUSHMORE & THE BADLANDS

"I really don't recommend doing this [flying Mount Rushmore] unless you know what you're doing," Harley said. "There really are no outs, and it took a fair amount of planning."

To help with the planning and to ensure his safety, two local pilots, Dan and Tanner, whom Harley met online, put their heads together to come up with a planned route.

"The reason I don't recommend anyone going there is that, first of all, there's only really one road that one could land on, if you had to land," Harley said. "The area around Mount Rushmore is fairly mountainous, and it has lots of trees and no real outs. So, it's a challenging location to go to and, of course, it's a national monument, so there are altitude and perimeter rules around flying near the monument."

All of Harley's planning, as well as some help from Tanner to get permission to take off from tribal land, paid off.

"It's just amazing topography," Harley said. "This flight was absolutely memorable. Few paramotor pilots can easily achieve [this], let alone with permission to take off from the reservation. Indeed, this was an honor."



Check out the digital edition of *EAA Sport Aviation* for a video about Harley Milne.



## VISITING OSHKOSH, WISCONSIN (STATE NO. 40)

— Harley's first time at AirVenture was in 2017, and he was "really in awe."

At the time, Harley didn't think it would be possible for him to come back and fly here. On April 24, 2020, with ample planning around COVID-19, what seemed impossible became possible, and Harley got to take off and fly from Pioneer Airport at EAA.

"This is where experimental aircraft takes place, and what better place to fly than in a place where ultralights have sort of led the way to so many other things," Harley said.

While visiting us at Pioneer Airport in April 2020, Jon Eisele, EAA flight programs manager and local paramotor instructor, gave Harley a tour of the area from his own paramotor. Then, before leaving Wisconsin and heading to Illinois, Harley met up with another local group of aviators: High Five Paramotoring, a team of father and four sons.

Harley took off with four of the five family members, who treated him to some aerobatic flying and a tour of the valleys near the family's farm.

"Thank you High Five Paramotoring and the Martin family for making my last stop and flight in Wisconsin so memorable," Harley said. "I appreciated your hospitality and the home-cooked meal."

## ALASKA: THE FINAL FRONTIER

— Harley's 50xChallenge tour finally came to an end on June 17, 2020, when he took off from a beach in Homer, Alaska.

"I was connected with a local paramotor pilot down in Homer [south of Anchorage], and he was kind enough to pick me up from the airport," Harley said. "Then we drove back down to Homer and we had to wait a couple of days for some weather, and then we had the opportunity to not only fly it to get the official completion done, but a couple of days later we were actually able to fly all the way up to the glacier that's there. And that was absolutely amazing."

*Editor's Note:* See Harley's video footage of flying over the glaciers on his YouTube channel, 50xChallenge, via the link at [EAA.org/Extras](http://EAA.org/Extras).

Harley spent a total of 10 days flying, exploring, fishing, and getting to know the locals in Alaska.

After completing the flight in Alaska that would check off all 50 states for the challenge, Harley had some mixed emotions.

"My biggest fear was finishing the tour and wondering what I was going to go do next," Harley said. "You go from talking to a lot of people and a lot of people showing a lot of interest in what we're doing and supporting me and encouraging me, and then almost overnight it comes to an end and a week or two goes by and you wonder what you're going to do. It was a 20-year dream that had come true, and I was very ecstatic to have achieved what I set out to do."

When Harley started the trip, he said he didn't know very many people in the paramotor community, and now he has a whole new family.

"I'm amazed by how many people reach out to me now on social media," Harley said. "It's quite daunting. On one occasion, I needed a prop, and a gentleman drove a hundred miles out of his way to bring me the prop that I needed because I didn't have the spacer for the spare I had. That's probably been the biggest surprise, is how much people are willing to do to help me succeed. It's just been remarkable; it really has been."

Harley's advice? Don't wait to start your trip of a lifetime.

"My advice is don't wait," Harley said. "If you've never driven around the country, everybody should do it. There's so much to see that's beautiful. But to be able to fly a paramotor in so many different places and meet so many amazing paramotorists that love the sport and aviation in general, that is just a huge privilege; it's just really been incredible to meet so many awesome people."





## LAUNCH DAY: NOVEMBER 29, IMPERIAL BEACH, CALIFORNIA

“We were flying the shortest and straightest route to get all the way across to Florida,” Harley said. “The planned route included all of our checkpoints and emergency landing points as well as refueling and airports that we considered. For me, personally, a very important aspect of the coast to coast that we wanted to demonstrate [was] that paramotors with good planning can operate the same way that general aviation does and that we weren’t a bunch of yahoos just taking off and landing wherever we wanted to; all the planning had designated takeoff and launch spots. And in the majority of cases, we did actually land at an airport to refill and launch from.”

Unlike the 50xChallenge where Harley would drive to each state and then fly, for him, the coast-to-coast tour involved zero driving. Harley flew the entire trip, only stopping for food and rest. For safety precautions, Harley’s team was split between two vehicles following along on his journey.

Harley’s goal was not only to fly coast to coast but also to be the fastest paramotor pilot to do it. Publicly, Harley and his team announced they were trying to achieve this goal in 14 days, although Harley had a personal goal that only his team was aware of, and that was to complete the tour in 10 days.

## COAST-TO-COAST RECORD ATTEMPT

When Harley came to EAA back in April during his 50xChallenge tour, we asked him what was next for him, and he tentatively let the cat out of the bag that he was working on putting into place his ultimate bucket-list tour.

“I’ll be honest, I can’t imagine going back to working a 9-to-5 job again, and I have been thinking about what I would like to do next,” Harley said in April. “So, it’s occurred to me that to my knowledge, no one or very few have flown a paramotor from coast to coast in the United States. It’s a daunting task, it’s going to require a fair amount of planning, and it will be probably one of the most challenging things that I’ve done in my life. So, if I can find a way to do it, I think that would be the next step is to try and take that on as the next challenge that I should do.”

And lo and behold on November 29, Harley set out to tackle that challenge.

If you thought the 50xChallenge was intense, it was nothing compared to this challenge. Everything from the planning phase to putting the plan into action required thorough attention to detail.

To make this happen, Harley put together a team consisting of highly knowledgeable people who would help Harley not only reach his goal, but most importantly keep him safe. This team included ground crew chief Ray Pierce, ground crew logistics Tom Pearce, meteorologist Dave Wert, medical officer Jeffrey Miller, public relations director Cynthia Lecompte, launch site liaison officer Anthony Dalton, and team photographer Greg Anthony Harris.

“In July I had actually contacted FAI and Guinness World Records to see if they would recognize a record for crossing the country,” Harley said. “It wasn’t until September that I made some calls, and my biggest concern was trying to determine whether I would have a road or a ground crew that would be able to support me, and it was when Ray Pierce, my crew chief, agreed to do it, that we pulled the trigger and we started to put the team together.”



# COAST TO COAST

## A DAUNTING TASK

As you can imagine, flying sunup to sundown with a relatively heavy engine on your back in less-than-ideal temperatures can be exhausting on the body.

In preparation for this challenge, Harley spent two months training to enhance his strength and endurance.

"I spent two months training to be able to launch with over 90 pounds on my back," Harley said. "And of course, it's not just the launch itself. It's actually getting ready." Harley pointed out that, with all of the gear and equipment required, just lining up before even starting a running takeoff can be exhausting for many people.

Even with two months of training his body, this challenge was quite the feat.

"We would literally launch at civil twilight in the morning and then fly all day every day until we got there," Harley said.

This was a true race against the clock. Harley and his team averaged about 45-minute turnarounds between each flight.

"There was enough time to land, eat something, drink something, and for the team to replace all my batteries," Harley said.

Harley said the biggest challenge during the tour was the impact the cold weather had on his body and his equipment.

To prevent the electronics from failing in the expected colder temperatures, Harley and his team came prepared (or so they thought) with chemically heated pads for iPads and iPhones, and a heated vest with pockets to keep the batteries warm.

**START:  
NOVEMBER 29  
IMPERIAL BEACH, CALIFORNIA**



"My heated vest operated on batteries, the flight recorders all had to be validated, my inReach, anything that ran on a battery to keep me going had to be checked; the batteries constantly needed to be updated, replaced, or recharged, even my aviation radio. We also had 2-meter radios so I could communicate directly with my ground crew," Harley said. "Most of the GoPros would stop working because the temperatures were just too cold for the batteries. Even the iPads, they stopped working in the super cold temperatures."

While in Texas, Harley experienced the coldest flying day, a chilling 17 degrees, but he said the impact of the cold weather didn't really hit until after he landed.

"I was super cold, but it didn't impact the overall safety of the flight," Harley said. "I didn't feel like I was hypothermic. I was certainly cold, and I was shivering, but during the course of the flight, I was managing that effectively. Once I had completed the flight, that is when I got to the point where I couldn't stop shaking on the ground."

Harley said safety was everyone's top priority on this trip.



# IN 8 DAYS

**FINISH:  
DECEMBER 7  
CRESCENT BEACH, FLORIDA**

“When you’re flying for fun and recreationally, you tend to have more caution about the environment that you’re flying in,” Harley said. “Of course, this being a race to set a record, one does push the boundaries further, but still with a sufficient safety margin.”

Against all odds, on December 7, Harley and his team not only successfully completed the coast-to-coast tour, also beat their time goal and finished in an astonishing eight days when they landed on Crescent Beach, just south of Jacksonville, Florida.

“Anyone who isn’t in the paramotoring world probably doesn’t fully appreciate just how amazing it was to do it in eight days, let alone the fact that we lost one day directly to weather that we couldn’t launch in in Texas” Harley said. “There was a fair amount of drama in terms of equipment and weather that we had to work around.”

Harley said there are few other claims from individuals who have said that they have flown across the country, but to his knowledge, he is the first paramotor pilot to fly coast to coast and set a record.

“My record is pending through FAI,” Harley said. “They will still have to validate it.”

Overall, the trip was an enormous success, which Harley said would not have been possible without his amazing team.

“I’m very proud that I did do this, but I think the part that I want to make very clear to everybody is that this was a team effort,” Harley said. “This trip and the success that we had was based off an incredible team who, despite never having worked together before or done something like this, came together. We came together and each person clearly understood their role and just jumped in to help .... And honestly, the biggest challenge that the crew had ... was being able to keep up with me because, on average, I was flying at 50 to 65 miles an hour and a lot of the roads that they were on, they could only do 50 or 55 miles an hour. I was flying in a straight line, and they couldn’t drive in a straight line. So, I’m very proud of the team and the success that we had.”

Throughout Harley’s 50xChallenge, there were a few “lessons learned” as Harley put it. The events in which those lessons were learned were an important part of Harley’s trip, as it forced him to be more situationally aware and, overall, a better pilot. To read about Harley’s takeaways from his trip, and to watch video footage of his visit to EAA and more, visit [EAA.org/Extras](http://EAA.org/Extras). *EAA*

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**Christina Basken**, EAA 1299943, is EAA’s multimedia journalist and an active sport pilot. When she is not taking photos or writing for various publications, you can find her outside enjoying nature.

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— HARLEY MILNE

