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Modern soaring (gliding) began in Germany after World War I. Restricted by the Treaty of Versailles from building powered aircraft, German engineers utilised the updrafts at the hilly Wasserkuppe region to keep fragile, wood and fabric aircraft aloft. The first soaring competition took place there in 1920.

During the 1930s, the sport evolved from simple slope soaring to cross country flights, driven by the discovery of thermal (rising warm air) and mountain wave lift. This technological and meteorological leap quickly spread the sport worldwide. The global governing body, the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale (FAI), organised the first recognised World Soaring Championships in 1937.

Following World War II, during which military gliders played notable tactical roles, the sport exploded in popularity. The discipline transformed from an amateur, do-it-yourself pastime into a high-tech discipline. The introduction of aerodynamic fiberglass and carbon fibre composites allowed for incredibly sleek, high-performance sailplanes with massive wingspans. Today, gliding is a highly competitive, global sport governed by the International Gliding Commission (IGC). Using satellite navigation, advanced flight computers and modern weather forecasting, pilots regularly fly hundreds, and sometimes thousands, of kilometres in a single day using the invisible currents of the atmosphere.

As local records have it, the first person to fly in Hawke's Bay was 15-year-old Tye Husheer in Napier in 1915 who built himself a rudimentary flying machine from plans in a boys' own annual. The Husheer family had immigrated to New Zealand from Germany four years before to pioneer the tobacco industry, but with the country at war, was now deemed enemy aliens. For reasons of "national security", police ordered the teen's "suspect" handmade glider be destroyed.

The NZ Gliding Association was formed in 1931, with an active local contingent, but it was not until after the Second World War that gliding became an established hobby.

Gliding Hawke's Bay was formed in 1957 and operated nomadically from Beacon's Airfield (now Napier Aerodrome), Roy's Hill, Ocean Beach and various farms, such as Joll's Farm behind Te Mata Peak, before settling at Hastings Aerodrome in the 1970s.

If you are interested in trying soaring yourself, come and join us to learn more about gliding, the weather, the wave and the "air pockets" you fly through in powered aircraft and save fuel! Aeroclub members can fly at gliding club member rates.

Further details about the club and learning to glide are on the gliding club website at http://www.glidinghbw.co.nz/