

Resident paraglider soars at World Cup

Many people move to Jackson Hole to ski. Nick Greece moved here to fly.

Six years ago, Greece came to the valley to join the free-flying, foot-launched sport of paragliding. Earlier this month, he recorded a landmark victory at the Paragliding World Cup in Roldanillo, Colombia. Greece finished first among 75 competitors from the Americas and seventh overall in the 130-person event.

He is the America's Cup winner and came home with the satisfaction of being the seventh-best paraglider in the world. It wasn't what he expected going in.

"I was hoping to get top 30 overall," he said. "That was my goal. I got lucky. There is a good amount of luck involved. You have to put yourself in the right position to get lucky."

You also have to be experienced. And that's exactly what the 34-year-old Greece is.

For those who don't know how a paragliding competition works, here's a primer: The contest is seven days long. Each day includes 70 to 150 kilometers of flying. Each competitor downloads a "task" on a GPS and must fly to several points to complete the task. The first person to finish gets 1,000 points. If the second-place finisher is five seconds behind, he or she gets 995 points, and so on. Each task takes between two and seven hours to complete.

"I flew every day I was there," Greece said of the World Cup.

His most harrowing experience wasn't in the air; it was a landing.

Due to an abundance of rainfall, much of Colombia experienced flooding while Greece was there. On one flight, he landed in a field that was flooded, and he had to walk through chest-deep water to get out.

Greece has been paragliding for nine years. He came to Jackson for

the first time for a competition six years ago. One flight from Jackson east toward the Wind River Range and he was hooked.

"I had the most amazing time flying down toward the Winds," he said. "And that was it. There was really a terrific flying community here."

Accomplished paragliders such as Jon Hunt, Jon Patterson, Josh Riggs and Chip Hildebrand became mentors to Greece.

Paragliding is one of the most overlooked activities in the valley.

With the abundance of things we can do on the ground, the level of accomplished paragliders who soar above the

ground is just as impressive.

Hildebrand, for instance, successfully paraglided from Phillips Ridge near Wilson to Thermopolis last summer. The 6-hour, 20-minute ride set the Wyoming paragliding distance record: 137 miles.



B Sides

Brandon
Zimmerman

*"I flew every day
I was there."*

— Nick Greece

CHAMPION PARAGLIDER

"Jackson has one of the best cross-country flying communities in the country," Greece said. "That's one of the reasons I moved here. I learned how to fly cross-country."

Paragliding is also unique in that it allows Greece to see the world — and from a bird's-eye perspective, no less.

"It's a great way to experience a culture, another country, and play one of the coolest games on Earth," he said.

Brandon Zimmerman is the sports editor at the News&Guide. His column details offbeat sports stories and runs weekly.