

OPENING: They said it couldn't be done

Scene

It's a beautiful morning on Blouberg Nature Reserve Beach. The sea is calm. The air is crisp.
Two paramotoring pilots glide in from an azure sky in perfect flying conditions.

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OFNB

Audio

Triumphant music (like victors returning from war) sets the scene for a great achievement.
The distant sound of two paramotors gets closer and closer and the engine decelerates as
the pilots prepare to land.
The background music swells.

Jaco: You know boet [or other], people will find it hard to believe we actually did this.
JP: Well then, Wright brother [or other], we're just going to have to show them exactly how
we achieved what they said couldn't be done!

Music reaches a crescendo.

Freeze frame on each character; data as visual overlay

JP:

The dreamer, aviation enthusiast, and intrepid adventurer of the skies.
Instigator of the “Johannesburg to Cape Town” odyssey.
Currently holds the record for most paramotor crashes in 2 years.

Jaco:

The genius alchemist, PG, and paragliding pro.
Corrects JP on all his planning (or they may have ended up in Cairo).
Only allowed to fly based on his good behaviour at home. He doesn't fly very often.

Hennie:

The coder, weather forecasting wizard, and brains behind the Gaggle flight recording app.
Terrible support vehicle driver.
Always late but arrives with a smile and a joke.

Narrator

Don't be fooled by the brains and brawn and technically perfect beach landing!
There's a lot more to this story.
Let me take you back to where it all began...

COVID led me to YouTube, which introduced me to paramotoring.
Thank you, Tucker Gott, for capturing and winning the 2017 Icarus Race. From that moment
I knew paramotoring was my goal, and XC flying was the discipline.
My only question: can we fly from Johannesburg to Cape Town?

Scene

Blouberg Nature Reserve Beach scene with pilots landing plays in reverse and paramotors
whizz backwards into the sky.

Audio

Rewinding visuals supported by the same opening audio,
this time played backwards and sped up.

Narrator

Some say it was chasing a zero-drag dream. Others, a flight of fancy.
With 18 months of meticulous planning, how hard could it be?
What could possibly go wrong?

Could we have done it better, in retrospect? Sure.
Would we have traded the experience and lessons for a perfect cross-country flight? Never!
Change the plan – where necessary – but never the goal.

Join us in a four-part paramotoring adventure from Hartbeespoort, in the North West of
South Africa, to Blouberg in the Western Cape – where the only thing more unpredictable
than the wind is our crew.

Audio

Music plays out.

DAY ONE: Change the plan but not the goal

Title Sequence with Music

A Twist in the Tailwind

Plan: Klerksdorp 165 km
Hoopstad 132 km
Kimberly 160 km
Total 456 km

Actual: Potchefstroom 130.2 km
Bothaville 87 km (flew 29 km, drove 58 km)
Bultfontien 107 km (flew 41 km, drove 66 km)
Total 324 km (38% of projected distance – flew 200.2km, drove 124 km)

Scene

Day breaks slowly over the hangar in Hartbeespoort, where we see our pilots checking their gear and doing final prep as the sky gets lighter and time for take-off approaches.

Narrator

It's a serene dawn at 05h36 on Thursday 11 April 2024:
Day One of our ambitious cross-country paramotoring adventure.
Our team of two pilots (Jaco and I) are brimming with confidence outside the hangar at our take-off site in Harties.

Cut to

Hennie interviews JP and Jaco, who are “optimistically nervous” ahead of their trip.

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Cut to

Hero shots of the motors, paramotoring paraphernalia, the runway by dawn, strategically placed wings, and our pilots all strapped up and ready for take-off.

Narrator

So with the sky – not as the limit, but rather, as our starting point – we prepared to launch into the heavens on our epic adventure...

Or at least aim to hover a few meters above ground without alarming the locals.
This proved surprisingly more challenging than we'd anticipated.

. Welcome to “A Twist in the Tailwind”, where our first act is a comedy of errors and a testament to the art of staying grounded.

Scene

The sound of birds chirping. All is calm. Then, the peace is shattered by the revving of a paramotor.

Cut to

Jaco prepping for take-off. He runs, the motor revs up... and cuts out.

<https://photos.google.com/share/AF1QipNEmpfefR4hHh-MDLyhhmiHJcnnSFjbyG8PBW9zpnN6DM7HpbCfEuW1phbuLAR6A/photo/AF1QipPRrIVkv7ntBkJxs48rcQrVZZWtAAaBRRxTAv7y?key=QjcyM1piU3p5a1NUMlhVWDdWZTIEU3VwbGNaOFNB>

Narrator

If the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, then the flight of a thousand kilometers begins with several helpings of humble pie.

We hadn't bargained on the early arrival of Murphy's Law, which, ironically, is named after the American aerospace engineer, Edward A. Murphy Jr.

THIS is The Murphy who famously predicted that,
“anything that could possibly go wrong WILL.”

Cut to

A montage of attempted take-offs, failed launches, a useless engine, a fizzled battery, and pilots looking puzzled.

Narrator

In this case it was Jaco's Law, which dictated a failure to launch – despite his best efforts.
Yes, Jaco couldn't get it up.

What did go up (for all of 10 or 20 seconds) promptly came down when Jaco suffered an unknown engine-out; his paramotor evidently preferring a lie-in on this particular morning.

On the upside,

I believe this was a new record in the ‘shortest paramotor flight’ category.

And as if that wasn't enough to make us reconsider our life choices and aerial ambitions, my battery somehow burned itself out before I could even take off.

I'm not naming any names, but I am guessing the battery was hooked up by someone who clearly thought that red means go and green means stop.
Much like my "Joburg to Cape Town" dream at that point, it literally went up in smoke.

With both of us grounded, we could easily have folded up our wings and left, in search of fresh coffee and rusks.

But the spirit of adventure was, and still is, strong within us.

Audio

Benny Hill Theme

<https://youtu.be/MK6TXMsvgQg?si=X2tmlmNAX9RzP06x>

Cut to

Scenes of a quick battery swap, our pilots with their wings and lines in position (again), and hero shots of the motors (again), and, finally, our two pilots all strapped up and ready for take-off... again.

Narrator

After some quick lateral thinking and a game of battery chess, I gave Jaco my spare paramotor and removed the battery. His battery, which was still good, was then put into my machine which he was now using, and I put his original battery in my working paramotor with all the precision and efficiency of a surgeon in an organ transplant.

Although I suspect it might have been less painful to donate my ego along with both my kidneys!

Scene

It's now full morning sunlight as both pilots execute a perfect take-off respectively: each running down the runway, and successfully lifting off against the backdrop of the surrounding mountains, with relieved family and friends cheering from the ground.

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Cut to

Scenes of the pilots doing a "victory lap" overhead, one behind the other, towards the mountain tops.

<https://photos.google.com/share/AF1QipNEmppefR4hHh-MDLyhhmiHJcnnSFjbyG8PBW9zpnN6DM7HpbCfEuW1phbuLAR6A/photo/AF1QipP2DscZyveJcrGMgdrFCRvEx48IHuG6sN4UJfpR?key=QjcyM1piU3p5a1NUMlhVWDdWZTIEU3VwbGNaOFNB>

Narrator

45 minutes later we actually got off the ground... and stayed there – finally on our way to Klerksdorp! Or so we thought.

Audio

Uplifting music fills the audience with a sense of relief and hope.

Cut to

Footage of breathtaking aerial views from the paramotors.

Data as visual overlay

Magaliesburg mountain range:

100 times older than Mount Everest (but fortunately not as high)

Narrator

One of the cool things about paramotoring is the unique bird's eye view you have of sights that you usually only see from the ground – all while you're perched in what is essentially a camping chair strapped to a giant leaf blower.

Don't get me wrong, paramotoring is rated as one of the safest leisure activities in aviation.
And you're guaranteed a window seat on every flight,
with unlimited legroom.

Audio

Chilled, happy music, which ends abruptly.

Cut to

Flight recording footage of headwind.

Stills of in-flight comms between pilots and ground crew discussing the bad weather and JP's low fuel level.

Narrator

Turns out that good ol' Murphy was not done with us yet as we learned all about the "wind" in these window seats!

We battled headwind and gusts, which Hennie's clever Gaggle flight recorder had warned us about. But what we hadn't anticipated was how unpleasant it would be up in the air.

To give you some context, facing a headwind in a paramotor is like being on a treadmill: lots of huffing and puffing, but you're not actually going anywhere.



It must have been about 60 or 70 km into the flight when I looked down and realised that I only had 5 litres of fuel left in my tank, thanks to the headwind treadmill.

This would never be enough to get us to Klerksdorp, which was the original plan, so I was sweating more than all our politicians on election day!

But by now, we all know that perfect planning is overrated – it's the pursuit that counts. So instead, we decided to redirect to Potchefstroom.

Cut to

Gaggle calculations which show the reroute to Potch.

Footage and stills from the landing at Potchefstroom Golf Course.

Shots of AJ and the first and second place podium.

Narrator

There's nothing like a hero's welcome after the morning we'd just had, battling a wall of wind for 130 kms.

Our man with the plan, Hennie, had arranged for us to be met by AJ, the super friendly and hospitable golf club manager at Potchefstroom Golf Course.

Despite our unscheduled arrival from the sky, we were welcomed in true South African style with open arms, and an open clubhouse too.

And while I can't vouch for the local golfers, WE were certainly made to feel like celebrities, despite a horrible morning with no mulligans!

Cut to

Our pilots, looking visibly weary after a tough morning of flying.

JP's vlog:

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Narrator

After a much needed recharge, replan, and redirect at our golf course oasis in Potch, we phoned yet another friend to conscript him into our spirit of adventure.

But before I introduce you to the magnanimous "Barend from Bultfontein", there's a chip and a putt of about 200 km we need to cover first.

Scene

It's just before 11h30 on a hot and sunny day in Potch.

We see our pilots preparing to leave their refuelling station with wings laid out in what looks like a field (or maybe it's the rough on the golf course).

Both Jaco and JP execute perfect take-offs, now headed towards Bothaville.

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Freeze frame of second take-off while data appears as visual overlay
Insert actual flying distance from Potch to Bothaville

Narrator

If only our flight was as smooth as those take-offs!

With our sights set on Bothaville, and our hearts full of hope, it wasn't long before our spirit of adventure was put to the test again.

Did I mention that we were both airborn by 11h30?

To the beginner, this seems pretty insignificant; but to the seasoned paramotorist it's like entering the Formula 1 in a Volksie – bold move, but you're not exactly geared up for the conditions! We learned this the hard way.

Scene

It's about midday in the middle of nowhere.

Our pilots have been forced to make an unscheduled out-landing after battling erratic gusts and crazy thermals.

Narrator

Moments later, our 2-man thermal fraternal was whipped up into the air by crazy gusts like a pair of socks in a tumble dryer (for those of you who like to tumble dry your socks).

Those gusts were out to kill us!

My advice:

Never EVER launch at this time of day – unless, like Jaco, you intend to make a new personal best for climbing a thermal!

So not even 30 km after take-off we were forced to make our first out-landing, literally in the middle of nowhere.

We tucked our tails between our legs, not so literally this time, and admitted defeat. The road to Bothaville might have been paved with good intentions; but it was also strewn with our deflated ambitions and paramotoring paraphernalia.

Cut to

Scenes of the pilots, their motors and wings in the middle of nowhere next to the road.



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diBw9S6JNK9r4icfmrkaoB1lTUXMDV?key=QjcyM1piU3p5a1NUMlhVWDdWZTIEU3VwbGN
OFNB

Scene of JP lying on the road waiting for the support vehicle to arrive, which it does –
45 mins later.

Footage of the kit being packed into the vehicle before the drive to Bothaville accompanied
by JP's obvious disappointment:

[https://photos.google.com/share/AF1QipNEmppefR4hHh-MDLyhhmiHJcnnSFjbyG8PBW9zpnN6DM7HpbCfEuW1phbuLAR6A/photo/AF1QipMtEHDDeN
JaurZvMJCiw2U8C2wQxGgHqLIDYASlo?key=QjcyM1piU3p5a1NUMlhVWDdWZTIEU3VwbGN
aOFNB](https://photos.google.com/share/AF1QipNEmppefR4hHh-MDLyhhmiHJcnnSFjbyG8PBW9zpnN6DM7HpbCfEuW1phbuLAR6A/photo/AF1QipMtEHDDeNJaurZvMJCiw2U8C2wQxGgHqLIDYASlo?key=QjcyM1piU3p5a1NUMlhVWDdWZTIEU3VwbGN)

Narrator

What's a cross-country flying adventure without a bit of "cross" weather and some driving
thrown in for good measure?

While we never planned to experience the answer to that first hand, we just had to roll with
it for about 60 km to get to our final take-off spot for the day.

Scene

It's 3pm; the final leg for Day One... much to the apparent relief of the entire crew.
The landscape is open and flat at a very barren-looking Bothaville airfield, while the crew
appears fresh and ready to tackle the last stretch.

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npyl97Djt_9XZI2fJUvQaZXKP2x1w4Y?key=QjcyM1piU3p5a1NUMlhVWDdWZTIEU3VwbGN
OFNB](https://photos.google.com/share/AF1QipNEmppefR4hHh-MDLyhhmiHJcnnSFjbyG8PBW9zpnN6DM7HpbCfEuW1phbuLAR6A/photo/AF1QipOmgG08Inpyl97Djt_9XZI2fJUvQaZXKP2x1w4Y?key=QjcyM1piU3p5a1NUMlhVWDdWZTIEU3VwbGN)

Cut to

Scenes of our pilots with their wings and lines in position (again), and hero shots of the
motors (again), and, finally, our two pilots ready for take-off (again), with Hennie as their
lonesome cheerleader.

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aOFNB](https://photos.google.com/share/AF1QipNEmppefR4hHh-MDLyhhmiHJcnnSFjbyG8PBW9zpnN6DM7HpbCfEuW1phbuLAR6A/photo/AF1QipNNMaB6nsymaDB5gipef48pbiFBxxqJP9WZ1XL6?key=QjcyM1piU3p5a1NUMlhVWDdWZTIEU3VwbGN)

One after the next, we see JP and Jaco each zig zagging along the runway as they lift off in
the general direction of Bultfontein.

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Data as visual overlay

Insert actual flying distance from Bothaville to Bultfontein

Audio

Uplifting opening theme song from Die Hard (or similar).

Narrator

Not sure if you remember the “Die Hard” franchise, with the indestructible John McClane, played by Bruce Willis?

By now, the chapters of Day One in this story are starting to sound like the titles of the first 3 movies in the saga: Die Hard, Die Hard 2, and then Die Hard with a Vengeance!

Audio

Music fades away.

Narrator

It wasn’t long before our senses were being assaulted again by the headwind and gusts; which were back with a vengeance.

We battled our vicious weather adversaries for a brave 40-odd kms, until eventually we were wishing for stunt doubles and needing a hug from our wives.

Cut to

Flight recording footage of headwind and gusts.

Stills of in-flight comms between pilots and ground crew deciding to call it.

Narrator

Jaco was evidently ‘gatvol’ of dying hard and made the call to call it a day. A good day to die quietly in the support vehicle for the remaining distance to Bultfontein.

Scene

With the support vehicle parked at the side of the road, the mood is deflated, but still cautiously optimistic, as the crew packs up the equipment for the day.

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Cut to

Shots of the arrival in Bultfontein, with another generous South African welcome.

Data as visual overlay

Bultfontein, Free State:

Est 1874 alongside the very aptly named neighbouring town, Hoopstad.

Narrator

With the last 66 km gap closed, we finally arrived in beautiful Bultfontein in the Free State. Here we were treated to another generous South African welcome: warm Rooibos tea for me, ice-cold beer for Jaco, and Hennie capturing our post-mortem for us to agonise over afterwards.

Cut to

Hennie interviews JP and Jaco, as they compare war stories from Day One.

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Cut to

Footage and stills of Barend's family hosting our crew in typical South African style

Narrator

So I promised to tell you more about "Barend from Bultfontein", when he answered our desperate call at Potchefstroom golf club earlier in the day.

I first met Barend on my paramotoring course and we've remained friends ever since. He's one of those pilots who earns instant respect, and a little bit of envy too, for making paramotoring seem as natural as breathing.

I can recall him picking up a wing for the first time on a Sunday, and by the next day he was up in the air as if he'd been there all along.

Just like Barend, his whole family is the gold standard of South African hospitality.

They welcomed us into their home like prodigal sons, and insisted on giving us all a warm shower, a hot meal, and a comfy bed.

What more could 3 travel-worn souls ask for?

Especially ones who had navigated the meticulously-planned Day One with more surprises in store than John McClane's Christmas Eve.

Yippee Ki Yay!!

Audio

Uplifting closing theme song from Die Hard (or similar) plays out.