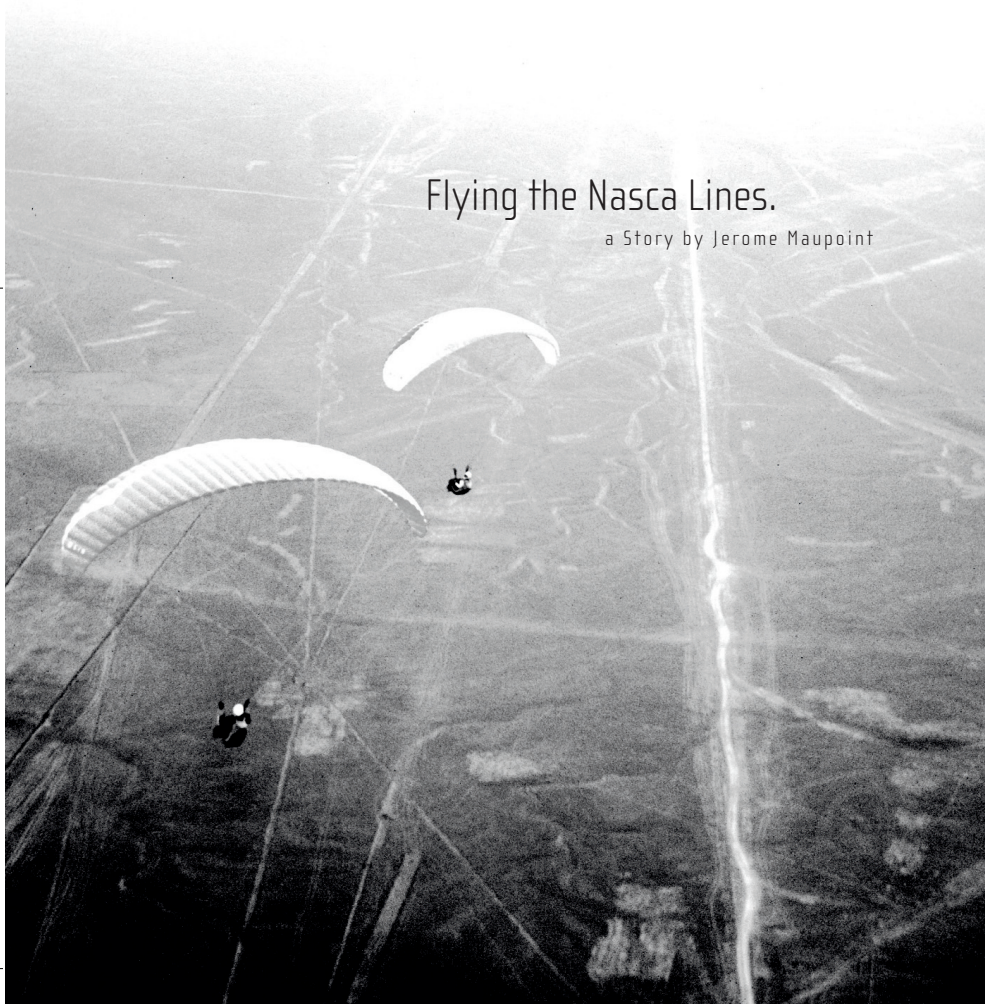




GIN

Flying the Nasca Lines.

a Story by Jerome Maupoint



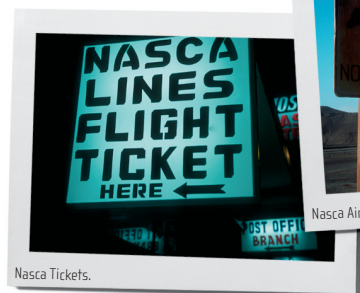


The Nasca Lines were first spotted when commercial airlines began flying across the Peruvian desert in the 1920's. Passengers reported seeing "primitive landing strips" on the ground below. Today people sometimes fly in hot air balloons to view the splendors of the Nasca Lines, their energies awakening something within their souls.

We're at the foot of a mirador or observation point in the middle of the desert and fifteen kilometers north of the city of Nasca, Peru. A souvenir vendor calls us over and points to the top platform of an iron tower.

He tells us that from up there we can see a pair of hands and a tree traced in the earth. Before long we're all standing at the top of the tower peering down at the famous drawings of Nasca.

(text and photos by Jerome Maupoint)

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Nasca Tickets.



Nasca Airport.



From this perspective, the pampa of San José reveals itself as strikingly rugged: a vast stony plain extending over tens of kilometres. Not a single soul inhabits it, and, according to hearsay not a single drop of rain has fallen here for at least five years. All day long dust devils sweep the plain like sentinels.

It's only 9.30 in the morning and already the thermometer on our truck reads 33° C. In the distance, two small planes dip their wings to circle at low altitude, breaking the golden silence that had filled the air. Within seconds, they're above us and descend to as low as 60 metres AGL. With this, Gin Seok Song starts to boil over, furiously, he waves a slip of paper pulled out of his pocket; it's an authorization to fly here for two days only and granted by the Peruvian civil aviation authority. It looks like we are not to have the skies to ourselves. Our aim is to capture

images of paragliders in flight over the famous earth lines of Nasca, although access to the historical site is strictly forbidden. With two drum winches, a paramotor and ten brand spanking new canopies, our equipment and logistics are worthy of a true expedition. The only thing left to do is to announce our project to the local authorities. Risking refusal, we nevertheless want to avoid any illegality and hope to glean the necessary permission from an official local source.

At Nasca airport, we're confronted with our first hurdle, a wall of total incomprehension. In explaining our idea, we don't want to give too much away. José Tabar, a local Aero Condor pilot takes our case in hand and generously informs us of the situation: No less than 180 planes, carrying three to four tourists each, fly over Nasca daily. Occasionally in the afternoons, the

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The Astronaut at 32m length an E.T., discovered by Eduardo Herran in 1982.

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turbulence is too strong for the planes to take off. This first remark deflates our enthusiasm. Every plane flies a circuit of about 30 minutes, passing over the best-preserved figures and lines. Often they'll fly several times at different altitudes over certain drawings – mainly the Hummingbird and the Condor which are the most spectacular. When conditions are right, the little Cessnas are likely to circle directly above the drawings at as low as 60 metres AGL and in very steep turns. It's the only way for their clients to see a complete picture. These foreign tourists will pay over 50 dollars to see certain drawings: The Condor, the Monkey, the Astronaut, the Dog, the Heron, the Spider and a dozen others.

It's quickly evident that any collaboration with the local Cessna pilots is out of the question due to the high risk of collisions. Still, we leave the airport with a complete list of GPS positions for each figure, but with no idea what lies ahead in terms of free flying. During our bumpy reconnaissance flights by plane, we spot a runway between the Condor and the Hummingbird. It looks like a perfect spot to operate the winches. The two figures are among the largest (the Condor alone is 200 metres long).

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and most distinguishable drawings of all and are set about a kilometer apart. On landing, we ask to meet with the flight officials in the control tower that results in some good news, and some bad. It is forbidden to fly over the San José Pampa between 7 am and 5 pm – that's the good news.

The bad news is that the officials of the NIC (National Institute of Culture) are manifestly upset that we hadn't informed them earlier of our project. They want to meet with us immediately. The NIC is a government agency that oversees protected areas. It's particularly sticky about the presence of human beings around the Nasca drawings. We state our case – we need only a kilometre and a half of runway and a perfect option already exists, and our group is made up entirely of world class pilots who can't possibly miss their landing spots and damage the earth lines.

I have a mind to tell these guys at the NIC that if paragliders alone had been allowed to fly over Nasca, then the Andes Condor (one of the world's most majestic birds) would never have left the area in the first place. I manage to restrain myself. Sometimes it seems



The crew on the Pick Up.



Housi winching.



Towing.



Gin on winch.

it'd be easier to get permission to land on the moon than on certain parts of our own planet!

They eventually give us permission to fly but restrict our flight window so narrowly (sunrise to 7 am and 5 pm to sunset) that we have only a maximum of 3 hours a day to work. Furthermore we still don't know where we'll launch from, needless to say, we're off to a slow start. The NIC grants us three days of filming and will authorize use of the diagonal runway off the Panamerican Highway. An agent from the Institute will remain on spot to watch that we don't take a single step out of bounds.

Finally ready, we each set to our specific tasks, Gin and Housi manage the winches, Mathias and Eric are the drivers, Louise, Ogi, Robert and Norman are the free flyers and my job is to follow the pilots by paramotor and capture as many "perfect" images in as short amount of time as possible. Paul, a Peruvian pilot who just happens to be in Nasca too offers to give a hand whenever needed. We count ourselves lucky – Paul arrived on the pampa with a car full of toys including a tandem paramotor and a kayak! The next morning our orders are to stand for sunrise at



Boleros over signs. [Gin sign is fake, but wouldn't it be nice?]

5.15 am and to get in as many flights and images as possible before the Cessnas arrive at 7 am. A battery of alarms go off in the hotel at 3:00 am, all the vehicles are loaded to the gunwales and each one of us checks his equipment and rehearses his part.

When the first ray of sun cuts across the sky it's just like being in the movies. "Camera, action!" But, wouldn't you know it, there's a problem with the paramotor and so the photographer is left on the ground. It takes too long to fix it so we decide to bring out the spare and rethink our plan. In the end, Norman and I take the tandem paraglider and paramotor, but get winched up rather than trying to launch from

the stony runway with 35 kilos on our back. This works fine but once in the air, another surprise awaits us.

Fully loaded, we can barely maintain altitude and have to put up with a cacophony of heavy metal roaring away behind us. So it's back to earth once again. Marc is certain that the problem comes from the carburettor and proceeds to dismantle and clean it, only to discover that one of the jets is entirely unscrewed. He works quickly and beforelong the motor roars back to life, giving full power again. It's now 6.15 am and the light illuminating the plains is unreal. It's already stifling hot and every minute lost means an equal number of images lost.

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We take off once again, Mathias gives the gas as Housi lets out the cable. Our wing lifts, the towline tightens and we rocket upward. At 100 metres we release and continue to climb with the motor, heading in the direction of the Hummingbird 850 metres ahead. Behind us, Louise has just taken off. She has to gain as much altitude as possible to optimise the height of the release before drifting slowly toward "goal".

Down below there's a smell of burning plastic coming from Housi's winch. With one hand he maintains the tension and with the other drenches the drum with water. In the air, the early morning mist has evaporated and the ravines lining the Hummingbird outline the contours.

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As carefully as I can, I begin pulling out my camera. At about 200 m from the Hummingbird and 500 m above it the ancient artwork is utterly magnificent. Louise releases her cable and heads toward us.

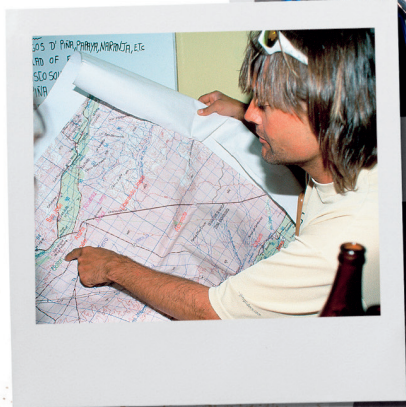
Before long she passes just beneath and I follow her track with the lens desperate to catch her in the perfect position relative to the drawing. I'm torn between wanting to take in the splendour of the surroundings and concentrating on the task at hand. Dare I miss this moment which is the culmination of weeks of arduous work for a sneak peek at the view. Once again I check to see if my camera is functioning properly, there are still plenty of things that can throw a spanner in the works of

Operation Nasca and I have no desire for it to be a film that doesn't wind on correctly or a lens ring that gets stuck due to a grain of sand. We experience the Hummingbird at 6.30 am for three whole minutes. The next day we winch two paragliders simultaneously on separate lines, but the light is not as beautiful as the previous day and the cable breaks twice. A few days later we lose 70 m of line somewhere near the Condor and the subsequent knots only weaken our towing efforts.

But then again, how can one possibly live through such emotions and not make a few sacrifices?

go
further

go
further



Follow the GIN Team as they travel through the fantastic country of Peru, from Lima City to the beach of Paracas. On this tour, Gin Seok Song and Robert Graham, designers of Gin Gliders, flew over beautiful spiritual places like the Lines and Geoglyphs of Nasca, and the Inca Temples and ruins of the Sacred Valley in Písac. Gin Factory test pilots were the first paragliding pilots ever to fly over Nasca's wonderful area listed as a World Heritage site by UNESCO. Located on the arid Peruvian coastal plain, some 400 km south of Lima, the Geoglyphs of Nasca and the pampas of Jumana cover about 450 km². These lines, which were scratched on the surface of the ground between 500 B.C. and A.D. 500, are among archaeology's greatest enigmas because of their quantity, nature, size and continuity. The geoglyphs depict living creatures, stylized plants and imaginary beings, as well as geometric figures several kilometres long. They are believed to have had ritual astronomical functions. Discover the spirit of GIN's team of pilots and friends as they travel together, spending their lives creating the most beautiful gliders for you.

22 min.



a Film by Marc Godefroy (www.overexposure.nl)
Music: Yves Roussel (rousselyves@yahoo.fr)
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