

# feel #5trings

B Y R O B M C M I L L A N

## ROADS TO NOWHERE

It seems that in today's jumping community there are a number of different paths that jumpers appear to be on. What is important to remember, and what some don't realise, is that we are all on the same road, though some seem to be heading the wrong way. There are those who enjoy the sport and wish to pace themselves, learning from their peers and choose not to jump to conclusions. Those who start running at an early stage, skip school and consequently miss out on a lot of lessons. They often update their gear, buying newer, often smaller equipment, and seem to be in a hurry to be the best. Finally there are those who start skydiving purely with the intention of becoming a BASE jumper.

### BASE-jumping

As much as skydiving and BASE-jumping involve parachutes and jumping, it is essential to recognise that they are worlds apart. The jumpers that choose to become BASE jumpers may do so for a number of reasons. The cost of skydiving may become too much. Waiting to get on a load and the politics at drop zones might all contribute to an individual's decision. Regardless of their motivation, it is essential that skydiving doesn't take a back seat to BASE jumping. Some individuals may give up skydiving completely; refusing to use the skills that skydiving offers to help them in their BASE jumps.

Among the BASE jumping community it is recommended amongst other things that before you start lobbing off a fixed object, you should have as little as 200 skydives. If this is the case then you should have considerable experience flying a large seven-cell parachute, including deep-braked approaches and have excellent accuracy skills amongst many other requirements. This is an ABSOLUTE BARE MINIMUM and perhaps only pertinent if you are going to jump off a large object with a large landing area that you would find in places like Norway or the U.S. Learning to BASE jump in Australia is like learning to swim in a small pool with a great white shark circling its perimeter. You'll either get lucky and learn very quickly and manage to dodge its jaws or you'll be swallowed in an instant. Think very carefully before deciding to jump in. If you were only a novice skydiver, why would you take a step sideways and become a novice BASE jumper?

It is absolutely astonishing that some people choose to push the envelope for that extra little bit of a rush. The old school BASE jumpers will tell you that stepping off and doing a short track face to earth is exciting enough. Yet some new school jumpers aren't satisfied and choose to add extra elements at sites which more often than not don't allow for any inkling of extra risk. The objects that you are jumping off have more than likely existed for many years and they will still be there in years to come, even after you've gone.

It will take your whole life to master the art of staying alive. Some jumpers including skydivers do not solely try to survive; they attempt to live more by pushing boundaries. In the process of trying to get more out of their jump they put their lives at even greater risk and don't survive. If it isn't completely obvious that you will survive then simply say NO. Sometimes the answer is very obvious and right in front of your face, though for whatever reason, some choose to ignore it. Walk away, smile at life and look forward to tomorrow, where life will present another opportunity to survive (Cheers Sooty).

### Saying NO

One of the hardest, yet simplest things to do in skydiving and BASE jumping is to say NO. You might have been hanging out to go jumping for weeks or trekked for miles to get to the edge. When

you get there all you want to do is jump. However if you have any doubt about your safety then simply say NO.

Consider a situation where you are planning to attempt something new or different. Your first pilot chute stowed jump from a low object, or skydiving when it is blowing 20+ knots in the middle of a hot thermic day and the most you've ever jumped in is 15 kts. I'll be fine, I'll try front risering close to the ground, that will give me an advantage. You should be 200% confident that you will pull it off otherwise wait for another opportunity that allows you a greater margin for error. Why not just say 'NO' for the hell of it every now and again, even if the conditions are perfect? Exercise your decision making process, that way it will be much easier to say NO when it matters most. The next time someone injures themselves at your DZ, take the time to go and visit them in hospital and query their choice to say 'Yes'. Think about how the situation could have been totally different if they chose to say 'NO' instead. *If in doubt, don't get out.*

### Mentors

One of the best steps that you can make as a skydiver or BASE jumper is to adopt a mentor. Someone that has been around the traps, knows a few tricks of the trade and most importantly is a person that you can trust. A mentor doesn't necessarily need to be an instructor though should still be a highly experienced jumper. A mentor may help you to plot your road map to success, offer quality tuition or act as a voice reminder in your head to stop running with a pocket full of kryptonite and scissors in your hands.

In the old school days when you were interested in buying gear you would ask the CI what should be most appropriate. He/she would even place the order for you and ensure that you would get a good deal. Today, you can ring any manufacturer and order almost anything that you want with few questions asked. A mentor in this situation is a vital ingredient. They will be able to advise you about what will meet your needs, rather than satisfying your wants.

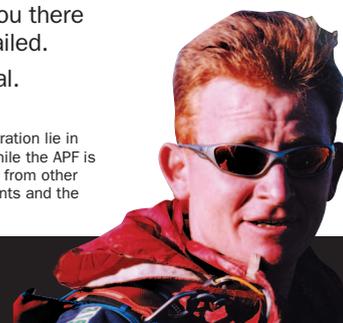
### Gear

I commented to Dave Smith that there appears to be more and more jumpers that get a packer, even though the jumper may have time to pack their rig. In the process they would have less opportunity to learn about their gear. Dave remarked that when riggers were introduced into the APF system the common perception was that jumpers would learn less about their gear, because they would not be doing their own repairs any longer. Regardless of whether you pack for yourself or not, you should learn to understand your gear. Buying new gear before you are ready to change is a recipe for disaster. How anyone could possibly say that they are ready to downsize after just a few hundred jumps is kidding themselves. Understanding how your gear functions and flies is paramount to your survival. Take every opportunity to learn more about it. What you need is equipment that will aid your survival, what you want may be completely different. I want a smaller rig, I want a different colour, I want to keep up with the Jones'....

Find a mentor to help you draw a map so you know what lies ahead. They will show you the best places to slow down so that you may enjoy the journey. Walk, do not run. Don't try to reinvent the wheel to get you there quicker... Many have tried and failed.

Understanding is one-dimensional.  
Realisation is three.

The parameters of the Australian Parachute Federation lie in sport parachuting operations from aircraft and while the APF is aware that parachuting descents are being made from other than aircraft, APF rules do not cover these descents and the APF are not in a position to control them.



FLY SMOOTH FLY SMART