Approach

AIRCRAFT OWNERS AND PILOTS ASSOCIATION OF NEW ZEALAND
AUTUMN 2026

Back to Basics

Perception of risk

A High Country aviation story

Rust never sleeps

AOPA FLY-INS • INDUSTRY NEWS AND VIEWS • COMING EVENTS AND MORE

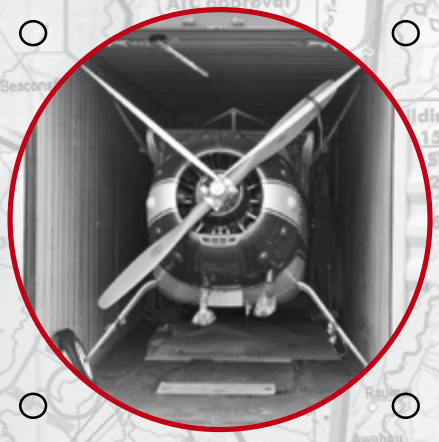
MAINTENANCE

REPAIR & REBUILD

ENGINES

AVIONICS

24/7 BREAKDOWN



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APPROACH: AUTUMN 2026
ISSN 2422-8230 / 2538-1083 (Online)

Coming up

- Warbirds over Wanaka
  3–5 April, Wanaka
- NZ Airwomen's Rally
  30 May–2 June, Hastings
- AOPA NZ Darfield
  25–27 September

For One-Day fly-ins and other coming events, check out www.aopa.nz

Cover photo: New Year AOPA NZ breakfast fly-in hosted by Johan Vlok at his home near Darfield

Photo credit: Aaron Murphy

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AOPA NZ *APPROACH* magazine is published by AOPA NZ Incorporated
Articles on relevant topics are welcomed. The editor reserves the right to edit submissions for clarity and/or length. Submission does not guarantee publication. Editorial submissions should be sent directly to the editor at editor@aopa.nz

ISSN 2422-8230 (print) / **ISSN 2538-1083** (online)

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Deadline for ads, articles and photos for the next (Winter) issue: **20 April 2026**

Outgoing President's Comment

At time of writing I am looking forward to presenting my President's Report at the 55th Annual General Meeting of AOPA NZ, to be held in Greymouth on 28 February 2026.

Reflecting on the past year, I am proud of the progress we have made as an organisation, and am deeply grateful to the many people who contribute their time, expertise and enthusiasm to AOPA NZ.

My sincere thanks go to the Executive Committee and to our sub-committees, whose commitment ensures AOPA NZ continues to serve its members effectively, advocate strongly for general aviation, and uphold best practice across all areas of our work. I would also like to personally acknowledge my husband, Gerald, for his ongoing support and understanding throughout the year.

In December 2025 the Executive met in Hastings, and took the opportunity to hold a 'Meet & Greet' with members at Hastings Aerodrome. North Island AOPA NZ members flew in from all directions, enjoying the HB&EC Aero Club's hospitality and the chance to catch up and chat aviation.

The year in brief

Significant progress has been made by the AOPA NZ Charitable Trust, which has focused on strengthening its foundational governance. In October 2025, Dan Clearwater joined as Executive Officer, and mentoring initiatives are now underway, including the awarding of three flying scholarships. With initial communications and fundraising completed, planning is well advanced for a broader 2026 programme encompassing scholarships, internships, school engagement and further fundraising. For more on the Trust's activities, see the article on page 21.

The Executive Committee has remained focused on strategic planning, with advocacy, safety and membership growth as its core priorities. To support continuity and effectiveness we have developed mandates for our existing portfolios – safety, advocacy, social, publishing, membership and the AOPA NZ Trust.

A key membership initiative is the proposed Pathway Membership, designed to attract those under 30 years of age. Offering full digital access and member benefits at a significantly reduced fee, this initiative aims to strengthen engagement with the next generation of aviators while maintaining the integrity of governance through non-voting status.

At the AGM we will farewell three long-serving Executive members – Ross Millichamp, Peter Armstrong and Geoff van Asch, who are all stepping down. I would like to thank each of them for their dedication and service over the years; their input has allowed us to be where we are today. Details about the newly elected faces on the Executive will feature in the next issue of *Approach*.

Behind the scenes, member services continue to be a cornerstone of our operations. Since joining us in June 2025, Nikki McKay has provided invaluable support, ensuring subscriptions, regulatory programmes, advertising, AVSEC cards and member enquiries are all managed efficiently.

International engagement will continue later this year, with AOPA NZ represented at the 2026 IAOPA World Assembly in Germany as part of the Pacific Region contingent.

AOPA NZ's social programme continues to be a highlight for many members. Fly-ins at Omarama, Haast, Darfield, Pateroa and Murchison, along with our popular One-Day Fly-ins, brought pilots together across the country. Despite at times challenging weather, the spirit of connection and shared experience remained strong. The Meet and Greet weekend at Bridge Pa Aerodrome in Hastings was supported by many North Island members, including some who I'd not previously met face-to-face. It is always of benefit to discuss the General Aviation scene, and AOPA NZ in particular, with the wider membership, and events such as this prove their worth every time. Thanks to the HB&EC Aero Club for hosting this event and our subsequent Executive meeting.

I am looking forward to Warbirds over Wanaka in April 2026, where AOPA NZ will once again be part of the NZAF-hosted GA hub – an excellent opportunity to showcase general aviation to the public and to connect with fellow aviation groups.

As I pass on the role of President, I do so with confidence in the strength of AOPA NZ and with optimism for our organisation's future. I look forward to remaining an active member, and thank you all for your ongoing support, dedication and passion for aviation.

Sue Kronfeld, President

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AOPA NZ News

New VNC Book offers more

Don't forget to update to the latest VNC Book, available to members at the discounted rate of $88 through our website.

Just log in then go to the drop down menu: Member Resources ➞ Member Benefits ➞ Order your Chart Book.

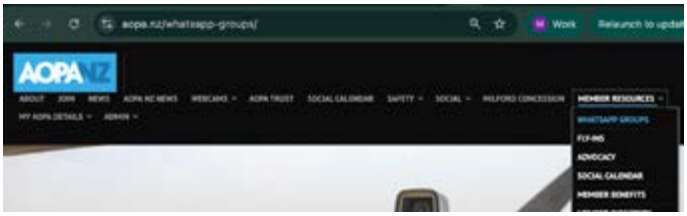
In addition to a complete set of 1:500,000 charts, plus 1:250,000 charts of airports, the November 2025—November 2026 VNC Book for the first time includes 1:125,000 charts covering areas with more complicated airspace.

Don't miss out; order your copy now!

Changes at Kimberly Road strip

Many of you will have in the past been into the Kimberley Road strip on Pete Morrison's farm at Darfield, formerly owned by Charlie Draper and used as 'home base' for the annual AOPA NZ Darfield Fly-In. The farm is currently undergoing changes to fencing and layout, and the strip as you knew it no longer exists, so please don't attempt to land there.

The AOPA NZ Darfield fly-in is still very much a highlight of the AOPA NZ calendar; details will be available later this year.



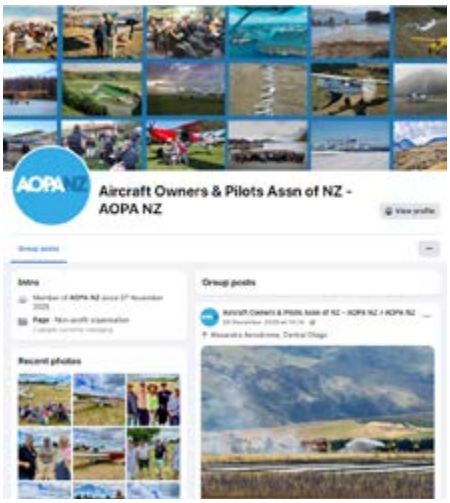
Regional WhatsApp groups

Late in January we launched a new way for members to connect via WhatsApp. There are six regional groups (shown below) and you can belong to as many as you like.

Once you've joined, you can use the app to touch base with others before a fly-in, to share useful information, to arrange to fly somewhere together, and more. It offers just one more way of connecting with other members of AOPA NZ.

For more information about WhatsApp and the new groups, or to sign up, visit the members only section of our AOPA NZ website.

The screenshot above shows how to locate the page. After you've logged in, go to the Member Resources drop-down menu and you'll find 'WhatsApp Groups' at the top of the list.



AOPA NZ Facebook page and group

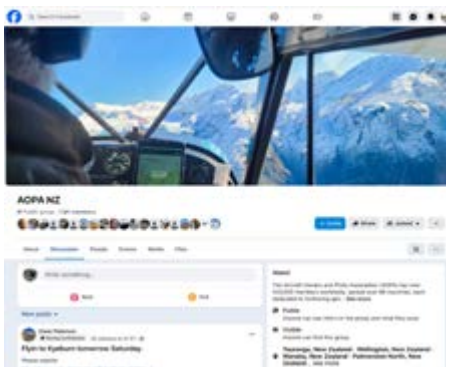
AOPA NZ has a long-running Facebook Group (shown in the screenshot below right), now boasting over 1800 members.

This Group allows members and non-members to share GA news and events, posting photos, questions and information. If you've already joined, you'll know that some of our members are very active contributors!

Recently AOPA NZ also set up a Facebook non-profit organisation 'Page' (shown in the screenshot at the left), which performs more as a 'front page' for our organisation, showcasing AOPA NZ to the public as well as to members.

If you use Facebook, do take a look and follow the page. Working in tandem, the Page and the Group will allow us to reach as many pilots and aviation enthusiasts as possible.

If you're not a Facebook user, no problem; all our other communications will continue as normal, so you'll always be in the loop!



Welcome to new members:

Hadleigh Bognuda, Grey Lynn; Ella Gare, Pleasant Point; Johnny Sharp, Darfield; Frank Wurmitzer, Timaru; Pete James, Arrowtown; Terence Maude, Auckland; Phillip Beale, Masterton; Jens Andreasen, Auckland; Bradley Yorke, Wyndham; Wim Laurence Bresser, Cust; Christopher Wood, Wānaka; Lindsay Williamson, Lincoln; Steve Anderson, Brightwater; Dan Ryalls, Twizel; Jamie Barrow, Westmere; Arthur Smethurst, Ohope; Robert Scherp, Blenheim; Jake Hynd, Picton; PC Taylor, Te Anau; Justin Booth, Dunedin; Hamish Smith, Omarama

Vice-President's view

What a great time we had in sunny Hastings back in December. The Hawke's Bay and East Coast Aero Club allowed us to use their magnificent Club House and put on a fantastic spread for the AOPA NZ 'Meet and Greet'. Thank you to all concerned. It was also great to meet so many new faces from the North Island. Some were long term members that we have not met up with in a while. The Committee will certainly be looking to arrange more North Island events.

GO/NO GO – that is the question

Our plane ZK-RJE is hangared at the airport in Nelson – the sunshine capital of New Zealand (some years!). What a great place to keep a plane and fly out of. Yeah, right. Unfortunately, it is not as easy as it sounds and, annoyingly, we have missed out on a number of AOPA NZ fly-ins. To go south we need 8500ft. To go west we need 5000ft, east 4500ft, and to fly north we could be down at only 500ft but over an awful lot of water! Alternatively for getting south, we could creep around the coast at low level, either east or west, but it adds on a good hour either way and you can bet we'll meet low cloud/rain and wind if the weather is no good up high. Those wires at French Pass are always a worry as well. As I write this Nelson has drizzle and showers with a cloud base of 1500ft, so we wouldn't be going anywhere!

As for the wind, in Nelson and Motueka it predominantly blows a north-easterly or south -westerly. As a low moves across the North or South Island we get caught on the edge of the wind funnelled through Cook Strait. Hence the 02/20 runways. These winds do get strong every now and then, but usually they are not too bad. The problem wind is the easterly, which is normally strong and very gusty and can sit with us for a few days. It passes over the terrain around the Marlborough Sounds and eventually over the Maitai Saddle before reaching Nelson. And when it does, it is best not to be in the air. The gustiness, up-draughts and dreaded down-draughts making flying very uncomfortable, if not dangerous. You would think that flying to the west or south across the Waimea Plain from Motueka or Nelson would be okay – but you'd better strap yourself in well.

So, that decision of GO or NO GO presents itself quite regularly. Often on trips south there is visible low cloud over Lake Rotoiti to the west and the Maitai Saddle to the east. Then the decision is easy. However, before now on trips south we have looked at the St Arnaud webcam and found it to be clear, and have then managed to fly south over the Rainbow and Island Pass as far as Hanmer, only to find a sheet of cloud covering Jack's and Jollies' passes and as far as the eye can see to the south. Little alternative but to head back home to Nelson or up the Acheron and Molesworth to Blenheim to then find cloud on the east coast at near sea level. What happened to the Webcam facing north from Hanmer? It was so useful. The south facing one gives a pilot very little useful information.

It is easy to become over-cautious, so on the odd occasion we have decided to give it a go, and we have invariably found a way through. That tempts one to say 'we got through last time so we should be okay this time'. However, many a lost aircraft tells me that this attitude is a recipe for disaster.

So, to make our GO/NO GO decision we make good use of the huge amount of information out there. Met Flight, wind speed apps, webcams, ATIS, Pre-flight and an overabundance of weather forecasts from NZ, AU, the US and even Norway. They all like to tell me a different story, but I find it easiest to go with the one I like best! I make good use of the Satellite images. The 'now' information lets me assess the likelihood of the weather improving or worsening. Whilst the forecasts are generally pretty good, what the clouds are doing right now and their direction of flow across the country tells me a lot more about what is likely to happen. Sometimes I can see that sitting tight, having a cup of coffee and planning to leave in an hour is the best option.

Richard Eberlein, Vice-President

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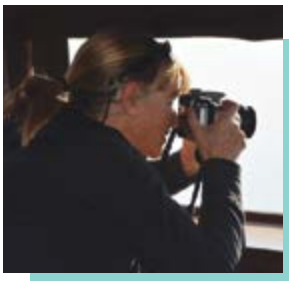

From the Editor

By the time this magazine is printed, AOPA NZ's 2026 AGM will be done and dusted, and the new Executive will be in place. More on incoming members in the next issue. Meanwhile, I'd like to thank our retiring Executive members, Sue Kronfeld, Peter Armstrong, Geoff van Asch and Ross Millichamp, who have committed their time and energy over many years. Particular thanks to Ross, who stepped up when the publishing portfolio was first created. He has been a huge contributor to *Approach* magazine, writing, commissioning and doggedly pursuing articles, and serving as a critical point of contact with the Executive and a vital contributor to the planning process for every issue over the past four years. I am delighted to report that he will continue to be involved – in a slightly less demanding capacity – in the future.

I look forward to seeing where AOPA NZ's new President and Executive will take us.

Meanwhile, with this issue I'm introducing some new user-friendly capabilities in the digital version of the magazine. Rest-assured, your print magazine will continue as normal, but for those who also like to be able to access *Approach* online, you'll find a variety of interactive features to enjoy. Let me know how you find them.

Please do get in touch with any suggestions for stories you'd like to write, or topics you'd like to read about, in your quarterly publication. In print and on-line, the magazine will continue to share aviation information, tips and experiences, promote AOPA NZ and GA, and strengthen our AOPA NZ flying community. Happy flying,

Anna Mackenzie, Editor, editor@aopa.nz

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New Year breakfast fly-in

By Ross Millichamp

Pancake breakfast fly-ins are a big deal in the USA. In Canterbury, the boerewors breakfast fly-in is quickly developing a similar place in the hearts of local aviators.

Johan Vlok grew up in South Africa, where braai (barbecues) and boerewors (a local beef sausage) are entrenched in the local culture.

Johan and Fiona came to New Zealand in 1995 and were, for their first few years here, extremely busy running their medical practice in Darfield.

Johan had been an active pilot in South Africa, but let his flying lapse in New Zealand until, about ten years ago, he ran into Fred Bull and Charlie Draper, who encouraged him back into the air.

In 2021 he took delivery of a brand new Carbon Cub and is now a regular participant in AOPA NZ events. Recently retired from his practice and no longer involved in the continuing medical education process, Johan really enjoys keeping sharp by discussing aviation techniques with fellow pilots.

In 2025 Johan and Fiona began hosting fly-in breakfasts at their property near Darfield. This year's event, in early January, was threatened by predictions of strong northwest winds, which can create difficult flying conditions in the lee of the Southern Alps. However, a dozen or so pilots braved the conditions, hoping that the worst of the wind would hold off until later in the day. The Darfield area must have one of the highest densities per capita of AOPA NZ members, so many more people drove in for the event. It was a real family affair with Johan on the BBQ, son-in-law James cooking eggs, and the rest helping with registrations.

Keep an eye out for notification of the 2027 event.

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Hooked for life

By Emily Blakey

Flight-planning, weather watching or simply talking aeroplanes, flying has a way of connecting people in a very special way.

I joined AOPA NZ some time ago and had been keen to attend a fly-in for quite a while. The opportunity arose with a Christmas lunch fly-in at the Crutchley family's Puketoi Station, 10nm southwest of Ranfurly, on 6 December.

Everything was new to me, from the prospect of arriving at the same time as 30-plus aircraft, to flying into a mown airstrip in a paddock. To ensure I got things right, preparation was key. I registered online and invited my friend and experienced aviator, Tom O'Donnell along as co-pilot in a Cessna 172, ZK-CAP.

After receiving the joining information, I gave Murray Paterson a call to introduce myself as the 'new kid', and to make sure I wasn't about to unknowingly commit any fly-in faux pas. Murray was incredibly reassuring and talked me through the procedures, instantly settling my nerves. I also reached out to Shaun Gilbertson for advice, having seen he had also registered to attend, and he was also encouraging; after landing he even rang to report 'no wind and perfect conditions'; always music to a pilot's ears.

Tom and I met at Wānaka Airport mid-morning, where Tom offered to pack us lunch — an offer I now know never to refuse. He produced an impressive spread of fresh strawberries, sandwiches and homemade mince pies (or 'minceys' as they are now known). It was top notch!

We departed Wānaka around 11am, tracking just south of Tarras and over Thomson's Saddle before heading through the Ida Valley towards Ranfurly. The flight couldn't have been better: blue skies, light westerlies and excellent visibility — the kind of day that reminds you why you fell in love with flying.

The joining procedure had us tracking to Gimmerburn, then Patearoa, descending to 2500ft and slowing to 90kt, with Puketoi Station sitting just below the surrounding hills. As we reached Gimmerburn and made our radio call, Murray came and cleared us to join straight overhead instead — no other traffic inbound at the time.

We tracked south, scanning for the airstrip. I'd been told to look for a 'mown strip of grass', which sounds simple, until you're staring at several very convincing paddocks of Central Otago countryside. Then we spotted it, the giveaway being an impressive lineup of parked aircraft. Seeing that many planes all together in a remote location was awesome.

We crossed the threshold, joined downwind, flew a tidy approach and touched down safely. High-fives were exchanged in the plane before Murray directed us to parking and kindly ferried us up to the house for lunch.

There were 32 aircraft in total — a great turnout — and up at the house we were treated to stunning views over the Maniototo, great food and even better company, leading us to do what pilots do best: talking flying. Comparing aircraft, regos, routes, Christmas plans and upcoming adventures with a group of like-minded enthusiasts was a highlight.

Eventually the call was made to head off before the wind picked up and gave us too much tailwind on departure. Murray gave us a ride back down the hill and soon the air was filled with the smell of avgas and the roar of engines firing up to head home in all directions.

Our flight back over Thomson's Saddle was smooth and scenic, and we landed back in Wānaka on runway 29 with a decent headwind. More high-fives followed, along with a cold drink and, of course, another of Tom's delicious mincey pies.

Attending my first AOPA NZ fly-in was an awesome experience I won't forget. The welcoming nature of everyone involved made it easy to feel part of the community, even as a first-timer. I can't wait for the next opportunity, and strongly encourage anyone who's been thinking about it to come along. Fly-ins are a fantastic way to meet people, learn, share stories, and enjoy a bit of adventure with aeroplanes. I'm officially hooked.

On behalf of all the members who attended, thanks to the Crutchley family for allowing us to fly in and have a Christmas gathering at stunning Puketoi Station.

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AOPA NZ members enjoying Christmas lunch and spectacular views at Geoff and Noela Crutchley's home on Puketoi Station, Patearoa.

Catching up with old friends

By Lynn Holland

Flying in my syndicated C172 VCT is always a delight, so when flying buddy Judith suggested a trip down to Hastings for the AOPA NZ 'meet and greet' in December, I didn't need to be asked twice.

I am a new AOPA NZ member and had yet to attend a gathering, although I do know a few members. The weather was looking CAVOK (ceiling and visibility OK), which makes flying much more relaxing.

Judith and I have flown together often over the years so we are familiar with each other's flying styles and preferences. We have different backgrounds: I started flying in my twenties, flew in Malaysia many years ago, and was fortunate to get some Metro time, while Judith took up flying in her retirement. We've both worked as instructors and have never lost the joy of sitting in the front seat.

As the previous owner of fifteen years, Judith knows VCT very well. When she put it up for sale, I jumped at the opportunity to form a syndicate to buy it. Owning an aircraft has been a learning curve, particularly in terms of getting on top of maintenance checks. Fortunately, I have stellar partners who share my flying goals, and the syndicate has proven one of my better life choices.

There's always a sense of adventure, heading to the hangar wondering what challenges the day will bring, never quite certain where we will end up or who we will meet along the way, yet always returning home with the satisfaction of a job well done.

On the day of our trip south, we decided on an early start to beat the heat. With unusually clear skies we departed North Shore Aerodrome and took a straight line, flying over Ardmore airspace with light traffic, abeam Mercer and into the very green Waikato. Even with some haze, the hills were clear and we could soon see Lake Taupo. Judith has done this two hour trip many times so could helpfully point out landmarks. Due to work and family commitments I haven't flown as much in recent years (and it's all about currency), but each time I fly to the Bay there's a layer of cloud on the ranges. I've come to expect it, something to do with the light southerly winds turning easterly.

December 13 proved no exception. Conditions were quite stable and there was no rain, which was a pleasant change from Auckland. We had the choice of talking to Napier Tower and going over the top, as we knew Hastings was clear, but we could also see a clear gap between hills and, after talking to an aircraft travelling in the opposite direction, we decided to stay low and, yes, follow SH5.

Once in the Bay we took a scenic route to view some of the damage caused by Cyclone Gabrielle and more recent weather events, the scars of the landslips quite a contrast to the green Waikato farmland.

There was a bit of traffic arriving at Bridge Pa Aerodrome, so we joined the queue for an overhead rejoin and were soon on the ground and introducing ourselves to the welcoming committee.

It was good to put faces to some of the names from AOPA NZ emails and magazines, but the best part is always catching up with flying buddies from other parts of New Zealand, including a few from the NZ Association of Airwomen in Aviation (NZAWA). With a number of members present we had an 'airwomen' photo taken (above, from left: Jan Chisum, Sue Kronfeld, myself, Holly Lyttle and Judith Grant). We were soon discussing the coming Airwomen's Rally, held annually over King's Birthday weekend, and this year being held at the HB&EC Aero Club at Hastings Aerodrome, who last hosted the event back in the late 1970s. I'm sure it will be a stunner.

NZAWA aims to foster friendship amongst women involved in all aspects of aviation, professionally or recreationally.

The annual NZAWA rallies are a flying highlight for me, a chance to connect with old friends, compete in flying competitions that lift your skills, and generally have fun. They are made possible by countless volunteer hours put in by highly skilled and experienced pilots and instructors from around the country.

We had a superb rally at Waipukurau in 2015, thanks to Jan Chisum and CHB Aero Club. Topping each year's event is an ongoing challenge! Last year the rally was held at my own base of North Shore Aero Club, and for the first time I helped with flight ops, matching judges with competitors and aircraft, and scheduling flights. Fortunately, Sue Kronfeld stepped up to assist me, for which I was very grateful. North Shore Aero Club committee, staff and members were generous with their support, experience and expertise, ensuring a safe and successful weekend event. I'm sure the team at HB&EC Aero Club will this year be equal to the challenge!

It was hard to leave the Bay and the warm hospitality of the HB&EC Aero Club, who provided an excellent lunch and much friendly chat, but all too soon it was time to depart. With Hawke's Bay cherries and coffee on board we headed for home, reversing the trip, minus the cloud on the ranges. En route home, Judith entertained me with stories of other AOPA NZ fly-ins, including landing at Lake Haupiri for a day visit to Gloriavale, and South Island alpine crossings. They all sounded lots of fun, and left me eager to participate in future events. Another excellent flying day.

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Strip flying, sandflies and the best of flying

By Harvey Trent

It was a quiet Tuesday afternoon at the Otago Aero Club when Kevin Anderson, a seasoned pilot from South Otago, popped in the door. He wanted to know if I'd be keen to tag along with him on a fly-in all the way up in Murchison. I didn't take much convincing.

A few phone calls were made, my scheduled flights were off-loaded onto Alan, one of our instructors at Taieri, and the plan was set.

On the morning of departure I woke early, checked the weather, grabbed some last-minute shopping and headed out to Kevin's hangar where he and his lovely wife Linda loaded our gear into Kevin's PA-28 Archer II, and we talked through the plan for the day – where we were going, how we'd get there, and what the weather was doing. Conditions couldn't have been better: dead calm, blue skies, and not another aircraft in sight as we fuelled up and departed Taieri at around 10:30.

Tracking north toward Hanmer Springs, the flight was glassy smooth, with barely a bump and only five to ten knots on the nose at 5500ft. We slipped past Oamaru without bothering any of the eight aircraft buzzing around. Once north of Ashburton, the terrain became completely new to me. We routed via Pudding Hill to stay clear of controlled airspace, crossed the hills, and headed direct for Hanmer.

I'd overflown Hanmer once before, but landing there was new. Kevin made it look easy, and before long we were on the ground with no drama at all. A bite to eat, a cup of tea, some fuel, and we were back in the air, departing via the opposite runway and heading west.

The first bumps of the day came crossing Lewis Pass, but they were short-lived. We followed the main road, turned sharply right at Springs Junction, and tracked up the valley toward Murchison. Not long after leaving Hanmer, Kevin recognised a couple of voices on the radio, switched to a chat frequency, and suddenly we were part of a loose gaggle of aircraft all heading to the same destination.

Neither Kevin nor I had been to Murchison before, so it proved a good test for our navigation skills. We ducked around a few hills and found our way into the stunning Tutaki valley, the strip we were destined for coming into view.

Aside from a brief turn in a topdressing aircraft back in 2023, this was my first real taste of strip flying, and I was buzzing. This was where Kevin's experience began to show its worth. He briefed me on the joining procedure and best practice when approaching a busy strip with a queue of aircraft behind us.

The strip was smooth, about 700m long, and the landing was a non-event. We were around the tenth aircraft to arrive, and as soon as we parked alongside the growing row of planes and tents, we were greeted by the landowners and a handful of Kevin's mates – people he'd been flying into events like this with for many years.

After a round of introductions, during which I desperately tried to remember all the names, we set up camp. We'd come slightly over prepared and it looked like we were glamping compared to some of the others, who'd squeezed everything they required, which wasn't much, into much smaller aircraft. We sat around chatting as more planes piled in.

Then the sandflies arrived.

Despite that, the turnout was fantastic. As evening set in, everyone wandered down to the hangar at the southern end of the strip to catch up over dinner. By the end of the first day I'd met a huge range of people from all walks of life, all connected by aviation.

Before sunset I snuck away for a quiet fish in the river, unsuccessful, but returned as the sun dipped behind the hills. The night was perfectly still and dead quiet. We sat chatting at our campsite with a cup of tea until about 11pm, soaking it all in.

Next morning offered a stunning blue sky, heavy dew and the welcome sound of coffee being brewed on the cooker. Breakfast was Weet-Bix and coffee, rapidly followed by long pants and a jersey; not because it was cold but in a vain attempt to fend off the sandflies. A little fog lingered at the northern end of the runway but the sun made quick work of it.

We gathered at the hangar for the morning briefing, and this is where the

learning began. The concept of strip flying was still foreign to me, but I was surrounded by a wealth of experience and passionate pilots to show me the ropes.

We split into two groups: taildraggers and tricycle gear. The tricycle group consisted of six aircraft – two Savannahs, two C206s, a C172 and our Archer. The plan was to visit two strips near Maruia then head back to Murchison for lunch, briefing at each strip for our next landing.

After our first brief for our first stop, we set off to prepare. Soon all the planes were preflighted and running up. We watched the taildragger group depart, then it was our turn. Kevin and I were fourth in sequence, which made navigation easy – just follow the aircraft in front.

After departure, Kevin talked me through the basics of strip flying and shared insights from his years of flying with AOPA NZ. Our route took us out the southern end of the valley, over the hills at around 3000ft, toward our first strip. The majority of the country we overflew was completely untouched, offering views that I'll remember for a lifetime.

The first landing was onto a well-kept gravel strip, 480m long, perched on top of a small knob. Ian Sinclair in the C172 went first and let us know what to expect: a couple of knots of crosswind, some bumps on short final, keep your speed up. Everything went smoothly. We parked, climbed out, briefed the next strip, and exchanged some friendly banter – mostly criticising each other's landings – while enjoying the incredible view across the valley.

The next strip was a paddock about four miles south, landing over the Maruia River. We gave the aircraft ahead plenty of time then lined up ourselves. This strip was longer but more technical, with willows at the start and wet patches either side that we had to thread through. Being fourth again paid off – we could watch the others test the surface and refine our approach. We rolled in, doing our best to avoid the mud and cow dung – the planes will need a wash after that one.

From there we set off for Murchison, following Highway 65 with Mount Mantell off to our right. As we rounded the hill, it was obvious the taildragger group had beaten us there. We joined for runway 13,

landed, and then collectively failed to find the gate off the airfield. The result was a short bush bash to reach the main road and the local café.

The café did a stellar job producing twenty-odd coffees in no time. By 1pm we were back in the air and returning to Tutaki Strip. The sandflies greeted us immediately. A huge thanks to whoever left their bug spray in the hangar as it allowed me and many others to eat our lunch in peace.

The plan for most of us was to stay another night then leave early the next morning, but as the afternoon wore on, the weather forecast began to deteriorate. The more we watched it, the worse it looked. Eventually, the thought of packing up wet tents triggered a mass exodus.

Kevin and I decided it was best to head off as well – we still had a long flight ahead. Our tents came down in a fraction of the time they'd taken to pitch, and soon the Archer was packed to the brim. After thanking our hosts, saying a few goodbyes and taking in the scenery one last time, we were on our way.

The plan was to climb out over the hills and head south to Rangiora for fuel. The Archer chugged its way up to 6500ft under the weight of two people and a glamping setup. The views were nothing short of spectacular. We covered country most people will never see from the air.

Cloud capped us at around 7000ft, with hills rising to 5500–6000ft, so ridge selection mattered. A steady 15kt northeasterly over the mountains gave us the first real turbulence of the trip, but Kevin showed off his experience once again, turning it into a comfortable and unforgettable flight.

Clear of the hills, we descended onto the Canterbury Plains and tracked south at 3000ft. A slight tailwind meant our fuel stop crept further south – from Rangiora, to Ashburton, and finally Timaru. We covered 155 miles to Timaru in just an hour and 25 minutes.

We landed on the grass, refuelled, used the facilities, chatted with the instructors, and were off again. It was quiet as we returned to Taieri, weaving over the hills and under Dunedin's airspace, finally touching down on the familiar grass strip that I call home.

Looking back, it was an incredible trip through completely new terrain in one of the most stunning parts of the country. Everyone at the fly-in was friendly and keen for a chat. I learnt a huge amount and gained a whole new appreciation for strip flying and what it takes to do it well. I wouldn't hesitate for a second to jump at another such opportunity. It's experiences like this that help to shape a good pilot. I only hope I can reflect my newfound knowledge in my instructing going forward.

A massive thanks to Kevin for taking me along and putting up with me for the many hours we spent side by side in the cockpit, and a huge thanks to everyone who puts in the effort to make events like these happen in the first place.

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How we perceive risk

By Neville Bailey

Risk is defined as: *the likelihood and severity of harm resulting from exposure to a hazard.*
In practical terms, risk is what remains after preparation, skill and intent have done all they can.

There's a poster you'll often see hanging on aero club walls. It shows a biplane tangled in a tree, accompanied by the now-familiar quote: "Aviation in itself is not inherently dangerous. But to an even greater degree than the sea, it is terribly unforgiving of any carelessness, incapacity, or neglect."

The quote is usually attributed to Captain Alfred Gilmer Lamplugh, and it has been reused countless times in safety publications and military studies. We've all seen it. We've all nodded along.

Or have we? Taken at face value, the statement is reassuring. It suggests that aviation itself is benign, and that danger only appears when pilots fall short. The implication is that with sufficient skill, discipline and attention, risk can be eliminated. Experience suggests otherwise.

Accidents and serious incidents continue to occur in well-maintained aircraft, flown by current, experienced pilots, operating within established procedures. These events are not always the result of carelessness or neglect. Often they arise from a convergence of small, reasonable decisions made in imperfect conditions.

That reality does not make aviation reckless. It makes it unforgiving. It's the reason we publish safety bulletins, form safety committees, and why airlines maintain entire departments dedicated to managing risk.

The data

The Aviation Safety Network database records more than 23,000 airliner, military, and corporate jet accidents, and over 258,000 accidents involving light aircraft, helicopters, gliders and balloons. The database exists because aviation produces data. If there were nothing to record, it would not exist.

If those figures were in the low hundreds or below, one might argue that aviation is not inherently dangerous. But look again at the numbers. They are confronting, and there is no comfortable way to frame them. The figures span different eras, aircraft types and operating contexts, but taken together they illustrate a simple point: aviation produces enough adverse outcomes to demand constant attention to risk.

Numbers alone do not explain why accidents continue to occur, but they do prompt important questions around how humans interpret and respond to risk.

Risk perception

Risk is a fascinating subject, particularly when we acknowledge the issues humans have with objectivity. A brief look at the literature turns up familiar concepts: confirmation bias, anchoring bias, the planning fallacy, selection bias, among others. We routinely skew our assessment of risk. We anchor to first impressions, favour information that confirms our beliefs, and adjust through optimism or pessimism to suit the situation. Most of this happens without our awareness.

The uncomfortable truth is that humans are not especially good at objectively assessing risk. This is why aviation is surrounded by a large and structured regulatory framework. Viewed individually, many rules seem arbitrary. Viewed collectively, their purpose is clear: they recognise inherent danger and seek to reduce it.

This conclusion is not unique to one or two countries. Every aviation authority has reached it. And even then, attempts to mitigate one risk can inadvertently shift it elsewhere, or overlook the same hazard when it appears in a different form.

Recognising these limitations in human judgement helps explain why aviation relies so heavily on structured training and standardisation.

Learning to fly

When we learn to fly, we join a training organisation and follow a well-defined syllabus. That organisation itself must meet regulatory standards and submit to ongoing oversight. During training, we learn about minimum speeds, minimum heights, and how to recover from situations such as engine failures or stalls. These are scenarios that carry inherent danger because the aircraft will not recover on its own.

We also learn about environmental hazards: weather, terrain, congested airfields. Training culminates in a flight test confirming that the required standard has been met, because there is a well-established correlation between meeting that standard and reducing accident rates. It is a correlation, not a guarantee.

Training does not remove inherent danger, but it allows us to recognise and manage it. We will never be able to set the park brake at 6000ft and hop out, but we now understand why that won't work, how to avoid getting close to such a situation, and how to recover if we do.

At the far end of the spectrum, where margins narrow and recovery options disappear entirely, the consequences of error become far more stark.

Learning to ride

Contrast this with learning to ride a bike. We accept that we'll probably fall off a few times and scrape a knee or two. While a bicycle may be inherently unstable, learning to ride one is generally not considered inherently dangerous. The distance between rider and ground is

small. There are no formal rules, no safety committees and no training organisations involved. If you want to stop, you simply stop. If you want to get off, you step off.

Of course, the environment in which you ride can introduce danger, and once speed is added, the equation changes. Many bicycle accidents are driven less by riding itself and more by where and how it occurs.

Street names

There is a tradition in aviation, particularly within the US Air Force, of naming streets after personnel and pioneers, many of them test pilots. A 2010 Edwards Air Force Base article announced plans to restore several historic street names, some commemorating individuals who lost their lives during test flying. Walking those streets is, by all accounts, sobering.

We owe much to what was learned by those pilots. They were highly trained and experienced, yet phrases like 'departed from controlled flight' appear with unsettling regularity in accident reports. Their work has led to decades of incremental improvement in aircraft design and safety, but those names also serve as a reminder to stay within our own aircraft's limits. True test flying remains a high-risk profession.

While most recreational flying never approaches this edge, the same principles apply at every level of aviation.

Swimming with crocodiles

If you don't want to be eaten by a crocodile, don't swim with them. It's a simple premise. The crocodile that gets you is the one you don't see.

The same logic applies in aviation. When flying recreationally, we often have choices, particularly around weather. Choosing the good days is one of the simplest and most effective risk mitigations available.

Risks are everywhere. We manage them with planning, checks, procedures, rules, currency and weather forecasts. All of this exists for good reason. But there is always the possibility of encountering a risk that we did not see, or that no one saw. History shows that this does happen.

The greater danger often lies, not in the risks we consciously accept, but in those we fail to recognise at all.

We don't know what we don't know

The Dunning–Kruger effect describes the tendency of people with limited experience to overestimate their ability. As experience grows, confidence often becomes more tempered by caution.

Closely related is the idea that we don't know what we don't know; that there are gaps in our understanding that we are unaware even exist. Together, these concepts explain why some risks are overlooked and others are effectively invisible. These are the crocodiles we don't see.

Where does that leave us?

Aviation involves inherent danger that is difficult, if not impossible, to eliminate. We deal with gravity, height and speed before considering weather, terrain and traffic. Did you ever really believe that poster?

Through structured risk management, we reduce danger to an acceptable level. Airlines have done this particularly well. In recreational aviation, we often operate outside the umbrella of an organisation that would otherwise provide oversight. Risk management therefore rests largely with the individual, sometimes at precisely the point where experience and human bias make recognition of risk most difficult.

Understanding that aviation is inherently dangerous is not pessimism. It is realism. The challenge is to actively manage those risks, not merely claim that we will. After all, in this business, no one wants to have a street named after them.

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The Mesopotamia aviation story

By Ross Millichamp

Mesopotamia, a high country station located in the upper reaches of the Rangitata River, has a long association with general aviation.

Laurie Prouting (right) with son Malcolm.

The Prouting family, caretakers of the property for more than eighty years, initially utilised aircraft as a practical way of getting into town but, over time, the aviation side of their operations grew to include aerial top-dressing, commercial hunting, hunter transport and general charter work.

Throughout they have remained strong supporters of recreational aviation and great hosts to visiting pilots.

The Proutings came to Mesopotamia in 1943. Malcolm Velvin Prouting (MVP) had been working on Clent Hills Station under Bob Buick, when Bob was appointed by receivers to administer Mesopotamia, which was having financial difficulties. Bob initially brought MVP in as manager, which led to his purchase of the property in 1945. At the time the station extended from the Rangitata River to the top of the Two Thumb range, and from the western side of Forest Creek to the main divide.

MVP was never a pilot, though later he admitted regretting that decision. His two sons embraced aviation at an early age, with Laurie and Frank starting flight training in an Auster under Paul Legg at Timaru in 1963. Laurie notes that learning together was a real bonus as they were able to encourage each other through the times when things were not going to plan. Between lessons they kept a diary of what they had learned, what had gone right and what had gone wrong, which proved a valuable training resource.

Once Laurie and Frank were qualified, Auster ZK AOB was purchased, and used primarily for getting to and from Ashburton for farm supplies. For the first few months it was stored in open sheep yards where it was protected from the wind. Although the undercarriage fitted through the yard gate, the wide tailplane had to be lifted over the gate each time the plane was moved in and out. This chore ended up paying dividends one chilly winter's day when Frank and MVP were unable to lift the tailplane over the gate. A closer look showed that the water had leaked into the fuselage and had frozen into a solid block of ice in the tail section.

"We estimated that there was half a ton of ice back there, which could have led to tragedy had Frank attempted to take off," Laurie says. This piece of luck convinced the Proutings to store the plane under cover, initially in a converted hay barn then in a new hangar at the homestead, which is still in service to this day.

Around this time the Proutings purchased a second Auster, ZK AUL, which was set up as an aerial top dresser. The seven hundredweight payload (around 355kg) of super phosphate was modest by today's standards but transformed the productivity of the station.

Over the next few years, Laurie clocked up over 3000 hours dropping fertiliser over Mesopotamia, most of the time with a PPL. During this time Laurie developed one of his aviation mantras, 'always fly straight lines'. The Auster had a limited payload and fuel endurance, and he was committed to drawing up a flight plan, estimating fuel needs and sticking to the plan. "It is more efficient, kinder on the machinery and ensures you do not run out of fuel on a side trip," he says.

In the early 1970s the Proutings moved into commercial aviation. A partnership of Laurie, MVP, Graeme Murray and Richard Rayward was formed under the name 'Air Safaris', and brought hunters and trampers to Mesopotamia in a Cessna 180. Legendary hunting guide Rex Forrester was one of the early outfitters specialising in bringing international hunters to New Zealand, including Mesopotamia.

"In those days we could fly hunters from the homestead to the Growler strip for $6 per person," Laurie says. Unfortunately pioneers of new industries often bear a burden of bureaucracy that later operators are able to avoid. Mesopotamia was a pastoral lease station and precluded from undertaking activities that were not strictly related to agriculture. The authorities raised issues with tourist operations

on Mesopotamia which made continuing more trouble than it was worth. Richard and Graeme moved south to Tekapo where Air Safaris flourished and became one of New Zealand's most enduring scenic flight operations.

In the mid 1980s Laurie undertook helicopter training with Simon Spencer Bower (Canterbury Helicopters) at Claxby. The family purchased a Schweitzer 300, which was used for general farm work and hunter support.

Laurie quickly learned that textbook techniques needed to be adapted for servicing hunters in the steep country of the Southern Alps. The standard method taught to approach a pick-up site is to come in from above before settling into a hover and landing. In the mountains this necessitates descending at a steep angle, and brings about the risk of flying through disturbed air ('power settling'). It is also hard on the machine, as it needs to be operated at very high power settings right until touch down. Laurie learned to approach the landing site from below at higher speed and to flare up onto the landing site, which kept him clear of disturbed air and did not require much additional power than was needed in the cruise.

In the early 2000s Laurie travelled to Texas and purchased a larger turbine powered helicopter. The MD520 Notar offered more speed, payload and safety and, critically, was much quieter for sneaking up on animals in their hunting operations. "Much of the noise of a standard MD500 comes from the tail rotor. The NOTAR solves that issue," Laurie says.

He has firm views about how to operate helicopters safely, whether in the mountains or out on the plains. "Almost everything relates to maintaining airspeed, in spite of what you are seeing outside. It's easy to get confused in tight terrain or close to the ground in windy conditions and allow your airspeed to decay."

Another is to maintain altitude whenever possible. He once had an engine failure in a MD500 while flying near Fairlie at 7000' AGL, much higher than many helicopters would be operating at. The resulting autorotation took seven minutes and gave him every opportunity to choose a safe touchdown point. "I even had time on the way down to ring a friend who lives in the area to ask him to come out and check we had made it okay," he recalls.

Always committed to GA, Laurie has continued to develop the airstrips on Mesopotamia Station.

Although helicopters dominated his later years in commercial aviation, Laurie remains committed to fixed wing aircraft and has continued to develop the airstrips on the property.

A recent project has been to extend the Black Mountain strip which lies in the bed of the Rangitata, just downstream of the confluence of the Havelock and the Clyde Rivers. Until recently the strip was only 280m long and reasonably rough, having been carved out of the riverbed with hand grubbers. It also had an uphill gradient which made it difficult in a light north-west wind. Never one to avoid a challenge, Laurie went to work with a grader, extending it out to 900m, and it is now usable to all manner of aircraft. Abundant topsoil was the reason Laurie was able to make such a good job of it. After flattening the tussock and matagouri, he dug a trench and scraped the topsoil into it with the grader blade. Next he smoothed the strip surface out as best he could before adding the topsoil back at the end. "This took less than a week, but spot spraying to prevent re-invasion by tussock and matagouri is a constant job," he says.

By comparison, the creation of the Royal strip in the headwaters of Bush Stream was a huge job. It took a week just to get a bulldozer to the strip before work began. The Royal remains short and rough, due to a lack of topsoil, and is really for experts only.

The other well-known strip in the area is the Growler, which was formerly on Mesopotamia but became public conservation land as part of Tenure Review. This process saw higher productivity

Putting in a solid week of work, Laurie more than trebled the length of Black Mountain strip.

land on the property being made freehold and lower productivity land going to the Crown. Laurie is adamant that the parts of the former station that are now managed as public conservation land will have to return to farming in time. "People need food and the land needs to be grazed to be kept free of weeds," Laurie says.

The Proutings have always been generous to visitors. MVP started a relationship with the New Zealand Deerstalkers Association in the 1950s. Hunters were granted access to the station and helped keep deer numbers under control. When the NZDA needed help moving a hut from the road end to Mistake Flat, a distance of some 30km, MVP loaned them a tractor. A few years later MVP needed a hand building a bridge over Forest Creek, and local deerstalkers turned up to help. It took nearly a year of part-time work to build the bridge, which is still in use today. "It was a genuine relationship of mutual respect and mutual benefit, quite different to the way things are today," Laurie says.

The Proutings continue to make their various strips available to recreational pilots, but of course you need to ask permission in advance. Laurie's son Malcolm spends a lot of time doing low-level operations in the MD520N in the area and rightly wants to know when visitors will be coming.

Laurie has now retired from commercial aviation after accumulating a large number of hours in both fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters. A career highlight was spending two summers supporting an independent operation in Antarctica.

Nigel Jolly owned the 43m vessel 'Braveheart' and secured a number of contracts in Antarctica that needed aerial support. In the first season Laurie flew a Schweitzer 300 off Braveheart, supporting a National Geographic team who were making a documentary about B15B, the largest iceberg ever recorded. The next year Laurie was back with an MD500 doing background work for the movie 'Happy Feet'. One lasting memory was the collaboration between the kiwis working there.

"On one occasion we needed help with repairs and the crew of the NIWA vessel Tangaroa could not have been more helpful," he says. By comparison the Americans questioned their right to be there, especially in such a small ship.

Some time ago Laurie stepped away from the day-to-day operations at Mesopotamia, leaving it in Malcolm's hands, although he is a regular visitor. He and Anne divide their time between a small block at Thornycroft and a townhouse in inner city Christchurch.

During the interview I nervously asked Laurie whether he was still flying privately. "No," he said, "I haven't flown for three days."

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In the next issue of *Approach* we'll share sage advice Laurie has gleaned from a lifetime of experience in mountain flying.

For more information on the Proutings and Mesopotamia, see *A Fabled Land* by Bruce Ansley and Peter Bush.

The flying

By Thomas van Asch

A January night under the wing of the cub, catching up with flying friends at the AOPA NZ Back to Basics, turns... cross-country.

Deciding on an early afternoon departure to beat the weather, I climbed out of the valley with the belly pod filled with my sleeping bag and pillow, swiftly departing the Tutaki to begin my trek home across the northern end of Lake Rotoroa, destination (supposedly) Omaka.

During the previous day of flying around Tutaki, Lake Station and Murchison, we'd all had to deal with the largest plague of bumblebees I'd ever encountered. These rather large, winged nuisances decided that the inside of the super cub windscreen was a great place to hang out. At the best of times there were no fewer than fifteen, and during take-off, cruising and landing, they flew at me from all angles. Delightful.

As a result, I had the brilliant idea of flying home with the side door wide open, something I'd done many a time previously. Now you may ask, why were there so many bees inside? A missing piece of Perspex (that's another story) meant there was a lovely large hole allowing the bees to make the plane their temporary living quarters.

Halfway between Lake Rotoroa and Lake Station, I'd grabbed my phone from the dash so I could log onto the preflight app to look at the local QNH, when what did I see? A great big bumblebee ambling along my hand from the underside of my phone. Now, I don't know what anyone else's reaction would be, but I imagine it would run along similar lines to my response. In one swift movement I jerked my hand away from my body, the bumblebee going straight out the door, and what followed? My phone.

A visceral sensation of dread and denial

... phone

washed over me. No, I thought, I haven't just thrown my (rather expensive) phone out of the plane; only a real dumbass would do that. Surely it's just gone into the back luggage compartment.

How wrong I was. The music in my headset promptly stopped, quickly followed by my watch announcing 'Bluetooth Disconnected' across the screen. A pithy string of expletives followed; no need to repeat them, you get the idea.

I circled overhead, eyeing up where I thought it dropped, but I couldn't be a hundred percent certain. I was now left with a decision. Land at Lake Station, a mere two minutes away – but do what? I have no phone, I can't call or text anyone. I could fly back to Omaka and call Dad, who was still at Tutaki, having driven up. But what good would that do? Or I could return to Tutaki.

I figured going back to Tutaki was the best decision. Once back on the ground I pulled up to the tent and exited the Cub, huffing and puffing like the wolf from The Three Little Pigs as I told Dad I'd just thrown my phone out of the plane in the middle of nowhere. Once he'd finished telling me to pull my head in, I grabbed his phone to hotspot my iPad to see if I could track the phone. Low and behold, not only could I see where the phone was last located, it was still alive, pinging out a location up the Howard Valley Road. Relief washed over me, however I was not yet out of the woods.

A plan was hatched. I would fly to Lake Station, tie down the plane and wait for Dad to pick me up so we could go searching for the phone. Knowing we would run out of service I took screen shots of where it was according to Apple's 'Find My' app, then we launched our mission to find the end of the rainbow, also known as my $2300 phone.

We drove up the gravel road to where it met a logging track on a distinctive corner that I thought I recognised from my aerial view. I hopped out and walked up the track towards the general vicinity where the phone was supposedly located. At the top of the track, unsure of where to go next, I spotted two tractors baling in the distance. Not wanting to be caught trespassing, I walked back to Dad in the ute to discuss our next move. We figured we'd carry on to the homestead to see if we could find someone.

When knocking on the door brought no answer, we decided that heading for the tractors I'd spied earlier was the best course of action. With me questioning the legality of opening gates and driving across a stranger's farm, we ploughed on until we reached the paddock to where a tractor was stacking bales.

Now, two men walking up to me on a tractor claiming they were looking for a phone that had fallen out of a plane would not exactly be on my bingo card of events for 2026. And I highly doubt it was for these poor young blokes either. With the confused expressions and questions out of the way, a radio call with the boss confirmed that we could go looking for the phone. So, I was sent on my way to 'retrieve' my phone.

Knowing it was abeam a hay shed along the fence line, I trotted off down the bank, across a creek and up the other side into a sprayed-out paddock, where the last known ping of my phone had been. Still with no reception to actively use the 'find my' function, I walked up the paddock, scanning the ground and the occasional tussock. Three minutes in, what do I see face down in the dirt? My phone. Experiencing a pronounced burst of joy, I ran to grab it, fully expecting something to be broken. But no, my phone was just as good as the day I got it out of the box, screen and back fully intact with no damage whatsoever.

Gleefully returning to Dad, we thanked the young bloke on the tractor, stopping on our way off-farm to also thank the farmer and promising to send him a dozen ginger beer the next day for the inconvenience. Dad dropped me back to the plane and I again set off for home, this time with the door closed.

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One big flying family

By Anna Mackenzie

Andrzej (left) and John Headifen out and about in John's Rans S-6ES Coyote II.

Professor Andrzej Cwirzen works in a field well beyond the parameters of aviation – research into intelligent building materials, in particular, nanomodified concrete – but attributes his success in his chosen field to his life outside academia, and specifically to flying and aircraft building.

Originally from Poland, where he completed a Masters Degree in structural engineering followed by a PhD in concrete technology, Andrzej moved first to Finland, for an associate professorship, then to Sweden, where he holds a professorship at the University of Lulea. The research group he heads there focuses mainly on nanomodified concrete that offers self-sensing, self-healing properties, or being able to produce energy. His work is globally significant – so much so that, for four consecutive years, Stanford University has ranked him in the top two percent of the most influential scientists in the discipline.

Early in November 2025, Andrzej arrived in Christchurch to take up a post as a visiting professor, whilst still working remotely for his home university in northern Sweden. His work at two universities as well as managing his eighteen-person research group back in Sweden resulted in a work schedule starting at 8am NZ time and often finishing at 1am the next day NZ time, which is just 1pm Swedish time. Despite this full schedule, Andrzej managed to find time to turn what could have been a typical three-month scientific exchange visit into something quite unexpected as he pursued a long-held passion and began to discover New Zealand's thriving GA scene.

"My adventure with flying started with building and flying aircraft models," he recalls. "Then, at the age of 18, came flying hang-gliders, followed by motorised hang-gliders."

But for Andrzej, flying wasn't enough. While at secondary school in Poland he designed and built his first flying machine. After flying it for two years, he sold it to finance his next project, a plan-built wooden Jodel D18 that flew some years later. At the same time, he was flying gliders, followed by ultralights, and finally he moved into GA.

"Since I like building almost as much as I like flying, I looked for new projects and ended up building a Bearhawk 4 from plans. The fuselage and tails are now ready for finishing work, while the wings are maybe twenty-five percent ready. Scratch building from plans is slower than building from a kit; it requires determination and consistency over many years. The builder must solve many technological problems, source all raw materials and, in Sweden, also ensure everything is well documented for the authorities."

Andrzej believes that the sense of accomplishment on reaching the finish line when building from scratch is well worth it. "Starting with bulk raw materials and ending up with a flying machine... When building my Jodel, the process started with cutting five pine trees in Poland."

For Andrzej, the advantage of building from scratch lies in being forced to constantly solve problems that are outside his

comfort zone of structural engineering and materials science.

"One must learn new manufacturing techniques, acquire knowledge related to aircraft building, mechanical engineering, composites, aircraft engines, electrical systems, avionics, etc. I believe that the aircraft building hobby contributed to my development as a scientist who thinks 'outside the box'. It helps to create new ideas for research and for solving problems differently."

But, once again, building a single aeroplane from scratch was not enough for Andrzej. Three years ago he acquired a Lancair 235/320 that had experienced a hard landing and been deemed by the insurer as worthy only of the scrap yard. To take on the rebuild, Andrzej went to Oshkosh to do a composite course, and to the Lycoming factory in Williamsport for training on engine maintenance and repairs.

"Again, these new experiences were important for my scientific activities. I modified the Lancair and fitted a ballistic parachute system – most probably the first in the world on that type! The aircraft is now ready for flight testing, which will happen after my return to Sweden."

But it was the Bearhawk that led Andrzej to explore New Zealand's aircraft building and flying community. A few months before arriving in Christchurch, he decided to try to contact someone he had been following on YouTube. "The work this man did on building then flying his Bearhawk was impressive, and he was also an airline captain with thousands of hours beneath his belt. Initially, I thought there was no way he would respond to my email, but he did. And this is how my adventure of experiencing flying in New Zealand really started."

Shortly after arriving in Christchurch, Andrzej met with Neville Bailey. A few days later, Neville took him for a short, 'typical NZ' flight in his Bearhawk. "I will never forget that flight," Andrzej recalls. "I am used to flying over rough terrain and mountains and I have float plane ratings, but the type of flying he showed me was on another level. Instead of flying over mountains, as I used to do, we were flying into them, landing on a riverbed and narrow mountain airstrips. After that flight, I knew I wanted more of that, way more."

After researching the options, Andrzej skipped (for now) transferring from EASA PPL to NZ PPL, instead opting for microlight flying. He joined the Canterbury Recreational Aircraft Club in Rangiora and got his NZ licence, along the way getting to know many new people and thoroughly experiencing New Zealand's GA flying culture.

"To me, it feels almost like being a member of a big family. People know each other well and are keen to help and support each other. They also regularly fly together to cool places, landing on beaches or impossible mountain airstrips. Many are former military and airline pilots, always ready to share their experience with 'younger' colleagues. Some are true inventors, having dream-like hangars combined with workshops, and 3D printing aircraft parts. Some are part of aviation history, like, for example, the jetpack inventor who was also my flight instructor for my transition training. I've met so many amazing people, and this is only the Christchurch area…"

Another experience Andrzej enjoyed was participating in a motivational programme aiming to encourage young people into aviation. "Through Neville, I attended a few meetings where experienced airline pilots help teenagers get into the profession. There is such a positive atmosphere and, surprisingly to me, behind all this tremendous life and flying experience, not once have I seen the arrogance that is unfortunately quite common elsewhere. It really feels like one big flying New Zealand family."

Andrzej built the Jodel fuselage on the fourth floor of his parents' apartment then, with the help of climber friends, lowered it to the ground.

Andrzej's time in New Zealand inevitably drew to a close, but he plans to return as often as possible to spend more time with his new friends and to learn more, especially about mountain and off-piste flying. "Maybe one day," he says, "I will bring my Bearhawk down here, too."

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Rust never sleeps

Jay McIntyre is the owner, LAME and IA of JEM Aviation, Omaka

Shortly after submitting my last article, the Wellington-based Nanchang come in for an annual inspection. Being Wellington-based, and hangared in a doorless hangar to boot, this machine has always suffered from surface corrosion issues, which we have managed to keep relatively under control.

However, at the last annual we decided that this time round she would need a little more TLC than usual, and we were planning to embark on corrosion control and a repaint of the upper surfaces of the wings and tailplane, the paint having suffered over the fifteen years since the aircraft had last been repainted.

Whilst getting the annual underway, I happened to notice three popped rivets attaching one of the skins to the main spar on the underside of the RH wing. A closer inspection revealed some bulging of the skin – not a good sign…

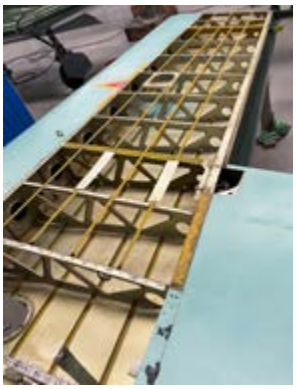
We proceeded as planned, removing the outer wing panels for the planned corrosion control and repaint. With the RH wing upside down on some trestles, I had the guys remove the wingtips and fuel tank access panel.

It was immediately obvious we were in trouble as, lying in the bottom of the tank bay, was a lot of exfoliation corrosion product. Inspection showed a corroded section of the lower main spar cap, just outboard of the tank bay. Interestingly, I'm not certain we would have found it easily on a routine inspection. In this case, with the wing upside down allowing the corrosion product to 'fall' to the top of the upside down bay, it was plainly obvious!

From here we carried out a complete borescope inspection of the wing and found one other area of exfoliation on the same spar cap. Without a borescope it was impossible to see much from the wingtip rib due to other ribs in the way.

We next removed the two lower outboard wing skins for a more detailed look, as these would have to be removed to carry out any repair work. 'Luckily', this revealed more exfoliation corrosion on the rear spar upper cap, right at the tip. These caps were hidden by the aileron bay close-out skin. Further corrosion was found on the rear spar upper cap about two feet from the wing attach point.

Inspection of the other wing was next.



Top from left: the smoking gun - three popped rivets and some bulging of the skin; skin removed; exfoliation corrosion visible.

Right: severe corrosion just outside the fuel bay.

We did not remove any skins on this wing. By drilling some small holes in the aileron bay close out skin we were able to inspect this area with the borescope. This revealed the only area of corrosion on this wing, again right at the tip of the rear spar cap.

So where to now? The exfoliation was very localised in certain areas of the spars affected and for this reason we believe it to have been caused by poor heat-treating processes, something that has been well documented in Eastern Bloc materials. We have previously come across this in another Nanchang and one of our Yak-11 projects. Additionally, when tested, this material has proven to be so close to Western 7075 aluminium, a material well known for this type of corrosion.

It is hard to know if the Wellington environment contributed, but I suspect not. How long had it been like this? Good question, but one suspects it has been festering for many years. We normally don't get that deep into the wings on annual inspection as there is normally not much to see in there and the anodising generally takes care of any corrosion. We have now updated our inspection schedules to carry out an in depth inspection every five years.

Subsequent inspections of two other CJ-6s have revealed no corrosion, reinforcing the heat treatment theory, and we will inspect the rest of the fleet as they come through for annuals. Other operators, both locally and internationally, have been notified, and a CAA005D filed.

Replacement of the affected spars seems to be the only option as it isn't possible to source replacement wings from China, and any wings for sale in the West are typically salvaged from wrecked aircraft and involve more work than just replacing the spar caps. Replacing the caps is not simple either, as new caps can't be purchased from China so the only option is to buy western aluminium extrusion and machine it to size. Of course, this is also not that easy as we have to buy oversize material and machine it to the metric dimensions. The process is not helped by the seemingly inconsequential issue that none of the extrusions are 90°. Depending on their position, some spar caps have an excluded angle of around 103° and others an included angle of around 87°. A simple way of introducing the correct profile into the wing, but not so simple when we need to machine everything!

One thing that makes it a little 'simpler' is that all spar caps have a manufactured joint approximately halfway along the length of the cap. This means that, if only the outboard section has corrosion, we don't need to remove the inboard section, helping to preserve the integrity and alignment of everything while repairs are carried out.

We are currently in the process of sourcing material for the repairs. Hopefully next instalment won't be more tales of corrosion, although we do have a reasonably unloved 150 coming back for remedial work next month after we couldn't get the fuel tank panels off at the annual immediately before Christmas…

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ThinkAviation Trust update

By Dan Clearwater

The flight plan was filed, take-off was smooth and now we're in the climb out.

After a lot of hard effort by volunteers over the last two years to set up the AOPA NZ Charitable Trust, I joined the team in October 2025 as a part-time staff member to support them on the next stage of the Trust's journey.

My aviation background was with the RNZAF, mostly flying UH-1H Iroquois helicopters for No.3 Squadron, with a few hundred hours fixed wing on the CT4-E and B200 King Air in the training arena. I left the Air Force in 2014. Since then, I've worked with a range of not-for-profit and charitable organisations, which gives me a good base of relevant experience to bring to the Trust.

Finalising our Strategic Plan has given us a clear direction for the journey ahead. Each objective details the programmes, initiatives and relationships that we intend to develop, while we are guided by our values, keeping our vision and mission forefront in our mind. I encourage you to read the detailed plan for yourself at thinkaviation.nz/strategy

It's a long and aspirational journey, but I'm pleased to report back on some initial progress along the way. As you'll recall, we awarded two flying scholarships last year and I caught up briefly with both recipients to hear how they are going.

Charlie Bryce was the PPL recipient. "I finished high school at the end of October last year, and between studying for exams, I've been working full-time to save up for flying," he says. "I did my first solo on 11 December, which was a fantastic experience. I'm grateful for the scholarship, which has helped me fly as much as I can."

Karen Dalldorf was our CPL recipient. "Apart from the tricky weather over spring, things are going well! Studying in between my regular job has kept me very busy, but I've done the Meteorology and Air Law exams and it's satisfying to see that progress towards the end goal." Karen adds that she has had to cancel quite a few flights recently. "Spare time doesn't always coincide with suitable flying weather! But I'm about halfway through the cross-country hours requirements, so there's light at the end of the tunnel."

The Trust is committed to continual improvement, so after the first scholarship round, we surveyed all 184 people who showed an interest. Feedback was strongly positive but also gave us plenty to improve on for next time.

As this story goes to print, we should be confirming our dates for the next round of Scholarships to applicants.

We'd appreciate it if you can spread the news around your networks, so we reach as many of the suitable candidates as possible. Watch out for details at thinkaviation.nz/scholarships

We're also excited to share progress with promoting aviation in schools. The House of Science has an existing programme which provides science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) kits, with practical projects that inspire students with real-world applications of what they are learning. After initial discussion, we hope to piggy-back on that programme by linking volunteer 'Classroom Ambassadors' with schools to speak about aviation careers. We'll be trialling this programme in a few regions around the country, and if successful, will be seeking more volunteers to expand the programme.

Strategic Plan

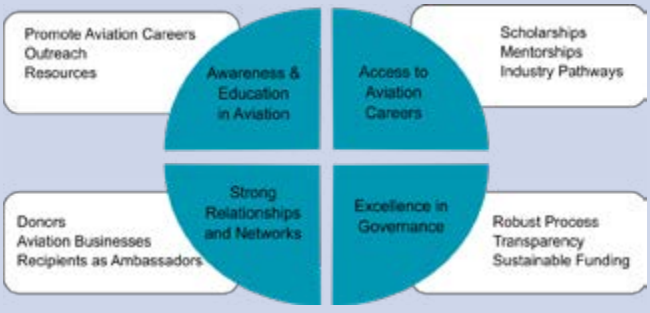
Vision: To inspire and enable the next generations by providing pathways into all sectors of aviation, advancing education, and promoting the enduring value of general aviation to New Zealand communities.

Mission: The AOPA NZ Charitable Trust – 'Think Aviation' exists to advance education, awareness, and access to careers in aviation. By building strong partnerships with industry, fostering community engagement, and providing targeted support, the Trust strengthens New Zealand's aviation ecosystem and creates lasting opportunities.

Values:

- Integrity – acting with transparency, accountability, and honesty.
- Stewardship – responsibly managing funds and resources entrusted by donors and supporters.
- Opportunity – enabling equitable access to aviation education and careers.
- Collaboration – partnership with aviation businesses, educators and communities.
- Inspiration – promoting aviation as an essential part of New Zealand's future.

Strategic Objectives



For more information, visit the ThinkAviation website

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Destination Whanganui

By Jacob Booth

Whanganui (NZWU) is a welcoming, busy, and scenic west coast destination for general aviation.

Located on the west coast of New Zealand's North Island, Whanganui Airport (NZWU) is a well-established and welcoming regional aerodrome offering easy access to the Whanganui River, rugged coastline and surrounding rural heartland. Whether you're planning a quick day trip or a longer stay, Whanganui is a practical and rewarding destination for general aviation pilots.

The aerodrome features a 1372m sealed runway (11/29) at an elevation of just 26ft, making it suitable for a wide range of GA aircraft. NZWU supports a large and diverse mix of aviation activity, creating a busy but well-coordinated operating environment that rewards good preparation and sound airmanship.

Diverse aviation hub

Whanganui is one of the most active regional aerodromes in the country. The level of activity reflects the breadth of operations based at NZWU and explains why visiting pilots should expect a dynamic and sometimes complex operating environment.

Air Chathams operates scheduled passenger services, while Air Whanganui conducts aeromedical and charter operations, often at short notice and at all hours. These are supported by significant flight training activity, a strong recreational presence through the Wanganui Aero Club, regular Aerowork operations, and frequent rotary-wing traffic from Midwest Helicopters.

Whanganui also hosts a large number of international flight training students. In a busy circuit environment with pilots of varied experience and training backgrounds, slow, precise and clearly structured radio calls greatly assist shared understanding. Using standard phraseology, avoiding rushed or clipped transmissions, and allowing space between calls helps reduce frequency congestion and improves situational awareness for all operators.

It is not unusual for airline movements, training circuits, aeromedical flights, agricultural aircraft and helicopters to be operating within a short period. Clear communication, disciplined lookout and a solid understanding of local procedures are essential when operating at NZWU.

UNICOM – a valuable resource

One of Whanganui Airport's standout features is its active UNICOM service. While the aerodrome is unattended, UNICOM provides an additional layer of situational awareness, particularly during busy periods or when airline or aeromedical flights are operating.

The UNICOM service is staffed by personnel who either hold a CPL or who have prior Air Traffic Control experience, ensuring that advice is informed, accurate and professionally delivered. The operator can provide advisory information such as runway in use, known traffic, weather observations and aerodrome conditions. While UNICOM does not provide air traffic control or separation, the information available is extremely valuable for building a clear mental picture of circuit and ground activity.

Responsibility for separation and safe operation always remains with the pilot in command. UNICOM information should be treated as advisory only and supported by standard circuit procedures, clear position reports and effective lookout.

Do your homework

As with any destination, especially one with a high level of mixed operations, thorough pre-flight preparation is essential.

Pilots should ensure they have reviewed the AIP, paying close attention to circuit procedures, noise abatement and local aerodrome notes. Studying the Visual Navigation Charts (VNCs) is equally important, particularly given Whanganui's proximity to Ohakea controlled airspace and the regular presence of military activity.

If UNICOM is on watch, making contact prior to departure, or even the day before, can be a valuable planning step. Confirming runway in use, expected traffic levels, weather conditions and any local considerations can significantly

reduce workload on arrival and enhance situational awareness.

The flight in

Whanganui offers a variety of scenic and straightforward routing options. Coastal routes from the north or south provide simple navigation alongside sweeping views of the Tasman Sea, black sand beaches and rolling farmland. Inland routes highlight classic Manawatū and Rangitīkei scenery, with river valleys naturally guiding you toward the coast.

The Whanganui River, New Zealand's longest navigable river, is an unmistakable landmark on arrival, winding inland and providing an excellent visual reference as you approach the aerodrome.

Whanganui is the sixth busiest regional airport in New Zealand (photo: Wanganui Aero Club).

Weather watch

As a west coast aerodrome, Whanganui is exposed to weather systems moving in from the Tasman Sea. Wind is a primary consideration, particularly strong or gusty westerlies that can create turbulence on approach. Sea breezes commonly develop during warmer months and can strengthen quickly in the afternoon.

Low cloud and rain bands can move in rapidly during unsettled conditions, so conservative decision-making and suitable alternates are important. Fog is generally less persistent than at some inland aerodromes, although early-morning mist can occasionally reduce visibility.

Airspace awareness

Whanganui lies beneath controlled airspace associated with Ohakea Military Air Base, making airspace awareness critical. Pilots should ensure they have reviewed the relevant VNCs and remain alert for military activity in the region.

Ohakea Approach is professional and helpful, and monitoring the appropriate frequency – even when clearance is not required – can significantly enhance situational awareness.

On the ground

Fuel is available at Whanganui Airport, making it a convenient refueling stop for touring pilots.

Information on landing fees, along with details of the local Whanganui Airport Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), can be found on the airport's official website at www.whanganuiairport.co.nz.

Transport into town is easy, with taxi services readily available. The airport is only a short drive from the city centre, meaning visitors can be enjoying Whanganui soon after shutdown.

Around and about

Whanganui offers a relaxed pace with a strong sense of history, culture and community. The revitalised riverfront is a highlight, featuring cafés, walking paths and scenic views over the river.

Popular attractions include the Whanganui River Markets (weekends), the Whanganui Regional Museum, and the historic Durie Hill Elevator, which provides panoramic views across the city. Outdoor enthusiasts can explore riverside walking and cycling tracks, rugged west coast beaches, or venture further upriver into Whanganui National Park for tramping or kayaking.

Dining options range from casual cafés to quality restaurants, many located near the river and town centre. Accommodation is plentiful, with hotels, motels and holiday parks available for those planning an overnight stay.

With its long sealed runway, fuel availability, active UNICOM service and a diverse mix of operators – from airline and aeromedical to training, rotary, and recreational, Whanganui Airport stands out as one of New Zealand's busiest and most rewarding GA destinations. To that, add scenic flying, easy access to town, and a welcoming aviation community, and NZWU firmly earns its place as a must-visit stop on the North Island's west coast.

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A busy December in Waitomo

By George Thomson

Favourable conditions on December 7 created the ideal opportunity to gather at Te Kuiti for a very successful pre-Christmas fly-in BBQ luncheon comprising members of the local Aero Club, together with AOPA NZ and SAA members from across the region.

Thirty aircraft and crew from North Shore, Ardmore, Whitianga, Onewhero, Whakatane and Feilding joined the local hard core, giving a great showing of more than fifty on the field.

Cessnas were well represented with models 150, 172, 180, 182, 185, 195 and 210, alongside a sprinkling of Pipers, RVs and other LSA types. Paul Waterhouse, his new hangar open, displayed his recently restored Pietenpol Aircamper.

So impressed were some of the first-time visitors, it was suggested that, due to its central location, the event should be held annually at Te Kuiti.

But there was more. The following Saturday, three members' aircraft travelled to Hastings for a very enjoyable AOPA NZ 'Meet and Greet' with the AOPA NZ Executive. The BBQ lunch was held at Bridge Pa and hosted by the HB & EC Aero Club. This opportunity does not happen often in our patch, and it provided a welcome opportunity to catch up with old faces and become familiar with a few new ones.

There was no time to linger in Hastings overnight however; we had a commitment the next day at Opotiki. Local aviators there hold a monthly lunch, which we've endeavoured to support on a regular basis, so the following day seven of our aircraft joined the local flying group on their very well-manicured airfield, surrounded by a well-established maize crop, for another enjoyable fly away.

With December activities having revived flying enthusiasm within our membership, 'Sunday School' was held on the 21st at Willow Brook airstrip in Te Kuiti, with billy boil at 3pm, completing the year's activities with nine aircraft present.

To be sure no one felt they'd missed out on the resurgence of aviation activity and bonhomie, a dinner was held on 22nd December at Caves Motor Inn, allowing thirty members and their partners to jointly celebrate the close of 2025.

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