

# Approach

AIRCRAFT OWNERS AND PILOTS ASSOCIATION OF NEW ZEALAND  
WINTER 2026



*Hawera fly-in  
Pacific air adventure  
Annual AOPA NZ Awards  
GA Champion 'gives back'*

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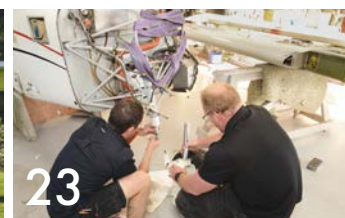
## Coming up

- AOPA NZ Meet & Greet  
20 June, Te Kowhai
- Haast Midwinter Fly-in  
17–19 July, tbc
- AOPA NZ Darfield fly-in  
18–20 September, tbc

For One-Day fly-ins  
and other coming events, check  
out [www.aopa.nz](http://www.aopa.nz)

Cover photo: Richard Bradley in DUK,  
Kaipo Wall, Southland, March 1994  
(story, page 24)

Photo credit: John King



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**Deadline for ads, articles and photos for the next (Spring) issue:** 20 July 2026.



## President's Comment

What a fantastic weekend we had in Greymouth for the AGM. Despite less than perfect

weather, members enjoyed a top quality meal and were most hospitably entertained by the team from the Greymouth Aero Club. Ian Whitmore and Katie Milne made all the arrangements for the weekend, which included a most interesting tour of a local gold mine. I added to my life experiences by holding a solid gold ingot, even if it was a little small. A big thank you to all those involved in the arrangements.

At the AGM Darren Hooks, Lewis Cooper and Matt Vaughan replaced Sue Kronfeld, Peter Armstrong and Ross Millichamp on the committee. Thank you to the outgoing members, who have tirelessly volunteered over many years. They have each agreed to continue helping in varying roles, so good on them.

A big thank you to the newcomers for putting your hands up. Darren is a cardiologist based in Wellington, Lewis, an Instructor in Ashburton and Matt runs an aircraft leasing company out of Queenstown, so they each bring differing knowledge and experience that will be invaluable to the team.

The committee has established a new sub-committee to support Pilot Health and Wellbeing led by Tim Pearce, who has asked Darren Hooks, Chris Hoffman

and Bev Pranker to join him. They are considering how they can best support pilots during difficult times around medicals, stress, mental health and the support available following a trauma.

Roger van der Zanden continues to lead the Advocacy Support sub-committee with Sue Kronfeld, Chris Hoffman, Steve Brown and Lewis Cooper. They have rapidly become entrenched in the many disputes arising around smaller airfields regarding Council District Plans, rents, landing fees, etc. Their aim is to offer support to members fighting individual battles. The team is also looking to assist with the recently announced CAA Rules Update Programme.

Matt Vaughan agreed to lead the Fly-ins and Social sub-committee with the help of Ian Sinclair and the usual local team established immediately prior to an event. As winter approaches there is a lull, but a full programme will begin with a Meet and Greet based at Te Kowhai on 20<sup>th</sup> June. More details to follow.

Reuben Hansen is leading the Safety Advisory team along with Neville Bailey, Holly Lyttle, Dave Paterson and John Evans. They all have a keen eye for detail in this sometimes-tricky sphere, but aim to support all other sub-committees and the membership.

A re-titled Publicity and Comms sub-committee is headed by Neville Bailey with a team of Ross Millichamp, Matt Vaughan, Lewis Cooper and Holly Lyttle. They will be coordinating *Approach* magazine, the website, AOPA NZ videos, our

regular comms, social media and even my *Short Approach*! They were pleased to receive a great response to the recent website survey and are now looking to make a few improvements.

The new Pathway Membership was established at the AGM and is already proving very popular, with more than twenty new members joining following the Warbirds Over Wanaka weekend.

We all know a young person who is a keen aviator. Why not let them know about the Pathway Membership? The annual sub of \$24 is not a huge cost to introduce them to hundreds of experienced and equally keen aviators... a son or daughter, grandchild, friend, or someone from your local Club. The benefits of membership include a digital magazine, unrestricted access to fly-ins and social events, and support of and information about advocacy issues. Application details are on the website, or scan the QR code on page 13 to take a step forward.

The AOPA NZ stand at Warbirds over Wanaka was a real success. Ian Sinclair and Nikki MacKay had set up a great stand that far surpassed others in the NZAF hangar. A constant stream of long-time members dropped in to say gidday, and the screens and images attracted many passers-by. The word had obviously got around about the new Pathway Membership and committee members on the stand spent much time talking to visitors under 30. A quiz also appealed to the younger ones and kept a huddle of visitors around the stand most of each day.

CAA are currently busy with their Rules Update. The Minister has given them two years, which seems a pretty big ask. They are inviting members of AOPA NZ and other aviation bodies to form Technical Groups. If you are interested in helping the process, please get in touch with Roger van der Zanden and he will be able to guide you.

Remember, have a think about the young people you know in aviation. Would they benefit from a Pathway Membership? Make the suggestion, or give them a gift...

Richard Eberlein, President



Happy faces at the AOPA NZ AGM held in late February in Greymouth.

## Warbirds draws the crowds



More than 60,000 enthusiasts attended Warbirds Over Wanaka International Airshow over Easter weekend, and AOPA NZ was there with a strong team of members fronting our stand, which holds prime position in the NZAF marquee.

Promoting both AOPANZ and its charitable trust, ThinkAviation, with screens, posters, magazines, interactive activities, refreshments and, most important of all, one-on-one chat, the team ended the weekend footsore but content. For new President Richard Eberlein, it proved a great way to talk to people about the work AOPA NZ does and the benefits of membership.

The event also saw around thirty new members signing up, while many existing members called by the stand to enjoy both respite and camaraderie.



## Website update

Thanks to all our members who responded to the recent survey about AOPA NZ's website. Your input and suggestions are important to the AOPA NZ committee and, in response to your feedback, changes to the website are already underway.

Take a look at some of the new features now on offer, and stay tuned for ongoing improvements over the coming months!

## Great news from Timaru

The Timaru District Council hearing panel Commissioners have released their decision in relation to the proposed District Plan changes impacting on rural airstrips within the Timaru district. The issues, as well as the drawn-out and costly process of contesting the proposed changes, have been covered in previous issues of *Approach*.

The good news is that the decision has come down in favour of the submissions made by the aviation community.

This was a significant case as it established the groundwork and trend we hope will be used by Councils around the country when they are faced with reviewing their own Plans or dealing with requests for land use change and noise abatement issues.

Well done to all those groups and individuals who played a part in achieving this milestone decision, and specific thanks and acknowledgement to the significant and time-consuming work undertaken by past AOPA NZ Committee member John Evans and AOPA NZ member Sid McAuley, with the support of the local aviation community and AOPA NZ committee.

John notes that the process was neither quick nor easy, but that professionally-led participation in District Plan processes can achieve results, given persistence and financial support.

## Pathway membership

Adopted at the 2026 AGM in March, AOPA NZ's new '[Pathway](#)' membership is designed to encourage younger people – pilots, aspiring pilots and people interested in general aviation – aged 15 to 30 years to join our organisation.

Pathway members can enjoy all AOPA NZ member benefits and discounts, a digital copy of *Approach* magazine, and access to member updates, fly-ins and other social events, not to mention the benefits of AOPA NZ advocacy.

For just \$24 a year, that's a great deal!

If you know someone who would benefit from Pathway membership, please encourage them to join up – or gift them a membership! You can [sign them up on the website](#).

## Welcome to new members:

John Bishop, San Francisco, CA; Paul Threadgill, Kaikoura; Lynda Prior, Blenheim; Lewis Cooper, Christchurch; Tom Meredith, Auckland; Louie Blanchard, Auckland; Jonathan Caddick, Swannanoa; Peter Innes, Timaru; Sophie Kerr, Blagdon; Gerard Coulson, Christchurch; Sam Hamill, Kaikoura; Thomas Jackson, Dunedin; Stephen Scott, Nelson; Hunter Heath, Wānaka; John Ahearn, Tauranga; William Crosse, Blenheim; Dave Wilson, Lower Hutt; Bede Laming, Wānaka; Bradan Foster, Lyttelton; Ben Kunath, Queenstown; Paige Win, Balclutha; Seren Wheatley, Wellington; Nicholas Evans, Wellington; Samit Desai, Auckland; Troy Wheeler, Christchurch; Tuulianna Laukkanen, Omarama; Divine Abarratigue, Christchurch; Ali Shand, Napier; Thomas Williams, Queenstown; Ben Marling, Christchurch; Matthew Almond, Auckland; Leon Fenemor, Nelson; Oliver Button, Twizel; Bailey Trowland, Napier; Mikayla Evans, Arrowtown; Jack Beavis, Auckland; Bridgette Spillane, Taumarunui; Jeremy Lomas, Whitianga; Robert Hayman, Christchurch; Trevor Smillie, Kirwee.



## From the Editor

Both our new Pathway membership and our charitable trust, ThinkAviation, are investments in the future of GA. Another critical investment, and one that we need to always keep in our sights, is our ongoing role in advocacy.

As I sat in the Hastings District Council chambers in late April listening to submissions on (yet another) proposal to have the District Plan amended to allow housing to be built around Hastings Aerodrome, it was clear that challenges to recreational flying are not going to stop coming, and also that they are becoming increasingly difficult for small organisations and individuals to fight.

HB&EC Aero Club invested considerable resources – financial as well as time and energy – into a submission to Council, as did the Gliding Club, Microlight Club and many impacted individuals who fly from or to Hastings Aerodrome.

It was very heartening to also have the weight of AOPA NZ behind us, reinforcing the importance of the Aerodrome as a regional asset, and underscoring concerns around reverse sensitivity. AOPA NZ's previous work on District Plan submissions nationwide additionally provided a body of research, for example around issues such as noise profiles, on which we could draw in arguing our case. Many thanks to the AOPA NZ committee, and in particular Reuben Hansen, Chris Hoffman and John Evans.

In its advocacy role, AOPA NZ keeps a watching brief across many issues that impact on GA, attends scheduled meetings with our regulatory body, and maintains a profile across the aviation sector. The CAA's Rules Update review is a key area where we will be engaging to offer a GA perspective.

The Timaru District Council decision on Plan changes impacting rural airstrips, covered in detail by John Evans in previous issues of this magazine, is outlined on page 3. Two things are clear from this excellent result. First, we can successfully fight our corner, despite the bureaucracy and complexity of the process; and second, stamina is one of the resources required – decisions do not come quickly.

While we await the outcome at Hastings, I've had the fun of pulling together another feature-packed issue of *Approach*. Alongside meeting new faces on the committee, you can read the wisdom of members who are a little longer in the tooth; vicariously enjoy aviation adventures ranging from the fingernail-biting to fun days out with friends; and celebrate our industry high fliers with the annual AOPA NZ Awards.

Always appreciated by recipients, I was thoroughly delighted to receive an Above and Beyond award. My thanks to our Life Members for this lovely gesture. AOPA NZ has been part of my life for nearly twenty years, and I'm sure it will continue to be so well into the future.

Anna Mackenzie, [anna.mackenzie@aopa.nz](mailto:anna.mackenzie@aopa.nz) 

## Out and about...

Late summer and early autumn weather can be perfect for flying (though not always!). But when you do get a break in the weather, what better way to enjoy it than exploring airstrips with friends.



Kyeburn One-Day Fly-in. Photos: Thomas Jackson.



Hastings Meet & Greet and HB Taildragger Day fly-arounds: Kereru and Lyons farm airstrips and the remote Boyd strip in Kaimanawa Forest Park.



Pathway member Leon Fenemor enjoyed a flight into Milford with another member in February; Right: southern visitors gather at Waipukurau Airfield.



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# New AOPA NZ committee members

## Matt Vaughan



With over 35 years' experience in aviation, Matt Vaughan has extensive technical expertise gained worldwide in the commercial aircraft leasing,

airline continuing airworthiness, and airline maintenance sectors.

Combining his work experience – initially on the 'shop floor' as an FAA and CAANZ Certifying Engineer, through to holding the Director of Airworthiness role for an Australasian-based airline – with over 25 years exclusively in commercial aviation leasing consulting, Matt has built a broad knowledge and skill base.

Matt has been flying for thirty years and is a qualified commercial pilot. He particularly enjoys back-country flying with

his family in his Maule MX7-180, based in Cromwell, Central Otago.

He has been an AOPA NZ member for several years and enjoys learning from the more experienced pilots through social and fly-in events.

Matt is looking forward to combining his skills and knowledge with his passion for general aviation in New Zealand, and applying these to his role on the AOPA NZ committee.

Besides flying, Matt also enjoys fishing and mountain biking.

## Lewis Cooper

One of the youngest faces on AOPA NZ's committee, Lewis Cooper's aviation journey began when he attended Des Lines' Tuesday night classes (more about Des in the feature on page 26). Soon after, he attended IAAZ where he achieved his CPL and Multi-Engine Instrument Rating.

Having finished flight school between lockdowns in 2020, Lewis gained very valuable work experience in the Operational Safety Team at Airways, where his work included operational safety investigations and working with external safety teams, providing data for investigations.

In 2023, Lewis took three months off work to move up to Motueka, completing his C-Cat Instructor Rating at Nelson Aviation College.

Over the past five years he has enjoyed flying on his days off, and he is an active member of the Mid Canterbury Aero Club (MCAC). In 2025, he began instructing at MCAC, and at the beginning of 2026 became the Chief Flight Instructor. He is currently working towards a B-Cat Instructor Rating, and is committed to remaining in GA as long as he can, as well as getting along to as many AOPA NZ fly-ins as possible.

In his spare time, Lewis plays drums and percussion across a variety of genres including big band, pop/rock and musical theatre. He has also returned to Des Lines' Tuesday nights to help teach, which he is thoroughly enjoying.



## Darren Hooks



Darren and son Ed

Darren Hooks was drawn to aviation, and in particular to the physics of flight, as a teenager, but – as so often happens – life intervened and he didn't embark on his PPL until 2020.

Soon after completing it in 2024, he discovered how well GA intersected with his life-long love of tramping, mountaineering and being in the great outdoors. "From Wellington, I can easily pop across to the South Island. Even a single night spent somewhere like Awaroa or Hanmer Springs feels refreshing with so little time lost in getting there – it's almost like being teleported."

Darren purchased his C182T in August last year, joining AOPA NZ soon after on the recommendation of a fellow aviator. Fly-ins were a revelation, especially those offering access to the back-country, and cemented Darren's enthusiasm for playing an active role in the future of the organisation. He hopes to see AOPA NZ become more visible across the sector and more embedded in aero clubs.

When not flying, tramping in the Tararuas with his wife Liz and two teenagers, Katie and Ed, or tinkering in his garage workshop, Darren works as a cardiologist at Wellington Hospital, specialising in heart arrhythmia surgery.

# Happy Hawera fly-in

By Tim Pearce

Friday, 20<sup>th</sup> March found the sun shining and the winds blowing easy across much of New Zealand, which led to a great turn-out and fantastic flying around the Hawera district.

With the settled weather forecast right through until the following week, the six aircraft venturing up from the South Island faced no difficulties with their flight planning. In all, eighteen aircraft visited Hawera for the three-day event, with Ian Sinclair and COL travelling the furthest.

Once again the whole Hawera Aero Club were incredibly hospitable, with no small thanks to Beverley Pranker who managed our meals and refreshments for the two evenings we were together. Bev is an absolute star and nothing is a problem. Both nights we gathered at the Aero Club, enjoying gorgeous fish and chips and a beer on the first night and pizza on the second night. This was simple and worked really well.

Hawera is a great airfield with three

very good published runways (six vectors), so absolutely no need for any embarrassing cross-wind landings. Fuel was also available from the club's own tank, which made things very straightforward.

We awoke Saturday morning to an absolute pearly of a day and, with relatively small numbers of aircraft, had a very relaxed briefing before heading off in three groups. All groups had a local to do the pathfinding so navigation was easy, and also had an experienced flying leader as a tail-end Charlie (no pun intended, Charlie). This worked really well.

First stop was Tony Muller's strip, just ten minutes west of Hawera. Tony's strip is lovely and open at both ends and about 600m long so it offered a great start for everyone. We were all very interested to

inspect Tony's progress on his new C180 project, now getting very close to flying.

From there we tracked to South Taranaki for Philip Crawford's strip which is 600m long, unobstructed at both ends and an easy landing for everyone. The Crawfords' new property at Kohi was the next destination and a little more challenging, having a rather large hump in the middle of it, but everyone managed well.

Mike Train's was the next stop with 450m of beautifully manicured grass. We were met by Michael's wife and family who put on a lovely morning tea. Huge thanks to Sally Train for going to so much trouble. Landing here was idyllic and there were plenty of locals to meet, keen to see the aircraft and how they were handled.

Hayden Cook's strip, just a short distance away, was next. Hayden has just acquired a twin-engine Piper Comanche and has recently developed this grass strip and a new hangar for the aircraft. Also very close to Cooks was the 700m strip at Rosie Gibbs and partner George Kiihfuss' property. This strip presented a few challenges with a slight tailwind on approach but with plenty of length and a slight uphill slope which everyone handled with relative ease.

Next stop was Norfolk Airfield, just out of Inglewood. The local group at Norfolk were most generous in putting on a great



barbecue lunch (thanks to Brad Raven and team). It was an absolutely idyllic setting with brilliant sunshine and great company.

From Norfolk the groups headed off into the final three strips for the day, each of which was a little more challenging than those encountered on the morning's flying. Those who have flown over north-eastern Taranaki will know that the terrain changes dramatically, with a fair bit of hard hill-country and native bush to fly over. Our first stop was Corletts, a one-way ag strip with a moderate slope but an easy approach and a good generous length. The presence of our experienced leader, Neville Bailey, was extremely valuable, giving us a very good briefing on our departure from Corletts. There was a slightly tricky quartering tailwind once the aircraft got halfway down the strip. Neville's briefing was right on the money and everyone handled the take-off very well.

Mako School strip, a beautiful 700m two-way strip in the valley next to the Mako School and about ten nautical miles north-east of Corletts, was the next stop.



*First group to land at Corletts ag airstrip, east of Inglewood.*

It sits within a lovely clear valley but did have a small water hazard on approach and a bend at the other end.

The final strip of the day was further north at Whangamomana which was relatively hard to visualise in the valley on our first fly-over. It is about 600m but can be a little daunting initially due to the proximity of the valley terrain and the slightly irregular margins of the surrounding trees. However everyone made a very good job of their landings, aided

immensely by perfect weather. The isolation of places like this made getting into the strip very special.

The 20-30 minute flight home to Hawera offered outstanding views of Mount Taranaki. The whole weekend was a great deal of fun, helped in no small way by the awesome bunch of people attending and perfect weather.

The plan is to make this an annual event. Thanks once again to Bev and Hawera Aero Club for such great hospitality.

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# Back to the Solomons, the hard way

## Part 1:

### To the Land of the Long White Cloud (the other one)

By David Berger

Sometimes the mode of the journey is as important as the journey itself.

Back in 1995, I spent four of the most formative months of my life as a District Medical Officer in Gizo Hospital in the Western Solomon Islands. For someone brought up on the short stories of Somerset Maugham, and for whom Arthur Grimble's *A Pattern of Islands* was a regular teenage read, the time passed as if in a dream, and that dream-like quality has only intensified with the passing years. No surprise then that this period has since remained a beckoning vision of a life less ordinary, which has sustained me through some otherwise very ordinary periods indeed.

Moving from the UK to North New South Wales in 2013 put Brisbane, with its daily flights to the Solomons, just four hours' drive away. For the first few years in Australia, I had the excuse of being busy, and never quite seemed to get round to making the trip. Then I realised I was actually scared of making the trip, just in case... "Never go back" is the adage, and once that has taken root in your mind it won't go away, like a catchy tune that has become the most annoying earworm ever. But flying my Cessna 185 'the wrong way' back from the US to Australia and then New Zealand in 2019 (see past issues of this magazine), made me look across again at the Solomons, just nine hundred measly nautical miles from Australia.

Taking the Cessna there would be an adventure and an excuse, wouldn't it? I wouldn't just be 'going back'. I'd be doing something new!

The mind suitably deceived and bamboozled, I set to planning. There followed COVID and then three over-complicated schemes to visit via Cape York and Papua New Guinea, thwarted variously by terrible weather on Cape York, the complete rebuild of the aircraft's tail and the theft of two drums of avgas, laboriously procured, and even more laboriously stationed, in Milne Bay.

By early 2025, it was becoming a case of now or never. You can only accost people so many times to tell them how you're going to do something mind-blowingly amazing before their eyes glaze over and you can see them praying for immediate annihilation in a meteorite impact. An opportunity to commit this daring act of aviation was starting to present itself, however. Middle son, Tom, my partner in crime on the 2019 trans-globe adventure, was on a year out from medical school and had just finished a stint as stunt pilot in Italy for a Hollywood movie, so he had a few months to spare. Youngest son, Ed, also current in the 185, was busy coasting in that nether world of infinite opportunity and indolent mornings in a dressing gown between leaving university and finding a job. (Dear God, thank you for eventually finding him one!)

The reluctant indifference of both of these was overcome through a mixture of persuasion, cajoling, threats and entreaties from their mother about their father's inevitable fate if they failed to accompany him. And so it was that in early November of 2025, towards the very end of the

settled(ish) season, we found ourselves in Coffs Harbour, ready to set forth.

Having been burned repeatedly on the PNG route, this time I chose a circuit of the inner south-west Pacific as a safer bet from all points of view: weather, PNG rascals, and prevailing winds, with the south to north direction meaning the south-east trade winds would theoretically be in our favour. The major planned stops were to be: Gold Coast – Noumea (NC) – Santo (Van) – Lata (SI) – Honiara – Gizo – Munda – Cairns. Fuel was available in Noumea (though at the domestic, not the international, airport), Santo, Honiara and Munda.

Our aircraft is a late model Cessna A185F with 84USgal (318l) of usable fuel in two wing tanks and also aftermarket Flint wingtip tanks, giving an extra 30USgal (113l) usable, making a total of 114USgal (431l) in the wings. The fuel in the Flints transfers into the mains by means of manually activated electric pumps, a configuration identical to that found in factory Maules. If you keep the main tanks well topped up, this arrangement on inner Pacific routes or the Trans-Tasman routes means that fuel transfer



New Caledonia's encircling lagoon;  
inset: David in Seabee.

pump failure can never, on its own, land you in the drink. At all times there is enough fuel in the main tanks to make land. Somewhere.

Lean of peak at 8500ft we get an honest 117kt TAS at heavy weights, increasing to 121-122kt as we lighten up, burning an equally honest 11USgal/hr (42l). With 8USgal burned to top of climb, these numbers give us a realistic still air range to dry tanks of 1100NM or so. Our longest ever previous leg was 846NM from Okinawa to Clark Field in the Philippines. On that journey, we had a slight tailwind and landed with about three and a half hours of fuel, so the numbers check out in real life. Digital fuel senders and a fuel flow monitor mean that fuel calculated and fuel used correlate within one gallon or so.

Some of the legs on this route are similarly long for the average single-engined piston aircraft. From Gold Coast to Noumea is 800NM exactly, with no diversion options in between, though there is quite a lot of shipping if the unthinkable happens. Munda to Cairns is a little more, at 875NM. A diversion to an island in PNG's Louisiade Archipelago, which sits halfway along that route, would be preferable to going swimming, but would also open up a world of woe, with diplomatic, security and fuel availability implications.

As a family of pilots, I would say we all tend to the anxious, so none of us wanted to be worried about fuel remaining in flight in the event of adverse winds. It's just unpleasant, isn't it? Plus, the sparse fuel availability where we were going was another reason to carry more fuel with us. We therefore plumbed the 33USgal Turtlepac, which we had sitting around from the Tasman crossing of our Super



Preparations in full swing (top); enormous ramp at Tontouta and the Air Calin Airbus from Sydney.

Cub in 2024, into the fuel return line in the right door frame, where it would pump fuel up into the right main wing tank. The tank itself sat behind the co-pilot's seat, secured to tie down points and the cargo net by ratchet straps, and we used one of the many 12 and 24 volt outlets we have in the panel for the pump.

This bumped our reliable still air range up to nearly 1500NM, more than ample for this journey and actually enough to carry us into the wider Pacific, if that fancy were, at a later date, ever to take us. As a final option to tanker fuel, we also carried four 5USgal Turtlepac folding jerry cans (left over from our 2019 trip) in the belly pod, and we did make

use of them in the end.

Add to all this, a 55gal drum hand-pump and wrench and a Mr Funnel, plus raft (a heavy Switlik offshore), plus survival kit with water, life jackets, tools and spares, and it is rapidly apparent that for an expedition like this you need a surfeit of power, payload and space, especially if you are going to carry any more than one human being in the aircraft. This is not a trip for a Cessna 172, or even a 182, and the 250lb gross weight increase which comes with the Flint tanks STC on the 185 comes in very handy. The titanium landing gear, new Pponk gearbox and new tail stinger also help to reassure that we will not be sitting despondently at

## Accommodation and hangar available at Pukaki Airport, Twizel



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a distant island airstrip, staring at the remains of our aircraft with broken landing gear and wondering whether we are just going to torch the wreck or jump into the bonfire ourselves as well.

With the Turtlepac plumbed in and fully fueled for the crossing to Noumea there was room for only two front seaters, so for this leg Ed was going to be flying commercial. After several days of watching the oceanic weather, it finally looked good, so Ed dropped us at the hangar and went off to catch the Dash 8 to Sydney, where he would board the Air Calin Airbus for Noumea.

The hour-long dawn flight to Gold Coast was serene, but the financial extortion to which we had to submit to get out of the country from there left me anything but serene. Compulsory handling is theoretically not required at Gold Coast for international departures, but after days of fruitless attempts to get information out of Border Force and to get a ramp slot from the airport on the 'international ramp' (because the aircraft obviously has to sit on a specially designated slab of concrete to get signed out to leave the country), it became clear that there was no practical way round it. The initial handling quote from the single FBO was an appalling A\$1500, based on the fact that our aircraft is N-registered, not VH-registered. I managed through petulance and wheedling – core competencies, developed over many years – to get this down to A\$858, for which we received:

- Marshalling
- Parking on the empty FBO ramp for 30mins
- The use of a toilet
- The use of a countertop for 2mins in the FBO for the Border Force agent to sign off the paperwork we prepared
- The privilege of organising our own fuel because the FBO's bowser was broken.

A cost of A\$795 for our Super Cub to spend one night at Norfolk Island in 2024, and even higher charges on our return to Cairns at the end of this trip, show that the costs for international entry and exit for light aircraft in Australia are now approaching the ridiculous levels of Asian countries. Border transit costs in New Caledonia, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands were to be negligible.

Anyway, with customary bad grace on my part ("Dad, can you just stop being such a grumpy old man for one minute? It doesn't help."), we were soon off, the 185 barely acknowledging its gross weight on the sea level runway on this relatively cool morning. We were IFR, so Tom was flying, and as we settled onto our north-east heading, we both allowed ourselves one look over our shoulders at the receding Australian coast. ("F\*\*\*!")

Approaching and leaving the Australian coast in a light aircraft gives an impressive sense of how massive and dominant the continent is, plonked in the middle of the ocean like a glowing sandbox. Obviously, it funnels Southern Ocean storm systems directly at New Zealand every two or three days, and further north you can see the haze and heat shimmering over the east coast, so dense that even if you didn't know it was generated by a hinterland of thousands of kilometres of land mass, you would guess it. From the coast it is about 150NM before the effects of Australia on the oceanic weather start to give way and the cloudscape adopts its characteristic ocean pattern of endless small, low, lumpy cotton wool cumulus.

On this trip, we had set up a Starlink mini on the dash, so had practically unlimited ultra-fast broadband for the entire flight. Sadly, as of March 2026, the speed limit for Starlink mini subscriptions has now been reduced to 100mph, so cheap access like this is no longer possible.

Aviation plans exist, but are far more expensive and have far less data. We used this data to good effect, however, by keeping an eye on the Marine Traffic app in between the usual enervating attempts to get the HF to work, and hailing likely looking boats on Channel 16 on our panel mounted marine VHF. Ships are a bit of a dead loss, but yachts are often happy to chat. We spotted a thirty foot RIB midway between New Caledonia and Gold Coast. Odd. It turned out to be a tender being towed behind a super yacht and they had forgotten to switch off the AIS. The Kiwi captain was gobsmacked and delighted to be hailed by a light aircraft: "The best part of the whole trip from Fiji!"

As is customary for him, Tom switched off the main engine instrument display on the G500 so he didn't have to contemplate minute variations in the vital signs of the fragile metal organism thrashing away furiously in front of him, and listened determinedly to the BBC recordings of Paul Temple, amateur detective. I just sat and stared at the view, ticked off the miles and refreshed Marine Traffic. Fuel transfers proceeded unremarkably, both from the Turtlepac and the Flint tip tanks, and we would land with over six hours of fuel remaining.

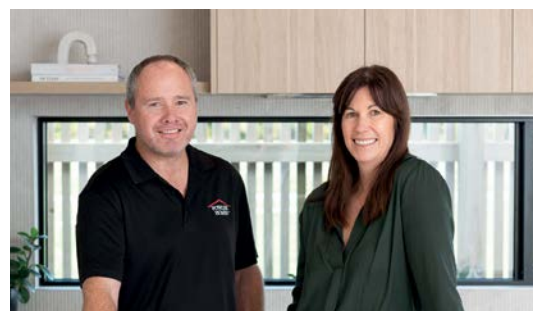
We had a slight tailwind, so it wasn't even six hours before we could make out in the distance the long white cloud (see arrows on image above), which marks the 400km streak of New Caledonia and its spine of craggy mountains. Then it was time to talk to Tontouta on the VHF and to open the Nouvelle Calédonie carte aéronautique on OzRunways, an eerie experience for someone used to using French aeronautical charts in Europe and the first of many reminders that "Nouvelle Calédonie, c'est vraiment la France!"

We flew the RNAV approach over an appropriately blue-green lagoon and before long we were landing on Tontouta's enormous runway and being marshalled onto a tiny spot on its equally enormous and empty ramp. We had beaten Ed in the Airbus by about an hour, so had time to go through customs and immigration, escorted by a smiley airport official, before picking him up and embarking on the twenty mile hop to Magenta, the GA airport right in the middle of Noumea.



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YOUR STYLE OF LIVING

# The view over a mountain

By Darren Hooks

Is the view flying over a mountain better than the view from the mountain top itself?

At first pass it ought to be – the vantage point being higher. Yet, the view from the top itself has its own distinction, imbued as it is with the toil and sweat of the climb. One view rapidly changing, and set to an orchestra of pistons and push-rods. The other still, static and quiet. Both tinged with adrenalin, a sense of the unknown, and risk mitigation. Neither gained easily.

The question bobbed around in my mind as we slogged up the Mole stream, en route the Mole Tops, slowly gaining altitude



against the backdrop of the Tutaki river valley below. To me, the combination of aviation and tramping is the ultimate yin and yang. Complementary forces of a well-performed landing, with a well-executed mountain route.

For the Wellington-based Hooks family of Darren, Liz, Ed (14) and Katie (12), the outdoors has been a part of life long before aviation. But with all roads from Wellington heading north, our recently acquired Cessna 182T (JRY aka 'Jerry') has conveyed access to the DOC estate only surpassed, perhaps, by a tail dragger or helicopter. The plane opens up the Southern Alps for weekend or short in-out trips, timed to optimal weather. Indeed, flying somewhere only for coffee and to fly straight back has never given me a great deal of satisfaction. For me, a deeper experience of the destination is required to justify the fuel burn – whether it be a swim, bike ride, tramp, or catching up with friends and family.

So it was that when the AOPA NZ back-to-basics Tutaki fly-in was advertised, I immediately pulled up the surrounding topo maps to see what tramping prospects Tutaki might offer.

The Mole Tops stood out, and a quick internet search consolidated a plan to fly into the AOPA meet-up then extend our stay in the valley with a three-to-four-day circuit up the Mole stream to the Mole Tops, returning via Tiraumea river.

Logistics were complete when Steve Todd of Tutaki Station very kindly offered to not only accommodate the C182 for a few days beyond the AOPA NZ fly-in, but also to drive us the 15km from his airstrip to the outlet of Mole stream to begin our tramp. The hospitality of Steve and his family was incredible, both in getting us to the track, but also in taking us in, wet and bedraggled, at the end of the tramp while we awaited a weather window to fly back north.

The AOPA NZ fly-in got off to a slightly shaky start for Jerry, as she ran out of elevator travel on approach, which may well turn into a whole other story. Suffice it to say that the combined

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efforts of Ian Sinclair in splitting our payload and the sage advice of many others in the debrief were reflective of all things great that AOPA NZ membership offers.

I'm hugely indebted to the AOPA NZ senior team who worked some sort of background magic to conjure up Dave Patterson, who flew in the next day to sit in Jerry's right-hand seat for a day of strip flying instruction... just what was needed. By the end of the day, I had a whole page of notes of things I'd learned from Dave after a very enjoyable day's flying.

Unsurprisingly, with the fly-in being timed to the best weather, we would be left a mixed bag for the tramp. With rain in the forecast, plans to camp among the tarns of the Mole Tops gave way to an overnight stay in the tiny four-bunk Mole Hut.

A misty climb up to Mole Saddle was followed by a soggy and slippery descent into the Tiraumea river. Next, a slightly high river meant a well-earned hut day at the 6-bunk Tiraumea Hut, and the opportunity to sit around a campfire spinning yarns, recounting scout campfire skits, marvelling at the (brief) appearance of the stars, and generally feeling bonded as a family and at one with the universe. The hut book contributed some pages to both a draft of this story, and some algebra revision for Ed.

The final day down the Tiraumea river was a wild and beautiful route, criss-crossing the tannin-stained river innumerable times.

Day 4, and the kids had found their tramping straps, leaving both parents to marvel at how they were now lagging behind. Track markers were aplenty, but as for a track – well not so much. Just as we like it. Four days in the bush, and not one other human seen.



A four day add-on to an AOPA NZ fly-in proved a fine family outing. Previous page: descent from the Mole Tops to the Tiraumea River. Inset: JRY parked up at Tutaki. This page, above: a well-earned rest day at Tiraumea hut. Left: the trusty topo map that provided inspiration.

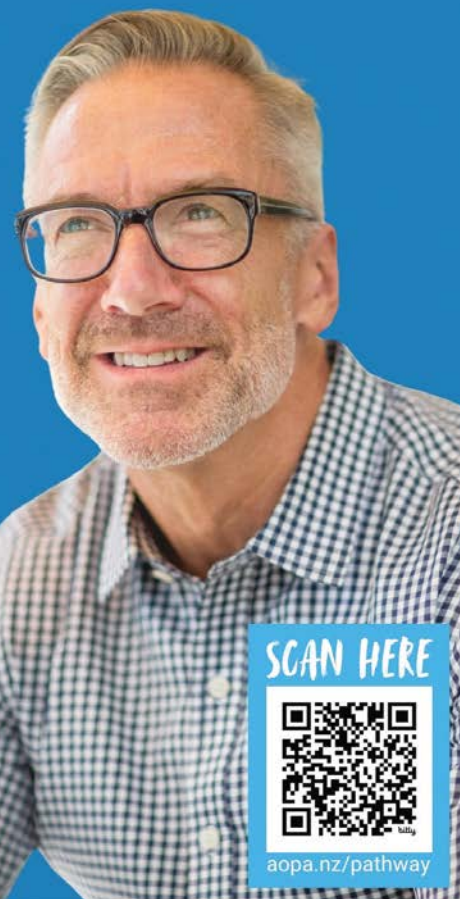
So back to the question. As we gained the crest of Mole Saddle to patchy mist and drizzle, only one thing was really clear – whether the view is better flying over a mountain as compared to the mountain top itself would certainly not be resolved on this particular trip. 🦋

[Return to contents](#)

## Imagine if someone had encouraged you to join AOPA NZ 20 years earlier

Now you can do exactly this for a young person. Our new Pathway membership is helping younger people\* interested in GA to join the AOPA NZ community at a discounted rate. **So who do you know** who would benefit from joining? Get them to scan the QR code. They will thank you for it!

\* Pathway is for those 15 – 30 years of age



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# AOPA NZ Awards 2026



George Thompson (left) receives his trophy from John Lissingington at Waitomo Aero Club.

## Above and Beyond

George Thompson's long commitment to GA and AOPA NZ was recognised with one of two Above and Beyond Awards bestowed this year.

George has invested many decades in supporting GA, promoting and contributing to AOPA NZ and quietly mentoring fledgling pilots.

He is a calm and encouraging presence at fly-ins and other aviation events, and is always willing to support others through sharing his knowledge and experience, always in a positive and friendly manner. He has been a huge part of building the strong aviation hub that continues to thrive in the Te Kuiti region, with regular excursions, fly-ins, lunches and social get-togethers. He has been a great supporter of AOPA NZ, serving on the Committee, and is still actively involved in aviation events and AOPA NZ fly-ins.



Life member Brian Hore at Glider Café with Jennie Hales.

## Aviation friendly café

The Glider cafe at Omarama and new owner, Jennie Hales won the prized award for the Most Aviation-Friendly Watering Hole.

Just before the Glider closed for winter, a sunny day presented and, with just a few days' notice, over thirty people in about fifteen planes arrived to support the trophy presentation. Jennie and her staff were over the moon to receive the award. It was presented by Kevin Anderson and Brian Hore – and the rumour is that Brian stepped into the kitchen to help out with a batch of scones...

Being able to taxi right up to the door is particularly special in the aviation world, especially when coupled with outstanding food provided by friendly and welcoming staff. The Glider reopens in spring and Jennie assures us she has some exciting new developments in store.

## Top Maintenance Shop

2026 AOPA NZ Best Maintenance Shop award went to SAB Avionics Wanaka.



Steve Bunting (left) with AOPA NZ's Kynan Yu.

SAB operates out of the Twenty24 Hangar at Wanaka Airport and specialises in avionics work on private fixed-wing aircraft and commercial helicopters.

Proprietor Steve Bunting learned his trade in the Royal Airforce in Great Britain, initially working as a line mechanic on Phantoms before specialising in avionics as an Avionics Tech on the Tornado. He emigrated to New Zealand in 2005 and set up SAB, a small but busy one-man operation.

In recent years Steve's time has been consumed with ADS-B transponder installations and the panel upgrades often done at the same time. Steve also undertakes IFR installs and upgrades.

Life Member Murray Paterson says that Steve has a reputation for everything working as it should from the first time it is turned on. Steve is an AOPA NZ member and flies Cessna 172, ZK CFD from his hangar home at Alexandra airfield.

# AOPA NZ Awards 2026



From left: Renee Helliwell, Jonny Manning, AOPA NZ's John Lissington, and Scott Cowley.

## Most Helpful Tower

Hamilton Tower was this year's winner of the Most Helpful Control Tower award.

In addition to their usual excellent service, Hamilton Tower provided a warm welcome and stand-out support during the multi-plane visit to Hamilton Airport that was a highlight of the 2025 AOPA NZ Summer Safari.

In April, long-time AOPA NZ member John Lissington presented the award to Hamilton Tower staff. Absent from the presentation picture above was the Controller on Duty, Anthea Wing. A big thanks also to the controllers on duty on the day of the AOPA NZ Safari in early 2025, Brady Swann, Zach Twentyman and Meg Duff.

## GA Champion: Des Lines



Russell Taylor (left) presents GA Champion award to Des Lines.

A former Air NZ pilot who has created a personal growth and mentoring programme for young people who aspire to aviation, Des is a true GA Champion.

Working below the radar for many years, the programme is now teaching its second generation of students, with some of the first generation back helping out.

Des runs his Tuesday night classes from his home base at Swannanoa airfield on the northern side of Christchurch. The wall of his office is lined with an impressive number of photographs of "graduates" who have gone on to successful aviation careers.

Committee member Neville Bailey, who has helped with the programme for a number of years, puts its success down to Des' personality. "He has a way of interacting with people that both challenges them and makes them feel good about themselves. Everyone walks away buzzing after an interaction with Des."

For more information on Des, see the feature on page 26.

## Above and Beyond

Anna Mackenzie joined us as the editor of *Approach* magazine sixteen years ago, bringing with her two decades of experience in marketing, comms and magazine production. She is also an award-winning fiction author and a teacher of creative writing and editing.

As the editor of *Approach* she has worked with six different AOPA NZ presidents, and has significantly contributed to the development of the magazine, which continues to go from strength to strength. While there is financial remuneration for the job, Anna's commitment extends far beyond her paid hours.

She has become increasingly enthusiastic about flying through her years with AOPA NZ, with a highlight being three



Hamish Ross (left) and Richard Bradley present the AOPA NZ Above and Beyond award to *Approach* editor, Anna Mackenzie.

flying safaris in Southern and East Africa. Those trips also saw her hone her photography skills, to the benefit of *Approach*.

Also a behind-the-scenes supporter of her local GA community, Anna is a familiar face at HB&EC Aero Club.

# Yakkety-Yak

By Jay McIntyre



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

Many of you will be aware of the Yak-7B rebuild project we have been working on since pre-covid. We finally flew the aeroplane two weeks before Easter, but it was quite an effort to get it to that point.

The aeroplane arrived in July 2019 for 'a bit of a tidy up' of the cockpits and cowlings. Despite the aeroplane having flown, albeit irregularly, in the USA, we quickly realised there was more to this machine than met the eye.

The fuselage required a complete strip and rebuild, with all systems requiring replacement and many repairs to the 4130 fuselage tubing. A rather interesting interpretation of an engine mount was replaced with a newly fabricated item copied from that fitted to both Yak-3M 'Full Noise' and Yak-3M ZK-YYY, and the engine had to be returned to the USA for inspection due to an almost complete lack of paperwork.

The original pneumatic system had been replaced with hydraulics, but only to the extent that selectors and other components were thrown into the cockpit willy-nilly, and the system filled with hydraulic fluid without any thought to replacing seals and the like with something more appropriate to a hydraulic system. As such there was literally an inch of red gunge in the bottom of the fuselage. Luckily the wing and undercarriage did not require a lot of repair work.

It went on like this, and it was really only at the beginning of 2025 that we turned a corner towards completion with the matting of the fuselage and wing. This then allowed us to concentrate on firewall forward work, with all new cowling supports and cowls being manufactured, and the fit out of all systems.

With this underway we were finally able to put a timeline in place for a completion date. Mike had been keen to have her at Warbirds over Wanaka 2024, but that was unrealistic (from our point of view!), so 2026 it was to be. I had it in mind that we wanted to be running the engine by Christmas 2025, C of A inspection by the end of February, and test flying starting no later than 1 March.

In actuality, these dates all slipped a month, with initial engine runs taking place on 12 February, the C of A on 5 March and first flight on 29 March. I wasn't too worried about the delayed engine runs as we were getting a lot of other jobs out of the way and I didn't expect any problems... how wrong I was!

First, our newly overhauled starter failed to live up to the challenge. Luckily we had the original starter and a quick change got



us running, but the engine would not run smoothly in position other than just out of idle-cut-off.

At this stage I was ready to give Wanaka away, as I had sworn I would not get myself into the 'finish-itis' mindset. Each day that went by, I threatened to pull the

pin on the C of A inspection, but the team working on her were adamant we could have it done and, against my better judgement, booked the C of A inspection.

With that date finalised it was a race against time, but the guys pulled out all the stops and, other than painting of cowls and some fairings, had her ready for Mark Price's visit.

I thought this last work would take a week or so but it ended up taking three weeks. I was getting nervous as we had a lot of questions about how she would fly and whether committing to taking her to Wanaka was too big a call.

Ryan Southam did the test flying and it was testament to the team that, other than some adjustments to the rudder and elevator trims, all went smoothly and he was able to complete the test flying with a week to spare.

Seeing all three Yaks depart for Wanaka together was very special and I headed off after them in the WACO very content.

Unfortunately, during Thursday's practice day, we lost the LH brake whilst taxiing back after practice. The brakes had given us some grief during initial taxi checks, which we eventually put down to a big slug of air in the system. At the same time, we realised that the brakes fitted to the aeroplane were smaller than those on the other Yaks we operate, being 3-piston rather than 4-piston callipers. As the brakes were adequate, the decision was taken to replace these on return from Wanaka, as there was not enough time to do so prior to Easter.

We had a lot of help from Callum Smith and the team at Twenty 24 during the weekend, but were unable to rectify the issue with the gear we had, and thus the aeroplane is still parked in Wanaka.

Since Easter we've got a set of 4-pot brakes together and will travel down soon to rectify the issue, which we still believe is related to air trapped in the system somewhere.

Watch this space! 🛩️

# Notes on mountain flying

By Laurie Prouting



For the beginner, the mountains can be a scary place to fly, particularly for those who have learnt flying on the Canterbury Plains or in similar terrain.



Add some cloud and it can become tricky, add the nor-west wind and it can become difficult or a bit unpleasant. That's not to say we should avoid the mountains in these conditions, just that we should be more careful.

I would impress on the student to take their time, give themselves a wide margin, and carefully work their way along and, above all, be comfortable with what you are doing. If you don't feel it's right, then probably you should turn away early and try an alternative. This is the key: always have an alternative.

Let me explain what I mean by alternative and how it relates to mountain flying.

## Flying up a narrow valley

Don't just meander up the middle but fly close to one side, generally on the right-hand side both going up stream and right-hand side coming down (anti collision).

Why fly close to one side? It gives you an alternative if your engine fails. You have all the valley to do an about turn and fly to safety. The same applies if you are caught in a violent down draught – and this can and does happen on an apparently calm and sunny day.

## Flying across a ridge

Don't fly straight at the ridge, unless you have plenty of height, but fly *with* the ridge and when you are comfortable with the terrain on the other side, and that there are no down draughts close to the ridge that would upset you, just veer gently over the ridge – or, if you are not happy, just veer away, use your alternative!

## Flying through a saddle

Maybe there's a layer of cloud leaving you a relatively small gap to get through... again, leave yourself an alternative. Fly close to one side with the idea of flying past the saddle in a gentle turn and checking out conditions on the other side, just in case there's another layer of cloud rolling in from the next valley!

Remember, don't be caught up the creek without a paddle!

## Valley pitfalls

One of the most common mistakes learner pilots can make in our smaller valley systems is thinking that the valley floor is level and, believe it or not, some pilots align their aircraft with the valley floor thinking they are flying straight and level. Doing this, they can so easily turn a corner, pass over a couple of waterfalls and run out of height, manoeuvring room, airspeed and ideas all at the one time!

I've set some rules for myself when flying in what I call sharp or narrow valleys.

- 1: Enter the valley at such a height that in the event of an engine failure you'll have sufficient height to glide to clear going.
- 2: Keep a sharp watch on your airspeed indicator. In my opinion this suddenly becomes the most important instrument you have!
- 3: Only fly to the point where you can safely turn; don't go through a narrow part expecting the valley to open up again, or for cloud conditions to be suitable for a turn.
- 4: Give some thought to the prevailing conditions. It may pay to fly on the windward side, or the sunny side, where up draughts are more likely. The shady side, if covered in snow, just could have the odd down draught. There could be less risk than other traffic.
- 5: I always make myself sharpen up when I'm doing this type of flying. Just because you're on the windward side does not necessarily mean up draughts! Be quick to believe what is actually happening and take evasive action. Don't sit there fat, dumb and happy believing you are in an up draught if the reverse is true!
- 6: Take the common scenario of wanting to fly through a saddle with a low cloud base (Shooting the Gap). Be careful! It is most likely that there is quite an airflow coupled with strong up draughts or down draughts. Maybe the side you approach from is quite calm but, once you get through, you could be hit by a walloping big up draught that threatens to push you right into the cloud even though the aircraft is red lining in a screaming dive to stay clear! Give yourself some manoeuvring room, don't get too close to that cloud base under these circumstances. Somewhere in the good old rule book it tells us much the same thing.

Don't get me wrong, mountain flying is not dangerous if approached the correct way. The above are just some of the basics and some of the pitfalls. Part of the key to it all is:

- (a) Always have an escape route; Alternative;
- (b) Keep a sharp watch on your Airspeed;
- (c) Pay Attention to the conditions and to your flying.

Above all just feel your way along quietly, get comfortable with your tight turns in a confined space, and give yourself room.

Happy and safe flying. 🦋

# Update on the AOPA NZ

## Safety Advisory sub-committee

By Reuben Hansen

The AOPA NZ Safety Advisory sub-committee (SASC) exists to support safe flying within the organisation, while remaining closely connected to the realities of general aviation. The SASC's role, set by the AOPA NZ Committee, is an advisory one, providing oversight, offering guidance, and ensuring safety considerations are actively woven into AOPA NZ activities.

Following the recent AGM, I have taken over the lead role of the Safety Advisory sub-committee from Neville Bailey. I'd like to thank Neville for his hard work over the past twelve months; safety within AOPA NZ is in a strong position thanks to his efforts.

As part of this transition, I wanted to take the opportunity to share an overview of the role and purpose of the SASC, how it fits within AOPA NZ, and what the sub-committee has been doing recently.

The sub-committee is made up of pilots from a range of backgrounds, including PPL, CPL and ATPL holders, with experience

across airline operations, GA, air transport, instructing and, most importantly, recreational and back-country flying. The current members are Reuben Hansen, Neville Bailey, John Evans, Dave Paterson, Holly Lyttle and Richard Eberlein.

### Where do we fit within AOPA NZ?

Operating under the AOPA NZ constitution and reporting directly to the Committee, the Safety Advisory sub-committee works within a clearly defined governance framework. Recent governance strategy work by the wider Committee has provided clearer guidance around how the SASC operates and how its work integrates with the organisation as a whole.

The sub-committee's responsibilities cover a broad range of activity. At a practical level, it advises on the safe operation of AOPA NZ activities, considers safety matters raised by members, and oversees responses to incidents when they occur in connection with AOPA NZ fly-ins. Just as importantly, it provides informed recommendations to the Committee when safety considerations need to be factored in to wider organisational decisions.

An external review carried out in 2025 prompted some refinement in how the SASC operates, particularly around clarity of roles, decision-making, and internal processes. You may already be noticing some small changes in how fly-ins are administered as a result of this work.

With those refinements largely in place, the core focus of the SASC, looking ahead, is ensuring these changes are applied consistently, refined where needed, and informed by feedback received through the recent safety survey.

### The changing recreational aviation environment

The recreational aviation environment continues to evolve. There is more back-country flying across an increasing range of aircraft types, and we are seeing more microlights attending AOPA NZ fly-ins. Social and group based flying is also becoming increasingly popular, reflected in growing participation at our fly-ins.

These trends are of course positive in many respects. At the same time, they do introduce different risks and human factor considerations that are worth recognising.

We now have more occasions where pilots who may not know

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each other well (or at all) find themselves operating in close proximity, often in unfamiliar environments and with differing experience levels. Understanding how these dynamics affect safety is an important part of the SASC's role.

### Group flying and shared operations

Group and shared flying are good examples of how safety dynamics can change. Flying as part of a group, or attending a fly-in with unfamiliar aircraft and pilots, brings a different dimension to decision-making. Assumptions can be made, sometimes unconsciously, about who is responsible for which decisions, how risks have been assessed, or how operations will be conducted. Often these assumptions remain unnoticed until something doesn't quite line up.

One of the SASC's roles is to help highlight these dynamics and encourage simple, practical measures that support clarity. This is not about telling pilots how to fly, but about offering guidance that helps everyone operate from a shared understanding. In some cases, that may be as simple as encouraging clear discussion around how the Pilot in Command (PIC) intends to operate in a group.

### Pilot in Command responsibility

That leads back to one principle that remains constant, Pilot in Command responsibility.

Regardless of how a group flying environment may appear, PIC ownership does not change. In shared or social flying situations, responsibility can sometimes feel diffused unless it is clearly acknowledged. Reinforcing that understanding is a consistent element of the SASC's guidance and an important foundation for safe operations.

### How AOPA NZ supports safe operations

AOPA NZ supports safe operations through a range of practical mechanisms. Fly-in structures, pilot briefings, and agreed planning processes are all designed to reduce ambiguity and help pilots start from a common baseline.

These measures are not about adding unnecessary formality. They exist to make it easier for pilots to make informed decisions, particularly in unfamiliar or dynamic environments. Across a fly-in, we may have forty aircraft in attendance. The least experienced pilot might be a newly-qualified PPL attending their first AOPA NZ fly-in, keen to explore new places and meet new people. At the other end of the spectrum may be a life member who has attended fly-ins for much of their recreational flying life.

Bringing such a wide range of experience together in a safe and enjoyable way requires recognising those differences, respecting them, and providing structures that support everyone involved. In practice we see our more experienced members 'taking the new members under their wing', and this is one of the most satisfying things to see at a fly-in.

### Incident oversight and reporting

When incidents or unsafe matters arise in connection with AOPA NZ activities, the Safety Advisory sub-committee has responsibility for overseeing how those situations are assessed. Depending on the nature of the issue, this may involve internal review, recommending further action to the AOPA NZ Committee, or appointing independent specialist advisors where technical expertise or independence is required.



*Bringing a wide range of experience together in a safe and enjoyable way requires recognising and respecting differences, and providing structures that support all. Image: AOPA NZ One-Day fly-in, Kyeburn.*

The ability to seek external input is an important part of the sub-committee's mandate, particularly when conflicts of interest exist or specialist knowledge is needed.

Safety reporting plays an important role in this process. AOPA NZ operates on the basic principle that flying behaviour at fly-ins needs to be safe, and incidences of reckless airmanship are taken seriously. If you see something that concerns you, members are encouraged to speak with a Safety Advisory sub-committee member or submit a report through the website reporting form. While AOPA NZ is not a regulatory body, there is a shared expectation that fly-ins are conducted safely.

### Keeping safety visible

Beyond specific incidents, the SASC's broader contribution is in keeping safety visible across the organisation. Safety is most effective when it is part of normal flying activity, something pilots talk about openly, learn from, and apply without feeling scrutinised or second-guessed.

Based on experience, your Safety Advisory sub-committee recognises that when safety becomes overly formal or disconnected from real-world practice, engagement tends to drop away. Maintaining the right balance is not always easy. The sub-committee is required to consider unsafe matters brought to its attention, report these appropriately, and oversee actions agreed with the AOPA NZ Committee. At the same time, it aims to foster a culture where members feel comfortable raising concerns early, sharing experiences, and learning from each other without fear of unnecessary escalation.

Communication is central to this. The SASC does not operate in isolation, nor does it exist to enforce rules. Its value lies in constructive engagement with members, fly-in organisers, and the AOPA NZ Committee. By remaining accessible and visible, particularly at fly-ins and gatherings, the sub-committee can better understand operational realities and provide advice grounded in actual conditions rather than assumptions.

AOPA NZ already benefits from a strong safety culture. The role of the Safety Advisory Sub-committee is to support that culture on behalf of the wider organisation, providing oversight where required.

Ultimately, safety in recreational aviation is not delivered by documents or committees alone. It is delivered by pilots making good decisions, looking out for each other, and being willing to engage honestly with the realities of flying. The SASC aims to support that process, operating within its mandate from the AOPA NZ Committee and keeping safety firmly connected to how AOPA NZ members actually fly. 🦋

# ***Dodging bullets, mountains and malaria***

By Matt Anderson



I have a couple of wines on the way to Jakarta, both to calm myself before border entry and to get myself to sleep. Despite it, I'm tired, if mostly awake, upon landing. Figure that out. Race through the halls to baggage pickup then flash my QR customs code and I'm outside facing the hoards of taxis.

Fighting off sales people and drivers has become second nature. Ignore and keep walking to the Bluebird taxi stand. Take a queuing ticket and stand in line. The ticket caller shouts the numbers in Indonesian so I try to stay alert to hear my number called whilst holding bags and sweating in the humid air. Off to the hotel in the central city, 45-60 minutes away at this hour due to traffic.

My usual base is North Kalimantan, flying to one airport daily carrying near 4000 litres of diesel. My shift partner, Lucy Newell, and I have shared the work for a couple of years and sort out our rotations to work in with each other well.

This shift is different. This time I'm filling in for a pilot who's on medical leave, so I'm heading back to West Papua where I spent nine years flying Pilatus Porters around some of the most demanding airstrips on the planet. I'm here for a month flying the Airtractor 802, carting fuel into a couple of familiar mountain airports. I was last here more than five years ago — in fact my last flight here ended with a runway excursion into a fence, caused by a brake issue. I saved the plane as best

I could and prevented the full ground-loop. The plane was fixed up and flown out a few months later.

Regardless of accidents, I've learnt that trust in your own ability is important, but that it has to be reinforced by constant practice and currency focusing on basic fundamentals.

This trip I'm flying that same aircraft into that same airstrip with similar or bigger loads. It's great to see the big terrain again and land at these familiar strips. It will also be good to leave and finally put an end to my aviation in the region. I'd said 'no' to coming back over the last few years due to the security risks. This is, after all, where my mate Phil was kidnapped for 19 months, and another Kiwi chopper colleague was murdered around the same time.

Unfortunately, another tragedy happens just two days after I arrive back. Two Indonesian pilots are shot after landing at a remote airstrip in South Papua, less than 200 miles from my base in Timika town. It puts me on edge. After discussing it with other local pilots and seeing media reports



*Above: Matt's last tour in West Papua.  
Inset: remains of wrecked aircraft around airstrips  
serve as a compelling reminder of the risks.*

and statements from the Free Papua movement perpetrators, we decide to stay put and continue. This particular company was targeted because they continue to carry military personnel and cargo.

The conflict in West Papua has been ongoing for decades and continues to cause security issues all over the region. The flying was relatively safe and peaceful back in the mid 2010s, but those days are long gone. The airports we fly into are now patrolled by armed military, and we get security and risk reports before taking off for each flight. Around 90% of non-Indonesian pilots have left Papua in the last few years because of the increased risks.

The sad fact is the flying here is the best that any pilot could experience. Ask anyone who has flown in West Papua and the stories will be the same. Incredible landscapes, huge mountains, valleys, lakes,



*Extremely rugged terrain and hand-built mountain airstrips make flying in West Papua both rewarding and challenging. Image above taken on left base heading into Mulia.*

waterfalls, and hundreds of hand-built mountain airstrips. And the people are very friendly — apart from the ones who aren't. The flying can be very demanding, with tropical weather, terrain up to 16,000ft and challenging sloping airstrips with very high density altitude.

After arriving at the Timika base town I do some circuits to get current. The next few days involve taking partial loads to the two regular airstrips in the highlands then, by end of the week, max loads for those same places.

With Timika at sea level and the airstrips fifty or sixty miles away on the far side of 16,000 foot mountains, a constant climb to the en route passes then immediate descent to destination is required. The passes can be crossed at 13,000ft but with cloud usually around the tops, we often climb to 15,000ft for more terrain clearance and to stay above other traffic. Onboard oxygen is certainly required.

Mulia is a well-known mountain airport, and was one of the first I ever saw back in 2007 when starting out with Susiair. Since then I've flown in here with Caravans, Porters and now Airtractors. Remnants of a crashed Twin Otter are visible on the ridge above the airport. In the past Mulia has also seen planes shot at whilst landing, and numerous other politically motivated incidents.

After entering the valley to land, I'm committed. If something bad happens, I either dump and run, or continue to land, which might be preferable since I'm going to be further from Papuan freedom fighters with guns aiming at the sky once

down in the valley floor and surrounded by Indonesian military.

Landing the AT802 on a sloping strip at 6000ft in high terrain requires a normal stable approach. Landing weights are up around 15,000lbs (6.8tons) for Mulia. The slope is ten percent and length is 700m. Once flap is down I hit my usual key point, which is a road on a ridge off my right wingtip. Set attitude for the speed I want. Then with full flap set, enough power to give me 500fpm descent.

The second airstrip is Ilaga, one of the most demanding in Papua at 7500ft and only 600m. Loads are limited to 2200l diesel, and we have a wind curfew of 9am, before anabatic tailwinds start up. Most of the 600m is used with firm braking and reverse. In lay terms it's basically chop and drop, then stand on all pedals and pull the biggest levers backwards... without delay. Some arrivals can be messy but as long as the plane is down to walking speed at the top, we're good to use it again to go home. This strip has also seen major problems in the past with shootings and a high number of accidents, which occur every year due to overruns and runway excursions. There is a stack of old wings, bent fuselages, engines and other bits lying next to the apron as reminders of recent misjudgments.

Considerations for flying in Papua are plenty. Engine failure options are very few. If we're high enough, a possible glide to the south flatlands might work. There are only a couple of airstrips and one of those is a closed red zone area with possible Papuan freedom fighters present.

The last thing anyone wants is to survive a forced landing only to be taken hostage — or worse. Riverbeds can be an obvious choice too. Over the tops, the terrain is rugged. There are a few more airstrips, but they wouldn't be easy to get to with so much terrain between them. With the amount of jungle, crashing into trees is almost a certainty. We've spoken about going into trees and certainly maintaining controlled flight above stall is a must.

Meanwhile, at our other base in Kalimantan, there has been another major accident. This time our competition company crashed an Airtractor near the airport we fly into. Cause unknown at this stage and, sadly, the pilot did not get out. Another bad month for aviation in Indonesia.

During my final week in Papua we have endless days of 40-50kt winds blowing parallel to the ranges, so crossing them has to be done with care. Our usual passes are about 20 miles downwind of the 16,000ft Puncak Jaya peaks and the Freeport mine area. A few times I have to sink before crossing the pass. With the 1400hp engine at its limit, turning out to climb higher for a safer crossing altitude has to be done. It feels like being in a Jodel crossing the Matukituki saddle in the wrong wind.

The amount of air traffic has increased a lot since I was last here. Timika airport is now base to more than fifteen Caravans, about ten helicopters and numerous other jets and turboprops. All have ADS-B in and out, and we are watched and separated on radar with squawk codes coming and going. Holds and orbits are common to fit the returning traffic in. Pilots call each other to say 'happy landing', but recently I've noticed departing pilots farewell controllers with 'happy controlling'.

In the past we had regular weekend BBQs outside, ignoring the mozzies and sinking a few beers. I learnt my lesson harshly for not protecting myself.

Timika town has one of the highest rates of malaria prevalence in Indonesia. I've caught it twice through my years of working in Papua; my first experience served with a side of typhoid fever.

I knew I had some sort of fever on my way out to Jakarta on a scheduled break so I wandered down to a hospital near my



Left: Finals at Ilaga, one of many rural strips that dot the Papuan highlands. Above: some of the wrecks that lie on either side of the runway.

hotel. They did some tests then the doctor sat me down and said, “These pills are for your typhoid, these are for malaria.”

I looked at him like he was an alien. I said, “Okay, thanks very much,” thinking that was probably what they said to all dumb looking westerners. And I wandered back to my hotel.

Well, the following fortnight was a mix of high fevers, soaking the bed in sweat most nights then going off like a firecracker from every orifice at any time and in any direction. The old Doc must’ve been correct.

My second malaria event happened around six years later, the last time I was in this town. I got tested and treated before leaving Papua. Or so I thought.

My first relapse occurred while I was in an MIQ facility in Auckland, which really set off alarm bells among the staff during the height of the pandemic. My second relapse, also in New Zealand, revealed that I have a rare genetic condition requiring a much higher drug dose than the common protocol.

Malaria really does knock you down. Fortunately for me, on both occasions I

contracted the non-deadly type. Bottom line for me is not to get it again.

With that in mind, I elected to stay at a Kiwi mate’s homestay in Timika instead of in a company hotel. Most of our staff have had malaria while working and staying at the hotel, and Ian’s place has better protection against mosquitos. I’m lucky to have a better option.

So the eventful month in Papua is done. Next is a full day’s travel to the Kalimantan base, 1200 miles away, into the other plane for a few weeks, then home for a Speights and Jimmy’s pie. 🐔

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# Who will sign out your aircraft?

By Dan Clearwater

Authorised by AOPA NZ Charitable Trust Chair,  
Mandy Deans

Many GA aviators are finding it harder to get the engineering support they need to keep flying. AOPA NZ's charitable Trust, ThinkAviation, is working on a solution.

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For instance, the engineering shop in Alexandra, Central Otago, lost its senior engineer, so Mike Kelly travels down from Wanaka each week to certify the work.

"Younger engineers are sometimes reluctant to sit their licensing exams, or they get tempted by bigger money and other perks at larger companies or overseas," says Mike. "That leaves us with a dwindling number of Licenced Aircraft Maintenance Engineers (LAME) in General Aviation, and fewer coming through in the next generation."

At 90 years old, Mike still works as an engineer, drawing on a lifetime's worth of experience. He qualified in 1955, and has worked on big jets, gliders, helicopters, hot air balloons and more, all around New Zealand. Mike was also a pilot, and was involved in establishing AOPA NZ in the 1970s.

Up at the other end of the island, readers will probably be familiar with regular magazine columnist Jay McIntyre who is the owner and Inspection Authorisation rated LAME of JEM Aviation in Omaka.

"Some of the challenges are around the way the rules work for companies that cater for larger aircraft, and are certified under Part 145, versus companies operating under Part 43, which often suit aircraft owned by AOPA NZ members," says Jay. "Part 145 organisations can approve staff to conduct certain work, which means that staff members don't necessarily need a licence. In contrast, Part 43 requires all work to be done under supervision of a LAME."

Because aircraft work is very hands-on and time consuming, labour costs factor in strongly in the final bill. "We're a Part 43 operation, so it's a delicate balance of charging enough for the business, without putting it out of reach of our customers," Jay says, adding that in the eyes of a young engineer, other careers offer similar pay with fewer responsibilities. "We've lost people to plumbing jobs, auto mechanics... These days, working at McDonalds is surprisingly well-paid for a role with no qualifications and limited responsibility."

Back in Wanaka, AOPA NZ Life Member Shaun Gilbertson is grateful that Mike Kelly is still available to sign out his aircraft. "He's tried to retire three times but, thankfully for us, he's come back to help us out. Our concern is that fewer young people are getting into the industry, and not enough make it through to becoming a licensed engineer."

So Shaun decided to do something about the problem. "With the establishment of the AOPA NZ Charitable Trust, there's an opportunity to directly support GA engineering, through initiatives like internships and licensing support."

Shaun says the idea of a '100 Club' fund-raising campaign has been percolating for a while. "I'm looking for 100 members to each donate \$1000. That's \$100k for the Trust, which is a bloody good start for building a future where there are enough engineers for General Aviation."

The Trustees and Shaun are looking for a balance of long-term impact, whilst starting the ball rolling now. That's why half of the funds raised will go to the Trust's long-term capital (endowment) fund, and half towards initiatives in the near term.

In the long-term, the Trust is aiming for a \$5 million capital (endowment) fund from a wide range of donations, partnerships and bequests, allowing investment returns to eventually fund the Trust's programmes and operations.

"A thousand bucks is about the same as one engine re-build shared among each of the 100 Club members," says Shaun. "Or about one tank of gas for the aircraft many of us operate. And because it's a donation, you get a third back as a tax credit, so it's only \$666 that really leaves your wallet."

The Trust is well underway with researching internship opportunities, in the first instance with high-school students in the Central Otago-Lakes District. Starting small will allow the Trustees to refine the programme before growing the scope and geographical area.

To join the club and donate \$1000 specifically for the support of GA engineering, visit [ThinkAviation.nz/100club](http://ThinkAviation.nz/100club).



# How do you know when to stop?

By Richard Bradley



I'm on record over many years as saying that I'd stop flying when I was ready – not when I had to, due to a failed medical, a failed BFR, CAA charges, or an accident. In other words, stopping flying would be my decision.

My first logged flight was 1 September 1974 in the Central Hawkes Bay (CHB) Aero Club's C150 ZK-DMG, now owned by Laurie Prouting. This was dual with the late Barry Hunt, who was a local Fieldair topdressing pilot doing some instructing at the time for the Aero Club.

My last flight as PIC was on 9th October 2022 in CHB Aero Club's C172 ZK-FGJ to Charlie Draper's fly-in at Darfield. In between were 1935.3 hours of terror, happiness, learning and comradeship. And most of all, almost 2000 hours of memories.

There had been some challenges with the Class Two medical along the way, mostly with a genetically high cholesterol, which required a very costly treadmill ECG at Palmerston North hospital and medication. When Dr Dave asked for another stress ECG at a later date, I declined his kind offer, the urine sample was poured on the lemon tree outside the door and, as I had already had an RPL for some years, I went on my merry way.

From 1984 I had been lucky enough to be a member of a three-person syndicate that owned C172M ZK-DUK. At the time of declining the offer of another ECG, I was still lucky enough to be a member of another three-person syndicate that owned Citabria 7GCBC ZK-CRT and, as

this was a two-seater, the RPL presented no restriction. Eventually commonsense broke out all round and passenger limits pertaining to the RPL were eased, so I could fly the club 172 with all seats full.

The 2000 hours of memories include many trips enjoyed by our family of four, often to AOPA NZ safaris and gatherings. Wendy and I had two trips in Australia in hired C182s, which remain our favourite flying memories. Both trips involved around fifty hours of flying, and at 130kt, it's not hard to figure out the distance we covered. There is a lot of Australia we haven't yet seen, but those trips gave us a fondness for the outback, the roadhouses, the station stays and the wonderful station and rural people of Australia.

## Enjoyment

It might seem obvious, but to continue to fly, it's most important that you enjoy it – the flying, the people and the whole experience.

For many years I was inclined to continue on in less than enjoyable conditions when we were heading to a destination that one knew would be a great deal of fun with fantastic people. We attended all the Wanaka airshows, from the very first one in the early eighties through to the mid-nineties. It was a bi-annual trip that always involved a few nights at Martins



Image: John King

Richard has always been a strong supporter of AOPA NZ. Top: Martins Bay, 22 years ago.

Bay with the wonderful Jules Tapper and his team, which one year included a very young Andy Woods. That was followed by a few nights at Dingleburn, hosted initially by the Sarginsons and later by the Meads. I'm lucky enough to have a genuine Milford rating endorsed in my logbook by Jules. The memories.

As the years passed, if the weather was difficult on the outward, or likely to be difficult on the homeward trip, I was less inclined to attend. Strong winds were always a major concern, with the worry of a 172 tied down in a less-than-ideal situation, or crosswind landings in the Citabria. It became less fun sometimes.

## Medical matters

Health, hearing, eyesight... and the elephant in the room for all of us, memory – or lack of. Latterly, I was flying on a DL9, which I still have, as I have a Class 5 drivers' licence, which I still use. While

the memory certainly is not what it once was, it still seems okay for the drivers' licence. My next check on that comes in two years' time, undertaken by the GP.

The change tends to manifest slowly. While I once knew most of the radio frequencies for the areas I flew in, in the later stages I always had to look them up to be sure. I started using check lists religiously – all the time.

If your health is great, that's a good reason to continue flying as PIC... but check yourself regularly.

### Currency and BFR

When did you last have some dual? One of the hardest things for me was staying current, initially in the Club's 172 and the Citabria. To be current, the regs require three take-offs and landings in the previous 90 days to carry Pax. In the early days that was no problem at all, and the transition from one plane to the other was smooth and competent. It gradually became harder. There is nothing worse than arriving at destination and finding that some part of the arrival and landing process proves challenging, causing you to wish you'd done more hours at home.

I've done a lot of flying with instructors, and that made it very easy to get checked out. BFRs and pre-hire flights with very young instructors in Australia were always great value. In the early years we did a lot of RNZAC competitions, so having an instructor on board became quite normal and was always a great learning experience.

### Availability of aircraft

If you have your own aircraft, availability is not really an issue. Cost, however, might be. If you are doing only five hours of flying a year, your costs could well be \$1000 to \$1500 an hour. At some point



*Trips of a lifetime, air-touring Australia. Birdsville proved a favourite stop (above); one of many strange sights – a float plane in the desert (right).*

you might need to consider whether this might be better shared with someone else who can take you flying in their aircraft.

### Technology

EFB, AvPlan etc, ADS-B, radios, CTR, pre-flight info – it all became quite challenging for me in the later years. The AvPlan system I used was absolutely fantastic and OzRunways is probably just as good. So much easier than paper maps all over the place in a tandem seat aircraft. As I am colour blind, all the different coloured lines south of Rangiora proved a special challenge on the way to Darfield and great care was needed. I enjoyed the use of ATC always – this was not an issue. But doing the right thing and always being in the right place became something that worried me.

Our home airfield and several others around the country have runways aligned 20/02 and I didn't ever want to be the old fella who joined for the wrong end. An air traffic controller at CHCH recently told me that if you can't see the traffic that called



final 20, have a look at the other end and usually that is where they'll be. I wanted to stop before that happened, and before I needed remedial dual for a BFR or failed a medical.

It may not feel like it will be an easy decision to take, but knowing when to take it is not as hard as you might think. Most of us have been through a similar process, for example, in helping our parents review when they need to stop driving, with the object of preventing them from injuring themselves or causing injury to others. This situation is no different from the decision which needs to be made about when to stop flying as PIC. I'm happy with the decision I made, with when I made it, and most of all with the fantastic memories I have of our flying adventures over the years. 🦅

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# Giving back: Des Lines

By Ross Millichamp

At the 2026 AOPA NZ AGM, Des Lines was awarded the GA Champion trophy, for services to general aviation. Although he had a celebrated career as an airline pilot, it is what he has done since that convinced the Life Members to select him for the award.

Des grew up in the Maniototo with only a loose connection to aviation. His uncle, Gerald George, was a local top-dressing pilot, and the occasional trip in his Auster was sufficient to convince Des that aviation was to feature heavily in his future. While still in high school, Des got a part-time job at the Ranfurly General store and used his earnings to fund flying lessons through the North Otago Aero Club. The club brought a Cessna 172 up

from Oamaru to Patearoa at regular intervals, and taught Des and a group of other young people from the farm strip. Shortly after going solo at the age of 16, he moved to Christchurch to take up an office job with National Airways Corporation (NAC). It was his first proper job and he stayed with the company until he retired as an Air New Zealand 747-400 Captain many years later!

Des worked in the NAC office while

continuing his flight training with the NAC Flying Club. He finished his PPL and built up hours as a tow pilot with the Canterbury Gliding Club while still working full-time for NAC. Once qualified as a CPL he embarked on a furious programme of sending out expressions of interest to aviation companies, in the hope of securing a permanent flying role. NAC, in particular, assembled a significant file on Des because he sent them 'updates'



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*Thinking of selling? Let us be of service!*

every time he completed a theory course or passed a flight test.

However, the first nibble came from Tourist Air Travel, looking for a pilot to fly Grumman Wigeon amphibians in Fiordland. Des spent a week with Bryan Antill learning the ins and outs of the Wigeon before returning to Christchurch to wait his final interview with Fred Ladd. Fred was too slow. In the meantime an offer came from NAC to join their next intake of airline trainees. There were eight pilots on the course, several from a top-dressing background, and only two had any IFR experience. It was literally a case of learning on the job while working as a co-pilot on the DC3.

Most of Des' flight experience had been on Austers and Cubs, so he was comfortable in the big tailwheel airliner. "As long as you landed on the main wheels and kept the tailwheel up, it was like a big Cub," he says.

NAC had retained the aging DC3s because they were cheap to buy and suited to the smaller regional airports that were yet to install sealed runways. In those days the IFR approaches often ended well short of the runway, and the pilots all had their own ways of flying the final VFR leg to the airfield. There were few company Standard Operating Procedures and much was left to the pilot's discretion.

In another example of how different aviation was in those days, Des remembers one occasion when the Captain stopped the DC3 as it was taxiing out to the runway, passed him a sick bag and asked him to duck out and grab the mushrooms he had noticed on the way in!

After 18 months on the DC3, Des moved through the various aircraft types operated by NAC and its international brother, Air New Zealand. Friendships, Viscounts and 737s as copilot, then back to Friendships and 737s as captain, before moving to international operations on 767s, 747-200s and 747-400s. Some of his mates tease Des about having only had one job his whole life! In 2003 Des was forced to retire at 60 years of age, being one of the last few pilots affected by that draconian policy.

Some years earlier, Des and Adrienne had purchased a property at Swannanoa, on the north side of Christchurch. His dream was always to live on a private

airfield, but the 22 acres of the original block were barely sufficient. The small farm cottage was also very tight for the family of six but, over time, both the property and the house grew. Over the next twenty years they added a number of hangars and an additional 45 acres of land, turning Swannanoa into a thriving aviation base.

It has three vectors, 800m to the NE/SW, 600m to the NW/SE and 500m to the N/S. Des houses four of his own aircraft there, a Yak 52, a Piper Cub, a Tiger Moth and an Isaacs Fury (a scale model of a Hawker Fury, a British between-wars biplane fighter). A few other privately-owned aircraft are also based there.

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*From Des, young people with an interest in aviation learn "the fundamentals of aviation, and the life skills required to achieve a career in the field."*

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Des wisely obtained a Certificate of Compliance for the airfield thirty years ago, which has secured its presence despite encroachment by lifestyle blocks all around him. However, Des has not relied on that piece of paper to avoid conflicts with his neighbours. He offers rides in the Tiger Moth to anyone and everyone who either lives nearby or who has an interest in aviation. His records of these flights reveal that to date he has given more than 900 people their first ride in an open cockpit biplane.

Des' generosity with his time and aircraft has led to another endeavour which is truly unique. Soon after he retired, Des was approached by a local pre-school wanting to bring kids to Swannanoa to look at his aircraft and sit behind the controls. This proved so popular with the youngsters that it was followed by an approach from an intermediate school teacher who hoped a similar experience could be offered to their students. Des decided to make that visit a little more challenging, and put together a 'lesson' designed to help the students put their general science knowledge to work in a practical environment. The lessons, woven around an aviation theme, were an instant hit, and more than 3000 students have participated in these free-of-charge school visits over the years.

Des also began his now renowned Tuesday Night classes, where young people with an interest in aviation come to his hangar and learn the fundamentals of aviation, and the life skills required to achieve a career in the field.

When I visited for the presentation of the AOPA NZ award, participants ranged from 11 year old Tomas, to Canterbury Aero Club's International Aviation Academy student Roland, aged 33. The class runs every Tuesday throughout the year, with the exception of a short shutdown over Christmas.

Des excels at teaching 'soft' skills – things like public speaking, problem solving and various aspects of personal growth – rather than focussing solely on the directly relevant aviation skills. To achieve this, he relies on cleverly chosen practical examples. One that I was suckered by, was a challenge to get a bead of toothpaste back into the tube. After trying all manner of techniques, I learned that the point of the exercise was to demonstrate that once words come out your mouth, you cannot take them back.

There is no formal induction or graduation process from Des' academy. People come and go as they see fit. One thing his 'graduates' generally have in common is that they tend to be high achievers.

Des believes that one of his points of difference is his lack of political correctness. He is able to challenge students in ways that might not fit within the school system. Of course, his students' passion for aviation ensures that anything unexpected that Des might throw at them is taken in good spirits, and on the understanding that the goal is to improve their chance of success in their dream career.

Des is now in his eighties, still actively flying, but thinking about a succession plan and wanting to investigate ways to continue and grow the programme in the future.

Mandy Deans and Richard Bradley of AOPA NZ's ThinkAviation Trust recently attended one of Des' Tuesday night classes. "We were blown away by what Des is achieving, and we are keen to try and replicate it outside North Canterbury," Mandy says.

Keep an eye out for information from the Trust about ways you may be able to help as this concept is developed.



# Celebration and farewell at Lismore

By Aaron Murphy



On a stunning Canterbury day in mid March, a good sized gathering of around twenty aircraft and their owners, as well as friends of the Vincent family, gathered to celebrate fifty years of the family Auster ZK-AZF, affectionately known as 'Alfie'.

While the day had been planned around Alfie, it was also an appropriate occasion, as Les and Elizabeth Vincent move on to the next chapter of their lives, to bid farewell to the Lismore airfield.

The Bell family has owned Lismore for 169 years. Elizabeth (nee Bell) and Les have been on their portion of the property for 63 years and, over this time, many a GA flyer has been welcomed with a cuppa and a chat whenever they chose to land on the picturesque airstrip, inland from Ashburton.

The day proved especially poignant for Les, as his granddaughter Hayley took him up for a flight as her first Auster passenger. On hand to witness the flight were many Vincent family members,

including sons Andrew and Murray, both well known in aviation circles, their partners, and Les' brother Peter.

The celebration included a very enjoyable BBQ lunch on the farm, after which Les shared a few words with the assembled guests before aircraft departed for home. Lismore Airfield then closed its doors to visiting aircraft for the last time.

A day or so later, after both Alfie and Les' gyrocopter departed for Ashburton, the new owners began preparing Lismore for its next chapter as a working farm.

Les reports that he is working towards the end of his 63 year flying career with mixed feelings, but with gratitude for the wonderful time he has had. With Les still involved with the Ashburton Aviation



Andrew Vincent, with daughter Hayley, flies Alfie above Lismore; three generations of the Vincent family; Les out for a spin in his gyro-copter, almost exactly fifty years after he joined AOPA NZ's forerunner, the Kittyhawk Flying Club.

Museum and his sons and several grandchildren active in civilian and military aviation careers, the Vincent name seems likely to continue in New Zealand aviation circles for many years yet.

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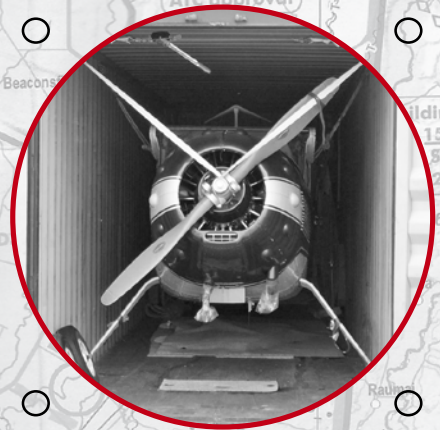
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