

Whitianga, Coromandel *Good for your Soul*

It was the sight of Phil Welcome getting airborne in his Tiger Moth at Whitianga this arvo and heading over the hill in the general direction of Matarangi, under a low cloud base, that suggested another story. Phil had said last weekend that he was off to the Kaikohe Tiger Moth rally next weekend but would have to keep an eye on the weather to ensure that his short range Tiger @ 75 mph would get to Kaikohe on one fuel tank! That is aviation in its most wonderful sense!

Having done a Tiger flight many years ago with my sister, inspired by the adventure of flight, I relived the adventure that Phil was embarking on. My sister Alison was particularly intrepid in the days that I was earning my "wings" and willingly agreed to embarking on such an adventure, in the frosty days of a late autumn weather pattern that began with a before daylight motorcycle ride out of Auckland to Ardmore airfield. Already chilled by the early departure from Auckland, we prepared ourselves for the next leg of the journey in the Tiger from Ardmore. Flight planning arranged and SARTIME in place we rose into the air on a clear frosty morning for Raglan and Hamilton, for refuel, and back to Ardmore.



I had the wonderful experience of being introduced into light aircraft flying by Pat Doherty after expressing my interest in aviation to him when we worked at Dominion Breweries together. He was already a "Tiger" pilot with the Auckland Gliding Club and suggested he take me up for a flight sometime. This was duly arranged and my first light aircraft flight was in a Tiger! This inspired me with the reality of flight and my continued interest in light aircraft, leading onwards, as planned, to the adventure in aviation that I have enjoyed.

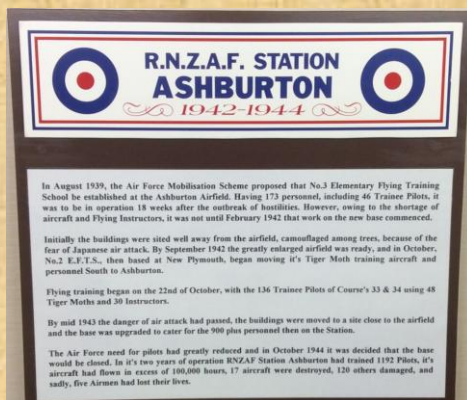
So Phil dragged me away from my computer work, at the sound of his Gypsy engine going past my front deck, making me wonder who was flying a Tiger today at Whitianga? It all came flooding back as I remembered Alison and I landing on a beautiful calm morning in Raglan before continuing onwards to Hamilton for the refuel and warm-up coffee or hot chocolate, as Alison chose, with me wandering off to pay landing fees at the Waikato Aero Club House, Alison, independently, shed her Bearlike Tiger Moth clothing outer layers and became a "girl" once again, surprising the gathered bunch of aviators who were enjoying their early morning coffees and teas in the sunshine of the front landing at the Aero Club. "It's a girl" was the surprised remark as we enjoyed the conviviality of the Aero Club Scene before getting airborne again for Ardmore and the end of the adventure on a fine frosty morning in a Tiger.

Back again in Whiti this morning and drawing the curtains back to see how the day begins (as I hear farmers do too, Alistair) I spied my neighbour Buster had his hangar door open. What's going on there, I mused? A late morning breakfast followed by a quick sortie down town had me pulling up outside his place a short time later to see "wots up?" I realised his annual inspection was underway last weekend after seeing him scratching his head over the re installation of his overhauled magnetos and finding the position was not aligning correctly, I thought I would drop by to see how things were going. Buster had, a couple of weekends previously, headed off to the SAA annual fly in at Ashburton (741nm away as the crow flies), in the South Island, with his tent and fellow Whitianga pilot, Bruce. I had caught up with them on Waitangi Day as I was also overnighing in Christchurch that night. A quick evaluation in Sydney while I awaited my connecting aircraft, said I could bus it to Ashburton on the layover.

As these were the part of the team heading for Osh Kosh this year, I was wondering how they were coping with the great outdoors! When we pulled up at the aerobridge the night before in Christchurch, the sky literally opened up. A downpour hit the airport just as we 'parked brakes'. No worries, straight to the hotel for us!

Next morning as I rode the bus to Ashburton, I spied the snow on the hills to the west as we drove south. After being dropped off on the main highway in Ashburton, walking to the strip seemed like a long way as I hadn't been back here since the Aero Club days years ago. Meeting up with Buster and Bruce was a surprise, shortly after entering the show and to hear their story of the cold windy night on the field overnight reminded me that that can happen at Osh Kosh too! Be prepared! Tents are wonderful experiences but the dawn takes a long time to arrive as the shivering takes hold and the sleep doesn't come easily under the stars!

After hitch hiking back to Christchurch (the bus failed to pick me up!) and away next day to Sydney and Auckland, I felt I had shared part of Buster and Bruce's adventure in Ashburton!. A different sense, of course, but still enjoyable and my days OFF pattern coincided with their return to Whitianga airfield where we were regaled with their stories of the journey and expedition south over some amber fluid specially brewed for aviators, as we sat on the deck of the Departure Lounge Cafe at the Mercury Bay Aero Club.



In turn, this led on to the next event at Whitianga which was the RNZAC National Championships hosted by the Auckland Aero Club held on 25 February 2015. Much activity took place over the week beginning with a number of 3 ship formations flying around Mercury Bay in the lead up to judging day. Aircraft flew in from far and wide to a week of conviviality and great weather. This made the whole week one to remember, marred only by the Bridge Pa team members needing to leave one of their Tomahawk aircraft behind after it suffered a split nose oleo on completing their final 3 ship formation run.

My requested days OFF enabled me to compete in the Precision Circuit in which Bill, our MBAC President, had encouraged us all to have a go, at the Wild Card event. Not being at the Saturday prize giving event, I didn't have to get what must have been the booby prize for the longest landing of the day! Whoops, more practice required for next time as I believe all the Aero Club pilots practice this stuff! Our little 309 "roadie" expedition today, after the monthly MBAC committee meeting, to the Mussel Kitchen in Coromandel, allowed us a quick reconnoitre of the Coromandel airstrip, ideal for spot landing practice and skill development, eh Bill?



Talley ho for now



Wally Pendray
Tiki Touring Guide