



Flight of Passage

Contributed by Julie Milne

On 28 December 2011 Chloe Milne started a ten day flying adventure around New Zealand. Piloting a Cessna 172 from Waikato Aero Club the aim was to land at 21 airstrips across the country to celebrate her 21st birthday.

THE IDEA came a year earlier when in January 2011 Chloe was watching Ewan McGregor and Charley Boorman's Long Way Round and Long Way Down motor cycle journeys. She decided right then and there to take a flying trip to celebrate her 21st. By this stage Chloe had just completed her first solo flight and so a plan was set in place to achieve her PPL by the end of the year.

Early on Chloe decided that it would be wise to take along an experienced pilot. Fortunately, Tony Petch, an experienced charter pilot, had invited Chloe to join team WAM as photographer, in the Great Northern Air Race in late January 2011. She had a great time with Tony and Viv Webb, not least because team WAM won – hence Tony was the obvious co-pilot. En route they would decide which legs each would fly and in particular which airstrips Chloe would land at to accumulate her 21 target.

Chloe's father Graeme and her brother Ross, both with PPLs, were also keen to join the trip in Graeme's Dynamic sport aircraft, MLC. So eager was Ross that he flew back from his work in Denmark especially to take part.

By early December 2011 Chloe had gained her PPL from Waikato Aero Club along with a rating in a Cessna 172. The plane was booked, naturally it was WAM, and the departure date pencilled in.

On departure day a prolonged period of rain was forecast for the north so the team wanted to get from Hamilton to at least Christchurch and onto Dunedin the next day to beat the weather. However, it was a tense wait until 2pm when WAM and MLC finally got away after waiting for a new oil transducer to arrive and be fitted in WAM.

An hour later and the first landing, Paraparaumu, was in the bag. However, WAM's take off was aborted because the oil flap cover opened. Fixed and with WAM back in the air, MLC radioed with an alternator fault. That was also quickly remedied and the trip was back on track.

Tony had suggested they fly through the Awatere Valley on the next leg south, and it didn't disappoint with smooth air and great views. En route their departure had aired on TV One news and a quarter of an hour later Chloe made her first radio call

to Christchurch International Airport – the reply "Whiskey Alpha Mike, Christchurch Tower, Good evening Chloe" was a huge thrill followed by the delight of being able to land on the 3.29 km main runway.

It was now the 29th of December so after take-off, a quick look at the Rhythm and Alps festival was compulsory albeit while climbing to 6,500 feet to overfly Mount Hutt, then onto Timaru for a quick stop, and then along the coast to the homely Taieri clubhouse, Dunedin, and the free coconut biscuits.

Ryan's Creek on Stewart Island was one of two airstrips Chloe really wanted to land at. Permission to land was granted and with a one knot wind, conditions were perfect. As the team joined overhead Ryan's Creek, the pre-organised shuttle had already arrived to take them to Oban for lunch.

Given such a perfect day they circumnavigated the island going right down to the amazing Smith's Lookout and of course beyond South West Cape, the most southerly point. They refuelled at Gore, where it got seriously hot, and continued on to Mandeville for a relaxed hot chocolate in the sun.

As they touched down in picturesque Te Anau, Fiordland Aero Club President Murray Hagen, later known more affectionately as Muza, was already hurtling down the road to pick up the team and escort them to their motel. Muza, the second person in New Zealand to fly a Microlight, became a legend to the team by, among other things, lending them his car to get back to the airstrip the next day.

After a good night's sleep and the compulsory briefing it was onto Milford

Sound – a major highlight and flying challenge. On short finals without the option of a go-around, and with the notoriously fickle winds and significant sink, it was full concentration until Chloe, with input from Tony, had WAM on the ground. Chloe was amazed at the scale and grandeur of Milford, to which photos couldn't do justice.



L to R: Tony Petch, Chloe Milne, Ross Milne (Chloe's brother) and Graeme Milne (Chloe's Dad).



WAM overhead Awatere Valley. Ross Milne photo.



Chloe and Tony at Milford Sound. Ross Milne photo.

Just as the team approached Mount Aspiring cruising at 9,000 feet the alternator fault reappeared and forced MLC to fly direct to Wanaka but WAM took in the full beauty of the summit before catching up on the ground with MLC and their new friend Wayne Allanson from U-Fly Wanaka. With Wayne's help MLC was fixed, leaving the team to relax in Wanaka for New Year's Eve.

A new day and a new year saw them fly at 11,000 feet around Mount Cook and over the crystal blue Godley Lakes and then back to land at Glentanner for fish and chips, while watching the helicopters ferry tourists to the glacier. And then what better way to spend New Year's afternoon than at the Kahu Café in Omarama, with its organic fizzy drinks and fabulous pancakes, watching the gliders return to base in a very stiff afternoon easterly.

Despite much of the North Island being deluged in rain, the first hint of bad weather for the team came on 2nd January forcing a pause in Ashburton before finding a gap in the weather sufficient to fly on to Rangiora. MLC was swapped for DYN to allow MLC to get new brakes fitted and with clearing showers the next day it was off to Woodbourne for cherries.

Upon arrival in Nelson, Chloe was

delighted to receive a handmade spitfire badge from Martin at The Nelson Mail. When Chloe took friends for a round trip to Adele Island, Waikato Aero Club staff watching Spidertracks assumed that bad weather had turned them back.

With the weather clearing and Tony back on board they flew up to French Pass, over the Marlborough Sounds and across Cook Strait, then through Ohakea controlled air space to Whanganui and New Plymouth. In fading light and with the odd shower to negotiate, they eventually arrived at Hamilton for a rest day.

There were only four airstrips to go. At this point they were joined by Geoff Andrew, a TV One news camera man With his three cameras including a go-pro, the team felt more like celebrities than adventurers for the final leg.

First stop was Dargaville for morning tea (did you know the Dargaville Aero Club gives free instruction for flying lessons there!). Reaching Cape Reinga and North Cape's Surville Cliffs (the northern most point) was a milestone. They had now flown around mainland New Zealand's northern and southern most points and DYN radioed across their congratulations.

Then it was a birthday hug at the most northern public airfield, Kaitaia, the team again receiving true northern hospitality.

As Chloe's Dad had inspired her to fly it was fitting that Rockhaven, at the family home, was to be the 21st landing. It's a tricky airstrip with hills and trees to navigate and only 520 metres long, so cameraman Geoff, and luggage, were off-loaded in Hamilton, thus lightening the load and giving Geoff a chance to get the camera set up on site to record the moment of touchdown. On the first attempt Chloe made a go-around (the first go-around of the trip). The second attempt resulted in a perfect landing.

For Chloe it was an amazing adventure made possible by the inclusion of Tony and support from the Waikato Aero Club. She had wanted to inspire others to do something a little different for their 21st and Facebook messages suggest that she may just have achieved that.

The final 21 airstrips that Chloe landed at, in order, were Paraparaumu, Christchurch International Airport, Timaru, Invercargill, Ryan's Creek Stewart Island, Gore, Mandeville, Te Anau, Milford Sound, Glentanner, Omarama, Ashburton, Rangiora, Woodbourne, Nelson, Whanganui, New Plymouth, Dargaville, Kaitaia, Whangarei and Rockhaven - the home farm airstrip.

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