

Ag. Planes Past and Present

Part 3 - The DHC-2 Beaver

In our last issue, part two of John Nicolson's series on New Zealand's aerial topdressing history covered the venerable Tiger Moth. He continues here with another classic and much loved aircraft:

AND then came the awesome DHC-2 Beaver (my favourite ag. plane of all), 33 of which started to arrive here from January 1951. The big Kiwi 450hp all-metal Beaver was the first of our single engine, large-capacity aerial topdressers with a payload of 2,200lb/997kg. In contrast, the Aussie ag. Beavers were fitted out with a 35 cubic foot hopper that could carry only 1850lb/839kg of solids or 1000 litres of chemicals.

The Beaver has quite chunky, high lift wings, at 48ft in length, at the expense of speed. The wings are STOL enhanced by way of their interconnected ailerons (or flaperons) that travel down with flap to a maximum of 15 degrees (the final notch of landing flap is 47 degrees). Our ag. Beavers were operating here precisely as they were intended – at low level in and around mountains and valleys and operating off short, mostly makeshift runways with heavy loads.

The first one (ZK-AXK) went to Rural Aviation and was written off in a fatal crash in April 1954. Other early registrations were ZK-AYT (Rural Aviation Dec 1951), AZB (Rural Aviation Dec 1951) and AVL (James Aviation Dec 1951). Meanwhile, the aerial topdressing people over the ditch didn't get to fly their first DHC Beaver topdresser (VH-AAI) until July 1957. VH-AAI started off a long line of VH Beaver arrivals (42 in all) that were mostly on aerial topdressing duties throughout the peak times of the 1960s and 1970s.

The life of ZK-CGX

In June 1964, the 450hp Beaver CGX arrived at DH HQ at Wellington for build-up, having its first NZ flight in September that year. In October 1964 it was registered to Fieldair of Gisborne and was originally flown by Clive Thorne until October 1966 before being flown by various company pilots. It went to Rangitikei Air Services Ltd of Taihape in January 1976, and there sported the

names 'Kaimanawa' or 'Pat Lonergan' (who flew CGX up until early 1978) or 'Jaws.' In January 1979 CGX went to Dalhoff & King Aviation Ltd at Ardmore then in April to Aspiring Air Ltd (Wanaka) as a people-mover. It was registered to Alistair McMillan at Wanaka in February 1982 and then in July 1983 CGX headed back up north to Vanair Ltd of Napier. Registration changed to Owen Harnish of



As classic as classic can get! Dave Bates captured this evocative early morning shot of one of Airwork's DHC-2 Beavers (CPE), flown by Col Bolgar, at full stretch on the job at Omihi in April 1977. Retaining some of its former Wanganui Aero Work's colours (July '67 to April '74 as "Moawhango"), the ex-bush plane's 1,020 ft/min ROC is being put to good use here. CPE was with various non-ag. owners following its time with Airwork (to 1982) before it underwent a rebuild, after which it was exported to Canada (in 1998), becoming C-GTCF. It is still flying there today. Col had previously been flying CPE when it was based at Waimate with Airwork (NZ) Ltd. Colman Geza Bolgar lost his life in October 1985 when his PL-12 Airtruk (ZK-CJT) struck high-tension power lines while working on a farm property near Waimate. Airwork also flew Beavers BFO and COV. BFO crashed in North Canterbury in 1964 and was later rebuilt and flown by Air Contracts before heading to Canada (in 1970) where it was destroyed in a crash in 1972. COV was involved in a fatal crash near Timaru, flown by Arthur Rudge, in March 1975.



ZK-CGX, a DHC-2 Beaver Mk1 today flying out of Sidney (Canada) on a P&W PT6 turbine engine. (John Nicolson Collection)

Ardmore in October 1983 and then to Papakura Motors Ltd. in March 1984. In 1993 CGX went to Aquatic & Vintage Airways Ltd., then in February 1999 it was again acquired by Owen Harnish. In November 1999 CGX went to the well-known 'Beaver Restorer,' Frank Wright of Mount Maunganui. In April 2000, CGX's ZK registration was cancelled to become C-FPSM (Canada.) In late 2005, C-FPSM was re-equipped with a 550shp P&W PT6 turbine engine and resurfaced as C-FBVR with Viking Air Ltd. C-FBVR is still flying out of Sidney, Canada. There were 1,692 Canadian-built Beavers produced between 1947 and 1968.

ZK-BBX and ZK-AZB

As an aside, well known Beaver ag. pilot, Jim Frogley owns DHC-Beaver Mk1 ZK-BBX, which was first registered to Fieldair Ltd. in early 1953. Jim purchased BBX (ex-Aussie) in the early 1990s and restored it to its original aerial topdressing configuration. BBX is today the only active topdressing Beaver in the world - and was once flown, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, (when with Fieldair Ltd.) by my flying instructor of the early 1980s, SCAC CFI Mike ('MJ') Tucker.

Beaver ZK-AZB, having first flown here in early 1952 with

Fieldair (with 18 others including BBX) is today flown, with over 22,000 hours on the clock, by Hallett Griffin, who owned and flew it as a topdresser between 1990 and 1992. AZB went to an Aussie concern in 1992 and in 2009, in NSW, Hallett crossed the ditch to fly his ex-AZB on its last aerial topdressing sortie. The Beaver returned to Hallett Griffin in early 2010, following its ZK-AZB re-registration, and was then repainted in its original mainly blue-on-white Fieldair colours. AZB is these days demonstrated, flown by Hallett, at airshows and such-like gatherings up and down the country. *In the next instalment: The CAC Ceres and Piper Pawnee.*