

SAA -Sport Avex South Island trip.

ZK-TNT was Pre-loaded, Pre-fuelled and wheeled out of the hanger and into the fog to hurry up and wait. As soon as the



*TNT Fuelled and loaded the day before
- Piper the Lab keeping the plovers at bay.*

fog burnt off around

Matamata TNT was swung into life on Wed the 6th of Feb – David and Don Wilkinson in RV-8 ZK-WLK along with Gary Briggs in his newly finished Sonex ZK-SXR and myself all departed our respective airfields in a roughly coordinated departure for Whanganui.

David, Don and Gary, met up mid-flight near Raglan on the West coast whilst I tracked on further southwards towards tiger country and a north bound front. The picture out the perspex changed pretty quickly around Taumaranui to where I met the front. The blue skies and scattered cloud were traded for flying into lowering cloud base, decaying visibility, rising terrain, a head wind and a lowering fuel gauge that would shortly disagree with me in reaching my destination. After relaying this info to David and Gary (who were 20 minutes or so behind me), an easy decision was made for us to all divert to Taumaranui to sit the weather out.



Most of the crew at Taumaranui.

After a two hour wait on the ground and a successful scavenge of a few litres of fuel for from the RV fuel drain to top TNT up and marginal improvement in the weather meant we were able to get airborne where we were now joined by Lloyd Morris in Glastar ZK-MPO, Peter Armstrong and Jon Farmer in DynAero ZK-PSA, and Paul Carran in Vans RV-8 YET (thanks Paul for hauling my bag around). Heading south from NZTM we were dodging cloud's and mountain tops which ultimately forced Gary and myself out towards Stratford where we hit IFR (I follow railways) to the coast south of Hawera - Whanganui being an easy run down the coast from there on. Fuel for the plane and pilot was uplifted at Whanganui – the life jacket was strapped on and I soon fastened TNT to my back. David swung the prop and before long we were airborne heading for the mainland. Heading south down the coast toward Paraparaumu some half decent lenticis reared their head and white caps were all over the straight from Paraparaumu onwards – we stayed a few miles

out to sea to avoid the leeward wind dumping onto the water from the southern end of Paraparaumu. We tracked towards Kapiti Island, south to Mana island and then turned direct for the Brothers Island. Having 35-knots on the nose gave Gary and myself plenty of time to check out the rather evil looking patch of water below us known as Cook Strait.

Arrival into Omaka was met by a good 20Knots on the ground and some excellent hospitality provided by the Marlborough Aero Club. This was followed by a few beers and a good feed up at the local for the night. Thanks to the M.A.C for getting the lightweights into the main hanger for the night.

After the overnight in Omaka – We fuelled up on some coffee and bacon and after a bit of a chat we were set to head to Motueka. TNT was loaded, tied down and burst into life on



Gary Briggs and SXR with TNT.

the first swing of the prop (VW owners will know that good feeling when there is a crowd watching you)

Motueka was made via St Arnaud - Lakes Station. The smoke from February's Nelson fires proved to be pretty thick in David



David Wilkinson post coffee.....

places, and certainly made us look at our CO detectors in the cockpit, often through some slightly watery eyes.

We enjoyed more coffee and a bit of food along with some decent sunshine at Motueka. Bill Luther and Steve Opie arrived in their RV's from up north. By now we were getting edgy so decided to gap it to our destination for the night which was Karamea – on the top of the South Islands West Coast. David and Don went via the Cobb dam, Paul Carran via Motueka and Collingwood, while Gary and I did a bit of a jaunt around the top of farewell spit via Kaiteriteri. This was followed by a 500ft run in loose formation down the coast to Karamea – This was an outstanding run down an amazing part of the country.



Top of the South - Farewell Spit
Kahurangi point



Few miles to the south of

‘The Last Resort’ at Karamea dished out a grouse feed of whitebait fritters and cold beer – topping off a day that was hard to beat.



Karamea airport did well for landing fees.

Friday the 8th February – saw us depart Karamea and head deeper into the Mainland. Blue skies, no wind, a clear view of the Alps and a glassy Tasman Ocean made for a picture-perfect run to Greymouth to grab some fuel to top the tanks after the West Coast run.



Peter Armstrong ZK-PSA, Paul Carran ZK-EYT, ZK-TNT and David Wilkinson ZK-WLK at Greymouth post refuelling.

Ashburton was close – and we were keen to get there. After fixing up the \$6.00 landing fee at Greymouth we were airborne and south bound for the Whitcomb Pass. This pass sits at a tad over 4000ft with and is surrounded by 8000ft mountains - making for a reasonably tight valley, with not a lot of room for movement. Seriously cool piece of country (on a good day).

Getting through the pass and over the top and into the Rakaia Valley, I couldn't help but think about my wingman Gary who was trailing behind me – that this was his first time south of Raglan – sharp contrast from the rolling hills of the Auckland Region. Checking in with him on the Radio - I always got a positive ex-pat South African response.



Whitcombe Pass on the nose



Whitcombe Pass tributary valley

Once clear of the Whitcombe we weaved our way down the Rakaia Valley and cut into Lake Heron, onto the Canterbury Plains and joining into a busy arrival pattern in the Ashburton circuit.

My father Gary Montagu, had flown up from from Taieri in his Corby Kestrel (ZK-SJM) and was there to greet me (and thankfully on-hand to assist in beating the tie downs into the parched Canterbury soil) - Great to catch up with him after his time in China.

Don jumped into TNT a few times to show the young dog how things were done – bit of shame ZK-TOY wasn't there to join the party. The awards night saw Gary B snatching up the Cook Strait Challenge Trophy – with David picking up the Best RV and Aerobatics Award along with many people picking up other well deserved awards.

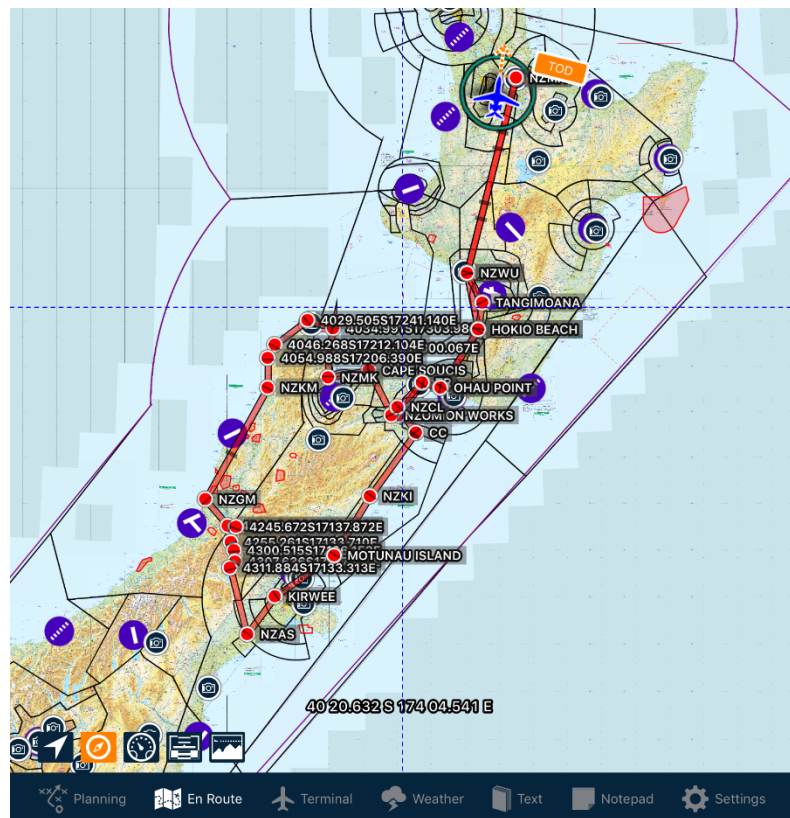


Photo Credit: John King - Saturday afternoon with John king in the Camera ship and my Father Gary in ZK-SJM

Sunday 10th February – Departure day. Gary B, Gavin Magill and I, banded together and devised a plan to head north. Gavin got airborne and followed shortly by Gary B, and myself in TNT. Kaikoura was the first stop, with Gavin first by 15 min or so - being the good bastard that he is, he fixed up the landing fees for SXR and TNT (Cheers mate). As we topped up the tanks to get across the pond, a small squadron of north bound RV's passed overhead. With tanks full and bladders emptied - the prop was once-again swung and we were ready to roll – A few RAN's members had dropped in with their Highlanders which made for six machines taxiing out to the Runway 23. North bound out of Kaikoura at 500ft made for a great view of the new Kaikoura roading and stabilisation project – Impressive bit of engineering. A few niggles were hit getting around Cape Campbell – getting across the straight this time proved to be a breeze with calm

winds and flat water. Getting along the beach and seeing the sealed runway at Whanganui was a relieving sight (by this time the fuel tank was empty, the bladder was full, and the body was well in tune with the hum of the V-Dub after a full morning of flying the Starlet). David had pre ordered a bunch of pizza's which disappeared reasonably quickly courtesy of some very hungry pilots. The bulk trip was deciphered over a quick yarn, a few laughs and the last scraps of pizza.

With the food gone and the afternoon getting on in time, everyone started the last leg of the trip to head off to our home fields scattered around the top half of the North Island.



In summary – An outstanding trip over some amazing country with a great bunch of guys – even had the weather on our side 94% of the time.

Cheers Team