



## Ruapehu Up & Over Trip 2010

Tuesday 13 July was shaping up to be a good day for another try to get over Mt. Ruapehu. After an earlier attempt on the 17 June we had been thwarted by low cloud to the north of Taupo near Mangakino. I made the call that we should all retreat to Matamata to give it time to clear. While on the ground at Matamata I was able to make contact with two others in our group who were attempting to get through. With

*Remnants of fog hug the Kaimai's on the Paeroa – Thames Road.*

*Co-pilots Phil Lightband and Ellie off on another NAAG adventure.*

a number of planes now on the ground and break of about an hour we set off once more. This time we decided to try to go via Te Kuiti and Taumarunui. Ten miles to the north east of Te Kuiti and we ran into the same problem. We then decided to try for Raglan but it became marginal to get over to the coast so we reversed our track and went back to Thames where we all got together at the cafe across the road from the airfield.

It was with much trepidation that I looked out the window on the morning of the 13<sup>th</sup> expecting to see fog toward the Paeroa ranges. In the early light it looked clear but often after sunrise the fog starts to roll in. At 7.30 my passenger, Phil Lightband, arrived ready for the day. For Phil's sake I really hoped it wouldn't be another disappointment. Phil pioneered much of New Zealand's early aviation and is the subject of the book Earlybird. If you



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have not read Earlybird, do make sure you get hold of a copy. A brief synopsis of Phil's life can be found here. <http://kac.co.nz/Phil.htm>

As we drove into Paeroa it was still clear and still, but closer to Thames we started driving into fog! Fortunately just before Thames the fog lifted to reveal a clear airfield. Yeah!! Today I was the only one leaving from Thames as everyone else was either working or not available. Ready in good time we set off some 20 minutes ahead of

*Arapuni Dam and the Waikato River stretch out to the south.*

*Mt. Egmont is clearly visible despite being 150 km from Arapuni.*

our planned departure time and made our way towards Waihi Beach where both Bob Byal and Bill Sisley were preparing to leave for the days outing.

We flew from the beach back toward Matamata where I would show Phil the construction site at Hobbiton which is undergoing preparation for the new movie, The Hobbit. With a few clicks of the camera we were done and winging our way down the Waikato River.

Lake Karapiro looked stunning off the starboard wingtip as the morning rays sparkled on the surface. There were no rowers out at this early hour though. The mountains were all clear and showing no sign of fog or cloud.

*Lake Rotoaira with the Kaimanawas in the background.*

Even Mt Egmont was standing out majestically to the south west with no sign of the usual cloud ring around it. Having passed Lake Taupo out to the east, at Lake Rotoaira we began the climb toward the summit of Mt Ngauruhoe. I was





one of the fortunate ones whose plane is equipped with a heater. Now the heater works well enough in the climb but in descent when the engine is cooling it tends just to blow cool air. Fortunately coming down is much quicker than going up. Many of the other aviators were well rugged up for the cold. At the summit of Mt. Ruapehu I noted my outside air temperature gauge was reading a tropical 2.5 degrees!



Having had such an early start we had beaten the climbers to the top of Mt Ngauruhoe. I could see a group of about 20 people on the Tongariro Crossing. One would need to be well dressed to take this on in the middle of winter with snow all round like it was on this day!

Local aviator, Arthur Whitehead, had suggested he would meet us at the summit in his RV 8 but with us being ahead of schedule he was just coming up over Lake Rotoaira as we were descending back toward Taupo. Arthur operates <http://www.airchartertaupo.co.nz/> which takes passengers into some spectacular back country in the Kaimanawa Ranges along with flights around the central plateau and as far as White Island.



***Mt. Tongariro, Ngauruhoe and Ruapehu in the background.***

On the ground at Taupo, aircraft began to trickle in. Over a period of about an hour we finally had nine aircraft on the ground. Some who were unable to make it earlier did the route in reverse order. Joining us first for lunch and then making their way to the mountains of central plateau.



By mid afternoon it was time to head home. Taking the scenic route via Huka Falls and then up the Waikato River again to pass over Orakei Korako and Lake Ohakuri





*Top: Looking across the summit of Ruapehu with Egmont in the background.*

*Middle: Ruapehu Crater Lake.*

*Below: Mt Ngauruhoe a most majestic mountain.*



before branching off toward Tokoroa and the final destination of Thames. One hour after departure we were tucking KFC back into the hangar. There is some great flying to be had on these still winter days. There will be more things planned before the last of the cold weather loses its grip.

Until next time, safe flying.

*Cliff McChesney*



# N.A.A.G.

Northern Adventure Aviation Group

Top: A line of trampers on the Tongariro Crossing.

Middle: First of the group to arrive at Taupo. Bill Sisley, Bob Byal and myself.

Below: The gang enjoying soup and other hot morsels.



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