



NAAG



Northern Adventure Aviation Group

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The Final Flight for 2010

With what appeared to be only one fine day in the week before New Year we had one last chance at a NAAG event before 2010 closed its doors for the final time. Tuesday the 28th December had brought wild weather to much of New Zealand and I had high hopes that with the sky 'washed' it would leave us with a brilliant day on Wednesday. While there was little wind the sky remained somewhat hazy all day.

Along the coast line north of Matata an avocado orchard flourishes.

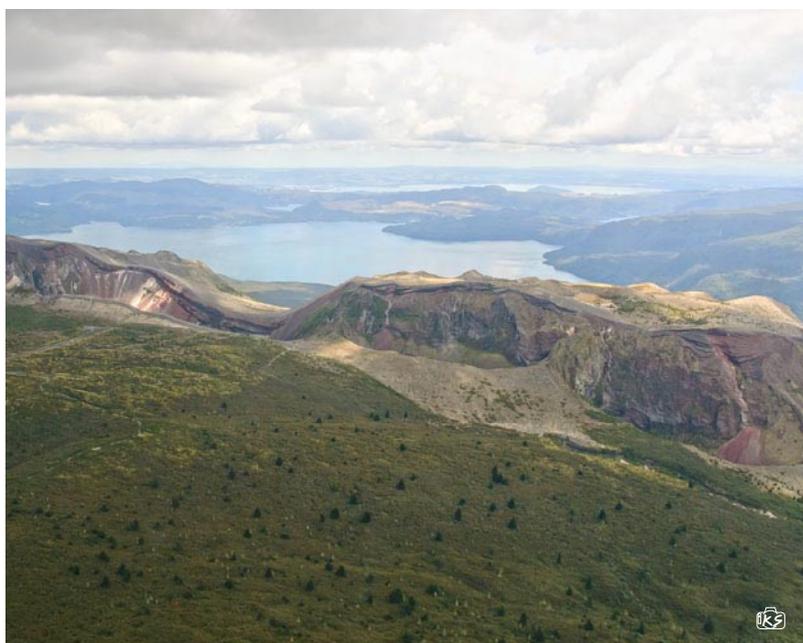
I had sent out an email suggesting we make a run to Whakatane but when I was unable to secure transport due to the shuttle firm being closed I quickly formulated a new plan. We would still go in the direction of Whakatane but instead take in a few mountains along the way. With several confirming their availability for the day we set off toward Tauranga and along the coast line as far as Matata. Turning inland a number of the group passed over Matahina Dam and then up and over Mt Tarawera. This is an awesome spectacle with its huge rift through the middle slicing the mountain in half. Two helicopters were perched on the western edge of the chasm disgorging passengers. They looked like Lego toys as they were dwarfed against the scale of the mountain.

A view of Mt. Tarawera from the south east.

Completing an orbit of the crater we continued on to Taupo via Wairakei and Huka Falls. The recently completed bridge and by pass through Taupo looks impressive from the air. Arriving on schedule for our midday rendezvous, I could hear others from our group making positional calls on the radio



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as they made their way toward the airfield. On the ground, it was good to see we had a few extras who had not informed me they would be coming. We had a final total of nine aircraft, which included Tony and Sue Unwin, who had started out from Tauranga and followed us round in their gyrocopter. With the entire group safely on the ground we discovered the airport cafe was closed. Fortunately the local Sky Dive Centre at the southern end of the field was open and the small shop there was able to serve us good food. The flutter of parachutes coupled with bursts of colour over our heads made the lunch time meal a great visual experience.

During lunch, a number of us made further plans to track up and over Mt Ruapehu. One of my cousins was in the area completing the Tongariro Crossing and had sent me a text message to say she and her husband were almost at the Ketetahi Hut and that if I was in that area she would wave a red T shirt. Reaching the northern slopes of Mt Tongariro and the hut, I could see perhaps 100 people, many of them wearing red shirts! My cousin later told me she had seen me fly over but they had not quite reached the hut by the time I came over. Sadly the summit of Mt Ruapehu was obscured by cloud but I was able to remain far enough East to climb above it. Only the last meter or two of rock was visible on reaching the summit but spectacular views were had all the way to New Plymouth where Mt Egmont's peak rose above the all too familiar ring of cloud around it. Descending along the western slopes of Mt Ruapehu the Chateau was also obscured by cloud. Making a gradual descent toward the north, so as not to upset Ellie's ears, we set a course for Hobbiton. I haven't been able to teach Ellie to block her nose with her paw and blow! I just watch to make sure she is not shaking her head, which gives me all the visual clues I need to know if she is okay. I have not been able to teach her to suck so Barley Sugars would give her no relief either!

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*Above: Tourist enjoy the pleasures of gliding to the earth.
Below: Lindsey Brown and Nooky Robinson are a couple of happy flyers at Taupo airport.*





The Waikato River soon came into view to the west of Mangakino. It seems like home territory to me when I pick up the river, but in reality it is still a long way home should I have to hitch a ride by car! Upon arrival overhead Hobbiton I noticed much work has been done since my last visit. A bridge has been constructed over the lake and two small houses with thatched roofs have been added and adorn the property near the lake edge. Several more Hobbit houses have also been built into the surrounding hillside. While I did have my camera with me, I didn't take any photos, which was a major oversight on my part. I will have further opportunity to get photos as I will be back there again within a few weeks as I have two overseas visitors I intend to take there.

In just 2.9 hours of flying I had covered 330 NM (611 KM) As pilots we are so privileged to see the things we see from our little offices in sky. If you don't know what it is like to soar above oceans and mountains you need to dare to dream and make a plan to join us.

For those that had come on the days flight, it had been a fitting end to a year of some very enjoyable times aviating and socialising together about our little country. We look forward to many more enjoyable outings in 2011 and hope that more of you will join us as we explore some of New Zealand's best scenery and hidden treasures.

Happy New Year & safe flying

Cliff McChesney



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