

Going to Wanaka?

– Don't Push It –

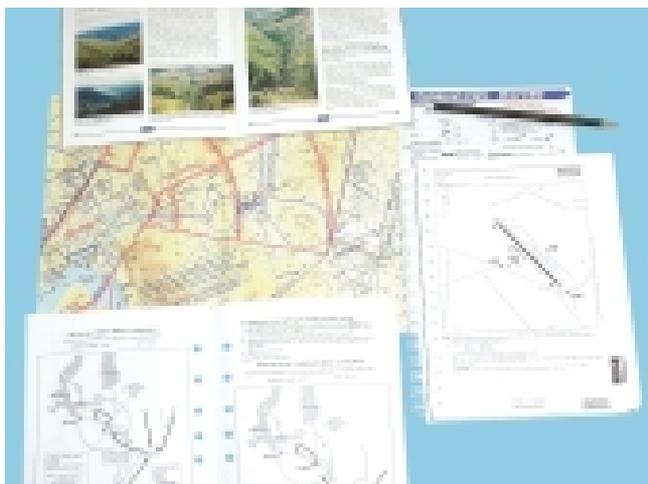
Warbirds Over Wanaka 2002 is fast approaching, and by now those of you planning to attend will be thinking about travel arrangements to and from the airshow. If you are intending to fly your family and friends there, this article will make important reading. If not, it will be a useful reference for other cross-country flying in the future.

In a previous *Vector* article relating to Warbirds Over Wanaka 2000, we reminded pilots intending to fly to the airshow of the need to be familiar with its associated AIP Supplement, have a full set of up-to-date charts, obtain a full NOTAM briefing, file a flight plan, etc. While all of these are important aspects of the flight planning process, they do not specifically address the areas where some pilots seem to be getting themselves into trouble – those of the pre-flight and in-flight decision making associated with making such a cross-country flight.

The Lindis Pass accident was tragic – but there were numerous other reported scud-running incidents, some of which could have easily resulted in serious accidents, highlighting the fact that sometimes pre-flight planning is not done properly and that crucial in-flight decisions are not being made at the appropriate times, if at all. There is certainly room for improvement among some pilots as far as this is concerned. We hope that this article makes you think about such key planning decisions before you head off to Wanaka this year, and that you apply the same advice to all the cross-country flying you do.

Initial Planning

Failing to thoroughly plan your flight well beforehand may mean you inadvertently set yourself up to fail in your goal of reaching your destination safely. Rather than leave too much to chance on the day, it makes more sense to remove as many of the external pressures as you possibly can well before the flight. These pressures include a perceived need to get there and back by specific times, or a fear of letting your passengers down. This section deals with removing some of those pressures.



Personal Ability

Before you even think about undertaking a flight to a destination like Wanaka, you need to decide whether or not such a trip is within your capabilities as a pilot. If you have limited mountain-flying experience, heading off into an alpine environment like that surrounding Wanaka (complete with its own changeable weather system) is not always a good idea. It is essential to be completely honest with yourself about your level of experience and personal ability when making such a decision; don't let others talk you into undertaking a trip you don't feel comfortable with.

In making this decision, you need to set yourself some personal minimums that you will stick to. Doing so is not only important in these early stages of the pre-flight planning process, but also applies equally to making enroute decisions (covered later in the article). We suggest that you read the article "Personal Minimums" in the November/December 2000 issue of *Vector* to refresh your memory on how to develop a personal minimums checklist. Copies of the checklist can be obtained from your local flight-training organisation or a CAA Field Safety Adviser.

Contingencies

Before planning your route(s), it is vital that you put in place some contingency plans (eg, alternative travel arrangements, extra time off work, extra night's accommodation, etc) well before your intended departure. In this sense, it is important that you set a realistic time frame for the trip. This means adding a day or two either side of the airshow as contingency days – particularly to allow for the eventuality of inclement weather. It is also a good idea at this point to explain the limitations of travelling by light aircraft (particularly when VFR) to your passengers, and suggest that they too arrange a couple of extra days off. This will significantly reduce the pressure to get back home should the weather not cooperate, and therefore the chances of making a foolish decision to set off in marginal weather. While you may feel some pressure to get the aircraft back to the aero club by a certain date, or to be back at work on time, we will absolutely guarantee that the club would prefer to get the plane back one day late than not at all. The same should apply to your boss.

Similarly, arranging a couple of extra night's accommodation in the eventuality that you can't get back from Wanaka as planned is also advisable. If you are going to be staying with family or friends this should be easy, if not, things are a little

Continued over ...

more complex. At least know what options are available to you so that you can fall back on them if the weather deteriorates.

It is also a good idea to arrange an alternative means of getting to Wanaka in the event that the weather is poor but you still want to attend the airshow. Having a plan B, such as taking the car, does take the pressure off.

“Keep a close eye on what the weather is doing behind you, and always be sure that you have an out.”

Note that, when it comes to planning your primary route to Wanaka, it is worthwhile making provision for at least one alternative route each way. The same level of consideration for terrain, weather patterns, fuel and airspace should be applied when planning these alternatives. This might involve talking to other pilots with experience of the area, or contacting a local operator to gather more information. There are a number of alternative routes that you should be aware of, which relate to the prevailing weather system affecting the area at the time (these are discussed next).

Picking a Route

If you are not totally familiar with flying in the south of the South Island, it is advisable to talk to another pilot before deciding what your primary route to and from Wanaka will be. There are a number of different options to choose from when coming south, depending on the prevailing weather system at the time. Essentially these are: down the centre of the Island via Burke Pass and Lindis Pass; down the West Coast and over the Haast Pass; and down the east coast to just south of Oamaru, inland to Alexandra, and up the Clutha River to Wanaka. The same routes are applicable when flying home again.

We strongly suggest that you prepare a full flight plan (this should include drawing the routes on your charts and completing a flight log card) for at least one alternative route in addition to the primary route that you have just planned. This avoids having to plan an alternative in haste if the weather is poor on the day and, in doing so, possibly overlook something important.

It was interesting to note that after Warbirds 2000 a number of pilots chose to head home via the Lindis Pass in marginal conditions when better alternative routes were available. If you are unsure which option to take for the conditions of the day, ask a pilot with experience of the area.

All flight-planned routes should take into account the weather system that is likely to prevail en route, forced landing options, refuelling stops, and airspace constraints. Poring over the charts noting the topographical layout (in particular the key valley and mountain range systems), spot heights, place names, airspace structure and general lie of the land is always going to be time well spent.

Refuelling Options

A significant percentage of pilots flying to and from Wanaka will have large distances to cover and consequently will probably need to make a fuel stop. It is therefore important to check that the aerodrome you choose has the correct brand of fuel available for your aircraft's fuel card. The importance of

meticulous fuel management on such long cross-country flights cannot be stressed enough – please don't cut it fine.

The chosen refuelling aerodrome should preferably be one that has an aero club, at which you can get help with weather interpretation and alternative routes if so required – aero club staff are always happy to help and are an excellent source of useful enroute information.

A fuel stop is also a good way to give you and your passengers a much-needed break on a long flight – it is also important that your concentration levels are at a peak towards the end of the flight, especially when it comes to following the arrival procedures at Wanaka.

Studying the AIP

Having finalised your primary and alternative routes, you now need to study the special AIP *Supplement* for Wanaka (AIRAC 02/2 effective 21 February 2002) and the Wanaka operational data pages in the VFG.

Particular attention must be given to understanding the Restricted Area, Control Zone, arrival/departure procedures, traffic flow control procedures, and flight planning requirements associated with the airshow. If for some reason you do not have access to a copy of the *Supplement*, it can be viewed on the IFIS web site (www.ifis.airways.co.nz) by clicking on **Publications/Documents Available Online**. Other information relating to the airshow can also be found in the same menu screen by clicking on **Special Events**, which contains some useful links to Warbirds-related websites.



The light aircraft park at Warbirds Over Wanaka 2000.

Photo courtesy of the Alpine Fighter Collection.

Remember to carry a copy of the *Supplement* with you in the aircraft for further reference when flying in and out of Wanaka.

Also ensure that you have a full complement of up-to-date charts (this must include the Queenstown/Milford VTC and Topographical Sheet 4) and a current VFG on board – they are now significantly (about 40 percent) cheaper, so there is no excuse for not having them. A number of pilots have turned up at previous Wanaka airshows with out-of-date charts and VFGs – in some cases with no aviation charts, VFG or AIP *Supplement* at all. This is a situation that we would not like to see repeated.

For those planning scenic flights in the local area (ie, Mt Cook, Milford and Queenstown), thoroughly study the associated traffic-flow, radio, and airspace procedures in the VFG well beforehand. Traffic densities in these areas can be considerable, and the risk of a mid-air collision very real – know the local procedures **before** taking to the air.

Survival Equipment

Being prepared with a basic survival kit, life jackets, cellphone, extra food and water, warm clothing and sturdy footwear is a must when operating in the south of the South Island – even over summer. Be sure to organise these items (and a set of pickets) well in advance of the flight, and let your passengers know what they need to bring in this regard.

Final Planning

Weather Interpretation

The most up-to-date weather must be obtained immediately prior to the flight and carefully interpreted in relation to your primary route. If the reported and forecast weather conditions along this route are borderline, and you are having difficulty forming a mental picture of how they might affect your flight, ask someone who has more experience to help you. It might also be prudent to call a local operator to gauge their assessment of the enroute weather conditions too – one call could save a lot of time, and possibly lives. If the conditions look doubtful, the pre-planned alternative routes should be considered.

A comparison between the forecast conditions and your personal minimums for whichever route looks the most promising should be made at this point. If the conditions are outside of your minimums, or you simply feel uncomfortable with proceeding, then it's time to fall back on your contingency plans – ie, try again the next day or find some alternative mode of transport. It takes discipline to do this, but you **must** for safety's sake. The decision to delay or cancel your flight is, however, made far easier by having such contingency plans in place.

NOTAMs

If you are proceeding with the flight, don't forget to obtain the latest enroute and destination NOTAMs and read them carefully. Any procedural changes relating to the airshow will be notified by NOTAM.

File a Flight Plan

Every pilot should file a flight plan prior to commencing a cross-country flight (especially when flying to and from an area like Wanaka). This will maximise their chances of being found should something go wrong. VFR flight plans can now be filed quickly and easily over Airways' Internet site at a very reasonable price (as low as \$3.60). This is a great service so there is no excuse for not using it. Flight plans can still be phoned or faxed to the National Briefing Office for \$6.50 if you do not have access to the Internet. Refer to the previous issue of *Vector* for details on how to file a VFR flight plan over the Internet.

In-Flight Decision Making

Even with the best of planning, you may encounter significantly different conditions en route than those forecast. Being faced with the unexpected certainly does test your judgement and self-discipline as a pilot. But, because you have made contingency plans, you are not under as much pressure to reach



your destination, and the decision to divert or turn back is made much easier.

If conditions do start to become marginal en route, or you become concerned about any other factor (eg, fuel, aircraft performance, navigation, etc) **do not**, whatever you do, press on in the hope that things will improve – chances are they will not. It is important that you seek assistance from Christchurch Information or another aircraft at this point, stating your position and the nature of the problem – such a call might just turn out to be a life saver. The decision to divert or turn back must be made as early as possible here – decisive pilot-in-command action is a must.

Keep a close eye on what the weather is doing behind you, and **always** be sure that you have an out. If, despite your best efforts, the weather does start to close in around you, slow the aircraft to the bad-weather configuration and give serious consideration to making a precautionary landing. It may be the most prudent thing to do in such circumstances – a decision that could save the lives of you and your passengers. They will see you as a hero, not a failure.

Arriving at Wanaka

Every year, ATC reports instances of pilots arriving at Wanaka who have either not read the AIP *Supplement* or for some reason seem incapable of following the instructions it contains. This causes significant and unnecessary problems for ATC and other pilots. To be blunt, such pilots are a menace to themselves and others. **Read and make sure you fully understand the procedures in use.** Ideally you should be able to follow them from memory, but have them available for quick reference in the cockpit anyway. Use your passengers to help out. Brief them to point out all the aircraft they spot (several hundred aircraft converge on Wanaka within a short space of time), as this may be the busiest traffic environment you will ever encounter in the air. Keep your head on a swivel, keep radio calls brief and to the point, and follow all ATC instructions.

Continued over ...



Summary

Flying to and from the airshow at Wanaka should never be undertaken lightly – especially if you don't have much mountain flying experience and have not flown into a large aviation event like Warbirds over Wanaka before. Remember, the weather in the area can be highly variable, and the terrain very unforgiving, with few forced landing opportunities. It is for these reasons, and the fact that detailed arrival and departure procedures will be in place at Wanaka, that you plan your flight thoroughly by following the advice outlined in this article.

Should you be unlucky enough to encounter an unexpected deterioration in the weather en route, then **please** think 'turn back, divert or precautionary landing' and **not** 'press on' – people will always admire you more for making safe decisions rather than ones involving 'pressing on'. Stick to your personal minimums, and don't let yourself become a casualty of 'get-there-itis'.

Fly safe this summer and enjoy your trip to Wanaka for what should be a fantastic airshow. ■



Photograph courtesy of Ian Brodie/NZFFPM.

Have you seen these titles in our GAP series, which contain information relevant to operating in the Wanaka area? If not, we suggest that you read them before heading off to Wanaka. Copies can be obtained from your local flight-training organisation, CAA Field Safety Adviser, or by contacting the Safety Education and Publishing Unit, Tel: 0-4-560 9400.



Oshkosh and Wanaka

In the September-October 2001 issue, we drew a parallel between Warbirds Over Wanaka and the annual Experimental Aircraft Association gathering held at Oshkosh, Wisconsin, USA.

Although Oshkosh is on a larger scale, both are events that pilots make a special effort to get to, with many flying there in their own or hired aircraft. Both have special arrival and departure procedures that pilots must be aware of and comply with. It is equally important that pilots apply a high degree of airmanship and basic flying skills while en route – and particularly during their arrival and departure.

There were several accidents, some fatal, associated with the last Oshkosh event, and Rick Durden, a columnist for AVweb, lost a friend in one of them. He wrote a heartfelt plea to all pilots in an article entitled "Yes, Pogo, the Enemy is Us" in AVweb's *The Pilot's Lounge* series, No 38. Here is an extract from the summary, but we recommend that you read the whole article before heading off to Wanaka. You will find it at www.avweb.com under **Articles**, then **Columns** (direct link <http://www.avweb.com/articles/lounge/tpl0038.html>).

Here's the extract:

"This is Oshkosh. It is a special, almost sacred place to aviators. On top of that it is extremely visible to the public (far more people drive in than fly in). Each and every one of us has an extra duty and responsibility when we fly in to OSH to do so with our skill levels high enough to meet the demands, and having read the stuff one has to read to arrive and depart. Our errors are magnified. Our accidents at OSH are discussed endlessly. Our stupid pilot tricks are in front of everyone in aviation. At Oshkosh we are not just responsible for the safety of ourselves and our passengers, we have a duty to aviation and every single person who cares deeply for it. Right now, we are letting aviation down, and we are at risk of having to pay a serious price."

"Ben, I miss you. The sight of that funeral pyre of smoke over your airplane is going to be with me until I die. ... right now, your death has caused me to finally express some of the deep anger I feel over pilots who continue to screw things up for the rest of us. If that means that just one more pilot next year reads the NOTAM, or takes some dual before coming to OSH or does an honest self-assessment and decides to drive in, and saves one life, then your death is going to make a difference to people you never knew, just as your life made a difference to a lot of people who knew you."

This extract originally appeared in AVweb, the Internet's aviation magazine and news service at <http://www.avweb.com>, and is reprinted here by permission. Copyright 1995-2001 AVweb Group. All rights reserved.

Importance of trip:

The more important the trip, the more tendency there is to compromise your personal minimums, and the more important it becomes to have alternative plans.