

June 2025

Issue No. 164

Annual General Meeting

We had an almost total membership turnout for our AGM. Minutes will be circulated in due course but the regulatory formalities were dealt with in less than an hour and we moved on to an open forum to review our achievements over the past 12 months and consider further ways to expand our profile and to increase membership and visitor numbers. No changes to the officers or subscriptions.

Tuesday Morning Talks - Wilson Lattey - First Flight Covers

At our weekly meeting on Tuesday 22nd April, Wilson brought along a selection of NZ / Australian First Flight Covers relating to early airmail flights around NZ and across the Tasman to Australia.

The names of the pilots flying these services was a virtual history of early aviation and aviators involved in NZ, such as: George Bolt, Euan Dickson, Bert Mercer, Charles Kingsford-Smith, and Charles T.P. Ulm.

It was most interesting in studying the variety of stamps – some of them being special airmail issues depicting NZ scenes and aircraft of the time. Also it was of interest to study the date stamps used to postmark the stamps.

To accompany most of the covers, Wilson had typed up a data sheet listing flight route and details, aircraft, airline, pilot, flight date, postmark date, back stamp date, addressee etc. These data sheets added much to the interest level.

Thanks Wilson for a most interesting session detailing and displaying another fascinating facet of aviation through your interest in philately.



1934 Kaitiā - Sydney, Kingsford Smith in Fokker VIIb "Southern Cross" VH-USU



1932 Wellington - Nelson, S/L MC McGregor in Simmonds Spartan ZK-ABU

FLYING IN CHINA, THE SAME, BUT DIFFERENT – by Keith Mackersy

A personal experience from Keith Mackersy, but first some background.

In the 1990s, Chinese airlines were known for their poor safety record, characterised by persistent pilot errors, unreliable maintenance, and erratic government oversight. However, China recognised the need to improve its safety record and as a result, embarked on a combination of reforms, increased international collaboration and technological advancements. It was through international collaboration that New Zealand became involved in assisting Chinese airlines.

In 1992, MetService was invited to consider offering advice to Chinese airlines regarding access to good meteorological information for the planning and operation of domestic and international flights. As the General Manager of Aviation Weather Services at MetService, I was asked to consider ways of assisting Chinese airlines with meteorological information. As a first step, and with the assistance of New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I made an initial visit to China (officially the People's Republic of China) in 1993 to gain an insight into the Chinese airline industry and review the availability of aviation meteorological information. I subsequently visited China on more than 20 occasions to assist Chinese airlines to plan and operate domestic and international flights using high-quality aviation weather information. Visits were made to numerous cities, airports and airlines throughout China.



People's Republic of China

China is the third-largest country (by area) in the world after Russia and Canada. It spans the equivalent of five time zones and borders fourteen countries by land. It is the second most populous country (1.411 billion) after India (1.438 billion).

Aviation is incredibly important to China, serving as a major driver of economic growth, tourism, and connectivity, both domestically and internationally.

There are over 50 airlines in China with a combined fleet of more than 4,500 aircraft operating from over 260 airports. Russian-built aircraft, including various Ilyushin and Tupolev types, were in common use by Chinese airlines well into the 1980s and early 1990s. However, today, aircraft from Airbus and Boeing dominate the fleets of Chinese airlines, but COMAC (Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China), a Chinese state-owned aerospace manufacturer, is now selling their C909 (a regional jet) and C919 (a short-range airliner similar to the A320) to several Chinese airlines. The C909 has also been sold to some other Asian airlines.



COMAC C909



COMAC C919

And now to share some of my experiences of flying in China (with a bit of humour thrown in).

A recent report noted that over 700 million passengers travelled on airlines in China in 2024, made up of 640 million domestic passengers and 60 million international passengers. The average load factor was 83%. While air travel is a good way of covering the vast distances in a country the size of China, aviation competes with High Speed Rail (HSR). HSR has developed rapidly since the mid-2000s, and the trains used have a design speed of 200 – 380 kph. The HSR network is modern and extensive, spanning 48,000 km and is expected to reach 60,000 km by 2030.



So, is flying in China the same as elsewhere? Yes, but also different.

Boarding passes are not always issued for domestic flights, so boarding can be a free-for-all with jostling and shoving for seats, especially those near the front of the aircraft. Even when boarding passes are issued, first-time passengers with families will often ignore their allocated seats and try to get all of their families sitting together by simply moving to any unoccupied seats.

Quite often, passengers with cabin baggage will place their bags in the overhead bins near the front of the aeroplane but then find seats many rows away from their bags. And speaking of cabin bags, it is not uncommon for these to be jammed with so much stuff (including pots and pans and woks) that the contents spill out when being removed from the bins at the end of a flight. But in addition to the cabin bags, some passengers try to place other, often bulky items, in the overhead bins. Fortunately, the flight attendants generally manage to sort things out even if it results in some passengers shouting a lot and waving their arms around.

Check in at an airport by some Chinese passengers can be quite an experience. They front up to the check-in counter with not one, but often several trolleys all loaded with large suitcases (and other goods), sufficient for a whole sports team. I once observed a passenger try to check in a large bird cage containing some chickens, but without success. Sorting things out and convincing the passengers that they have too many bags can slow things down for other passengers checking in. The problem really becomes significant when the passengers concerned won't pay for the extra bags or don't know what to do with the bags if the check-in staff refuse to accept them. That's when the uniformed personnel arrive to handle the situation, often not to the liking of the passengers concerned.

Seats on Chinese airlines operating Western-built aircraft are pretty standard but on the older Russian aircraft many of the seats had seen better days, some with broken arm rests, meal trays that wouldn't fold away, window shades that had collapsed or were missing, overhead lights that had failed and seat belts with broken buckles.

When landing at an airport, it was often fun to watch the behaviour of first-time passengers (and even some more experienced flyers). As soon as the aircraft touched down, these passengers would quickly unbuckle and try to retrieve their cabin bags. However, as the plane decelerated or turned off the runway, the standing passengers would fall over in the aisles or against other seats.

The meals served on Chinese airlines operating Western-built aircraft are usually good and, of course, very much based on Chinese food, but increasingly, Western food options are also being offered. It is not uncommon for Chinese passengers to transfer the food served onboard to various containers they had brought with them so that they could give these to friends and family meeting them at their destination airport.

The headsets handed out for passengers to use on board often provided for another interesting moment. For first-time passengers, these were a novelty, and they tried to collect as many of them as they could and put them in their cabin bags to take home for family and friends.

Airports in China are generally quite modern, and the terminals often reflect modern architectural styles, such as at the new Beijing Daxing International Airport (below).



As noted earlier, China spans five time zones, but the country has a single time zone for the whole country based on the time in Beijing (called Beijing Time). This presents an interesting situation for people in those parts of the country to the west of Beijing. For example, when it is, say, 8:00 am in Beijing and the sun is up and most people are well awake, in the far west it is only 6:00 am “sun time”, and the sun hasn't risen, and most people are still asleep. So, for people to the west of Beijing, they have largely adopted some form of their own “local time” (based on their geographical location) for everything they do locally, but use Beijing Time for any official activities or watching news and entertainment TV broadcasts from Beijing.

Finally, an interesting flight on a Russian Tupolev Tu-154 airliner from Harbin (in Northeast China) to Beijing (flight time 2:10).

The aircraft departed from the terminal as normal, lined up on the runway and commenced take-off, but about halfway down the runway, it suddenly decelerated. After continuing to the end of the runway, the aircraft then taxied back for a second attempt. Same result again. Once more back for a third attempt, but this time the brakes were held while the engines were spooled up to maximum thrust, and away we went, but alas, another aborted take-off.



At this stage, I thought we would be going back to the terminal, but no, a fifth attempt and this time successful (just). We lifted off near the end of the runway and started to climb very, very slowly, but eventually managed to get up to 26,000 ft. There was no word from the flight deck, so no one knew what the issue was. However, an English passenger sitting next to me said, *"Thank goodness for the curvature of the Earth!"*.

So, flying in China is the same, but also different.

Map & Photo credits: Worldometer.org, COMAC (Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China Ltd) and Map, China State Railway Group Co Ltd, Beijing Capital International Airport Co Ltd, Planespotters.net

Tuesday Morning Talks - Ernie James - Agricultural Aviation Experiences



Wanganui Aero Work formation showing the main helicopter types used

On 13th May, Ernie gave us a run-down on his experiences working in early aerial topdressing days undertaking ground support and fertilizer loading work for Wanganui Aero Work Ltd. In the early days the aircraft involved included Tiger Moths and Piper Cubs. It was pretty hair-raising stuff but it proved that aerial topdressing was viable. These were followed by purpose-designed machines like Cessna Agwagons and Fletchers.

When helicopters came on the scene other activities such as spraying lifting and positioning materials for construction projects, plus deer culling and live deer capture using net guns. He spoke about the various helicopters used over the years, their idiosyncrasies and mechanical frailties.

Standard jobs included working for the Forest Service (food supplies and hut materials) and with the Waipipi iron sands ships (ferrying a "harbour" pilot to assist with berthing to the buoy and providing supplies to the ships).

One major local job was the 1080 treatment of Kapiti Island to eradicate pests on what is now our district's pre-eminent bird sanctuary.

Much of the work was pretty dangerous and there were many accidents, particularly in the early years.

Planespotting at Paraparaumu

by Stu Brown



SoundsAir Pilatus PC12 ZK-PLS



Air Chathams Saab 340A ZK-CIT, after dark

Upcoming Meeting Programme

Tuesday 3 June	9.30 am	Open forum
Tuesday 10 June	9.30 am	Search out models from storage and hang in Museum
Tuesday 17 June	9.30 am	Open Forum
Tuesday 24 June	9.30 am	Warren O’Keeffe, “Flight Simulators”
Tuesday 1 July	9.30 am	Open forum

MUSEUM HOURS: SUNDAYS 1pm to 4pm

PRIVATE AND GROUP VISITS BY ARRANGEMENT

PHONE: 021 037 1937

ADDRESS: 227 KAPITI ROAD, PARAPARAUMU 5032

POSTAL: C/- P O BOX 248, PARAPARAUMU 5254

WEBSITE: www.kapitiaviationmuseum.nz

EMAIL: kapitiaviation@gmail.com