



READY TO TAKE A PASSENGER FROM BRUCE BAY



A NEW LANDING GROUND AT MUSSELL BEACH

IN common with other countries, New Zealand has found the benefit of aeroplane transport in serving isolated settlements. Perhaps the most striking instance is the service commenced last December to the south from Hokitika, as far as Okuru, about 200 miles distant. Road communication does not go any further than Weheka, just over 100 miles south of Hokitika. Settlers beyond had to rely on packhorse mail, once a fortnight, weather and rivers permitting, and a steamer freight service once every two months. Now the mail is carried on an unsubsidised aerial service once a week, while the aeroplane flies down almost daily with passengers.

The settlers have not been slow in recognising the value of these modern facilities. Probably they are the most "air-minded" people in New Zealand. Where it is not convenient for the aeroplane to land on the many miles of beach along the coastline, runways at homesteads have landing grounds, which bring the aeroplane right to their front and back doors respectively. It is to the enterprise of Captain J. C. (Bert) Mercer, that the "Coasters" owe this service. For two years he planned the undertaking and visited the many points along the route; for it is tricky flying country in places. One has only to visit the Coast on a trip with him to discover the esteem in which he is held. He has proved that the aeroplane is invaluable in cases of backblock sickness, and many a sufferer in Westland has reason to be grateful for its coming. Where it previously took days to reach a patient, doctors can now reach him in an hour or so. At Bruce Bay a bushman cut his foot badly. The aeroplane was on its way south with the mails when it was intercepted. A landing was made on a near-by beach, the patient was placed aboard and within two and a-half hours of the accident occurring, he was in the hospital at Hokitika.

Beachcombers find the aeroplane a convenient method of shifting from claim to claim. All along the coast are miners' shacks, hidden in the scrub bordering the beach. Fresh meat and vegetables are dropped to them. Even butter has been dropped with safety. With their black-sanding equipment they go by aeroplane a few miles down the coast to try new beaches. A signal or a smoke fire will bring the machine down, when the tide is suitable. Gold is quite a common part of the freight to Hokitika.

All kinds of machinery and implements are taken by air down the Coast, and musters, stalkers and mountaineers are taken to huts in the valleys. Bolts are being transported for a new bridge over the Hapuka River at Okuru at the present time. Dogs and ducks have been among the live cargo taken down the Westland coast.

Many of the children in far Westland have never seen a railway train but now are quite familiar with the aeroplane. Those settlers who have children at school in Christchurch and Dunedin are able to have them home for their vacations much longer than was previously possible. It used to take five days, providing the weather was fair, for the journey from Christchurch to the far settlements of Westland—by train, bus and horseback. Today the journey is accomplished in three hours. Recently some children brought the evening paper home with them from Christchurch. South of Weheka—past where the road ends—the mail aeroplane droning overhead is the signal for a member of the family or one of a goldmining party to go out, for the pilot never fails to drop the daily paper, which bears the imprint, "delivered by air."

Hero of the Children

Captain Mercer has become the hero of all the small children along the route. He is a regular flying "Father Christmas" to them; never failing to produce from the cockpit some form of sweet. To the grown-ups he is a flying "good Samaritan" with his many kind gestures, such as bringing medicine to the sick. He has endeared himself to all the people of the Coast, as I found out for myself when making a journey with him recently.

Friday, the thirteenth, was certainly not my unlucky day. It broke beautifully fine. About 9.30 a.m. the orange aeroplane came sweeping over the Fox Glacier Hostel. Down at the landing ground were a Reverend Mother and three sisters, who, attracted by the noise of the engine, had come to see the machine. After spending a few moments while two of the sisters sat in the cabin, "to see what it felt like," we took off. Climbing steadily to the main divide ahead, the machine was

soon in the valley of the Fox. Dwarfed by the mountains around, the glacier lay below, resembling a portion of a huge iced cake, but in reality was a great, glittering ice stream some nine and a-half miles long with a drop of 9000 feet in that distance. We were now over the middle ice fall with its great pinnacles shining deep blue in the early morning sunlight. Only the previous day I had laboriously climbed among these pinnacles, the trip taking some five hours. Here we were now above them in ten minutes! Higher and higher the Fox Moth rose, until we were on top of the world at eleven thousand feet, all around us being the mighty sentinels of the Southern Alps.

Soft-looking, billowy clouds appeared from nowhere and lent further enchantment to the scene. As we moved along at 100 miles an hour the clouds played hide and seek among the peaks. Ahead of us were the unusual glaciers on Mount Hooker. The two glaciers on this peak, which has only once been conquered by men, resemble a huge white cross as they cross each other

on their journey down the steep, rocky face of Hooker.

Soon we were to view one of the most awe-inspiring sights of the journey, for below us appeared mighty precipices which fell sheer for thousands of feet. An indescribable scene presented itself, as row after row of these jagged precipices came into view. We were now above the most topsyturvy part of New Zealand. Our little machine, with its engine functioning perfectly, climbed even higher and we were at a safe height above this inhospitable country. Over Hooker we looked down on a small lake with a glacier running into it. It is reputed to be the only lake with a feeding

glacier in New Zealand. Away to the left were the snow-capped ridges of Otago, while in a direct line ahead, was the "Matterhorn" of Aspiring, the highest peak in Otago.

The Landsborough Valley with its fertile tussock flat and shining river was now in front of us, while the Haast River connecting Otago with Westland, appeared in view at the head. With the engine just idling we commenced to descend. Down, down, leaving the snowfields behind, bush-clad slopes took the place of mountain peaks. We were above a huge natural park. The Landsborough River flowed lazily along the floor of the valley, clumps of trees here and there heightened the park-like appearance. On the flats were small circles for all the world like laid-out flower beds, which were the places where small pools of water had lain and caused growth to be more advanced than in others. Cattle, grazing peacefully, took little notice of the descending aeroplane.

The machine was brought to a graceful landing between two rows of rocks,

which marked a safe landing area. The previous season parties of mountaineers and stalkers had been brought to this spot by aeroplane, being able to reach it within an hour and in addition being able to go aloft and survey the country for likely hunting grounds and routes to the various peaks. After taking down a tent which had been used by some musters we stowed it in the cabin and once again taking the air, made our way down the Landsborough to the Haast.

To describe the beauty of a flight down the Haast would be impossible. It is one place in which the natural colour photographer would find superb subjects. All the way through the

valley, hundreds and hundreds of paradise ducks rose from the river. The almost white stones of the river bed shimmered in the noonday sun while the exquisite blue waters, crystal clear, flowed lazily 50 feet beneath the on-rushing aeroplane.

Bush-clad slopes with occasional peeps of snow-covered peaks were on each side and rose to thousands of feet. Now and again the aeroplane circled over some still limped pool. So unruffled were the winding waters of the Haast, that it appeared as if someone had drawn a huge brush of blue paint over the smooth stones of the river bed.

Waterfalls, some dancing over rocks from the high slopes, others dropping over sheer precipices in bridal-veil effect, added to the entrancing panorama.

Emerged from the valley we were on the sea coast. As far as the eye could see stretched miles and miles of flat country covered with white and red pine. Civilisation too! A house appeared, and, low and behold, a two-way landing runway right at the rear of it! Down again to a graceful landing, to be met by a family, the members of which have lived there all their lives. They are air-minded too, for the son of the family is a Canterbury Aero Club pilot and it is due to his enthusi-

asm that stumps have been cleared and a ground fit for the use of any light aeroplane has been made. Until the aeroplane service started last December, it took these people five days to reach Christchurch!

We continued the flight down the coastline. A lone figure waving from the beach attracted Captain Mercer's attention and the machine was turned and brought down on the smooth beach. A be-whiskered man, still in his twenties, came toward us and with a "Good-day, Captain," he produced two cog wheels which had been stripped. He was a beachcomber and had just installed a water pump which had been delivered by aeroplane two days previously. Something had gone wrong and the part produced had broken.

The next landing was at Okuru, this time in front of the homestead of Mr. Nolan, who is another pioneer of Westland, and has just built a whitebait factory. The rivers in the far south teem with these delectable small fish. The tinned whitebait is shipped to Sydney, a small boat calling at Okuru once every two months. Again I was to listen to the great benefits derived from the advent of the flying machine. It had proved a saviour in Mr. Nolan's case, as he had experienced a sudden attack of illness and was rushed to Hokitika within two hours. Mr. Nolan said the service also speeded up the arrival of THE WEEKLY NEWS.

We came down next at Mussell Beach landing ground. In the early days there was quite a large settlement here and the landing ground was formerly the racecourse. A good-sized machine could now get down here, the ground being approachable from all directions.