

Golden Beaches

We now turned back up the Coast. Mile after mile over a golden beach at a speed of 100 miles an hour the machine skimmed the breakers as they crashed in an unending line on the seashore. Occasionally we would pass over small lagoons at the back of the beach where teal, duck and swan sat on the still waters. Most of the feathered flock were used to the roar of the aeroplane and did no more than look at us as we flew by. Huts hidden among the bushes were occupied by beachcombers, who waved to us as we passed swiftly overhead. Ahead of us, north of the Haast Beach, lay the rugged coastline out from Paringa. The machine rose now to several hundred feet and we looked down on to innumerable golden beaches. Bay after bay, resembling huge scallops in the cliffs, made a striking picture. The blue waters of the Tasman never looked more tranquil, and lazy breakers left a wake of white as they turned over on the sheltered beaches.

Immediately ahead and out to sea a small speck on the ocean proved to be the Government steamer Matai making for Bruce Bay to drop three pedigree Herefords from Waimahaka, in Southland. We flew out and circled over the steamer, the glistening white hull shining brilliantly in the late afternoon sun, and we could see the crew busy on the deck preparing to lower boats over the side. After circling several times we made back to the coastline and landed on a secluded beach at the mouth of the Paringa River. We were in idyllic surroundings. A clear stream flowed over the gravel a few yards away, while the sun shone through the trees bordering the opposite bank and sparkled on the swift-flowing waters—a paradise for the trout fishermen, as are all the streams in far Westland.

Taking off, the gravel crunching under the running wheels, we rose and landed, within five minutes, on the beach at Bruce Bay. Dogs, dozens of them, scampered round, while Maori children came out and greeted us. Situated here was the first of the mills to commence operations in South Westland to work the white pine. The place was a hive of activity.

Over Kairangarua, past the Copeland Valley—the pass to the Hermitage—the peaks of Cook and Tasman again came into view. The sun was setting over the sea horizon in a blaze of red—sinking into the calm waters of the Tasman. The Fox Glacier was a deep shade of pink. Slowly the evening shadow crept up the ice fall until only the peak of Cook caught the dying rays. The journey was at an end. I had seen and gloried in "unknown New Zealand."



VARIED CARGO: A gold-seeker hands Captain Mercer a portion of machinery for delivery at Hokitika.



THE GRANDEUR OF THE SCENERY along the aerial route is typified by this view of Mounts Cook (right) and Tasman, taken by the author on his recent trip with Captain Mercer.

See map p. 160

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Cochran's from letter of Jack Cox about time 10 hours ago

Arawata River for aeroplane landing on Williamson flat.

Returned from the Arawata River last Wednesday when I proceeded there the 10 hours ago etc. to the Williamson Flats. I took one of the boys from here & with the air pilot's assistance he returned to our old camp of February (Feb 23 1935 see p 77) he spent two days packing the last material to the site (ie Capt. Mercer's material mostly taken down Feb. 1935) & then set off for a landing ground in Williamson's flats. Capt. Mercer was too busy to come with us, so we went there without him - were back. He never saw Smith's base & only then, it being necessary to find there, he found the river when he coiled the killy the day we were remembering (March 1 p. 78) he picked up Arawata Bill's blaze on the other side, it was well & run but I managed to follow it completely. He passed most of his dry rock camps, each containing a lot of his & old mining gear & reached the Williamson River at 2 pm. Found the river again in hope of finding a good ground but it was unsuitable so in this the second gorge of the Williamson flat - which he reached quite early the following day. The trip was to be made in one day & the bank cleared up & it. However exploring it 1000 acres was much a big job. But after some heavy operations I saw & rubber work he managed to reach a perfect landing ground at the head (?) of the Arawata & the Poi River. Worked it all etc. Then he discovered another one as smooth as a billiard table so he worked it out. Mt. Tania is a picture from here."