

Maroochydore Aerodrome – Aerodrome Road

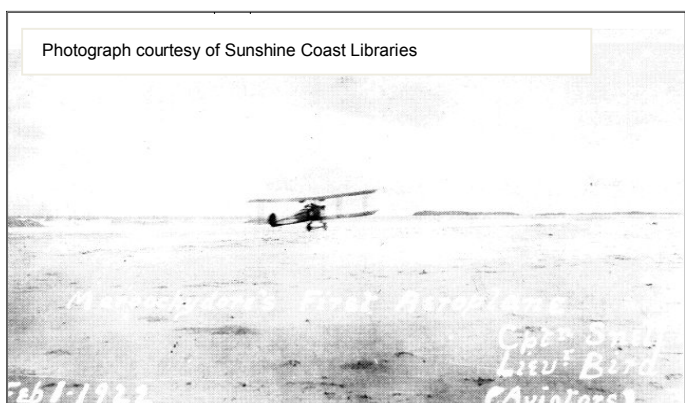
Some time ago an English visitor to The Queensland Air Museum asked me where the Maroochydore Airstrip was before the new one was constructed. He went on to say that he thought that it must have been near Aerodrome Road as Hinkler Parade and Kingsford Smith Parade were nearby. This led me to try to find out whether an airfield had in fact existed in the vicinity.

The following is a small part of what I have discovered. Below is a photograph of the first aeroplane to land in Maroochydore on Maroochydore Beach on 1st February, 1922.



The pilots were Capt P.W. Snell and Lieut S.W. Bird. The aircraft was an Avro 504K, registration G-AUDA, owned by Aeroflight Aviation Company, Bulimba. (The Nambour Chronicle described the aeroplane as a Gauda plane.) They landed unexpectedly about midday. It was first thought to be a forced landing but two valid reasons transpired afterwards. One was a dire shortage of cigarettes on the aeroplane and the other was that, having an alleged up-to-

date map on board, which mentioned no township, village or settlement here, they went down to get its name. They were delighted with their discovery of a place with Maroochydore's advantages, to say nothing of a perfectly natural landing place. They maintained that Queensland was slipping badly in regard to aviation because of the insufficient maps available, which they regarded as the most backward in Australia. They recommended the adoption of the NSW mapping system which would never miss a place of Maroochydore's importance.



The aviators treated Messrs J.T. Lowe and F. Goeths to a flight over the 'Dore, Mooloolah River, out to sea where the ocean floor could be clearly seen, especially the reefs and up Maroochy River nearly to Bli Bli. The passengers declared that they never saw a prettier view than Maroochydore from 2000 feet up. Further joy flights were prevented by inclement weather. It took off the next day.

Subsequently, the aeroplane was badly damaged in a forced landing at Stanwell in 1924 and was written off.

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The next mention of aircraft in Maroochydore was the advertisement in the Chronicle on 24th December, 1926 and the following article on another page on the same day.

Aeroplane Flights

**MAROOCHYDORE and
ALEXANDRA HEADLANDS.**

THE EAGLE AVIATION COMPANY'S

Aeroplane will leave Brisbane Aerodrome for Maroochydore Beach Thursday or Friday.

Flights will be arranged at moderate charges during Xmas and New Year Holidays.

**SEE THE AEROPLANE
ON THE BEACH**

Aeroplane's Visit. An aeroplane from the Eagle Aviation Company is due to visit Maroochydore and Alexandra Headland during the holidays and is expected to land early Friday morning. Should such bright weather continue, the thrills of a trip through the air will prove most invigorating, and the opportunity will be given intending aerists by the inauguration of a series of flights, which will be arranged daily. Mr T. O'Connor whom we understand is responsible for the inauguration of this pleasure, is worthy of congratulation in his endeavour to provide novel enjoyment for the many holiday makers at these popular resorts.

The aircraft, an Airco DH6 belonging to Eagle Aviation Service of Bulimba duly arrived having left Brisbane 35 minutes previously. It brought a consignment of the morning's dailies to be distributed to breakfast tables of the surrounding towns. Captain Howell was in charge of the aeroplane and joy flights continued on Christmas afternoon and again on Sunday. While in the air about 7 o'clock on Sunday morning a forced landing was rendered necessary. The aircraft landed gently on the

beach at Alexandra Headlands. The two passengers at the time reported that they were none the worse for their experience. Each flight lasted 15 minutes, going south to Caloundra and then north to Coolum. Those who "flew aloft" were delighted with the experience. A part for the engine was obtained from Brisbane. It was announced that the flights would continue after a few days.

Photograph courtesy of Sunshine Coast Libraries



The following photographs show the same aircraft on Maroochydore beach after a crash landing, the first ca 1926 and the second captioned "*Grimmell family of Caloundra sitting on a damaged aeroplane at Maroochydore Beach, 27 January 1927*"

Photograph courtesy of Sunshine Coast Libraries



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The Civil Aircraft Register – Australia related the fate of G-AUBO as “Crashed on takeoff from Maroochydore Beach, Queensland, 27th January, 1927”.



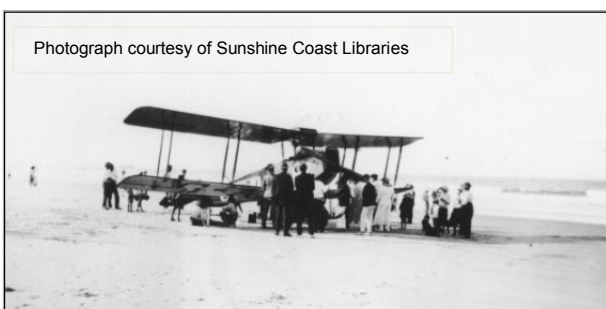
This photo is captioned “Glider in sand dunes, Maroochydore, ca 1926”. It is most probably the same aircraft. The photographs on the previous page show an aircraft not too badly damaged, probably easily repairable and this photo could explain why it was written off. Did souvenir hunters or vandals, or are they both the same, finish what the crash landing didn’t finish? Yes, there were vandals around in those days too.

An alternative explanation for the same photo may be found in this extract from an article “When Aviation Was Young – Adventures of Australian Airmen” by John D. Balfe which appeared in The Argus (Melbourne) on Saturday 26 January 1935.

“Mr. Leslie Kewell, another Queensland pilot, who won distinction as a "ferry" pilot during the Great War, was flying with a passenger over Brisbane in an antiquated De Havilland 6. The machine was so old that how it flew was a source of wonder to the other pilots at the aerodrome. To use Mr. Kewell's expression, it was "like flying a brick." The flight was a test before leaving on a cross-country journey. He took the mechanic up with him, and they had not been in the air more than a few minutes before a large sheet of three-ply was torn off from near the nose of the machine by the wind. It sped past the mechanic's head toward Mr. Kewell, who caught it in mid-air as it passed his cockpit. Calmly he handed it to the mechanic, and then landed before more parts of the 'plane loosened. The sheet was replaced and the cross-country flight was begun. Some 40 miles out of Brisbane another forced landing was necessary, and the machine had to be left on Maroochydore Beach, It is still there buried beneath a sand-dune.

Stories such as these belong to a past stage in the development of flight. Similar situations are seldom if ever encountered now, for the modern aeroplane is constructed as strongly as the modern motor-car.”

The following two photographs also picture aeroplanes taking people for joyrides from Maroochydore Beach about the same time.



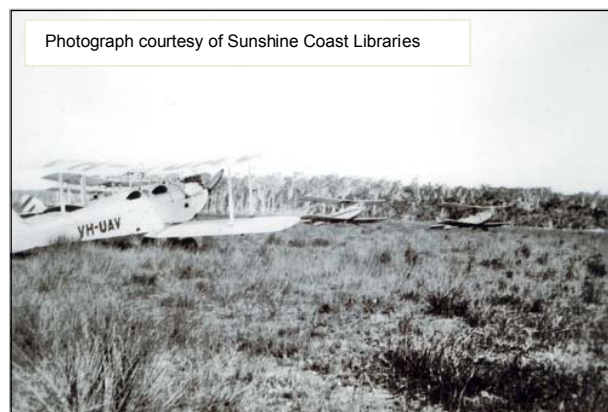
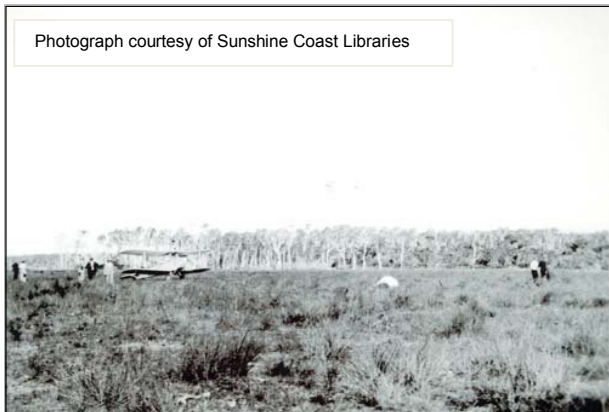
AVRO 504 fitted with Sunbeam Dyak Engine



AVRO Avian

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These photographs are accompanied by the following description. “Captain Tracey, accompanied by a sales manager for Queensland Air Navigation Ltd. and members of the Maroochydore Aerodrome Committee, selected a site for the aerodrome on the plain near the Maroochydore Beach in October 1928. The area was cleared and a landing strip for light planes was marked out.”



Aeroplanes at the “airstrip” on Aerodrome Plains, now the site of Aerodrome Road, Maroochydore.

VH-UAV is a DH60X Moth, owned by Civil Aviation Board and on loan to Australian Aero Club, Qld Branch. It was destroyed in a collision at Archerfield 19th June, 1939. The pilot was killed.

An interesting aside is the following article from the Chronicle on Friday, 14th June, 1929.

The Astor Wireless – Aeroplane’s visit to the District.

The Astor Wireless which is so well and favourably known in New South Wales and Victoria is now being handled in Queensland by the Queensland Pastoral Supplies Ltd. The Astor embraces the Sheilded Neutrodyne plus the new Screen Grid valve and One Dial Control. A magnificent range is



kept in stock embracing the all-electric and battery series. It is only necessary to turn the switch and one dial to get in touch with Japan, New Zealand and all Australian stations. Most of the Astor models will give daylight reception of all Australian stations. During July the “Astor” aeroplane will be visiting this district and all Astor owners will be entitled to a free ride, and others can book at the office of this paper for £1.

About this time the timeline gets a bit hazy and conflicting reports appear from various sources. The Nambour Chronicle of 25 July, 1930 reports that “matters have moved along in acquiring a commodious and suitable site at Maroochydore, where an area, it is expected, will be set aside and work concentrated upon to bring it up to requirements laid down for registration by the Civil Aviation Department. It will rest with the residents to use their best endeavours to keep the project before the authorities, and to cooperate with those who have undertaken responsibility in the preparation of the ground. In fact, it is already announced that what is in the mind’s eye is for improvements to proceed immediately at this locality in Maroochydore, so that there may be ensured the ground being in such a condition to permit its use at no great distant date in the future.

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Should this eventuate there is not the least reason why an aerial pageant should not be held during the next midsummer holidays.”

The Brisbane Courier, Friday, 21st November 1930 reported that a large portion of the ground secured at Maroochydore as an aerodrome site had been felled and cleared.



On 24th December 1930 the Nambour Chronicle promoted a coming Aerial Pageant. It said “reports to hand indicate that all classes from the moth to the new Junkers monoplane will be seen in action. The new aerodrome is regarded by those in a position to pass opinion, as being in excellent order for the special items listed in a programme that will cause intense interest and enthusiasm. A number of aviatrix will also be included in the party. Aerial bombing, parachute jump by the celebrated Captain Erho, and open pilots’ race will be the principal items.” It went on to say “The following airmen have notified their participation. Capt. T. Young (Sky Travel Aus. Ltd),

three machines including the famous Junkers monoplane: Captain L. J. Brain (QANTAS), three machines; Aero Club, two or three Moths: Capt Ron Adair and W. Shaw (Aircraft Pty Ltd), three machines, including the new Hawk Moth (6-seater), the Waco and Gipsy Moth: Capt Treacy (Qld Air Navigation), Avro V Monoplane and two Moths: Capt K. Frewin (Australia’s leading, noted stunt flier) who will be accompanied by Capt. Wedgman and the noted parachutist, Capt Erho.

Captains Young, Treacy, Winning and Davidson have recently visited the grounds, and have expressed high appreciation of their condition and are doing all possible to ensure success of the pageant. The aero club has offered assistance in supervising the various events.

WARNING

Special controls have been arranged for car parking, the site selected being the reserve adjoining the aerodrome. A special warning is given to the public that everyone must keep clear of all runways, and not to cross the ground on any account while a machine is in action. Fatal accidents have occurred as a result of people rushing on to an aeroplane, and it is hoped that the public will co-operate with the officials in recognising this important fact. The entrance to the grounds will be past Richard’s Mill at Maroochydore.

No specified time has been arranged for the various events. Up till 10.30 a.m. joy-riding will be provided for those desirous of taking a trip aloft and the main events are to proceed from 1 p.m. till 2.30 p.m.”

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The Nambour Chronicle reported on the pageant on Friday, 2nd January, 1931. It said, “Whilst the attendance at Maroochydore on Boxing Day to view what was announced as an aerial pageant was all that could be desired, it was with regret and disappointment that the majority of the vast crowd turned away in the late afternoon, realising that so far as an advertised programme of events was concerned, there was very little to commend it.” Apparently most of the pilots were more concerned with taking passengers on joy flights and it wasn’t until the closing hours that two aircraft gave an aerial exhibition, which, if it had have been done earlier, would have sent the crowd home in better humour. The report went on to say that, “The lengthy runway was well cleared of encumbrances, and showed that the work undertaken had provided for even three times the number of machines to operate without trouble of over-crowding. It is shown that with a little more attention the ground could be utilised successfully for the dual purpose of aerodrome and golf links. Still, the place is only in the making, and with the scheme of having established permanently an aerodrome, Maroochydore will not be the loser by instituting such an important asset.”

New Air Service - Maroochydore and Brisbane

Things developed quite rapidly after the opening up of the aerodrome. Sky Travel Australia announced in the Chronicle of 9th January, 1931 that it has definitely commenced a regular service between here and Brisbane. It suggested that Brisbane business men would now be able to spend their weekends here and return to business feeling the benefits of frequent relaxation on our beautiful beaches. It further promoted that racegoers, persons interested in all sport, and others, may leave on Saturday, spend the weekend in Brisbane and return here in time for breakfast on Monday. In fact, two residents had already arranged to go to Brisbane to attend the cricket match between West Indies and Queensland next Saturday. The article finished by announcing that, should sufficient inducement offer, Sky Travel would run its ‘planes anytime, and as often as necessary.

The local newspaper appears to have gone to sleep regarding news about the airport for some time but the Brisbane Courier on Thursday, 8th October 1931 reported that members of the Queensland Aero Club flew from Brisbane on September 27 led by G.H. Gardner, the Club’s chief instructor, so it seems that the Maroochydore Aero Club was still in existence. Confirmation of this appeared in the Chronicle on Friday, 2nd December. An article advertised “Flying Scholarships”. At least twelve candidates were to take their first course in flying at Maroochydore Aerodrome entailing about half an hour in the air during which the instructor would impart practical knowledge to each pupil. On December 23rd further testing would be made and six would be elected to vie for a full course of instruction for qualification for an “A” Pilot’s Certificate.

Although all this is quite interesting, it’s now time to let the Nambour Chronicle tell you how it all came about. What follows is a fairly complete wrap up of the Aerodrome’s progress and development from its early years. The article on the next page appeared on Friday, 2nd December, 1932 and is printed in full.

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AVAILABLE FOR ALL CLASSES OF AIRCRAFT

Venue of Spectacular Pageant During Holidays

About October, 1930, operations were commenced at Maroochydore with a view of establishing an aerodrome at that centre. Through the generosity of a number of the local residents, monies were obtained, in the way of temporary loans, to begin the work of clearing sufficient ground to enable practically all types of aircraft to land and take off with reasonable safety.

Portion of the land which was cleared is owned by Mr. W. Parker, and portion of what is known as the town reserve adjoining Parker's property, is on the northern side. Approximately £100 was expended in this way by engaging a number of local unemployed. By the middle of December, 1930, sufficient ground was cleared to enable aircraft to land and take off with safety, but before this ground could be used, it was necessary to remove a piece of fence running through the cleared ground dividing the reserve from Mr. Parker's property. After an aerial pageant on the ground on Boxing Day, 1930, on account of certain difficulties arising through the removal of the fence mentioned, it was again necessary to replace it. Owing to a roadway running through the reserve, which was believed at the time could not be fenced, the ground was useless for aircraft to land, as well as being unsafe. On most occasions, with the exception of a suitable wind, the fence had to be removed to allow aircraft to land, and replaced afterwards.

The Aerial pageant which was conducted on the ground on Boxing Day, 1930, to the disappointment of the promoter and the general public, was a failure. It was caused by poor sportsmanship and unreasonable excuses offered by some of the pilots present on the ground, despite certain promises from them that they would do anything to assist the promoter to make the pageant a success. The pilots referred to had made a "harvest" in the way of joy flying. They refused to take any part in the events advertised. They also refused to take the parachutist into the air for the purpose of a parachute jump, as advertised, although Captain Erho was on the ground. Several other well known pilots, who were present, were unable to carry out this work owing to the unsuitable type of machines being flown by them. They went to a great deal of trouble in endeavouring to carry out the program advertised. One well known pilot who was present (Pilot T. R. Young), of Sky Travel Limited, showed good sportsmanship by making arrangements with his company to send a moth aeroplane from Brisbane (although this machine was at the time engaged in other work) to Maroochydore to assist in carrying out the programme. When it arrived Pilot Young took the machine into the air himself and gave a splendid display of aerobatics for about 20 minutes. By this time most of the large crowd had dispersed. It was not until late in the afternoon that two of the pilots who had refused to assist earlier in the day, were persuaded to take to the air and give a very mild display of formation flying, but not until the sum of £5 had been paid.

Another pageant was conducted on the same ground the following year, when the programme (including the parachute jump by Mr. J. H. Milne, which was a very spectacular event) was carried out, with the co-operation and assistance given by some of Queensland's leading pilots. On Easter Saturday of the present year another pageant was conducted. On both occasions, although the gate takings were far below expenses, those present appeared to be well satisfied. No doubt the cause of the very poor attendance on the two referred to was due to the disappointment the public experienced at the 1930 pageant.

Arrangements have now been made for a five-year' lease of Mr. Parkers portion of the land, now cleared, coupled with permission to fence in the town reserve, which has already been set apart for aerodrome purposes. The fence running through the ground will now be removed. Together with assistance rendered by the Local Authority, it is expected to have the aerodrome completed and licensed towards the end of December next, and matters are now well in hand for conducting a big aerial pageant and sports meeting on the ground on Boxing Day. The programme will include the Maroochydore aerial derby, landing competition for aircraft, crazy flying display, stunt flying and motor car bombing as well as a special aerial and ground novelty event enacted for the first time in Queensland.

It is hoped that the pageant will be well attended and supported by the public, as the total proceeds go towards the further improvements to the aerodrome. The ground will also be used regularly at weekends by the Queensland Aero Club as a cross country flying course for pupils as well as being a great service to the district.

Apart from commercial machines which will be present on Boxing Day, the Queensland Aero Club is sending from four to six machines. One of the main ground attractions will be a beach pyjama parade for the ladies, when a handsome trophy will be presented to the winner.

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Now, what about the fate of the Air Pageant? QAM members would be happy to learn that the Maroochydore Aerial Derby, Silver Cup was won by Don Cameron. (A different Don Cameron is one of QAM's elder statesmen). He completed the race to Nambour and back in 5 minutes and 54 seconds. Mr. J. T. Lowe, in presenting the prizes felt that all were pleased with the performances put up by the various competitors. He thanked the Queensland branch of the Australian Flying Corps and regretted the small attendance. (The gate takings were greatly below expectations, little more than £11.) He also thanked Mr. Appleby for his interest and support to the pageant and also Mr. W. Parker, the owner of the ground for his assistance in removing the fence to allow for greater accommodation on the aerodrome.

It is not known when the last aeroplane landed at Aerodrome Road but articles appear in local newspapers until at least 1937 when it was reported in The Chronicle, 12th November, 1937 that Mr. Mowbray, an inspector of the Civil Aviation Department had inspected the Maroochydore Aerodrome. He expressed the opinion that an expenditure of £2,000 would be necessary to make the ground suitable for the use of modern aeroplanes. The Maroochydore Progress Association requested the Maroochy Shire Council to approach the State Government for a grant of £500 to effect the improvements to ensure an emergency landing ground. At this stage the search for a new airport was already beginning.

John Stitt (Member, Queensland Air Museum)

Sources:

Nambour Chronicle

Brisbane Courier

Sunshine Coast Daily

The Argus (Melbourne)

Civil Aircraft Register - Australia

Photographs courtesy of

Sunshine Coast Libraries

State Library of Victoria

Special Thanks

to Carol Hawley from Nambour library for all her help in providing both information and photographs and

to Don Cameron and Michael Hinsbey for their help in aeroplane identification.