



On The Step Issue 20 - Aug 2009

Dawn from Gulf St Vincent, looking towards Wild Horse Plains, SA

In this Issue

Fly Safe

Just after our last SPAA newsletter was published there was a serious crash in the USA involving a SeaRey. The accident was fatal for both the pilot and the passenger.

Light aircraft do not have a *black box*, or cockpit voice recorder so we are usually left wondering "what happened?" Was there an engine failure or a fault in the aircraft?

In this case the entire accident sequence was captured on video by a spectator. It appears that the most likely problem was pilot error.

None of us wants to bend our beautiful aircraft or cause injury to ourselves or others so I discussed this with our safe-flying professor, Dale DeRemer. In response, Dale has written an article for us called "Flying In The Dangerous Layer."

As seaplane pilots we spend more time in the dangerous layer than almost any other aircraft type (except agricultural flying – and we know what their accident rate is like).

In this issue, Dale looks at the hazards of low airspeed and the associated stall-spin.

Dale welcomes comments and questions from all SPAA members. You can contact him on email: drdder@gmail.com

We will have more articles from Dale to remind us that while our seaplanes can give us great pleasure and fulfilment, they also give us a means to cause grief to ourselves and our families. And usually, the key factor determining whether the outcome is pleasure and fulfilment, or grief, is in the decisions we make as pilots.

Fly Safe

From the Editor

Gold at the end of the rainbow

Is there really gold at the end of the rainbow?

Absolutely, because I recently flew right through it.

It was late one Sunday afternoon when I was crossing Gulf St Vincent in South Australia, heading east, with a bright sun low in the sky directly behind me. I was approaching a wall of rain. From a distance a rainbow started to form and the closer I got the more intense the rainbow became. As I flew into the side of the rain squall a complete circle of intense vibrant rainbow engulfed me. I felt like I was flying into a huge multi coloured bull's eye.

This was a fitting end to a magic day.

I had departed early from Adelaide and travelled up to the Flinders Ranges, landing first in estuarine waters at Wild Horse Plains, then at a variety of small dirt strips with enchanting names like 'Ghost Gully Airstrip'.

Flying around the ridges and valleys of the Flinders Ranges on a dead calm winter's day was idyllic, no turbulence, no rotors, no thermals, just the joy of the suburb scenery rolling out around me.

From the Flinders I headed back to Adelaide via Port Augusta at the head of Spencer Gulf. What an afternoon. The Gulf presented an almost infinite expanse of glassy water. I landed and motored along just sitting on the step for many kilometres, occasionally adding a little power and climbing to 50ft then reducing power and slowly descending until that beautiful hiss told me I was back on the water. The huge expanse of the gulf afforded the ultimate glassy water experience. Great care was needed because there was no sensation of speed or altitude; it felt like I was resting on a giant mirror.

As I left Spencer Gulf and crossed the Yorke Peninsula the weather changed, dark clouds appeared ahead and the perfect rainbow started to crystallise.

This trip was my gold. It had been a day of solid gold experiences and it ended with a perfect rainbow.

Gear UP to "kiss the water" # #

Ross Vining (VH-RRZ)



Dear Editor

I have always been interested by the fascination that people have of flying under the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

Our last newsletter "On the Step" showed a PBY Catalina supposedly flying under the bridge. These days no-one but no-one is allowed to fly under the bridge. Seaplanes and helicopters are permitted, nay directed, to fly over the bridge in R405 at 500ft over the southern pylon.

Larger aircraft such as the Catalina may only traverse the bridge, under air traffic control at a minimum of 1500ft.

Why is it not allowed to fly under the bridge?

To me it would be a lot safer than flying over it; safer for people and traffic on the bridge and for aircraft flying over it. In the event of a sudden engine failure a pilot would simply glide into the water, not into the bridge, if he were trying to go over it.

In any case, why is it so fascinating to fly under the bridge when the best view and the most exciting thing is to go over it in R405.

Is it only because it is taboo?

Having postured all this I have to admit I have flown under the bridge, not once, but on many occasions.

When I first got my Piper Super Cub on floats to fly daily to my office and works at Wyong from the Lane Cove River I was not allowed (by the then MSB) to alight at Lane Cove but to land and take off ONLY from the designated water aerodrome at Rose Bay.

Once on the water I became a boat and officially could taxi anywhere on the harbour.

There was no speed limit for boats on the harbour

so I was able to step taxi all the way from Rose Bay to Greenwich.

The roughest part of this taxi run was at Circular Quay just under the Bridge. This is the narrowest part of the harbour and water currents are greatest there. It is also the place where all the ferries congregate to get into Circular Quay generating large wakes and waves as they do.

At first I would slow down to idle taxi but the rough waters would be picked up by the propeller and I would have spray all over the plane. To counter this I would get back on the step and with a bit of nose up, to keep the prop clear, the plane would go over a wave and suddenly become airborne. The safest and cleanest way was to keep her airborne, just above the chop and fly up to Greenwich at about 3ft over the surface.

To keep myself legal, I was about to fit a radio antenna sticking downwards so that, part of the plane would be in contact with the water and so I would be 'legal'.

Before I could do this the authorities, DCA and MSB, agreed that I should be allowed to take off and alight on the Lane Cove River under a special provision called an "Instrument of Authorisation" which had to be renewed every year and carried a few restrictive clauses, such as no operations prior to 7am and always in daylight hours, etc.

This was a climb down for the MSB but DCA was always helpful and in favour of it.

In the meantime, I had flown under the bridge at least half a dozen times.

Phil Dulhunty OAM
Chairman - SPAA

Editors reply: Dear Phil - I have replaced the Catalina with a squadron of Supercubs on floats .

I trust you like the improvement? Editor.

Flying In The Dangerous Layer

By Dale DeRemer*



A Stall/spin from about 20 feet in the air. Pilot showing off at a safety seminar. When he climbed out of wreck he was heard to say, "My God! What am I going to tell my wife?". (I was there and watched it, and heard him. - Dale)

Seaplane pilots spend most of their time flying in the dangerous layer. This is where 99%+ of aircraft accidents begin and terminate.

The dangerous layer of air starts at the surface but its top is not so clear cut. It depends on the aircraft, the pilot's skill level and whether he makes safe decisions about the terrain he flies over. Weather may also affect the height of the dangerous layer. Roughly, the top of the dangerous layer will be somewhere between 500' and 1500' above the surface.

Many different kinds of accidents occur in the dangerous layer. Takeoff accidents, landing accidents and traffic pattern accidents are the most common. But why do we call them 'accidents'? The vast majority of fatalities and airplane benders are clearly pilot error - 75-95% of them, depending on who you ask. In my book, those are not 'accidents'. They are crashes caused by pilot error.

We pilots are the cause of this destruction. This article addresses some of the hazards of the dangerous layer. In fact one BIG cause applies to both takeoff-climb and traffic pattern, the stall-spin in its many forms.

Airspeed is life
What controls
airspeed?
The Elevator

Takeoff

One of the worst things that can happen to a flight instructor is to learn of a former student pilot who has killed himself in an airplane. I speak from experience.

The takeoff stall-spin happens in two scenarios.

1 The short lake takeoff where the pilot decides he's not going to make it over the trees. Instinctively, he pulls back on the stick, causing both airspeed and climb performance to decrease, add a little more elevator and the full power stall is very violent. He would have been better off going into the trees, level, in controlled flight. Many seaplane occupants have survived landing in trees. Where did the pilot go wrong? Poor planning! There are good ways, before power-up, to determine whether you can clear the trees.

2 Power failure during climbout. How quickly that ground comes up to meet the pilot! The instinct is strong, when seeing that surface coming up so fast, to pull back on the stick, which, of course, makes the ground come up faster! How often are you and I subjected to this possibility? Right! Every time we take off. A reasonable passenger expects us to be able to handle things like a power failure on takeoff. And, so do the courts.

The dead pilot I mentioned above did a Biennial Flight Review with me at a seaplane safety seminar. We took off, I waited until he could make it to the water then throttled the engine back during climbout. He did nothing for the longest time then pulled the wheel back. Whew! After six more tries, he did everything correctly but I'm here to tell you, that wasn't enough training! He killed himself in the same airplane, the following winter. Power failure on takeoff. I will never forget it.

Do yourself a favour. Achieve V_y (best climb speed) or greater as soon as possible after liftoff. One wing span above the water is not too soon. And practice, at a safe altitude, after simulated power failure, getting the nose down to maintain as close to V_y as you can. Memorise the sight picture of the correct pitch attitude to maintain V_y . It has to be quick but smooth! Pitch immediately to that correct attitude. You will have a flare to accomplish, so you need that airspeed energy to trade in the flare. If you don't have it, you will fall through the flare. Back injuries are really lifestyle changing!

Watch your airspeed!



This aircraft was badly damaged in a stall-spin, takeoff accident similar to that described in this article. The fact that the pilot walked away with only minor injuries is a testament to the inherent strength of the aircraft.

The Pattern

I taught Advanced Wilderness Seaplane Flight Courses to 20-25 seaplane-rated pilots every summer for 18 years. One manoeuvre we worked on until proficiency prevailed involved getting the pilot (at a safe altitude) to stall the plane deeply, until a wing dropped at least 30 degrees, then recover with minimum loss of altitude and no evidence of a secondary stall.

Many pilots had never done this manoeuvre before! During the long climb to my recommended 7000' (the surface was about 850'), we arrived at a simple conclusion. Smooth recovery to level flight required only enough elevator pressure to see that the IAS was increasing slowly with a goal of V_y , then climb. We also discussed that most airplanes required just a bit of nose down attitude to get out of the stall, with power moderated, since power is destabilizing. Once IAS got above stall, power was brought back in smoothly, knowing that if the throttle was jammed forward, power would be destabilizing.

Many of my students were confident they could recover without losing more than 1000', but most would have made a big hole in the ground or water if the surface had been 1000' below. With practice, the better natural pilots were able to get their altitude loss down to about 500', but that skill erodes without regular practice.

Most water birds neither fly well at speeds near stall nor climb well at speeds below V_y . But they fall fast when in a deep stall. So a stall-spin from traffic pattern altitude is usually deadly. The message is clear; keep above V_y in the dangerous layer until starting the landing flare.

Traffic pattern stall/spin accidents seem to fall into two categories or a combination thereof:

1 The turn to final; where did we seaplane pilots ever get the idea that we need to make square corners to get from downwind to final? Make it more like a wide turn, then there are no steep banks. Try practicing the more gentle continuous turn and keep up V_y speed. Also, get a feel for the nose attitude, for the day when there is a bug in your pitot.

2 The other category of stall spin in the traffic pattern is almost always fatal because it starts from about 500' and achieves a high vertical speed. Why does it happen? Because the pilot is fooling around, showing off or is just inattentive. It is difficult to believe that a wings-level stall in the traffic pattern could be caused by poor proficiency or simply inattention to attitude. Such a crash (fatal for both pilot and passenger) of a SeaRey in the USA happened in June this year, and was video taped by a boater. The stall-spin occurred at nearly traffic pattern altitude, wings level, when the pilot appears to have abruptly pulled the nose up, from an already nose high attitude. Could he have recovered? Maybe he could, with excellent training and proficiency practice. Nonetheless, he signed his contract to die, way up in the air, where it is supposed to be safe. (With no intention of offending anyone, these are the results of study of the video of the crash as were apparent to me).

I won't live long enough to say this often enough: AIRSPEED IS LIFE ITSELF!

And, what controls airspeed? ONLY the elevator!



Landings

At the bottom of the dangerous layer is the water, and water has two insidious characteristics. One is that it is very difficult to judge distance ahead from close to the water. There is the story of the pilot who made long, low approaches toward where he wanted to go ashore until one day he put the floats through the screen door of the camp.

Another good reason to avoid long, low approaches is the rogue wave. Simply stated, two waves that encounter each other (because one is moving faster or at an angle to the other) momentarily produce a wave whose height is the sum of the two encountering waves. Long, low approaches over water with any wave height more than an inch or two create a very dangerous scenario. The seaplane is in a high speed, minimum pitch angle attitude and if a wave slaps the bottom of the float or hull, causing a pitch down moment, then things get really ugly! At best, it generally results in PAPS (pilot and passengers swimming) and major damage/upset for the airplane.

*Author's note: I've always heard that Aussies are a tough, boisterous and sometimes argumentative crowd. Feel free to ask questions, challenge ideas, be critical, etc. We all learn from that! If you are flying something for which there is no V_y published, it is fun and easy to determine your bird's V_y (and other) speeds. "How to" is all there in the book "Water Flying Concepts".

Cheers, Dale (email: drdder@gmail.com)



This "accident" resulted from a very flat high speed approach. The aircraft touched the water much too fast. The two black airborne objects are the float tip bumpers!

Know Your Knots

Ben Hunter

The 'Bowline'..... a must know for any Seaplane Pilot.

Probably the most useful of all boat knots and the most secure, the bowline (pronounced bo-lynn) retains over 80% of the strength of the rope in which it is tied.

It can be called the essential sailing/boating knot... quick to tie, easy to untie, a practical knot used all around any boat..... or seaplane.

The bowline is an excellent method of making a temporary loop in the end of a rope. It can be used for making fast to a rope, an anchor or chain shackle, it can be used to tie off to a pile, bollard or tree, or any other object that a loop can be thrown over or tied around.

It is also a good way to bring someone in the water back to a boat, as it can be slipped over the head and shoulders and placed around the body. This bowline knot will not slip, so it cannot close up on the body and crush it when the rope is pulled hard.

The easiest way to remember how to tie a bowline is the kid's way, by imagining a tree beside a hole. The rabbit comes out of his hole, runs around the back of the tree and then runs down his hole again.

1. Make the rabbit hole as shown.
2. The rabbit comes up through the hole,
3. Around the back of the tree.
4. The rabbit goes back down the hole.
5. Pull the three ends to tighten.

To untie a bowline, bend back the part formed when the rabbit goes "around the back of the tree," and the knot loosens up nicely.

Editor's Note: I am frequently shocked when I see the flimsy, half hearted way some pilots tie down their aircraft, often with knots that would slip under stress. If you tie an aircraft down, do it properly, use a knot that will not let you down. The bowline is a good general purpose knot with many uses for a seaplane.



Step 1



Step 2



Step 3



Step 4

The Catalina Festival at Rathmines

Dear Editor

The Catalina Festival is on Saturday 24th October. We have changed the date to make it well clear of the October long weekend.

We would love to have lots of seaplanes and helicopters visit.

We can arrange overnight security for aircraft at a very reasonable price from a rover scout group (18/26 year olds) who do this for many events.

I would like an early indication of who might attend so I can allocate space and arrange safety fencing.

Please email or phone me if you think you may be able to attend the festival with your aircraft.

Regards Mike

Rathmines Memorial Bowling Club (Ph 02 4975 1955)
email: rathminesbc@bigpond.com



Editor's Note: Rathmines was built as a Catalina base. The concrete ramp is the biggest and best ramp in Australia. The first Catalina Festival at Rathmines was in 2007, it was attended by 6 seaplanes and a helicopter. My wife Linda and I attended in our SeaRey. It was lots of fun - I highly recommend it. Ross



The BigBight GASA

It's time for another GASA (Great Australian SeaRey {Seaplane?} Adventure).

I'm planning a trip from Adelaide to Perth in January 2010, it's the BigBight GASA.

The Great Australian Bight – with its dramatic cliffs will be a feature of the trip.

Other highlights will include :

- The picturesque Port Lincoln (SA) area
- Numerous estuarine water ways of the Eyre Peninsula (SA)
- Hundreds of islands of the Archipelago of the Recherche (WA)
- Landings in reef protected ocean ponds
- Headlands and inlets of the South West Corner (WA)
- Participation in the Skyworks Airshow over the Swan River (Perth)

I flew my SeaRey from Adelaide to Perth in January this year. It was fantastic – one of the most varied and spectacular flying experiences I have had.

It was so good I want to do it all again in 2010 and all seaplanes are invited.

THE VISION

All participants to assemble in Adelaide by the evening of 19 January 2010. The BigBight GASA will depart Adelaide on 20 January (Wednesday) and fly coastal to Perth over 6 days. In January this year flying the same route took 30 hours in my SeaRey.

Allowing 6 days will give a margin for bad weather.

The adventure will culminate in our participation in the

Skyworks Airshow in Perth on Australia Day (Tuesday 26th January). This spectacular display over the Swan River in the centre of Perth is a prelude to the evening fireworks over the river. 2010 is the 80th anniversary of the first landing of a seaplane on the Swan River and so the Airshow organisers are keen to have a major Seaplane contingent in the display. I have put a proposal to CASA for the SeaReys in the group to take part in the Skyworks Airshow. This display has received in-principle approval from CASA.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

We will stay in motels each night so no camping gear is needed. The trip can be done entirely on mogas for those with Rotax engines, or there are avgas options for those who need a stronger tipple!

The refuelling stops are planned so that a standard SeaRey with 88 litre long range fuel tank will not need to carry additional fuel.

We will avoid major centres as much as possible and land at out-of-the-way rural strips.

I scouted the route in January this year (in company with John and Greg Daley in Lake VH-TZT and Harvey Prior and Brian Zeederberg in Lake VH-LAK). There are plenty of opportunities for "splashing and dashing". In one day between Esperance and Augusta (WA) I did 125 water landings, in lakes, estuaries, rivers and reef protected ocean ponds.

Australia has an amazingly varied coastline. Join me in January to see it from the "dress circle".

Send me an email if you are interested ross.vining@gpa.net.au

Regards • Ross Vining



Refuelling at Nullarbor Roadhouses is simple. You just pull up to the pump and "fill-er-up"

Participation in the Australia Day Skyworks Airshow will be a highlight of the trip.



Wether to go?

Weather to go!

Jamie Dantalis is an Adelaide chap with a passion for boats and flying. He has discovered that he can have double pleasure in a seaplane, so he has ordered a SeaRey kit and will soon be enmeshed in the building process.

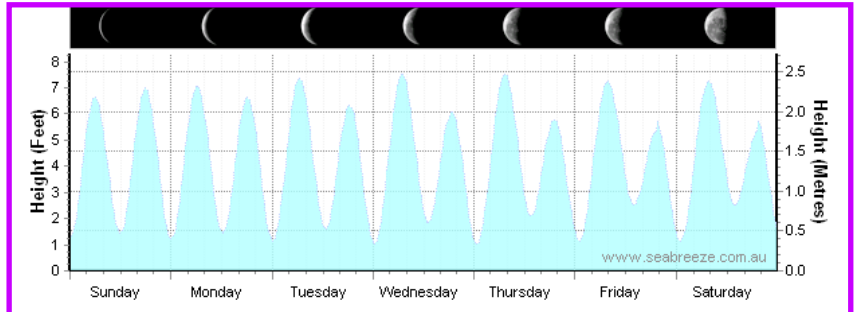
Jamie drew my attention to a great website called Seabreeze which he uses to plan his boating activities. I now use it to plan my seaplane activities.

Seabreeze is a website run by self-confessed ocean junkies! They say.

"What drives you? A howling 35 knots, a solid 8 foot swell, maybe zero swell and a complete glass off so you can drop a line in? (Or for beautiful seaplane flying - Ed). We share your passion and this site was setup for you and me."

The site provides live weather information and seven day weather forecasts.

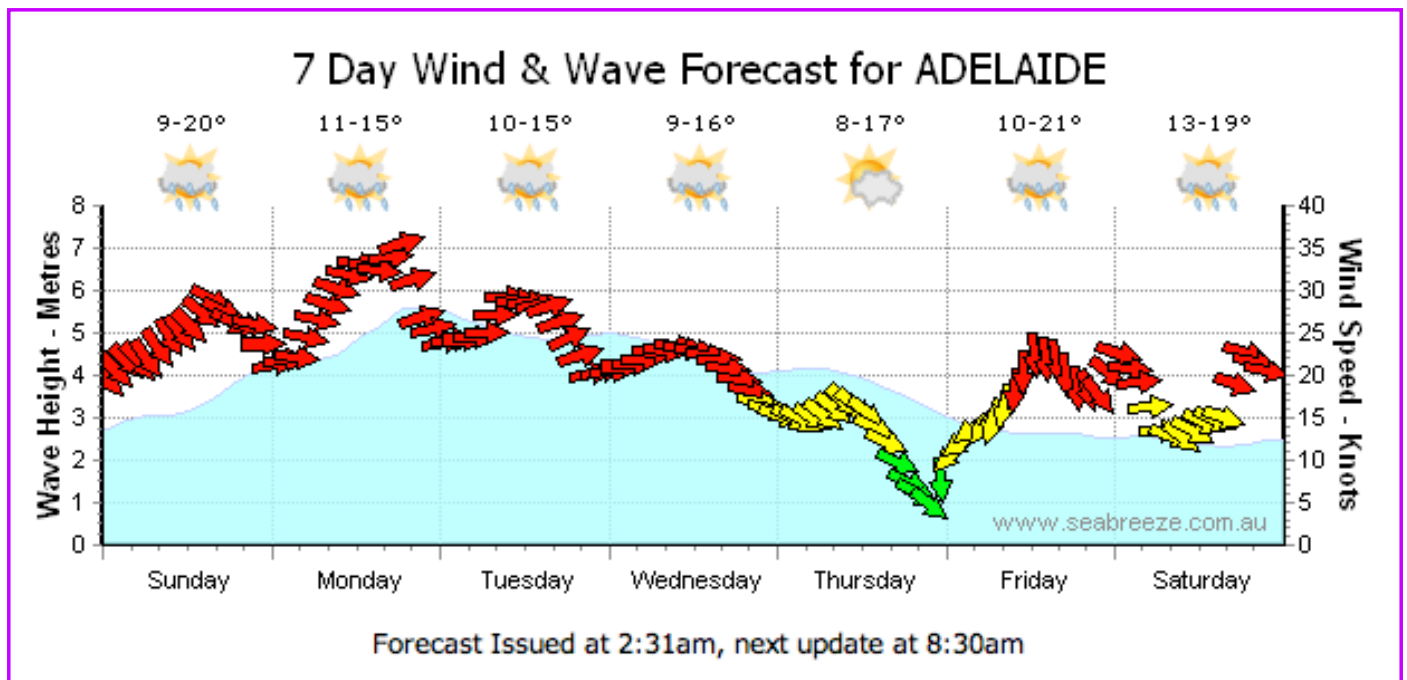
Seabreeze.com.au was initially designed in 1997 for windsurfers but is now used for kiteboarding, fishing, sailing, boating, surfing, scuba diving, and seaplaning!



All information on the site is provided in easily assimilated graphical format, this graph shows the predicted phase of the moon and tides for Adelaide for the next week

The site has a great user interface that puts a lot of information on wind speed and direction, wave height and tides into an easily assimilated format. Also the data shows what has happened recently, what is happening right now and it provides predictions for the next 7 days.

Because the site was designed by windsurfers who want strong wind and big surf, the colour code defaults to strong wind being green arrows and light wind being red arrows, but you can set your personal colour coding to read the other way, as the examples show.



Editors note: I think this presentation of data is superb.

The graph provides predictive information on wind strength (position of the arrow on the graph), wind direction (arrow orientation), at hourly intervals plus

weather (clouds/sun pictograph), temperature and wave height, predicted over the next 7 days. And its in a graphical presentation that enables you to take in all that information in a few seconds. That's magic!

News * News * News * News

RAAF 10SQN/11SQN

70th Anniversary

10 & 11 Sqn were formed in the dark days of 1939.

70th anniversary celebrations are being held at RAAF Base Edinburgh on 24-26 Sept 2009.

See full details at www.ednelfare.com.au

All members of 10SQN, 11SQN or 492SQN, and anyone who flew, maintained or supported the Catalina, Sunderland or Neptune aircraft are invited to attend.

Over the three days, there will be an informal night at the hangar, a dining-in in Adelaide, and the VP International bar open for everyone to catch up. The Catalina and Neptune aircraft from HARS (Historic Aircraft Restoration Society) will fly in for the event.

Email: edn92wg.orionanniversary@defence.gov.au

Or write: 70th Committee; c/o Orderly Room; 11SQN, PO Box 1500; RAAF Edinburgh SA 5111

FLTLT Gregg McFaul

On behalf of the Organising Committee

RIP - Stan Sismey

WWII Catalina pilot and cricketing legend Squadron Leader Stanley George Sismey, OAM passed away on 19 June 2009 aged 92.

Born in Junee NSW in 1915, Stan loved cricket. He was a fine wicket keeper and a good batsman, one of the last to stand up to all but the fastest bowlers. He played for NSW in 1938/39, but the war intervened and he joined the Royal Australian Air Force and was speedily promoted through the ranks.

In 1944, as a Squadron Leader, he was piloting a Catalina off the Algerian Coast and was shot down, spending 8 hours in the Mediterranean before being rescued by the Royal Navy. He spent the rest of the war as a test pilot in Scotland. He said there was so much shrapnel in his back, it affected aircraft compasses. In Scotland he met and married Elma McLachlan.

He returned to cricket after the war and played for Australia in 1945. During the tour he frequently had to leave the field as pieces of shrapnel worked their way to his skin.

A banker by profession, Stan was President of the NSW Cricket Association for 10 years, and was made a Life Member on his retirement.

Stan Sismey is survived by his wife, Elma, and their daughters, Pam and Carol

The Catalina Flying Memorial

The CFML to forging ahead, raising money and recruiting helpers to their cause.

A successful funding raising ball was held at Rathmines in July where they were entertained by the RAAF Swing Band.



Catalina Festival Ball

RATHMINES

A fund raising celebration of the World War II Royal Australian Air Force Seaplane Base and the men and women who served there.

Saturday 11th July, 7pm

RATHMINES COMMUNITY CENTRE



Entertainment By:

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN
AIRFORCE BAND



"RICHMOND DETACHMENT - SWING BAND"

The group also participated in the Powerhouse Discovery Centre Open Day, which was themed *Flight: Air and Space*.

The CFML are very fortunate to have the services of David Sieber to supervise the work of their volunteers. Dave is a LAME who, from 1972 to 1974 worked for Ansett at Rose Bay on the S25 Sandringham VH-BRC and Sunderland VH-BRF flying boats.

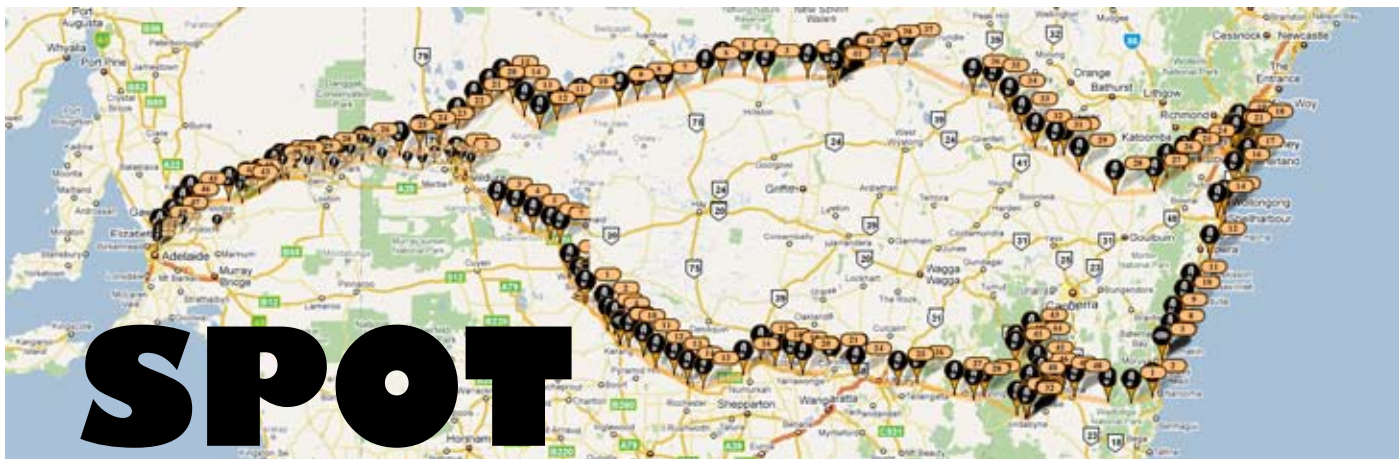
The volunteers work program is structured to allow each person to be involved in the type of work they want to do. Activities are planned for most Saturdays.

The group is currently planning the 3rd Annual Catalina Festival at Rathmines, scheduled for 24 October.

The CFM needs YOU - Join up NOW

Contact Colin Cool 0402 060 527
colin.cool@jemena.com.au





Recently I bought a SPOT personal tracker which I have used successfully on several trips. Below is my assessment of the tool. The map above shows the Google Map track created by SPOT for my most recent trip. Editor.

SPOT uses a GPS chip to locate your position which it broadcasts to a global star communications satellite, which relays it the SPOT headquarters in USA.

Your position, anywhere in the world, can then be displayed on Google Maps, or if you have activated the "message" features then appropriate messages will be phoned, emailed or sent by SMS.

Features:

SPOT can send out 4 different **predefined** messages:

- **Alert 911** - Alert emergency services, with location.
- **Help** - Request help from family, with location.
- **Check In** - Send "OK" to family, with location.
- **Track Progress** - Log and track your location on Google Maps™ - This is called SPOTcasting.

Specifications

The bright orange handheld device is water and shock-proof and it floats. It works around the world, independent of cellular systems and it weighs just 206 grams.

Coverage: virtually all of North America, Europe and Australia, portions of South America, Northern Africa and Northeastern Asia, and hundreds or thousands of miles offshore from these areas.

Battery Life: Uses 2 AA lithium batteries; SPOTcasting tracking mode: Approx. 14 days
 SPOTcheck OK/√: 1900 messages
 Operating Temperatures: -40°F to +185°F
 Operating Altitude: -300 feet to +21,000 feet

Limitation: the SPOT link to global star satellites is a one-way (simplex) system. SPOT sends data to the



satellite network, but it cannot receive a reply. So it does not know if the message was received.

GPS magazine (www.gpsmagazine.com) has a good review



of this device. In the comment's section there are 70 comments by users. Some comments are positive but a majority appear to be negative and relate to apparent failure of SPOT to send out OK messages or to log positions in SPOTcasting mode.

I used my recent trip from Adelaide to Sydney to test the accuracy and reliability of SPOT.

My SPOT was left on the dash of the aircraft with a good view of the sky. It was switched on and placed in tracking mode at the start of each flight. An "OK" message was sent at the completion of each flight.

My route from Adelaide to Sydney followed the Murray River to the Snowy Mts and then up the NSW south coast to Sydney and then return, more or less direct to Adelaide. The flight was mostly low level (usually 500ft above ground) with more than 100 landings on the Murray River and associated waterways.

I carefully analysed the performance of SPOT as follows.

Reliability

Over the course of the approx 30 hours of flying there were 230 occasions when SPOT should have put a SPOTcast position on the web site. Of these 230 possibilities exactly 180 positions were logged and 50 positions were missed - 78% reliability.

On one occasion, 3 consecutive SPOTcasts were missed. On 6 occasions 2 consecutive SPOTcasts were missed. All other SPOTcast failures were "one offs" and were flanked by good positions.

Eight "OK" messages were sent – all were received by both email and SMS usually within 5 minutes.

I did not attempt to use the "911" or "help" functions.

Accuracy

The position accuracy of the "OK" messages was checked by observing the location on Goggle maps. In each case they were accurate to within 5 metres.

The 180 SPOTcast positions also appeared to be accurate.

Conclusion

I would like 100% reliability of the tracking function, but I can live with 78%, especially given that consecutive failure to track was relatively rare.

I do a lot of solo flying in remote areas of Australia. Overall I believe the SPOT adds considerably to my safety. It is on my checklist of "essential items".

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