

## MY FIRST IFR FLIGHT: Geoff Aitken.

Flying training in 1961 was slightly different to today. There was no restricted licence and the licence you got was a full Private Licence. Before you went on your solo cross-country, the instructor took you on a dual cross-country flight. The theory was that you did everything the instructor just went along for the ride. My instructor at the Bendigo Flying School was the late Dick Arthur. He was a good instructor but he had a very short fuse, and somehow I was always equipped with a box of matches. (How I could strike a match in a Tiger Moth I don't quite know but I was expert). Dick decided the dual cross-country would be Bendigo to Ararat – Ballarat and back to Bendigo. We fuelled VH-AKA early one morning and Dick handed me a WAC and said work out the headings. I don't think I had seen a WAC before but I worked it out and decided that a good check would be the Laanecoorie Weir that would be on my right about 25 miles out. All went well except the body of water appeared on my left. Consequently I made a correction of heading and after another 10 minutes or so there was another body of water on my right. Slowly it dawned on me that something was wrong: in the dark recesses of my mind I remembered reading about a Cairn Curren Reservoir that had been built previously. It definitely wasn't on the chart which I found out later was at least 10 years old. (I still haven't broken that habit). SO, another correction to heading was needed. By this time Dick was sitting up and looking around.

The following conversation went something like this DICK Where are we?

ME I haven't got a clue

D Then turn around and set a heading back to Bendigo from here

M How can I set a heading from here to Bendigo when I don't know where here is? D Then what are you going to do?

M Just keep flying for a while and see what turns up

Two things aggravated the situation for Dick. Firstly, for some reason that I can't remember, he had no stick in the front cockpit, and secondly as anyone who has ever instructed in a Tiger Moth will tell you, it is impossible to turn around and- shout obscenities at the student for as soon as the head is turned, no noise comes down the Gosport Tube. All Dick could do was throw his hands in the air and sink down in the seat. It was obvious he was not a happy chappy.

After another 10 minutes or so, I made a heading change of about 30 degrees and Dick sat up straight again.

D. Where are you going now?

M. Ararat.

D. What compass heading are you following and why do you think it is the right one.

M. I'm not following a compass heading. At this Dick turns around as far as his harness would let him and his face took on a violent red colour. His mouth opened and shut and I'm glad I couldn't hear what he was saying. He eventually gained some composure and turning back to the mouthpiece and said if you are not following a heading then how will we get to Ararat?

M (pointing downwards) See that railway line down there; it goes to Ararat so I'll just follow it. — Which we did and landed safely. I won't bore readers with the conversation on the ground: I believe women and children may have access to this article. Dick then said to prepare a plan to Ballarat. I said why? As the railway line ran from Ararat to very close to Ballarat aerodrome and as it had got us here all right, why shouldn't it work on the next leg. He gave me some very good reasons, one of which sounded like walking home.

I followed the railway anyway only I didn't tell Dick

Nearly 40 years later, I still follow railways, rivers and roads if possible; they are just as reliable as a GPS.

Geoff Aitken.