

New Zealand Microlight Air Service By Tom Reyman

In August 1985, the Timaru Herald newspaper, published in Timaru, New Zealand needed to speed up the delivery of news items from communities surrounding Timaru so that they could be published in a timely manner. This was before email was available and the usual surface delivery of information usually required a slow two or three days. Staff members of the newspaper decided to use airborne delivery and initiated a delivery service using microlight aircraft to deliver the needed information from the outlying areas to their newspaper. To help to defray the costs of this service and to provide stamp collectors with a souvenir of the flights, covers were prepared with a \$1.00 NZ company stamp in addition to the regular 25 cent NZ required postage. Initially, about 450 covers were prepared but these sold out quickly and additional covers were prepared.

The communities serviced were Fairlie, Geraldine, and Temuka, with Timaru as the hub. Timaru is approximately 155 km/95 miles South of Christchurch on the East Coast of the South Island of New Zealand. The distance to the surrounding communities from Timaru are: 20 km/12 miles (Temuka), 40 km/25 miles (Geraldine), and 60 km/35 miles (Fairlie), well within the operational range for the small microlight aircraft.

The first flight of five aircraft occurred on August 16, 1985, a Friday afternoon, and flew from Fairlie to Geraldine to Temuka reaching the Timaru Herald at 3:00 P.M. These craft brought information as well as packages and mail. Subsequent flights over the next three weeks brought more information for the newspaper to publish and more mail and packages. Despite the initial success of the service, it was terminated as the local winds and weather conditions made flying too difficult for the light aircraft.



Two examples of the microlight covers are shown here. The first envelope is from August 19, 1985 for the initial flight from Fairlie to Geraldine to Timaru. The second envelope marked the flight from Fairlie to Temuka to Timaru on August 23, 1985. The cost of delivery of this mail was covered by the addition of the \$1.00 company stamp to front of the envelope. The regular NZ postage of 25 NZ cents was still required to meet postal expenses. The newspaper reported that the service paid for itself during the time it was operational.

Tom Reyman is our newest NSSS member whose collecting interests are U.S. FAM covers, general Air Mail covers, Canadian Semi-Official Air Mail stamps and covers, and Cape Breton (Nova Scotia) covers.