



TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY Incorporated

TASMANIAN AIRPORTS – PAST AND PRESENT – A HISTORY
THE FURNEAUX GROUP

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The **Furneaux Group** is a group of approximately 52 islands located at the eastern end of Bass Strait, between Victoria and Tasmania. The largest islands in the group are Flinders Island, Cape Barren Island and Clarke Island.



With the completion of the Western Junction aerodrome in 1930 and commercial flights to Essendon commencing the following year, the Flinders Island Municipal Council was active in establishing a landing strip for commercial aircraft and air mail services to use.

The Council initially used the property of Mr A. G. Woodside at Trousers Point, about 8 kms south east of Whitemark as a landing strip, which was ready for use in March 1932.



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Lawrence Johnson initiated his Western Junction to Flinders Island service with “*Miss Flinders*” on 19 March 1932. Tasmanian Aerial Services, which later became Holyman’s Airways, subsequently undertook regular services between Western Junction, Flinders island and Essendon.

The Council then built a permanent aerodrome after purchasing ground at St Pats River and undertook significant clearing and sowing of new grass throughout 1934. On 18 December 1934, the Holyman’s Airways “*Miss Launceston*” was the first plane to land on the new aerodrome. (This was the regular bi-weekly service between Western Junction and Flinders Island). The aerodrome was officially opened on 16 February 1935. Runway 05/23 was further extended in 1939 and runway 32/14 constructed during 1944/45.

Today the airport consists of two now sealed runways of 1,720 metres (32/14) and 1070 metres (05/23) in length, a full instrument approach sequence and, with prior notice, runway lights for night operations.

The airport is still owned and operated by Flinders Island Council. It has a modern terminal and is serviced by Sharp Airlines and various cargo aircraft operators, light aircraft visitors, from both Tasmania and the mainland, and most importantly a 24hour service provided by the RFDS that has delivered medical relief and repositioning for many of the island’s inhabitants.



ANA Building at St Pats River Aerodrome (Photo compliments of the Brammall family.)



ANA DH.89 Dragon Rapide “Moogana” (Photo compliments of the Brammall family).

A secondary airstrip is located at Lady Barron some 28 kms south of Whitemark. The township is the island’s second largest settlement and boasts two airstrips. The larger strip, north east of the township, consists of a gravel strip (07/25) and parking together with a small terminal building and is 1300 metres in length. It can accommodate light twin engine aircraft and is regularly visited by freight and site seeing aircraft. Two secondary grass airstrips, (15/33 and 10/28) of 1000 and 650 metres respectively, suitable only for light aircraft can be found to the west of the Lady Barron strip.

Further north we have Killiecrankie which again is a east/west gravel and grass strip used by visiting aircraft and the locals inhabitants.

South lies Cape Barren Island and this island boasts a 1000 metre gravel runway suitable for light twin engined aircraft. Additionally there are two grass cross strips suitable for light aircraft. The island is regularly visited by the RFDS in addition to charter and freight aircraft that provide services to the indigenous population of the island.

South of Cape Barren lies Clarke Island, mainly uninhabited, but still with two grass strips of 424 metres each in length, however, their condition and serviceability are unknown. In the past they did provide the facility for the delivery of supplies and equipment by light aircraft for the farming families that inhabited the island.



View of Killiecrankie Airstrip facing east



View of Cape Barron Airstrips



**Flinders Island Airport facing east with runway 05/23 clearly visible.
Runway 14/32 can just be seen in the foreground**

Off the west coast of Flinders Island lies several smaller islands that play a part in Flinders Island's economy and were, and still are, accessible only by small boats or light aircraft. Islands such as Badger and Prime Seal still have airstrips used by the local Flinders Island farmers who fly in to check their grazing cattle and sheep.

One island that has some notoriety is Chappell Island, just north east of Badger Island, and whilst there is an airstrip on the island it is in poor repair and attracts very few visitors. The island's notoriety does not lay solely in the airstrip condition but rather in the local population.



One of the local population sunbaking. Chappell Island is the home of very aggressive and highly venomous Tiger Snakes known to grow to over two metres in length.

The arrival of the helicopter has made access to many of the smaller islands far easier than in the past, however, because of the island group's location weather plays an important role in aviation.

Situated in the roaring forties these strong west to east air currents are caused by the combination of air being displaced from the equator towards the south pole, the earth's rotation and the scarcity of land masses to serve as wind breaks. These factors can make flying into the island group a significant challenge.

Notwithstanding the challenges of the island group's remoteness and weather aviation has historically and will in the future continue to play an important part in the economy, development, education and provision of health services for the island's population.