

Feilding Aerodrome Bit of History

The Feilding Flying Club started flying from the Paorangi site in about 1930

This is a paddock just past the entrance to the Paorangi School and if you look at the roadside of it you can see the concrete plinth which originally housed the refuelling tank on top and also the windsock.

In 1937 the land at Taonui was purchased - it was about 60 acres of low lying and swampy land and was cleared by the Public Works dep, giving work to the unemployed in the district.

The very corner by Taonui road was originally the site of the Taonui saw mill and subsequently the first sheep yards.

When we cleared this area for hangar space we buried some of the huge concrete bases used to mount the saw mills on. We understand that a railway ran up Taonui rd and as late as the early 70s the Taonui railway station still stood at the intersection of Campbell road and Taonui rd

Descendants of the early settlers have erected a monument on the aerodrome land on this corner.

The land was purchased cheaply because it was considered a bad bit of farming land due to the soil structure and low lying aspect.

In 1937 the 1st hangar was built on the site of the public car park at a cost of about \$1000 (560 pounds) and in 1938 the aerodrome was opened with an airshow.

The reason why the taxiway has the bend in it around the car park, was of course that this hangar was still being utilized when the taxiway went in.

The hangar was in a bad state of repair and was demolished by the incumbent at the time Wareham Airspray in about 1996

Early on in World War 2, the aerodrome was taken over by the Airforce and barricaded so that the enemy could not land anywhere on it.

It was handed back in 1947 and at that stage was a real mess and unusable again

The Aerodrome committee decided to continually crop it to get it back into a state where it could be used as an aerodrome again

The topdressing industry dominated the use of the aerodrome from then on till well into the 80's and the two big hangars still standing today were busy places, with many topdressing planes parked out and about.

The Aerodrome committee built the hangar now owned by the Gliding Club in 1976. They didn't see it really as a hangar but built it to store wool bales and to generate income

Extensive drainage was done during the 70's - the airfield is a criss cross on tile drains, with some quite large ones running from North to South - with the water running into the main drains on the south and east sides

By the time I arrived on the scene in 1983, all that existed were the two big hangars, the original old one, the gliding club hangar and the two small half round ones

The committee at that stage did not have any plans for further development but it wasn't long before that changed and we saw the Microlite club building going up and further private hangars erected.

It was one big paddock extending right over to where the model aircraft used to operate on the far northern side. It was very very wet in the winter and generally was closed to aircraft movements.

In 1988 the runway was built .

This was 700 meters long by 10 meters wide and was constructed by the Army during the summer months

In those days the Army were actively looking for summer projects – we put our hand up at the right time

Can you imagine trenches and dugouts at the main entrance , with all sorts of armament poking out to welcome you .

I clearly remember the day the Airforce attacked us - they were been and gone before the Army guys knew what had struck them .

400 men were camped over on the Northern side and there were many machines on the job

They excavated down about 50cm and then back filled with metal from the Oroua river.

A generous local resident Graham Guy allowed access through his farm to the river and we swapped our soil for the metal. This was a mammoth task using some really big gear.

The original idea was to have a lime stabilized clay grass over lay as the final surface , but this did not work out too well

At this stage the cost to us had been negligible, so without the army we would not have what we have today.

We then overlaid with metal and this stabilized the surface.

This made a huge difference to operations on the aerodrome, but we soon realized that there was still a problem getting to the runway during the winter . You still got stuck trying to get to the threshold

Subsequently in 1990 we had the taxiways made and these were metal as well.

This work was done with motorscrapers and the soil was stock piled down where the Feilding flyers have their base now.

What a difference now

However In 1993 we decided to seal the total area

In 1994 the tarmac areas around the fuel pumps and aircraft parking areas were constructed – once again being all grass, meant that in the winter the bulk tankers could not get to the pumps - so no fuel deliveries.

In 1996 the aerodrome was mole drained for the last time . The contractor on leaving stated he would never return as the ironstone and metal below the surface had cost him dearly in terms of lost blades etc. He was pulling quite a large mole with a Caterpillar D5. It was a mission. We still have the map of the field showing the huge patches of sold ironstone beneath the surface.

In 1998 the Aeromodelers left the aerodrome and shifted to their present site. They could see that the future was not looking safe for them or us ,with them operating in close proximity to the runway.

In 1999 we installed the PAL lighting on the runway followed by the glide slope lighting in 2003

In 2002 the unique sheep stops were installed . We previously still had sheep on the runway , with it being only fenced on the Northern side. While this did give us two paddocks meaning that the sheep were not there all the time , it was far from ideal.

We still had to buzz the sheep .

The idea for the sheep stops came from Rex Thomson one of our committee members at the time,. It is a great concept and has worked very well I still havn't seen it anywhere else.

In 2003/2004 we negotiated the land swop with the 20 acres on the other side of the runway, for 2 ½ acres off the end of 28 which then gave us the 300 metre extension and 1000 m runway.

Funding for the sealing and formation of this extension came from Pub charity.

At the same time we widened the runway to 14 metres.

This extension has made the aerodrome-- – it was the best thing we ever did.

As you all know, we have a mission ahead of continuous improvement and we really do seek and welcome input on ideas for the future,

Bruce Brownlie

Presented to the Safety Meeting Oct 2016