



Airmail Centenary Commemoration Flight

Aviation Historical Society of Australia (NSW) inc Air Mail Centenary Commemoration Group

General press release

In July, 1914, French airman Maurice Guillaux flew his Bleriot XI aircraft from Melbourne to Sydney, a distance of nearly 1000 kilometres. The journey took him 2 days 5 hours 43 minutes, and he carried 1785 specially printed postcards – Australia's first air mail, and some tea and some lemon cordial, which became Australia's first air freight.

At the time this was the longest such flight that had been made anywhere in the world. It created a media storm, but was soon forgotten because a fortnight later the world was plunged into war.

The Australian aviation community, and the French community, have decided that the centenary of this epic flight should be commemorated. This is developing into a major celebration, not only of Guillaux' amazing flight, but of Australia's aviation heritage.

On 12 July at 9 12 am an Australian-designed, Australian-built Jabiru aircraft will take off from Essendon airport, Melbourne, to begin a re-enactment flight. This lightweight aircraft is of similar weight and dimensions to Guillaux' Bleriot, but a state-of-the-art modern aircraft made of carbon-fibre rather than wood, canvas and bamboo. Guillaux sat on top of his aircraft and worked a complicated set of controls that warped the wings to control the aircraft, reaching a speed of about 100 kilometres per hour, while the Jabiru carries two people in comfort at about 170 miles an hour. The aircraft will follow much the same route as Guillaux, with seven landings at towns en route. At part of the celebrations of Bastille Day. Guillaux landed at nearby Moore Park and was greeted by the New South Wales state governor and by the Governor-General of Australia; the re-enactment aircraft will land in Centennial Park, near the original landing site, as part of the Bastille Day celebrations. Shell Australia sponsored Guillaux' flight and two subsequent re-enactments. On this occasion they are also sponsoring the use of a de Havilland Caribou as escort aircraft. This rugged transport aircraft has recently been retired from the RAAF, and is in the care of HARS, the Historical Aircraft Restoration Society at Albion Park. This historic aircraft will be just one of a number of aircraft that will fly along with the re-enactment flight, either for the whole distance or one or two stages.

The towns along the route are enthusiastically planning to welcome the re-enactment flight by having special events at each place Guillaux landed. As the event is becoming more widely known, more and more people and organisations want to participate.

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Celebrating Australia's Aviation Heritage