

I LEARNED ABOUT FLYING FROM THAT

This pilot's a planner. But even he forgot one seemingly small, but important, thing.



I was taking my daughter over to the West Coast settlement of Ōkārito for a few hours' lagoon-paddling.

Flight planning started a month before. Across from Canterbury, direct on track up the Rakaia River and over the main divide, then home via Hokitika, where I planned to refuel.

I'm very comfortable flying in the mountains – I've done thousands of gliding hours there.

I'd flown over the strip at Ōkārito a couple of times, and just 12 months ago, walked over it, and talked to very welcoming locals who'd said, "fly in any time".

I fly a PA-18-150 Super Cub using a high-quality navigation app on my phone, which I also use to give ground speed and navigation. I have the latest New Zealand visual navigation chart book from AOPA – which I mainly use for a topographical overview, and to check different areas of airspace. And I use the AIPNZ, Vol 4. Flight following is a satellite tracking system.

We carry enough food and warm clothing for a forced landing, and a night out in the Southern Alps.

I'd been to Hokitika several years before during cross-country training for my PPL. I'd done a few circuits there, when the radio frequency was 119.1 MHz, unattended airfield.

The day of the flight was clear and calm and the flight to Ōkārito was stunning. We had a couple of stops up the head of the Rakaia for a few pics.

Passing through all the glaciers and out onto the west coast, we were soon on the ground at our destination.

After a four-hour paddle and some lunch, we were ready to head up the coast to Hokitika. I checked again my VNC to see where we would be clear of the restricted area over the wetlands of the Ōkārito and Saltwater Lagoons. I knew the radio frequency of Hokitika as I'd been there before, and my AIP confirmed that.

After a short flight up the coast, I made the comment to my daughter that it was very quiet around Hokitika – I knew there were a few microlights that fly out of there. But it was a weekday and maybe that's why it was so quiet on the radio.

Also, my AIP chart told me to expect NORDO traffic on runway 12/30.

Approaching Hokitika we made a call and joined for 30 left-hand. I then made another call mid-downwind.

Meanwhile, down on the ground

Jesper Reinink is part of Hokitika Airport's runway inspection team, who check the runways before each scheduled passenger flight.

On a clear March day in 2022, Jesper had just finished reviewing the condition of Hokitika's 03 and 21 runways, removing any debris, making sure the runway surrounds were also clear, and checking the lights and the windsock.

He knew an RNZAF King Air was due in, so he parked against the aerodrome's western boundary to watch it land.

As the King Air appeared on long final from the south, Jesper also became aware of a recreational aircraft, approaching from the east, and doing a left-hand turn on to base.

He could see what could happen if that recreational aircraft was going to do a touch-and-go.

"We get quite a bit of trainee traffic here, and if it was going to do a touch-and-go, it and the King Air were going to cross over each other very closely in the same airspace."

He radioed the recreational aircraft asking its intentions. But there was no response.

The King Air pilot, however, heard the transmission and immediately undertook a go-around, climbing and heading north.

And back in the air

On final, about a kilometre from the threshold, we saw a King Air climbing out on 03.

"Where did that come from?" I remember thinking. "It wasn't on the ground when we flew past, and I never heard them call!"

We landed, taxied over to the fuel pumps, and shut down. »

» The aerodrome's runway inspector came over saying, "We've been trying to call you". "But I had my radio on," I told him.

"What frequency were you calling me on?" I asked him. Even as I asked, I started to have the sick feeling that I might have stuffed up.

"One, one, nine, eight," he replied.

I got out my AIP and took another look. It read 119.1.

The runway inspector said the frequency had changed (2017). I looked at the date at the bottom of the page in the AIP and it said 'Feb 16'.

I hadn't updated it. I then had a look at my VNC and there it was in blue, '119.8'.

The sick feeling was right – I *had* stuffed up.

I apologised to the runway inspector and made a phone call to the air force to let them know it was me who'd caused their missed approach, and I passed on my apologies.

I spoke to a local instructor about what I'd done and asked his opinion. We spoke about the airfield rule changes, and I asked his opinion about weather conditions for our intended flight track home, since he'd just come from that direction. Local knowledge.

We refuelled, departed – on the correct frequency – and headed for home. I was pretty disappointed with myself that I'd made such a mistake.

What have I learned and can pass on?

Don't assume things will be the same as last time. I've updated my AIP and will continue to do so.

I've installed ADS-B.

I've changed to bifocal sunglasses, so no need to take glasses off and on.

I'm running a first-class electronic flight bag on a small tablet.

I could have talked to more experienced, local pilots because they might have told me of the frequency change at Hokitika.

Remember, due to weather, you may end up somewhere that's not your original destination. But do you have the latest chart for your new landing place?

I write the different radio frequencies for my intended track on a piece of paper for quick reference. But they're only any good if they're the *updated* ones.

Finally, I'm more vigilant during flight planning. It's very easy to become complacent about planning when you've been to a destination before. 🙏

Vector thanks this pilot for sharing his story, so that others can get a 'free lesson' on keeping their AIPNZ up-to-date.

Comments or queries? Email education@caa.govt.nz



Photo courtesy of Hokitika Airport.