

Chadwick & ZK-AFB

The trail of evidence of a flight from Christchurch through the Mackenzie Country to Aspiring - February 1962

Introduction

The complexity of the search for this aircraft has been detailed in official search records from 1962 and later thoroughly set out in Rev Dr Richard Waugh's 2005 book "Lost Without Trace ".

The volume of reports on sightings and hearings on both sides of the Divide created an overwhelming task for search authorities as well as a basis for some later speculative interpretation based largely on the logged reports. Many of the people who made those reports, or later their descendants, were never personally interviewed in order to enlarge on and evaluate what had been reported. In some cases, highlighted here, this led to some incorrect assumptions being made.

With the benefit of additional new information obtained in 2022 there is now good evidence of an eastern progression through Canterbury and the Mackenzie country, more likely than not down as far as Hawea and into Wanaka. Quite separate to these findings are sightings by people in the area of Rainbow valley near Aspiring from 1962 to 1972, as detailed in the website at www.dh90.info, that suggest strong possibility of aircraft debris in that area. So does the Mackenzie country progression, and the Aspiring reports, connect?

Route choices

Chadwick had two route choices from Christchurch to Milford. One east via Canterbury to Hawea, Wanaka, and on to Milford, and the other by flying across the Divide to the West Coast. He preferred the West Coast route to Milford because of the scenic attraction for his tourist passengers of the glaciers and the dramatic approach in by way of Milford Sound. The weather however always dictated which route he could safely take.

Chadwick received a weather briefing prior to his flight. The weather on the Main Divide was assessed as being unsuitable to attempt to cross over. Chadwick told the Forecaster he would consequently then go via the MacKenzie country (Canterbury side of the Divide).

Chadwick filed his flight plan confirming that he would have to take the eastern route through Canterbury and Otago. He would have been disappointed at having to take that route. Nonetheless, that was his stated intention necessary for the safety of his flight.

It's perhaps of some interest, and another indicator that he was committed to the Mackenzie route, that Chadwick on his handwritten Flight Plan Form nominated Queenstown (QN) as his alternate airport. Was this some additional mute confirmation that his flight plan intent actually was, as he'd already told the Duty Forecaster, firmly in fact via Canterbury? He'd have hardly named QN as his alternate if he really intended his "Usual Route" to be over to the West Coast. This is a small but possibly important detail, overlooked until now.

Chadwick's normal route across to the West Coast was via Methven, Lake Tripp, and the junction of the Havelock & Clyde rivers. Some reports suggest that Chadwick made several attempts to get across the Divide in this area but there are no reports confirming success with that and the consensus view was that it would not have been possible. As a qualified aeronautical engineer Chadwick well knew the operational limitations of this aircraft. As a pilot he had vast flying experience in many parts of the world, sometimes in much larger aircraft. He was adventurous and by personal admission to a colleague took risks for his passengers.

But Chadwick would well know the need in mountain flying to make turnback decisions early and to not continue on in deteriorating weather.

Barker Report (Search Log #38) - Sighting south of Four Peaks

David Barker was a member of a prominent Geraldine family. He reported seeing what he described as a light blue "Dominie" south of Four Peaks, flying through cloud at what he said was 6000ft, towards Fairlie.

The Four Peaks area is a few kilometres due south of Chadwick's normal route commencement to the West Coast. And perhaps, his turnback area? There has been speculation that Barker was mistaken in this sighting and that the aircraft he saw was just a DC3. David Barker died in 2005. His son Gerald Barker was located in March 2022. Gerald Barker explained how his father served in the Royal New Zealand Air Force from 1940 to 1945. He said that his father would definitely have had the knowledge to identify an aircraft. He was a radio operator based in the Pacific, mainly in Fiji, and may well have been in Dominie aircraft on reconnaissance missions.

The RNZAF at Fiji used several permanently stationed de Havilland Dominies/Rapides for reconnaissance and communications flights throughout the war. De Havilland Dominies, at distance and visually, are a near identical aircraft to the de Havilland Dragonfly. David Barker in retirement years was a volunteer Guide at the Air Force Museum of New Zealand at Wigram, Christchurch.

There can be no doubt at all that David Barker well knew the difference between a DC3 and a de Havilland biplane. As there were no other biplanes operating in this area on this day, what he saw was within any reasonable argument therefore Chadwick's Dragonfly, heading towards Fairlie.

Harrington Report (letter to Dr Waugh) - Sighting at Fairlie.

In 1987 one Eileen Harrington wrote to Dr Waugh saying that her brother Eric Gillum (further mentioned below) had sent her a press cutting about the 1962 disappearance. She felt prompted to tell of her observations that day. She said she had been staying with her daughter at a property in Claytons Road, Fairlie. She was in the garden some time after 11am. She saw an aircraft fly over in a south, slightly west direction. She heard the motors (motors plural) in the plane cutting out and firing erratically. She believed the aircraft was in trouble. She said that she'd felt uneasy for the people in the aircraft and in 1987 could still remember it well. Her brother Eric saw the same aircraft soon after, near Pukaki. She believed her brothers observations would be correct.

Claytons Road runs several kilometres north from Fairlie township.

Gillum Report (letters to Dr Waugh) - Sighting at Pukaki.

Eric Gillum wrote two letters to Dr Waugh in 1987. Gillum described how he'd been working at a sheep station at Omahau, close to what is now Twizel Village. This was about 60km due south-west of his sister Eileen Harrington's location at Fairlie that day. He's stopped work before lunch and had seen "a Dragonfly" flying far too low with one motor giving trouble, smoking and spluttering. He was worried about the way the engine was behaving.

Gillum wrote as if he was familiar with Dragonfly and other aircraft. He said the Dragonfly was not a very popular aircraft in those days, unlike Tiger Moth or Cessna. Gillum went on to say that he had actually met Captain Chadwick, though his letters did not explain where, or how.

Gillum's report, as with Barker's, has been met with some doubt primarily due to the 25 years delay in his reporting it. His sighting is another that has been attributed as more likely a DC3 passing over. Gillum died in 1988. In 1962 he'd been living in Temuka, South Canterbury, for many years. He was a foster father to two children, one of whom was located in 2022 and gave a comprehensive account of the man she called Uncle Eric.

She explained how she was Gillum's grand-daughter and had been brought up by him and his wife in Temuka since she was 2 years old. He'd had total custody of her and she had remained with him all her growing years. She described how he operated Draglines and heavy machinery in the South Canterbury area for as long as she could remember.

Gillum had written his memoirs, describing his love for machinery. His grand-daughter recalled that he had done work at Timaru Airport and while she could not remember him mentioning meeting anyone named Chadwick, it is conceivable he could have met Chadwick at the airport while working there. Gillum was sought-after in the South Canterbury area as a mechanic. His passion was engines. (His WW2 army call-up Notice described him as an "engine-driver".) She knew him well, and said that he was a true and honest man respected by many for his accounts and honesty and "did not make statements without plausibility" and whatever he said happened "did happen". Even after 34 years since his death she misses him and holds "the greatest respect and admiration for such a gentle, humbling and honest man". She was in awe of his life and work and contribution to the Temuka community and adamantly believes that what he wrote in his letters to Dr Waugh, which she has now read, is the truth.

So that is an account of Eric Gillum from someone who was raised by him over many years and knew him well. It seems unreasonable and contrary to this man's makeup to attempt to write off his description of this aircraft as mistaken, and label it as a DC3. Chadwick visited and flew into Timaru on many occasions. In 1951, he went to the airfield at Saltwater Creek to help in the investigation of a new airfield. Draglines, as Gillum worked on, were used in earlier years at Saltwater Creek airfield. In 1953 and 1956 and throughout the 50's Chadwick was flying into both Timaru and Oamaru. In 1961 he flew a Dominie at Timaru. All of this creates a strong likelihood that Gillum had met Chadwick at Timaru during Gillum's work activity there.

Smith Report (Search Log #26) - Sighting at Pukaki

This was a report passed on by a pilot Struan Robertson from one Fred Smith of Windy Ridge, Fairlie. Fred Smith had told Robertson of seeing an aircraft that morning flying at about 3000ft somewhere in the vicinity of Lake Pukaki. Where Fred actually was at the time of the sighting is unfortunately not known. He'd described the aircraft as black underneath with silver wing tips.

What is of interest with this report is that Fred Smith described the aircraft as having "two wings".

Smith's son is Huxley Smith (he was named after the Huxley Gorge), former architect who has been living in Texas, USA, for 43 years. He advises that his father Fred would supervise Rabbit Board flying operations using a Piper Cub. Huxley sometimes helped load the Piper, and flew in it. Fred Smith obviously therefore had familiarity with aircraft. Huxley believes that his father, in describing an aircraft as having "two wings" would have meant a biplane, of similar wing structure to, say, a Tiger Moth. From that, and by simple elimination, it could only have been the Dragonfly that Smith saw.

Ivey Report (Search Log#16) - Sighting at Pukaki

Glentanner Station is an iconic and historic high country sheep station situated at the head of Lake Pukaki, 23km before Mount Cook Village. It has been privately owned by the Ivey family since 1957. Ian Ivey reported seeing a twin engined aircraft colored blue and silver traveling up Lake Pukaki. He also advised that this aircraft was definitely not the usual Mt Cook Air Services DC3. Ian Ivey's grandson George today farms the property. He advises that his grandfather Ian died in 1998 but George believes his report would have been reliable as his grandfather had a considerable interest and knowledge of aircraft and went on to develop an airfield at the property along with aviation-based tourism.

This is another credible report never followed up until now. Ian Ivey would have known the various aircraft types and in his Report was firm that this was not a DC3. Glentanner Airport was formerly used as a standby airport for Mt Cook Airlines whenever Mt Cook Airport was closed due to weather. It remains now a registered public airport where alongside its tourist aviation activity a NZ-Dutch space transportation company, Dawn Aerospace, has been conducting suborbital space flight trials.

Blanch Report (to SAR & Dr Waugh as detailed in "Lost") - Hearing at Huxley Gorge

Evan Blanch was one of a party of professional cullers who that morning were all gathered at Huxley Gorge Station at the entrance to Hopkins Valley. (Their colleague Paddy Gordon - mentioned below - was further up the valley, alone.) The group heard an aircraft flying up the Hopkins in low cloud amongst rain showers.

Blanch's account of this has been well documented in Dr Waugh's book. Blanch was however recontacted in late 2022. He described how he'd spent nearly two years in the area, hunting. He said that on the day a strong southerly had been coming through Lake Ohau but was being met by an opposing northwest wind. Blanch continues to believe that the aircraft he heard, but never saw due to cloud, was twin engined. Asked why he was so certain of this, Blanch explained how he had grown up close to Wigram airforce base and had aircraft flying over his home every day. He could identify by sound alone, from a very young age, what type of aircraft was flying over and whether it was single or twin engined. Blanch is adamant that the aircraft he heard in the Hopkins was twin engined.

Gordon Report (2022 emails to Dr Waugh) - Sighting Hopkins/Huxley Valleys

Paddy Gordon, now in his 80's, made contact with Dr Waugh in March 2022. His story had never been placed on record until now. He was personally interviewed in Blenheim in late 2022 and described how he saw an aircraft on that morning, flying up Hopkins Valley.

The Hopkins river flows south from the Southern Alps into the northern end of Lake Ohau in the Mackenzie Country. It's headwaters, on the southern slopes of Mt Hopkins, form the northernmost point of Otago and the river's braided valley is part of the border between Otago and Canterbury.

Gordon was a young man and a professional deer culler at that time. He's been part of a large group of cullers but became separated from them and was alone at Red Hut that morning. Red Hut is situated on the eastern bank of the Hopkins River, directly across from the entrance in to Huxley Valley. The western end of Huxley Valley splits into two branches. The northern branch leads on to the relatively low Brodrick Pass then giving access into Landsborough Valley, a good flying route through to the West Coast. The southern branch leads to the Ahuriri Valley, and to Dingle Burn which flows down to Lake Hawea.

Gordon had shot deer early that morning and needed to wash his hands. Red Hut, in those years, had no water. So Gordon walked the track from the hut to the river's edge and while washing his hands heard "*the roar of engines*" from an aircraft coming up the Hopkins from the direction of Lake Ohau. The weather was miserable; overcast and drizzly, with low cloud. Gordon's initial reaction to himself was - "*why in God would anyone be up here in these conditions?*" He thought it "*bloody ridiculous*" that any aircraft would be up there.

He started looking and got glimpses of an aircraft - a dark shape moving through the low cloud. He then observed the aircraft turn left and fly directly into the Huxley Valley. This turn point was just a few hundred metres directly across from Gordon. As the aircraft turned, the sound of its exhausts got louder. Then as it progressed up the Huxley Valley the noise began to fade out.

The sheer volume of noise, particularly when the aircraft turned and its exhausts faced Gordon, led him to believe that it was twin-engined. The noise of the engines, in Gordon's experience, was excessive; the pilot clearly had full power on.

Gordon had flying experience. Years earlier he'd had a yearn to fly and had taken flying lessons. He'd known Bill Black, who flew Dominies. And coincidentally as well Alan Duncan (mentioned in www.dh90.info) who had been doing fixed wing deer recovery. Duncan would shoot deer and later fly in to pick them up. Gordon had gone with Duncan on several of those trips. He had a lot of respect for Duncan who he thought was a marvellous pilot. Gordon later took tuition in a Tiger Moth. He had about 7 hours flying in a Moth but moved away and never went solo. Tiger Moths have exactly the same engine as a Dragonfly, though only one whereas the Dragonfly has two. Gordon was therefore very familiar with the sound and noise of their Gypsy Major engines. He's also flown in smaller aircraft, such as Piper Cubs, which Alan Duncan and he had used. Asked, Gordon was adamant that the noise of these engines was inconsistent with smaller aircraft such as a Piper. He was equally adamant that the aircraft he saw was much larger than a Piper.

As to any suggestion that the aircraft he saw might have been a DC3, Gordon laughed that suggestion off. He said that in any case DC3 engines are radial and have a totally different sound to that of the distinctive Gypsy Major.

Gordon was unable to identify the aircraft type. All he could see from time to time through low clouds was the body of a dark aircraft. He could not see the wings. The area of Hopkins/Huxley and the hut where this took place is clearly shown at <https://www.topomap.co.nz/NZTopoMap?v=2&ll=-44.01825,169.788208&z=12>. Online aerial images show the (now new) Red Hut position, the same track down to the river that Gordon took in 1962, and the relative position to the entrance across to Huxley.

Gillespie Report (Search Log #41) - Hearing in Dingle Burn

James Gillespie was Manager of Hunter Valley Station, a large high country property positioned at the headwater of Lake Hawea with access encompassing both Lake Hawea and Lake Wanaka. Dingle Burn, with its headwaters in the Huxley range, flows through this valley. Gillespie reported that he was definite in hearing what he described as a twin engined aircraft flying down the Dingle Burn towards Hawea late that morning. It's on record that Search authorities thought Gillespie's report very significant, tying in with other reports and timings and in SAR opinion a natural way for an aircraft to leave the Huxley area.

Notes

- SAR authorities at Ohau placed considerable store on the reports by Blanch and his team. This view was shared by Paul Powell, a very experienced mountaineer who at the time was the Chief Search and Rescue Officer of the New Zealand Federated Mountain Clubs in the Otago region and fully conversant with all incoming reports. Powell is separately mentioned in www.dh90.info as to his belief around Aspiring.
- Chadwick's friend and fellow Pilot Brian Waugh, who knew Chadwick's personality and flying characteristics better than anyone else, was of the opinion that Chadwick most certainly never crossed the Main Divide. Brian Waugh was never personally consulted by search authorities at any time during the search, which seems highly regrettable.
- In 2015 a NZ family involved in commercial film production reported finding a women's shoe on a river flat. The exact location of the shoe find has not been disclosed on their website although there is some reference to Temple Valley. This find has been used to advance their theory that Chadwick crashed somewhere around the Huxley. The shoe appears to be a winter weight women's fashion shoe. It appears to have (ornamental?) ski bindings on it. Sole woman passenger Valerie Saville had come over from Australia in what is usually the hottest month of the summer. She'd obviously have had no expectation of enjoying snow. The owners of a prominent Sydney shoe company with over 100 years of experience

including shoe manufacture have recently been provided with a photo of this shoe. They are of the opinion that the design is inconsistent with a shoe from the late 50's/early 60's. The sole of such boots from the 60's period is also lower in design. They have shown the photo to others in the industry and the combined opinion of all these industry experts is that this shoe is from the late 90's or early 2000's. Importantly, should Temple Valley transpire to be the area in which this shoe was found, that location is well south of the point where Gordon saw the aircraft turning into Huxley. Consequently, it would seem very unlikely that this shoe was Saville's.

- A logged SAR report (#34 - Lamp) mentioned an aircraft heading toward Motatapu Valley from Aspiring. Logged reports, in those years, were passed down through several hands, merely accepted in an administrative fashion and entered into the log, and rarely thoroughly analyzed or questioned. This report, as logged/recorded, is vague and on investigation has been found to be factually inaccurate in detail, which makes it difficult to assess its value.

Conclusions

What was Chadwick doing, flying up Hopkins Valley and turning into Huxley? The probable answer is that he was, once again, trying to get across to the West Coast, this time via Brodrick Pass and the Landsborough Valley, which would lead him directly to Haast and then on into Milford. He had a plane full of disappointed tourists, flying in dismal weather. Brodrick Pass is low and well known as a route into the Landsborough. One very experienced aviator who knows the area advises that if the aircraft had been able to get into the Landsborough it is almost certain that it would have reached Haast as the route down the valley to Haast is straightforward. The Landsborough is a large open valley with the Haast river flowing down through it. It has been well flown through over many years as far back as the mid thirties. If Chadwick had had a problem in there, a forced landing could be carried out on the valley floor. It's not inconceivable that Chadwick already knew the Landsborough.

It's perhaps of interest that the reports in Hopkins and Dingle Burn make no mention of an engine running erratically. Gordon's report, in particular, describes the loud noise coming from both engines. Is it possible that the earlier reported engine issue temporarily rectified itself, giving Chadwick the confidence to make a try for Landsborough and on to Haast and Milford? We'll never know. We do know that he was a very experienced aeronautical engineer and aviator, an ambitious businessman, an adventurer, and a risk taker who had once emotionally spoken about expecting to be one day killed on these flights. The Air Department Official report on the accident thought it probable that Chadwick was making hay while the sun shone, and in doing so somewhere went beyond the point of discretion.

If the engine issue inherent in this aircraft and well described in the Fairlie and Pukaki reports remained, surely Chadwick would have elected to try and go through the Lindis Pass to Queenstown, his nominated alternative airport, where he could safely land. Whatever the case, the facts presented here, with new information and far more clarity on earlier reports, now evidences a clear progression by Chadwick through Canterbury and the Mackenzie country. Additionally, this provides compelling support to the independent sightings in Rainbow Valley, near Aspiring, as detailed in www.dh90.info.

The individuals who have given reliable accounts relating to the scenarios dealt with both here and in the website at www.dh90.info now number more than 16 in total. They can't all be wrong, nor should their accounts be conveniently dismissed as being merely coincidental. The evaluation of these many reports and stories rests on the usual credentials of believability and weight of relevant inference. The people who provided these accounts are all assessed as honest and credible individuals.

The conclusion that Chadwick did fly his passengers via the Mackenzie route, as he himself said he would be doing, is now an inescapable one. It's human nature for westerners to always look for complicated answers to problems especially when faced with many complex contradictory inputs. What this paper offers is a summary of the accumulated evidence including that derived from more recent additional investigative research based on a number of personal interviews and emailed dialogue. The simple connection of the many evidentiary dots here now provides a credible and persuasive indication as to where Chadwick flew, and where he and his four passengers ended up, in thunderous cloud near Aspiring.

Five people perished that day. They deserve fresh efforts to find them.

**"If you ever try connecting the dots,
you will realize that not everything is a coincidence" - Ayush Sharma**

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