

Places to Go: Haast

Contributed by Ruth Presland

FLYING FROM the North Island to the Southern Lakes area or Southland can be executed several ways; East coast, down the middle or West coast. I really enjoy the West coast for its scenery and for its low level routes. These are a great training ground in nice weather and a good way to keep up with skills when the weather is not so nice. One of the best things I like about the West coast route is the Haast Pass and Haast itself.

It is the gate-way to the South and the hospitality will have you returning again and again.

The airstrip was built during the Second World War for access (as was Port Jackson), to Australia if the Japanese had invaded. Traces of the two retired vectors can still be seen when you fly over. The circuit is straight forward on 119.10. Note power lines at the North West end. When landing to the North West, it pays to set up early as the sea breeze is very buoyant and can give lift on finals. The surface is hard gravel and was resurfaced in recent times resulting in a good parking area as well, up by the Mobil pump at the Northern end.

A short walk will take you to the Haast garage; Johnston Motors 03 750 0846, where you can pay the small landing fee. If you are lucky you may strike the garage owner, Amon who has a resident Cessna 180. Amon is a great host and will entertain with flying stories and keep you up to date with the strip conditions - for example if stock are expected to be moved on. And he'll know what the local weather is likely to do.

The Haast World Heritage Hotel is just across the road from the garage. It has a phone box outside as there is no mobile phone reception in Haast. Their rooms are tidy and welcoming, prices are reasonable and you can enjoy a good meal of West coast blue cod in the bar while you gaze out to your plane parked across the road.

For another excellent meal in the Haast township, a couple of km's down the road there is the Hard Antler Bar and restaurant. Phone 03 750 0034. It is the local's choice and the food there is outstanding and great value. Accommodation in Haast village ranges from a backpacker to a list of good motels.

If you have decided to spend some extra time in this stunning area of South Westland, then have a look down the coast. Follow the road to Jackson Bay and you will come across little townships such as Okuru and Hannah's Clearing which are like stepping back in time. These are mostly holiday houses and are right on the beach.

At Hannah's Clearing there is a brand new B&B called Hannah's Homestead. www.hannahshomestead.co.nz Call your host Susan, on 0800 538 723. It is affordable luxury with the most extraordinary view, two storied with a motel unit below including fully equipped kitchen and two bedrooms upstairs. It is an ideal base in which to overnight, as there is no better place to sit on the balcony and watch

the sun dip into the sea whilst sipping a nice G&T and grazing on the local seafood.

While you are there a Must Do is the Waitototo River Safari. www.riversafaris.co.nz. This jet boat trip is like no other and comes highly recommended by the Author. The Waitototo River flowing



Waitototo River Safari: Highly recommended.



Haast Airfield and township.

out of the Southern Alps is simply breath taking and the history of the river, as you will learn during the trip, is fascinating. An excellent book has been recently published on the area called 'River of Blood'.

After that, you are most likely in need of another meal of seafood. The Cray pot is a unique little restaurant in a perfect location at Jacksons Bay; fish & chips, meals, take-aways. Phone 03 750 0877. It is well worth the short drive to the end of the road.

Over all you find the West coast hospitality unlike anywhere else in NZ. Everyone is welcoming and will invite you in as if you are a local.

Once you are airborne and on your way again, the Haast pass provides spectacular and interesting flying. Remember to keep to one side of the valley, keep a good look out and seek some training in the mountains if you are unsure. The Haast pass is great on a good day and can be rather dismal when the cloud comes down. Do be aware that a sea breeze can make its way right through the valley systems, so in choppy conditions keep to your aircraft's VA.

The pass itself is 1800 feet but narrow, so use 3500 feet as minimum height to cross just to be comfortable.

Enjoy the flight and be sure to call in and see us once you get to Wanaka!

Ruth can be contacted via Mountain Flying New Zealand on 03 443 4005, email: rfy@mountainflyingnewzealand.com

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