



It was 6.45am on a Monday morning in May 2009. There was not a breath of wind and the galahs were squawking their good mornings. The sun was about to rise in the distance. This was the country. This was far north of Adelaide. This was Weekeroo. This was the culmination of many months of training, study, practice and observation. This was the destination of my first navigation after obtaining my cross-country endorsement only a few days beforehand. This is what the ‘learn-to-fly’ journey was all about; friendship, camaraderie and sharing the journey with a fellow pilot. Actually, in the end, it was sharing the journey with 5 fellow pilots.

Our flying friend (from the RPA family) Pauline had lost her Foxbat at the Avalon Airshow and Ian and I had planned to fly to Weekeroo to help scratch her itch, get her up in the air and over her property in the Jabiru. To take advantage of our visit, Pauline had organised for us to assist her husband Will to remove 4km’s of fencing on the property. As it turned out, 2 other planes and 3 other pilots joined us in the journey which made for an eventful and entertaining time. But that’s another story, to be told by another pilot.

So in sharing this journey, I share my experience of the tiny steps, one after another, taken to get to this point. To share the journey in the hope of encouraging

anyone who started the journey and gave up, thinking and believing they couldn’t do it. I am so glad I persisted. Every flight improves my skills and knowledge and I love the ongoing learning curve. The wisdom and generosity of experiences shared by other pilots as you sit around a table discussing moments of a-ha learning, hindsight and tips for the future.

After I obtained my pilots certificate, I was ecstatic with my achievement and happy to take my time in going further. I just wanted to savour the moment of being a free-agent, even if it meant only flying within the training area or as authorised by an instructor. That was enough. But slowly I began to spread my wings again and before I knew it, I had my instructor sitting next to me again for another flight test. This time it was my passenger endorsement. For me this test was relatively easy, it involved common sense and looking after my passenger. So as we headed toward the aircraft I briefed my passenger (the CFI) about being in and around the aircraft, to finally strapping him into the passenger seat and advising him to keep his hands and feet off the controls. That in itself was enough to make me laugh – what a funny thing to be telling an instructor. Of course I delighted in telling him, in his role as a passenger, that I would be in control of the aircraft.

Passenger strapped in and comfortable, time to get myself into the pilot’s seat. Hatches and harnesses secure, start the engine, taxi calls made and off we go for the flight test. As I was put through my paces I explained what I was doing and answered his passenger questions. It all came relatively easily and when we encountered the engine failure, I calmly briefed the passenger and kicked into immediate actions. Circuits complete, testing over, endorsement granted... I took up my first passenger.

The friend I chose to take



up was someone who had shared and kept my secret of learning to fly for 2 years. We had a lovely flight. It was a perfectly calm day and included flying over restricted areas R289A and R289B. As a rule I try to avoid restricted areas, but we were on a mission. My friend told me there was property that was in her family and the night before we had done our research on Google Earth and printed it off to ensure we could find and identify the area easily. Transferring this research to the map, as it happened, the border of the property was right underneath the restricted area... *of course*, or rather, talk about Murphy's Law coming into play. Anyway, reading the NOTAM for R289A what I had to be aware of was that I had to fly above 2500, so we flew at 3000 to ensure we wouldn't become a fatality of potentially friendly gunfire. R289B was not active and therefore not a concern. It was great to see the excitement on her face; to be able to fly over land she hadn't seen or visited for about 40 years. Tears welled in her eyes as her emotions came to the surface. For me, it was a sheer joy to be able to fulfil her dream, something she thought she wouldn't see again. This is the joy of flying, the joy of having someone else enjoy the journey as much as yourself.



The experiences from here on were ongoing dual and solo navigation experiences. I flew to Aldinga airfield which was very busy with radio calls. I find experiences at unfamiliar airfields to be somewhat daunting. I was very nervous but thankfully I had my instructor by my side who patiently talked me through it. After landing we enjoyed a lovely coffee at the café there. I can't wait to go back again and take a friend for coffee and cake. The owners of the café were very welcoming, offering warm hospitality and excellent food. If you haven't been there I recommend you put it on your list of places to visit.

Another nav was to Wellington, Meningie, Goolwa and back to Murray Bridge. I avoided landing at Goolwa due to inclement weather. I did however land at Wellington and Meningie and whilst at Meningie I signed the visitor's book and had my photo taken as proof of being there. The thing I love about country strips is the opportunity for 2nd stage of flap landings (with no strong crosswinds of course). I love the slow, nose down approach that 2nd stage of flap provides and revel in the practice which provides invaluable and critical skills for short-field approaches.

My WAC nav was fun. It involved low level flying and navigation which my instructor could not fault me on (or so he said). He tried all the tricks in his book to distract me, talking to me, making me laugh, pointing out different landmarks, but every time he asked me where we were, I always pointed to the position on the map and replied, 'right here'.

I found the map reading skills involved in navigation relatively easy to adopt (certainly much easier than some of my other training). On a couple of occasions whilst learning I was temporarily unable to identify my exact location, but given a few more minutes, and a few more points of reference, eventually I could find my position on the map. The book study... well, that was another story entirely. I enjoyed reading about meteorology and navigation in general but retaining all the information, well, the more I tried, the more stressed I became and the less information I retained. In the end, I just had to relax and think about the processes logically. This certainly helped, and I made up aids to assist with my learning. I dearly would have loved to have done some classroom based training to assist with consolidating the information and theory I needed to retain.

A week before I sat my navigation flight test, I sat and passed the theory test. That was the worst of it for me. I was glad that leg was over. The day of my flight test, I was, as usual,

nervous, very nervous. Human factors kicked in and as with any exam I have ever sat in my life, I was nervous, anxious, worried I wouldn't pass, did not want to fail and certainly did not want to look or do anything stupid in front of the instructor. All this pressure I put on myself just made matters worse. I really had to calm myself down as I prepared for the test.

I was given my destination and took several deep breaths. I plotted the path on my VTC then went online to obtain the current weather for area 50 and any NOTAM information about where I had to fly. In particular I had to pass near the Edinburgh Military CTR so I was nervous and knew I had to do all the right things or there would be consequences. Gawler airfield was right on the border and if you missed it, you had the potential to be in an area where we were not allowed. Area R259, which included Gawler airfield, has a limit of 1500/SFC so I could not fly above 1500 and on the prior border, near danger areas D297A and D297B, I had to fly above 2000 if I was going to fly over them and at no point could I fly over 4500. So somehow at some point, which I had identified on the map, I had to be above 2000 feet but then get down to 1500 feet. Plus I also had to contend with Mt Crawford and the forestry area. I was concerned. I transferred all my known information to my flight plan, then set about working out distances, ground speed, headings, fuel requirements, etc. Once done, I conducted the pre-flight check of the Jabiru then notified my instructor I was ready.

As I set off on my track, I felt confident I could get to Gawler without too many concerns, but I was concerned about entering and navigating near and around the danger and restricted areas. I had made the decision to fly over the danger zones, so therefore at some point, I had to get down to 1500 relatively quickly. As I approached the area just outside D297A and before R259 I decide to do an orbit to reduce height. Thank goodness my instructor thought that was a good idea. I was somewhat relieved as I wasn't really confident about how best to tackle it.

For those of you before me who have been through this experience of navigating in and

around danger zones, restricted zones and controlled airspace, listening to the radio can be very distracting to the point of confusion, especially for a newbie like me. This being the case, I actually had to turn the radio down, and then finally changed to 122.5 (Gawler CTAF) to make my approach calls. Prior to arriving at Gawler, and as part of my pre-flight planning (wind direction considered etc), I had ascertained I would use runway 31. I thought I had been smart beforehand, viewed ERSA (was aware there were right and left hand circuits) and been onto Google Earth to view the airfield. It all looked good and I knew what I was looking for and what I would have to do. On arrival of course, it was a very different story (which my instructor knew, but purposely kept me in the dark as part of the exercise). As I approached the airfield, I saw heavy machinery at the beginning of the runway I planned to use, along with the beginnings of a new freeway going right through the early part of the runway. What on earth was going on? I panicked a little, took a deep breath and as I flew over I had to rethink my approach. There was no X anywhere on any runway or near the windsock to say I couldn't land. On I went to complete my circuit and land. A beautiful landing and a taxi down the runway, to the new hangars and check out what Gawler airport looked like from the ground.

Time to return to Murray Bridge, or so I thought. As we became airborne and I was navigating my way out of what I considered a mine field (above 2000 but not above 2500 and watch the danger and restricted zones), I was told to divert to Woodside. Oh my... what a challenge. Ok get myself settled, plane in trim, set at the right height and work out my strategy. VTC on my lap, out comes the ruler and pencil. Pick a place on the map to divert from, draw in the line. Measure the distance. Out with the protractor and measure the angle. Out with the flight computer, spin the wheels to calculate heading, distance and time. Ok, I'm over my diversion point, off we go again. Without hitch I navigate successfully to Woodside and land again. A pretty rough strip, but a precautionary circuit and 2 stages of flap helped a lot. Finally off we go again and back to Murray Bridge. I am exhausted but know I am on the home

stretch now. My instructor is in a good frame of mind so I think that's a good omen.

Finally back home and in front of the hangar I am informed I have passed my test. I should be elated but I feel empty and deflated; somewhat expired and tired. Was this normal? I don't know. No-one else had shared their experience with me, so I had nothing to measure myself against. All I knew was how I felt right now.

Driving home through the hills, I was on my way to a fellow pilots place to plan my first long navigation to Weekeroo. It had been a long day. But, wasn't this supposed to be fun? Every time I closed my eyes all I could see were roads, runways, transmission wires, pipelines, magenta boundaries, ceiling heights and CTAF frequencies. I had to open my eyes for it all to go away.

On reflection, I realised I was really proud of myself. I had achieved a lot in a relatively short period of time. In 5 months I had done more study than I think I have done in a lifetime, well... for quite some time anyway. So many books, so many lessons and still, so much to learn. I have what I call my "P" plates now and my journey continues.



And so you have read about my nav to Weekeroo. Ian flew there and I navigated. We had a great time and the BBQ on Monday after all the hard work of fence removal was a wonderful reward. I flew home in 2.6 hours and knew I had achieved another milestone. Certainly it was an entry in my log book to be proud of. I can't wait to do the whole journey again myself without a flying partner, just for the experience. I also picked up the skill of driving a tractor... which I have told Pauline and Will I would be happy to oblige again at any time in the future should they require my assistance on the tractor driver.



Words cannot express the sheer joy of having completed my first journey, of the hospitality extended by both Pauline and her husband, of the fun sharing the experience with the other pilots, and the peace and quiet of a country morning, strolling around the property and watching the sun rise. I am thankful I persisted with my dream and made it a reality. To all those who have ever thought about it, or who started and gave it up for whatever reason, consider flying ultralights... it's an affordable way to achieve a life long dream. Flying has given me a new lease on life and opened many new doors. I can't wait for my next adventure.