
WITH AERODROME SAFETY, **SIZE DOESN'T MATTER**

‘Private aerodrome’ conjures up a simple strip and little activity. Some, however, are quite complex and increasingly busy. Pilots who don’t plan their flights properly and barrel through the circuit areas of these aerodromes put everyone in danger. *Vector* spoke to three aerodrome owners in Canterbury because their issues reflect the national picture.



// The three vectors of Forest Field aerodrome.

Ces and Pam Collings established Forest Field Aerodrome – 10 NM northwest of Christchurch Airport – in 1989. Its standard circuit altitude and procedures lent themselves to flight training, and from the start, Ces and Pam gave local flight training organisations access to their airfield.

Since then, Forest Field has grown into quite a complex aerodrome. Ten aircraft are based there, and there are a number of houses on site.

“There are also three runways,” says Pam. “With six potential circuit patterns there can be aircraft anywhere within the vicinity of the aerodrome, ie, a two NM radius.”

Over the years the number of aircraft flying in the area has increased; some of that due to airspace changes altering traffic flow patterns.

Training aircraft fly between Christchurch Airport and the western training areas, and there are numerous north-south transiting aircraft each day.

At an airfield elevation of 400 feet, the circuit traffic at Forest Field is at 1400 feet and joining altitude is 1900 feet.

“That’s a slim margin of 100 feet between joining height and the lower limit of the control area, and as a result, we’ve had some close calls,” says Pam. “Especially lately.”

The problem is nationwide. According to latest figures from CAA’s analysts, reported unauthorised airspace incursions at unattended aerodromes more than doubled from 14 in 2017, to 32 in 2019. Analyst Charlotte Rose says this cannot be explained by increased activity.

“During the same two year period, activity has remained relatively stable,” she says.

“The raw data indicates the causes are often a failure to read the charts, and check NOTAMs.”

“Increasingly, transiting pilots are flying through at 1500 ft,” says Pam. “I suspect that sometimes they’re using Forest Field as a waypoint. But this puts them in direct conflict with any circuit traffic.”

“It isn’t hard to avoid the area,” pleads Pam to itinerant pilots, “so please do it.”

Frequency issues

Aircraft approaching from Christchurch, or from the north, change from the Canterbury CFZ frequency, 120.0 MHz, very close to Forest Field (119.2 MHz).

“So there’s not much time for making calls or hearing calls from circuit traffic,” says Pam, “before being in the airfield area.”

“Even making a radio call does not absolve a pilot from maintaining situational awareness because we have quite a bit of NORDO aircraft round here.

“It’s possible some pilots think there won’t be any traffic: often Forest Field is quiet, but other times it’s quite busy. You don’t know if and when there’ll be activity, or if and when there’ll be NORDO traffic in the vicinity.”

The wrong frequency

Russell Brodie of Rangitata Island, 15 NM from Timaru, used to have regular problems with pilots flying overhead his aerodrome, even cutting the circuit areas.

“About 15 years ago, we got our aerodrome published in the AIP Vol 4, and that’s made a big difference.”

Nevertheless, Russell says, there are still some aircraft completely oblivious to the presence of a privately owned aerodrome directly beneath them.

“Clearly they don’t consult the charts,” says Russell. “Or their charts are hopelessly out of date.”

“It’s the same with radio frequencies. Before publication in the AIP, we’d been on the Timaru frequency. Then for a short time after publication we went to 119.1 MHz. It was pretty quickly realised that wasn’t going to work because we’re so close to Timaru. So for many years now we’ve been back on the Timaru frequency of 119.5.

“But, even now, some pilots make calls on 119.1.

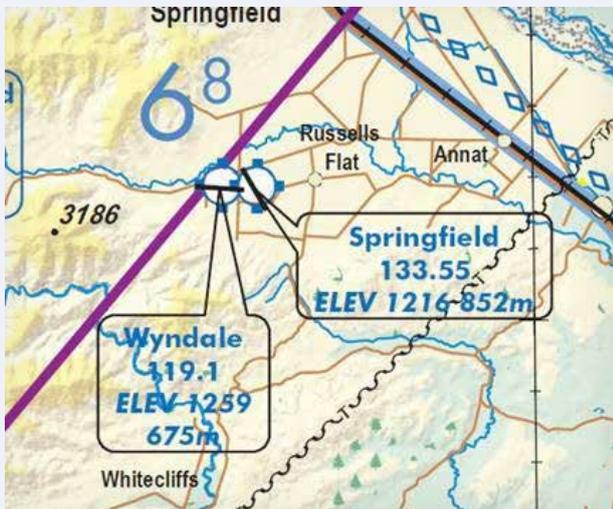
“What does it take for pilots to realise what frequency you’re on after all this time?” he asks.

Like Forest Field, Rangitata Island can be a very busy place. It has two vectors, extensive NORDO microlight activity and standard join training. »



Photo courtesy of Russell Brodie.

// Rangitata Island can be busier than Timaru aerodrome some days.



// If there are two aerodromes close together, Aeropath says it will slightly overlap them to reduce chart clutter.

» It's home to the Geraldine Flying Group, and several heritage aircraft collections.

"The irony is that, despite some pilots being totally fixated on Timaru and oblivious to our presence, some days it can be quiet in Timaru, and really busy here."

Read the blinkin' chart...

Russell says some pilots get south of Christchurch and think it's all 'open skies' after that.

"Blissfully unaware, they can track clean through our circuit.

"It's simple enough – just read the blinkin' chart."

While Russell encourages pilots to do 'proper' flight planning, he also says the owners of private aerodromes should announce their presence in the AIP Vol 4. (When an aerodrome is listed in Vol 4, it also appears on the relevant chart when it's next published.)

"How else are pilots to know you're there? While we still have aircraft coming through at circuit height, the numbers have greatly reduced since we've been on the charts.

"There are a few private aerodromes around here which have problems with transiting aircraft and I say to the owners, 'why don't you get the strip published?' and they say, 'oh, it'll cost too much and it's too much of a hassle'.

"But it's in their interests to be on the charts – it lowers the risk of them being run down."

...particularly you transient pilots!

Keith Vallance's Fernside Fields – which neighbours another private aerodrome, Barradale, is just 1.8 NM from the Rangiora aerodrome.

Although Fernside Fields is published in Vol 4, Keith says his main concern is pilots arriving at the aerodrome, not having – surprise surprise – read the AIP nor the chart.

"They circuit incorrectly to the south side of the airfield, conflicting with the Barradale circuit. Or they take off on O6, turning right and overflying Barradale to the south-east." [↗](#)

// THERE ARE A NUMBER OF BENEFITS IN HAVING YOUR AERODROME PUBLISHED IN THE AIPNZ VOL 4.

Apart from letting pilots know you exist and where:

- it gives you the ability to file a flight plan to and from the aerodrome, and get a flight following service.
- it gives you the ability to request the issue of a NOTAM for, say, a temporary closure.
- it provides pilots with your location should they need to land quickly in an emergency, or precautionary landing situation.

Requests for submissions can be made to info@aeropath.aero.

The process of having your aerodrome or heliport noted in the AIP and on the relevant chart is free of charge.

Your only responsibilities as the owner/operator are to arrange NOTAMs when needed, and to contact Aeropath for amendments to your AIP listing if any details change, eg, runway length, contact phone number.

To check if your proposed aerodrome needs a 'determination' by the Director of Civil Aviation, check rule 157.1. This work is charged out at the CAA's standard hourly rate.

Contact aeronauticalservices@caa.govt.nz.

By the way

According to rule 101.205, the operator of a drone cannot fly their aircraft within 4 km of an aerodrome unless the owner/operator of that aerodrome agrees.

That has Aeropath busy as increasing numbers of private aerodrome operators apply to have their site listed in Vol 4, to have more control over drones flying over or near their property.