

# CHARLES KINGSFORD SMITH

## 1897 – 1935

### ***1. Introduction***

*I am not an expert on Charles Kingsford Smith. I usually only give a five minute synopsis of his life to year six students from Kings School in Sydney.*

*Once one of them asked me if I knew Kingsford Smith. I had to tell him that I wasn't born when he was around, and even if I had been, I lived on the other side of the world. So I have to rely on extracts from the Sydney Morning Herald and Kiama Independent of the time as well as first hand accounts of some of our society members, namely Clive Emery, Dave Johnson and Bruce Winley. I also acknowledge an extract from the Berry & District Historical Society written by Ronald Ulrick.*

*Before I talk about the historic flight of Jan 1933 I thought I would give you a brief outline of the life of Sir Charles Kingsford Smith.*

### ***2. Charles Kingsford Smith***

*Charles Kingsford Smith was born in Brisbane on 9<sup>th</sup> February 1897 to William Charles Smith and Catherine Kingsford, their seventh child. The name Kingsford was not at this time included in the family name.*

*He and his family moved quite often, even going to Canada for 6 years. It was while they were in Canada that Kingsford was added to the Smith name to solve a mailing problem with two other Smiths in the same street.*

*When they came back to Australia, in 1907, Charles attended St. Andrews Cathedral School, Sydney. In spite of all the moves he was good at his schoolwork. Whilst on holiday, and swimming at Bondi with his cousin Rupert, he almost drowned, and had to be rescued by Surf Life Savers. (This could have been the end of the story!)*

*After leaving school Charles enrolled as an engineering apprentice at Sydney Technical College and worked in a factory in Sydney.*

*In 1915, on his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, he joined the Australian Imperial Forces (AIF), first in the infantry then in the signal corps. He was trained in motorcycle despatch riding and field telephone operations. Charles desperately wanted to go to war. In May 1915 he was sent to Gallipoli and later France. Both very dangerous situations for a despatch rider.*

*In France he applied for the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) and was sent to England in 1916 for training. In June 1917 with barely 45 hours flying training he was sent into combat. Later that year he was awarded the Military Cross after being in aerial combat where he lost two toes and part of his left foot..*

*After the war he and another pilot acquired an aeroplane and carried out joy flights (barnstorming) around England. When this enterprise came to an end he went to America in 1920. He returned to Australia in 1921 where in 1923 he married his first wife Thelma Corboy. This marriage lasted only 2 years.*

*In 1927 he met Charles Ulm and wanting to get some publicity they flew around Australia in 10 days 5 hours and 15 minutes, a new record for the 7,500 mile trip, which was previously over 22 days.*

*Charles Kingsford Smith created many world records, either alone or with others.*

***1928 May 31** in the Southern Cross, Smith (pilot), Ulm (co-pilot), Harry Lyon (navigator) and Jim Warner (wireless-operator) took off from Oakland on San Francisco Bay flew to Honolulu (27hr 25mins), to Fiji (34hr 30mins) and onto Brisbane (20hrs) arriving on June 9<sup>th</sup> to be met by several thousand people. This was the first trans-Pacific flight between America and Australia. Smith and Ulm were awarded the Air Force Cross and were both given honorary commissions in the Royal Australian Air Force.*

***1928 August** in the Southern Cross the first non-stop flight across Australia from Melbourne to Perth.*

***1928 September** the first flight across the Tasman Sea from Australia to New Zealand.*

***1928 October** the first westbound crossing from New Zealand to Australia.*

***1929 June - July** Record flight from Australia to England in 12 days 18 hours.*

***1930 October** Record solo flight in the Southern Cross Junior from England to Australia. Time taken 9 days 22 hours.*

***1932** Knighted.*

***1933 January 11<sup>th</sup>** Trip to New Zealand from Gerringong for a barnstorming tour. It was the first passenger flight across the Tasman. They took off from Seven Mile Beach at Gerroa at 2.50am. The flight took 14 hours 10 minutes and landed in New Plymouth NZ. Co-pilot/navigator was Bill Taylor, wireless operator John Stannage.+++++++  
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***1933 March 27<sup>th</sup>** return flight from New Zealand to Sydney.*

***1933 October** Record solo flight of 7 days 4 hours 43 minutes from England to Australia.*

***1934 October – November** First east bound trans-Pacific flight from Australia to America in Lady Southern Cross, a single engine aircraft.*

*1935 November Final flight – a failed attempt to break the England-Australia record of 2 days 4 hours 38 minutes. The Lady Southern Cross was lost on 8<sup>th</sup> November between India and Malaya. The co-pilot was Tommy Pethybridge. Kingsford Smith was 38 yrs old.*

*In 2009 what was thought to be the Lady Southern Cross was discovered on the seabed and in 2011 it was confirmed.*

*The Southern Cross G-AUSU is now in a glass walled hangar on Airport drive at Brisbane Airport.*

*Smithy liked to name most of his planes to include ‘Southern Cross’.*

<i>Southern Cross</i>	<i>Fokker Trimotor Monoplane</i>
<i>Southern Cross Junior</i>	<i>Avro Avian Biplane</i>
<i>Southern Cross Minor</i>	<i>Avro Avion Biplane</i>
<i>Miss Southern Cross</i>	<i>Percival Gull Single Engine Monoplane</i>
<i>Lady Southern Cross</i>	<i>Lockheed Altair Single Engine Sport Aircraft</i>

### **3. Eyewitness Accounts**

*I am now giving two eyewitness accounts of the historic day.. The first is with the courtesy of the Berry & District Historical Society.*

*These two accounts are interesting in their different views of the day.*

#### **3.1 Ronald Ulrick**

##### **KINGSFORD SMITH AT SEVEN MILE BEACH**

It was 10 January 1938 and there was great excitement at Berry and surrounding districts. That afternoon the famous Charles Kingsford Smith was to land at Seven Mile Beach in his equally famous aeroplane, the “Southern Cross”. The event is commemorated by an outline of the plane in concrete on the hilltop at the western end of Headland Drive at Gerroa.

I, Ronald Ulrick, fourteen year old schoolboy and student at high school at Nowra, lived with my parents on a dairy farm just off Beach Road. I have vague recollections that the milking was completed very early that afternoon so that we could join the crowd at the beach awaiting the plane's arrival. The tide was ebbing and as all local people knew Seven Mile Beach was renowned for its hard flat surface at low tide. In earlier days it had been used for horse racing and in more recent times for speed car races.

Finally the Southern Cross appeared in the sky, landed on the beach and taxied to a position opposite the end of Beach Road and just below the Surf Club's shed. It was

indeed a thrill when I joined the dozens of other volunteers and we manhandled the plane up the beach and above the high water mark. Ground crew checked over the plane and filled up the petrol tanks. Extra tanks had been fitted so that the plane's range was sufficient to cover the projected record-breaking flight. Seven Mile Beach was to be used next morning because none of the existing airfields had a runway long enough for the plane to take off with such a heavy load including the additional fuel.

“Smithy” had long since adjourned to the clubhouse presumably to rest. Many people went home but hundreds settled down in the sandhills to chatter and to doze the night away while the tide came in and went out again.

Early next morning the volunteers, including myself, were at work again hauling the plane down the beach to the hard sand exposed by the low tide. Kingsford Smith and crew climbed into the Southern Cross, the engine kicked over, the plane first crawled then sped up the beach, finally lifted off and headed to the east. Thus on 11 January 1933 commenced the successful first commercial flight to New Zealand.

### **It was time to go home for the milking!**

BERRY & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

### **3.2 Bruce Winley**

#### MEMORIES OF

#### SMITHY'S HISTORIC FLIGHT

From Seven Mile Beach, 11th January. 1933

By Bruce A. Winley.

22nd October 1992

At this particular time I was living with my parents at “Allyn”, on a portion of Alne Bank, the property of Mr. C.T.Hindmarsh, and I was a student at the Nowra Intermediate High School. *(He was approx. 18 yrs old)*

It was widely known that Kingsford Smith was going to bring the Southern Cross to Seven Mile Beach on the afternoon of the 10<sup>th</sup> of January, and would be taking off for New Zealand in the early hours of the next morning. There must also have been some announcement that there would be other aircraft offering joy-flights. Consequently I set out from home with ten shillings (that was all the money I had), my box camera and small supply of food. My brother, Marcus came also. It was about 1.00 p.m.

We had to cover on foot a distance of about five km. to get to Seven Mile Beach. On the way I called in at the stationmaster's residence where Buddy Gallegos (Mrs. Eric Johnston) decided to come with us. We made our way through Campbells', Millers', Grahams' and possibly Emerys' properties to shorten the journey as much as possible. When we arrived at the beach we discovered that we had to continue on to the Berry Turn-off, about another five km. The weather was sunny with a

light northerly breeze.

While walking along the beach the Southern Cross passed overhead, turned and landed well down the beach. By the time we reached the turn-off the aircraft was already there, surrounded by a large crowd. If my memory is correct, Kingsford Smith spoke to the crowd, but I could not get near enough to hear what he had to say.

The fuel tanks of the Southern Cross were topped up from 44-gallon drums, apparently brought by road transport and manhandled over the sand from the beach boundary. There was a considerable amount of spillage during the filling process. Notices had been put up warning of fire danger. I think the Southern Cross was turned to face the sea before the filling commenced. On completion of this task the engines were covered for protection pending take-off in the morning.

I moved to the outskirts and took a photograph of the Southern Cross surrounded by the crowd. At that time there were about 200 people there.

In the meantime two de Havilland Gipsy Moths had arrived and parked nearby. As soon as I heard that joy flights were on I hurried over to Gypsy Moth VH-UIC and eagerly handed over my ten shillings to the man in charge.

*I won't elaborate on the flight except to say that on its completion Bruce continues*

We taxied up to the starting point and while I was waiting to get out Val Noble took a photograph with my camera of me sitting in the cockpit. I thought this would be a wonderful photograph, but discovered later that I had forgotten to tell Val to remove the lens cover. So it was a non-exposure – quite disappointing.

By this time it must have been about 5.30 p.m. and time was spent looking at the aircraft and talking to various people. We partook of the refreshments we had brought and when it got dark we lay on the dry sand near the sandhills and tried to go to sleep. I must have got some sleep, because I was awakened at about 2.0 a.m. by the sound of voices.

The Southern Cross was being prepared for its next historic flight. There was some kind of floodlight. The covers were removed from the engines and some time later they were started. They were each started consecutively by hand. This entailed hand cranking an inertia starter contained in each engine but using the one crank handle.

As the starter was cranked it made a whine, which increased in pitch until sufficient speed was attained. At this stage the starter was engaged to start the engine. When all the engines had been started they were run for a considerable time to warm them up, and when all was ready the Southern Cross moved off down the beach to commence its take off run, which was in a northerly direction.

Flares had been placed for a kilometre or more along the beach at about 50 metre intervals.

Our group had started walking homeward along the beach. We were able to see the Southern Cross as it overtook us on its take-off run. It all seemed to happen so

quickly. I don't remember whether the Southern Cross had any headlights on for the take-off, but I remember it coming towards us making a great roar, and as it went past I saw the large glow coming from the exhaust pipes, particularly the two outer ones which were above the main plane. It took a long run and finally climbed into the sky. I watched it till the lights of the exhausts disappeared toward the east. The take-off time was about 2.50 a.m.

The walk home seemed longer than the walk the previous afternoon. I arrived home about sunrise, and went to bed and slept till about midday. I was glad to have witnessed a great historic event, and elated with the experience of my first flight in an aeroplane.

The Southern Cross arrived at New Plymouth, N. Z. at 7.00 p. m. N.Z. time (5.00 p.m. Sydney time) after a flight of 14 hours 10 minutes, over a distance of 1149 nautical miles.

Those on board were Sir Charles Kingsford Smith (pilot), Captain P.G.Taylor (co-pilot and navigator), Mr. J. Stannage (wireless operator), Mr.S.E.Neilson (secretary of the New Zealand and New Plymouth Aero Clubs), and Mr.J.Percival. The latter two people were the first air passengers across the Tasman Sea.

## **4. Newspaper Accounts**

### **4.1 Kiama Independent**

#### **HISTORIC FLIGHT**

**January 11, 1933**

In 1933 Australia's greatest aviator, Sir Charles Kingsford Smith, was trying to interest the Government in a regular Tasman airmail service. With Australia still in the grip of the Depression, he also proposed to raise income by a barnstorming tour of New Zealand in the famous Southern Cross.

He made his first crossing of the Tasman in September 1928, in 14 hours and 25 minutes.

His second crossing in 1933 was from Seven Mile Beach Gerroa because of the long smooth stretch of sand. His co-pilot and navigator was Captain P G Taylor. The wireless operator was Mr. John Stannage. The two passengers were Mr. Jack Percival, the aviation writer for Associated Newspapers, and Mr. Stan E. Neilson, secretary of the New Plymouth Aero Club and ground organiser of the Dominion tour.

On Tuesday, January 10, he flew from Mascot to Gerroa in 35 minutes, and landed safely in preparation for the scheduled Tasman take-off. He informed the Kiama Independent of his plans and preparations.

Two hundred and fifty gallons of fuel had been taken on board at Mascot and another

412 gallons added on Seven Mile Beach, together with 30 gallons of oil.

“ In the event of bad weather or mishap, I have fuel for 22 flying hours ” he said. Air speed was predicted at 90 miles per hour, and 100 m /p / h with favorable winds.

With 15 hours of daylight flying time, New Plymouth on Ninety Mile Beach was chosen for the landing place, as Mt Egmont was discernible 150 miles out to sea.

The plane by this time had 2200 flying hours up, and covered a distance of quarter million miles. Two of the original engines had been replaced, and new Morse and wireless equipment installed. A 60,000 candlepower searchlight had been installed for take off and landings if required.

Amateur radio organisations had been co-opted and the Zero Beat Radio Club, with 6 operators, had the previous day taken over the Berry Surf Club building and was in touch with 20 stations in every state, plus Lord Howe Island.

The Southern Cross resting near Motor Courts, 3 miles south of the Crooked River end of Seven Mile Beach, was guarded by 10 policemen, to protect it against sightseers or souvenir hunters. Low tide before dawn was the object aimed at.

Long before dark there was a large crowd on the beach, people came from Kiama, Gerringong and Berry districts, for this was the biggest thing that had ever happened. Picnic parties of mum, dad and the children, parked near the plane and on every vantage point to see the take off.

It was a dark, humid and eerie night with a misty northeast wind blowing in from the sea.

Program for the crew was a meal and a rest, they turned in at 9.30 pm in the surf shed.

Smithy was awakened at midnight and given a weather report. The men came to the plane more photos were taken, the farewells were said. Mrs. Stannage, wife of the wireless operator and niece of Smithy, the last to say Au Revoir to her husband and uncle. Smithy leaned out of the plane, waved and called "Cheerio". A tremendous reply of " Good Luck, Cheerio"

The plane took off heading north at 2.50 am the beach was lit by car lights and flares. The weather was fine throughout, but the plane was blown further south than anticipated. Wireless communication had been maintained throughout the flight.

The flight took 14 hours and 10 minutes.

## **4.2 Sydney Morning Herald**

*See extract of SMH 12<sup>th</sup> January 1933*

## 5. Kingsford Smith Memorial Gerroa

*To commemorate the historic flight a memorial was built at Gerroa. The following is an extract from the Kiama Independent*

The Kingsford Smith Memorial Gerroa.

### HOW IT ALL STARTED.

Today's ceremony (10<sup>th</sup> February 1968) represents a triumph for the perseverance of the former Gerringong R.S.L. sub-branch president, Mr. Harry Miller, of Foxground.

It was in 1938 that the idea of honoring the district's association with the flight of the Southern Cross was first mooted. Plans for a suitable memorial were interrupted by World War Two, and the proposal was not revived until after the war.

Mr. Miller pursued the plan and a Kingsford Smith Memorial Committee was formed with representation of Gerringong, Kiama, Jamberoo sub-branches and also Kiama municipality.

Original plans were for the construction of a memorial at the beach, but it was considered that the ravages of the weather and risk of vandalism might make this impracticable.

After long negotiations it was finally agreed to locate the memorial on an elevated spot adjacent to the Crooked River Road, now the sealed Kiama -Berry Road. Land was generously provided by the Marist Brothers, and various arrangements concluded with Government departments for its use.

Various proposals for the memorial were canvassed -- that of a shelter shed with panorama of Seven Mile Beach, a tablet in stone. and a replica of the Southern Cross in concrete at ground level.

Ultimately the Gerringong sub-branch opened a building fund and with State Executive approval sought from the public and other sub branches the funds to construct a memorial to Sir Charles Kingsford Smith, who in addition to his exploits in aviation, had served with distinction in the First A.I.F. in Egypt, Gallipoli and France as a dispatch rider, before being selected for the Royal Flying Corps in which he gained the Military Cross.

There were delays because of land transfer difficulties and dedication of the site, but construction commenced in 1965, and by persistence of the Gerringong sub-branch has been brought to fruition.

It's only a small sub-branch at Gerringong, but it is tenacious, and the officers serve for long periods..