

## Failing to see the light

After visiting Flinders Island, in Bass Strait, to check on sources of yacca gum, which CM was exporting in small quantities at the time, Bob Mostyn and Russ Fretwell climbed into their Auster for the return to Hobart. A strong wind had sprung up and the island's air traffic controller was reluctant to let them go. Nevertheless, they were determined, and Mostyn took off and headed south across Banks Strait.

In those days light aircraft did not carry radios, so once a pilot was in the air the only way he could be contacted was through light signals at airports. A white light meant an aircraft should return to an airport; a red light was a warning to stay away, and a green light indicated clearance to land. A flare meant that things were very serious indeed.

The sou'westerly headwind that the Auster encountered was not only strong but also very rough. At times it was blowing as fast as the aircraft's forward speed. The result was that the CM duo occasionally seemed to be hovering over

the same spot. After a very bumpy ride indeed they arrived over Launceston's Western Junction airport which, in keeping with the dreadful flying conditions, was displaying a white light. However, for one reason or another, Mostyn failed to see it and flew on for Hobart.

After the roughest flight of his life, Mostyn finally put the Auster down at Hobart, thoroughly relieved to be on the ground again. He was convinced that if the aircraft had not been built for aerobatics, its wings would have broken off long before.

He was called in to the control tower and asked to explain why he had not obeyed the signal at Launceston, which had indicated that the weather was unsuitable for flying.

Mostyn replied that he had already found out that the weather was bad because he had been right up there in the middle of it. Besides which, he had arrived in Hobart, and that was where he wanted to be.

Having acquired his private pilot's licence, Mostyn flew for both business and pleasure. One side of CM's Tasmanian business in which flying proved particularly beneficial was the wattle bark trade. Bark was the perfect commodity for the fledgling branch because not only did the company have a share in a Hobart bark mill, but harvesting could also be slotted in between fruit seasons. In addition, it dovetailed with the Federal Government's policy of encouraging land clearance for agriculture. A wattle tree in pasture, it was claimed, meant 10 fewer sheep that could be carried on that land because the tree extracted nutrients from the soil around it and prevented grass from growing. So wattles had their bark stripped from them, a process that inevitably killed them. There were plenty of people who were happy to go out into the bush to strip bark in the long summer evenings.