

Who and What is the Matamata Soaring Centre!

Sometimes good things come to us almost by accident. The Matamata Soaring Centre, for example. In 1963 difficulties had arisen between the Piako County Council, as administrators of Waharoa Airfield, and the gliding clubs at that time using the airfield, and from the point of view of payment of charges levied by the Council, between the clubs themselves. Out of this turmoil arose the Matamata Soaring Centre, an incorporated body with a membership made up of the gliding clubs using Waharoa, its main purpose in life being to promote and administer ground facilities on the airfield, and to negotiate when necessary on behalf of all gliding users with the County Council, C.A.A., and any other bodies.

A steering meeting was held in Matamata on 2nd May, 1964 with delegates from the Auckland, Waikato, Tauranga, Rotorua, Ruapehu, Piako, and Tokoroa clubs, with apologies being received from the Hawkes Bay, Wanganui, and Whangarei clubs. Up to this stage, a Flying Centre had been envisaged, but, upon the refusal of the Piako Aero Club to join, the name Matamata Soaring Centre was adopted.

An inaugural meeting of the Centre was held in Matamata on 12th December, 1964, attended by the same clubs that had been present at the steering meeting. A set of Rules was adopted, and the incoming Committee was instructed to take steps to make the Centre an incorporated body. Ralph Court of Auckland was elected president. John Marshall of Matamata was elected secretary, and Colin Nicholson of Auckland appointed honorary solicitor to the Centre. Upon these three enthusiasts devolved the not inconsiderable work of establishing the Centre, not only as a legal body, but as a physical entity working for the good of the gliding community in the north. The amount of work that they put into this task has barely been recognised and the Centre's present sound position owes much to their efforts. A Certificate of Incorporation was issued, on 14th July, 1965.

In the meantime, happier relations were being built up with the County Council and plans were being made for future facilities. Unfortunately, a major

stumbling block was the delay incurred by the County in obtaining an area of Maori land adjacent to the airfield. Since all future building was limited to this area, no real progress could be made until the land was acquired, and this took some two to three years. Gliding camps and competitions, however, were held over this period, and the utilisation of the airfield steadily increased. The resident club, Piako, was operating three or four days a week, and the Auckland club held camps over every public holiday period.

Morrie Green of Auckland was elected to the position of president at the Centre's A.G.M. in October, 1965 and Lewis Hale to the position of secretary at the A.G.M. in July, 1967. By this time, the County had acquired the adjacent Maori Land, but to balance this, it had become obvious that the County was unable to assist with finance either directly, or via the Local Bodies' Loan Authority Board.

However, it was felt that a start must be made, and plans were drawn up for an eight roomed bunkhouse, made of concrete blocks, and containing 32 bunks with innerspring mattresses. John Roake of Tauranga organised the raising of debentures for \$3500 while the bunkhouse was being built. The final equipped cost of the bunkhouse was \$4400 and it was first used for the Christmas 1967 camp. At the same time, the County, following persuasion from the Centre, was erecting an ablution block containing toilets, showers and washing facilities, at a cost of \$9800. Whilst the County had appreciated its responsibility to erect a toilet block, the airfield being a public reserve, it had planned to accumulate the necessary finance over three years and erect the building in the year ending March, 1970. However, a successful approach from the Centre saw the building erected in time for the Nationals at Waharoa in February, 1968. The Centre pays a rental of \$200 per annum for the ablution block, and meets the fuel oil costs. At this time, the County also installed a number of caravan power points, and the Centre also makes payment to the County for their use.

Simultaneously, other buildings were being erected. The main hangar on