

Adelaide Now Goldsworthy obit 30/4/2011

Coober Pedy aviation pioneer

Born: December 7, 1937; Richmond, NSW

Died: December 25, 2010; Adelaide

Outback pioneer aviator

WARWICK, whose father was in the RAAF and then an engineer, knew from the age of 13 that he wanted to be a pilot.

He completed his engineering apprenticeship in Brisbane, where he worked for five years as a fitter and turner. He became a student pilot soon after his 16th birthday, learning to fly Tiger Moths.

After finishing his apprenticeship at 22, Warwick travelled to Madang in Papua New Guinea and worked on powerhouse installations for 12 months.

He obtained his commercial pilot's licence and a job with Silver City Air Taxis in Port Augusta, operating charter flights and a weekly freight service to Coober Pedy. While flying opal miners back to Port Augusta, he was shown some glorious solid opal and his second passion was born - opal mining.

Warwick could see the opportunity to fly opal miners through to Adelaide instead of stopping at Port Augusta, and Opal Air was established in 1963, providing commercial air service to Coober Pedy and Andamooka.

It began with a five-passenger, single-engine Cessna 205. Opal Air became successful, extending routes to Aboriginal settlements, Uluru and Roxby Downs.

Warwick ensured his staff maintained his high standards of safety, resulting in 23 accident-free years. The first commuter airline licence issued in Australia was granted to Opal Air in 1967.

Warwick introduced the first light aircraft used on regular public transport services with a Cessna 421, in 1970.

That same year he banned smoking on all Opal Air services, which was another first in Australian aviation.

Disasters with contractual agreements, engine problems and spiralling aviation fuel costs forced Opal Air to close in 1986. Through the years at Opal Air, Warwick engaged in opal mining, which led him in 1965 to design the first tunnelling machine suited to this purpose. The machine was built in Brisbane and returned to the opal fields for extensive opal searching.

Warwick married Gillian (Hollingsworth) in Perth in 1968.

A wonderful by-product resulting from the tunnelling machine was the creation of their unique dugout in 1970, where the front and back entrances had views to the far horizons; a step up from their first residence in the tin sheds beside the airstrip.

Their daughter Melissa was born that year and their son, Nigel, 21 months later.

After Opal Air, Warwick set up a workshop in Marleston, Adelaide, and, on his own over several years, built a drilling rig which was used in conjunction with shallow depth seismic exploration on the opal fields.

The workshop became a base for a variety of research development and inventions, and was the scene of much collaboration with friends and colleagues of similar interests.

More recently, Warwick spent some time in the US working on an electric car; a development he was convinced would be of great benefit to humanity when it was perfected. In 2009 he became an active member of the Unitarian community.

Warwick died after a short, valiant battle against a rare lymphoma.

Warwick Goldsworthy is survived by his wife Gillian, children Melissa and Nigel, and four grandchildren.

Opal Air Pty Ltd (formed in 1962) operates daily services from Adelaide to Coober Pedy via Andamooka, with thrice-weekly extension to Ayers Rock in the Northern Territory. Optional stops can be made on request at Amata, Ernabella, Indulkna and Everard Park. Charter flights to the Stuart's Range opal fields at Coober Pedy are also undertaken. Opal Air was the first company to be awarded a third-level certificate by the Australian Department of Civil Aviation on July 1, 1967. Head Office: PO Box 168, Coober Pedy, South Australia 5723. Z 73-5051. Chief Executive: Warwick Goldsworthy, managing director.

Fleet: One Cessna 421, two Cessna 402.