

That was then ...



Fannie Bay, Darwin, 10 December 1919

This is now ...



SilkAir SQ 5201: Flying into history

Today's scheduled flight is one of around fifty thousand airline flights that take place daily worldwide. However, it is very special, as it landed in Darwin within an hour of the first aircraft that reached Darwin, 100 years ago. At 3 45pm on December 10, 1919, a Vickers Vimy aircraft, carrying four people, in open cockpits, flying at 80 mph, arrived in Darwin nearly 29 days after leaving Hounslow, London, while the everyday modern alternative (Singapore Airlines SQ317 / SilkAir SQ5201) routinely takes 18 hours 55 minutes.



Souvenir of the first aircraft flight from
England to Australia, November-
December 1898, by Australians Ross
and Keith Smith, James Bennett and
Walter Shiers, for passengers arriving in
Darwin on SQ 5201, 10 December 2019.

This memento is a gift from the

**Aviation Historical
Society of Australia
(NSW) inc**

**Smith Centenary
Celebration Group**

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Some adventures of the 1919 flight

London to Lyon, 12 November
(500 miles, 6 hrs 20 minutes)

Flying through snowstorms, the aircraft was so cold that the lunch sandwiches were frozen solid.

At Pisa, 12 November, the Vimy was bogged and had to be pushed out by fifty Italian servicemen. On take-off, mechanic Jim Bennet sat on the tail of the aircraft till it was moving free of the mud, then ran to the cockpit and jumped aboard.

No aircraft had ever flown beyond Calcutta (29 November). Landing fields had to be specially prepared and supplied with fuel and oil.

On 4 December they landed at Seletar, Singapore. The landing strip was so short that Bennet had to leave the cockpit and sit on the tail of the aircraft as it landed so that they stopped in time. On 6 December, they took off, clearing surrounding trees by a matter of inches.

At Surabaya (7-8 December), the landing field was very boggy. The aircraft had to be pulled out of the mud by Indonesian workers, who also provided hundreds of bamboo mats to make a runway.

Crossing from Atamboea, (Timor), to Darwin, the Australian Navy stationed the warship *HMAS Sydney* midway across the Timor Sea.

They landed at Darwin on December 10, 27 days and 20 hours after leaving Hounslow. They won a prize of £10,000 offered by the Federal Government for completing the journey within thirty days.

