

Weather Diversions

At this time of year, weather diversions become a distinct possibility on every cross-country flight. It's all very well planning and familiarising yourself with alternate routes in case Plan A can't be executed, but make sure you have enough fuel to carry them out, or know where you can get it.

Every year, the operator of Raetihi Aerodrome, Selwyn Ward, sees several aircraft land due to the weather in the central North Island. "The thing that catches them out is a front approaching from behind, while flying over rising ground. The weather looks okay in front, but it doesn't take much of a change to be in trouble if the cloud lowers a bit and the ground keeps rising. The space of 10 minutes can make a huge difference."

However, Selwyn is very pleased to see aircraft using Raetihi Aerodrome as a bad weather alternative.

"A lot of people are making better safety decisions these days, because there is a lot more weather information available to them. If they are wise enough not to press on, they pop in and see us here at Raetihi."

You should be aware that the minimum height rule (91.311) does not permit flight below 500 feet due to bad weather.

You are expected to turn back, divert, or land before you get to the 500 foot minimum safe height. Similarly, a Special VFR clearance does not approve flight below 500 feet, or 1000 feet over a congested area.

A few of the aircraft who have diverted to Raetihi have not had a lot of fuel to spare. If you are planning a trip in this area, be aware that there are very few places in the central North Island where avgas is available.

There is **no** avgas at: Turangi, Chateau, Raetihi, Ohakune, Karioi, Boyd, and Rangitaiki aerodromes. Only three aerodromes in the area do have avgas: Taumarunui (Shell), Taihape (Mobil), and Taupo (Shell and BP). The one-way ag strip at Taihape, however, is not for the faint-hearted. It is only 455 metres long, with a slope of 1.68, and an elevation of 1550 feet.

Always refer to *AIP New Zealand, Vol 4* to figure out where along your route, or alternate routes, you can access fuel. ■