

Flying to remote places

This task is about reading for information and to make inferences

Read the article and answer the questions that follow.



The job of the New Zealand Flight Inspection Team is to make sure that planes can get to where they are going quickly and safely. The team checks on navigational aids, like radio beacons and runway landing systems, and the condition of the airports and airfields aircraft use. Their work sometimes takes them to out-of-the-way places in the Pacific region, such as the scattered islands of Kiribati, near the equator. A team member recalls one visit he made.

Kanton Island in Kiribati was an old wartime airbase. In 1990, the United States asked us to inspect a beacon there so that Kanton could be used as an emergency alternative for planes flying from Honolulu to Christmas Island. They also wanted us to take samples of the reserves of jet fuel in forty-four-gallon drums at the airfield.

It must have been years since a plane had been there, so when we arrived, we made three low passes over the runway to have a look at it. There could have been bikes, farm animals, shovels, wheelbarrows, all sorts of things on the runway. So we flew along it low, with everybody looking out the windows to check that it was all clear. Then we landed. Well, the kids just ran straight out around the plane. We were using a Fokker Friendship at the time – a propeller-driven plane – so we had to get the propellers stopped in a hurry. Most of the kids had never seen a plane before. The adults had, and they were very keen to welcome us. There hadn't been a supply ship in the place for more than a year. They were quite short of food and were living mainly on fish and coconuts. They all came on board the plane and absolutely cleaned us out. None of those kids had seen commercially made biscuits before. We asked for some coconuts, and the kids shinned up the palm trees and got some.

All the old airfield buildings were still there; it was like the *Marie Celeste* – log books opened on the desk, technical equipment... There was a well, and a pump. The pump looked brand new. Then we noticed that the drive-belt had rotted away in the sun. It had been there for years.

It was pretty hot, so the crew decided to go for a swim in the lagoon. The locals went crazy and ran over to watch us. We said, "Haven't you seen people swimming before?"

Well, not here," they said. "It's full of sharks!"

a) The aircraft flew low over the airfield several times before landing to

- scare farm animals off the runway.
- check that it was long enough to land the Fokker Friendship.
- give the pilot practice in landing on an unfamiliar airstrip.
- see that there were no obstructions on the runway.
- inspect the beacon landing system.

b) What did the local people do on board the plane?

- Cleaned it.
- Gave the plane crew coconuts to eat.
- Took all the food supplies.
- Made welcome speeches.
- Invited the crew to go swimming.

c) Why did the aircraft's propellers need to be stopped quickly?

- To allow the team members to get off the plane.
- To brake the plane as the runway was very short.
- So the local people could board the plane.
- To conserve precious fuel supplies.
- So that the children would not be injured.

d) What was the main reason the team was asked to go to Kanton Island?

- So that a navigational beacon could be checked.
- Because an emergency flight had been requested.
- To take food to the local people.
- So that the runway could be inspected.

e) What food item do we know for certain was on the plane?

f) Why did the people behave as they did when the team members went for a swim?

g) What word(s) is/are used to tell that the children climbed the coconut palms?

h) What does 'went crazy' mean as used in this passage?

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