

'Finding Smithy'

His early life



(National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution, Washington 1919)

Source

b

Some events in Kingsford Smith's early life

- Born Brisbane 1897
- Family moved to Sydney 1899
- Family moved to Canada 1903
- Visiting Sydney 1907 when he nearly drowned at Bondi – he was rescued by the newly-formed lifesaving service, and resuscitated by a nurse who happened to be on the beach
- Family returned to Sydney permanently 1909
- Enlisted in the AIF on his 18th birthday 10 February 1915
- Served at Gallipoli
- Transferred to Royal Flying Corps 1917
- Awarded Military Cross for bravery 1917
- Wounded – two toes shot off in an aerial combat 1917
- Demobilised 1919
- Travelled to USA and flew stunts in films 1919

7 Discuss which of this information might be most relevant in your understanding of Smithy, and how you might present some or all of this information in the display you are creating about him.



(London Daily Mail 1919)

'Finding Smithy'

His pioneer aviation achievements



Smithy returned to Australia in 1920. He started flying for a Western Australian aerial company. In 1928 he and his crew were the first people to fly from Australia to the United States. The feat was acclaimed throughout the world. He created several other flight records, and was the first to fly several routes. He was knighted in 1932.

8 Use the information about the flights and the routes marked to create a colour code to identify each of Smithy's famous flights on the following map.

19–29 June 1927 Record-breaking flight around Australia in (Bristol Tourer G-AUDJ)
30–31 March 1929 Lost, forced to land in Kimberley area of WA attempting Australia-England flight, Sydney–'Coffee Royal' site (in <i>Southern Cross</i>)
31 May – 9 June 1928 First trans-Pacific crossing Oakland–Brisbane (in <i>Southern Cross</i>)
10–11 September 1928 First flight across Tasman Sydney-Christchurch (in <i>Southern Cross</i>)
8–9 October 1928 First westbound Tasman crossing Christchurch–Sydney (in <i>Southern Cross</i>)
23–24 June 1930 First westbound North Atlantic crossing Dublin-Harbour Grace (in <i>Southern Cross</i>)
31 May – 9 June 1928 First trans-Pacific crossing Oakland–Brisbane (in <i>Southern Cross</i>)
9–19 October 1930 Record-breaking solo England-Australia flight London-Sydney via Rome and Karachi (in <i>Southern Cross Junior</i>)
20 October – 3 November 1934 First eastbound Pacific crossing Brisbane–San Francisco (in <i>Lady Southern Cross</i>)
15 May 1935 Dramatic failed crossing of Tasman when propeller smashed mid-flight and Gordon Taylor had to stand on the wing and put oil in an engine (in <i>Southern Cross</i>)
6–8 November 1935 Final flight, attempting to break England-Australia record via Baghdad and Allahabad (in <i>Lady Southern Cross</i>)



(*Australian Geographic*, Number 54, April-June 1999 page 114)

Pioneer flying was difficult and dangerous. Biographer Ian Mackersey, sitting in the tiny cockpit of the Southern Cross aeroplane while writing Smith's biography, imagined it this way:

'Here, wrestling the great spoked bicycle-wheel control columns, he and his co-pilots had sat, unable to move about or stand up properly, for up to fifty hours at a stretch. Through the open sides of the flight deck they had been blasted by freezing air and drenched by rain. Their hearing had been bombarded to insensibility by the roar of three unsilenced engines, their conversation reduced to scribbled notes. How, trapped in this confined space without access to the cabin for a day and a half, did they empty their bladders and bowels? How, with no intercom, did they confer with their navigator and wireless-operator sitting out of sight behind the giant fuel-tank they carried?'



(Ian Mackersey, *Smithy. The life of Sir Charles Kingsford Smith*, Little, Brown and Company, London, 1998 page viii)

How did they manage to find small islands in mid-Pacific? To survive, unstrapped in their wicker seats, in bone-shattering turbulence amid great explosions of lightning, on crude blind-flying instruments with no radar to warn them of the atomic forces that threatened to annihilate them inside every storm they so innocently tried to penetrate? The stress and fatigue must have taken them to the limits of their resistance.'

(Ian Mackersey, *Smithy. The life of Sir Charles Kingsford Smith*, Warner Books, London, 1999 page viii)

Smithy wrote of aspects of the experience of pioneer flying at various times:

- 'We seemed to be leaving the world for a new one of our own. Before us swept an immensity of silent ocean.'
- '[The noise] seemed to get right into the bones at the sides of the forehead.'
- 'Encrusted with ice. Our radio failed. Alone in the middle of the deserted Tasman Sea. We could see nothing, hear nothing. We didn't know where we were. I think that night I touched the extreme of human fear. Panic was very near and I almost lost my head. I felt a desire to pull her around, dive – climb – do anything to escape. We were like rats in a trap – terrified, dazed with fear.'

(Ian Mackersey, *Smithy. The life of Sir Charles Kingsford Smith*, Warner Books, London, 1999 pages 136, 182)

9 What was special about the achievements of pioneer aviation?

10 If Kingsford Smith had not flown those routes or set the records, somebody else would have. Why give so much attention to the first person to do something?







