

Go further and further north by plane

THE DRYDEN OBSERVER

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 12, 1972

Two men got off the Hooker Air Service plane after it had landed at the Dryden Airport. Both of them were business men on a business trip. From Toronto, the two men had previously flown to Dryden on the Transair jet and had then taken the connecting flight in Hooker's beechcraft to Pickle Lake.

B. Keene and R. J. Roach are consulting engineers for a Toronto based firm, Kilborn Engineering Ltd.

They use the air service from Dryden to Pickle Lake at least once a month, sometimes more often than that. Before this service was made available these gentlemen had to drive on paved and gravelled roads from Thunder Bay to Pickle Lake. A long, time-consuming drive.

An attractive woman boarded the plane as it prepared to take off again, heading for Sioux Lookout and then on to Pickle Lake. She too was from Toronto and had come to Dryden via the jet service to connect with Hooker Air Service. Her daughter was getting married in Pickle Lake in three days time to one of the local O.P.P. officers. She was looking forward to a happy reunion at the airport in Pickle Lake.

Noel Love, a pilot for Hooker Air Service, was flying the plane on its scheduled run to Pickle Lake. A pilot with Hooker for 5 years and born in Sioux Lookout, he was quite familiar with the lakes and forests of Northwestern Ontario that he flies over every day.

Noel refueled the engines at the Dryden Airport and at 2 p.m. the afternoon flight was ready to go. At an altitude of 3,000 feet the colours of Indian Summer on the northwestern landscape were breathtaking.

A short 15 minutes and the plane was decreasing altitude in order to land at the Sioux Lookout Airport. The runway at Sioux is being lengthened to 4,000 feet to accommodate large planes. The Beechcraft taxied up the runway to the Hooker terminal and shut down engines for a brief stop. The passengers who were to travel on to Pickle Lake transferred to another plane equipped with floats rather than wheels. Noel explained that they had to do this because the airstrip at Pickle Lake was not serviceable because of dust and sand on the runway that could easily cause considerable damage to any plane. The change-over caused no one any inconvenience whatsoever and proved to be more enjoyable than anything else. A Hooker bus took the passengers along a three-mile drive to the water base of Hooker Air Service.

Once again in the air, north of Sioux Lookout, the passengers constantly scanned the earth for a possible glimpse of a moose swimming on one of the lakes. Hunting season was in full swing and several boats were seen leaving rippling trails behind them. Just a few days ago, Noel had spotted a moose swimming across one of the smaller lakes. As the plane crossed over Lake St. Joseph a

silent helpless awe is felt by those who see for the first time this lake, over 100 miles in length, with countless islands dotting the blue water.

Only forty minutes after leaving Sioux Lookout one may see the small community of Pickle Lake on the northeast shore of the lake it was named after. Enclosed by forest and water, the town was once the home for gold miners when two gold mines, the Pickle Crow Mine and the Central Patricia Mine were very active. Now both are no longer in operation.

Pioneer air service

Dave Hooker is the owner of Hooker Air Service and has developed his present-day operation over a long period of time. In 1947 he bought a plane, a Tiger Moth, to help him out in his commercial inland fish packing and hauling business. He used the plane to collect fish from the local Indian fishermen who caught the sturgeons in lakes as far north as Fort Severn. In winter he purchased furs and supplied transportation in and out of the far northern areas for the Indians and other people working in the north.

"We were right in here all the time to enjoy the bulk of the business," Dave commented. "We always had people depending on us for supplies and requirements for the north. Food, medicine and clothing were the basics but a lot of odds and ends went up north too."

In the season of 1966 Dave's company packed and hauled over ¼ million pounds of fresh

fish, the biggest season they ever saw. As time went on they increased their number of planes required to handle the increase in traffic, both passenger and express. Hudson's Bay Co. employees, independent and co-op fur traders, Indian Health stations, Indian Affairs and the O.P.P. constantly relied on air service. Delivering the mail was an important function for the air service and as the north opened up so did the mail traffic. The planes were frequently called upon to provide ambulance services, flying distressed people into the hospital at Sioux Lookout. To service the northern outposts today Hooker Air Service provides regularly scheduled flights to such places as Sandy Lake, Big Trout Lake, Fort Severn, and others.

More recently the exploration and mining crews have become dependent upon air transportation. Various mining companies have exploration crews in the Pickle Lake area and the opportunities for new mine sites and rising employment are strong currents in the air at the moment.

By the year 1970, Hooker Air Service had acquired a total of 14 aircraft, 10 equipped with floats for summer flying service and a wheel-ski operation during the long winters. Hooker's services now employ 35 people on a steady payroll that includes people at Pickle Lake and Sioux Lookout.

Difficulties
Tourism will become a vital link in the economy of northwestern Ontario, according to

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ities by plane: Hooker Air Service has been in operation for 25 years and is still providing safe and reliable transportation in Northwestern Ontario.

Dave Hooker. There are plenty of outlying points for anglers. "But to provide services for these tourists we need help from the government," he said. "If Pickle Lake are at present studied in their attempts to keep it serviceable at their own expense.

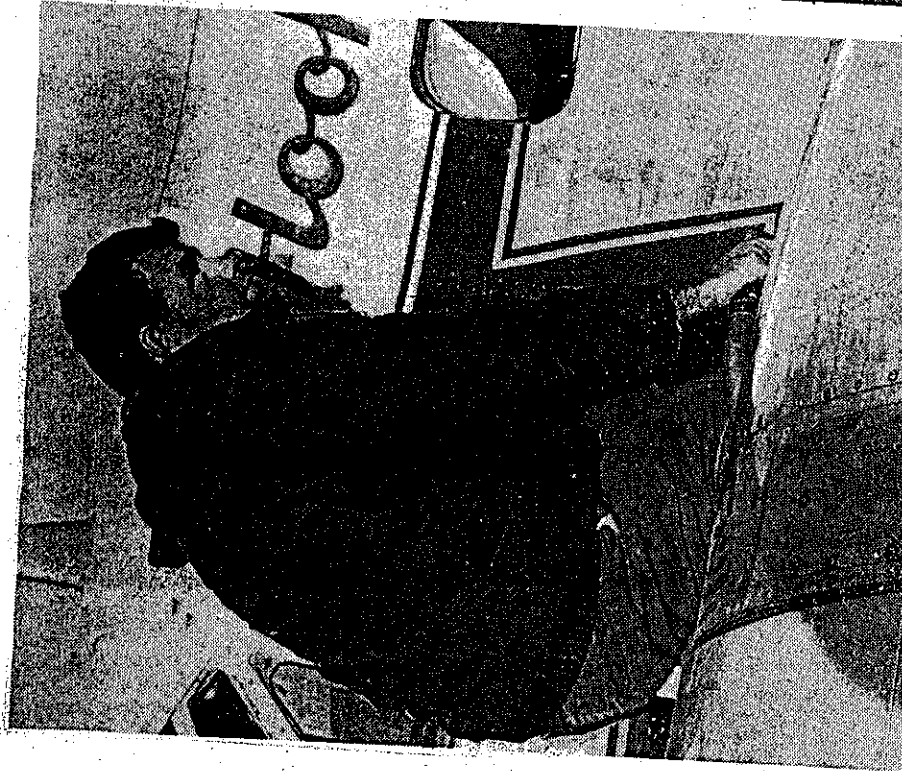
To the future
The small community of Pickle Lake is in the primary stages of growth. Mining and exploration is opening up the area and tourism is soon to follow with the increased air traffic in Northwestern Ontario. From the air only the beauty of the north can be seen but underneath the forest carpet lies vast reserves of mineral wealth.

As the plane flew over Pickle Lake on its way back to Dryden, a glance at the small lakeside community below brought to mind the human warmth of the people living and working there. Winter isolation is no longer a problem, but there are still many difficulties for the community to overcome.

Hooker Air Service stopped briefly at Sioux Lookout to pick up passengers and freight and then Noel was off to the air again heading for Dryden, only 15 minutes away. The relaxing comfort of the scenery and the aircraft create a pleasant background for conversation with fellow passengers.

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Pilot Noel Love refuels the aircraft and is soon at the controls again warming up for take-off.



Regular scheduled service from Dryden to Pickle Lake and Sioux Lookout is offered by Hooker Air Service.