

Fox Moth



Painting by Wally Wolfe of Fox Moth "BNI" flying near Yellowknife, N.W.T.

The deHavilland Fox Moth is probably not as well known in northern aviation history as the Fokker Universal, the Fairchild or the Norseman of its time or, indeed, the highly successful deHavilland Beavers and Otters that followed. Nevertheless, it is a part of northern aviation history, providing transportation and supply links that contributed to the post-World War II development of the North.

The Fox Moth was only one of a number of "Moth" designs produced by Geoffrey deHavilland of Great Britain after World War I. It was a combination of the Tiger and Puss Moths. The first Canadian Fox Moth was built in 1945, with a total of 53 being manufactured here. Max Ward, founder of Wardair, began his northern aviation career when he purchased a Fox Moth in 1946 and operated it out of Yellowknife. This was the beginning of a long and successful relationship between Ward and deHavilland.

The original Fox Moth was built in Great Britain. It was a biplane, with a plywood fuselage and wings of spruce covered with fabric. The Canadian Moth was modified somewhat to make it more suitable for conditions in Canada. It was given a larger cabin door, reinforced cabin floor and better heating and ventilation. The engine was an in-line, four-cylinder, air-cooled Gypsy Major of 140 hp, giving the aircraft a cruising speed of approximately $90 \text{ m}\cdot\text{h}^{-1}$ ($144 \text{ km}\cdot\text{h}^{-1}$). The Moth was considered comfortable, stable and economical by those who had flown it. It was versatile and could be used in all three configurations — wheels, skis and floats. It could be adapted to haul freight, move people (normally three passengers) and for medical evacuations and aerial reconnaissance. Since the aircraft was primarily wood and fabric, it could easily be repaired using basic materials.

Out of the 53 Fox Moths that were built in Canada, 7 saw



Don Allinott and Gordon Emberley assembling the Fox Moth after its arrival in Yellowknife. (Photo credit: John Poirier.)

northern service. Several of these crashed, ending their final days in the North.

In 1977, a local Yellowknifer initiated the concept of restoring a Fox Moth to its original condition using parts from various known crash sites. Although there were some sceptics, the idea soon caught on. With the assistance of Aero Arctic Helicopters and the Government of the Northwest Territories, parts of the aircraft were retrieved from three crash sites — the project was under way.

The restoration of the Moth took place in St. Albert, Alberta. It took seven years at a cost of \$100 000, but in 1985 the project was finally completed. Although it did not progress beyond a ground run, the aircraft was rebuilt to flying con-

dition and was given the registration CF-BNI, which belonged to one of the Moths that had flown in the North.

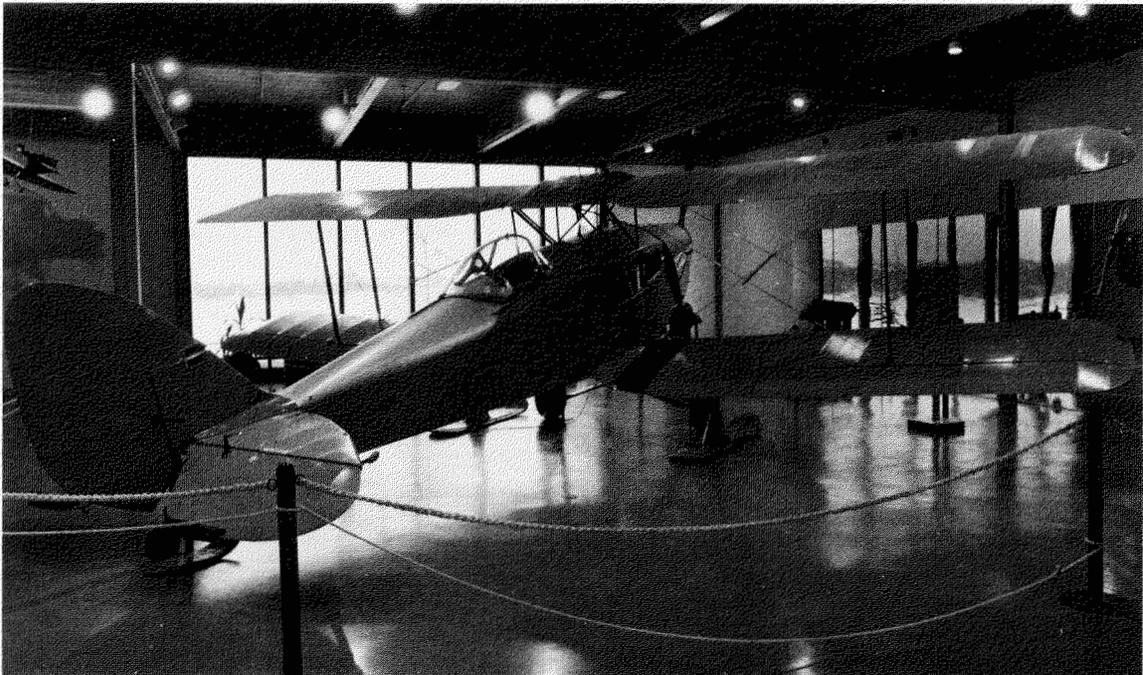
Once reconstructed, no space could be found in the North to accommodate the Fox Moth and it was decided to send the aircraft to the Western Canada Aviation Museum in Winnipeg on temporary loan. It remained there from 1985 to 1987. Early in 1987 a group of aviation enthusiasts in Yellowknife, many of whom were connected with the Fox Moth project since its inception, banded together to form the Fox Moth Society. The aim of the society was to ensure that space was added to the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre to accommodate the Fox Moth. Many individuals and companies came forward, donating financial, human and material resources.

When the new gallery was complete, the Fox Moth was transported from Winnipeg on board a Canadian Armed Forces Hercules. The Moth was finally home! The Northern Aviation Gallery was officially opened on 17 October 1987 in the presence of such notables as Max Ward and Stan McMillan, a fitting tribute to the early bush pilots and their crews.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The following individuals were instrumental in the restoration and return of the Fox Moth: Don Allinott, Hank Bertrand, Doug Emberley, Gordon Emberley, Dana Ferguson, Jack Johnson, Jim McGarry, David McGiven, Neil Menzies, Bob O'Connor and Roy Pawluk.

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Fully assembled Fox Moth in the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre's Northern Aviation Gallery.