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COMMERCIAL pilot Owen Zupp will retrace Australia's rich aviation history when he circumnavigates the country to celebrate the centenary year of powered flight.

Starting in Bundaberg in May, the Bowral resident will get behind the controls of a purpose-built Jabiru J230 and follow the path of Qantas, the Flying Doctors, Bert Hinkler and Charles Kingsford Smith on his way around Australia.

In 1910 Harry Houdini became the first person in Australia to complete a controlled power flight, so 2010 seemed like the perfect opportunity for Mr Zupp to undertake the journey himself and raise money for the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

Mr Zupp said he wanted to do long distance flying in a light aircraft as opposed to a commercial aircraft.

"The centenary year seemed to be a good catalyst to do it," he said.

"I fly for a living and I fly on my days off for fun as well.

"Most people get into flying as a career because they love it.

"Flying a jet airliner is totally different to flying a light aircraft in the handling of the aircraft as well as the nature of the type of work you do. It is very controlled up there in a radar environment.

"Whereas a light aircraft is outside controlled airspace. You just look outside the window and say it's a nice day, grab a map and off you go. In some cases it is more a pure form of flying."

It is hard for Mr Zupp to describe his love of flying to someone that has never flown an aeroplane themselves.

Mr Zupp said it is one of those things that is almost impossible to describe in much the same way some people talk about their love of the sea.

"It is almost impossible to put into words... to look out beyond the horizon as far as you can see," he said.

"The sites that you see up there. The sunrises I have seen you just wouldn't believe. I've seen rockets launch over California. Flying by full moon you can see the southern lights on the way back from Johannesburg... just a million sites.

"I often say that people crawl over each other's backs to get the corner office in the corporate world. I have a different corner office every day."

It is relatively unremarkable to circumnavigate Australia today, but 100 years ago would have been akin to putting someone in orbit.

The challenge is to do it in a safe fashion, to plan adequately. Sometimes Mr Zupp will be flying over desert, while at other times over Bass Strait.

The type of preparation and survival gear he will need to carry is part of the groundwork to flying around Australia.

The flight will be in 13 stages over 16 days and the route has been influenced in most part by aviation history.

Bundaberg is the starting point because it is the birthplace of Bert Hinkler, one of Australia's great aviation pioneers.

Mr Zupp will then fly across to Longreach where Qantas first started, then past Julia Creek in Cloncurry where the Flying Doctor did their first service, and then down through the Kimberley's where Charles Kingsford Smith had to force-land in the 1930s.

Digger's Rest is also on the agenda, where Houdini did the first controlled flight, and of course Mittagong is also on the route.



HERE AND BACK: Owen Zupp in a Tiger Moth. He will fly around Australia next May to celebrate the centenary of powered flight. Photo supplied

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Mr Zupp said Australia enjoyed a rich aviation history.

"[Australia] was really punching above its weight," he said.

Follow through Mr Zupp's progress www.thereandback.com.au.



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