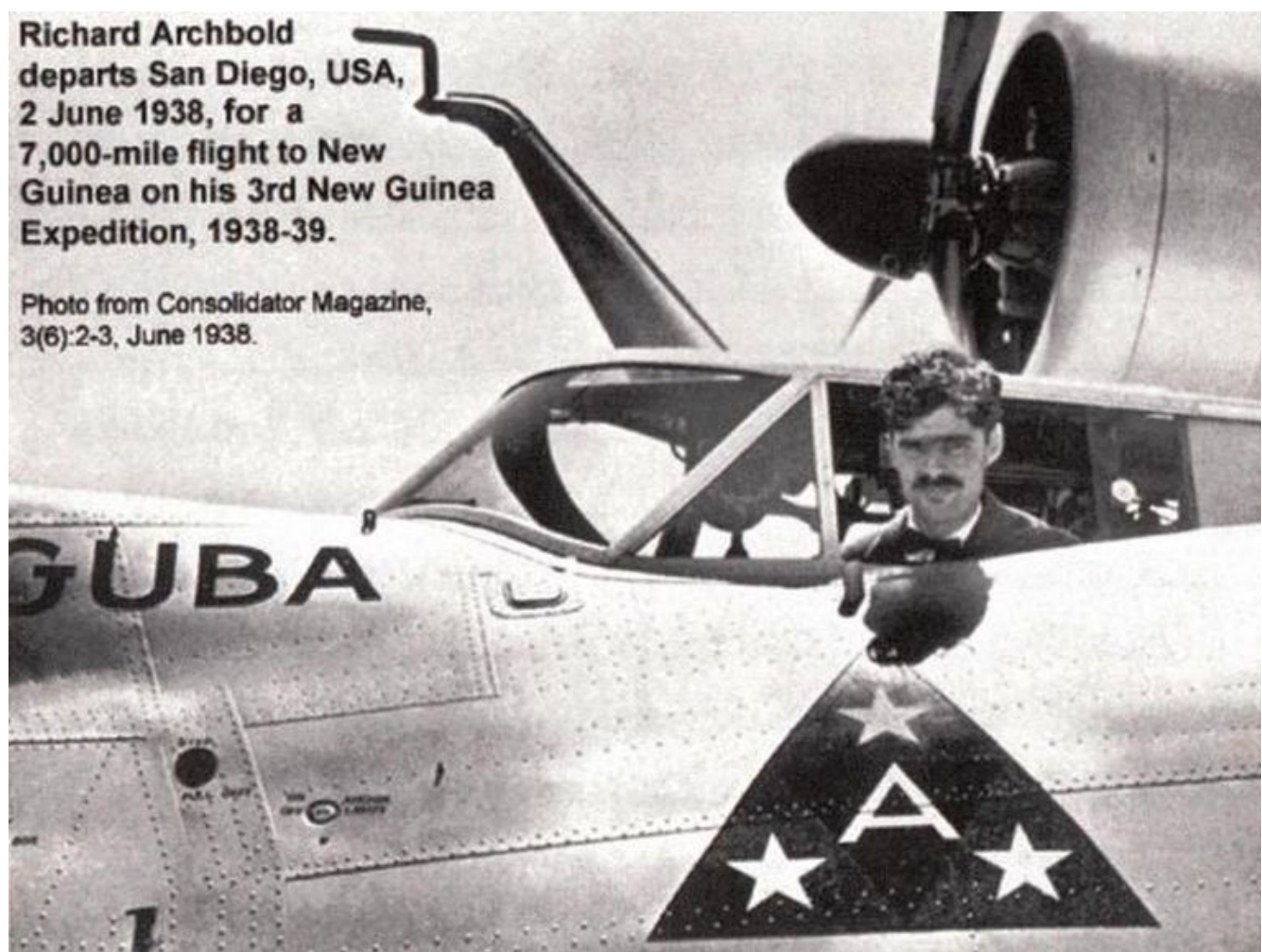


https://www.midfloridanewspapers.com/highlands_news-sun/the-story-of-richard-archbold-s-expeditions-part-3/article_cca2cf2a-803d-11eb-9203-9b6063787dcf.html

The story of Richard Archbold's expeditions, Part 3

Archbold Biological Station

Mar 10, 2021



Richard Archbold and Guba II before the third New Guinea expedition.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

Two earlier articles (7/8/20 and 8/19/20) were published in the Highlands News-Sun and this is Part 3 of that series.

Richard Archbold personally led three expeditions to the island of New Guinea during the 1930s. The third of these expeditions took place from 1938-39 and was a watershed moment in the history of 20th century Pacific Exploration, which brought Archbold and crew to the world's attention. Thousands of specimens were collected for the American Museum of Natural History. These have been studied for decades, including recent work done by Dr. Lauren Oliver, a frog researcher at the Museum.

“Oliver utilized other museums' collections as well the Museum's own extensive records. These include many specimens from the Museum's pioneering 1930s expeditions to the interior of New Guinea...sponsored by Museum supporter Richard Archbold. Information from Archbold's expeditions not only added to Oliver's research, but also helped guide her to sites she could revisit decades later to collect further frog specimens,” according to a 2016 Museum article.

The third expedition led to fame for Archbold for two main reasons aside from the staggering number of biological specimens collected. Firstly, he was celebrated for a major anthropological discovery.

“On June 23, 1938, during a reconnaissance flight between the coast and alpine Lake Habbema, Richard Archbold discovered the Balim Valley. Approximately 5,000 — 5,500 feet above sea level, in Netherlands New Guinea (Irian Jaya, now Papua Province of Indonesia), 60,000 natives were living in an unknown valley of the Balim River on the north slope of the Snow Mountains,” says Archbold Emeritus Librarian Fred Lohrer.

Other populations of Native peoples were known throughout the island but on this date Archbold was the first person not born on New Guinea to see this large civilization and observe what they had constructed.

Secondly, Archbold and crew made a variety of aviation achievements in his plane Guba II. This was at a time when air travel was dominating the public consciousness and imagination. In his PBV-2 Catalina Flying Boat, sometimes flying solo, and sometimes with his crewmembers in tow, Archbold reached many aviation milestones.

Lohrer described some of these exploits, “In July 1938, in Guba II, Archbold landed and took off from Lake Habbema, Netherlands New Guinea, a height of 10,580 feet above sea level. This is the highest elevation that a seaplane lifted off from. In 1938-1939, he and crew completed the first flight around the world at its widest diameter, approximately at the equator.”

This flight includes three 'firsts' as noted in the attached chart. The trip was accomplished in eight distinct legs beginning in 1938; however, most of the legs took place during a five-week period from late May until early July 1939. The feat was celebrated widely at the time in countless newspaper and magazine articles as well as in newsreel footage.

Archbold wrote about the expedition for National Geographic Magazine, which published a 29-page photo essay in its March 1941 Issue. He stated in the article that, "The decision to fly home by the longest way came about while Guba was in Sydney for supplies. The Commonwealth of Australia and the British Government had been interested in a proposal made by Captain P.G. Taylor to survey an aerial route across the Indian Ocean... Taylor was commissioned to find a ship, but none suitable for so long a journey were available until the Guba arrived in Sydney. This would give us an opportunity to circle the globe near its greatest circumference and to pioneer in unknown skies."

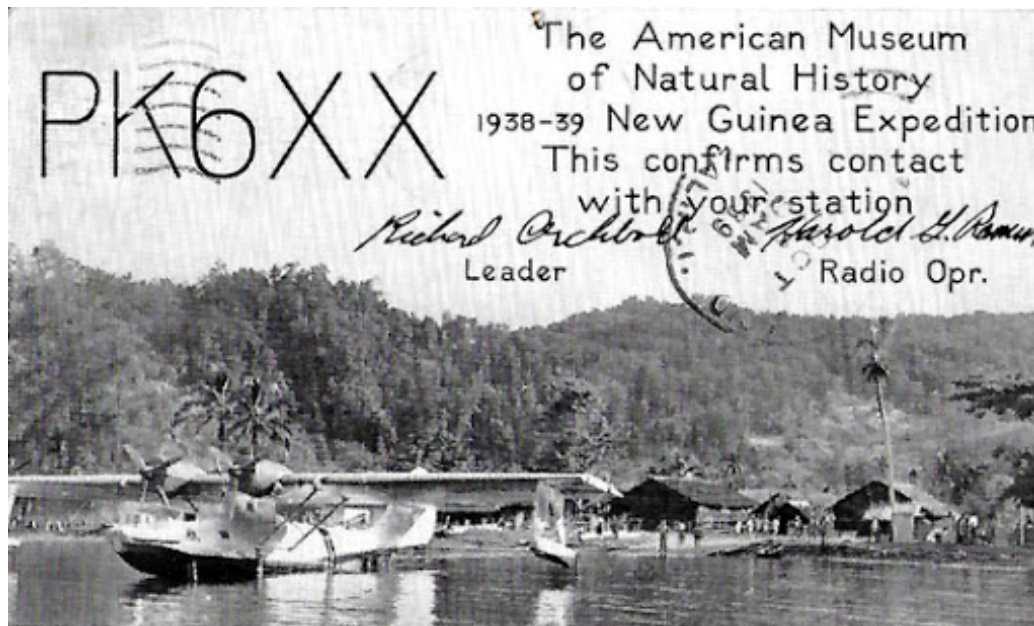
Richard Archbold kept a variety of artifacts from his time in New Guinea and Lohrer wrote, "There were 50-100 black & white 4-inch by 5-inch photos from the second and third New Guinea expeditions in envelopes. They were floating around when I arrived at the Station [in 1972], perhaps in the 'Museum,' where Richard Archbold had a desk, and where he set type for the specimen labels when he was the collections manager for all the biological collections. I had the idea that they were contact prints sent to him as a sample of the photos published in the American Museum of Natural History Bulletin Account of the expedition."

Part 4 of the series will consider the expeditions Richard Archbold sponsored in the 1950s and 1960s after permanently moving to Highlands County, Florida and establishing Archbold Biological Station in 1941.

Legs of Richard Archbold's round-the-world flight include:

• San Diego to New Guinea, June 3, 1938- June 10, 1938.
• New Guinea to Sydney, Australia, May 30, 1939- June 1, 1939.
• Trans-Australia flight, Sydney to Port Hedland, June 3 -June 4, 1939- This was the first flight across Australia by a seaplane.
• Island hopping across the Indian Ocean to Mombassa, June 4-17 1939- This was the first flight across the Indian Ocean by any airplane and an official survey flight for the Australian government.
• Mombassa to Dakar, West Africa, June 27, 1939- This was the first flight across equatorial Africa by a seaplane.
•Dakar, West Africa to St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, June 29, 1939-July 1, 1939.
•St. Thomas to New York City, July 1, 1939.
•NYC to San Diego, 1939.

A chart detailing the many legs of Richard Archbold's flight around the world during 1938-1939. Chart by Joe Gentili/ Laura Reed.



A postcard from the third New Guinea expedition, signed by Richard Archbold and Harold G. Ramm. From the American Museum of Natural History.