

FLYING FARMERS ASSOCIATION

Newsletter No. 104

August 2010

Opening Thoughts

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Editor, Publisher & Printer;

P.A.& R Stephens
Moor Farm
West Heslerton
Malton
North Yorkshire
Tel: 01944 738281
Fax: 01944 738240
Email: chix@farmline.com

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Cover photograph;
Peter Gales's strip on the edge of the Salisbury Plain Training Area, taken by David Corbett from Jeremy James' helicopter.

Chairman's Ramblings

25/06/2010

Last time I wrote I said the clocks were just about to go forward and how welcome that would be. Now as I write, the days are starting to get shorter again!! We can all depress ourselves with any facts and figures at any time if we try hard enough, but we must enjoy each day as it comes, for life really is too short. Yesterday was the hottest day of the year so far and a real pleasure to be in this wonderful country.

We have all read and listened with horror to the awful recent shooting events in Cumbria. For some of us in the North of England it has been too close for comfort. Ghastly though it is, I do hope that we don't get the usual knee-jerk reaction of authorities clamouring for yet more gun controls. It happened at Dunblane, and it had no effect then on criminal gun ownership, but just made it ever more tiresome for the law-abiding gun owner and true sportsman. It must not be allowed to happen again. Legislation will never ever stop the act of madmen.

We now have a long-awaited change of Government – will it get to grips with the appalling mess the outgoing administration left us in? It looks as though it is making some positive moves, but one thing is for sure, it is going to be very painful for us all – as the recent Budget has shown us. The pound is still awful, corn prices are still awful, and my own policy of 'buy high and sell low' still seems to be right in there!!

We are desperately short of rain here in East Anglia (as in most of the country, I believe) with enormous cracks in our clay soils. Our hay crop, which we completed yesterday, was only about 18" high in places despite having had about 70 units of nitrogen (too old to do kgs/ha!). Our yield was only 60% of last year's bumper crop and I suspect that with all the dry weather, most of the nitrogen remains unused. I would like to think the price would reflect the shortage, but I somehow doubt it!

On last night's weather forecast they said that in the North East it has been the driest start to the year for over 7 decades (since 1937), and that there is a real risk of a hosepipe ban. And yet even with all our weather ups and downs we still don't have the extremes of a lot of countries.

Despite that the cereal crops and rape down here in East Anglia generally look full of potential (in yield, if not price) probably due to our moisture retaining clay soils. I wish you all a most successful and rewarding harvest which will be starting somewhere in the country within 4 weeks of writing. Let's hope it is a hot and dry one which will not need all the expense and worry of weeks of drier usage.

I recently came back from a short holiday in Menorca and I was unfortunate enough to witness at close quarters a fatal take-off accident to a Beech Baron on that island. It was a most unpleasant experience and should remind us all of the small risk we take when we indulge in our passion – but not let it ruin it for us. After all, there are many daily motor accidents which don't put us off driving.

"Aviation in itself is not inherently dangerous. But to an even greater degree than the sea, it is terribly unforgiving of any carelessness, incapacity or neglect".

Fly safely

Martin Gosling

Editor's Notes

As usual, the August Newsletter is full of reports from the meetings held during the year up to the end of June 2010.

I couldn't help but include a bit of adventure reading sent in by Gerry Humphries (our Irish member), who together with Boyd Munro (our Australian / British / Scottish member) who did a very topical flight a few months ago. Be amused on page 15.

We will be sad to hear that Tim Harrison has sent his farewell message from New Zealand, but happy that he has settled so well there. See his letter on page 18.

The annual accounts are printed on page 19, showing a profit of £17! It will improve in the current year as there will be no membership list this year and we have a useful amount coming in from a bond taken out with surplus funds.

Paul Stephens

Committee Members

Dick Walgate	President	01472 371203
Martin Gosling	Chairman	01787 269369
Paul Stephens	Secretary	01944 738281
Andrew Cragg	Treasurer	01303 874251
Rick Holt	Events Secretary	01386 761816
Gordon Bellerby	Committee Member	01423 520770

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Committee Meeting

The Committee met at Moor Farm in Yorkshire on the 22nd June. All Committee members were present, but the President sent his apologies.

Items of interest to the membership are as follows:-

Bill Burton has started making plans for a European Tour to Finland in 2011, possibly stopping off in Denmark on the way out and Poland on the return. Plans are at a very early stage, so any suggestions or contacts in Finland would be useful.

The 2010 AGM plans are detailed over the page. Other events on the horizon for 2011 include a two day event in Wales at RAF Valley and area, a visit to Syngenta landing at White Waltham, a possible meeting at the Vacher's strip near Oxford, a two day meeting in Guernsey with the members there, a willow farm and Hurricane restorations.

Turning to the membership, our Treasurer is having problems with standing orders. This is partly to do with the banks not following instructions and partly to do with members.

One point of confusion is that if a member leaves, it is they that have to cancel the standing order. We cannot cancel it for the member - it is an arrangement you have with your bank.

Another disappointing occurrence is that when I enroll a new member and they haven't already sent me a standing order, I send them one with their joining pack and trust that they will fill it in and send it to the Treasurer. This doesn't always happen so the Treasurer ends up having to chase people who usually promise to look into the matter, but still forget about it.

Other problems occur when a member might change banks and the standing order doesn't get transferred. It is only at the year end that the Treasurer has to check through all the subscriptions and start the chasing exercise.

We have taken a hard line now and if people don't respond after one or two reminders, they will be struck off. Hence some members have just been removed from the list.

It will also be a new policy to not enroll anyone until the standing orders are received.

We had a good response to the appeal for representatives at GACC, GAAC and GASCo. As David Corbett gradually retires from representing the FFA at these councils, the new reps will take over and report back to the Committee with the latest news of what is going on. Their names will be released when all is finalized.

Donations to the various councils were repeated from last year with £600 going to AOPA and £200 going to each of the following - GAAC, GASCo and LAA.

RotorSport UK

RotorSport UK Ltd is very pleased to announce that, for the first time ever in the UK market, we have commenced supply of factory built gyroplanes fitted with in flight variable pitch propellers, managed by a constant speed controller. The first example, G-JUGS (pictures courtesy of Mr S Hornsby), was handed over to the proud owners (Mr Simon & Mr Peter Hornsby) at the Midland Gliding Club in early March 2010, amidst many smiles all round. It has taken a huge amount of effort by the RotorSport Team to get the UK CAA to accept this combination, but the fitment of the Woodcomp SR3000 propeller matched to a unique version of the Smart Avionics Constant speed controller takes flight in a gyroplane to a whole new level of capability. The superb SR3000 propeller blade features a wooden core and composite outer, and a polyurethane leading edge to prevent stone damage.



The unit is electrically pitch adjusted, either manually or using the Smart Avionics automatic control system that matches the propeller pitch to the power available, against a target engine rpm. So if you like to cruise at 4,500rpm and 100mph, simply set the rpm target, increase the throttle to the speed desired, and the controller changes the pitch of the propeller to maintain 4,500rpm. There are three key settings; manual; climb, and cruise. The pilot presses climb before take off, cruise once in the cruise, and climb again for landing, and each has its own adjustable target engine rpm.

Five more of propeller and controller combinations are already on site and due for fitment over the next month.

For more information, contact the RotorSport UK Team, details below, and two photos also included with this mail.

Gerry Speich (FFA No 650), RotorSport UK Ltd
Poplar Farm, Prolley Moor, Wentnor, Bishops Castle,
Shropshire, UK SY9 5EJ,
Tel 01588 650769 www.rotorsport.org

Since 1st March 2010

New Members

851	Piers Sheddon, Buckinghamshire
852	Andrew Hill, Hertfordshire
853	Simon Gurney, Norfolk
854	Graham Lamyman, Lincolnshire
855	Andrew Mumford, Kent

Departed

269	Tony Brooker, Warwickshire
586	Jean-Marie Cousty, France
844	William Greenwood, East Sussex
727	Jeremy Hodges, Northamptonshire
701	Will Pringle, Nottinghamshire
692	Denis Ridley, Co. Durham
684	Joe Singleton, Oxfordshire
170	Nigel Skinner, Devon
152	John Wright, Suffolk

The total membership is now 392

Programme 2010



16th April	Brooklands
27th April	British Sugar, Downham Market
12th May	Marybelle Dairy & Broilers, Suffolk
17th May	European Tour - Borders & Scotland
15th June	Salisbury Plain Training Area
30th June / 1st July	2 day visit to Yorkshire
12th October	AGM - Wymeswold near Loughborough.

Events such as these set above are arranged by FFA members on a voluntary basis. It is accepted by those who participate that nothing undertaken by the FFA collectively or members individually shall be construed as establishing a duty of care nor in any way removing or modifying the duties, responsibilities or obligations of pilots or land owners in relation to any event and attendance thereat. All information provided in these programmes is purely advisory and should ALWAYS be verified from official sources.

Notice is herby given that there will be an Annual General Meeting of the Flying Farmers Association, to be held at 11:30 on October 12th 2010 at Wymeswold, Loughborough, Leicestershire.

The meeting will be held at member Edward Packe-Drury-Lowe's impressive stately home - Prestwood Hall which has been in the family for 350 years.

On this 3500 acre estate is Wymeswold Airfield which has hard and grass runways. Sometimes the hard is not available because it forms part of a track used by a host of cars like Ferraris, Aston Martins and Lamborghini's on track and driving experience days. (I don't think this is included in our visit, but you may want to return at some future date!)

Speakers will be arranged for the day and Edward will probably tell us about the diverse activities on his estate.

Provisional times:-

10:00 - 10:45	Arrive for coffee and biscuits
11.30	AGM
12:30	Lunch
14:00	Speakers
15:00	Tea
15:30	Depart

There will be a small charge of £10 per person. This will be heavily subsidised by the FFA as we don't want the cost to put anyone off attending the AGM.

Times and airfield details will be given to those responding on the Reply Slip, so please give a clear email address or an SAE. Send in your entry to Rick Holt before 10th September.

The postcode for those driving is LE12 5SQ.

Committee Members

The two committee members serving the longest and hence having to stand down at the AGM, will be Andrew Cragg and Rick Holt. Both are willing to stand for re-election.

There is still a place on the Committee for one more member, so if you would like to stand for election, please fill in the attached reply slip with your proposer and return to Paul Stephens before 5th October 2010.

Two Days in Yorkshire, 30th June / 1st July

This event will be reported in full in the December newsletter as I wouldn't have received the write ups in time for this one.

Briefly, it was yet another very successful thanks to Gordon Bellerby's faultless organisation and the warm hospitality of Chris and Jane Makin.

We landed at Chris's strip near Leeds and were immediately impressed with the huge scale of his Strawberry business and the enormous statistics of his whole operation, not least of which was employing and housing 371 staff to pick and process the strawberries and other fruits for the retailers.

We spent the night in York with a guided tour, a dinner and a very interesting talk from a local farmer's wife who with her husband, farm both near Thirsk and in Ethiopia!

The second day started with a visit to the huge Arla Foods in Leeds, then a flight to Marshall Slingsby near Helmsley. But before the factory tour we were treated to the best Fish and Chips ever at Jane Makin's chip shop, called simply Makin's, in Helmsley. If ever you visit this beautiful part of the world, their restaurant is a must.

To finish the day, we were conducted round Marshall Slingsby to see what they are making from composites for the MOD which included helmets for Eurofighter pilots, an unmanned aircraft, parts for the C130, torpedo tubes etc. etc.

ing and very well produced

Friday 16th April 2010

Despite the Icelandic volcano scare it was a glorious day for flying in the South of the Country. A little low cloud to start with in the Eastern Counties soon burnt away and everyone managed to make Fairoaks in good time to meet the coach at about 10.00hrs. We arrived at Brooklands to find it was a Press Day for The Vintage Car Club.

I think the cars "stole the day". There were some magnificent examples of Bentleys, Jaguars and many other exotic types. It was interesting to see them being put through their paces and being driven on to the original track which is sadly beginning to crumble.

We were split into two groups and escorted round the hangars. Unfortunately one guide lost most of his group because of the interest shown in the cars.

Lunch was taken in an outside marquee and then most people wandered over to the Mercedes building opposite the Museum. Here we could see some of the early Mercedes cars or even choose a new one and then if you wanted to put it through it's paces you could try it out on the racetrack or skidpan. I am not sure if any of our party did but it was fun watching others try their hand at it.

We arrived back at Fairoaks at about 1600hrs and took off into Cavok.

Brooklands is a wonderful Museum and I can recommend anyone who is driving in the area to make a detour for a visit and also spend an hour or two in the Mercedes building.

Sadly, I don`t think we shall ever again be able to fly into this great historic airfield.

Tony Poulsom

An outsider's view

As a non member of the FFA, and indeed ineligible to become one, I very much appreciate the welcome I was given on Friday 16 on April when I was Rick Holt's passenger. If you visited The Brooklands Museum, you will have spotted me as the odd one out.

Our journey was from Worcestershire and by Oxford we were aware of other aircraft heading for Fairoaks and the FFA Event. Gathering at Fairoaks Airport, while not as convenient as landing at Brooklands' itself, was only a short journey away from the museum and considering the location on the edge of the London conurbation, I was pleasantly surprised that the traffic did not noticeably delay us. Near to the back of the coach I was reminded of my youth and school trips!



Many of the group seemed to know the site quite well but as a first time visitor I found the Wellington Bomber the best exhibit. Many smaller items were interesting not least the mechanical arrangements on the Hawker Fury for attaching the external starter! Would this have been the famous Huck Starter? http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Buvo5pgEZYM.

Vehicles were giving rides on the section the banked track - one an audibly notable exception to the very large collection of supercharged Bentleys was a Bughatti which was very enthusiastically driven.

The Mercedes establishment adjacent provided an off site alternative for lunch and a display of historic models through the current catalogue. With activity to watch on the skid pans and test track this added to the diversity of the day.

This is the second occasion that I have been invited to one of your events: This was social, the other, a visit to Cambridgeshire to see the application of differential GPS to agriculture, was business. The first thing that strikes me is the unique nature of your group. The common interest provides the motivation for travel to a wide range of destinations which going for a £200.00 cup of coffee can never provide. The friendships across the country and the regular meetings are something you should guard and continue to nurture, as I am sure you will, and I think other pilots would be well advised to copy your example.

Thank you all for a splendid day and particularly Rick whose fault it all was!

Giles Herbert.





Visit to British Sugar Factory and Cornerways Nursery, Wissington, Norfolk 27th April 2010

The visit had been kept a closely-guarded secret from the Met Office and we were rewarded by a sunny and warm day, almost too hot in the greenhouses in the afternoon. The good weather meant that 17 aircraft were able to fly in, the only cancellation being a technical issue.

Our coach took us first to the British Sugar Corporation factory at Wissington, only 10 minutes drive from the airstrip at Southery. This is the largest and most ecologically efficient sugar factory in Europe, recycling everything that comes into the factory in the beet trucks. Surplus earth is graded and sold as topsoil, stones are sorted and sold as gravel or hardcore, and the crushed pulp of the beet is made into animal feeds. Even the water produced when the beet is crushed is used to water the tomatoes at the attached Cornerways nursery. The factory's generating plant sells surplus power to the CEGB and up 50 MW is transferred into the national grid when the factory is not "in campaign".



Bob Beard & Pat Nutt

Plant and operations managers Ray and Andy boarded the coach and took us through the processes involved in converting sugar beet into liquid sugar (and recently into bioethanol). They stressed the involvement of the NFU in the sampling and testing procedures which determine the fees paid to farmers in respect of their output. As we drove round the plant, they explained the functions of the machinery and passed round samples of the end product of each process.

The annual output of the factory is 400,000 tonnes of sugar, part as granulated and castor for domestic consumption under the "Silver Spoon" label, part in liquid form as a food and drink ingredient. 55,000 tonnes of bioethanol fuel additive are also produced, and a side product of the sugar processing is betaine, an amino-nitrogen which is sold as an animal food supplement.

We then drove to the Hare Arms at Stow Bardolph for lunch. A tomato soup starter was made from tomatoes provided by Cornerways Nursery, followed by a hearty steak pie made from local beef. We were entertained by a chorus of the Hare's peacocks during the meal.



Nigel Bartle

The afternoon visit was to Cornerways Nursery, closely linked to the sugar operation. Nigel Bartle was our guide and explained how the two operation intermesh. Throughout the campaign hot water from the factory is used to heat the greenhouses via 200 km of piping; this is the only heat source used. The factory's generating plant produces carbon dioxide which is used to encourage photosynthesis, an essential part of the growing process. Water from the crushed beet is used to water the crops. The green houses currently cover 27 acres, and an even larger extension has received planning permission. Output is some 70 million tomatoes annually, all pollinated by over 2,000 resident bumble bees, which have to be fed (tomato flowers don't produce nectar!).

The productive part of the tomato plant is the top 6 feet or so; as the plants grow, the main stem is laid down horizontally so that the active portion, kept vertical to make hand picking easier, moves along as the plant grows. By the end of the growing season the plants are 35 – 40 feet long. Watering and feeding is automatically controlled and the plants grow in a rockwool medium using a home-made plant food.

After a welcome cup of tea and a chance to sample the products, the coach took us back to Southery for the flight/drive home.

David Burnett



Visit to Marybelle Wednesday 12th May 2010

Twelve aircraft, two cars and thirty two people assembled at Beccles in a brisk north-easterly. We experienced snow over Northampton! After being greeted by new member Guy Plenderleith, we boarded the coach for the Marybelle dairy. I was surprised how hilly this corner of the country is!

Marybelle Dairy was built during in 2001, after the foot and mouth outbreak, by the Strachan family, some distance away from the home farm for bio-security reasons. We were shown around by the owner David Strachan, who has worked tirelessly to develop the Marybelle brand of milk, cream, crème fraiche,



yogurts and ice-cream. As a small independent dairy, their priority is customer service, working through the night to satisfy orders. After a tour of the processing and bottling plant, the best bit was sampling the products. The dairy is also involved in the development of a compostable milk bottle. Most plastic bottles still end up in landfill where they take 500 years to degrade.

www.marybelle.co.uk

St Lawrence Hall Farms Ltd

Lunch was taken in the lovely old barn at Ilketshall Hall, owned by the Parker family, and served by Dominic, Guy's brother-in-law, and his wife Ollie. Dominic came out of the army 15 years ago to take over from his father who was also present. Our visit was concerned with the broiler unit, part of a mixed arable and livestock farm, and in particular new steel sheds, an innovative design, imported by Dominic. The new sheds, covering 75,000 sq. ft., feature sophisticated environmental equipment to satisfy the ever higher welfare demands of the customers. After tea in the Hall, a 100 year old shooting lodge built for the Flixton Estate, we returned to Beccles for our flights home in 60 mile viz.

www.bpsequipment.co.uk

These visits are just what the FFA is all about. Many thanks to David, Dominic, Ollie and Guy.

Rick Holt

As Editor, and a participant on this event, I would like to second Rick's comments about the nature of this event.

Organised by Guy Plenderleith, a new member who admitted himself that this was also the first FFA event he had ever been on, put together a superb day.



Dominic Parker (left) and Guy Plenderleith

Both hosts were the most enthusiastic of go ahead farmers who didn't whinge about how bad things were and how badly off they were. Both had identified problems with their businesses and tackled them head on.

At Marybelle, David has built up a market for his business through sheer enthusiasm and hard work. His prime concern is to provide his customers with what they want and deliver a good product on time, to keep the punters satisfied.

Dominic, having been in the army, came home and identified the problems on his family farm and tackled them military style. These included an out of date broiler enterprise - solved by setting up a business to market state of the art buildings and equipment, then building a new site on the farm.

Marketing chicken to a large dominant processor was tackled by setting up a management business which looks after several million chicken places throughout the area to give him some clout.

The arable side was showing variable results with low wheat prices. This will be tackled by bio digesting the crops, which together with the chicken manure will give a more consistent return in the form of electricity.

The 14 bedroom mansion in need of repair, and a high maintenance wife, were tackled by revitalising her architectural degree and forming a building business, which in it's spare time maintains the big house.

Our hosts were probably an insight to the future of what the next generations of farmers, or maybe we should change the name to 'agricultural entrepreneurs', will look like.

Thanks Guy for organising a very enlightening day.



Study Tour 2010 – Scotland and the Borders

Sunday 16th May 2010

This year's study tour was arranged closer to home than the usual European venues by the combined efforts of Richard Lawrence and Mike Ashmole, and was blessed with generally good weather. Mike was to be away on a flying adventure in Canada for the beginning of the tour and was not due to join us until the Tuesday afternoon.

Asked to arrive at Charterhall airfield at staggered times to avoid a transport bottleneck to the hotel, 16 aircraft arrived well before the appointed cut-off time, and the occupants were delivered to the very smart Dryburg Abbey Hotel some 15 miles away by a shuttle of cars and mini buses. Charterhall airfield is an old wartime airbase which had suffered over many years from a severely decaying surface, but recently the owners had resurfaced one section with an excellent layer of smooth tarmac which was a joy to operate from, however great care still had to be exercised on all the remaining surface which was both uneven and littered with loose stones and debris. Parking and backtracking was carried out with great care so as not to damage any of the props, and I heard of no damage reported.

The welcome dinner included our farming hosts for the next couple of days who circulated around the tables getting to know some of the members.

A leisurely start to Monday saw us depart for the Buccleuch Estates at Bowhill.

Monday 17th May 2010 - 9.00am coach departs, 9.45am Farm tour...Bowhill... An ordinary agenda for a visit to an extraordinary enterprise.

"Buccleuch Estates Bowhill" lies in the Scottish Borders. Together with Langholm, Thornhill, and Queensbury in Scotland and Boughton near Kettering, Northampton, it is part of the vast Buccleuch Estate, which covers over 400 square miles of countryside. Of this vast area the Buccleuch family farm 14% in hand i.e. 14,160 hectares (35,000 acres). The remainder is rented out to 200 tenant farmers. This makes the Duke the largest in-hand farmer in the EU.

Shawn Williams the farm manager, enthusiastic and knowledgeable with all the facts and figures at his fingertips, greeted us. Shawn is responsible for the Bowhill farm of 3,925 hectares (9,700 acres) where the majority of the land lies between the Yarrow and Ettrick valleys.

Most of the land is grass or heather moorland, with just 32hectares(80acres) of Spring Barley to provide cheap stock feed and 46 hectares (110 acres) of Kale for fattening spring lambs and feeding suckler cows. The land supports three enterprises: cattle, sheep and poultry, kept separate for tax reasons and farmed on separate farms for the single farm payment.

We visited each area of the Estate beginning with the cattle sheds where the electronically tagged cattle were bedded on straw at the insistence of the Duke at a cost of £50,000 annually. The Buccleuch group began tagging cattle electronically 15 years ago, being the leaders in this field of technology. Each cow is weighed daily and data processed.



Currently there are 150 pedigrees Angus cows producing replacements for the herd and breeding stock for selling to pedigree and commercial farmers. There are 365 Suckler cows. These commercial cows provide replacements for the herd and beef calves for beef production. The Charolais is used to sire the beef calves while the Beef Shorthorn and Limousin are crossed to the Angus for replacement. All of the cows calve in the spring. On an annual basis there will be around 410 beef store calves. These are weaned and then housed on straw until the following summer when they graze on grass until the winter when they are finished inside at about 18months of age.



The sheep production is being more and more led by market requirements. The Estate produces lamb for M&S and Sainsbury. M&S want lambs of 17-21 kilos preferring the Blackie, which is crossed with a maternal New Zealand sire and looks a bit like a Romney, while Sainsbury will take any lamb 12-21 kilos. The Butcher trade is not supplied, as it only requires 100 lambs per week, a scale far too small for the Bowhill enterprise. In contrast Sainsbury take 6,000 lambs per week. The earliest lambs are sold in mid June.

The sheep are kept in two flocks. A Hill flock of 2800 Blackfaced breeding ewes kept on 2,800 hectares 7,000 acres of heather moorland and an In-bye flock of 1300 Pure Highlander, Primera and cross breeds (Highlander x, Lleyn x and Greyfaced Ewes crossed to the Scottish Blackface) kept on highly productive grassland. The sheep are usually outside on grass, although when supplements are needed they are given soya, barley and silage.

Bowhill has been tagging sheep for the past five years. They have encountered problems caused by tagging during wet weather, leading to septic ears and streptococcus caused by the tags pinching. Having experimented with different types of tags, the electronic "Bubble gum" tag, which is very flexible has proved to be the best.

The sheep are tagged on the left hand side, the cattle on the right. The sheep are clipped annually, with 7 clippers clipping 1,000 ewes a day, the payment for the wool just about covering the cost of the clipping.

On the economy front, the sheep made a profit of £79,000, without the single farm payment, while the cattle lost £230.00 per head, without the single farm payment (they should break even





next year). The new enterprise of free-range hens has, however, shown the fantastic return of 18% on investment!

Bowhill began free-range egg production as a diversification project in 2005 as it does not rely on subsidies. There are 32,000 free-range hens. These are housed in two 16,000 capacity sheds separated by an egg packing unit. The doors are opened from 10.00 am to 9.00 pm and the hens have access to 85 acres of grassland, although it would seem that they prefer to be "perch-potatoes" as only 5,000 hens are to be found outside even on a sunny summer day! We did not see any! But then it was cold and all their food and water is inside. However, Shawn told us though that on a hot day they have been known to jump the fence and roam the woods. ABN supplies the feed for the hens. Outside each shed is strip of gravel, which needs to be changed to prevent the hens from picking up disease. They are vaccinated against Salmonella. The hens are kept for thirteen months and then supplied to the Asian market and soup market in return for taking them away. The chicken muck is an asset to the business providing fertilizer for the arable and grassland instead of costly non-organic fertilizers.

The farms employ nine full time employees who work on the sheep and cattle enterprises, with a further three full time on the hens. Bowhill intends to extend the farming of free- range eggs.

Within the boundary of the Estate, in the Yarrow valley, lies a 16th century ruined fortress - Newark Castle. Having walls 4 feet thick and 6 floors high. The Duke has a great interest in its preservation. Receiving no grants from Historic Scotland he has spent over a million pounds on repairs. Funding is received for heather regeneration projects and for Steading.

Our visit gave us an insight into the complexities of maximizing profit on a large mixed farming enterprise. Obviously bedding straw costs weigh on Shawn's mind. He was pleased to point out the fields of barley and kale near Falkirk Castle, which provides strip grazing for 50 cattle from the 1st November to the middle of March. This brings down the cost of the bedding straw! A bit.

Lavinia Soul

After lunch and a tour of the house we coached to Fans Farm to be shown around this extensive mixed farm enterprise.

Tuesday dawned bright and sunny and we gathered up our cases to board the coach again to visit the Straker-Smith farm at Wark Common.

Straker - Smith Farms is a partnership farming on the English/ Scottish borders. It is a 400ha mainly arable farm which also runs a commercial pheasant shoot based on its own 50 ha of woods and 430ha of a neighbour's adjoining land over which it has shooting rights.

The farm lies amongst gently sloping ridges running southwest to northeast formed by glaciers draining to the north sea. Soil is loamy sand to alluvial clay.

The farm is mainly arable with only 13 ha of permanent grass stocked by 110 out wintered Blackface ewes (must be hardy to survive last winter!!). The arable is run on a 6 year rotation of oil seed rape, wheat, 2nd wheat, vining peas wheat and winter barley. The above average nitrogen content of wheat means it is Group 1 bread wheat but the barley is grown for feed. Currently 21ha a year of 2nd cereals are replaced by summer fallow under a Countryside Stewardship scheme. Vining peas are grown by a local co-operative and processed in Eyemouth. All cereal crops are dried on farm and sold on a pool basis. The land is minimally tilled and only ploughing before peas and barley. Milling wheat has averaged about 3.4 tons per acre over the last 4 years. Storage facilities consist of 700 ton bins, 700 ton floor storage and 200 ton wet bin storage. 1 days combining can be dried overnight so no wheat is combined at more than 20%moisture.

The farm has 2 full time staff and is fully equipped with up to date machinery.

The Carham shoot has 2 gamekeepers and poults are raised on site for their own use and to sell. It is currently expanding from 15 to 20 days of 150-250 bird days per season.

The tour ended here but Peter had a captive audience as he talked about the areas border battles such as Flodden Field which were all in this area.

George and Claire Sly

After this fascinating visit which ended up with much discussion about the battles between the English and the Scots in the area, with much emphasis being put on the battle success of the Scots, we bussed off to the Chain Bridge Honey Farm, where we were split into two parties to make it easier for the catering, which was offered inside an old double-decker London bus set up as a restaurant.

The Chain Bridge Honey Farm is a flourishing family business, started by beekeeping advisor William Selby Robson in 1948. In 1962, his son, also William but known as Willie, took up bee-



keeping with the aim of expanding his father's enterprise, not only by increasing the number of hives, but also the diversity of products.

Bees were purchased from retiring beekeepers while Smith hives were made from local timber. In those days, large quantities of comb honey were produced as well as liquid honey mainly from wild white clover.

In 1971 William Robson Snr retired and helped Willie establish a viable honey farm. His knowledge and experience was crucial at this time. Mr Robson Snr continued to work with bees until he was 82 years old. In 1973 Daphne Robson joined the business, preparing honey for sale and delivering it to the shops.

The business grew year by year and in 1982 a new honey house was built. Much of the machinery installed came from shipbreakers and is still in use today. The honey house was gradually extended to include workshops and, in 1991, a very comprehensive visitor centre.

It was around this time that many new products were introduced using the vast amounts of beeswax produced. Hive numbers rose gradually as the seasons allowed from 500 to nearly 2,000 at present (with 2,500 the future target). These are located within a 40-mile radius of Berwick-upon-Tweed.

2007 should see the business move into a new, third honey house, with hopes to increase the average production of honey to above 80 tonnes. Most people who telephone the honey farm will speak to Daphne, who is now responsible for organising honey deliveries to about 350 shops.

The enterprise at Chain Bridge Honey Farm is 'vertically integrated', in so far as all relevant jobs are carried out by the existing staff and this includes constructing the buildings, making the beehives (plus all the relevant parts), modifying and installing machinery, beekeeping and preparation of honey and by-products, wholesaling the products to retailers and retailing the product at Chain Bridge Honey Farm and online.

The farm currently employs 15 people including Willie and Daphne and their three children, Stephen, Heather and Frances.





Adorning the visitor centre walls are intricate murals painted by artist Tony Johnson from nearby Horncliffe. These are a 10-year labour of love. The most recent to be unveiled is a pictorial map of North Northumberland and the Scottish Borders depicting no less than 110 different sites.

An additional exhibit is Stephen Robson's vast display of vintage vehicles, ranging from Caterpillars to rare Lanz Bulldog tractors, from a stunningly restored ERF lorry to a whimsical gentleman's caravan.

Roger Bell

After the most interesting honey farm and their display of vintage machinery, we embussed again for the third visit of the day to the Eyemouth Freezing plant on the coast.

Eyemouth Freezers Ltd is an independent company which opened its doors in 2000 founded by a group of 40 local farmers (from the Scottish Borders and the north of England) with a commitment and determination to deliver the highest possible standards. The company operates a long-established 10,000 pallet cold store next to its new vegetable factory.

The processes and procedures are designed to guarantee excellence in every aspect of the operations with the highest of standards.

: quality
: safety
: product traceability

Peas are the main volume (1300 ha) all processed within 150 minutes at the rate of 7-8 tons per hour coming out of the freezer at -18 degrees C and stored at -22degrees C.

All payments are by pool system. Other products - broad beans, cauliflowers and sprouts are accommodated before and after peas – a very tidy operation.

Bill Burton

We were now taken back to Charterhall airfield to fly North to Balado Bridge. It was at this point that a mild panic set in with our organiser Richard, as at this point he was due to hand over the remaining arrangements to Mike – but the Icelandic volcano had erupted again over the weekend and there was doubt as to whether his flight would weave its way through the ash from Canada or not! Richard had not got the finer details of the remaining part of the tour to hand, but many phone calls later it was established that Mike's flight had indeed landed earlier in the day, and a visibly relieved Richard could now enjoy the rest of the day!

Balado Bridge airfield is basically a microlighting centre operating from an old wartime airfield about 15 miles North of Edinburgh and Mike had arranged with the owners to prepare an area of grass so we would be able to fly in. This entailed filling in low ways where tracks crossed the area, and cutting down some small poplars on the approach. A lot of effort was put into these preparations and although only around 500 metres long the majority of our team were able to fly in on a glorious evening – the remainder going to Perth and being bussed back to the hotel.

Next morning, Tuesday 18th May 2010, we were taken to the Norbord factory. This plant could only accept a group of 22 of us so the remainder of the group spent the morning shopping and exploring the local town and we all met up again after lunch.

Well, we all set off in the coach for our visit to the Norbord factory at Cowie. First obstacle – they couldn't accommodate all of us, and so volunteers were sought to go shopping instead. A





tough one that. However several ladies made the sacrifice - although they did express their deep regret at not being able to attend a chipboard factory visit. The remainder of us were extremely grateful for their selflessness.

On arrival at the factory we were made most welcome and were ushered to the very smart conference/board room for a presentation. This was given by Dave Mc Elroy, vice president of the company. A very engaging man who was instantly likeable and also happened to be a private pilot. What more can I say? Dave, a Canadian, began to tell us about Norbord.

"So who is Norbord?" I hear you ask. Well, Dave explained that Norbord is a Canadian company, with head offices in Toronto and a regional office in Cowie. It is engaged in the production of timber based building materials the main one of which is O.S.B. or Orientated Strand Board. This is a structural wooden board consisting of compressed wood strands and resin. It is becoming more frequently used as an alternative to plywood in the building trade. You've almost certainly seen it around building sites, recognisable by its criss-cross pattern of wood "shavings". Norbord owns 11 O.S.B. mills, mostly in Canada and the U.S.A., but also one in Inverness. They also have a works in South Molton Devon, which manufactures furniture and Conti board. At Cowie, however, they do not make O.S.B., but are the only factory in the group to manufacture particle board (chipboard to you and me) and M.D.F. or medium density fibre board, used extensively in the furniture and D.I.Y. industry via outlets such as B. & Q.

Dave's talk outlined to us some of the history of the Cowie plant and how it had changed hands. An emphasis was placed on the working of the factory in a sustainable way, bearing in mind its core requirement is for wood and it is also a huge consumer of energy. He was very enthusiastic about their new biomass energy plant to help source their requirements, but more of that later.

We were then given a walking tour of the factory.

Earlier, on the coach, I had been tempted to volunteer for shopping. A chipboard factory was going to be quite boring, wasn't it and, O.K. I don't like shopping either, but could at least have passed the time with some enjoyable coffee and cakes.

However, I couldn't have been more wrong.

The factory visit was absolutely fascinating. I think it is fair to say that we were all gobsmacked by the sheer size and power of the huge rolling mills, the likes of which I had never seen before. The chipboard mill was not running, due to maintenance but we were able to witness the processes involved in the production of M.D.F.

The raw material for the whole factory is wood ; not tree trunks or planks, but shavings and small pieces recovered from logging operations. They also utilise a huge amount of recycled wood obtained from demolition and building sites. This is all brought in, graded according to its suitability for each of their products and dumped in huge piles ready for processing. The material which cannot be used for this is used in the biomass energy plant which I mentioned earlier. Biomass, in this instance is simply burning wood. The wood they use would normally be considered as waste, being bark, dust and unrecyclable old wood. So they are not using fossil fuels and are very proud of the fact that this process is a sustainable way of producing their energy. What it generates is heat, then steam, and then electricity via very impressive huge steam turbines (I think two) generating 7.5M Watts (that 10,000 horsepower) each. The electricity this produced is used to run the plant. I do believe that they meet 75% of their energy needs this way.

So what happens in the production of M.D.F.? The wood is first ground up into a kind of fibre, which is a bit like scrunched up fibreglass - or more like Rockwool, but in very fine form. This material is mixed with resin and laid out in a huge moving blanket, as wide as a living room and, I'm guessing about 12 inches thick, on a rolling belt. This is rolled and compressed and rolled and compressed again and heated. Incredible tonnage is used in the process by great rollers. The whole mill is measured in bus lengths I'm guessing between 6 and 10 buses long. Absolutely huge, very impressive and incredibly noisy. For me the sheer size of the machinery, run by so few operators, was fascinating.

At the end of the line the compressed board emerges as a conveyor belt of half or three quarter inch M.D.F. It is then cut into manageable sizes and allowed to cool on huge fan shaped frames before being taken and stacked.

Due to time constraints our walking tour had to be very short, maybe a half hour or so. This was a shame for me because I was absolutely impressed by the outfit, and could have spent much longer there. I had been round factories before but never anything like this, with so much size and power.

Anyway I have only scratched the surface of the experience here and can't really begin to convey what it was truly like. But it was good.

After the all too short tour we returned to the boardroom for an excelled buffet lunch and some informal chat including some slides of flying in Canada.

For me this visit was a real highlight. Thank you Mike Ashmole, Dave and Norbord for a most enjoyable time.

Ray Friedlander





Returning to Balado Bridge, the owner and his son gave us a presentation and the history of the site. The father has, over the last dozen or so years developed the site into one of the premier venues for Pop concerts in Scotland and probably the UK – certainly being on a par with Glastonbury. It injects over £10 million into the local economy every year. It was fascinating to learn how it has all developed over those years and how all the various logistical problems have been resolved – such as traffic flows and crowd control – with all the local authorities, and how the whole concept has been embraced by the local communities. His son is very involved with the development of the aviation side of the organisation, and between them they were thrilled with how our arrival went and what a success it was to the airfield – and has endorsed their desire to get on and expand the microlighting side of their activities with more General Aviation. They were two very go-ahead individuals with great vision and enthusiasm.

On Wednesday 19th May 2010 we were due to fly to and base ourselves at Insch airfield to the North West of Aberdeen, but the owner had been in touch with Mike only a short time earlier to say that due to a grave family problem, he was no longer able to have us at the airfield. This created a massive problem for the organisation as there were few alternatives in that area that would accord with the remainder of the programme – but in true spirit of friendship our regular touring friends, the Andersons, immediately stepped into the breach and offered the use of their strip at Hatton. Transport was re-arranged, Aberdeen was advised that 17 aircraft were going to invade their radar screens, and another headache for the tour organiser was resolved.

The next one was just about to rear its head!!

The next morning, Thursday 20th May 2010, we were due to fly to Easter airfield near Dornoch to visit the Tain bombing ranges courtesy of the RAF – a gentle hour's flight or so past Lossiemouth. Although the weather was bright, sunny and clear at breakfast-time, Mike had got a forecast for Aberdeen for the return period which was giving "PROB30 TEMPO BKN007 4000BR". Much consultation resulted in the decision to abandon the flying and rearrange the coach – which in turn meant a late arrival at all our venues for the day. With a 3½ hour drive each way, it was not a decision taken lightly, but with all things aviation on these tours, safety of the group is paramount, and with few alternates available and high ground in the area, the decision was made. A certain amount of grumbling soon gave way to typical stoicism and all the flight-planning was left to the coach driver! We eventually arrived at the Tain ranges late morning.

Arrived Tain Range 11:45 am after a long but scenic coach journey, due to fog being forecast for our return flight to Jims strip, which in the event did not materialise (that's flying), but a decision had to be made and it was the right one.

We were welcomed by Squadron Leader Metcalf and Squadron Leader McCuan, split into two groups and took it in turns to visit the control tower where we were briefed by Flight Sergeant Gilray. He told us that the range offered mock up targets of tanks, armoured vehicles, bunkers etc, made of wood and canvas. They also frequently use old caravans.

The ATC is all VFR - no radar is available. The range is used by most European air forces and of course the Americans. There are 9 staff in total, from ATC to target builders to bomb accuracy scorers.

Aircraft drop practice 10 kilo bombs with a small charge which simulate 1000 pounders and are scored by triangulation, by staff not only in the control tower but in bunkers strategically placed around the range. The pilot is informed of his accuracy (or lack of it) and if need be is guided in for a second of third run.

Three GR4 Tornadoes from 15 Training Squadron at Lossiemouth were due in at any moment. We all waited with baited breath at the hope of seeing aircraft bombing and strafing at such close range, but after 30 minutes we were informed that due to some technical hitch with the aircrafts systems, they would not arrive within our time schedule. So after a vote of thanks by Martin Gosling we departed for our next visit at Dunrobin Castle.

Leaving the Tain ranges after our visit we re-boarded the coach for the 40 minute drive to Dunrobin Castle

The magnificent Dunrobin Castle and its estates overlook The Dornoch Firth just across from the Tain range and are owned by Lord Strathnaver. On our arrival we were given a very warm welcome by Alistair Sutherland (the present Lord Strathnaver). He ushered us into the dinning area, post haste, as we were a tad late (nothing new there) for soup and sandwiches.

After the very welcome lunch we were taken out onto the lawns and were introduced to Andy Hughes, who is nationally revered in the world of the ancient art of falconry. Andy proceeded to give us a breath taking and spectacular flying demonstration of some of these birds, such as the golden eagle, peregrine falcon and eagle owl. He gave a running commentary on how each bird hunts its prey and how he trains them. Each bird needs many hours of his individual attention for him to gain their trust. He had them flying around the garden then swooping in very low and fast over our heads back to him. Very impressive to see these beautiful birds at such close quarters.

Again time was pressing and Herr Ashmole reminded everyone of this and so after a very pleasant stroll through the magnificent gardens and a conducted tour through a very quirky animal trophy museum we were assembled back in the dinning room where Lord Strathnaver gave us a short talk on the running of the estates and how he had once sold a rhino's head, from the museum, which had paid for a brand new fire alarm system for the whole of the castle.

A vote of thanks was then given by William Proctor.

Gordon Bellerby





Another 3½ drive took us back to our hotel for welcome baths and showers and preparation for our last day of the tour.

The morning visit on Friday 21st May 2010 was to the Mcauley Research centre on land use and climate change.

Visit to The Macaulay Land Use Research Institute

A marked contrast in the content of visits during this tour was enjoyed when the group were given a warm welcome to this academic institute whose work is relevant and important in considering the security and availability of food, water and energy.

The purpose of the Founder, T. B. Macaulay, to "better the productivity and sustainability of farming on the Island of Lewis" in 1930, has now been extended to the world stage. The Institute has evolved into a £15m research and consultancy business to advise on such topics as the condition of soils in Scotland, soil analysis and livestock distributions.

The visitors were both educated and entertained by learning about Environmental Forensics, "we know from traces on your shoes where you have been", well so did the coach driver after we left Mackies Dairy Farm! Other topics included Contaminated Land, Catchment Management, Understanding Biodiversity and of course Climate Change.

The most impressive visual part of the visit was The Virtual Landscape Theatre, a large screen presentation of the countryside in which various scenarios, such as change of crops from cereals to biofuel or forests or more green energy production, could be displayed. The visual impact was then assessed by the audience using electronic hand-held keypads to sample the response. Once everyone in our group had appreciated that the original scene was not from The Falklands but from Falkland in the Kingdom of Fife, the relevance of the exercise was realised.

The whole group enjoyed the visit and were very much enlightened by the presentation of the work done by the Institute, and with some of the data presented, which provided much food for thought. The buffet lunch, however, provided outstanding food for the body.

For more information on the work of the Institute visit their website at www.macaulay.ac.uk

Martin Worrall (FFA "hanger-on")

Leaving the research institute after a buffet lunch provided in house, we bussed to our last visit of the tour, a visit to a farm owned by the Mackie family, home to the exceptionally fine 'Mackies Ice Cream'.

We were warmly greeted by Maitland Mackie 'the younger' and ushered into an impressive boardroom with a welcome tub of ice cream.

The family have been farming in Aberdeenshire for 4 generations and from a milk retail background began making ice cream in 1986.

They employ 71 people making 10million litres of ice cream per annum. It is one of the UK's best selling ice cream. All made with double cream and whole milk , creating a luxury product. They make over 25 flavours, several pack sizes from 120ml to 10litres. The top selling four being chocolate, strawberry, vanilla and toffee. They have a new product development team creating new lines, reviewed by the staff taste panel, (the tiramisu was delicious, eagerly tried by Flying Farmers guests).

With an investment of £800,000 a packaging plant makes their own tubs with injection moulding equipment. Low fat dairy sorbets are also produced as well as 'Mackice' ice cubes from spring water from a well on the farm.

The 1600 acre farm grows the crops to feed Mackie's own herd of over 400 Jersey and Holstein cows, they provide milk and cream for the ice cream business.

With a £1million investment, their robotic milking system is the largest in Europe, it is an amazing voluntary system, where the cows milk themselves choosing when to visit one of the robots, which wash, milk and feed them and provide instant management information. We were quickly shown around the calf unit seeing some fine animals and then bussed up to see the Mackie's 750 kwh wind turbines at the top of the hill.

These huge turbines generate more then enough renewable energy to power the business, all build by the family and have paid for themselves in 4years.

Mackie's other environmental achievements include zero water waste, ancient minimal till practice promoting organic soil activity and an arboretum and tree planting programme.

In 2009 The Mackie's launched a new venture jointly with Taypack creating the perfect 'Scottish Crisp', which is selling extremely well.

What an interesting and amazing visit we all thoroughly enjoyed.

Lyn Williamson

With all the visits now completed, it just left the farewell dinner for us all to reflect on another excellent Study tour, and to thank our organisers, Richard and Mike, for all their considerable input which made the tour the success that it was.

Saturday 22nd May 2010 dawned fine and clear and an excellent day for us all to return to our various bases with cloudless skies and almost unlimited visibility. A fitting end to a great week.

Martin Gosling

15th June 2010

56 people arrived in 25 Aircraft at Edington Hill airstrip on a beautiful sunny day in Wiltshire.

The Defence Estates Land Agent Rowan Watts introduced the day and told us that the Plain was 94,000 acres, the size of the Isle of Wight, and a 10th of Wiltshire 27 x 9 miles. Full tenanted land Sched 1, 15,000 acres and Sched 3, annual grazing licence 50,000 acres the rest being woodland, garrisons etc.

44 Tenant farmers on farms from 50 up to 12,000 acres bringing in a rent of £1.5m

He had 23 farm houses and 148 cottages to maintain.

We then coached along the northern escarpment, where the perfect visibility gave us extensive views of the whole plain.

First stop was at Simon Collin's Gore Cross Farm. Simon described the management problems of grazing 850 suckler cows within 8,000 acres of the training area.

Moving them to permanent pennings on live firing days, hauling 1000's gallons of water, moving temporary electric pennings, cut wire, stolen batteries and energisers plus the annual nightmare of TB testing, all requiring a dedicated staff of 7.





We also viewed Simon's new continuous grain drier and grain store for over 1,000 acres of crops.

Next stop, Rowans headquarters at Westdown Camp for a quick lunch. This was followed by presentations on the Salisbury Plain Training Area by Major Alistair Rule and a talk on Air Operations within the plain by Simon Donague.

David Corbett's guest for the day, Mike O'Donoghue the new C.E. of GASCo gave us the latest safety briefing.

Back on the coach to Copehill Down, a purpose built training village where Major Rule described that general training had given way to specific training for the current conflicts. His Sergeant Major took us around the village looking at the various assault courses and modified areas to replicate Afghanistan houses. Much interest was shown in the tracked vehicles that had been converted into bulldozers with back acting digger arms.

On the coach once more for a tour across the training area where we saw pennings of cattle and a commentary by Richard Osgood on the archaeological features - 3/4 of the plain is SSSI.

We next stopped at Battlesbury Hill which was an ancient fort, with the modern Battlesbury Barracks behind us, now the Warminster Warfare Training Centre.

We saw more archaeology around the southern concrete road, which was built to stop soil erosion by tanks in the winter and to keep army traffic off busy civilian roads.

A second guest of David Corbett, Rick Grimwood gave a short talk on the new unmanned drones that will soon be working in a restricted area southwest of Boscombe Zone. As they would be above 6,000ft weekdays, the disruption to GA was thought to be minimal.

A vote of thanks was given by David Corbett before we arrived back at Edington Hill for tea.

Peter Gale

Salisbury Plain crossing Info:- From Lynham 123.4 or Boscombe 126.70, Salisbury Air Opps 122.75 Tel: DESIS 01980 674739 Weekdays 01980 674730/710



Redbird Goes Volcano Hunting

Eyafjallajökull volcano (which apparently means 'Island-Mountain under a glacier') erupted spectacularly on 20 March 2010, after having been dormant for almost 200 years. During its most violent phase, the subglacial eruption produced large ash plumes that drifted over Europe and forced an unprecedented closure of airspace over most of Europe for several days in mid April.

Volcanic ash is nasty stuff, with very fine silicate abrasive particles that act like 3-dimensional airborne sandpaper; not the sort of stuff you want to fly through in large quantities. Another problem with volcanic ash is that it melts inside the core of modern turbine engines causing irreversible damage. The spectacular incident where Capt Eric Moody's BA 747 had all 4 engines shut down near Jakarta in June 1982 is well known; however, it is not uncommon for aircraft to inadvertently fly through ash.

A NASA DC8 had an unplanned ash encounter in Feb 2000 which resulted in a $3.2M bill to repair its engines; they published a comprehensive report which is available online and makes interesting reading.

The problem with volcanic ash is that it is very difficult to detect once it has dispersed away from the initial plume. Models have been developed which take into account the many variables (atmospheric conditions, particle amounts and size, eruption conditions etc) but are really a best guess. ICAO has long been aware of the hazards and has produced a comprehensive manual (Doc 9691) which is available online and makes interesting bedtime reading.

Unusual high pressure over the North Atlantic at the time of the Eyafjallajökull eruption resulted in the ash cloud heading straight for some of the busiest airspace in the world controlled by a large group of individual nations who each had to decide quickly what to do.

The decision to close airspace to IFR traffic was made quickly (largely because of a 'zero tolerance' approach recommended by the ICAO document at the time); & almost everyone followed suit. The Dutch went one better and banned VFR traffic also; their neighbours in Belgium then did the same as did Luxembourg and others, eventually there was virtual chaos across Europe with even Balloons and Gliders grounded in many countries and the public becoming traumatised from fear of plummeting aircraft. After several days of glorious blue skies the GA community as well as the Airlines were up in arms – some of the best weather ever seen, skies completely empty, people stranded all over Europe and no-one allowed to get airborne. Then the French pulled a rail strike!!! My phone was melting with calls from friends stranded all over Europe; sadly I could only fly VFR in Ireland and the UK; North West Europe was completely closed. Eventually the authorities reluctantly agreed that their reaction had been completely over the top and reluctantly allowed a trickle of GA to go and 'sniff the air'. Some of the NOTAMS from this period were hilarious;



On 19th April I could not help thinking it highly ironic that the authorities in a country that allows the public to make sensible decisions about alcohol, drugs and prostitution publishes this:

DUE TO VOLCANIC ACTIVITY IN ICELAND AND THE RESULTING ASHCLOUDS IN THE AMSTERDAM FIR, ALL CIVIL IFR AND VFR OPERATIONS ARE PROHIBITED.

- then on 20th this appeared (presumably to provide amusement):

AFTER CAREFUL CONSIDERATION CAA-NL HAS DECIDED TO EXEMPT NON-MOTORIZED AIRCRAFT, I.E. GLIDERS, HOT AIR BALLOONS, NON MOTORIZED HANGGLIDERS AND PARAGLIDERS FROM THE CLOSURE OF THE AMSTERDAM FIR DUE TO THE VOLCANIC ASH CLOUD. NEVERTHELESS, CAA-NL RECOMMENDS INCREASED MONITORING OF THE FLIGHT SPEED AND HEIGHT INDICATION AND WINDSCREEN TRANSPARENCY DURING FLIGHT IN THE RISK AREA.

- Meanwhile the French, while allowing private VFR flights below FL115 were obviously trying to get a few new words into the Oxford English dictionary....

IT IS STRONGLY REQUIRED TO VFR FLIGHTS TO CONSULT SIGMET, NOTAM AND ASHTAM BEFORE ANY FLIGHT. PILOTS HAVE TO PAY ATTENTION OF THE PHENOMENOUS DANGEROUSNESS AND OF THE RISKS FOR ANY ACFT ENTERING THE VOLCANIC ASH CLOUD

During all of this; fellow Flying Farmer, Boyd Munro was desperately trying to get to Europe from Australia to see, as he put it, the 'European Emperor's new clothes'. Boyd is a highly experienced aviator with several FAI world records to his name and a healthy disdain for petty bureaucracy. His magnificent Cessna Caravan 'Redbird' has been parked at my strip since his visit last summer and he asked me to fly him to see the volcano. Since I could not do much else while GA in North West Europe was paralysed, I agreed and started planning. Boyd got as far as Barcelona from Sydney using the airlines, a superhuman effort considering the air transport chaos at the time; but the French rail strike was the last straw!

We decided the best plan was to rescue him in the Caravan. At the last minute I asked if my son Harry could come along – he would miss school for a few days, but I figured this was an opportunity not to be missed... besides, it turned out that only 1 of the guests Boyd had invited along could come so there would be plenty of room.

Next morning at first light we set off from Brittas, straight line to Sabadel, a GA field North of Barcelona. We went mostly at FL 135 – perfectly acceptable in an unpressurised aeroplane the FAA system. We had a little oxygen in the tank and took the occasional hit to keep us alert. We found Boyd via e-mail and eventually met up after a little messing around when some ATC splitter looked up the *real* wingspan of a caravan which banished us to the wrong side of the airfield! We set off north across the Pyrenees again through a deserted middle airspace in France until we came to the virtual brick wall of Class A around the Paris TMA. I was reminded of the dog in the manger story; no VFR allowed in Class A; No IFR allowed because of all the ash; so we had to de-

scend to below 2500 ft into what I can only describe as shark infested custard... hazy vis and a 2000 ft layer full of light aircraft.... sometimes the law really is an ass...

Le Touquet next where ATC had gone home since no-one could fly IFR, but no-one took any notice and we landed amidst a steady stream of light aircraft coming and going despite the *contamination*. We managed to refuel and discovered that the airfield did not open until 09:00 local next day. However, the airfield manager helpfully showed us the hole in the fence that we hopped through at first light next morning to get airborne. You gotta love flying in France ☺



Across the channel to the UK and an instant life story was required on the radio by London info, with every man and his dog airborne, it seemed, rescuing friends stranded across Europe. Added to that a rash of practice pans on 121.5 and I soon took Boyd's advice and turned the radios down to enjoy the scenery up the whole length of the UK to Wick. There we were met by Andy, proprietor of Far North Aviation; specialist in seeing off intrepid travellers on their way across the North Atlantic. A quick fill of Oxygen and fuel and we were ready for the off, however, Boyd & I did not like the look of the weather in Iceland – freezing level on the deck and the likelihood of icing in cloud (not good in a Caravan) coupled with headwinds, meant things could have got tense. In addition, the fact that the ash cloud that we had been somewhat cynical about until now was, in fact, likely to be blowing right in our path, albeit above our planned level, meant discretion was the better part of valour. We considered landing in Vagar, a sort of 'halfway' strip in the Faroe Islands, however, it is a notoriously tricky spot in anything but the most benign of conditions. Boyd decided his castle near Perth was a much more attractive option than a night in Vagar, so we backtracked to Strathallen and had some haggis for tea!

Next day looked much better, so we set off again and this time made it all the way to Iceland in just under 6 hours via Wick once more. Having cleared customs in Eskifjörður, a regional airport in the North East, we filed VFR along the coast to Reykjavik and had our first look at the terrifying monster that had the whole of Europe in its grip. I must admit to some trepidation approaching what looked like a cross between a nuclear explosion and a huge Cumulo-nimbus. However, I was confident that as long as we stayed a safe distance upwind we would come to no harm. The Caravan is fitted with an inertial separator in its engine intake, a simple but effective device which is designed to filter out any foreign objects from the engine; when selected 'on' there is a small performance loss, but one is protected from dust, debris, water droplets and the like. While I had no intention of trying it out for real, it certainly was nice to have, and was 'on' whenever we were in the vicinity of the volcano.

Our first few passes were truly awe inspiring, massive clouds of steam and ash billowed up to 15,000 ft or so and we could hear and feel regular explosions as it appeared more fuel was added to what was already a fiercely burning furnace. My Blackberry worked all the time while airborne over Iceland and with 2 laptops permanently fired up 'down the back' we were able to post regular live updates on Facebook; "just seen the entrance to hell" with a picture was pretty accurate.

We decided to call into Bakki – a small airstrip almost at the base of the glacier, partly to check out the plane, and partly because we could! To my surprise there was a guy in the tower and an islander in the circuit doing a regular passenger run from the nearby island of Vestmannaeyjar – right under the nose of the volcano that had the whole of Europe at a standstill – as if nothing was amiss. The Icelanders are used to volcanoes!

I enquired about landing fees and the tower guy looked at me in surprise – "we don't charge landing fees in Iceland"... Harry slipped him a bottle of Tesco's finest Red plonk and he was our new best friend; our 'volcano diversion airfield' was sorted for the rest of the visit ☺.

Next we went to Reykjavik where we had to walk almost 30 yards from the plane to the hotel. Severe clear weather still, but next morning things got serious as the wind changed to South East and both Reykjavik and Keflavik, the Military base nearby, were closed to IFR traffic. In fact the only field open to international traffic was Akureyri, a smallish field on the North coast at the end of a Fjord with interesting IFR approaches. Boyd's only guest was due to arrive there next day instead of Reykjavik, having been diverted via Glasgow from LA.

A slight snag appeared in the form of a NOTAM banning all but essential traffic from Akureyri due to anticipated congestion, however, we decided to press on and see what happened. As it turned out, no-one in the tower seemed to have read the NOTAM and we were cheerfully welcomed after a pleasant hour's tourism over what can only be described as a frozen moonscape. There is not a sign of life anywhere as far as the eye can see in central Iceland. Usually covered in cloud, we had perfect vis and no cloud so were privileged to witness one of the most barren landscapes on the planet from close up.

The tower let us park on the grass, freeing up space for the airliners that later descended on the normally sleepy little airport. One of these had Boyd's guest from LA - Millie, minus her bags, who, despite having endured 7 airports and 36 hours without sleep was raring to go and see the volcano. Naturally we felt we had to oblige so away we went on a 'local VFR flight 2 hours' – no-one batted an eyelid. Unfortunately despite CAVOK conditions all across the highlands of central Iceland, as we approached the Eyafjallajökull area the cloud built up and it was clear that we were not going to see much. However, as we got closer we could see the top of the volcano poking up through the broken cloud

layer. As we circled we could see shockwaves in the cloud below and hear regular bangs over the noise of the engine as the earth vented its fury. I must admit I very soon had enough of volcano tourism on that occasion and we left it to its own devices.

Overnight in the 'hotel with a view' and we woke up to another clear blue sky. This time even Akureyri airport had fallen foul of the 'ash map' and was now closed to all IFR traffic. All the 757s were trapped on the ground and some had their engine intakes hurriedly sealed with makeshift plastic covers to prevent dust ingestion. (At least the ones visible to the press & TV cameras from the terminal were – I can't help thinking it was a PR exercise). We decided to take one last look and since we had probably stretched out luck with the weather, head for home. That last visit was the best. The volcano was less 'angry' but still spectacular. We got some great shots and said farewell to our now relatively gentle giant.

More wonderful scenery along the South Coast to Hornafjörður which was closed, but where we had arranged for a friendly local to come in and refuel us. Some nice tailwinds on the way home meant 3 hours to Wick, a quick refuel and a nostalgic low level trip down Scotland at a pace far more suited to tourism than in a Hunter or Harrier with a couple of bombs aboard. We did the Great Glen - no sign of Nessie :-(- then on to Strathallen for a thorough debrief at the Castle before a bleary-eyed trip home next day.

We had a great adventure, with no drama. The only heart-stopping moment was climbing out of Shannon after a final refuel en route to Brittas when Harry beside me suddenly shouts "Oh my God!!!" ... "Whats up??" I said, thinking *how ironic, we do 36 hours, bait a volcano and now this....* "Oh my God... I've just seen the place where the 'Rubberbandits' did that Willie O'Dea video!!!!!" ..... "Yeahhhh, Thanks for that Harry!!"

See the video and learn to say ***Eyafjallajökull***

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ul_HlJe4aFU



Gerry Humphries

Editor's note:- The youtube video is well worth looking at - very amus-



Gerry Humphreys with his son, Harry and Boyd Munro's Caravan - Redbird

Over and Out from Down-under

It's now four and a half years since we arrived here in New Zealand and it's time to give you our final update. It's been pretty much full on for the whole time and I guess the main achievement has been to nurture the family along and help with support through the transition of leaving our whole circle of friends and contacts behind and building up new ones.

We completed our new house just over twelve months ago and love the situation we've created. Sixteen acres situated in a picturesque private valley 55km north of Auckland. There is a sealed 900m airstrip on the adjacent farm and we are fortunate to be based there with our flying activities, so just a short walk or cycle ride and we're opening the hangar doors! The neighbour's farm is all down to grass and a core flock of 3,000 Poll Dorset sheep take care of the grazing, so a real Kiwi vista with rolling green hills and fluffy white dots everywhere.





Thirty five a/c landed and a lot of pictures were taken of airplanes in all kinds of attitudes!! We are now all citizens of this fair land and on reflection it's probably one of the best things we've ever done. This brings me to the farewell bit, as we no longer have anything to do with the UK, except a summer visit to catch up with friends and rellies it's time to say goodbye and thank you all for the friendship of being part of Flying Farmers.

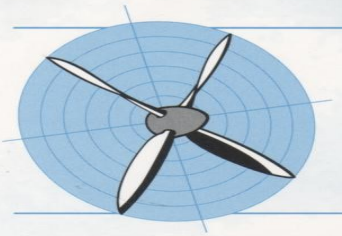
Tim & Carol Harrison.

Activities range from running the New Zealand distributorship for the Flight Design range of micro-light/LSA a/c (www.sportsaircraftnz.com), the occasional bit of instructing and flying touring together with lots of boating around our beautiful waters of the Hauraki Gulf during the summer. We are members of AOPA New Zealand and for us this really takes the place of FFA. Virtually the same type of people with the same passion for flying. The main bi-annual event is a 'summer safari' and this year we flew all around the Eastern part of the North Island for 7 days, met lots of wonderful people and saw some amazing sights. The highlight of the week for pilot skills was landing on Portland Island, small unkempt grass strip with a howling cross wind and a mountain on the approach right down to the threshold.



Detailed Income and Expenditure Account 31st MARCH 2010		2010		2009
INCOME				
Subscription & Entrance Fees		10300		10260
Surplus on sale of stock of clothing		5		39
Interest earned		14		791
		10319		11090
DEDUCT EXPENDITURE				
Newsletters - cost of production	4304		3937	
Less – advertisements	-150		-150	
Net newsletter cost		4154		3787
Membership booklet		1843		0
Committee expenses		405		526
Contribution to AOPA		600		600
Contribution to GAAC		200		200
Contribution to GASCo		200		200
Contribution to LAA		200		0
Contribution to Vulcan Appeal		100		0
Accountancy		129		143
AGM costs		900		445
Website costs		200		483
Insurance		1325		1313
Sundry		43		78
Re-valuation of stock		--		--
Total expenditure		10299		7775
Surplus/(deficit) before taxation		20		3315
Deduct Corporation Tax due on interest earned		3		166
Surplus/(deficit) after taxation		17		3149
Surplus on Fly-ins (movement)		186		-340
Surplus brought forward		26866		24057
Surplus carried forward		27069		26866

Balance Sheet as at 31st March 2010	2010	2009
CURRENT ASSETS		
Stocks of clothing	994	1067
Debtors	1155	1344
Cash at bank	25088	24811
	27237	27222
DEDUCT: CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Creditors: Amounts falling due within one year		
Creditors and Accruals	165	178
Corporation Tax	3	178
	168	356
TOTAL NET ASSETS	27069	26866
RESERVES		
Accumulated surplus	27069	26866



DYNAMIC PROP BALANCING SERVICES

BENEFITS OF DYNAMIC PROP BALANCING :

- DYNAMIC PROPELLER BALANCING CARRIED OUT ON AIRCRAFT.
- SINGLE AND MULTI ENGINES.
- NO PROP REMOVAL NECESSARY.
- REDUCES VIBRATION.
- PROVIDES WEIGHT SOLUTIONS DOWN TO ONE TENTH GRAM.
- PERFORMS TWO - PLANE ENGINE VIBRATION TEST FOR EVEN BETTER VIBRATION REDUCTION.
- CALCULATES SPLIT WEIGHTS FOR EASY PLACEMENT.
- HELPS PREVENT EXHAUST AND COWLING CRACKING.
- REDUCES INSTRUMENT AND AVIONICS DAMAGE.

A properly balanced propeller reduces wear and tear on engines, airframes, radios and instruments. Many pilots notice an immediate difference in the planes vibration levels, and often report a noticeable decrease in cockpit noise.

We compute balance location and weight between runs for improvement in vibration level.

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TELEPHONE & FAX: 01455 272284 MOBILE: 07749 392330 07917 003130

The FFA in association with Hayward Aviation Ltd, have created the **Flying Farmers Association Airfield Owners and Operators Scheme.** The basic policy is available in two parts. The first part covers the premises liability and there are two choices of cover limits available. The premium is determined by estimated third party movements each year and the limit of liability cover chosen.

Annual Movements by Third Party Aircraft	Limit of Liability £500,000	Limit of Liability £1,000,000	Other
Up to 100	£195	£300	To be agreed
Up to 250	£240	£325	To be agreed
Up to 500	£275	£360	To be agreed
Up to 1000	£385	£440	To be agreed
Up to 2000	£440	£495	To be agreed
Over 2000	To be agreed	To be agreed	To be agreed

In addition to premises liability and if hangarage is provided, or if aircraft are kept in your care, custody and control, or where aircraft are moved by you or your employees, then you should include **Hangarkeepers Liability** for an additional £75 for £500,000 any one occurrence, but limited to £50,000 any one aircraft. For £1,000,000 any one occurrence, it would be £150, limited to £50,000 any one aircraft.

Additional premium for Extended Coverage Endorsement (Aviation Liablilities) AVN 52G, 15% of premium charged for Premisis and Hangarkeepers Liability.

If you have any queries whatsoever, contact Tim Proctor or William Mann at Hayward Aviation Ltd on 0207 902 7800 or email tproctor@haywards.net or wmann@haywards.net

Finally, it is worth noting that the FFA Committee are so concerned about liability claims that the FFA will be unable to organise an event at any strip that does not have this or similar cover, for fear of exposing itself and in turn its members to any liability claim. Under certain circumstances, the FFA will pay a year's premium if a member will allow their strip to be used for an event.