
FLYING FARMERS ASSOCIATION
Italy
2006
Newsletter No. 105
December 2010

Opening Thoughts

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Cover photograph;
Chris Makin showing his strawberries on a visit to his farm in July 2010

Chairman's Ramblings

Land work should now be all completed and the sugar beet harvest is well under way with large heaps of lifted beet scattered around the countryside awaiting delivery to the factories. I hope they don't suffer from being frosted and then thawing out which makes them prone to rejection. The corn market remains very strong and I hope many of you have been able to take advantage of the high prices – I have followed my usual strategy of buying high and selling low; I would like to think that one year I may get it right!

It's -4°c outside as I write this, and quite possibly colder still in other parts of the country, and snow is causing the usual chaos to life in general. It seems to be the lead item in all the papers and TV news. Winter has come earlier than expected this year – or has it? Isn't that what winter is supposed to be? But of course it must be global warming. I had a lovely email last week with a quote from Michael O'Leary (love him or hate him) which said "It is absolutely bizarre that the people who can't tell us what the weather is going to be next Tuesday, can predict with absolute precision what the global temperatures will be in 100 years time". Precisely!

I seem to remember in my youth all those decades ago (remember the average age of our membership is now approaching 61!) weeks of snow and ice every winter, and regular ice hockey matches on the local pond every Sunday. It was the norm. As a farm student prior to agricultural college, I was relief cowman with a herd of pedigree Ayrshires in the 1962/63 winter when it snowed somewhere in the country for 71 consecutive days, and every morning we spent the first two hours thawing the pipes out to get drinking water to the cows. **That** was winter!

A bit of snow forecast? – Let's shut the schools in case someone slips over and sues us. Better to be safe rather than run the risk of having to pay many thousands in compensation for something that is not our fault, and anyway then our teachers can have a few days off relaxing. We just got on with life, walked to school or work if we couldn't drive – and indeed were expected to. How stupid has our culture become.

I must get off my high horse!

These cold winter days can be an absolute bonus for us flyers. Last Saturday was one of those stunningly icy cold, blue sky, see forever' days and the sky was full of aircraft enjoying it. They are short days, certainly, but why not take advantage of the early darkness to gain, or renew, a night rating? Night flying can be enormous fun and gives a whole new perspective on the world. These dark evenings won't last much longer (happily) – but by the time you all get to read this it will be within a week or so of the days beginning to get longer, and although it a slow happening to begin with, Christmas comes very soon after, and then it is the New Year, and then the clocks go forward, and then it is spring and another season of events for the FFA. Your Committee works hard to arrange a season of varied events for us, and **many** thanks to all of you who have made suggestions to include in the programme. It really is very much appreciated – please keep them coming for the fun and enjoyment of us all.

Your committee and I wish each and every one of you and enjoyable and peaceful Christmas period (and for those of you who got their marketing right, a prosperous one too!), and we all look forward to meeting up again at some of the events in 2011.

Martin Gosling

Committee Members

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Editor's Notes

I feel that we have some new enthusiasm within the membership! We have volunteers all round with a new committee member, three new representatives and a full programme for the 2011 visits. Thank you to you all.

Thank you also for the contributions to this newsletter without which it would all have gone on one A4 sheet. I think the contents of this edition will keep you reading for a few minutes in front of the fire.

It seems as though we now have a number of different levels of visits from simple one day events, 2 day visits, the annual European Tour and going beyond that we have the tours outside Europe organised by Sam Rutherford of Prepare 2 Go. These aren't just for FFA members, but a bit like the GOANA trips a few years ago, quite a few members are participating in them. Not least will be the Round Africa trip in February / March 2011 and a tour of Algeria in November 2011.

Paul Stephens

GACC

Shortly before he died, David Corbett, a friend of mine and fellow Europa flyer, asked me to represent the FFA at the General Aviation Consultative Committee meeting which took place at the CAAs Gatwick office on the 23 November 2010. I had got to know David when I was a director of the General Aviation Awareness Council many years ago and we often flew together on our Europa Club trips around mainland Europe. Needless to state I was honored to follow in his footsteps at the GACC.

The GACC is used by the CAA as a means of communicating ideas on GA amongst the representative bodies for GA organisations in the UK. It is a useful public interface with EASA which increasingly is beginning to dominate the regulatory regime for aviation in Europe.

I shall not attempt to précis every topic discussed by GACC but instead I shall list the current issues and comment thereon where appropriate.

The committee discussed the progress with a number of ongoing concerns including the use of Mogas with ethanol content in GA aircraft, the need for a current Government statement on Aerodrome Safeguarding (which, surprisingly is likely to be forthcoming), the likely restrictions on the use of airspace during the 2012 Olympic Games, the review of the regulatory regime for aviation (both Commercial Air Transport and GA), the need for better visual presentation of Notams, Aerial Work permissions for Microlight pilots and aircraft, the need for approval and audit of Microlight flying schools, remunerated flying training in group owned microlights, warning placards on aircraft fitted with ballistic recovery systems, volcanic ash contaminated airspace, Air Traffic Zones at unlicensed aerodromes where flying training takes place and progress with standardised European Rules of the Air.

At the meeting presentations were given by CAA staff on agenda items which included the CAAs State Safety Programme (a sort of risk assessment for GA), the Comprehensive Human Factors Review, the transition to EASA Regulations for flight crew licensing in the UK, the latest on EASA ideas, and the draft AIC on Flying Training in Private Aircraft.

I was impressed by some of the speakers and particularly by CAA personnel stressing that the Authority is in "RECEIVE" mode. The cynic in me says that this message is in response to the power being taken by EASA and the resulting emploment threat to CAA staff. However let us take the CAA at its word- if any member of the FFA has a problem with the CAA, I suggest that now is the time to "TRANSMIT" .

I can give a personal briefing to any member who would like to know more about the GACC meeting but I would prefer people to contact me by email (2pk@peterkember.co.uk). I cannot guarantee to give an authoritative answer but I can send a copy of the minutes when I receive them. The next GACC meeting is in March 2011."

Peter Kember Dip TP, MRTPI, MRAeS,
Aviation Planning Consultant to Kember Loudon Williams Ltd.
Managing Director of Laddingford Farm Ltd.

GAAC

Anthony Kedros has volunteered to be the FFA representative at the General Aviation Awareness Council.

As this was his first meeting and just finding his feet, he felt that he couldn't give a full report as yet but items discussed were:-

- Transition to EASA regulations for flight crew licenses in the UK.
- The impact of wind turbines on aviation. It would appear that there has been some success in relation to the restriction of turbines in the vicinity of airfields. It might be useful to the Working Group if affected FFA members could send me some feedback to pass on.

GASCo

Mark Badminton will be our representative at the GASCo meetings. His first feedback as follows:-

"I attended the GASCo council meeting at CAA House in London yesterday. I was made to feel very welcome and the meeting started with a moments silence in memory of David. I hope to have put some names to faces already and although there was nothing specifically relevant to FFA members at this meeting, the EASA changes will of course affect many of us. My intention is that as I find my feet and from the next meeting in February onwards, I will submit a short report for inclusion in newsletter/ website after each meeting.

There a couple of ideas regarding safety that I would like to bounce off the membership for some feedback before the next meeting. The one that I particularly want to explore is the potential for asking members to allow their strips to be included in a "strasser" scheme type of arrangement. It strikes me that we have a great resource in the form of our widely distributed members, who often own strips in otherwise quite isolated areas. The facility for pilots in distress to be able to land at one of these strips could avoid an otherwise dangerous field landing. I appreciate there are a whole host of issues to contend with (for instance, what constitutes distress, safe landing length, etc etc) and the final decision would of course be the landowners as to whether to participate or opt out. Obviously we would need to ensure the system did not lead to abuse or any unnecessary invasion of privacy, but I still feel handled sensitively it could be a great thing and that most chaps would be genuinely chuffed if they felt their strip had potentially saved a life."

Mark Badminton email thorpefields@aol.com

Peking to Paris

Congratualtions to member Alex Howard, owner of the Isle of Colonsay in Scotland. Together with Dominic Collins, they drove a 1935 Rolls Royce Phantom 11 from Beijing to Paris on an organised rally from September 10th to October 16th.

See the website www.pekingparis.com

Since 30th July 2010

New Members

856	Chris Dawes, Ashbourne, Derbyshire
857	Rob Keene, Gloucester
858	Jerry Noble, Steyning, Sussex
859	Richard Turner, Exmouth, Devon
860	Brian Sheane, Co. Wicklow, Ireland
861	Bernard Cullen, Co. Meath, Ireland
862	George Stops, Market Harborough

The total membership is now 395

Game Fair 2011

A letter from Andrew Dent

Once again, as in past years when the Game Fair has been at Blenheim, I am putting together a package for air arrivals at Oxford Kidlington airport which will include VIP transport to and from the event for a fee per person (probably around £5), and discounted landing fees.

Anyone interested can contact me at andrew@dentcomm.net or on 07860 378429.

Kind regards

Andrew Dent

Windfarms

Jim Anderson has been successful with his opposition to a proposed plan for 3, 80 metre windturbines 2000 metres from the centre of his strip and 250 feet above the threshold.

The Buchan area of the Aberdeenshire Council turned down the application on air safety grounds following Jim's determined efforts to stop them with help from David Ogilvy from AOPA.

The turbines would have been just off the centreline of his runway.

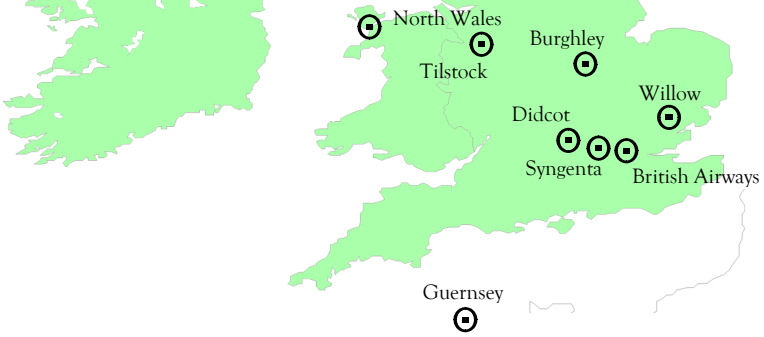
Paul Stephens also has a proposed windfarm on top of the Wolds in North Yorkshire. The developers are planning 10, 125 metre turbines within 2500 metres of his runway which has been in place for 41 years. They will stand on land 200 feet above his runway, which means they will tower 600 feet above airstrip level covering a 70 degree arc to the north west.

David Ogilvy will also be supporting this opposition.

Paul would like to thank all those members who have written to his local council with letters of objection.

Programme 2011

28th January	British Airways Museum
13th April	Willow growers, Essex
Late April	Burghley House
4th & 5th May	North Wales
28th May / 5th June	FFA Tour to Finland
8th June	Syngenta - White Waltham
14th June	Polly Vacher's strip, Didcot
Late June	Tilstock, Shropshire
28th to 30th June	Guernsey



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.

Friday 28th January 2011. Visit to British Airways Heritage Collection

"Welcome to the British Airways Heritage Collection.

The collection provides an important reflection of a proud heritage established by the pioneering spirit, the endeavour and the sheer commitment of our people over many decades.

British Airways and its predecessor companies have been at the very forefront of air transport development since the dawn of this industry. We will continue to lead in the future."

Lord Marshall of Knightsbridge, Chairman, BA, 1993 - 2004

Rick Holt is arranging this visit which is near Heathrow at BA's Waterside headquarters on the A4. The meeting will start at 11.00 with a meal afterwards. Costs to be paid on the day. Deadline for Rick to receive your reply slip is 10th January.

Please fill in the reply slip and more details will be sent nearer the time.

Wednesday April 13th Visit to J S Wright & Co, willow growers, Great Leighs, Essex

Fly in to Martin Gosling's strip in Essex by 10am – coffee and biccys on arrival.

Coach to J S Wright & Co, Willow growers and cricket bat manufacturers. Briefing on requirements for propagation & growing of bat willows.

Tour of the production area making the bat blanks.

Lunch at a local pub close by.

Return to strip around 3.30 for light refreshments and departure at will.

Cost £25/ head payable to R.M.Gosling

"Replies by January 28th at the latest please, as I am away the following week for 2 months and don't return until the week before the event, so have to have all numbers firmed before my departure". *(Martin Gosling).*

North Wales Visit 4th & 5th May 2011

Due to the fact that RAF Valley can only accept a maximum of 20 people at one time this visit will be split over two days and two groups. Both groups will meet at Caernarfon airfield late morning (due to the high cost of landing fees at RAF Valley, this may change in which case we will be able to land at Valley)

Day One afternoon May 4th Group "A" Land at Caernarfon airfield, picked up by coach, visit RAF Valley: The Search and Rescue section with a strong possibility of a visit to the fast jet Squadron. A full itinerary will be put out nearer the time

Day One afternoon May 4th Group "B" Land at Caernarfon airfield, picked up by coach, visit to the Electric Mountain. If you're looking for a truly electrifying day out, why not visit the Electric Mountain Visitors' Centre on the edge of the beautiful Snowdonia National Park. You'll discover the amazing powers of pumped storage hydro-electricity in a totally entertaining and educational environment.

From Electric Mountain, visitors can take a fully guided tour around Dinorwig Power Station. This starts with a sound and vision spectacular at Electric Mountain, illustrating the role that pumped storage plays in ensuring the country's electricity demands are always met. An Electric Mountain Expedition bus will then transport visitors to the power station itself. Descending deep inside the ancient Elidir Mountain's labyrinth of dark and imposing tunnels, you'll experience one of man's greatest engineering achievements.

Both groups will meet and stay in the Celtic Hotel (www.celtic-royal.co.uk) in the centre of Caernarfon were a private room has been booked for dinner, before dinner there will be a guided tour around this Historic town with it's fortified inner wall and famous castle.

Day Two: The groups reverse from day one.

This is a first come first booked in. The total cost - Coaches, entrance fee for the Electric Mountain , tour guide of Caernarfon Town & Dinner, bed & breakfast at the Celtic Hotel £130:00 per head, sharing a twin/double room (a single supplement of £27:00). A deposit of £25:00 per head is required when booking in payable to Neville Stops by 31st January 2011. All landing fees are the pilots' responsibility.

Footnote options at your own cost:

For those who do not wish to visit the Electric Mountain there may be other options. You could visit Caernarfon Town or catch the Welsh railway that should by then be running to Portmadog or go to the Electric Mountain and take a short walk catch the train to the top of Snowdown.

Saturday 28th May to Sunday 5th June 2011 FFA European Tour to Denmark, Sweden and Finland.

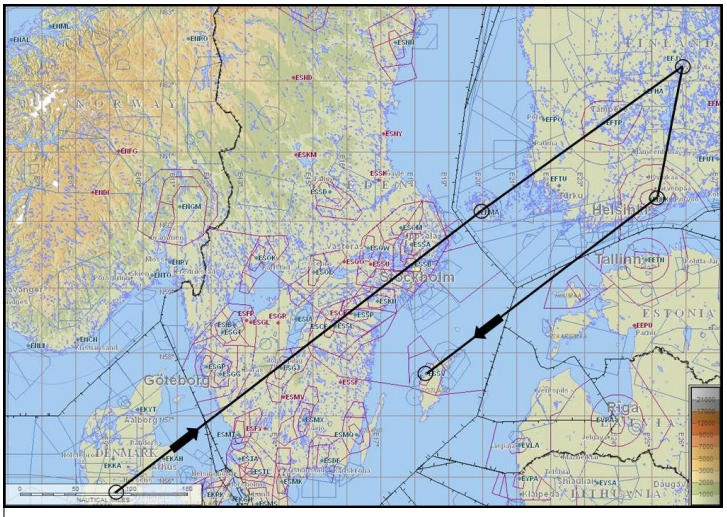
The crew of G-CRUZ (Bill & Wendy Burton, George & Claire Sly and Roger Taylor) are organizing the European Tour for 2011 with Bill being the captain - of course.

We will meet in Billund in Denmark on the **28th May**. Local visits will be carried out the next day, **29th May**.

On the **30th May** we fly to the Aland Islands which are just into Finland, landing at Mariehamn Airfield (EFMA). After a local visit next morning, we fly on to Jynakyla (EFJY).

Visit Valtra Tractors on the **1st June** plus other things. Next day, **2nd June** there are some local visits before flying to Helsinki Malmi (EFHF) in the afternoon.

On the **3rd June** we have a city tour and time to look round Helsinki.



On the **4th June** we fly to Gotland, Sweden landing at Visby airfield (ESSV) where we will have the final dinner .

Return home on the **5th June**.

The trip will be limited to 16 aircraft and 35 members. Because places are limited, it will be first come first served and priority will be given to members and their wives / girlfriends, rather than guests.

Bookings will have to be in and £250.00 per person deposit paid to W. Burton by 24 January 2011, so that hotel bookings can be made. Please complete the reply slip asap.

28th - 30th June 2011, Guernsey

This is advance notice of another event being coordinated by Martin Gosling, so that you can mark it in your diary and send in your reply slips (closing date for entries by April 30th).

Predicted cost to be in the region of £140-£150/head for a double/twin room to include two nights bed and breakfast, dinner in

Tuesday 28th June	
AM	**Arrive Guernsey airport by 13.00**
Lunch	**Sandwiches available for our group at the Aeroclub**
2.00pm	**Depart for visit to Guernsey Cider Company**
4.00pm	**Leave for hotel La Trelard - book in**
7.00pm	**Minibus to The Farmhouse restaurant for Dinner**
10.00pm	**Return to Hotel**
Wednesday 29th June	
9.00am	**Minibus to Guernsey Sea Farms**
11.30am	**Leave to catch ferry to Herm Island**
12.30pm	**Ferry across to Herm**
13.00pm	**Lunch at The Ship Inn**
14.00- 16.00	**Explore Island at leisure**
16.00pm	**Ferry back to St Peter Port**
16.30pm	**Minibus back to Hotel - R & R**
19.30pm	**Minibus to airfield for barbeque with Aeroclub**
20.00pm	**Return to Hotel**
Thursday 30th June	
9.30am	**Leave Hotel for Meadow Court Farm**
10.00- 12.00	**Tour of Farm & diversification - largest on Guernsey**
12.00- 13.00	**Light lunch laid on at farm**
13.00 pm	**Minibus back to airfield - depart at will**

the Farmhouse restaurant, barbecue at the aeroclub, visit to the cider company, ferry to Herm, lunch at the Ship Inn, lunch at Meadowcourt Farm and all transport for the visit. Replies with cheque for £25/head to Martin Gosling to reserve your place. Balance of costs to be paid by mid-June when invoiced.

30th June / 1st July 2010

This is a belated write up of the last of the Summer events as the August newsletter had to be finished before the reports were in.

We met at Sturton Grange near Leeds on the 30th June and the immediate impression whilst flying over was the enormity of Chris Makin's set up with acres of poly tunnels and huge storage buildings. We landed alongside what appeared to be a large static caravan park, which turned out to be the housing for the 370+ staff.





The weather was bright and sunny, as was the reception by Chris and Jane Makin with drinks served on the front lawn of his magnificent and beautifully kept house and gardens. Everything about Chris and his 'farm' is on a huge scale, but done to perfection.

Chris ran through a brief history of the farm starting when Mr E Makin bought 350 accres in 1956. During the '60s a number of crops were grown including rhubarb, cabbage, swedes, peas, potatoes and cereals. The farm was built up to 1000 acres of arable land and growing sugarbeet, cereals and strawberries.

By 1997, Managing Director, Chris Makin diversified into grading potatoes for a large multiple retailer. Initially starting with 4000 tonnes, this sector of the business grew to grading in excess of 45,000 tonnes in a 6 month period. Makins became the largest importer of new potatoes into the UK.

As we started the tour of the soft fruit, we were impressed with the quality of the strawberries. There was plenty of tasting going on! Makins now produce 1200 tonnes of strawberries in the season between May and November.

2010 will be the first year that Makins produce strawberries utilising the "table top tray substrate system". The tray system comprises steel tables held above ground by steel supports. Rows of trays are sat on the steel tables in to which the strawberry plants are transplanted. This enables the trays and steel tables to be utilised year after year which will minimise costs, once established. This growing method will increase yields, reduce picking costs and produce high quality fruit, consistently.

Blackberries are also grown producing about 100 tonnes annually.

Makins specialise in growing, packing and distributing soft fruit to selected major retailers and Michelin star restaurants in Yorkshire & Lancashire.

With 370 staff employed in the picking and packing of this fruit, we could see now why a village of static caravans are required for housing as nearly everyone of them are foreign workers. Chris explained that he advertises for British workers, but they don't want to do the job.

The staff are well looked after with facilities such as laundry games, catering and social events in the hall. Things like laundry and internet used to be included in the accommodation price, but Chris had to stop these included items as there now has to be free competition to give them chance to source these facilities elsewhere! They now get charged separately.

We moved onto the impressive large storage buildings covering 200,000 sq feet, half of which is chilled, controlled environment. Chris makes sure that his customer get first class service. The buildings are up to full food regulation standards.

One of the customers is Arla in Leeds, who we visited the next day.

The hospitality was extended further when Jane, their daughter and neice - who is a cordon bleu chef, served us a lovely lunch on the lawn.

We then headed to York, about 15 miles away, for a conducted tour and an evening meal. After the meal we were given a presentation about farming in Ethiopia by a Yorkshire farmer's wife who with her husband are also farming in Ethiopia. She struggled a bit as her husband was supposed to give the talk but was unable to come. With various offers of help from the audience as to how to operate a laptop and projector, she did well to present a very interesting talk.



Next day, we had to be at the Arla dairy in Leeds fairly early to be shown round this superb high tech processing and bottling plant. The pasteurising and heat treatment processes was explained to us as well as the Cravendale range.

Looking round, the place was cleaner than most hospitals - maybe not saying a lot!

Back to Chris's strip for a short flight to Slingsby's strip near Kirkbymoorside. Before looking round their works, we went for a look round Helmsley and have lunch at the best Fish & Chip restaurant that I have ever been in - run by Jane Makin and her daughter.

Now why would Jane, wife of an obviously very well off entrepreneur, want to tie herself to running a fish and chip establishment? She wanted the challenge and by taking guidance from the best in the fish and chip world, she produces a fish that just melts in your mouth, is not filling and doesn't leave a greasy mark on the plate.

The restaurant itself is very well done and is a must if you ever visit Helmsley.

Now over to David Soul who took notes on the Slingsby visit.

Paul Stephens



Buses are frequently driven by large middle aged men. Our pretty lady driver on the fish and chip run to Helmsley and again on the return to Slingsby's was a notable exception. (Send £5 for the pictures!)

Stuart Brown, one of three directors running Slingsby's today, gave us a brief introduction and history lesson on the company which was founded by Fred Slingsby, a Scarborough furniture manufacturer and passionate sailplane enthusiast. He was one of the founders of the Scarborough Gliding Club and repaired the club's gliders in his factory, building his first new glider in 1931.

The story goes that in the late 1930's he was asked by the Air Ministry to carry out some secret work, which culminated in the design and construction of troop carrying gliders. Wikipedia claims his troop carriers never saw action although others were towed across the Channel carrying troops during the Normandy Landings in the Second World War. Rumour has it that the Luftwaffe tried to bomb Slingby's but couldn't find it in its quiet rural setting. I might well have had the same problem if it hadn't been for the GPS.!

Post war production centered on gliders of which around 350 are still flying today. In the 60s and 70s the company started building powered aircraft and continued until 2003 when the last Firefly left the production line. The Firefly was purchased in large numbers by the US Government for training but grounded when an American Senator's son died in a flying accident. The enquiry exonerated the Company but the Government were persuaded that the aircraft was unsafe and 300 Fireflies were subsequently scrapped.

Ownership has changed hands on numerous occasions with Vickers buying the assets in 1969 after a disastrous fire that forced the company into liquidation. They sold to UBE who sold to ML Holdings, Cobham in 1995 and 3 individuals in 2006. These 3 individuals of which I believe Mr Brown was one, turned the company around from loss to profit. Earlier this year it was purchased by Marshall's of Cambridge.

We were taken on a tour of several large buildings containing odd shaped structures and simple machines. In one we saw the mould for a reinforced gunshield for the Type 45 destroyer and a fiberglass reinforced torpedo tube wound onto a steel mandrel. An 8ft diameter enclave (oven) looking a bit like the tank from the back of a milk lorry stood at one end. This was used to cure the cold molded layups.

We crossed over sticky floor mats into a clean room, maintained above atmospheric pressure to ensure dust does not enter through doors and windows, where we saw various layups of pre-impregnated resin cloth waiting completion before curing. This resin impregnated cloth is supplied in a roll sealed between two sheets of plastic and stored in a cold room. Bits are cut to shape and placed over the mould. A further flexible clear plastic film is placed over the cloth and attached with double sided sticky tape around the edges of the mould. Tubes attached to this film are connected to a vacuum pump which sucks the pre-preg cloth firmly onto the mould ensuring accurate copying of the shape. The pre-preg cloth air cures over time, but heating it in an oven accelerates the process.

The components being laid up in the clean room were internal panels for the Hercules aircraft, which were subsequently fitted with lights and electronic components after curing, and inner shells for the pilots helmets used in the Euro fighter.

The company currently manufactures approximately 10 helmets a month with production ramping up to 20. One imagines that with such low numbers it would be a simple matter of perhaps working a bit of overtime but the complexity of the helmets and the special jigs used to assemble them mean that it is not so simple. The helmets contain many of the electronics used to operate the aircraft and its systems. Information from weapons and flight instruments together with enhanced night vision is projected onto the helmet display visor overlaying the real view the pilot actually sees. The helmet also provides other functions like crash protection, 600 knot wind blast protection, noise attenuated communication and oxygen. Each one is made specifically for each pilot. It took Slingsby's over 4 years to develop their part of the helmet which is essentially the inner and outer plastic shells.

We moved on to the UAV manufacturing area where large machined aluminium moulds are used to lay up the wings and fuselage of the Herti. Two halves are laid up in their respective moulds, internal ribs and stiffening structures put in place and then one mould is lowered upside down over the other using positioning pegs to ensure accuracy whilst the pre-preg skins are glued together. A bit like a large Airfix kit. The skin thickness is only around half a millimeter which I find hard to believe. The Herti is intended for both military and civilian use with some police forces expressing interest.

The last item on the agenda was an emergency train door developed by Slingby's which forms part of the front of a train and enables passengers to descend from the train via inbuilt steps onto the track. This is for use in tunnels and underground where side doors cannot be used.

After a vote of thanks we departed the strip for our various destinations. A big thank you to Gordon and Caroline Bellerby for putting together a fascinating couple of days.

David Soul

AGM 2010

The AGM this year was held at Wymeswold, a disused WW11 airfield on the eastern boundary of the East Midlands zone, owned by our member Edward Packe-Drury-Lowe.

For once at the AGM, the weather was good which eased the entry for about 25 aeroplanes and around 50 members into the East Midlands zone to land. Rick Holt had done a good job of organising this venue which entailed slot times given by East Midlands for landing. There was even to be a prize for the landing nearest the slot which was judged to the second by Laura Holt who stood at the touchdown point on the runway. Three members apparently landed within a minute of their time, but the nearest and prize winner was Robert Knapton.

Martin Gosling handled his first AGM as Chairman admirably, starting off with a tribute to David Corbett who died on the 6th October 2010 aged 74, at home after a short illness. He was one of our founder members, our first Secretary followed by Treasurer until he retired from the committee only a few years ago. He was probably the most active member over the Association's life of 36 years in the FFA and the aviation political world.



We will miss his joviality at the FFA events which he attended in his self built Europa, and the big welcome we always got when landing at Shobdon if he was at home.

The rest of the business part of the AGM was fairly standard stuff apart from Philip Young volunteering and being voted onto the FFA committee. Philip and his wife Julia have been regular attendees at meetings over the last few years since becoming members in 2005. They farm near Hunstanton in Norfolk.

Paul Stephens

After an excellent lunch our host Edward gave us a potted history of Prestwood Hall and the estate, and also the origin of the Packe family roots going back to Oliver Cromwell.

He was followed by Detective Constable Bob Shuttlewood from Leicester Special Branch who impressed upon us the ongoing fight against terrorism and stating that the present threat was real and was right now at high status. He assured us that the GAR forms that we all fill in are an essential tool in this ongoing battle, and although we may perceive it as another chore to our flying, and it is by no means the perfect solution, it does give the Special Branch a very good insight into who is going and coming from where, and any suspicion raised by names or passport numbers will ALWAYS be followed up, either overtly or covertly.

He gave us an overview of the likely restrictions that could be put in place for the 2012 Olympics and said there would almost certainly be 'no-fly' zones set up around London and also the out-of-town events. We may feel that a Cessna could do very little damage, but a light aircraft crashing onto the opening ceremony - for example, would do irreparable damage worldwide for evermore. In case we thought damage from a light aircraft could never be very extensive, he reminded us that the Cessna that was deliberately crashed into a tax office in the USA recently piloted by a suicidal disgruntled person (not a terrorist) caused damage of half a million pounds to that building alone.

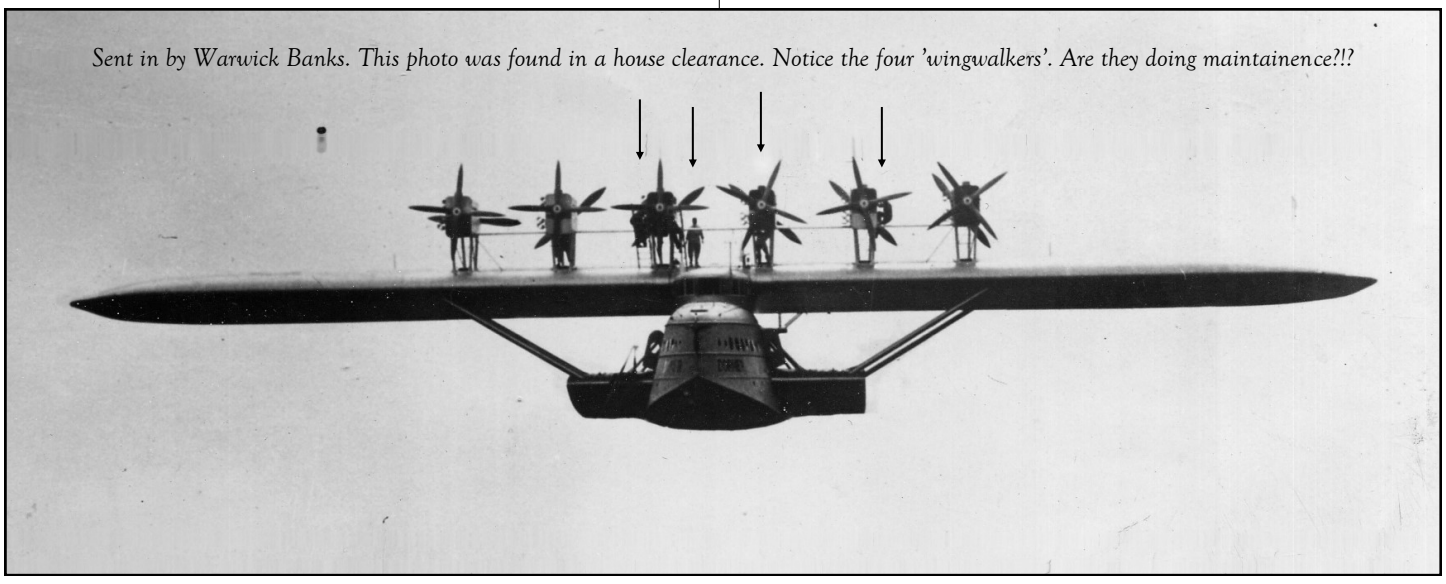
Next up was Group Captain Simon Brailsford, RAF Inspector of Flight Safety. A hugely experienced RAF officer with many years navigating under his belt, and who has operated in every theatre of war since the mid-80's that our country has been involved in - and some of those theatres several times. He also had the privilege to be Equerry to the Queen for three years.

He kept us all entertained for some considerable time about the many aspects of flight safety and the close correlation between the Military and the Civilian operations. He impressed upon us, which we probably already knew, that accidents are almost never the result of one single event, but an insidious culmination of several events which gradually overwhelm us. He reminded us how important were Human Resources and the interaction between crew members, and that we must never get tunnel vision when things get difficult but at all times keep sight of the bigger picture. Gone are the days of dismissiveness by the authorities to carelessness or stupidity by a pilot - now it is very much encouraged that every event, however small, should be reported and recorded for the future benefit of all, so that the sequence leading up to an accident can be intercepted rather than having to pick up the pieces after the accident. He interspersed his talk with many amusing anecdotes, finishing up by asking the question of the audience "What do you buy the Queen for a Christmas present when you are her Equerry?"!

An excellent day for all concerned in a magnificent venue, and a finale to our events season where not one single event was cancelled by weather.

Martin Gosling

Sent in by Warwick Banks. This photo was found in a house clearance. Notice the four 'wingwalkers'. Are they doing maintainence?!?



Prepare2Go Libyan Trip September 30th – October 12th 2010

Following the Burtons, Goslings and Stephens participation in Bea and Sam Rutherford's first Libyan expedition last year, 9 aircraft, comprising a Cessna 310 twin, a Cirrus 22, 2 Piper Malibus, a Robin 180, a Grumman A5, a Dynamic WT9 Rotax powered sports aircraft, and one Robinson 44 helicopter sportingly flown by William Cortazzi – an interesting mix of machines and capabilities. The Flying Farmers Association were represented by Mark Newman in his Robin 180, by Charlie Ellingworth in the Micro Dynamic, and myself (Chris Moore) flying with ex Tiger Moth pilot, Ed Woods. We were joining by Annie Cortazzi and Amanda Ellingworth in Libya. Essential to fun is a good group, and we had a great one, with lots of humour both on the chat frequency and on the ground.

Quite a few people, when I told them I was hoping to fly my machine to Libya, said "why on earth Libya?". The simplistic answer is because it's there! A more comprehensive answer would be that from a flying point of view, like the Flying Farmer expeditions, it pushes you into flying experiences you would not otherwise encounter. Secondly, we all know very little about Libya precisely because it is only just beginning to open its doors to the West. It has some stunning geography, the people we met were all very friendly, and without a knowledgeable party prepared to go organising the visas, paperwork, delays etc., the trip would have been a nightmare.

September 30th saw my strip covered in early morning autumnal mist, which delayed departure an hour or so. After taking off and climbing a few hundred feet we burst into bright sunshine, which continued across the Channel until we got to the Reims area, where we ran into the warm front which had been hanging over England before. We therefore diverted to Reims Prunay, waited there a couple of hours, and then set out again, working our way to the west of the front to land and stay the night at Lyon Bron – Basle info giving us a particularly helpful service. The next morning we flew on down the Rhone valley to Cannes Mandelieu in time to attend our first briefing with Sam Rutherford and his co-organiser Jamie Murray.

Saturday morning saw the 8 aircraft and one helicopter depart for Tunis, routing over Corsica and Sardinia, with some opting to break the journey at Figari or Cagliari. Corsica is a mountainous island; flying above the cloud we saw a black speck not far below us, which was Monte Cinto at 8,877ft. South of Sardinia the sky was clear, and Africa, in the form of the rather flat Tunis coastline, hove into view. Landing, and for that matter taking off, at Tunis International Airport kept us on our toes with delays and multiple runways being used simultaneously despite the fact that





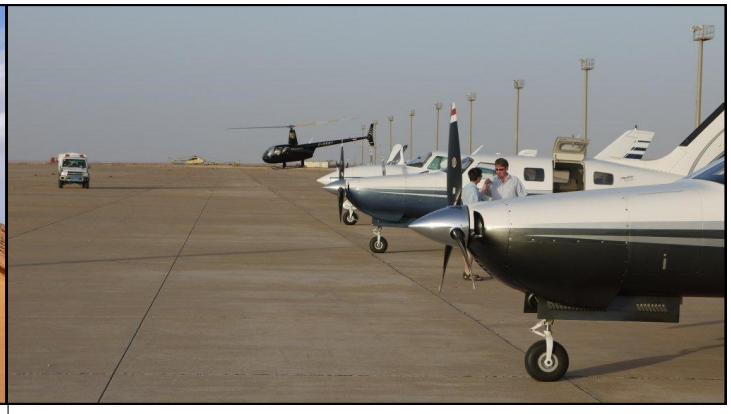
there was a southerly wind.

The next day we flew down to Tripoli - again over a dollop of sea – but the Mediterranean always looks much more inviting than the North Sea! After overflying the amphitheatre of El Jem in Tunisia and the Roman city of Sabratha in Libya, both listed as UNESCO World Heritage sites, we approached Tripoli from the sea, flying over the port to land at Tripoli. Also landing were various Russian military kits and a series of executive jets for a North African states summit conference. Tripoli has an attractive position on the coast, and must have been quite a fun place under Italian colonial rule. We had our best dinner of the Libyan sector next door to floodlit Roman ruins, and started our initiation into the Libyan non-alcohol regime. The problem was, we all compared notes each morning and didn't feel that we felt the slightest bit better for our week or so's abstention!

After leaving all equipment unnecessary for the desert at our hotel in Tripoli we proceeded next morning to the airport and received our initiation into the ways of Libyan officialdom, which included somewhat lengthy transits through the terminal to the aircraft and passports disappearing for several days. However Sam, Jamie and his local staff handled everything with great effect and all the Libyans we met were friendly. Nonetheless although relaxing somewhat, Libya is still a police state, airport officials can still summarily lose their jobs or liberty so it is not difficult to understand where they are coming from. Refuelling brought an interesting conundrum in that the refuelling tap at the end of the hose was configured for large commercial aircraft, and would not fit into our filler pipes. The solution? To cut up a five litre plastic water bottle and refuel through that, which could take time, but also had the advantage, in hot weather, of providing insulation between the pipe and the aircraft, as nowhere we refuelled had an earthing wire.

Next morning it was time to attack the desert. Every tourist in Libya is assigned a minder, and our minders arrived in the form of two young policemen, very affable, but appearing, at any rate, not to speak English. We took it in turns to fly them round with us. Sam advised us that there was only one working radar in Libya, and that once we were 50 miles from Tripoli we were very much on our own. We were each allocated satellite phones and flew with a common frequency, but also in pairs, mine being Charlie's G-EECC. Sam also advised, as the Algerian border kinked across our direct route, not to fly into Algeria as firstly they had a more active defence system, and secondly he could not guarantee to get us out. Sam also provided us with charts, some of which were less useful than others as they had been made in the 1960s. We relied mainly on the Jepperson Africa high-low en route chart, the pilot's free flight atlas (very good on reporting





points) and above all the Michelin road map for Northern Africa, although the problem here was that there aren't that many roads in Libya. Fortunately there was no jamming or blockages in the GPS transmissions.

Heading south from Tripoli, we crossed the coastal plain, a range of hills, and then after 40 miles or so entered the Sahara. It has, when seen close up, many textures, including flat scrub, desolate areas pockmarked with craters and dried up river beds, spectacular yellow and reddish sand-dunes, and from time to time isolated rocky outcrops and mountain ranges. Many areas showed evidence of oil exploration. After 260 nautical miles we landed at Ghadames, the "pearl of the desert".

In 1826 the Scottish explorer Gordon Laing took two months to get from Tripoli to Ghadames (sadly he later died after a thirteen month trip across the Sahara to Timbuktu, thus never consummating his marriage to Emma, the beautiful daughter of the British Consul in Tripoli.) Ghadames, like our next destination, was on a junction for camel routes and has a fascinating old settlement of some considerable size, which we visited in the evening.

The following day's flight was 290 nautical miles to Ghat, landing on a long runway literally in the middle of nowhere. Four craft – Charlie Illingworth's Dynamic, Mark Newman's Robin 180, William Cortazzi's R44, and my 182, then flew on to the culmination of several years' applications by Sam, a 400yd desert strip surrounded by stunning rocks and scenery, some of which have early cave drawings. The flight from Ghat to the Akkakus and back again, although relatively short, around 55 nautical miles, provided some of the most spectacular scenery of the trip. The mountains surrounding Ghat, and the crossing of the pure rock mountain range of the Akkakus, were truly awe inspiring. Staying at the desert camp, evening expeditions by foot, vehicle and helicopter ensued.

To me this was the most spectacular part of the trip. Some idea of the scenery can be gained by going on to Prepare2go's site on U Tube – and it really brought home the immenseness of the Sahara. After two days flying to the south west corner of Libya bordering with Algeria and Niger we were still only about a third of the way across the Sahara. Yet until quite recently camels, their riders, produce and slaves regularly transited from Central Africa to the northern coast.

Flying back to Ghat in the early morning, Mark Newman and I enjoyed an interesting cameo. Parked about half a mile from the terminal we waited for about an hour as the airport controller was somewhat preoccupied with this unusual activity, the desert heat beginning to make itself felt; 43°C was later recorded on the tarmac. Eventually we were refuelled from a bladder tank which was by now nicely warmed up – again no earthing wire! By now we had collected quite a group of people; the fire truck, very sensibly parked about 200yds away, two refuellers, and about six other officials, who then proceeded to fill up their vehicles after the aircraft had had their take!







This was followed by a full group takeoff in the early afternoon. With the airport being about 2,000ft above sea level, and the heat being quite considerable, the effect on takeoff performance and climb was quite noticeable. Mark and I, watching our rapidly rising engine temperatures, decided to jump the takeoff queue and avoid the somewhat prolonged taxiing instructions, positioning, and briefing on the local weather, which we could see was clear, sunny, and hot! One lesson of the trip was the effect of heat on speed, range and endurance; keeping the cylinder head temperatures within range by use of cowl flaps, richer mixture and at time reduced power had a marked effect.

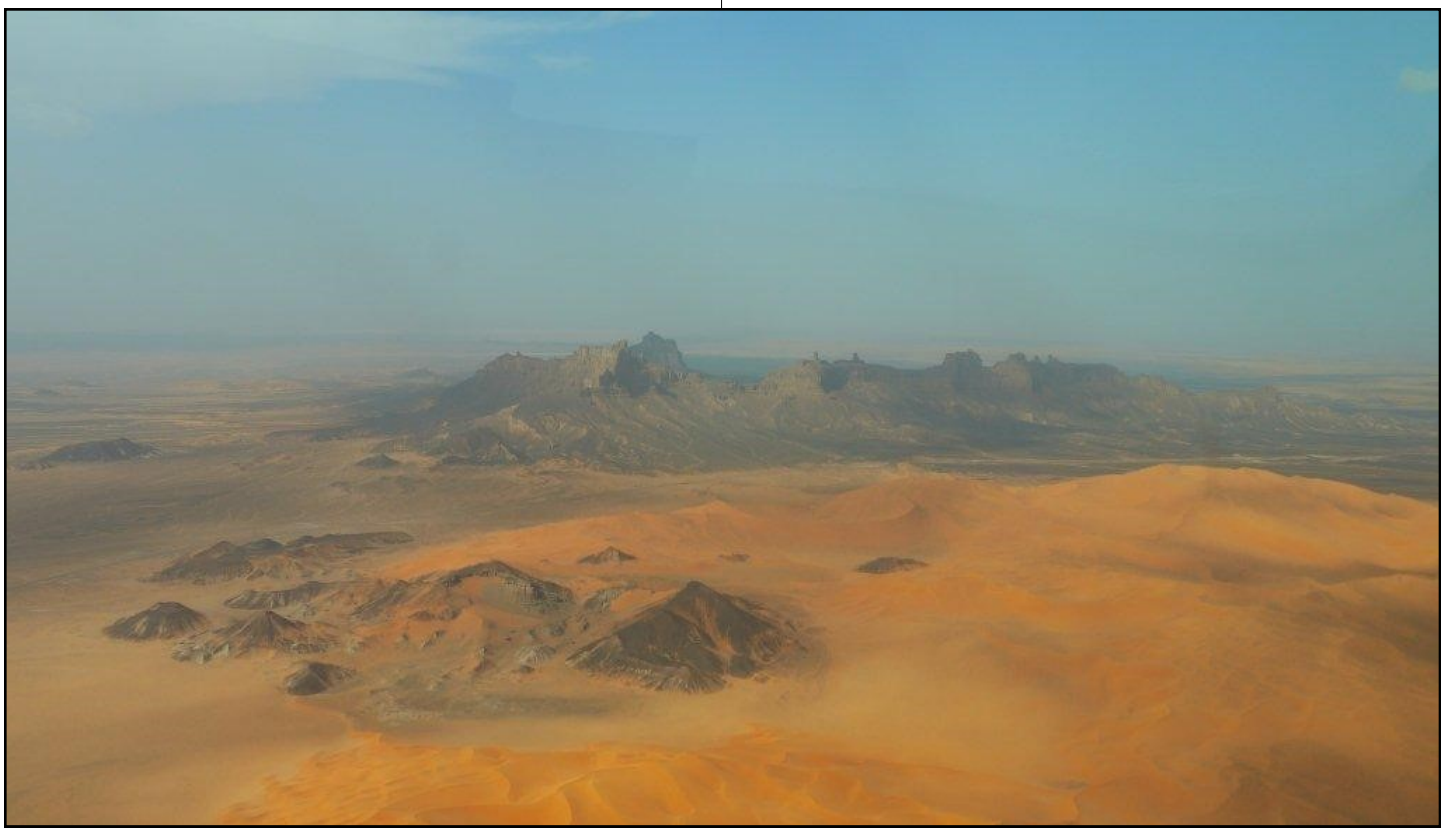
Our next destination was Ubari, 250 miles nautical miles to the northeast, flying over Erg Murzuk, one of the world's largest sand seas, and, just before landing, down a spectacular 50 mile line of cliffs lowering the desert floor from around 3,000ft to around 2,000ft.

The following day was the only non-flying day as we 4x4d to see the famous four Ubari oases and lakes, once part of a much larger aquifer. Because of the intense heat the lakes are very salty; swimming in them was just like swimming in the Dead Sea, it was so buoyant that swimming style had to be adapted somewhat.

On a pre-briefing call with Annette Gosling I had been warned about camp we stayed in, and told to take a sleeping bag and purchase various cleansing bits from Boots! In the event, Annette's advice was excellent, but the camp was not as dire as expected! When in the bush etc. etc. .....

The following day we flew 380 nautical miles north back to Tripoli. Trying to escape the desert one could only reflect on the incredible achievements on the early aviation pioneers, including Alex Henshaw and Antoine de St. Exupery, who flew the Sahara day and night on dead reckoning only – absolutely amazing. Also on what has made the desert so attractive to foreigners, including many Englishmen. Perhaps it is a sense of infinity, a clear definition of life and death, and the challenge, as with a large ocean, of successfully navigating the hazards of getting from A to B.

We had all opted for an extra day to see Leptis Magna, a World Heritage site, and one of several major Roman towns and settlements on the north Libyan coast, reminding one that in Roman times Libya was a very prosperous breadbasket for the Roman Empire. Rumour has it that Colonel Ghadaffi had thought at one stage of blowing it up, but either changed his mind or ran out of explosives. Although under half of the site has been excavated the scale of the ruins are impressive; at its peak Leptis Magna housed between 80,000 - 100,000 people. Its theatre could accommodate between 8,000 - 10,000 people. The amphitheatre, where the games were held, could accommodate around 18,000 people. Despite the major earthquake of AD365 it is very well preserved, and one can explore the underground chambers where animals were kept, and where "surgeons" patched up wounded gladiators. Being enslaved in the Congo, marched across the Sahara with cages of wild animals perhaps to be met







later, and then forced to fight in the amphitheatre was probably not a recipe for a particularly enjoyable or long life.

So what did the Flying Farmers trio contribute to the trip? Well, Mark Newman flew solo, apart from taking the odd passenger, throughout the trip, and also managed a precautionary landing on a road way out in the desert, thus showing off his aircraft to some somewhat amazed Libyan drivers. Charlie Ellingworth followed suite and also showed, with the performance of his Dynamic, how truly revolutionary the new light sports aircraft are. He also gave a superb demonstration of sandboarding down a quite steep sand-dune. Amanda and Charlie also decided to sample real desert life by camping for the night in the sand-dunes above the Ubari campsite. This was against the rulebook, which resulted in a night search by our two policemen, which kept the local dog pack howling happily until dawn. It is pleasing to report that Amanda and Charlie were not captured, and returned triumphantly for breakfast. At the Akkakus strip my 182 provided some amusement by landing well within the distance, but then sinking through the surface desert crust enough to require team pushing to a firmer spot. This prompted a clearing of stones from a shorter parellel strip where the surface crust had not been broken. Fortunately an early morning departure was no problem, and Romeo Romeo was not left as a Wichita static exhibition for eternity.

Our final leg was from Tripoli to Malta, just under 200 nautical miles – by now we were all quite blasé about sea crossings. For some reason I cannot explain, the airport bar seemed to be enjoying very good custom that Sunday morning. After enjoying an excellent farewell dinner in a comfortable hotel close to Valetta Harbour it was left to each crew to decide on their return route. Weather briefing started with lightning and thunder storms at 5am. Further briefing showed that with an easterly wind this front would be moving westwards over the Mediterranean, and would have to be crossed. Also, as described in last year's, there was another front over the south of France, which was forecast to weaken. Mark Newman, Stephen Day's team in their Malibu, and Romeo Romeo decided to depart.

In the event crossing the first front south of Sicily provided some rain and turbulence, but did not trigger a turn back decision. Requests for the east weather when over Corsica indicated that the Nice weather was acceptable, although again as reported in last year's trip, it became cloudy with quite a strong squirrelly wind bumping the aircraft around. The Nice controller made us descend to 1,000ft 15 miles off the coast, so we had ample opportunity to look at a somewhat angry sea. However reflecting on Beryl Markham's flight back from Kenya with Baron Blix in a Leopard Moth, when she was to all intents lost above storm clouds at 10,000ft, hit a particularly violent bump, said "that's Corsica" and then set a dead reckoning course, descended through the storm and arrived at Cannes, put our flight into its proper perspective.

For Romeo Romeo this was a six hour flight. The following day there was cloud over the Rhone valley, the Channel and the UK, but amazingly northern France was completely clear – most unusual. The fast and high brigade quite rightly referred to Romeo Romeo's progress during the trip as "stately" – after all it is a 1954 design with a 1947 designed engine which has changed very little since. However as some consolation we were able to land in proper Flying Farmers style on the home grass strip with 2 hours endurance remaining. The total recorded distance for the trip was 4,202 nautical miles.

So to go back to the original question, why Libya, and was it worth it? Definitely. It was a unique trip which brought new dimensions into my flying experience I readily admit that looking at some of the watery, sand strewn or rocky views, I was pleased that Romeo Romeo's current engine did not emulate its predecessor's example over the hills north of Perth which prompted its immediate demise. It was a chance to see Libya with much of the paperwork hassle being handled by someone else. Libya is just beginning to open up again; it has fascinating geography, history, and very friendly people.

Again, many thanks to Bea and Sam Rutherford, Jamie Murray and their team in Libya for making this unique trip possible. Flying Farmers are already strong supporters of Sam's trips and maybe this article will encourage others to sign up.

Chris Moore





Rectifying Soggy Winter Airstrips

The Ramco airstrip at Croft was originally levelled and grassed in 1974. Since that time the clay subsoil has changed the profile of the surface, in some places the levels have varied by as much as 600mm. Although these changes in levels are difficult to see with the naked eye, they become apparent when landing or taking off.

During winter periods the strip became very wet in some areas, causing the wheels of the Cessna 182 to become bogged down. The stub area in front of the hanger was perhaps the worst part. Various solutions were considered, such as laying open plastic membrane to support the aircraft and trenching down the strip with ordinary land drains. The latter we felt would be rather disruptive. However discussions with George Crust of DMJ Drainage, Boston, provided the ideal remedy using his agricultural drainage skills combined with specialist golf course drainage methods provided by Shelton Sportsturf Drainage Solutions LLP of Baumber, Lincolnshire.

In October 2005 work commenced to lay one 100mm perforated plastic drainage pipe on each side of the runway, keeping right to the edge to avoid disruption to flying activities. These were backfilled with local washed gravel to 150mm below field level. Then the unique Shelton's drainage machine was brought in to cut a 25mm band approximately 350mm deep and insert Lytag granules (like small pea gravel) to full depth. The machine's inclined blade combined with a vibrating system installed bands at 1.5m spacing across the whole of the strip. There was no surplus soil, that would have been the case if a standard narrow trencher had been used and the ground was practically undisturbed. Providing the equipment was clear to the side of the strip, the aircraft could continue to fly. The benefit of Lytag was two fold, firstly unlike gravel the material would not damage the propeller and secondly the Lytag material can absorb 20% water very quickly.

The whole operation took less than 10 days to complete and left the surface of the grass practically undisturbed. The effect of the drainage system could be seen immediately. During the next few weeks the work was well tested with heavy rains and snow in December. Even after the snow had cleared the field was immediately usable.



The piped main drains run down either side of the airstrip.



The Shelton Gravel Band Drainer installed Lytag filled 'gravel bands that connected to the main drains running down each side of the strip



In optimum conditions gravel banding allows flying to resume without delay.

Ramco (UK) Limited station their Cessna 182 at Croft and use the aircraft frequently to visit RAF locations and other Government Departments. They are contracted with both the UK and USA Governments to market miscellaneous surplus materials and vehicles throughout the UK. Generators, machine tools, railway engines, air transportable bridges and catering equipment are just some of the vast range of materials passing through their warehouses (see www.ramco.co.uk). Skegness is not served by the best of roads and driving from Skegness, North, South or West, normally takes 1.5hrs to reach a dual carriageway. Flying enables sites to be visited and back the same day, increasing employee's productive time.

During the dry summer of 2006 the heavy clay soils shrank, with the result that the original 25mm wide bands opened up. Although this caused some concern David Shelton said, "this is a fine opportunity to further improve the drainage". So, the Shelton's tractor and gravel hopper were employed to top up the open channels with Lytag. Again this proved to be good advice, inspection sees the strip drained and useable, and this will be the case for future years.

Roy Sanderson © R.S.

Contacts: George Crust, DMJ Drainage. Tel: 01205 480958 (www.dmjdrainage.co.uk)
David Shelton, Shelton Sportsturf Drainage Solutions LLP. Tel: 01507 578288 (www.sheltonsdrainage.com) Sales, Hire and Contracting services.

A Visit to Brize Norton

In the middle of October, along with around 30 other guests, I was lucky enough to have a three day visit to RAF Brize Norton, "The Defence Gateway to Operations"

During the first two days we were shown around every aspect of the base and the various squadrons that were based there, and given comprehensive briefings into the why's and wherefore's of their past history, what their modus operandi now is and what the future holds for the base. The timing of our visit could not have been more ironic as on the second day, the government announced its strategic spending review, which it had been working on for so many months to try to get our country solvent again.

There are 5 Squadrons and 5 Wings based on the station;

- 99 Squadron, flying the C-17 cargo aircraft with its cavernous interior, used to carry passengers and freight to the war theatre and is the first port of call for special Aeromedical tasks bringing critically injured soldiers back from theatre, and indeed from anywhere in the world, and in its critical role each critically injured soldier has no less than 6 professional medical staff in attendance for the entire journey including doctors, anaesthetists and intensive care nurses. Should it be necessary, the aircraft can, and does, get dispatched all the way to the war zone, just for a single critical patient, giving the lie to the rumour that this Government does not look after its wounded personnel as well as it should. This squadron is also used for the repatriation of the fallen as we have seen on our TV screens so often.
- 101 Squadron, flies the venerable VC 10 in Air-to-Air refuelling mode and can refuel two aircraft at a time with hoses deployed from the centre of each wing
- 216 Squadron, which operates the Tristar in passenger and freight mode to operational theatre around the world, is also used extensively for Air-to-Air refuelling with a centreline hose refuelling one aircraft at a time. It can also quickly be configured for a Medevac role to supplement or replace the C-17 as required.
- 501 Squadron and 4624 Squadron are part of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force based at Brize Norton providing a reserve of trained personnel in support of operations.

The five wings are The Operations Wing, The Airborne Delivery Wing, The Base Support Wing, The Forward Support Wing and the APOE Wing (Air Port Of Embarkation).

The Airborne Delivery Wing needs special mention here as we were given a comprehensive tour of their headquarters on the base seeing every aspect of parachute training from ab initio through to deployment into theatre with the extraordinary volume and weight of kit they have strapped to them when they exit the aircraft. We were offered a full pack to sample and few of us could even lift it off the floor – and they would have this on their backs plus a smaller one on their front! The parachutes are rated to support 380 lbs of weight (with a man weighing perhaps 185 lbs in combat gear, that means nearly 200lb of equipment, both weaponry and personal), and in real combat situations, they regularly exceed this figure of 380 lbs. One interesting fact we were told was that sometimes personnel are dropped from as high as 30,000 ft with oxygen with modern ram-air chutes, and if they were dropped, for example, over the English Channel, they could land in a war area as far away as Paris.

Their engineering section will design and manufacture anything that is necessary to ensure that any load, of whatever shape and size, that is required to be dropped into theatre has all the safety features tried and tested to ensure it is safe inside the aircraft and does not compromise the aircraft itself, and its integrity will remain secure both on leaving the aircraft and on reaching the ground, whether dropped at low level or from height.

Probably the highlight of our visit was a 2½ hour trip in a Tristar for a refuelling sortie over the North Sea. Tasked for departure at 0945, we were wheels-rolling on the dot and routed across the middle of the country to arrive over the coast at Boston at 16,000 ft. We went round and round our allotted rectangle of around 40 miles long by 15 miles wide, waiting for 3 Tornados to appear. Surprisingly they were late and only two appeared as one had gone 'tech'. They latched onto the probe trailing from the centreline and each one sucked up two tons of fuel in about 4 minutes – the first one formation closely on the starboard wing after refuelling, smiling and waving to 30 cameras clicking away while his playmate collected his two tons. No: 2 then joined his leader on our wingtip for his moment of camera fame before they both departed to do whatever they had to do at taxpayers expense.

We were expecting a couple of Typhoons to appear, but they had pushed off somewhere for some unknown reason, but we did however collect a wandering singleton happy to take on a couple of tons as we had it going spare. Then it was time to get back to the station as the aircraft had to be prepared for an early afternoon task. The return was uneventful, but the landing could best be described as firm, and at worst described as awful! You may well imagine the ribaldry that ensued from 30 critical pilots in the back! For the entire trip except the first and last couple of minutes, we were at liberty to do as we pleased, go where we pleased and ask as many searching questions as we pleased. At no time were there less than about 6 extra people in the cockpit all straining over one another to see everything, and ask questions. The two pilots and the engineer made themselves as small as they could and continued to humour us all – even while the refuelling was going on. I suppose basically all they had to do was to fly around and around a racetrack trailing fighters. The height was held with the autopilot, but the roll and heading was conducted manually.

The whole exercise had taken 2½ hours of expensive Tristar time, and burned 20 tons of fuel, whilst giving away just 6 tons. It doesn't seem very cost effective to me – but I suppose it has to be done in order to be prepared for the war situation. Fully laden she can carry about 130 tons of fuel of which 96 tons is carried in the wings. That is perfect when she is flying, but is seems a hell of a weight for the wheels and wing spars to support while she is on the ground.

That evening we were entertained to a typical Officers mess dinner in full mess uniform and excellent food and wine in true Air Force tradition, (it struck me that however big the defence cutbacks, the Officers Mess dining experience would always be lavish!). Speeches concluded the evening with continued reference to the interesting 'arrival' after our North Sea sortie, much to the embarrassment of the pilot, Wing Commander Al Green, who just happened to be our co-ordinating host for the flying part of our visit.

Wednesday morning was set aside for a few of our aircraft to give a bit of payback time to some of the station personnel, by flying them and giving them some hands-on experience for a half hour or so in the local area. It was the very least we could do after the generous time we had been given by everyone on the

station.

Incidentally, the spending revue confirmed that Brize Norton will become the primary RAF station in the country (she operates 24/7 all year round, unlike most other stations which close about 4pm on a Friday and heaven help us if the Russians come!). Lyneham will close and be absorbed into Brize, bringing their Hercules with them. That means that the personnel at Brize will swell from 4,000 at present to 7,000 by 2013.

The Hercules will gradually be phased out for replacement with the Airbus A400M, and the VC 10's are to be phased out within a couple of years followed by the Tristars (both aircraft becoming more and more difficult and expensive to keep airworthy) until the tanking fleet will be completely replaced by a modern fleet of Airbus A330 tankers – much more economical and only requiring two crew instead of three. Thus the whole fleet will eventually be rationalised to three aircraft types, the C-17, the A400M, and the A330 tanker.

Martin Gosling

Unfit to Fly by Hugh Thompson





UNFIT TO FLY?



A civil pilot's lucky career





Hugh Thompson was born to a country farming family at Milson in South Shropshire and was educated at Hightree House, Lentwardine, Aymestrey School, near Worcester, and Lucton School, near Leominster in Herefordshire. Fascinated about flying from the age of 11 having seen the X-15 Rocket Plane on film, he learnt to fly at Shobdon airfield in Herefordshire shortly after leaving school and has had a varied career in aviation ever since; flying aircraft as diverse as the De Havilland Beaver, Scottish Aviation Twin Pioneer, Twin Otter and the Shorts SD 360; acquiring over 12,000 Hours to date. He continues to fly occasionally as a part time instructor and currently lives with his partner Wendy near to Ludlow. He hopes to find a new employment connected with aviation, and is prepared to be grounded for good if need be!

FOR ENQUIRIES AND ORDERS

e-mail thompsonmilson@talk21.com
or
Telephone: 01584 711986
(Mobile: 07702 077996)

Price £10 plus Postage and Packing

The book title, Unfit to Fly, sums up the content of this publication nicely for the author has achieved and enjoyed a varied aviation career as a civilian pilot despite a medical condition which threatened to curtail his flying before it had even began. Had the Civil Aviation Authority had its way, this book would never have been written.

The theme of the book is one of determination to succeed against the odds, overcoming several periods of redundancy which ironically has made the writer's flying more varied and interesting. It is hoped that readers will be given encouragement to pursue a career in flying even if they have had a poor start to life; if you want to succeed, you can, provided you put in the effort and study hard. There is also a flight safety element to the book as Hugh has been happy to reveal some remarkably lucky escapes which he hopes will help to prevent similar incidents happening to other pilots.

He has also created and developed a small airstrip in south Shropshire at "Milson" which he is proud to declare as his legacy to aviation. His efforts to overcome planning difficulties are given a particular emphasis. The Ruskin quote relates to this achievement.

Anyone wishing to fly will find this book interesting and useful, but if you can already, it will be an interesting read about someone else's flying history. Enjoy it.

Forward.

It is a great pleasure for me to write this forward to Hugh Thompson's very well written book "Unfit to Fly?"

Hugh came into my life when he started his regular Sunday afternoon walks from Lucton School to Shobdon Airfield in 1967; although I held an Assistant Flying Instructor's rating for a number of years, Hugh had finished his Private Pilot's Licence training before I qualified as an AFI, but I do see his name in my logbooks for a number of type checks at later dates.

When Hugh moved on from his regular instructing and parachute pilot duties at Shobdon in 1974, I lost touch with his career, even though he used to come back to visit us from time to time.

Each time that I have read through the various drafts of this book, I have become more fascinated by the great variety of flying, both paid and unpaid, that Hugh has undertaken in his 43 year flying career; and each time I have found more intriguing snippets that I had missed on previous readings.

This book is different from most aviation stories; not only is it well researched and well written but it gives readers an excellent example of what determination, good flying and good instructional discipline, can achieve - and Hugh does not hide his occasional mistakes, nor spare us from his occasional red-faced moments.

There are several well know sayings in aviation, one of which is "I learned about flying from that..." In my case I learned about flying my self-built Shaw Europa from Hugh - for his instruction I am eternally grateful, after almost 10 years of incident free flying in my magical aeroplane.

Thank you, Hugh, for writing and publishing this excellent story about your flying career - and for all you have done for General Aviation over the years. You have shown enormous initiative and courage in pursuing your career against all the medical odds - and we must be very grateful to you for sharing your experience and your adventures with your readers. I wish you every success with this book.

David Corbett.
Shobdon. August 2010.

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