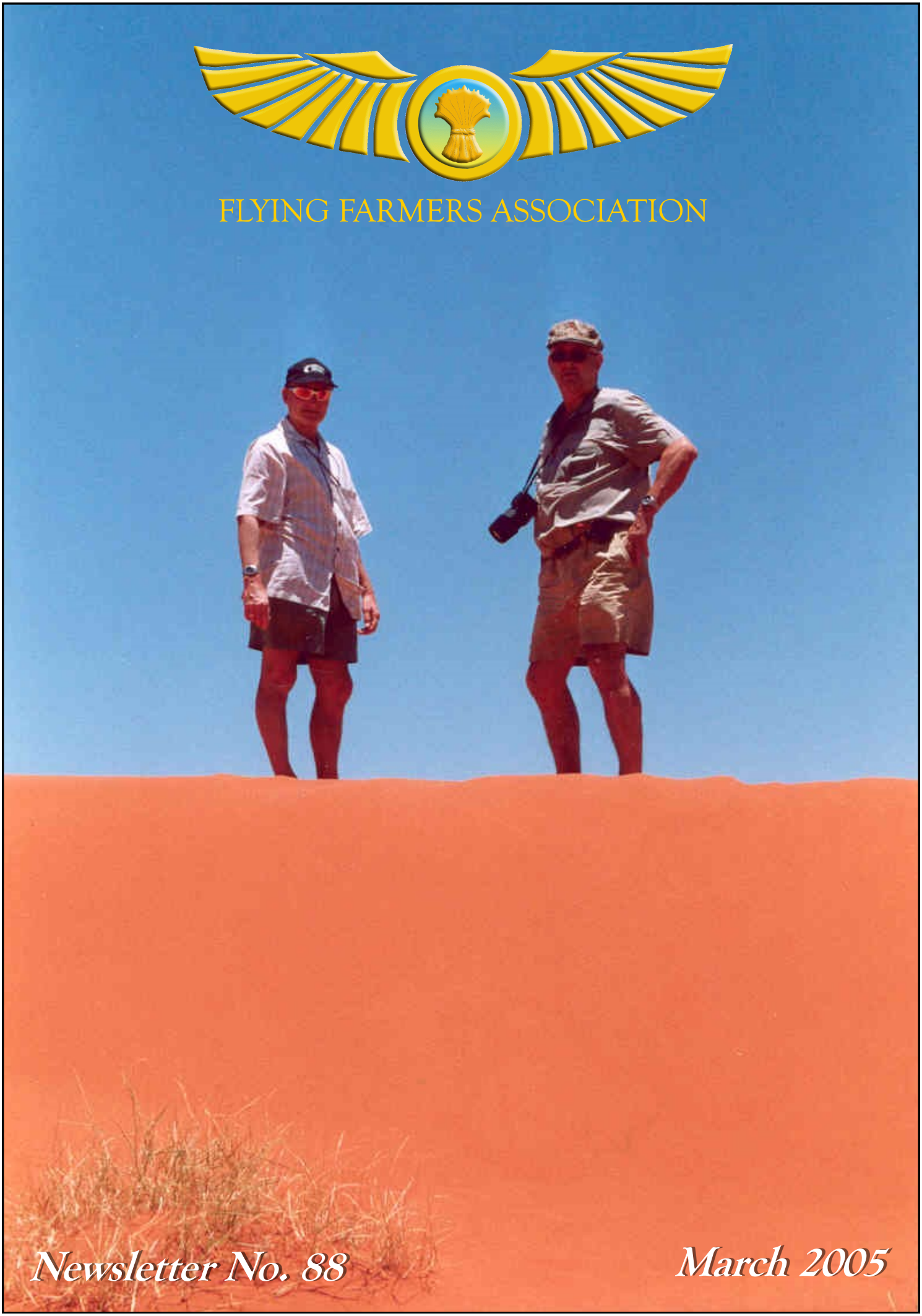
FLYING FARMERS ASSOCIATION



Newsletter No. 88

March 2005

Opening Thoughts

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Cover photograph;

Bill Burton & Tony Fisher in the outback somewhere near Windorah, Queensland, Australia. Photograph by David Corbett. See the article starting on page 6

Chairman's Message

As time goes by we learn a little more about the Single Farm Payment/cross compliance/ GAEC/ELS/OELS/HLS. It feels to me like a climb through mist and cloud, trying to get VMC on top – on the way up we seem to encounter more cloud and uncertainty, and the brief brighter areas soon give way to inhospitable darker ones. Before we achieve cross compliance etc etc etc will we have picked up too much ice to make it to the top?

At least some of aviation's problems seem to have gone away for a while. Just how the authorities could devise a system to collect navigation charges from VFR pilots on local flights has yet to be made clear.

On a happier note, spring is coming, the evenings are getting lighter and the days are getting longer (by 20 minutes a week during February). Hard work beckons, but will hopefully sometimes let up enough for us to enjoy the delights of the air.

We have some interesting events planned for the coming year – I hope to see many of you there.

John Golden

Editor's Notes

These newsletter seem to come round all too quickly! Despite the pessimism in some quarters of agriculture, the Flying Farmers Association is stronger than ever. The Committee meet twice a year and have good debates about the future of the FFA with changing agricultural and political practice (see page 3). The events are nearly always fully subscribed and we have a steady flow of new applicants. Adding a new dimension to the Association, Bruce Sharpe from the Queensland / NSW border in Australia has joined and the Vacher family, well known for round the world epics and restoring a Hawker Hurricane, have joined. We look forward to them offering articles and interest for us all in the future.

Please make sure I have your up to date email addresses. There is a possibility that we could do bulk emails to members of any FFA news or changes to programmes. If your address is different to the one published in the membership list or you are not listed, you won't get the bulletins.

Wanted - Participants for another Tour of Australia 2005

Following a very successful tour in November 2004, we are looking for anyone interested in doing the same tour again in November 2005.

There are already some members who want to go, but to make a tour, at least 2 more couples are needed. For more information see the article in the December 2004 newsletter, or a collection of excellent photographs by David Corbett in this issue, or contact Paul Stephens who has done a number of tours in conjunction with GOANA.

FFA Tours and Events Book

I have reprinted and brought up to date the 77 page FFA Tours and Events book, first published three years ago. It follows the history of the FFA from 1974 to 2004 and details all the events held.

Maps are included with all places visited both at home and abroad, with a European map depicting the routes taken on the tours covering 25 different countries.

This second edition has been much improved and will be of interest to those that would like a record of all the events and to new members who want to know more about how the FFA was founded and where we've been over the last 30 years.

Available from Paul Stephens at £15 to cover the printing and postage costs, by returning the enclosed reply slip.

Committee Members

Dick Walgate	President	01472 371203
John Golden	Chairman	01725 552384
Paul Stephens	Secretary	01944 738281
David Corbett	Treasurer	01568 708351
Mike Cuttell	Events Secretary	01242 236770
Martin Gosling	Airstrip Advice	01787 269369
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Mike Ashmole	Committee Member	01738 627622

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FFA Airfield Owners and Operators Scheme

Hayward Aviaition have increased the premiums for the FFA airfield insurance scheme to cover liability.

They now start at £195 for £500,000 cover and £303 for £1,000,000 of cover. This is for up to 100 third party annual movements. Hangarkeepers liability can be added for £75 and £150 correspondingly, but limited to £50,000 any one aircraft.

For more information, contact Tim Proctor at Hayward Aviation tel: 0207 902 7800. Please give your FFA membership number.

The FFA Committee Meeting, Nottingham 2nd February 2005.

The matter that is being debated longest and hardest is whether to form a new category of membership in order to accept Associate members. Some of the Committee feel that there are those that would like to join the FFA, but they are either not eligible or borderline. People such as land agents and vets might be pilots and fraternize with the farming community, but as they maybe don't own any land, they don't fulfil the requirements of eligibility. More will come clear at the next AGM.

Our hard working Events Secretary has produced another programme for 2005 and is already gathering ideas for 2006. More can be seen on page 4 of this issue. We would like to maintain the agricultural aspect to these visits, but need members to come forward with invitations either to their own strips or their locality, especially in the north of the country. The AGM venue and ideas for future European tours were discussed.

Some of you might have noticed a brief safety report in Pilot magazine in January. This involved the participants of the FFA Irish Tour 2004. Martin Gosling immediately followed this up and found that an overloading of the Aldergrove frequency report was submitted, when the tour went through their area. No blame was directed at the FFA or the tour organiser as our responsibility ended with the filing of the flight plans. It appears the problem lay with the way the flight plans were forwarded to Belfast from Dublin, where they were filed.

Any unlicensed airstrip developers or those looking for advice about existing strips, should check a CAA document, CAP 428 which you can find on the CAA website or on our own website on the Forms page. It is very comprehensive and is well worth a read through.

Water in the Fuel

One of our members has an underground avgas tank with a metal breather pipe. Unbeknown to him, the breather pipe has rotted at ground level and let water into the tank. Luckily the water, a considerable amount, was detected in the aircraft tank during the pre-flight inspection.

Amazingly, the same member filled his Range Rover with diesel and it stopped a few yards down the road after refuelling. Exactly the same had happened with his underground motor fuel tank, now converted from petrol to diesel!

Maybe time to check your installation.

A Place in Africa

A friend of our President (Dick Walgate) has drawn his attention to a fruit farm for sale in South Africa for approximately £625,000.

It is known as Canning Croft and is situated in the picturesque Elgin Valley approximately, around 75 km from Cape Town. This area is one of the most sought after fruit and wine producing sub-areas of the Boland region. The farm has 13.5 hectares of orchards in full production, 1.25 hectares of young orchards, 7.25 of fallow and 9.6 of dwellings, buildings, dams, river, roads and garden. Total area is 31.605 hectares.

The present owner is due for retirement and indicated that his son will be more than happy to stay on as manager.

See the back cover for the advertisement. If you're interested , either contact Durr Estates direct or email me (Paul Stephens) for more details and photographs.

The Late Jean Hitchman

(written by Mike Rowland)

It is with great sadness I have to inform you that Jean passed away on February 19th. She had not been at all well for the last 12 months.

She very much enjoyed the many flying trips with the late John Hitchman, who was one of the early pioneers of the Flying Farmers. Jean participated in and enjoyed the many social FFA events. They particularly enjoyed France, but travelled extensively all over Europe, including Corsica in one 'hop' in the Robin 210. For several years they also acted as caretakers for Tim Green's farm (the Farmers Weekly farm) in Normandy. John tending to the farm and Jean the housekeeping.

When, a few years ago, they retired and moved to a new house, John looked puzzled and said "what shall we call the new house?". "Robins, of course", Jean instantly retorted, "you've had two of them!"

Jean was a loving, caring person who gave herself to helping others. Two days a week she helped in the local Jubilee Centre as a volunteer helper for the elderly.

She leaves three sons, Simon, Colin and Jonathon and Lesley (Jonathon's wife), who has been so supportive during these last difficult 12 months.

Jean will be long remembered by many of us. I personally shall miss the warm welcome, cups of tea and extremely good fruit cake!

Welcome to New Members

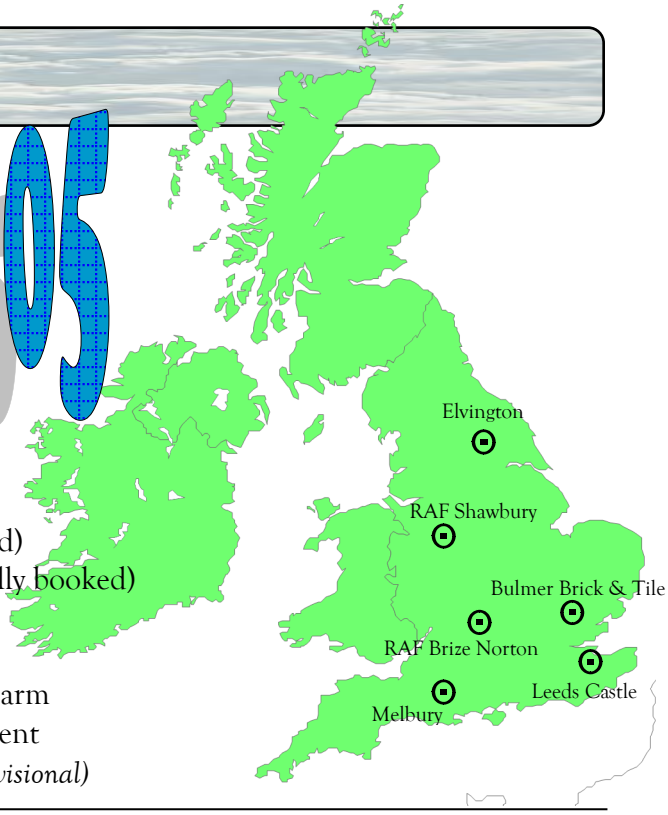
Since 15th December 2004, the following have joined

768	Bruce Sharpe, Comeroo Station, Australia
769	Peter Minter, Sudbury, Suffolk
770	Peter Vacher, Abingdon

Goodbye to

611	Richard Goodenough, Wooton-under-Edge, Glos.
57	Jean Hitchman, Marlborough, Wiltshire

Programme 2005



Wednesday March 9th	RAF Shawbury (Fully booked)
Tuesday March 15th	RAF Brize Norton (Fully booked)
Wednesday April 20th	Bulmer Brick & Tile, Essex (Fully booked)
Wednesday May 18th	Velcourt, Melbury, Nr. Yeovil
Saturday June 4th	The European Tour, Germany
Thursday 30th June	Normandy – Farmers Weekly Farm
Wednesday July 20th	Leeds Castle & Lees gardens, Kent
Wednesday October 19th	AGM, Elvington, Nr. York *(provisional)*

From the Events Secretary

For me the year has started badly. I never dreamt that our 2 RAF visits would be so fraught with difficulties. The response from you was (perhaps understandably) enormous and as your applications were pouring into my office, both Shawbury and Brize suddenly imposed lower limits on numbers than I had agreed. Some of you didn't return completed forms, one or two weren't covered for Crown property and some provided one cheque for both events, which might have been alright until I had to thin down the numbers. It all resulted in lots of phone calls, faxes and letters and despite all that work I guess that some of you were less than happy.

I can only apologise to those who were unhappy and thank those that were so gracious and understanding on the telephone.

What I have promised is to give priority to those who may have been unable to get a slot on one of our visits. If you are one of those, with your next application, please fill it in in red ink and I will do my utmost to see that you are included.

Can I just include one small gripe. Some of you fail to put in your full address or phone number and indeed some of you have writing so bad that you could easily have become doctors.

I know I have a membership list and I can look you all up, but all this takes time and like you, I have a full time job and something else has to give way to let me do this for the Association.

Upon reflection, what would help enormously would be if each applicant would provide a SAE. This is something we might ask for in the future to help the organiser.

We are still earnestly looking for interesting farming venues, even if they are only half a day, as long as there is some other activity to combine with it. The Velcourt visit is a good example.

What about our northern members. Surely there must be something going on north of Birmingham?

Mike Cuttell

Future European Tours

The Committee would like to suggest some destinations for future European tours which might spark off some ideas and contacts from you. Please send your ideas to Paul Stephens (chix@farmline.com or by fax to 01944 738240). What we also need are organisers for these tours. Help and advice can be given by Committee members, all of whom have organised events in the past.

The suggested destinations, chosen as we haven't centred tours on them as yet are

2006 Italy
2007 Belgium
2008 Norway
2009 Switzerland
2010 Bulgaria/ Romania

Already, one member has given us some useful information about Italy. If anyone has experience of flying in these countries, it would be very much appreciated if you were to take on the job of organising the tour. Believe me, from past experience, it can be a very interesting and satisfying experience.

2007

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.

Wednesday, 18th May 2005. Velcourt

Organiser—Roger Bell

09:30 Arrive either at Melbury Airstrip or Yeovil Judwin
10:45 Coffee and introduction at Melbury House
11:15 Visit Evershot Farms.
13:00 Light lunch at Melbury House
14:00 Visit Abbotsbury Sub Tropical Gardens and Abbotts bury Swannery.
17:00 Depart

Evershot Farm's main enterprise is a 1450 cow dairy unit, plus other commercial rural activities which will be of interest to members.

The Abbottsbury Sub Tropical Gardens, the estate's 20 acre garden, is filled with rare and exotic plants from all over the world, many of which are species which are grown in the tropics. The Swannery, which is sheltered by the famous Chesil Beach, houses a colony of friendly Mute Swans. It's origins go back 600 years to the Benediction Monastery.

Velcourt's own airstrip is not particularly long (575m) and has hedges at both ends. They will not allow us to put more than 15 aircraft into there, the balance will go to Judwin. If any of you prefer Judwin, please put a J on the application form. Those pilots totally happy with the constraints of the Melbury strip, please put a M on the slip. This will be of great help to our co-ordinator.

Please return your reply slips by 1st April. The cost will be £18 a head payable to Roger Bell. All applications to enclose a SAE please. Numbers will be restricted to 50.

Saturday June 4th to Sunday June 12th, Berlin & other parts of Germany

Organiser—Martin Gosling

The original plans for this tour proved unworkable due to difficulties with the intended hosts.

I have reluctantly stepped into the breach to try to organise something in the same area, but as yet am not able to offer the membership a detailed itinerary. Discussions are still under way with a contact I have in Berlin who specialises in battlefield tours, along with another couple of ideas.

The bare bones at the moment are a visit to the Claas factory in West Germany, (probably at the end of the tour), a visit to a farmer or some contact in the Leipzig area (suggested by another member), and then a period in and around the Berlin area which may include things such as a tour of Colditz and a trip to Peenemunde. My apologies for the vagueness at the moment, but we are working on it, and will produce a more detailed itinerary as and when it is known for those who have shown an interest.

It is important that we have an idea of numbers interested and so I am requesting those members who are, to fill in the application form at the earliest opportunity with a **non-returnable deposit of £100/head** to show their commitment.

As always, there will be a limit to the numbers accepted on the tour (probably 40-45), and members will be accepted strictly on a first-come first-served basis.

Sadly, because of the timing of my involvement, I will be unable to undertake a recce, which is the usual way the organiser confirms details of these tours, so I will instead be relying upon outside helpers in the planning. My hope is that it will be just as enjoyable for the participants as all previous tours have been!

Normandy, 30th June to 1st July 2005

Organiser—Anthony Kedros

The primary purpose of this short trip is to revisit the former Farmers' Weekly farm near Vimoutiers. It is eleven years since we visited Le Ferme de Vimer run by Tim and Chrissie Green, and it should be fascinating to see how their dairy and sheep enterprise has fared. I can tell you, without giving too many secrets away, that they are still very much in business.

We will also visit a local arable farm or, for those who would prefer, the Chateau de Vendeuvre.

Thursday 30 June
- Arrive Deauville Saint-Gatien LFRG
- Taxi to Hotel Continental in town centre
- Dinner

Friday 1 July
- Morning; coach to le Ferme de Vimer
- Lunch (not at the farm)
- Afternoon visit to arable farm or the chateau
- Return by coach to the hotel
- Free evening

Saturday 2 July
- Stay on or depart at will

The estimated average cost will be in the order of £120 per person to include landing & parking fees, two nights bed & breakfast, dinner, lunch, coach and tours; taxi and second dinner excluded. A more accurate costing will be available nearer the time. A £30 deposit on the tear off slip will be required by the 28th March to secure your place.

Wednesday 20th July 2005. Visit to Lees Court and Leeds Castle, Kent

Organiser—Marc Lhermette

We begin our day by landing at Headcorn airfield by 09:30, courtesy of Jamie Freeman, where landing fees have been reduced to £5 per aircraft, or free to any pilot buying a minimum of 40 litres of avgas or avtur. A bus will be waiting to take us to Lees Court, the home and farm of the Countess Sondes.

Lady Sondes grows a range of non food crops which should look at their best at the time of our visit. Her interesting cropping featured in a full page article in The Telegraph last year, mentioning such crops as Echium and Calendula.

We spend the morning at her estate before the bus takes us to Leeds Castle, where a two course lunch has been arranged, following which our passes entitle us to a non guided tour of the castle and grounds. Our coach will return us to Headcorn airfield prior to departure at 17:00.

Items included in the charge will be our coach, the two course lunch and admission to the castle and grounds. Our costs are quite high and we have to place early deposits, so applications should be accompanied by your cheque no later than 1st April. Cheques for £32 per head should be made payable to Marc Lhermette with a SAE, who has kindly offered to run the visit for the FFA.

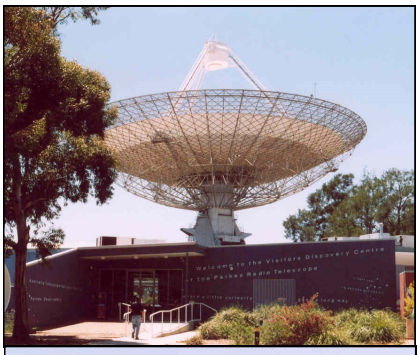
Australia 2004, David Corbett's Memories

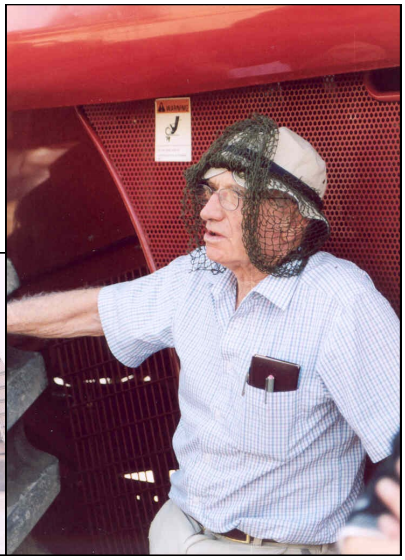




The owner of Kings Plain Castle, Don Hollingworth, describes his farming activities before setting off on a drive around his 6000 acre cattle and sheep station. As we flew on next day towards Moree, we passed over some interesting examples of contour farming – much practiced in Australia and parts of Midwest USA. Approaching Moree, we flew over a pecan nut farm, this one with its own landing strip. The pecan nut trees are 40-50 ft high, and have to be pruned annually to prevent them growing into the inter-row space; a series of pruning machines, with enormous vertically-revolving pruning heads, were in the yard at the farm that we visited – which had 75000 trees on 1720 acres. The largest pruning machine was mounted on a chassis on crawler tracks. Each morning, before take-off (this photo is at Moree), we had a quick briefing on the weather (as far as could be found out) and details of the strip/airfield into which we were to fly. Joe Greenhatch, our tour leader, is in the black T-shirt in the centre of the group. There was an enormous grain silo and railhead adjoining Moree airfield; shortly after departing Moree, we passed over this "on-the-floor" grain store – in the early stages of filling and being sheeted over. The Parkes radio telescope is shown in its maintenance position, ie horizontal. Soon after we arrived, it altered its elevation to about 45' as we watched. Then we see Neil Unger's airstrip – with fungicide treated wheat looking very well each side of the strip. All his unharvested wheat was destroyed in a savage bush fire about 3 weeks after we were there – see the February and March editions of Arable Farming for Neil's reports of this horrendous event. The radio telescope is about 1 mile to the right of the airstrip in this photo. The next photo shows Neil telling it all to Jim Anderson – with his enormous machinery barn in the background. Neil then took us to his brother Geoff's station about 5 miles away; here we see Geoff's empty grain store with a grain "semi" and our bus showing the scale of the building. We then drove into Parkes and stopped at the local Case dealer; we see John Dunford getting some relief from the flies and the











sun.

At Haddon Rig – the house and the adjoining Jackeroo Lodge are seen from the air – George Falkiner arrived to greet us from doing the rounds on his motorbike (he also had a rally equipped Porsche 911, in which he had done a London-Sydney Rally, just out of this photo); and we see Merino rams awaiting shearing on our second day at Haddon. On arrival at Haddon Rig, we were warned to tie down our aircraft securely – winds of 90 (kph or knots?) were expected that afternoon – and the violent wind and heavy rain arrived later. On our tour that afternoon, before seeing the 3 "headers" at work, we passed many of the Haddon Rig reservoirs – all completely dry, leading to George's decision not to plant cotton in 2004. We were also taken to see the original Haddon Rig farmhouse – miles from anywhere, and now a "listed building", and quite well preserved because the atmosphere is so dry. The river close to the present house was very low, but there were lots of beautiful birds.











En route to Commeroo – where we see ancient and modern transport together on their airstrip – we passed over an area where bunds had been created to catch what water could be saved to moisten their small patches of "terrace farming". Our hosts at Commeroo were Chris and Bruce Sharpe. After a tour of their station – very dry, and only a few cattle and sheep to be seen, although there was a lot of scrub in which the livestock could hide – Bruce took a few of us to this artesian-fed hot tub in the middle of nowhere. It is Penny Corbett who is throwing her empty beer bottle out of the photo! The following day, en route to Birdsville, we flew over these and many other similar amazing patterns – the inspiration, so we were told – for much of the Aborigine art so prevalent in Australia. That's all there is of the town of Birdsville – the tarmac runway stands out clearly, the dirt cross runway is harder to see. When we were there, we had no idea that that lake was there! The famous Birdsville racetrack, used for one race meeting in September each year, is just out of the photo to the left; they expect to get up to 350 aircraft parked on the airfield for this event!













One of the characters of Birdsville is the resident artist, Wolfgang John, a German who has been there for many years. Although his gallery was closed – most of his pictures had been packed to go off next day for exhibition at Cairns, he opened the door to a few of us when he heard us chatting outside. You can see the amazing colour of his work. Opposite his gallery was the town's power station – all power is generated by heat from artesian water. As we flew on towards Windorah, I got a good air-to-air of Goana Six – Jim and Angus Anderson. We were flying over sparse but apparently very productive cattle country, with occasional water holes fed by windmills, or in some cases by solar power. We were greeted at the Western Star Hotel at Windorah (even smaller than Birdsville) by Sandy Kidd in his working clothes – Wendy was having her post flight reviver!





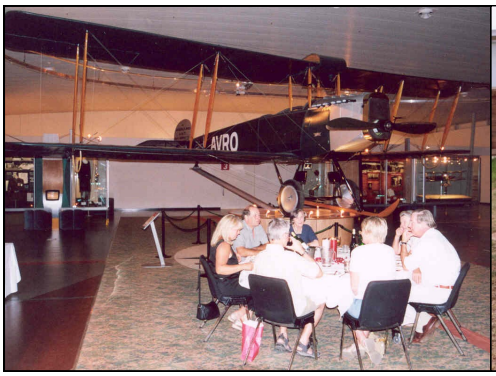
Sandy led us off on a lightning tour of a tiny part of his enormous station. We stopped at one point, and Bill Burton and Tony Fisher climbed up a sand-dune to survey the local scenery (see front cover). After Sandy's guided tour (you only heard what he had to say at each stop if your "ute" driver drove as fast as Sandy!), a local Helicopter Jackeroo, David (who flies 1000 hours a year in his R22) , and the hotel owner took 8 of us for a local scenic drive; we then went on for a further 20 minutes to the famous dingo fence, which is still fully maintained to this day. Whilst driving almost flat out alongside the fence, we caught up with a 'roo, and then with this emu male with his 8 children. We then stopped alongside the fence and found this real Goana! On the way to and from the dingo fence, we crossed Coopers Creek in the Channel Country. At Longreach, we visited the Stockman's Hall of Fame – a fascinating history of life in the outback, beautifully presented – you could easily spend a whole day there. And then, at the Qantas Founders Museum, we found this recently constructed full size replica of Qantas' first ever aircraft, a DH 61. Qantas started life as the Queensland and Northern Territories Aerial Service.

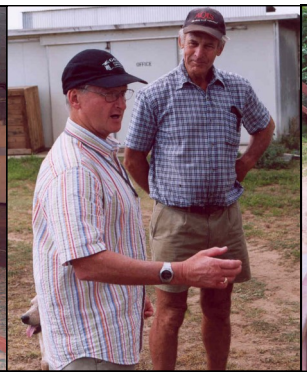














After an informal "after hours" tour of the Founders Museum, we then dined under this AVRO. Two days later, at Mitchell, we were shown around a small pig farm, owned by an ex-pat from Epping, London, seen here being thanked by Bill Burton. He is one a very few pig farmers around – he was fattening his own weaners to various weights for different local customers. Mitchell has a main road bridge over the local river; each of its 10 piers has recently had 2 murals painted on as part of a local art project. This mural seemed particularly appropriate as, a few days earlier, we had stood in silence on Armistice Day at Haddon Rig. Later that day, Gavin Henry took a few of us for a safari drive around his 6000 acre cattle station just outside Mitchell; the first photograph shows Gavin and Tony Fisher before we set off, and the second a typical scene on his station. All Gavin's cattle looked incredibly well.





At Bunderberg, after visiting the rum factory, we looked at a sugar cane farm on the outskirts of town; this farmer, and his brother – who also drove our coach as his "second job" – described the operations on this 150 acre farm supplying cane to the sugar processing plant adjoining the rum factory.

And finally – on behalf of all our group of 14 members, wives, and one son, I would like to pass on our heartfelt thanks to Paul and Roz for the enormous effort that they put in to organising this fantastic trip, in conjunction with Mal and Marjorie Shipton, owners of GOANA Air Safaris; it has been a truly memorable experience. Let us hope that Mal and Marjorie can keep GOANA in operation, and that the other members of FFA who have already put their names down for the 2005 tour will indeed get their holiday.



Thank you again, Paul – here you are seen charming "Cocky" to display his head feathers after arriving back at Redcliffe.



The participants were;
Jim & Angus Anderson, Bill & Wendy Burton, David & Penny Corbett, John Dunford & Tony Fisher, Richard & Joyce Hall, Paul & Roz Stephens and Ian & Marion Weston.
We flew a total of 2270 nautical miles as the crow flies (actually quite a bit more as we would weave about a bit) in about 28 hours.

Anyone interested in making up another tour for November 2005, please contact Paul Stephens asap. GOANA *have now sorted out their problems and are continuing business in a smaller but more financially secure way.*

Alpi Aviation Pioneer 300

I recently had the good fortune of being able to visit the Apli Aviation's main factory at Comina Airfield in Northern Italy, and fly their very popular Pioneer 300. This followed a brief visit to see the UK agent for the aircraft, Mr Frank Cavaciuti, who suggested I visit the factory during a recent weekend stay in nearby Venice. Corrado Rusalen the Managing Director allowed me to examine the factory's production line in detail and then offered me a 45 minute familiarization flight in a recently constructed example which had a variable pitch prop and retractable gear.

I was very favourably impressed by the aircraft, especially its apparent difficultly to stall whatever its configuration and its excellent handling characteristics during take off and landing. Having pre-read a recent PFA magazine article I already had a good idea of what to expect but found that the example aircraft had an airspeed indication in Kilometres. However, this proved to be no problem as Corrado told me to base my climb and descent profiles on 90 kph! Having examined some examples under construction in the main hangar, I also had a good idea of how the various systems worked; although kit built aircraft for the UK PFA market have to have a modified undercarriage suspension and a different fuel cock selector fitted.





After a good external examination of the aircraft, we taxied out and got airborne quickly, flew east from the field in perfect CAVOK weather at 1000 feet (we could not go higher due to military activity from the nearby Aviano airbase). I flew the aircraft throughout the flight and being a tailwheel trained pilot, found myself trying to use the rudder in turns which is NOT required. I examined the stall in the conventional way first but Corrado then took control and stalled it in turns, flaps up and down with power on and off. Just letting go of the stick allowed it to recover immediately. There was little if any warning of a stall at around 30-35 Kph when lightly loaded but you have to be an idiot to get anywhere near it during normal flying. I am told the PFA require a stall warning device on UK aircraft but personally I do not think that is necessary if you have been trained properly in the first place.

The speed range of the aircraft equipped with a variable pitch prop and retractable gear is impressive and similar to the Europa. Speeds around 230 Kph (130 Knots) are easily achieved and although there is no gear lowering limit speed you should slow down a little before doing so! A window in the cabin floor allows you to visually check that the nose gear is indeed down. However, I must confess to not having looked at it myself. If you do forget a warning will sound when you lower flap; unless of course you decide to make a fast flapless approach; so be warned!

You do have to reduce the speed fur1her before lowering any flap but that limit is given on the ASI and the amount of flap is easily set by looking at graduated marks on the port flap. Trimming is also achieved with an electric trim but I felt the gauge operated the wrong way round. A trim switch on the stick itself would have made it easier to adjust and find in flight. Everything is electrically controlled but in case of a total electrics failure the gear can be lowered manually with a stowed handle.

Returning to the circuit, with a little help from Corrado who









was doing the radio and navigation, I specifically asked if I could fly a number of take offs and landings. I got him to talk me through the figures on the first one then got on with it myself. Initially I tried to be gentle and give myself plenty of room on the approach but soon realised that the aircraft was capable of a steep descent and very short landing, even with a calm surface wind. Handling is surprisingly easy and conventional and would pose no problem to any well trained and low houred PPL or NPPL holder.

What I did find as a tailwheel trained pilot, was a tendency to hold the nosewheel off the ground after touchdown. I remember Corrado on more than one occasion reminding me to lower the nosewheel to the ground before initiating another take off. Although it is possible to get airborne with full flap down I raised them to 15 degrees prior to getting airborne and also made sure the propeller pitch was set to fine. There is a light which, I think, indicates fine pitch only. However, like the trim I found that the electrical pitch control for the prop was not prominent enough in my view, and difficult to locate while in the circuit. What I did find was a good sized and accurate manifold pressure gauge which made it easy to control the power requirement during the climb, approach and while in the circuit. (These gauges would be a welcome addition in other variable pitch propeller type aircraft)

Finally to impress me about his confidence in the aircraft we climbed overhead the airfield and shut down the engine before making a glide approach back for a slightly downwind landing. We did remember to lower the gear but I fear that could be easily forgotten in an emergency. However having said that, I am aware of a forced landing in a Pioneer 300 where with the exception of the pitot tube and propeller which unfortunately stopped vertically, no damage was done.

I promised Corrado a frank and honest report based on my first impressions. I found the aircraft a very safe and easy aircraft to fly with no worrying vices and excellent lookout but I was critical of the Trimmer and Pitch Controls which I found difficult to find and operate easily. Concern has been expressed about the brake lever but since that is only used on the ground to park it, I did not find it a problem. Also the throttle lever which was set at an odd angle and needs changing but that problem has already been rectified on all subsequent kits. The canopy has only one lock but although it is obvious and works well, I feel a secondary lock might be a good idea. I do however think that the gear could easily be left in the up position as I personally did not look through the floor window to check it was down. The specific aircraft we flew also had a large padlocked handle which turned out to be an optional final option recovery parachute! This, I was told, was not to be used.

The Pioneer 300, its smaller sister the microlight fixed gear version, the 200, and the aerobatic 330 version are well constructed, all wooden wonders; and should sell well, just like the Europa did when that aircraft first came into being. If you have adequate funds available seriously examine this one before making a choice.

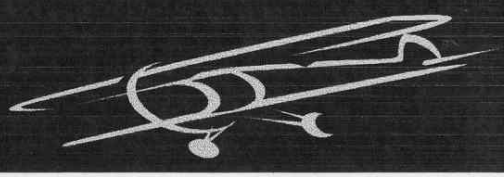
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