

October 2003

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Last meeting - 11th September

For our first meeting back after the summer break, we were pleased to welcome Terry Francis of Reality Aircraft, along with his wife Kate, who brought along their latest model, the Escapade, for us to look over. The aircraft was towed on its custom trailer to the BAWA car park, where we were able to inspect the fine workmanship at close quarters and ask any number of searching questions.

One intriguing feature of the aircraft is the ability to convert from nose-wheel to tail-wheel configuration in less than an hour, thus catering for a wide range of operating conditions, not to mention pilot preference! The Escapade is constructed from conventional steel tube and fabric, but the design of the fuselage structure allows for a large cargo area behind the twin seats capable of carrying up to 60 Kg without exceeding C of G limits, and even provides sleeping accommodation for that camping weekend away. With quoted take off and landing rolls of only 100 metres fully loaded this is a true short strip aeroplane. See the reality website <http://www.realityaircraft.com/> for the full story, and reports on its further development. Our thanks to Terry and Kate for a very informative and entertaining evening.

AGM - This months meeting - 9th October

Do try to make it for this important meeting, as there will be discussions about Strut activities in the coming year. Nigel wonders if everybody was happy with his attendance at NC meetings being affected by his job otherwise he will continue. As both Alan and Gordon have expressed a willingness to stand again as Coordinator and Treasurer respectively, there should be no more than a formal re-election of officers this year. Hopefully the business bit can be disposed of fairly quickly, allowing more time for interesting discussion! An Agenda is attached to the newsletters circulated to members giving an idea of what to expect.

The Minutes recorded from last year's AGM are also attached to this newsletter (for members only) so when you come to the meeting they can be taken as read. Gordon will present his customary Balance Sheet, and will no doubt be able to tell us how the membership was affected by offering free sign-ups during 2003. If you have any items to bring to the meeting please get them in writing (or e-mail) to Alan in good time.

Next month - November meeting

We look forward to meeting John Lewis, test pilot for the Shuttleworth Collection, who has agreed to come along and talk about the rare and fascinating aircraft that they operate, and specifically the 1930 Granger Archaeopteryx. Two brothers in Nottingham, R F T and R J T Granger built the aircraft, after they had seen the Westland-Hill Pterodactyl. The brothers flew the aircraft many times near Nottingham and once ventured as far as Hatfield; G-ABXL was the only specimen built and was flown between 1930 and 1936. It was stored for thirty years before being handed to the Collection, and it flew again in 1971. Now maintained in airworthy condition but not currently permitted to fly.



Photo by Dave Stewart

Where to go in October

Free landings in **October** with -

Pilot Magazine: Fenland, Lands End, North Coates, Retford (Gamston), Shipdham and Stapleford.

In Flyer magazine: Andrewsfield, Donegal, Shobdon, Swansea

And in Today's Pilot: Free Landing with lunch!: Shobdon, Elstree, Maypole, Lashenden, Thruxton and Eaglescott (no lunch included here)

Bristol Aviation Enthusiasts' Fair

Sunday 2nd November 10.00 - 16.00 @ BAWA Leisure Centre Southmead Road.

Admission £1.50 Children/OAP £1 Buy, Sell, Exchange or just browse.

Enquiries and stall bookings: Jack Thomas 01278 760448 or 07949 064720

Looking ahead...

In keeping with tradition, it's the Strut Quiz once again in **December**. This year, Spike Parker has taken on the role of Questionmaster so we can expect an evening full of fun and surprises, with the occasional mince pie to keep the concentration in focus. Spike would like to know how many teams to plan for, so if you can form a team with 2 or 3 close friends please let Alan know you're coming along. Indeed, if you are on your own looking to join a team then do let him know anyway. And don't forget to bring along some food items for the buffet as well!

For our first meeting in the New Year, **January 8th 2004**, we will have David Willmott giving an illustrated talk titled "A Life in Aviation". David was a competitive aero-modeller in his teens and entered the RAF as a cadet pilot for his National Service. In the following 45 years he flew for more than 25 airlines and companies flying 53 different types of aircraft. These varied from Avro Tudors to glass cockpit MD-83. He lived in various parts of Africa for a total of 7 years and his adventures included being hijacked. He retired in 1999 with a logbook total of close to 26,000 hours, as Chief Pilot of a UK airline, a CAA Type and Instrument Rating examiner and is still flying privately as he approaches his 70th year.

Young Air League members get to fly the British Airways Simulator!

Readers will remember the news in last month's Strutter about Andrew Ferrington getting through to the first round for a Flying Scholarship with the Air League. He attended a very interesting weekend at Cranwell in September, thoroughly enjoyed the experience, and now awaits the results of his endeavours sometime in November. Meanwhile, he has applied for, and won, an opportunity to tour the Cranefield Training Centre at Heathrow, which will include a hands-on session in the 757 or 767 simulator. Andrew is one of only 12 entrants who have impressed the Director sufficiently to qualify! We're sure he will enjoy this experience as well and maybe he will let us know how he gets on.

Looking back ...

Over the summer, several people have been to interesting places, but we have yet to hear from them, so to kick it off we have included a write-up of our trip across the water. As the nights are drawing in and there's a chill in the air just remember those lazy, hazy, crazy days of summer



A Scilly Summer Break

Recounted by Ian & Mary Leader

We have often thought of planning a trip to the Scottish Islands, but for various reasons it hasn't happened yet. Time away from two very busy work schedules was the main culprit, but even when holidays came around the weather would always refuse to co-operate.

So, this summer, when we actually had time to play with, and long sultry evenings in store, we got out the Scottish half-mill purchased at the rally especially for this trip. Green lines were drawn between waypoints and fuel calculations completed, and for the first time Mull actually seemed achievable. We had equipped ourselves with free landing vouchers from the bookshelf magazines which helped considerably with the overall budget, and also helped to influence our route which would take in several new airfields for the logbook.

The schedule was planned to begin on the Saturday, but doubts began to creep in with the discovery that the very airfields we needed for fuel were closed on Sundays. However, it was still possible to follow the master plan by re-timing the departure date, although a precious day of the holiday would be sacrificed in the process. The conundrum was solved for us by the weather man on Friday evening - a front was due to arrive right across the Scottish Isles on Monday, and little change was expected for days to come.

A rapid re-think was in order, so what does every good aviator do when faced with bad weather? A one eighty reverse turn was a good idea, so we looked south towards the Scilly Isles instead! The weather forecast for Cornwall was for at least a week of wall-to-wall sunshine, so how could we lose? Ironically, St Mary's airport is also closed on Sundays (remember our article some years ago?) but Bodmin isn't, so that settled the plan. We would pack the tent in the plane and enjoy a leisurely jaunt to Cornwall on Sunday, setting us in pole position for a morning crossing to the Islands after a night under canvas at Bodmin.

The folk at Bodmin airfield could not be more welcoming; on a previous visit we had dropped in to re-fuel and had been encouraged to camp beside the aircraft after enjoying the hospitality of the local watering hole. A brief phone call to the airfield manager, Mark Taylor, confirmed we could do the same again, and an added bonus was the promise of Sunday Lunch if we booked it in advance. Michelle's cooking is legendary within the Bodmin community, and on arriving at the field just after 14:00 we found out why!



We spent a lazy summer afternoon watching the coming and going of the local club aeroplanes, while reviewing various pages we had printed off the Scilly Tourism websites. For anyone considering a visit to the Islands, this is an invaluable source of information. If you have a computer, take a look at www.isles-of-scilly.co.uk/about-Scilly.html and also www.scillyonline.co.uk/ for all you need to know. It is essential to confirm accommodation on the Islands before you depart, as all available rooms are usually booked months in advance. We had secured a pitch for the tent on the Island of St Agnes because all spaces on St Mary were taken for that week. This meant a ferry crossing on arrival at the harbour, but the scheduled crossings are not expensive.

So it was, Monday dawned bright and sunny and we set off following the north Cornwall coast towards LND, the Lands End VOR that would guide us across the water to the Scillies. It's a mere 26 miles over water, and you can see the Islands from the mainland on a good day. This was not a good day, however, and it was not until about six or seven miles out that the smudge on the horizon turned more solid and confirmed our heading. To make the crossing, Air Traffic require you to have at least a GPS or DME of some description so that you can report your range on request. You will also have to calculate an ETA to mid-point, or in our case, DME 10 miles to run. This stretch of water is frequented by the commercial Island hoppers from Penzance and Lands End, so height holding is critical for separation, although the Twin Otters and helicopters do tend to keep low - maybe not much more than 1000ft QNH.

On arrival at St Mary's airport we requested clearance to descend and were directed to join right-hand for runway 09 with permission for a low go-around if required. Although not a difficult field to land on, the controllers are very mindful that visitors often need to size up the runway before committing, as 09 uniquely starts up-hill on grass and becomes tarmac half way along! A delightful approach, and a creditable touchdown were followed by a short taxi to our tie-down beside the tower.

We had left Bodmin's heat wearing shorts and T-shirts and after a pleasant crossing in the hazy sunshine were really surprised by the strength and chill of the wind when we opened the canopy. That had been the reason for a consistent gentle course correction over the water! There are several concrete tie-downs available and we used 5 of them just to be sure. We intended leaving the plane for a couple of days, and would be a ferry crossing away thus unable to return easily if the wind should increase even more, but the friendly helpful folk in tower were quite happy to keep an eye on G-DENS for us out of their window.



A quick bus ride delivered us to the harbour in time for the 15 minute ferry crossing to St Agnes, but the sun was not quite so warm - trousers and fleece were now needed for comfort. On arrival, our luggage was transferred to the campsite by tractor and we were given directions - "take this path until it becomes a farm-track, continue on until it runs out and that's the campsite"!



What a beautiful setting - our pitch was literally 20 feet from the water's edge. We would be able to open the tent in the morning and look right out to sea - or so we thought! The weather did not improve as hoped but a nourishing meal at the Turk's Head, the only pub on the island, soon warmed us up ready for a night under canvas. We were woken by gentle rumbles of thunder at 6.30 am which increased steadily until 7 am when the storm passed right overhead and the rain descended. Oh well, we thought, at least this will clear the air. By 7.30 the storm had passed over; we opened the tent door - and couldn't see the sea at all.

Contrary to our expectations the storm had brought in the fog, and this hung around the islands for the next three days. There was about 2 hours of sunshine in the afternoon but by 4 pm the fog was back, and while the rest of Britain was sweltering in temperatures of 25 to 30 degrees we were walking around the island in 15 to 18 degrees, at most.

When the sun shines, the Scillies are beautiful and it is a delight to find secluded coves with crystal clear, COLD water, and rocks teeming with sea birds of all species. St Agnes is a very quiet island; the only transport is either by tractor or electric golf cart, so everyone walks everywhere and says hello to fellow walkers. The 70 or so islanders are very friendly, encouraging visitors to enjoy their island to the full.

We had booked the 3.15 ferry on Wednesday to return to St Mary's, and as we left St Agnes the sun began to shine, a good omen we hoped, for our intended flight back that day. Having topped up with cash from the ATM in Hugh Town, (there isn't a bank on St Agnes) we called into the Tourism Office to check on accommodation - just in case - and were informed that there were just 3 rooms available on the island. Another bus ride to the Airport raised our hopes as the views of the coast looked clear. St Mary's ATC is very efficiently run, friendly, and very informative. When we asked about conditions at Land's End and Bodmin we were told "fogged in".

So, here we were in bright sunshine, on a beautiful island with the rest of the Cornish peninsular in fog. Well, we were happy to stay another night, but where? Camping on the licensed airfield is not allowed, the Garrison campsite was fully booked, there were now only 2 rooms available according to Tourism and one of those was the most expensive hotel on St Mary's! Tower really helped us out by phoning the Beachfield House B&B and we managed to get their last room, vacant only because their intended guests couldn't get into the island due to the fog on the mainland! We had a 'fish and chips' tea by the harbour in peaceful sunshine and watched the evening fog roll in again - it looked as though we might be staying in the islands for some time to come!



Thursday dawned foggy again but, ever optimistic, we made our way up to the airport once more. Arriving just as the sun was breaking through, we were grateful to be informed by Tower that both Land's End and Bodmin were clear. We just had to wait for conditions to clear in the island. Reports coming in from the arriving Otter stated that the fog was only about 5 miles out from the island so, having loaded up the plane and checked her over carefully, we took off from Runway 33 and climbed out over the very low sea fog into clear blue sky to complete an uneventful crossing back to St Just. The returning Twin Otter passed below and landed ahead of us, which was just as well as it helped to identify runway 07 in the hazy conditions.

There was some inversion on the mainland caused by the heat, which hit us as we opened the canopy - at least 10 degrees above that in the islands!

Having discarded life-jackets, and refueled both ourselves and the aircraft at Land's End, we felt Bodmin beckoning for another overnight stop. Our original plan was to head directly home from St Just, but it was such a lovely summer afternoon it seemed a shame to rush it. After studying the Met reports we were a bit concerned that the fog would return before we did, but the flight up country was wonderful; clear air with views over to the South coast with the sea in the distance and a very dense fog bank obscuring the North coast completely. Keeping a close watch on the fog bank, we continued North East passing the deep quarries near St Dennis, overhead Roche and straight into Bodmin airfield landing at about 5 pm. Tent pitched and DENS tied down, we accepted Richard's offer of a lift into Blisland for a well earned Bodmin 'beast-burger' helped down with a pint of award-winning local beer.

With all of Friday to make a leisurely cruise home, the thought was to extend our track over to Henstridge where the tank could be topped up for the weekend flying. However, much to our surprise the air quality was somewhat less than forecast, accompanied by rather uncomfortable thermic turbulence, so on arriving at Cullompton on the M5 the decision was made to modify our track direct to the Farm instead. Interestingly, we discovered afterwards that visibility over Somerset the previous day had been abysmal, and what we had expected to be a super day for flying was in fact just the opposite. So our decision to camp overnight at Bodmin was indeed a good one!

So, what had started as a 3-day jaunt to the Scillies and back, turned into an enjoyable week's holiday. This was the second trip we had made to the Islands, and we hope it won't be the last. We can recommend it as a perfect get-away break, which is both achievable in a small PFA aeroplane, and affordable if you are prepared to 'rough it' a bit by camping out. But if you decide to go, book accommodation in advance and do pay close attention to the weather forecast, TAF's and Metars, as the Cornish peninsular seems to have its own eco-system under the influence of all the water that surrounds it. But it does make life interesting!

Ian & Mary

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