



March 2009

SKYWRITINGS

Newsletter of the *Mid Kent*



Light Aircraft Association

Mike's Mutterings

Mike Negus -
Editor



Paragliding (is it for you?)

Recently a Paragliding site has been set up at Detling (just near the beacon) with the gliders being launched by cable. As part of their submission to the CAA for permission to establish the site, it was necessary for them to contact local airfields and we thought it would be enjoyable if they came along to a Strut meeting to tell us a little about their side of our great flying hobby. Some of the members of the Dover & Folkstone Hang-gliding Club jumped at the chance of spreading the word about their flying about which they feel passionate. One member said "To my mind it isn't a "poor man's aviation"



March Meeting

26th March 2009 - Cobtree Manor Golf Club - 8pm

Talk on Paragliding

www.midkentstrut.freeserve.co.uk

but a sport in its own right, and hugely addictive.

I think the sheer simplicity (on one level) means that foot-launched flight is the nearest someone can come to flying like a bird, and because the rig is so portable paraglider pilots travel the world, and once the sun goes down, or the windspeed either drops or blows us out of the sky, we'll while away the time with tales of exotic places and tales of derring-do.

In some ways it re-enacts those early stringbag days of aviation in the way it evokes a sense of wonder. There are much more reliable means of flying, but it is that challenge of pitting one's wits against the elements and the sheer sense of freedom gets me every time. I'm by no means the best of flyers, or the one with the best tales (although I have one or two!) - just a middle-aged bloke with bags of enthusiasm, who loves to take on the sky whenever he can".

Sounds as if it will be a presentation well worth listening to.



Human Error

In my experience things can go wrong and whilst I look back on past events with some humour, it shows the system works and should be taken seriously to avoid silly errors.

It's all too easy to rely on someone else for information when completing a flight plan. On one occasion at an airfield in Holland, I could not remember the code for our destination airfield. I asked my pilot passenger who confidently replied EKVJ. With the remainder of the flight plan completed we departed.

A while later, an inquisitive phone call to our departure aerodrome from a controller in the Faroe Islands to ask if a Jodel and Auster, were seriously intending to visit his airfield today. Fortunately, the Dutch controller was aware of our intended destination and made the necessary amendment to our flight plan, changing the code from EKVJ to EKVJ. On our arrival I was asked what I considered some daft questions, like am I at the right place or how are the Faroe's today ?. Only when I was debriefed did the penny drop and I went to find my passenger who had mysteriously slinked away!

One other trip comes to mind when travelling in a group of three aircraft, we filled a flight plan from Bornholme, an Island South East of Sweden, to another Danish Island approximately 130 miles to the West. Feeling brave or perhaps stupid we elected to fly direct which involved a water crossing of some eighty miles. Our appointed leader of the day filed our flight plan,

as our route took us through Malmo FIR, but unbeknown to me did he not take into consideration the headwind of at least twenty knots.

The Luscombe, Taylorcraft and Auster took off and we arrived at our destination 2 hours 30 minutes later, a bit longer than I had anticipated even considering the wind. Those of you who are good at maths will by now have calculated that this trip in still air could be achieved in about 1 hour 35 minutes at 80 knots, so we were well overdue. I was oblivious to this and not unduly concerned about the police car waiting outside the clubhouse.

Once parked up we were all interviewed and asked to cancel our flight plan immediately. The flight planning office had had a sense of humour failure and concerned for our safety an air sea rescue operation was about to commence. This is normal practice when after 30 minutes of no show, phones start ringing at every airfield along your flight planned route. With no news and still no show one hour on, a very expensive helicopter and similarly expensive aircraft of The Royal Danish Airforce had prepared for departure.

The amount of work my fellow travelling companion caused in Denmark that afternoon after a simple error was tremendous. I now take more interest in flight planing, especially when travelling in a group, even if it means completing a flight plan form for ten assorted aircraft myself. This experience does illustrate the system works and although I wonder if in a real situation anyone would still be swimming in the English Channel once a rescue is mounted?

What Winter!!

We had just about finished the Christmas and New Year celebrations when it was time to pick up our cases, drive to Heathrow and head for the sun "down under" courtesy of Singapore Airlines.

Our first stop was Singapore itself. The plan was that, after thirteen hours on the plane, we would spend four days there to recover before moving on to our main destination - New Zealand. As it turned out, we arrived in Singapore in pretty good nick after a comfortable but uneventful flight, and immediately set about discovering its many delights. A four day stopover proved to be just about right.

The next stage was a quick hop (about 9+1/2 hours) down to Auckland to be met by friends and quickly launched into a sightseeing tour of the most breathtaking coastal scenery that you can imagine. This included a trip to the Papakura Airfield where we watched an old Decota doing 30 minute sightseeing trips around the local area. Whist there I took the opportunity to inquire about the cost of hiring a

'Ladies and gentlemen, if you wish to smoke, the smoking section on this airplane is on the wing and if you can light 'em, you can smoke 'em.'

self-piloted Cessna 150. With a quick currency conversion it worked out a little over £30 an hour.

After a couple of days we left our friends in Auckland, jumped into a hire car and started driving south. Our first stop was Rotorua - a smashing little holiday town on the edge of a vast lake. We had two fun-filled days there boating, sledging down the mountain side on a luge, flying around extinct volcanoes, over thermal lakes and great sulphur springs.

The next move was to make our way slowly down to Wellington, a very modern place wedged between the base of the mountains and the sea, and incredibly small for a capital city. We left the car there and caught the morning ferry for the 3+1/2 hour crossing from the North to the South Island.

You spend about an hour of the journey cruising from the Cook Strait through Queen Charlotte Sound. The word "stunning" does not do it justice - it must surely be one of the most breathtakingly beautiful ferry crossings in the world, and you sail into Picton which is as picturesque as the Sound itself.

At Picton we picked up a fresh car and

I made a quick phone call to a Jabiru owner called John who I had contacted by E-mail before leaving the UK. He lived near to Picton and, as it was late, we arranged to meet the next day. John picked us up from the motel and we drove to the airfield where I was proudly introduced to his Jabi. We didn't have a lot of time as he had got clearance to take us to a local military airfield to meet another Jabiru builder. There are only about three or four Jabirus in New Zealand I'm told, and I'd managed to see two of them!

We spent too much time talking and it soon became necessary to press on, so reluctantly we said goodbye but agreed that, time permitting, before we left the South Island John would take us for a fly. We headed south again for more fun and adventures. We drove through wonderful scenery, walked in magnificent rain forests, climbed to the foot of the Franz Joseph Glacier and took our first helicopter ride to the top of the Fox Glacier. We hired a plane in Wanaka and flew through and over the Southern Alps. We did more cruising, more flying and more sledging. We ate well and met some wonderful people, then we ran out of time. The weather had been really good, the holiday was great, but it was time to head for home.

A man and a friend are playing golf one day at their local golf course.

One of the guys is about to chip onto the green when he sees a long Funeral procession on the road next to the course. He stops in mid-swing, takes off his golf cap, closes his eyes, and bows down in prayer.

His friend says: 'Wow, that is the most thoughtful and touching thing I have ever seen. You truly are a kind man.'

The man then replies: 'Yeah, well we were married for 35 years.'

A Very Singular Man

by Frank O'Phile

I wish I'd looked for the microlights earlier, but I was happy with the aeromodellers. It was in our village builders' merchants (getting the grit they call sand to patch the wall-to-wall stone in our Froggy hovel) that I found the manager flew a howling plank in an aeromodelling club not far away on Sunday mornings. Thence I was welcomed, with strong drink even (no 8-hr rule) to their subsidized clubhouse and hard runway.

One day my manager friend wasn't among the faithful and they said his new passion was 'aviation ULM (*Ultra-Legere Motorise*) I got only a vague idea where, until one day I spotted a dashed rectangle on a large-scale map labelled "Piste ULM" near a place called Lacave, 10 miles away as the buzzard flies - more of them than crows.

Now Lacave is famous for its *Grotte*. It's more grotty than Cheddar Gorge; it takes 40 minutes in an electric train to tour Lacave's stalactites and 'mites, so with that excuse we went there one day in August 2000 but didn't find a piste ULM signpost.

I asked at the restaurant but the *patronne* didn't know. Then I saw a couple of other customers with an avmap. Yes, they said, not just ULM, an aerodrome, back there. So well hidden we missed it once, but at last bumped up an unsigned track and there was a little grass airfield sitting in the sun on

the plateau on top of the famous Grotte Clubhouse, hangars, workshop, but not a soul in sight. The workshop was like the Marie Celeste half-eaten sandwich, packet of Gauloises, a lighter. And a Pietenpoll Well, the makings of one. And a new skeleton wing for a Cassutt. Our kind of place. Eventually the man emerged from somewhere, greeted us and gave us the grand tour, opening up all the hangars. Among the more interesting types were a Turbi, an immaculate Menestrel and a weird version of Mignets Pou du Ciel, rebuilt modified with conventional 3-axis controls, plus a pitch trimmer consisting of a screwjack behind the pilot, working the foreplane's trailing edge, chain-driven by a hand-crank in front of his head. Oui, il vole '-j'uste", said our man with a smile.

We arrived again this year just as France was about to stop for its 2 hour lunch and just caught our friendly man. Yes, he was fine and progressing with his Pietenpol .

"Of course you can picnic, . -well, *piqueunique* -he said. As he had just varnished the outside table he unlocked the clubhouse, showed us the sink, cooker and fridge and outside left us to use it, take chairs outside beside the piste and make free, all on our own. Back from lunch he started to slide open the doors of a hangar and was glad of help with that but declined it to push out a Piper J3 Cub as he said he was used to doing it. It was modified with disc brakes, a self-starting Lycoming 0235 and wing tanks only, thus rebalanced for solo flying from the front seat, plus a few other mods.

He disappeared and returned with a stepladder on his right shoulder, a jer-

rycan in his left hand, a battery screw-driver in his breast pocket and a big funnel on his head.

By these means and my (superfluous) help he unscrewed wing-tank access panels and fuelled it up. He then did a thorough Check A, put on a bone-dome and at last it dawned on me he was not doing this for someone else to fly.

---Oh yes- he said, "I shall fly now. I am going to take some "

I wished him well; he started, warmed up, taxied back to the threshold, was airborne as he passed us, then up and away in a steeply-banked climbing turn through 270 degrees

Incidentally, we never saw an ULM on either visit.

"What is the point of this story?", you ask. Well, France didn't easily give up all its colonies; it fought to keep Indo-China and Algeria and as a young fighter pilot Christian Crouzel, now 72, lost an arm to a cannon shell, so he is a very singular man.

Continental Drift

(from the Archive)

To say the weather this summer has been disappointing is something to an understatement, but Shirley and I managed to spend a number of weekends away at various French coastal resorts, and were now champing at the bit to go further afield and stay away longer. So, when it looked as if the weather for France was set fair a few days (and it coincided with the French RSA rally at Chambley), we

grabbed the opportunity to go.

Thursday and Friday the 18th and 19th July were hectic, getting the plane ready, sorting out the minimum amount of clothing we could manage with, getting advice and suggestions on where to go and where to stay from a number of the more experienced Strut members, and then creating some sort of flexible plan to work from.

Saturday 20th July dawned fair - the flight plan was sent and we left Headcom at 0945 hours. The first stop was Calais to clear customs and take off our "water wings". Then off again for a one and a quarter hour flight to Laon, where we had reserved a room at a local hotel (my other half is not into tents!)



Laon Cathedral

At Laon we were invited to join the club's flight out to Chambley the next morning, which we did and had a great day. On the Monday we were off to Bernay (about 2 hours away) in good weather. A smashing place - lots of thirteenth century buildings etc and a wonderful evening meal at the Hotel Angleterre.

Tuesday was a bit murky but forecast to improve, so a not so early start to Granville for Lunch. By then the weather was great - some good coastal flying over huge areas of mussel beds stretch' for miles. We flew round the legendary Mont St Michel, towering up out-of-the sea, and then on to Dinan, - another gem of a place - quite stunningly beautiful.



Quiberon Airfield

Wednesday came and we were off to Quiberon, a peninsular about 6 to 8 miles long that sticks out into the sea with the airstrip and town right on the far end. There were hundreds of yachts and boats as far as the eye could see and the flying and scenery was fantastic. The downwind, base and final legs were made really low over a beautiful azure sea - we were in paradise - and there we stayed, but just for a couple of days.

The next stop was Flers- not the most exiting of places but a nice strip and friendly people. The weather by now was extremely hot and we were glad of a cool hotel room.

From Flers we flew to Chartres. The hotel was almost at the end of the strip and we had a pleasant walk to the nice cathedral town.



Chartres Cathedral

Sunday was our last day and we were away early for a long flight to Le Tou



Le Touquet

quet. We arrived about 1115 hours and the place was already buzzing. We walked into town for lunch and put our feet up out of the heat. Then

A flight attendant's comment on a less than perfect landing: 'We ask you to please remain seated as Captain Kangaroo bounces us to the terminal.'

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a stroll back to the airport and a nice fly back to Headcorn, arriving late afternoon.

We had a great holiday, met some really wonderful people, flown over some fantastic sights and - to really cap it all - it had all been so very very easy.

I would just like to say a big thank you to the many Strut members who offered suggestions and advice on places to visit and where to stay etc.

Graham Hammond

**United Flight Attendant
 announced, 'People, people
 we're not picking out furniture
 here, find a seat and get in it!**

Dates for your Diary

Mar 26	Paragliding
April 30	Talk on Touring (inc how to use AFPex)