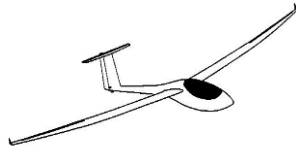


From the home of the *Scottish Gliding Union*

Portmoak Press

Editorial – Ian Easson

Season’s Greetings from everyone at the SGU. The first bit of news in this issue has to be...



Well done to John Williams for his World Record flight on St Andrews Day in South America. His flight of 1550km was achieved in eight and a half hours with an average speed of 180km per hour! John has been keeping a blog of his trip to South America <http://scottishglidingcentre.com/blog/>, and this is an extract of that world record flight:

"It's been a huge privilege to be able to fly in the Andes and an enormously pleasant surprise to find that I've broken the world record. I now know that if you can fly well in Scottish conditions (which are some of the best in Europe) then you can compete with the very best in the world in a country which is 35 times bigger."

Well done John – and we look forward to an article (or two) in the New Year.

In this issue of Portmoak Press, Andrew Gordon reports on the Walking on Air expedition to the Pocklington two-seater comp. I detect some pretty good “Hack” work by Andrew as he has managed to get some interesting quotes. Bruce Marshall furnishes us with some interesting history around the old Briefing Hut and Richard Lucas recalls his gliding experiences in America.

During a recent telephone call with Chris Ellis, he recalled a visit to Portmoak which culminated in a light-hearted article around the phonetic alphabet. The story was first published in the S&G in the Christmas 1993/94 edition and is reprinted here on page 10. Alastair Dodds reflects on SGU members he remembers and wonders where some of them have gone. Regular contributor, Frank Smith reports on his

expedition to Bicester last year.

Fame and Fortune, anyone?

I am looking for suitable, enthusiastic and talented people – well, anyone really – to help me prepare a case for the Sports Club of the Year Awards. My plan is to attempt a two year programme, using the first year to gain sufficient knowledge and expertise to win the second year. Of course, if we were to win the first year, we could have the rest of the year off and go gliding, or whatever. Please see the article on page 2 and let me know if you are interested to help. Time is of the essence and I will set up a short meeting early in the New Year to kick things off

Finally, the usual plea to all members, new or old, experienced or ab initio, regular contributors or not, to consider submitting material for *Portmoak Press*. Details of how to do this can be found below.

Cut off dates are as follows: end of March for April, end of June for July, end of September for October and end of December for January. Material can be sent to me either typed or hand-written and dropped in my mailbox beside the payphone, or e-mail me at ian.easson@btinternet.com

In this issue:

Editorial – Ian Easson	1
CFI Notes	2
Club News.....	2
Sports Club of the Year Awards	2
The Story of a Hut.....	3
Walking on Air at the Pocklington Comp.....	4
Bicester 2009	7
Gliding in the USA: The same - but different.....	9
Keep in Brief – Phonetically.....	10
Where have all the members gone – 30 years on? ..	11



Board Members

Chairman	Douglas Tait
Vice-Chairman & Membership	Alan Boyle
Treasurer	tba
Technical	Joe Fisher
Marketing & Sales	Fiona Gillanders
Club Secretary	Alec Stevenson
Development Projects	Kevin Hook
Airfield & Roads	Mike Cartney
Cadets & New Members	Andy Graham
Clubhouse & Catering	Ian Norman
Winch	tba
Social	tba

board so please add your name to it if you are interested in gaining your R/T licence. Thanks to Steve Boston who took this photo of John Henry on 28th November. Yes- this is the Centre Strip with the farm road in the background.



CFI Notes

I have received the following email from both Pete Stratten and Jim Hammerton and therefore, as has been pointed out to me, only Bronze Badge Pilots and above may DI a Glider and sign the logbook:

The BGA view is that clubs should list those pilots who are approved to carry out a daily inspection on club owner aircraft/gliders. These should be qualified pilots to comply with Part M. The BGA deems that a Bronze pilot is a qualified glider pilot.

Attention all power pilots – including Falke(s) syndicate members: Please note that the Power Aircraft Booking Out/In Log (in the entrance lobby) **MUST BE COMPLETED** before and after every departure/arrival. As well as a mandatory requirement (legal), it is part of the club duty of care in the event of an aircraft becoming overdue.

Bob Petrie

Club News

A reminder that the Friday evening lectures are well under way (alternate weeks from 8th January – through to 2nd April). Check the notice board for subject matter as these may change at short notice. Also, if there is sufficient demand, there will be Radio Telephony lectures and practice sessions. There is a list on the notice



Sports Club of the Year Awards

The quality of gliding experience on offer in the UK does not happen by accident. It is as a direct result of the passion, enthusiasm, determination and sheer hard work of thousands of volunteers in local community gliding clubs – people like you in your club.

In the year when the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills formally recognised gliding as an informal learning activity and the British Team brought yet more medals home from international competitions, the BGA wishes to bring this opportunity to your attention.

Sports Club of the Year Awards 2010

- First Prize - £6,000
- Two x Second Prizes - £3,000
- Three x Third Prizes - £1,000

- Is your club the focal point of the local community?
- Providing opportunities for everyone to experience high quality activities at all levels of your sport or recreation?
- Demonstrating a commitment to the development of

participants as well as coaches and volunteers?

- Taking an innovative approach to the promotion of the club?

Affectionately known as 'SCOTY', the Central Council for Physical Recreation (CCPR) has launched its annual search for the Sports Club of the Year (SCOTY) in association with the Foundation for Sport and the Arts and running sports. Gliding clubs have done well in the past.

The BGA can endorse up to 3 gliding clubs (top prize £6,000), plus two University clubs (top prize £1,000).

Please let me know if you are interested as this year's closing date is 29th January 2010.

Ian Easson

The Story of a Hut

At the recent Information Meeting, there was much discussion about what should be done to replace the SGU's longest serving asset – the briefing hut. Most members will agree that this building has been on borrowed time for quite a few years now, but as its days now seem to be finally numbered, it would seem to be an appropriate time to reflect on the hut's long and varied history.

The SGU started operations on the Lomond Hills in 1938, and in 1939, established their base at the old shepherd's cottage at East Feal. Although the cottage appears to have made a cosy little clubroom, it was in an isolated location, and was not big enough to provide much in the way of overnight accommodation. As it was intended to run a number of summer courses that year, something larger was needed, and our hut made its first appearance, as a male bunkhouse - Females were accommodated at a safe distance, a mile away at West Feal farm! There is no record of what the hut cost, but it was almost certainly not new even then – in fact, photos taken at the time show it to have had a close resemblance to barrack huts used by the RFC during the First World War.

On the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, the club had to cease flying operations, and although it had been hoped to keep the premises open as a social club, they were soon

evicted from East Feal, as wartime regulations prohibited gatherings of people in reservoir catchment areas. The SGU had accordingly to sell most of their assets to pay off their bank loans, but the hut must have had little commercial value even then, as it seems to have been loaned to the recently formed Air Training Corps. Where it then went is not known, but we do know that, rather surprisingly, in 1948, the club got it back!

By then, the SGU was operating from the now disused wartime airfield at Balado, and there was no need for the hut there, as there were plenty vacant buildings on site. However, it was decided to erect the hut on the south west corner of Bishop Hill, at the top of the Kilmagadwood, above Scotlandwell, where it entered its next incarnation, this time as a hangar! Two de-rigged single seat Cadet gliders were stored in it, and on suitable west wind days, when there was a spare instructor at Balado, a party would set off to Bishop. There, the aircraft would be rigged and bungee launched from the top of the ridge above the golf course, to let members get their C certificates or even five hour legs in the hill lift. After the club moved to Portmoak in 1957, the hut became redundant as gliders could now [sometimes] reach the hill lift from a winch launch. However, there was an urgent need for a glider workshop on site at Portmoak, and little money to pay for one, so the hut was dismantled again in 1959, and brought down the hill. Half way through its re-erection, a gale sprung up and nearly knocked it flat again! It did get put up safely at the next attempt, and became the domain of Frank Ireland, the SGU's ground engineer. It was a place full of the scent of sawdust and dope, and was generally almost knee deep in wood shavings and old masking paper. At weekends, it became the first port of call for members as they arrived, to get all the latest gossip and scuttlebut from Frank! Many a C of A or repair was carried out within its limited confines, but on one occasion, Frank was rebuilding a damaged Swallow, and had to rig the machine to complete the repairs. Although the length of the building was

just sufficient to take the 13 metre span of the Swallow, the width was



not enough for the length of the fuselage. Not a problem to Frank – he merely cut a hole in the west wall of the hut, and stuck the tail out through it! The SGU bought the remainder of Portmoak Farm in 1968 and in due course the workshop was moved to the farm buildings, and the hut became redundant once more. Swept out, it made a spacious briefing room for the 1976 Portmoak Regionals, but by the following year, the developers, led by Jim Wales, had been in. The hut was re-clad externally, and new, larger windows fitted. Internally, the building was sub-divided to provide an admin office, a CFI's office, a storage area and a much smaller briefing room. At some point, a small, lean-to annex was added at the north end, where a stretcher and first aid gear was kept, and an area was provided in the north east corner for the black art of smoking barographs. Since then, the hut has remained largely unchanged, although it has been treated to a re-roofing and a number of minor face lifts in the briefing room area over the years. The two offices are now little used, and the briefing area is often inadequate for the numbers needing to meet in it. Structurally, it is showing its age, and it is generally agreed that the old hut is no longer fit for purpose. Whether it will be replaced by a new, purpose built building or by another temporary structure remains to be seen, but it looks likely that there will be plenty material available for a November 5th bonfire in 2010!

Bruce Marshall

(The story of the hut and the SGU can be found in our club book, *The Scottish Gliding Union – A History, 1934-2009*. Copies are available at the club for £12 with all proceeds going to the SGU. [Sorry, couldn't resist the plug – Ed])

Walking on Air at the Pocklington Comp.

The Pocklington 2 Seater Competition is in its 24th year and throughout its history its ethos has always been that competitors should have “*fun, fun, fun*” and all this whilst being safe, and improving their flying skills. Charity fundraising is also always an important part of the competition as is the “*après gliding*”. This year the nominated



charity was MacMillan Cancer Care. The Competition Director was John Norman with his team of Dave and Karen Binney, Martin Boulton and many other hard working members of the Wolds Gliding Club who give their time to make this such a good event. There were 28 teams competing from all over the UK and I'm sure all would report that they had a great time. On arrival at the club Walking on Air's glider, a Schleicher K21 (WA1), was rigged with the assistance of our first group of helpers: Fiona Gillanders, Alan Gillanders and Willie Laing - our Full Cat. instructor. We then retired to the excellent clubhouse for a meal and refreshments, perhaps too much refreshment, but that is another story. The next day, 23rd August, Steve Derwin, a Wolds Club member and a member of Walking on Air flew with Willie Laing to familiarise him with the site. Steve takes up the story

“Willie is a keen supporter of Walking on Air and we were pleased that he was able to keep an eye on us at our first Two Seater Competition. This was my first time flying with Willie and it was down to me to show him the local area of my home club. Our flight was in blustery conditions with broken thermals and we pressed as hard as we could to the south towards the first turn point at Scunthorpe but, due to the strong southerly, didn't even get as far as the river. Every time we stopped to thermal we drifted back more than we had gained in our previous push. Very frustrating, although it did give us an opportunity to look at the area and allow Willie to feel more comfortable with his knowledge of the Yorkshire countryside. It was great to fly with him and pick up tips. For one thing it helped me to moderate my compulsion to push on too hard”. Later that day, Steve flew with Fiona. Fiona tells us about it.

“This was my first flight away from home territory at Portmoak. I am early solo. Steve handled the launch from the back seat and we headed out on a long straight aerotow away from the field. As anyone familiar with Portmoak will know this is not a usual phenomenon. My confusion must have seeped its way into the

rear cockpit prompting the question “Everything OK”. My response was that “the tug always turns on the aerotows I have done before. Why isn’t it turning?” Steve pointed out that there were no hazards to be avoided, no Loch below us and no ridge to bump into, so why exactly did it need to turn? Point well made.”

“Unfortunately the sky was about as flat as the fields beneath us with not even the sniff of a thermal, so, given the option I readily agreed to do some aerobatics. After the necessary clearing turns and cockpit checks we did a few loops and three chandelles and very much appreciated by the front seater they were.”

“I can now proudly say I have two airfields in my flying log – Thanks Walking on Air.”

The next day was rained off and Joe Fisher, Alan, Fiona and Steve went to Elvington for a look around the excellent Air Museum. The following day, the 25th looked a bit more promising. The gliders were prepared and on the grid ready and the task was set after “Ivor the Weather” promised “reasonable” conditions. The pilots for WA1 this day were to be Steve and Dave Tuttle, both wheelchair users. Dave Tuttle explains,

“On our first launch we found a promising thermal which took us close to cloud base at 3000 ft. Unfortunately it also took us downwind. We headed back to the airfield where we found just enough lift to tease us, and Steve worked hard to prolong the flight for a further 10 minutes before making a tight circuit and landing back in the reflight area. Our 2nd launch started out with a couple of strong thermals and we managed some progress upwind before it all started shutting down again. As we thermalled lower and lower and were carried downwind, the very real advantage of holding the comp at this time of year became apparent to me. We were continuously able to select new stubble fields for our inevitable “land out”. The final choice was influenced by a distinct lack of height and rapidly approaching electricity pylons. Once we were successfully on the ground the owners of a house alongside the field called over the fence to ask if everything was OK as no one had got out

of the aircraft. They were not at all fazed when Steve explained that we were both paralysed and that was why we had stayed in the glider. I have to say it would have been nice if they had offered a cup of tea. However, our recovery team came to the rescue here as Willie's car followed shortly by Andrew's camper van were a welcome sight, especially when the kettle was put on for a brew.”

Recovering two wheelchair users is not quite the same as other recoveries. We needed to take three people, two wheelchairs, ramps etc. We set off in two vehicles with a map reference but unfortunately failed to enter the map reference correctly on the Tom Tom. Thankfully Fiona had a better sense of direction than Tom Tom or was it just her feminine intuition; anyway she got us to the right field where she then supervised the recovery.

The next day was non-flyable. Joe, Fiona and Alan returned to Portmoak and Jim Cook joined our recovery team.

The 27th was flyable. This time Willie Laing was P1 with Dave Tuttle as the P2. They managed the first turn point, an achievement for Walking on Air. They then made a valiant effort to reach the second turn point but landed out just South of Sutton Bank. Willie describes what happened

“Not a competition veteran myself but I enjoy cross country flying so I thought this seemed a good introduction as it is a relaxed comp. (at least for some). I will spare you a how we never dunnit story suffice to say it was the first cross country for my P2 and getting round a turn point was valuable experience”

Willie had landed on a hillside. Steve (now at home with family) was checking up on us at regular intervals by phone. One call was received just as we were about to turn off the main road, I could not take the call as I was driving, so my fellow retriever did. He was not familiar with the mobile and ended up talking into the earpiece and listening to the microphone. This confusion caused me to miss the turnoff resulting in a dodgy reversing manoeuvre.

We arrived at the landing site and promptly got stuck at the field entrance and then got stuck on the slope.



Willie had landed out next to two other gliders and their recovery crews helped us out. We were very grateful!

Again the next day was rained off, seems we did not have much luck with the weather that week. The 29th was flyable although "Ivor the Weather" did not promise good conditions. This time it was my turn as P2 with Steve Derwin as P1. We launched to 2,000 feet and managed to stay at 1,800 feet for a while. Then we joined the rest of the competitors at 1,200 feet above the airfield. This was the busiest sky I have ever been in and I worked hard looking out. Half an hour later, after struggling to stay aloft, we performed a crosswind landing on the reflight area and I operated the airbrake at Steve's request as he was busy with the rudder handle and the stick. We took a reflight again to 2,000 feet. Steve thermalled us up to cloud base at 4,000 feet and we headed off to Burn, our first turn point with me on the controls. Just north of the Humber we encountered rain and the inevitable sink. Steve tried to thermal but with broken thermals and wet wings we had to select a field and land. On landing we were spotted by the local riding school who sent out two girls to ensure we were OK. The rest of the riding school then came to see us and the farmer's wife assured us we were welcome in the field. By return we invited them to sit in the glider and if they wished to come along and have a flight some time.

Our recovery team took two hours to reach us. We learned that they were halfway to the land-out field when they realised they had forgotten Steve's wheelchair. When they finally arrived, the glider was de-rigged, but they were short of some packing material so decided to use Steve's expensive orthopaedic cushion. Our chairman was not best impressed, and who can blame him.

On the same day during the competition the Janus 563 from Shropshire GC with Chris Fox as P1 and Gavin Foster as P2 also had an eventful land out. Chris tells us what happened:-

"After a good landing I went to look for the landowner – Gavin stayed with the aircraft. No luck finding the landowner so back to the glider. We'd been

on the ground for about 40 minutes when we heard distant sirens getting closer – oh no! Sure enough, someone had phoned 999 and reported a crash – 4 fire engines, 2 police cars and an ambulance. All the people were fine about it and they gave me a lift to where they thought the farmer lived. No joy there either so back to the field. Emergency Services gone, but another car stopped and anxious driver looking across at the glider 100m away. I assured him there was no problem – 'Oh that's good – I was worried that there was a body lying next to the plane' – the body being Gavin having a snooze! Reporter from the local paper then arrived too, and also had to be re-assured".

Because of the weather and the journey ahead WA1 did not fly on the last day of the competition, but for the rest of it we had competed on an equal footing with our able-bodied colleagues and that is important to us. All thanks are due to our helpers and the organisers of the excellent competition at Pocklington. A total of £3,212:22p was raised for MacMillan Cancer Relief. Thanks to all.

Our overall assessment of the Wolds 2 Seater Competition is that it is a great event and one not to be missed so there's a good chance Walking on Air will be back next year and looking to improve on its performance. Thanks to Pocklington and all who made it happen. See you all then.

As a corollary, some interesting tales came to light in the "après gliding" This is a true story - although we have removed any acknowledgment as to the perpetrators so as to protect the guilty.

"Phoned for retrieve. Said to bring 4-wheel drive as field muddy. Phoned again to say car keys in pilot's pocket. Crew set off but remembered the tail plane removal tool not in trailer. Carry on anyway "We will manage". Vehicle needs fuel but all the filling stations are on opposite side of road and, as it is busy, don't want to cross over with trailer. "It will be alright, anyway you always get a warning light don't you?" Using Iphone for satnav and discover that although it uses GPS for nav it uses the phone network for the map service so when

service is lost so is map and all you have is a blue screen with an



arrow on it! Trying to guess when to turn by judging the distance on the screen. Another small problem, phone is set for North up so coming to a turn you have to be aware when your mate has tried to be helpful by turning phone upside down!

Now almost at field and OUT OF FUEL. Ask a local for nearest filling station.

Arrive at field and the tail plane has to come off. What can be used? Try screwdriver not ideal for removing a bolt. Maybe we could tap it round with screwdriver and hammer. No hammer! Scan stubble field. A Rock? That will have to do. That didn't work. Get a bigger rock. Still no good. Eventually a metal tube is found and hammered on to the bolt with a carefully selected rock from the collection and the bolt removed."

All in all a most memorable event and one Walking on Air was pleased to be involved in.

Andrew Gordon and others.

Bicester 2009

Travelling down the M6 southbound with the lashing rain accompanied by a nasty wind which was sweeping across the carriageways was hardly an auspicious start for a gliding holiday. As I trailed over the Shap summit with these prevailing conditions surrounding me, I was seriously considering returning to home comforts. Do I really need this kind of hassle? Two hours later the sky ahead had brightened, the road was starting to dry out and my sense of humour was returning.

Later, passing through the M6 Toll, the smile was back on my face as I exchanged some banter with the buxom lady collecting the dues. She looked past the car at the trailer and said "My you've got a big one", to which I replied "How dare you". We both laughed and I was still chuckling to myself several miles down the road.

Having flown over Bicester Airfield but never visited by road, I thought the best idea was to adhere explicitly to the guidance instructions posted on the club's website, especially with a trailer behind the car. Coming in from the Northwest and using the M40, the advice was to exit at junction 9. Then it was a case of following the details

I'd downloaded. This proved quite exhilarating or fraught, depending how good you are at this sort of thing. A passenger would have been useful at this time.

The airfield lies on Ministry of Defence ground with entry through coded locked gates. Luckily I had the code. Bicester is a large grass airfield, roughly circular in shape with a peri-track running round the outside. They can pretty well place the winch and launch point anywhere on the field, but tend to use the more normal conventional runway directions. There is also plenty of room for visitors to park their trailers.

Sally and Alastair were already on site and gave me a hand to rig the Vega. Now to find my digs for the next ten days or so, this was at Home Farm, Kidlington near Oxford and about eight miles from the airfield. On arrival at the farm I discovered a note pinned to the front door which read, 'Hi Frank' sorry I can't be there to welcome you, but I'm out baling hay. (This was from the farmer's wife Tricia.) Make yourself at home, you're in room one, the key is under the mat. In fact it was under the flower pot and I just knew I would enjoy my time there.

Staying with farming folk is always interesting. John and Tricia Honour made me so welcome. He was a great fishing and countryside man and we had many chats while I was staying with them. One evening he drove me round his farm pointing out many interesting features. During the drive round he showed where two gliders had landed in one of his fields just a few days before. Strange thing was, he said, that he never saw any pilots or trailers while he was working in the fields nearby. Also none of the villagers had seen hide nor hair of anyone enquiring about whose field they had landed in. From the ride I had in his Landrover, down a very rough track to reach this point, the retrieve crew must have had a pretty bumpy journey to regain the road. Good choice of field though.

I was even treated to a fish and chip supper by them after this excursion around the farm. John the farmer and his young grandson who was staying with them



during the school holidays went out catching Crayfish one day. Later, after boiling them lobster style, I was offered some but I politely declined after thoughts of being bad while aloft flashed through my mind. Farmer John had said they were the scavengers of the river bed, okay.

What about the gliding you may ask. Well the weather played a great part as ever and this year was not that good, though there were a few days when there were slots when folk went off, some not returning, well not by air that is. I landed out for the first time in a long while having pushed off to the East under a cloud base of 3200 feet and an indifferent sky. Getting lower by the minute between Buckingham and Milton Keynes it became pretty clear the only way I was going, was downwards. Where there had been lots of stubble barley fields before, I was now staring at loads of standing wheat which is always harvested later in the season. A cut silage field saved the day. The guy I contacted regarding whose land it was, told me he'd watched me getting lower and lower while he had been outside his small workshop drinking his coffee. One of the interesting features modern technology has now made possible, is to be able to log on to Google earth and find the field you landed in using satellite imagery. All good stuff and very interesting, pinpointing your landing place with deadly accuracy, but it also shows whether you inadvertently strayed into a restricted area. Another useful piece of information one can glean from this aerial mapping is to measure the size of the field one chose using the scale provided with each setting of the zoom feature. In my case about 300m - the length of the Portmoak South field.

There was another first while I was flying the Vega at Bicester. I had a weak link break on me, first time in the fourteen seasons since we acquired the glider back in 1995 from Ted Neighbour who flew it at Camphill. Working on those statistics, I shall be about ninety the next time it happens.

Bicester Gliding Club has a single-decker bus which is driven out on flying days to act as launch point control and at weekends supplies a

rather tasty line in victuals.

Talking of food, it's worth mentioning that on Sundays and sometimes Mondays in the south, local pubs don't always serve evening meals. Better to try the High Street Indian, Chinese or Chippy rather than spend fruitless hours touring the countryside. In actual fact the entire task force from Portmoak did exactly that on one evening. It was rather like a lead and follow cross country with four cars replacing gliders. To make matters worse we lost tail end Charlie at one point. In the end our intrepid leader circumnavigated a roundabout and drove straight into a Little Chef's car park having lost his appetite for any further excursions. We all ended up having fish and chips and a pot of tea. Just shows you what all you abstainers from these merry jaunts are missing.

One of the highlights for me occurred on a sunny, blue day, when sitting strapped in the Vega waiting for a winch launch. Gliding operations were being held up for a powered aircraft which was in the circuit. A guy with a camera appeared in front of me and I casually enquired if it was coming in to land. He said yes and was obviously going to take some shots. At this point I didn't know what type of aircraft was making the landing as it was coming in from behind.

Then there was this roar from an engine somewhere behind my right ear. This was no aircraft coming in to land, the guy with the camera had got it wrong! Seconds later this apparition of raw energy swept by just off my starboard wing tip. The marvellous, spectacular sight of a North American P51 'Mustang' hurtling by and then pulling up into a steep climbing turn and being silhouetted against the sky will stay with me for a long time. It passed through my mind, what a tow plane that would make. The 'Mustang' like the Spitfire and Hurricane made a massive impact in the aerial arena in WW2, Particularly in carrying out escort duties on long range bombing missions to enemy targets. It looked the part then and watching it join the circuit it still looked the part now. I wondered how many

ghosts from the past it awoke as the noise from its Rolls Royce Merlin



Engine reverberated round the old buildings and hangars and echoed across this historic grass airfield. Sitting there in the Vega after it had taxied away towards the hangars I had time to recall some of the other famous aircraft that had flown from Bicester down the years - Spitfires, Mosquitoes, Blenheims, the Handley Page Halifax. Bicester was also a base for towed glider operations, men and equipment being delivered into the theatre of war by Hamicar and Horsa.

On one of the better looking days, the pundits of Portmoak with their laptops working overtime were looking at weather predictions for the day and unanimously agreed that by 13.30 hours there would be a serious degradation in the weather conditions over Bicester. Therefore caution was the watchword, make the most of the morning and be prepared for a tactical withdrawal from the skies as a well documented front or whatever, moved in.

Faced with all this knowledge, I made a tentative approach to the day's flying. Out to Banbury and westwards always keeping an eye over my shoulder for the first signs of trouble, and back over Bicester by 1.30pm. So where was this approaching line of foul weather? Two o'clock arrived, then 3 o'clock, nothing, by 4.30 there was a hazy sky out to the southwest. It just goes to show, you can't depend on the weather, even bad weather.

One of the interesting features about airfields is that they have extensive boundaries and hidden away areas where folk rarely go. Bicester is no exception. Dog walkers having paid their fees are allowed to use the peri-track which circumnavigates the operational grass area. However, to the east and just beyond the perimeter fence lies a disused quarry. It's quite an extensive area and no doubt at some time in the future will be used for council housing, but right now it's a veritable botanists dream. During my visit in August there was a profusion of grass species and flowering plants to delight and excite those interested in such things. Throw in the odd water feature with Mallard Duck swimming around and it all made for an interesting afternoon's diversion from gliding.

One evening we all gathered and went for a meal in the

centre of Bicester, this was after a non flying day. However, as we trooped from the car park the poorer conditions had cleared. One of our group happened to look up and there high above us were several gliders circling lazily under this beautiful black bottomed cumulus cloud. We had no idea where they had come from, certainly not Bicester, on enquiring next day. Perhaps from Hinton in the Hedges to the North.

After spending a day on the ground one could be forgiven for thinking uncharitable thoughts towards these pilots as they enjoyed their soaring flights at gone 7 o'clock in the evening. Anyway thank goodness the food and beer were good.

Finally, just to show you what can happen on these trips. I was negotiating my way through the large iron double entry gates, where one was supposed to use metal pins after opening them to prevent closure as one drove through. On this occasion I didn't bother and paid the price. The upwind gate started to swing shut as I moved forward, I accelerated, so did the gate. Be warned, if you ever go to Bicester, do it right.

So that was about it for Bicester 09, the gliding could have been better, but I enjoyed it. One of these years is going to be a classic, maybe next year's expedition, certainly 2010 has the right ring to it. Be there, wherever there is.

Frank Smith

Gliding in the USA: The same - but different

Usually my work trips to the US are short but on this occasion I would be there over a weekend so a Google search for gliding sites was clearly required. In no time at all I found that the Greater Boston Soaring Club at Sterling, Massachusetts was about a 90-minute drive away. Saturday dawned misty but it was forecast to burn off as the temperature climbed to 90F. The website had told me that the Club was an all aerotow operation and as I approached the airfield the wooded landscape made me ponder the options if the rope broke. The Club has 4 training

gliders, a Schweizer 2-33, which looks a bit like a K7, two Super Blaniks and a Puchacz.



The 2-33 was on an inspection and I had previously flown a Super Blanik so I opted for the Puchacz. With a blue sky and no sign of thermal activity I decided to wait and see if conditions improved. As I wandered around the parked aircraft and gliders at the field I bumped into one of the tug pilots doing his DI on a Pawnee. He was a Brit called Richard from Bristol who, despite having lived in the US for 25 years, had no trace of an American accent. There was another Pawnee belonging to the Club in the next slot and initially I thought it had some sort of sophisticated propeller with swept blade tips but it turned out that they, and the dented left wing tip, were the result of a recent landing accident. Fortunately, the Club's third tug, a Korean War vintage Cessna Bird Dog was serviceable so we would have two tugs on the go.

Around lunchtime, cumulus started to appear so it was time to go flying. Climbing into the front of the Puchacz it was comforting to see that the pre-take off checklist on the panel was almost the same as ours, CB SIT CBE (I wonder what they do in a flapped glider?). The rope from the Pawnee was attached and the tug began to take up slack with our wing tip firmly on the ground. I can't say I was comfortable with this and my hand was twitching around the release handle. With the slack taken up the wing tip man held his arms out horizontally as a signal to the tug pilot to stop. Our wing was lifted and then a thumbs-up from me and a waggle of the rudder was necessary to get the show on the road. As we got airborne, the one option if the rope broke came into view in the 2 'o'clock position. It was a relatively clear area with some young trees but I was not convinced that the glider would escape unscathed even if we did. At 3000ft I pulled off and turned RIGHT. Potential embarrassment was only prevented because I had watched a previous tow and queried the right turn with another pilot. We found sufficient weak thermals to stay up in the local area until after 45 minutes we were called back because the instructor was needed for a queue of pupils. Rejoining the circuit at this joint power and gliding site is more formal than at Portmoak. We joined from the

dead-side where the procedure is to fly a crosswind leg on the upwind boundary of the airfield, starting at about 1200 feet, and then turning downwind. Unlike our cut corner at the end of the downwind leg, the turn onto base leg is 90 degrees. Had we joined the circuit from the active side of the airfield we would have had to approach the airfield on a line projected out at 45 degrees from the start of the downwind leg. All proceeded normally with the circuit and landing until touchdown when I fully opened the airbrakes and pulled the stick back as we are taught. The voice in the back said close the airbrakes and although I was a little surprised, I complied without thinking. The glider caught me unawares and, as it turned out, the voice in the back as well, by climbing a few feet into the air. The second arrival is best described as inelegant. On reflection, I got a lot out of a flight that could be considered as pretty routine at home. I realised that I had got so used to flying at Portmoak that I took our standard procedures for granted without really thinking about them and it took me too long to assume nothing and question everything. The instructor also assumed that I knew what I was doing and let me do all the flying without prior questioning on the procedures I was used to in the UK. I encourage anyone who has the opportunity to fly abroad to give it a go. I'm sure you'll find it enjoyable and you'll probably learn something – I certainly did.

Richard Lucas

Keep in Brief – Phonetically

I was sitting in the clubhouse at Portmoak last autumn listening to the wind howl, the waves crashing on the shores of Loch Leven and watching the geese fly backwards. Reflecting on the radio chatter that had pervaded the air waves during the previous day's superb soaring conditions, I became convinced that the RAF crew from the Dam Busters and S for Sugar were still flying around in the skies over Scotland.

For no reason at all, I started to wonder if it was possible to string the words of the phonetic alphabet together to make sense. The game



evolved as follows - the rules are simple:

1. The entire alphabet must be used.
2. The story must be as short as possible.
3. The words must not be altered (no plurals etc.)
4. Unlimited poetic and tabloidal journalistic licence is permitted.

The result was a story concerning a chauffeur of South African origin, whose apparel varies according to the time of year and the family for whom he works. They are in Peru attending a sporting tournament at a local hostelry. The game was won by an alcoholic American. The game is heard by a radiographer of Asian birth with a penchant for listening to dance music in his Ford car in Canada.

The story goes as follows:

In November Uniform, Zulu Oscar drove his Alpha Romeo, Papa, Juliet and Charlie to Lima Hotel for Golf. Yankee Victor wins Kilo Whiskey – Bravo! Quebec X-ray expert, Mike, from India hears Tango Foxtrot Echo in his Sierra.

Thirty-eight words. Can anyone improve on that?

Chris Ellis

Where have all the members gone – 30 years on?

I first joined the club in 1979. I know this because I recently found an old copy of Portmoak Press dated Winter 1979/80 (*aha – before my time! – Ed*) and found my name in the list of new members who joined that year. So what you might ask? Well, the thing that really surprised me was that there had been 96 new members that year. No wonder that I found myself arriving at the club at 6.30 a.m. to get my name on the flying list to have any chance of a flight. There are a lot of names on the list that I recognise, though relatively few who I know to be members in 2009. Some of the names that leap off the page include Bob Jones, Kate Byrne, Sant Cervantes, John Reilly and a couple of others. Many others have long since disappeared though I remember their faces, especially those who joined me on the Saturday morning syndicate that got going that winter to alleviate the problem of getting instructional flights.

Of the many others whose names I do not recognise I wonder where they are now and how long they stayed as members of the SGU. Certainly some must have joined for a particular reason, perhaps for that year only, for among the locations listed with the members names there were some far-flung places including Oxford, Wigtownshire and Leicestershire.

I know the stories behind some of those who stopped flying such as Janice West who married instructor Jim Woodley and then promptly stopped flying. Charlie McAllister was a student who left to pursue work elsewhere. Peter Whitehead who is, I presume, now running Eden Soaring. However, two questions I can't answer are: why we did not have 96 new members in 2009, and why so many of those joining in 1979 are no longer members? Answer these questions and we would be well on the way to knowing how to recruit and retain new members today.

For interest, there were a few weel-kent names on the page listing member's achievements with BGA badges. Bob Jones went solo, Howard Fox completed Bronze, John Galloway and Brian Scougal flew Silver Distance and Bruce Marshall completed Gold (*so, what about your own experiences since then Alastair? – Ed*)

Alastair Dodds

