



May 2009 Newsletter

Startup - James Mason

One of the suggestions following publication of the last newsletter was that we should try and publish shorter newsletters more regularly. Consequently I am trying this out this month with two articles, the first is a real treat from John Akerman on visiting lesser known airfields. I hope that you enjoy this article as much as I did and it should provide some fresh ideas for the summer flying season.

A popular subject for private pilots involves the planning of a cross channel trip. Recently over a curry, I agreed to take former club chairman, Dave Ashford, across to France so that we could renew our appreciation of a French lunch. I thought that a write up of the trip might be useful for others planning similar forays over the next few months. The flights were both straightforward and very enjoyable and it is a real pleasure to be flying across the channel with the good visibility and ATC service that we experienced. In my view, trips like these make all the effort and work involved in achieving and maintaining your license worthwhile.

Happy and safe flying.

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Fancy somewhere different? – John Akerman

Here is an assortment of airfields that don't seem to feature much on anyone's list of 'must visit' destinations. I've flown into them during the last year or so and thoroughly enjoyed all of them, albeit sometimes for rather idiosyncratic reasons. For example I particularly like glider sites since the inhabitants always seem to be very friendly and costs are always reasonable. I also like the atmosphere of WW2 airfields. So a glider site on a WW2 airfield is a very attractive combination.

Some of these airfields have websites. It is helpful to consult them before phoning for PPR.

Debach



Debach is about 10 miles NE of Ipswich. The 500M grass strip, which is kept in good condition, is on the western edge of a WW2 USAAF base. Just a couple of hundred yards away is a really excellent museum, consisting of a fully restored WW2 control tower and a couple of Nissen huts. Phone farmer / owner Richard Taylor and he will bring along the museum keys and let you in. There is no landing fee but donations are appreciated. If you're dying for food and drink call in at Great Oakley, about 15NM south. It's the only airfield I have ever visited that has a resident submarine, although it may have gone by now.

Deenethorpe



Another WW2 airfield, this time in Northants and just to the north of Corby. In fact the one remaining runway, 1200M of fairly decent tarmac, was used by visitors to the now-defunct Corby Steelworks. Aside from a microlight school and a few locally-based aircraft, it is devoid of features, let alone facilities. However it is just a few minutes walk to Deene Park, a lovely 16th century mansion in delightful grounds. See www.deenepark.com for opening times, or when you phone for PPR arrange your own opening time. There is no stated landing fee but donations are welcome.

Garston Farm



This delightfully smooth 800M grass strip is about 6 miles NE of Bath. In fact you can get a bus into Bath from Garston village, next door. Or call a taxi. Also well worth visiting are Corsham Court and village, about 5 miles NE. Or just stay in Garston, where there are several pubs. The very aviation-minded farmers who run the strip are guaranteed to give you a really warm welcome and will readily show you all the home-based aircraft. PPR is essential to get briefings about noise abatement and how to avoid conflict with next-door-neighbour RAF Colerne.

Little Rissington



This airfield, in the middle of the Cotswolds, was once home to the RAF's Central Flying School. It is still owned by the MoD but leased to Devonair. You'll need to call them for PPR and to make sure the MoD isn't messing around on any of the runways. The airfield is peacefully located on a Cotswold plateau, with excellent views (and walks) in all directions. All three runways are in very good condition but some sections of taxiway are rough. When I visited, a couple of guys from Devonair made us coffee and showed us round their two hangars which contain, amongst other things, a mountain of DH Dove / Devon spares and enough NAC Freelance parts to build about 5 new aircraft.

Ludham



Right in the middle of the Norfolk Broads, Ludham has 550 metres of rather tatty tarmac on top of an original WW2 runway. There are no facilities whatsoever, aside from a curiously located hangar in which live, if I remember correctly, an RV8 and an RV6. However after a very pleasant 15 min walk along quiet country lanes you come to the lovely village of Ludham in which there is a substantial pub that serves good food. Walk on for a further 5 minutes and you arrive at Ludham staithe, at the end of a pretty and peaceful Broads tributary. A visit to Ludham is like a journey back through time to an older and gentler England. PPR essential, even if only to find out how to pay landing fees.

Saltby



Saltby is a glider site that occupies about half of a WW2 airfield a few miles north of Melton Mowbray. The hard runways (02/20 800M and 07/25 1200M) are in remarkably good condition. Grass 07/25 (950M) is a bit bumpy and this is the one you'll probably be using for landing when gliders are being launched by aerotow. If you are using 07/25 hard, please mind the double-decker bus on the north side of the hard runway near the 25 threshold. It is used as a local control tower and lounge / refreshment area and is much-prized as such. The main clubhouse, hidden behind woods, is reached via a taxiway. As you come round the corner from the 25 threshold you are greeted by a huge area of concrete, a mass of small hangars, and the friendly clubhouse. This is where you sign in, make a donation (no landing fee), and have lunch. PPR is of course essential, and it is best to avoid really busy gliding days.

Sandtoft



This poor WW2 airfield, about 7 miles west of Scunthorpe, has been ferociously butchered. None of the concrete has been torn up. Instead it has had dumped on it all manner of factory buildings, sheds, storage containers, cars, pallets, trucks and heaven knows what else. The aero club is crammed into the SE corner and has just 886 metres of taxiway to use as a runway, plus some dispersals and a large hardstanding. However the tarmac is in very good condition, the clubhouse is excellent, and it is a really lively, friendly place. With landing fees £5 for a single and sensibly-priced good quality food it is also excellent value. There is no taxiway, but with plenty of holding points on the old dispersals, backtracking seems not to cause any significant delays.

Tibenham



One of my favourites, Tibenham is about 15 miles SSW of Norwich and close to Old Buckenham. As a WW2 USAAF base it had an illustrious history and was for a while home to James Stewart, movie star and B24 captain. The three tarmac runways are in very good condition and, at 700M, 1250M and 1600M, completely over the top for gliders. Curiously, the only tatty bit of runway is an unused 1950s extension to 21/03. Glider club members are extremely friendly and the clubhouse is very good indeed. There is no landing fee but donations are welcome. PPR is essential – they operate both aerotows and winch launches. How a glider club can own a virtually complete WW2 airfield is quite beyond me, but if there's a pilots' heaven I think it will be rather similar to Tibenham.

Crossing the Channel in the Cirrus SR20 – James Mason

One of the pleasures of flying is that ability to get to places which can be time consuming to reach by more conventional methods. I have always enjoyed crossing the English Channel for a day trip to France, it has been a while since my last trip so I had an ideal excuse when Dave Ashford suggested that we should revisit Cherbourg. In the days when we had G-ZERO, it was a favourite destination, sometimes with a return back via the Channel Islands to give everyone chance to fly.

Our trip was in a Cirrus SR20 G2 aircraft, G-EDHO, based at Bournemouth and the trip to Cherbourg can be done in 40 minutes. The route was out from Bournemouth along the coast to the southern side of the Isle of Wight to join the recommended VFR route across to the Cherbourg peninsular. We planned a departure from Bournemouth at 0945Z with French local time two hours ahead that would put us in Cherbourg in time for lunch. A few days before the trip, I did the route planning and checked the Notams, we were travelling on a public holiday but the airport was still open normally. The aircraft contains its own liferaft and jackets, but I did borrow the club Jeppesen VFR Manual (formerly known as the Bottlang) for the Cherbourg airfield plate and also in case we needed any alternative airfield information although my planned alternative was Alderney in the first instance. The two main forms required for a cross channel crossing are the Flight Plan and General Declaration (or 'Gendec') and I prepared these the evening before the flight when the weather forecast for the trip was looking favourable.

This trip was my first experience of the NATS AFPEX (Assisted Flight Plan Exchange) system which is an internet-based flight planning system and I found that it worked well. It is a significant improvement over the old system of manually completing a form and faxing it to the relevant ATC unit. Some months ago, I registered with NATS for an AFPEX id which is relatively straightforward but it does take some days to set up as NATS run a check on your pilot's license and there are various security steps to go through to activate your id. Consequently I would recommend that the application is done well ahead of any planned trip and that you check the login process beforehand. Actually producing the flight plan is straightforward, there are several nice features over the familiar CA48 Flight Plan Form. The system allows checking of the form for syntax which is very handy and I thought that the online help was good here as well. Also the system determines the relevant addressees for the flight plan, depending on the route details, I was interested to see that this included the alternate airfields as well. I submitted the form the night before the flight and phoned Bournemouth ATC the next morning just to check that it had been received. Sure enough it was all there and the controller immediately quoted my planned departure time which was reassuring. Well done NATS on providing this system which I found to be a significant improvement over previous methods!

The Gendec form is available as a word document which I filled out and FAXed in my case to Bournemouth Handling who kindly circulated the relevant authorities (HM Customs and Special Branch). It's a good idea to prepare the Gendec well ahead of time since you need to collect your passenger information as well for the form which includes passport information.

On the night before the trip, I checked all the details which included the weight and balance and then arranged for the aircraft to be refuelled to save some time the next day. There is nothing worse than arriving at the airport on a trip with an expected departure time on a flight plan and being delayed for refuelling. I have found that refuellers are often very helpful in accepting telephone instructions the previous evening which can eliminate this hassle.

All we needed now was the weather and as I woke up the sun was streaming through the curtains, it looked just what we wanted. Unfortunately an hour or so later, the clouds had rolled in but the forecast still looked good for the trip as some high pressure nudged in from the south west and we were between fronts which promised a good trip. As we arrived at Bournemouth, a Falcon jet from FRA landed which gave us a taste of what was to come. Dave and I got the covers off the Cirrus and after the preflight checks, we were soon taxiing to the hold for 26. At this point, two Hawks overflew the airfield, I did explain to Dave that this was all part of the planning for the day but he did not look too convinced! All of this excitement had led to some delay and we waited for our turn to depart and were given a standard VFR departure via Hengistbury Head. I actually worked the ground, tower and approach frequencies on our departure from Bournemouth. As we climbed out we could see that the weather in the channel looked even better and I soon transferred to London Information as we were routing along the south coast of the Isle of Wight.

I was planning to use the quadrantal rule height for our channel crossing and as we coasted out I set the STEC autopilot to hold our altitude and bearing. The planned track took us through danger area D036 and after checking we were advised that it was notified as active with 'live firings' which certainly got our attention. I had planned an alternate track to take us clear of D036 but after making a call to Plymouth Military on 124.15, we were given permission to transit with a transponder code. Perhaps the aircraft that we had seen earlier at Bournemouth were connected to this activity and as we transited through D036 we kept an especially good lookout but did not see anything. The moving map display on the MFD panel in the Cirrus is a very useful supplementary aid in this situation, once clear of the area I transferred from Plymouth Military to Cherbourg. In my experience, I have always found the French controllers in places like Cherbourg very helpful. My own view is that it is a pity that the service is not quite the same in the opposite direction, after contacting Solent Approach you would probably be answered with "...remain

clear....” I know that the airspace is more congested in Southern England than Northern France but there is a significant difference and I don’t even speak French!

The airfield at Cherbourg with its 2440m of runway was clearly visible well before we coasted in and soon we were on finals with just one other aircraft in the circuit. After landing, we parked on an almost deserted apron and Dave attended to the fireman collecting the landing fees as I finished off the paperwork and put the aircraft away. While Dave visited Luc’s bar I went and filed a flight plan for our return trip. Actually this couldn’t be easier at the moment since in the control tower, there is now simply a telephone which connects you to Rennes, I believe. The controller on the other end of the line was again extremely helpful, actually I think he also had my outbound plan in front of him as he checked some of the details, and filed the plan on my behalf. There was a terminal in the room which was out of commission which I seem to remember using on a previous trip, quite often at French airfields there is a minitel terminal for this purpose.



Now down to the serious business of the day, arranging the taxi and getting into town for lunch. I thought the taxi fare was pretty expensive at 31euros but the rates do go up on public holidays. With the good restaurant at the airport, it is not surprising that quite a few pilots do not venture out of the airport. I have to say that Dave’s choice of restaurant, Café de Paris (40, quai de Caligny) was excellent, it was interesting to see them prepare Dave’s fruits de mer and it certainly looked very impressive as they delivered it to the table:



I had rather more modest plat du jour and every course was delightful, I particularly enjoyed the sea bream main course and it is very pleasant to have such a good lunch without having to rush! Afterwards we went for a walk around the town which has a lot of character, there was one street which can barely have been six feet across, certainly one of the narrowest that I have seen. By now there was hardly a cloud in the sky and it did feel as if summer had arrived.

After getting back to the airfield, we found that rush hour had arrived, the terminal building was full of people with an airliner just about to depart, it looked like a charter flight and I think it was the busiest that I had ever seen the airport apart from when it holds the Christmas market. We decided to pick up some wine to take home from Luc's shop and then made our way back to the aeroplane. After departure, I recalled Plymouth Military but it looked as if they had closed by this time, calling London Information confirmed that D036 was inactive. The viz was now excellent and we saw the Isle of Wight from a long way out, here a bit closer in we had a nice view of St Catherine's Point:



London Information was very busy on our flight home and I would not have liked the job of the controller managing the traffic volume present. I do wonder why they do not allocate more resources at times like these since the workload volume seems unacceptably high for the poor controller and I do wonder about any aircraft who have simply not been able to get through. After coasting in at St Catherine's, I transferred to Bournemouth approach. We were put into orbits at Milford followed by another few on an extended left hand base for runway 26 before landing, actually it was one of the busiest arrivals that I have had at Bournemouth.

As we landed we could see clouds building up from the west as the forecast had suggested and we had certainly had the best part of the day. As we put the aircraft away, all the hard work that it takes in maintaining your pilot's license and currency seemed worthwhile after such a great trip.

Forthcoming Events

Glenforsa Airfield

Isle of Mull

43rd Annual Fly-in

Fri. 22nd. until Sun. 24th May 2009



The late Spring Bank Holiday in the UK is the 25th May so you have no excuse about having to get home for work on Monday! PPR is required from the Argyll and Bute Council representative on Glenforsa, David Howitt (telephone: 01688 300 402 or mobile 077997 44 908). PPR may also be obtained through Oban Airport telephone: 09056 470151).

Check out www.glenforsaairfield.co.uk

Or contact [Chris Thompson](mailto:Chris.Thompson@oban-airport.co.uk), (normally Popham A/G) - (H) 02392 597965 (M) 07710093155 who has an invaluable source of information for aviators wishing to fly up from England - and will be there to greet you - as usual! Accommodation (even B&B) on Mull is limited so you will need to make an early commitment to this. Car hire is available from www.mullselfdrive.co.uk on the airfield.