



BIGGIN HILL AIRPORT BUGLE

News from our Airport at Biggin Hill - established 2005



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FISH BAIT AND DUCT TAPE

What do these two items have in common? One of our members sent this delightful story of what can be achieved in a desperate far from home situation with some skilful assessment and common sense approach to a quick fix to a fishing trip in the outback of Alaska that went slightly wrong. The pilot chappie and his fisherman friend left their excess fishing bait in one of those secure cooler boxes in the aircraft, whilst they went to the river bank for a bit of fishing – they were lucky they didn't take the extra bait with them..! Bears have an exceptional keen sense of smell and are able to sniff out the minutest whiff of anything edible from a mile away. Their aircraft was no deterrent to accessing the cooler box of bait.



The bear even punctured the tyres



to prove the quality of his teeth.

The pilot, not to be outdone, smiled and showed 'his' pearly white teeth as he called another pilot on the radio to bring him two tyres, three boxes of duct tape and a couple of sheets of plastic.



The skills and ingenuity of this bush pilot are to be admired – the advantages of a metal framed aircraft are evident, for this get you home repair with available products such as duct tape. A monocoque wooden constructed aircraft would have been destroyed beyond repair. The Hurricane fighter of WW11 was easily repaired for the same reason because of the metal tubing employed in its construction and covered with fabric. This aircraft was flown safely back to base.

SAVING LIONS OF AFRICA

Our Pilot correspondent of RSA sends these pictures to the Bugle.



This picture is difficult to see here,

of a lion asleep (drugged) in the back of a light aircraft ready for transportation – we are not sure what happens if it wakes during flight. These lions were rescued from a canned hunting park and transported to a safer environment.



Here is a trailer load at the local airport ready for their individual flights – imagine on opening the doors if they too were all wide awake..!!

Incidentally lions like bears can do a lot of damage to aircraft – they too chew tyres and puncture them.

A STORY FROM GAUTENG

Life + Legalities in South Africa.

Gauteng Metro policeman pulled Sipo's car over and told him that because he was wearing his seat belt he had just won R5000, in an 'Arrive Alive' safety competition. Sipo's could hardly believe his luck. 'What are you going to do with your cash?' asked the traffic cop. 'Well I guess I am going to get a drivers licence' Sipo answered.

'Oh, don't listen to him' yelled Dipo in the passenger seat. 'He tries to be smart when he's drunk.' This woke Ndlovu in the back seat who took one look at the cop and

moaned, 'I knew we wouldn't get far in a stolen car.'

At that moment there was a knock from the boot and Zakeles voice said, are we over the border yet?' The cop said....Let's share the R5000..!

MAIDEN VOYAGE LAUNCH

She had bought a new craft and decided to take it for a maiden trip. This was of course her first boat and she wasn't quite sure of the 'Standard Operating Procedure' for launching off a ramp, but figured it couldn't be too hard.

She contacted the local boat dealer for advice, they said don't let the trailer get in too deep when you launch the boat.

Well she didn't quite comprehend what the boat dealer meant, because she could hardly get the trailer in the water at all..!!

Below is a picture of the launch.



Yes, it is rather tricky trying to get the trailer the right depth for a successful launch. There must be a solution to this problem.

GORDON JONES FAREWELL

Join us on the 27th March 2010 at the Old Jail at 1400pm, to celebrate Gordon's memory as we knew him

'A true gentleman'



AIRFIELD PERSONALITIES



BARRY MacGRATH. A quiet spoken Irishman with striking hazel eyes was educated at the Royal Academical Institution, to A-Level Standard in Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics. Barry served his apprenticeship of Aeronautical & General Engineering at Short and Harland, Belfast. Barry decided to leave Belfast in November 1962 for London and the big life, arriving at St Pancras with £20 in his pocket.

He got a job as a Motor Cycle Mechanic with Pride and Clarke of Stockwell one of the largest M/C dealers in the world at that time.

Throughout the winter of 1963 he rode a 350cc Matchless, bump starting on the icy roads because his kick starter was broken.

Around this time he found his way to Biggin Hill and started flying with Surrey & Kent under the tuition of Tiny Marshall.

The summer of 1965 Barry decided he would ride his 500cc Triumph motor cycle overland to Australia. This was possibly the beginning of



his true destiny which would involve travel in a totally different field, and direction and method of transport and more financial backing.

However the overland journey to took him down to Trieste in Northern Italy passing a tram en-route, toward Turkey, taking in a



large Mosque in Istanbul. The next picture is of Mt Ararat which towers 5165 metres amsl situated on the Armenian / Iranian border of eastern Turkey with his laden Triumph, Speed Twin



Below, with some Iranians from the nearby local village. Take note of the road surface.



The next picture is of the tomb of Omar Khayyam who was born in 1048AD a philosopher, poet, astronomer, mathematician.



A huge Mausoleum stands to his memory at Neyshapur. (Persia). Barry continued on his adventure until his Triumph suffered metal fatigue of the fuel tank mounting points, from which it split and caught fire whilst traveling at speed between Meshad and the Afghanistan frontier – he leapt off the machine in motion with scorched pants and watched it burn out. He then made his way back to the UK. and joined Rollason Aircraft and Engines Ltd at Croydon from 1964 – 1968 and continued to fly with the County Flying Club. (below)



This habitat (above) has long since gone. In January 1967 he crashed a Tiger Moth whilst trying to take-off in a gusting cross wind. He then suffered a forced landing in another Tiger Moth, due to the engineer failing to wire lock the nuts on the rocker pedestal on one cylinder. There followed another forced landing with the Isaacs Fury at Rochester airport when the engine failed during an aerobatic display.



Barry by now had gained his Instructors Rating and was instructing at Rochester during 1971. He moved to Fairflight Charters, following this period at Rochester, as an Airframe Fitter and co-pilot and was subsequently Chief Engineer for Sportair Aviation. He suffered another engine failure in a

Stampe when the propeller disintegrated from the aircraft causing him to land near Sundridge. Barry also had a near death experience on Keston Common whilst returning from an evening curry at East Street, Bromley. He was confronted with another motorcyclist coming around the bend on the wrong side of the road without lights, they collided handle bar to handle bar. The other bike ripping Barry's throttle cable and jamming his throttle wide open causing him to continue at high speed before regaining control. The errant motorcyclist was not so lucky! Barry spent two years instructing at Kingair Flying Club on Cessna's and the Chipmunk during 1972 – 1974. This was followed by an Engineering Contract for Bedek, at Lod Airport, Israel. In 1977 he flew a Cessna 210 to Khartoum, Sudan and helped set up the commercial operation for the owners of the aircraft, Ecologic Khartoum. Nothing is ecological if aircraft are involved he says with a wry smile. He would return to the Sudan in 1984 as an engineer for a crop spraying operation run by Farm Air International Ltd. "We're not expecting overwhelming success with initials like 'F.A.I.L.' !" observed the chief pilot dryly. However he found time to compete in the famous 'Perithon' on the 20th July 1984 at Biggin Hill Airport. This was a race around the perimeter track after the airfield closed. The band of Acker Bilk provided the musical entertainment with the late Keith Agate joining in with his trumpet.



The race was started by James Hunt the current F1 World Champion firing Tom Sergeants famous Bronze Cannon. The competitors took off with fright, more than split second anticipation. This event

attracted several professional runners from the Woolwich Harriers who got to hear of this event, carrying away all the prizes. These professional runners completed the 3.5nm course in 15 minutes. Two of our airfield competitors



(Micky Cohen and Barry MacGrath) arrived 45 minutes after the race start, claiming they were *first and second – from last.*

Having recovered from this strenuous escapade, Barry set course for the Sudan. He would ferry a Turbo Thrush back to the UK and returned to Egypt and the Sudan in subsequent years working for A & G Aviation which became Anglo American Airwork. January 1986 - another forced landing. This time in a Turbo Thrush near Kosti in the Sudan due to a malfunction of a fuel flow control unit.



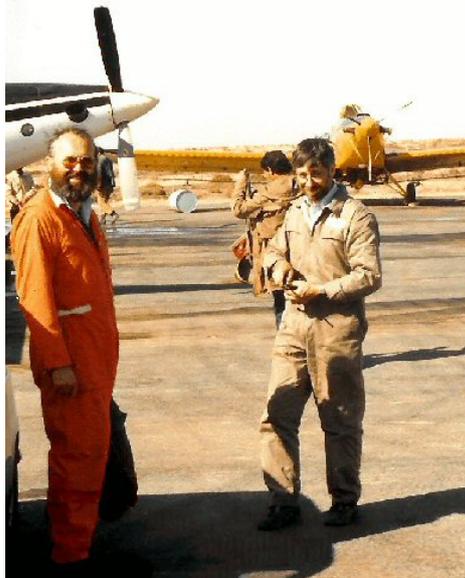
Sudan is a large area some 1200nm x 900nm, a hot and dry barren land except for the banks of the Nile which is lush green.

Ferry flights can start in any weather like this scene at Troyes,

in France, with the knowledge that the weather will get a lot warmer



as you head for the continent of Africa and the golden sunshine.



During a ferry flight from Zimbabwe to Mali in 1987, the agent failed to appear at Brazzaville. Barry and his No 2 were arrested and confined under guard, until the next morning whence they were escorted to the aircraft. They took off with 150' cloud base and flew 400 odd miles at zero feet to Libreville in Gabon, thence to Togo and another weather drama diverting to Abidjan at low level. Two minutes after landing, the weather was zero feet with spray bouncing off the taxiway. When it rains in this part of the world, it rains almost solid water



The next ferry flight from UK to Zimbabwe had been attacked by the environmental weather in Lincolnshire. It was desperately

required for work in Zim' he departed with most instruments u/s. These aircraft don't have a vast amount of right way up gauges anyway, due to the nature of their work. Well into the flight in Africa worsening weather resulted in running out of daylight and force landing in the bush after 10hrs 30min. Next morning he bought a drum of diesel from the local farmer and continued to Harare. As usual the beacon 'SAL' (Salisbury) wasn't working. Needless to say, fortunately the PT6 engine will burn, diesel, illuminating paraffin, avgas, kerosene and pretty well anything wet and flammable in an emergency!

Same year, Mali to Zimbabwe, had to make unscheduled landing at Pointe Noire, Congo in violent weather. Barry and his No2 were promptly arrested, seems they had flown over a prohibited area within the airfield boundaries. (It was the commandants house). Whilst a friendly Frenchman and his No2 kept the firing squad distracted he paid the landing fees, and before they could make up their minds what to do with them, they jumped into the aircraft and took off relieved, but poor weather loomed ahead. They followed a railway line at zero feet until it disappeared into a tunnel, and continued flying through the tree tops until the ground dropped away and the weather improved as a result and they arrived safely at Kinshasa. January 1988 ferry flight from Morocco to Johannesburg via



Tammanrasset and Agadez, both situated a long way from nowhere. Although the Ahaggar mountains nearby rise to 11,000ft. It is often, extremely hazy in this area of the

Sahara and these nasty hills are often invisible, in the haze. Became stranded at Agadez for seven days, due to a severe sandstorm.



Arriving at Bangui, Central Africa, Concorde arrived out of the blue carrying the President of Zaire. (Wonder who paid for that flight?) Departed for Bujumbura the next morning which is situated at the top of Lake Tanganyika. Retiring to the hotel Source du Nil the best hotel at the top of the lake.



Field maintenance facilities can be found most places where it is warm, which is the advantage of working in Africa. March 1988 saw the end of Tsetse-fly spraying in Somalia and ferried a NAC-6 Fieldmaster from Mogadishu to Cardiff.



This aircraft was so slow compared to the Thrush Commander, and with the headwinds encountered they were not going to make it to Djibouti, so decided to take a short cut across the Ogaden area of Ethiopia keeping low to minimize the effect of the headwind. Suddenly saw bright flashes at 2 o'clock, with shells bursting above

and in their haste to get undercover hit a thorn tree and transported most of it 400nm to Djibouti, where a helpful re-fueller assisted in removing the debris and the remainder of the landing gear fairings. His Zimbabwean passenger declared it was a battery of 14.5s that almost hit them.. They retired to the pool-side bar of



the Djibouti Sheraton which is almost surrounded by the Red Sea. Subsequently on the journey back to Europe they ran into bad weather and made an unscheduled landing at Lamezia, southern Italy where upon the Zimbabwean was arrested, but they couldn't touch Barry being an Irishman.

On his next trip flying across Tanzania a tail brace wire snapped forcing him to make an emergency landing at Dodoma, 30 mins after the President's jet had arrived for an A.O.U. meeting of foreign ministers, so was promptly arrested yet again. *(Getting used to this by now, says Barry).*



Fortunately he was released into custody of the M.A.F. (Missionary Aviation Fellowship) and made up a strut to replace the broken wire.

By 1990 ferry flights were beginning to dry up, so he spent a year in Morocco attached to the Gendarmerie Royale as Technical Instructor for Ayres Corporation, manufacturers of the S2R Turbo Thrush. Barry had worked with the Moroccans the previous year on locust control with over 20

Thrushes and a DC-7c for area spraying of the desert. There had been 3 DC-7s, but by the time he had arrived 2 had been shot down by the Polisario (they assumed, anything with 4 engines was a Moroccan Air Force C-130).

July 1992 Barry collected a Thrush at Odienne, Ivory Coast, to deliver to South Africa. (and a refresher dose of Malaria)



On his way to Abidjan to clear customs he checked out the ferry fuel system which seemed OK until he turned finals and to his surprise the engine flamed out. This certainly grabbed his attention, and he put in a lot of skillful flying into the few remaining seconds of flight, landing safely he was able to turn off the runway.

It took a couple of days to figure out the cause. An incorrect part had been fitted in the engine fuel system. Ironically had he adhered to the correct procedure of reverting to the normal aircraft fuel tanks for landing, the fact of by being lazy, this fault would have remained hidden and would have probably run out of fuel well out to sea across the 'Bight of Benin' hundreds of miles from land.

At Luanda in Angola Barry encountered a drunken body guard of Jonas Savimbi with an AK-47 in one hand and a can of Castle beer in the other.

He was advised by some South Africans not to leave the aircraft unattended. He spent a nervous night in the aircraft trying to sleep which was disturbed by erratic bursts of automatic gun fire uncomfortably close.

During the comings and goings of the 1980's Barry maintained his engineering licences with Sqr Leader Bill Webb at Biggin Hill, eventually joining him full time.

In 1996 he moved to Redhill as Chief Engineer specializing in the repair and overhaul of vintage aircraft.



Missing Africa, in 2001 he joined Bristow Helicopters in Lagos, Nigeria just in time for the crew bus to be shot up by a gang of robbers. Shortly afterwards the Nigerian Army Munitions Dump caught fire and blew up, he along with several others went up on the roof to watch the display.

When shells went flying overhead and hot shrapnel began falling from the sky they decided they had seen enough and retired to the bar below, par-taking of much defensive drinking.

Eventually by 2005 long term Malaria was getting the better of him and reluctantly he had to leave the tropics, spending the last few



years as a self-employed engineer on the maintenance of Jet & Turbo Prop aircraft back at Biggin Hill.

Barry MacGrath, is a talented engineer / experienced pilot.

A 'true genius' in disguise..!