



BIGGIN HILL AIRPORT BUGLE

News from our Airport at Biggin Hill - established 2005



CLUB AND AIRPORT NEWS
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AIRFIELD REUNION PARTY



50 airfield pilots and friends attended a gathering at the Aperfield Inn, Biggin Hill on Tuesday 25th February 2014.

This was an informal event off the airfield to keep alive the halcyon days of the airfield bars have long gone and pilots and friends have become a little disjointed in respect of a common meeting place close to the airfield.

Falcon Flying Services were the hosts for this wonderful evening.

The food at the Aperfield was excellent and served efficiently.

It is hoped to arrange future events such as this to give people the opportunity to stay in contact with like people.



Peter Fletcher, Singh Bhamra and Tom Wood

Well done to Falcon Flying Services for arranging this wonderful night out with every one arriving promptly.



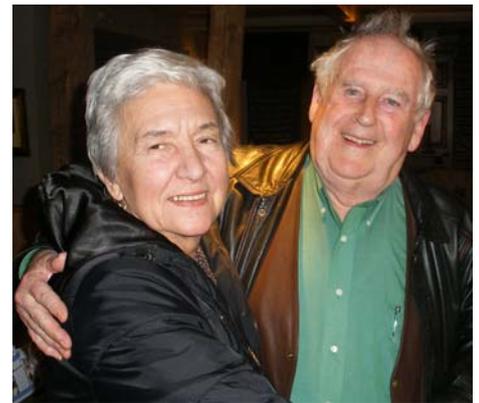
L to R; Singh, Sylvie, Shono, Charlie, Sara & Alan Lavender.



Don and Helen Ward.



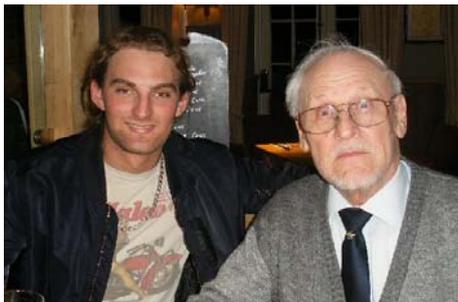
Imran, JB (Editor) & Peter Adams.



Jerry Nolan with 'B'



Dave Crew, Paul Nelson and Don Foreman, sharing a drink.



James Flashman and Bill Wunderlich.

BIGGIN FESTIVAL of FLIGHT



The Red Arrows return to Biggin Hill for their 50th Anniversary on the 14th June 2014.

This will be a one day event with the flying display taking place during the afternoon into the early evening.



The flying display will celebrate flight through some old favorites like the Spitfire & Hurricane up to the latest aerobatic aircraft that are flown in the Red Bull Air Races. All three branches of the armed services have been invited with confirmation of RAF and Royal Navy support confirmed.

One of the new features for the Festival of Flight is the Model Zone with remote control Planes, Boats, Cars and Tanks alongside the arena which will feature a number of high adrenalin performances. Classic Cars and Military vehicles will also be included in the static area.

This new format event is to be very family orientated and is aimed at the local community to enjoy and appreciate the airfield for what it is.

Tickets, which are limited to 15,000, will be on sale shortly. For details see www.BHFOF.com or the facebook page LBHACommunity

LATE SUNDAY AFTERNOON

It was a dull December day with the editor dreaming of warmer climes when the phone rang.

It was his pilot friend Maurice from Socata who was stranded in Bangui, Central Africa with two aircraft and a technician named Francise from Socata.

The aircraft to be flown out a.s.a.p. was the Rallye 235 Guerrier

The three of us have flown together many times across Africa, but today is an emergency rescue mission.

No need to ask twice "I am on my way". Monday morning I am at Gatwick early and heading for Socata offices in Paris.

On arrival I head for their internal bank with a request for expenses with as much small denominations of French Francs that I can muster, because no one has change in Africa. All this takes a little while to arrange the currency request, and of course find a direct flight with UTA to Bangui.

All of a sudden it is lunch time at Socata so let's go and have some good French Cuisine.

Returning to the office after lunch the money I had requested was being counted and my airline ticket was coming by courier.

As soon as it arrived I was transported to the airport to catch a UTA flight to Bangui at 1930 hrs.

Socata arranged to contact Maurice at Bangui and confirm my arrival time at Bangui where Francise will meet me on arrival at 0200 a.m. on Tuesday morning.



After 8 hrs 35 min, I arrived at Bangui, with no Francise to be seen anywhere...!!

The only hotel in town was fully booked so we had been billeted in a large French house, but I had no idea where it was,

There was a Chinaman on my flight who spoke English, but was unaware there was only one hotel here which was full. He also had a large suitcase and it was very hot being close to the equator.

Outside, inside no Francise..! I sat with the Chinaman and his large suitcase hoping my colleague would appear.

After some time I decided I may as well take a walk down to the Flying Club where the Guerrier was parked, only to find Francise asleep on the back seat of the other aircraft two sheets to the wind.

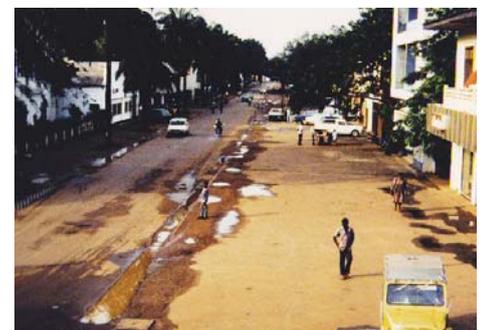
I woke him up and he responded with, 'Ah..! John, I am looking for you', with his best wide-awake look..!!

He had arrived a little early and decided he would have a short nap thinking he would hear UTA arriving. Short naps can be fatal. By the time we arrived at the French house everyone was sleeping in one large room with the air conditioning running full on.

I elected to sleep on a large sofa in the lounge which looked very comfortable, However, after a short period of a serious invasion by thousands of mosquito's I moved into the cool room, where there were no mosquito's and slept on the floor in relative comfort.

Although during the night suffering from thirst, I went to the large refrigerator in the kitchen for a drink, whereupon I found a bottle of water (local) and some Menthol Syrup. Downing two pints of this cool liquid mixture I felt great.

I had broken a sacred rule, but my thirst was satisfied



The view off the balcony of the French house shows the main drag of Bangui which had two Bata shoe shops side by side and a further Bata shop about 100 yards away.

It is now Tuesday and Maurice appears full of questions as to our situation.

Did I have the money. Yes.! Did I have any clearances? to which I answered no..! We sat down and planned our attack, so to speak.

Studying the charts that I had taken with me, we decided that we may get away with this trip, if we routed around all the places we had previously visited and land at those we hadn't.

The element of surprise was the plan, money was shared out equally and whoever reached the intended destination first would file a flight plan, arrange fuel for the following aircraft and leave.

Hopefully this allowed minimum time spent on the ground, before anyone became suspicious of our haste.

Airports that dealt with a lot of traffic were always looking for a handout and often ask for paperwork if baksheesh was not forthcoming.

For the rest of this day we will relax and I will have a couple more drinks of water laced with menthol syrup.

Wednesday we are airborne early heading for Zinder where it is known to be friendly.



This leg was 6 hrs 50 min and 835 nautical miles.

Early before departure I had a very upset stomach and spent some time in the toilet until I felt I was OK.

Wrong, I suffered throughout the whole flight which was due to drinking that cool water at Bangui

and I had broken the golden rule, NEVER DRINK THE WATER..!!



Approaching the border of Niger the Kebi river appears out of the mist en route Zinder & Niamey.



I spent an uncomfortable day flying and was glad to get to Zinder after 6 hrs 50 min.



I taxied up to the other aircraft and asked my colleagues to re-fuel my aircraft as I made a hurried dash to the toilet, swearing never to drink local water ever again..!

That rule has never been broken since that time.

My colleagues had fuelled my aircraft and filed a flight plan and were already taxiing out for Niamey.

I boarded my aircraft and left for Niamey arriving after 3 hrs 10 min.

We were escorted to a nice hotel on arrival and treated to some good French food. Niamey is rather

sandy and subject to some vicious dust storms of the Sahara, to be avoided at all cost.



Early morning scene at Niamey as the sun rises.

We will be heading toward Burkina Faso (formerly Upper Volta) to Bobo Dioulasso.



The low scrub land of Niger seems to go forever. A force landing here would be a delicate operation not to hit some solid vegetation in this flat terrain.



Bobo Dioulasso: below is an ancient Islamic centre with several Mosques. This town is also the site of many ancient tombs. It was first visited by the French in 1888 and became under French rule in 1897.



Bobo's old airport is still visible but the jet age is coming and they have a brand new airport nearby.



After 3 hrs 20 min we arrived at Bobo Dioulasso, refueled without any questions and departed for Nouachott in Mauritania, which was 679 nm across the Sahara desert.



Our route takes us passed Bamako and Kayes in Mali.



Bamako had a single bridge across the Senegal river which consisted of two lanes for trucks and cars, and a footpath either side for pedestrians and motorcycles.

Crossing this bridge in those far off days was an experience.

Today there are now three bridges, but the original bridge still has the same traffic rules. Absolute chaos!



We pass the town of Kayes on the River Senegal as we leave Mali.

The biggest problem in this desert wilderness is the bad haze which exists most days making check points hard to spot.

A good flight log is essential, most check points will appear.

Having a mental plot of your position at all times, with more than one watch, and knowledge of the days weather changes. Temperature changes, increasing wind changes, laterally and vertically will affect the day's outcome.



A Bedouin village, in the desert of Mauritania, is 100's of miles from anywhere.

Due to high winds from the west developing across the desert in the late afternoon I was forced to fly at low level to increase ground speed.

My colleagues who were some distance ahead of me, called on the radio and suggested that I descend to ground level as they were experiencing strong head winds.

I responded that I had been at ground level for the last 30 minutes trying to hide behind the sand dunes as I progressed westward.



Late afternoon Nouachott after a 6hrs 45min flight across the Sahara, we are almost home and dry.

We enjoyed a very good evening meal at a French restaurant positioned at the end of a very long pier protruding well out into the Atlantic with sea splashing heavily over the rocky foundations below.

Early departure from Nouachott with the sunrise we head north across the Spanish Sahara.



Laayoune comes in sight for me after 5hrs 50min my two colleagues were already on the ground preparing the way for me, because we are not too sure of the reception my aircraft will attract



being in military colours.

This airfield has two runways, one civilian and one military.

Maurice and Francise had refueled and were departing as I landed. We didn't want to run the risk of both aircraft being impounded.

So far everything seemed to be in order as I was refueled without question. I thought to myself, "I'm out of here". Then I was approached by an official in a smart suit who began to interrogate me about the aircraft and my intentions.

I explained that the aircraft was being returned to the factory and I had only made a technical stop for fuel, besides I couldn't stay because I didn't have a visa, so I can't stay. He seemed to accept this excuse and said, au revoir!

I departed as quickly as I had arrived and set course for Rabat.

Flight time from Laayoune was 4hrs 05min.



Rabat is as far as we will go today as the weather over Spain is rather poor.

This airport has a side for General Aviation with the Met Office and other facilities on the commercial side of the airfield which entails getting transport around the perimeter, which is rather time consuming.

Early the next morning we arrive at Rabat and spend some time trying to get across the airfield to the met office, to check the weather over Spain

It wasn't too good but appeared to be clearing later in the day along the Mediterranean coast.



With plenty of diversions available we set course toward Spain. Eventually the weather began to clear as we passed Valencia.

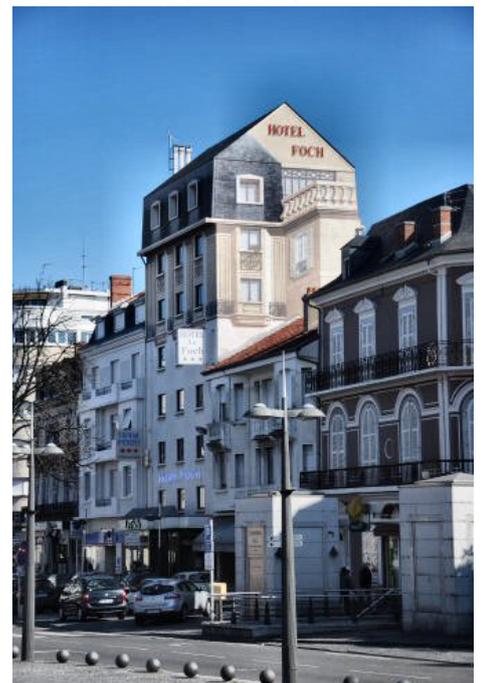


We slide passed Barcelona with some evidence of heavy snow showers appearing over the Pyrenees.



Having passed via Perpignan we set course for Ousson Lourdes, (Tarbes) our final destination passing very heavy snow showers all along the mountains of the Pyrenees landing after 6 hrs 05 min.

After putting the aircraft in the hangar, Francise gave Maurice and I a lift to our favourite Hotel Foch, in the centre of Tarbes.



This was a very nice hotel which I used for many years.



Passing Agadir with the Atlas mountains to the right rising to 13,665ft at the highest point.



Passing Casablanca below:



A short time after this point we had Rabat in sight and prepared for landing.

It featured a blank wall which stood out like a sore thumb and the local council funded the painting of a false balcony which was really effective, changing the outlook of the old blank wall.



Beneath this fountain outside this highly recommended hotel is a large underground car park.



The entrance, to Hotel Foch, at Place de Verdun, Tarbes.

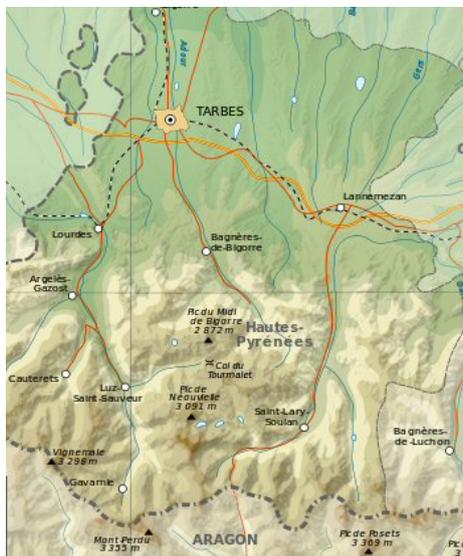


A rear balcony, with a wonderful view of the Pyrenees.



This view of the Pyrenees is from the road out of Lourdes.

It is a very good drive to the top of Pic du Midi the highest point seen from this position.



The route generally winds its way South as it rises ever upward.

It is far safer to do this journey in the summer, even then it can be quite hazardous.

ENGINE FAILURE IN A 2CV

The editor was in Tarbes at the factory of Aerospatiale for the weekend and one of his good friends there, suggested that he would drive him to Pic Du Midi on the Saturday morning and return to his house for dinner that evening.

The weather was dull but dry as we drove up the mountain in his Citerón 2cv. We were going quite well and getting near the summit the engine seemed to be labouring a bit, putting it down to the rarified air. After a while longer it was evident we had a problem, the 2CV has a 2 cylinder air cooled engine and the owner had fitted the winter kit (a cover over the front of the grill) which made the cabin a little more comfortable (warmer).

However this didn't help the engine cooling being in low gears high rev's and lack of air cooling. By the time he realised what the problem was the engine was wrecked.

We allowed it to cool down and set off back down the mountain, the engine rattling rather badly and didn't want to continue providing power, even downhill.

We now, have a somewhat serious problem stranded up a mountain with no sign of people to be seen

anywhere, probably because the weather being a bit dull didn't inspire others to venture up the mountain on this day.

Our only option seems to be to start walking (mobile phones hadn't been invented yet) after an hour it became dark, very dark.

The Pyrenees at night is pitch black, blacker than black..!!

We came across a footpath leading straight down the steep sloping side of the mountain which would intersect the road as it wound its way up the mountain.

We stumbled across a telephone box, complete with phone book, but no light to read it.. Ah!

Wherever you travelled in the world in those days, and you found a French telephone box in the middle of the Sahara, or anywhere else, it would work 100%.

We phoned a friend who owned an aircraft maintenance business at Tarbes he agreed to rescue us.

It was beginning to get cold and our friend duly arrived in his Puegot 406 Estate with a short length of rope, which he secured to the front of the 2CV.

He jumped in his car and took up the slack of the tow rope and careered off down the mountain at a speed that seemed wrecklessly fast, the road surface was damp, throwing up spray all over our windscreen, whilst the wipers did their best to clear the screen.

We had no headlights on because of any glare to our towing vehicle, but we needed the battery to operate the wipers.

After some time the battery went flat and we were left trying to keep visual with the red lights of the 406 through the ever thickening layer of road grime which progressively obliterated the ever dimming view just a few feet in front of us, as we careered down the mountain with a total wreckless belief, that no one would be coming the other way. !!

We three laughed about this crazy ride for years afterwards..!!

The editor is the only survivor..!!