

SHAMROCK HOPOVER 2006

RAF Lyneham Flying Club have undertaken a flying tour of Southern Ireland, the first of its kind by an RAF Flying Club. The expedition consisted of two aircraft and six people over a four day period battling against some absolutely atrocious weather to experience some wonderful sights.

Funded by the RAF Flying Clubs Association (RAFFCA), and the station Gym, the aim was to pay homage to Alcock and Brown who were the first to complete a successful crossing of the Atlantic in 1955 before landing at Connemara after a pioneering flight from New York of 34 hours .

After an evening of preparing the aircraft and planning for the days ahead, the first aircraft set off with Graham Rumbelow, Sean Gilvear and Kevin Turner on board. The other aircraft was due to leave Lyneham a day later with Dave Jelly, Sarah Brewin and Phil Threlfall.

Our first destination was to be St Athan to pick up fuel.

After an uneventful flight in beautiful clear blue skies we landed, refuelled and were soon ready to depart.

As we back tracked the runway we admired the redundant Jaguars on the South side of the airfield and discussed the costs and feasibility of running one; the conclusion was that one of us would have to come up trumps on the lottery!

The next leg to Haverfordwest started with a very shallow climb being at maximum all up weight with 3 people and full tanks, but a great view of the Welsh coast was had until our descent.

Located about 10 miles from the western tip of Wales, Haverfordwest gave us a chance to stop for lunch and to check the weather before setting off across the Irish Sea. It also allowed Shaun time for a moments reflection about the place where he had originally learned to fly.

With everything looking good, we took off and headed out via St David's Head levelling off at 7000ft for a very smooth trip in wonderful conditions. We could see Ireland before we had coasted out so the navigation was fairly straight forward across the sea before descending to 1000ft to follow the coast to Cork.

Cork is a grand place with wide streets and large stone buildings. There are more pubs than you can shake a stick at and it is most certainly a very vibrant place. After a pint or two of murphys, we booked into B&B. Kev sent a picture message to Dave Jelly of us all holding a pint of murphys; I will leave the response to your imagination!

Day 2

A hearty breakfast preceded our journey back to the airport where we found that the weather was overcast at 700ft but forecast to improve by midday. After refuelling the weather cleared allowing us to depart and head west around the coast. This piece of coastline can experience very extreme weather, being exposed to the Atlantic and has been perilous to many a ship in stormy waters.

The construction, 5 miles off the coast, of the Fastnet Lighthouse in 19..... reduced the number of shipping accidents and precipitated the establishment of the famous Fastnet sailing ship races. The views along the coast line were magnificent with jagged looking cliffs and harsh, lively seas battering them. We found that we had to fly around some showers and low cloud to remain visual with the ground and despite being at a safe altitude the feeling of being exposed and vulnerable was hard to quell.

Our route then took us North around the West coast before heading inland to Shannon once again dogging around poor weather.

After this 2 hour flight and a leg stretch, a weather check was our main aim as a decision had to be made on whether or not we would be spending a night in Shannon. With a favourable actual and forecast for the next leg, we submitted a flight plan for Conemarra and were soon on our way.

Heading Northwest, the Aran Islands were soon in sight and we continued for a touch and go on Inishmere and Inishman. These strips were incredibly short for us at 450 meters with the thresholds next to the sea so a bit of lively action with the power and flaps was required. The largest of these islands was the setting for the filming of Father Ted so I can imagine that "feck" may have originally come from the mouths of pilots trying to land there!

After the second touch and go, we routed 10 miles North to Connemara. The runway was relatively short with a cross-wind and it was quite a challenge to land on the threshold. The airfield was closed with no-one around so after securing the aircraft from the wind with some rope and boulders, we set off in search of somewhere to stay. With any flying expedition, it can be really difficult to plan accommodation along the route as you are never really sure where you will end with the weather playing such a large part. We had brought a two man tent along just in case but I didn't relish the idea of actually using it, especially for 3 people after Irish ale and Kebabs !

We found a pub at the end of the road, in the middle of nowhere and managed to find a local B and B to stay in. The owner, Mimi was very hospitable and we ended up going with her to the community pub where a famous Irish singer was performing a one man band.

Day 3

Mimi served us a hearty breakfast and then gave us a lift to the airfield. There was a fresh wind down the runway which was ideal as it meant that a shorter take off was achievable. Due to the aircraft loading and short runway, it was essential to calculate very accurately the length of runway required to take off. The weather was favourable and we set about preparing the aircraft for the flight ahead of us. The aircraft left the runway at the predicted point and Kev flew us over Mimi's house before heading along the Conemarra coastline to the West. The scenery was spectacular, especially when the mountain range came into

view. Our aim was to locate the aircraft wing which marks the site where landed their aircraft on the first trans-Atlantic flight from the states. Unfortunately it eluded us so we continued north along the coastline over the now sandy beaches, until turning North East into land for Sligo. The navigation was not as straight forward as using the features along the coastline but we were soon on our final approach to land at Sligo airfield.

Leg 7: Sligo – Weston

Crew: Pilot-Sean Gilvear, Co-Pilot-Kev Turner, Passenger-Graham Rumbelow

Having refuelled the aircraft and our stomachs, we had a delay due to a front that was passing over. We continued planning the route and requested further weather information before departing later on. As we climbed out to the West we admired the coastline once more before turning back into land. The route was planned for a track through a series of Lochs and then to track to Weston airfield. There was a significant amount of turbulence initially but it died out as we headed south from the mountain range. The visibility was good and there was certainly enough going on below to keep the mind stimulated, as well as flying of course. There is a turning point for Weston airfield in the form of an industrial area, but selecting the correct one is not blatantly obvious. However, this was not a problem and it was not long before we joined the circuit down wind to land. The approach was surprisingly turbulent but calmed down once the aircraft was over the threshold. As we departed the aircraft with our overnight kit, G-WFFW came into sight as she was on the approach to land. Dave, Sarah and? Had only left Cardiff the same morning and had flown for a total of 6 hours before finally meeting us at Weston; British weather!

We all exchanged stories as we waited for the taxi to take us to a hotel, and continued later on that evening during the meal with a glass of wine. A few of us decided to venture out to the local pub to sample a gooiness or two afterwards.

Day 4

Leg 8: Weston – Mona

Crew: Pilot-Kev Turner, Co-Pilot-Graham Rumbelow, Passenger-Sean Gilvear

On arrival at Weston airfield, flight plans and customs documentation were submitted while others referred to Notams, weather reports and maps. G-WFFW set off first followed by ourselves in G-BNNT, and it wasn't long before we were over the Irish Sea en-route to Mona in Anglesey. The same procedure was required for transiting the Irish Sea i.e. timed navigation leg from a set point in order to request a frequency change to London information at the correct time. With Holyhead on the nose it took no time at all until we were on the final approach for Mona airfield.

Leg 9: Mona – Caernarfon

Crew: Pilot-Graham Rumbelow, Co-Pilot-Kev Turner, Passenger-Sean Gilvear

We set off on the short flight across to Caernarfon airfield for a cup of tea and rendezvous with the other aircraft crew.

Leg 10: Caernarfon – Welshpool

Crew: Pilot-Graham Rumbelow, Co-Pilot- Sean Gilvear, Passenger-Kev Turner

The weather actuals and forecast were favourable for the route but an alternative was collectively decided in the event of the weather closing in over the Welsh mountains. En-route our altitude was 2500' which provided sufficient clearance from the mountains left and right of track. The view over the mountains was fabulous and was the first aerial view for most of us. We continued east towards Oswestry and then South to Welshpool on timed navigation legs. The airfield is situated South East of a hill abeam Welshpool with the runway running North to South and was ideal for a direct approach to land.

Leg 11: Welshpool – Lyneham

Crew: Pilot-Sean Gilvear, Co-Pilot-Graham Rumbelow, Passenger-Kev Turner

The final leg and the surroundings became a lot more familiar. There was glider activity north of Hereford, but aside from that there was little or no traffic along our route. As soon as we had crossed the River Severn it was not long before we were in Lyneham zone and then on final approach to land.

The four day trip was an extremely useful exercise; it provided the environment and conditions necessary to develop flying technique, navigational skills and a more in depth knowledge of assessing the weather conditions. As members of the Lyneham Aviation Centre we would like to thank the and for their support and contributions to the exercise.