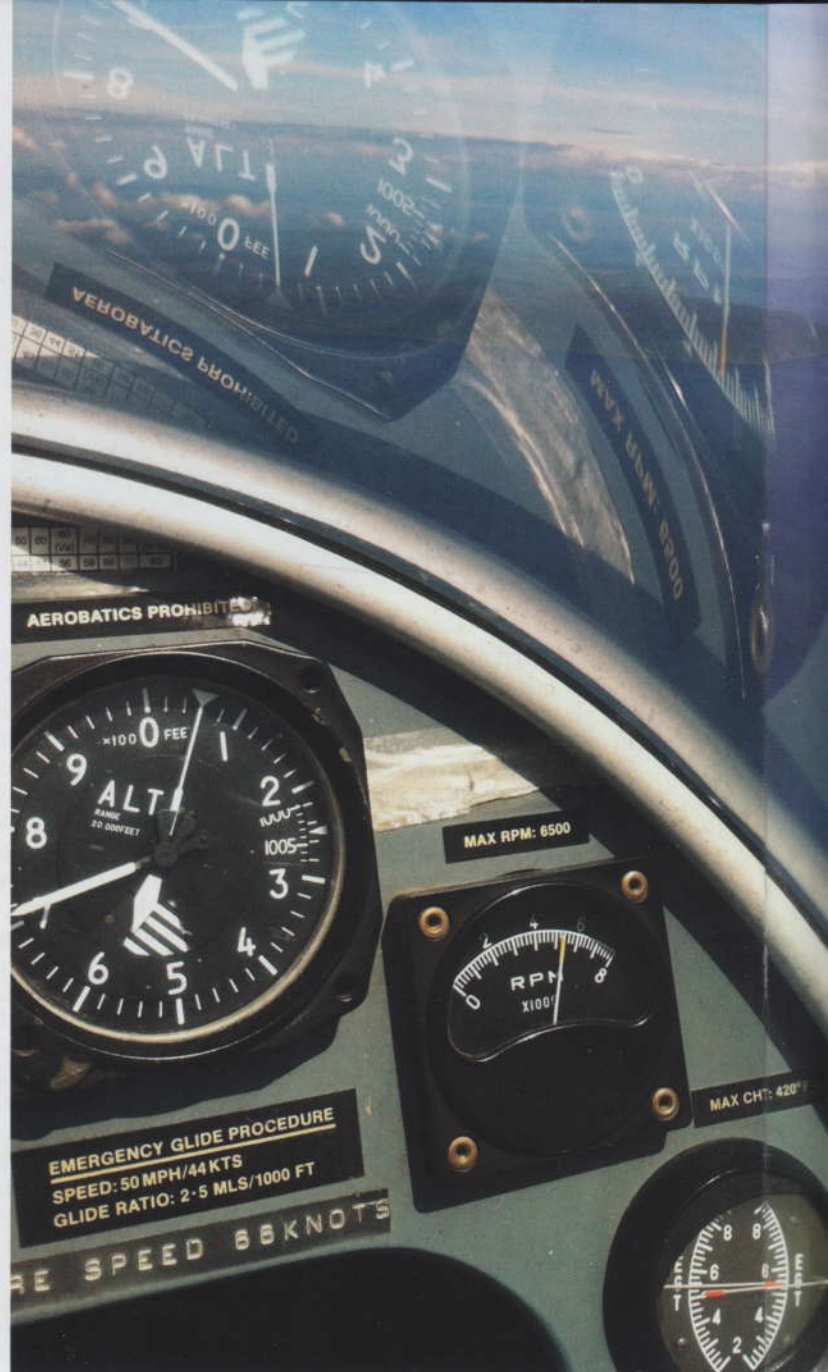


COME ON... YOU KNOW YOU WANT TO



FEATURE OF THE MONTH



WINS A YEAR'S SUBSCRIPTION TO RUNWAYHD FROM AIRBOX

WITH FLY-UK ONLY SIX WEEKS AWAY, TOM DAWSON LOOKS BACK ON A GREAT EVENT LAST YEAR, AND URGES YOU TO SIGN UP FOR THIS ONE

FLY-UK had been to Northern Ireland in previous years, but in time for the 2012 adventure the rules for UK pilots flying south of the border had been relaxed. So, on a glorious sunny morning we took the first step – 23 miles across water from the Mull of Galloway to County Down, which seemed to take no time at all.

I was in the company of Colin (Sky-Ranger G-CETV) who helps me with the interactive side of the Fly-UK website, John Mundy and Simon Stoodley (Sky-Ranger G-CEZE) aka The Breakfast Boys (owing to their reluctance to fly before a hearty cooked breakfast) and James Sandars (Quantum G-MKZF), a novice but accomplished adventurer who was

crossing water for the first time. I was in my trusty Shadow, G-MWEZ.

I bought my microlight in 2004, but even in 2012 I still did not have a radio licence! Why? Well, I don't get much time for flying and even less for sitting exams, so I had put it off – for too long! Then, at the last minute I heard Wayne Chang was organizing a course at Plaistows – my field. So I enrolled and picked up my FRTOL just before the start of Fly-UK. Now I was fully legal!

To fly into Eire we needed to be properly authorised by the IAA*. So we had duly sent off photocopies of our documents and the application forms to have our licences validated. Now, with validation documents tucked into our licence wallets alongside our

* Prior to the flight this requirement was removed.



Photos Clear skies approaching the Mull (above); and (left) heading for the mountains after departing Bantry

ing we crossed into Northern Ireland in fine weather, but it was not until Tuesday that we really got going. Crossing into the Shannon FIR at Dundalk, we visited Athboy, Abbeyleix, Rathcoole, Bantry, Spanish Point and Sligo.

Athboy, also known as Ballyboy, was a very well presented airfield, with neatly cut grass on the apron. But this did not prepare us for the majority of fields where the grass needed cutting and the fields needed rolling. It seemed that the wet summer had made it difficult to keep them in good condition.

Abbeyleix is home of the Midland Microlight Centre run by Vincent Vaughan, who I had met at the Flying Show the previous year. He provided phone numbers of numerous contacts for airfields in Eire but was not able to meet us on the field, since we'd arrived a day or two late due to the weather. As we were flying midweek, we didn't meet many other pilots, and fuel runs might have been difficult, so we carried plenty of spare.

My sharpest memory was at Rathcoole, where we had stopped and needed fuel. It was memorable not because the airfield owner had kindly arranged a fuel run up the road, nor for the quality of the strip (it had been a wet year!), but due to the service from the garage in the town.

The pump had one of those electronic digital displays which were popular about 30 years ago! You know, the type with seven neon bars that light up to make the shape of each number. Nothing wrong with that, but the top row of numbers (price per litre) was missing, the second row (number of litres) had some lights but none was working, and the bottom row, which showed the price, had random bars missing in each number.

Now that's not too difficult if you are serving only a few litres, but I was filling

jerrycans for everyone. The display was reading something like "£Ihe:-e"

On top of all that, even though the pump was £s and gallons, I was assured that it had recently passed a weights and measures check! It was suggested that I put a few more litres into my cans, as they looked low, but I was conscious of the mix ratio for my two-stroke and declined.

After a short discussion it was all sorted out. I was asked to pay 120€ for a vague number of litres, which turned out to be a few euros less than the true cost, and the owner then pressed on me a bunch of nine bananas from the shop for our trip. Weird, but appreciated.

The south west of Ireland was glorious. In the company of James I took a touch-and-go at Bantry just to get it in the book, with a wave to the Breakfast Boys who were sitting on the apron, then north-westwards along the coast, across great sea inlets which split the high mountains – spectacular scenery. The mountain peaks were cloud-covered but in between there was just room for a Shadow's width to pass through.

Into Spanish Point for the night, where the owner has eight seats out of a 747 in the departure lounge ...er, Portakabin. ▷

flight radiotelephony licences, we were ready to boldly go where no microlight had gone before – Shannon flight information region (FIR) – the Final Frontier.

The weather in June was everything from atrocious to diabolical, but with patches of good weather between the storms we persevered and were rewarded with a brilliant trip round Eire. But first, to get there.

I left Plaistows on the Friday afternoon and flew due north to Nottingham airport, the start of Fly-UK 2012. With a wind touching 30kt behind, it was a fast trip.

Nottingham is a very friendly field and one that we will return to, but the weather became more difficult, so on the Saturday we only managed 28 miles – as far as Netherthorpe.

Sunday was a bit better and we dropped in for a bacon butty at Fishburn, then, after a silencer repair, on to Castle Kennedy for the night. On Monday morn-

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Preparing to depart Abbeyleix, central Eire (top); and the author folding his chart ready for the trip (bottom)

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we supposed to do a practice pan at some time to get some experience in? I know, why not give it a go right now, and see what happens?

OK, as I was at 6500ft I probably wouldn't have bothered if it had happened for real, as I could probably have glided in to Campbeltown. And anyway I was in the company of three other aircraft who would have given the call for me. What's more, thanks to a dead battery, my radio doesn't work when the engine stops.

What the heck. I let the others know that I would QSY to 121.5MHz for a practice pan. A little surprised, they followed me and heard my call...

"Practice pan, practice pan, practice pan, Golf Mike Whisky Echo Zulu, practice pan".

Nothing heard, so after a pause I tried again.

"Practice pan, practice pan, practice pan, Golf Mike Whisky Echo Zulu, practice pan".

Still nothing heard!

I think I'll get the aerial checked before next year. New battery too, huh!

From Bute we reached Glenforsa, as far north as we would get, for chips at the harbour and an evening in the bars of Tobermory, then, with a break in the weather on Thursday, three of us crept into Strathaven beneath the clouds. (The Breakfast Boys didn't get out of Glenforsa because the break in the weather came before their repast was complete.) We were given a tour of Colin McKinnon's Grand Design house but for us it was pizza and the clubhouse for the night!

Friday's weather was appalling and we only just managed to get away – heading for the lighter skies on the east coast. We were following the rainfall radar to find the gaps, but the weather systems caught us out, so we diverted into Midlem and were looked after by the farmer, Robin Johnson, and his family until the weather cleared sufficiently for a run down the valley and into Kirkbride.

▷ First class, of course. Unfortunately the TVs in the arm were not working, so we had to go to the pub for our entertainment. Happily the airfield was marked on the street signs so we found our way back, no problem!

The following day we were making our way back to the UK, so the plan was to drop into Sligo, which is a proper airport – Class C airspace, proper procedures, etc. It is capable of taking large passenger jets, so it has a real departure lounge with a bar and things.

Unfortunately the airlines have now gone elsewhere so we had the facilities almost to ourselves. From there we were able to make a direct flight to the Island of Bute in Scotland, which would avoid a stop in NI and so save one stage of notifying special branch, customs etc. And

it meant only 11 miles across water too – just a short hop. At 3h, it was quite a long flight though.

What a great time we'd had in Ireland! Now, while cruising back to the UK, I had time to reflect. Over the water I started thinking back to my radio course, recently passed. All that stuff about requesting a VDF; advising of diversions; requesting weather reports; Mayday calls...

Mayday calls? Yes, Mayday calls. I'd had my engine stop last year over Hertfordshire but what if I had been just here, right above the North Channel, when I had my engine failure? What if I was flying from Sligo to Bute, and about halfway between Ireland and the Mull of Kintyre, when the donkey took a break?

Hmm, what response would I get from those nice boys in D&D? Well, weren't

We arrived at the same time as a rain shower and strong winds, so we were glad to be down. It took a quarter of an hour for three of us to tie James' flexwing down. Saturday's weather was dreadful, so we sat it out in the clubhouse all day while Colin attended a wedding. As you do.

So, we missed the party at the end of Fly-UK. An opportunity to tell tales of the trip, whether embellished or not. In fact only one aircraft managed to get to Boston on the Saturday, so it can't have been much of a party.

We made our escape from Kirkbride by early afternoon on the Sunday morning, hearing that the Breakfast Boys had left Glenforsa earlier and over-flown us to drop into Boston before returning home.

The three of us flew eastwards from Kirkbride, past Carlisle and through the Spadeadam gap, following the eastern side of the Pennines until James peeled off for his field near Derby while we flew on to revisit Nottingham. A 190-mile leg in 2.5h. Colin and I enjoyed a cake at the café then went our separate ways.

What a week! Come on 2013!

Fly-UK: What it's about

TO fly by day and socialize by night – that's the motto of Fly-UK and we do it in spades.

Each year we try to stretch the boundaries of weekend flying by attempting to reach the far corners of our islands. It's not just for hard nuts, but for anyone who wants an experience within their personal limits.

2013 is our 10th year – one full week of flying and fun. Starts Friday 14 June. Why not register now at www.fly-uk.org?

