



THE ROTATING BEACON
The Bulletin of IFFR (UK) Limited
THE UK SECTION OF THE
FLYING ROTARIANS

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From the Chairman

Since my last report, I have attended the Scandinavian Section meeting in Visby on Gotland Island and the French meeting in Libourne near Bordeaux. At both these events, the UK Section had the largest delegation other than the host country and we experienced great Rotary fellowship.

On the home front, we had successful meetings at York and Sandown (thanks respectively to Malcolm and Margaret Hill, and Jeff Watkins), and Kirkbride was a success in a different way! The success of the IFFR is based on members organising events – so if you would help with an event in 2008, or have ideas as to where you would like to go, please let me know.

Congratulations to Colin Walker who it was agreed at York would take over as Chairman at the conclusion of our meeting in Perth in July 2008 when I have completed my two years. Colin organised a successful event at Retford a few years ago and has flown regularly to overseas events in his Saratoga with wife and fellow IFFR member, Jo.

In spite of request, we did not have any volunteers to join the IFFR UK Board this year but we will be putting further effort into finding active volunteer – if you are interested in helping and would like further information, contact Colin Walker or me.

The remaining meeting of this year's flying season is at Sandtoft on Sunday 14 October (see programme) – I hope you will join me there. As mentioned in my last report, the Rotary International Convention will now be held Birmingham in 2009, and I can now confirm the dates will be 21 – 24 June 2009. The UK section will be responsible for the Fly Round which will take place from 25 June – 4 July 2009. More details to follow.

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The Most Costly IFFR Dinner Ever Held or
How We Arrived 36 Hours Late for Dinner in Albenga

Readers of The Rotating Beacon will know that I like to attend at least one distant, foreign IFFR Flyin, or Flyround a year. 2007 was to be no exception and I started advertising for a co-pilot/navigator two months or so before departure. As is common with this sort of venture there are generally two types of participants: those who fly their own aircraft with spouse or co-owner and those who use other forms of transport. For those like myself who fly a part club and part private aircraft it is generally very difficult to find another person to sit in the right hand seat. Albenga was to prove the point again. Fortunately and again almost at the last moment Rtn Tony Palmer said he would like to fly with me. The last, and the first time, we flew together was 48 hrs after meeting for the first time and off we flew to Strasbourg for the French IFFR meeting two years ago.

As we all recall, the beginning of June was not good weather either here in UK or across central Europe. After a delayed start from Middle Wallop and having checked with their resident met office equipped with full satellite coverage, we made a quick change of route from Bourges, Lyon, Cannes, to Rennes, Toulouse, Montpellier. Crossing the channel was not pleasant with a nasty sea haze and we arrived at Rennes quite tired. However our spirits were raised when we had the bill for our overnight stay at Eu 52 which included a full bottle of wine each and a four course dinner and continental breakfast!

Rennes had a 400ft cloud base in the early morning and an English couple flew in from Pontivy to the west and were catching the train to Paris because of the bad weather to the east. Around lunchtime we took off, climbed to flight level 45 and continued south to Toulouse Labordes, of last years IFFR flyin, where we landed in blazing hot sunshine. A quick refuel and we were off to Montpellier. For those not in the know Montpellier has two parallel runways one for commercial and the other for light a/c. We had an interesting landing which included an immediate go round! Sadly taxi drivers would not take us the 1km to the nearest hotel so we struggled there on foot. The lamb chops at dinner were like old leather!

I should say here that throughout our travails Tony had been a great help and support. Next morning when we came to depart we found the battery was u/s in some way. At least the engine would not turn. It was now Saturday morning, we were already 12 hrs behind schedule and of course there were no engineers at the local, 1km away, aero clubs. We made 3 return journeys in sweltering heat and sun finally borrowing a wire brush from the fire station and took off for Albenga. (Dirty terminals we think!)

Flying 500ft VFR routes is very interesting, the low level visibility can be quite an eye-opener: pink salt pans, exclusive villas, azure sea and so on. Albenga lies in a valley that runs in from the sea. The westerly approach VFR is up and over a mountain, drop down with hard right hand bank to the right, two more sharp right handers and the runway is in front of one!

John Bowden who had had to drive from Troyes kindly picked us up and gave us a whistle stop tour before dropping us at our hotels. We were given a very warm welcome by the Italians and by Ray and Feroz.

The evening reception and dinner was very Italian, excellent menu with about 8 or 10 course of delectable small light dishes and of course pasta, not to mention fine local wines. My Italian host at dinner is the manager of Albenga airport and a retired Italian air force general who spoke excellent English. His charming wife who sat opposite spoke French. I had a memorable evening.

Next morning with yet more thunderstorms and CBs up the Rhone valley we decided on a "before lunch" departure back along our outward route. The same low-level VFR routes proved just interesting especially when meeting a wall of sea mist whilst flying along at 500ft over the beaches south of the Camargues!

We refuelled at Carcasonnes. Here I met the most miserable, obnoxious difficult and rude French airport staff it has been my misfortune to come across. At Limoges the local hotels were closed so we had a 16km drive to the city for a bed. At least we found an excellent restaurant nearby.

Next morning more low cloud. But we did meet an American pilot who was flying his Edge to the world aerobatic championships in Grenada for his daughter to fly! His GPS was u/s, he had borrowed a hand held from a French pilot in Macon where he had landed having become lost! He was waiting for a patch of blue sky so he could take off and climb to his flight level of 105! We left him behind but 10 miles out we passed a message back to Limoges to tell him that we had found blue sky! I wonder if he made it?

On nearing Saumur I decided to use it as an alternate airfield for the low cloud and mist had crept in again. The field was deserted except for a truck and crew who turned up to clean the oil trap tanks! A Warrior arrived an hour later from Guernsey via Dinard with a young family on board. They said it was clear to the west so off we went and true enough Dinard was cavok. Crossing the Channel was again unpleasant because of sea mist. London Info took us in hand at Garmin and then passed us to Southampton Radar who stayed with us all the way to Stoneycross.

In all we had flown 19.6 tacho hours. Sadly we had missed all but the Saturday dinner in Italy but it had been a very worthwhile flight and one that we both felt had been full of different but interesting experiences. I should also like to report that ALL air staff that we came into contact with had been helpful and obliging: except sadly for Carcasonnes.

Having read this tale I know there will be many who would like to fly with me to the French meeting in Bordeaux in September: too late, my son-in-law is coming with me!!

Graham Browning.

IN MEMORIAM

Mary Ritchie who died on the 14th September was a great lady in every sense of the word. She was a true Rotary wife and supported John wholeheartedly in his multi faceted activities for the Flying Rotarians. Yet she also had a strong independent mind and life of her own. We met only at IFFR functions but over the years these were many and all over the world. Probably the first one was in 1978, on a grand flying tour of the Mediterranean, where she first became friends with my wife Maureen. How tragic that they both finally succumbed to that slow and painful loss of quality of life known as Alzheimer's. Mary was an enthusiastic flyer and was always in John's copilot seat, even after their crash on the way to yet another IFFR fly-in. Everyone who met her became her friend and so I say farewell Mary until we meet again one day in that great hangar in the sky.

Charles Strasser IFFR World President 1986/8

ANNUAL MEETING IN YORK

As is so often the case, the weather did it's best to spoil an otherwise successful event. Nevertheless we welcomed a good attendance with a substantial contingent of visitors from Italy, Germany and Scandinavia although Jean-Pierre Gabert was forced to abort. More than usual took the wise precaution of coming by road or rail although five aircraft reached Elvington on the Friday to visit the Yorkshire Air Museum.

On Sunday the Annual General Meeting saw a good attendance of members who duly welcomed the report on the increase in membership, largely as a result of the drive by the Chairman who had persuaded RIBI to circulate a membership leaflet to all Rotary Clubs. The Secretary confirmed that the statutory accounts of the Company had been approved by the Directors and that the statement included in the Bulletin gave a fair report on the healthy state of the Section finances, although he reminded members that next year would see the induction of Feroz Wadia as World President and thought would be needed about offering a contribution towards his expenses.

There were no nominations for office from members so the current directors were reappointed, but the Board recommended that Colin Walker be nominated as Vice-Chairman. It has been the practice for many years for the Chairman to serve for two years only, and for the Executive to suggest his successor in the absence of any proposition from the membership at large.

The Chairman reported that the regular informal meetings had proved successful and requested suggestions for the coming year. The Annual Meeting would be held in Perth but postponed to July in the hope of better weather and to avoid following too closely on the RI Convention and IFFR Tour in June.

In 2009 the Convention will be in Birmingham (UK not Alabama) and we will have to provide an IFFR Tour. Ideas for the program and Tour would be considered during the next 12 months and put to the 2008 Annual Meeting for confirmation.

The meeting concluded with a comprehensive report from Colin Walker who is a Director of the GAAC on the work done by them to make the authorities and the public at large aware of the value of General Aviation and the airfields it uses.

The social side of the weekend was the customary success, with a relaxed daytime program that enabled everyone to follow their own choice of activity. A conducted tour of the city on Saturday indicated the alternatives on offer, of which the renowned National Railway Museum proved an irresistible attraction to members of all ages. *(Tell the men from the boys by the size of their toys !)*

Holding the Gala Dinner in the hotel meant that we were spared any problem of getting back to our rooms after enjoying a good meal with a generous supply of wine, and the opportunity was taken to renew acquaintance with friends from both home and abroad. They ranged from Skye to the Channel Islands, and from Sweden to Berlin and Milan. Who can say that IFFR is not truly International.

A memorable weekend for which we sincerely thank Malcolm and Margaret Hill whose competent planning and organisation made it a success in every respect.

Sandown on Sea in the Sun

Like the butterflies, the first really hot day of the summer brought out a record number of IFFR members and their guests to the lunchtime fly-in to the Isle of Wight. No fewer than 13 aircraft brought a total of 40 occupants to the grass airfield on the island where we enjoyed lunch at the excellent modern clubhouse and restaurant overlooking the airfield. Although there had been suggestions of going to the beach everyone was only too happy to sit around chatting, renewing old friendships and making new ones, while watching the aircraft, including a two-seat Spitfire. It was just too hot to move far and the supply of cold drinks was more appealing.

It was gratifying to see two past-Presidents of RIBI, Keith Barnard Jones, and Len Smith who was taking a break from air racing, as well as so many wives and guests among the visitors. We also welcomed a wide selection of members who have joined within the past year and others whom we have not seen recently but who made a special effort to turn out.

Meeting on an island, you might think it odd for anyone to arrive by road but one couple did so. Tony & Ann Erskine, having flogged down against a headwind all the way from Blackpool arrived overhead to find the airfield temporarily closed by an

incident which fortunately did not affect our party, and had to divert to Bembridge from whence they arrived by taxi. Congratulations to Jeff Watkins from Bath who suggested the venue and then made all the arrangements for a most successful day, even if the writer (who shall remain anonymous) failed to latch the door properly on departure and had to make an unscheduled stop at Goodwood to secure it !

Kirkbride

Rodney Spokes

Our August meeting was a success in that 40 people and 13 aircraft turned up at Sandown on the Isle of Wight. The format for our September meeting in Kirkbride was an equal success in that I was the only person to fly there in time for lunch, to be joined by Tony and John Erskine by road. Whilst making use of my IMC rating and sharpening up my IFR flying skills, I was pleased that the likely late return of my aircraft from the Isles of Scilly meant that I was flying alone through some bumpy conditions.

The telephone message from Alan and Lynn Walker saying they would not be attending for lunch meant just that – when they arrived later in the afternoon from Dundee, I had departed and missed seeing their Aviat Husky. Further details for those interested in some amphibious flying are at www.caledonianseaplanes.co.uk So why was it a success? Because those from the South and East had no compulsion to fly in bad weather. There were no cancellation fees, and the reduction in lunches from 20 to three was fully understood by the hotel owner.



WHICH BADGE IS THE IFFR BADGE ?

The answer ? They both are. Members that have joined the UK Section of IFFR in recent years have sometimes enquired why there are two different badges sported by members. This is the explanation.

IFFR was founded in America in 1965 and was brought to the UK the following year by a British Rotarian. At first membership grew slowly, but by the late 1970's enough meetings were being held for membership to have spread across the whole country. Those attending found that they needed a ready means of recognising

other IFFR members among the crowd at a flying event and it was decided that a badge combining the Rotary emblem with wings was the most appropriate. As many of the membership had gained their flying experience with the RAF the Air Force style of wing (sometimes described as “Angel Wings”) was adopted.

All went without comment until 1984, when several of the American members of IFFR flew themselves across the Atlantic to the RI Convention in Birmingham where the UK Section held a dinner to welcome them. On seeing our badges they appreciated their value but challenged their legality as at that time RI was (and still is) insistent that the Rotary badge should not be used in any unapproved manner. However on their return home the Americans lobbied RI and were fortunate enough to have in office a World RI President who strongly supported Rotary Fellowships and who was willing to approve the badge submitted by the American members.

As might be expected this was modelled on the USAF style (known as “Eagle Wings”) and the lower style of badge was approved. Notwithstanding our “Special Relationship” with the United States we have clung to our own badge as being the original but either style is now accepted at IFFR activities around the world. Do wear your badge – other Rotarians may comment on it, a Sergeant-at-Arms may try to impose a fine for attending a meeting without a Rotary badge, but you can then explain the best kept secret in Rotary and do your part in recruiting for the Fellowship.

R.I. Convention and IFFR Fly/Drive 2008

Go to America while we can still get Two Dollars to the Pound Sterling. You may never have the chance again. The R.I. Convention is in Los Angeles and the full details of the IFFR program, the tour route, and the Hotels can be found on the IFFR website www.iffr.org. Because of the insurance problems of renting American aircraft by aliens, the tour has been arranged so that you can participate either with an American IFFR pilot or driver or by renting a car yourself. No leg is too long for comfortable driving in the time allocated. BOOK NOW while rooms are available.

IFFR Fly-in to Bordeaux, September 7th to 9th

My weekend to Bordeaux started on the Thursday because I had planned to stop at Gloucester on the way having booked my plane in to RGV, a main Cirrus service centre, to have a service bulletin attended to and new software uploaded to the avionics. That completed, we continued to Jersey and enjoyed wonderful hospitality overnight from Charles and Dorothea. The departure from Jersey was fine but the conditions at Dinard were too poor to land for Customs clearance so we continued to Bordeaux. Several times over the radio we requested permission from Customs to continue to the non Customs field at Libourne near Bordeaux but were refused. On landing at Bordeaux, the man who marshalled us expressed surprise, telephoned Customs and they said no need to see us, we may continue!! However, the first part of the programme was for everyone to be brought by bus for a visit to CRNA (en route

air traffic control) at Bordeaux which was only a 2 minute stroll from where we parked so we decided to remain parked there for the weekend.

The visit was only available to 24, early bookers getting priority. As one of the first to book we were in – myself with Ian Macneish on his first trip since recently joining IFFR. The visit was most interesting and some of the French commentary was translated for the considerable UK contingent.

Saturday could be summed up by several bus rides and vineyards. We had a tour of Bordeaux, went to a Margaux vineyard for lunch, went to a Pomerol vineyard for a tour, bus to hotel to change then back to a vineyard for dinner. On Sunday we visited St Emilion, an ancient city renowned for its wine but with a considerable and interesting history. The young guide spoke very good English and the non French speakers were well looked after.

Ian and I delayed our return to the UK by a day because we flew east to Brive to spend the night with friends who live nearby. On the Monday we flew to Dinard for Customs clearance, landed at Guernsey to refuel then a 4 hour flight non-stop back to Perth.

Thanks to Jean Pierre for organising the weekend and a fine way to round off the international trips – this year I've been to Luxembourg, Berlin, Gotland, Kiel and Bordeaux as well as the UK meeting in York so I'm very grateful to IFFR for the opportunity to enjoy some great flying and fellowship.

Ian Kerr

Fly-in to Kiel, August 31st to September 2nd

I always suggest to passengers that they leave the afternoon preceding a fly-in free in case weather forecast indicates an early departure. Given the strange summer we have endured, it was no great surprise that the weather for the Friday looked poor at our destination so we took off from Perth in the Cirrus at 3.0 pm on the Thursday. With the benefit of a 35 knot tailwind at 7500 feet it took only 3 hours direct to Kiel. It was a little unnerving when on base leg for runway 26 to have a helicopter heading towards us but we were assured by ATC that they had us visual and were landing at the heliport approx 100 feet below the threshold of our runway. Our host for the weekend, Edi Wismeth, was there to greet us and we decided to have a bite to eat at the airport restaurant, together with a much appreciated beer. He then delivered us to the hotel he had chosen for the weekend, The Kieler Yacht Club, which was extremely comfortable.

We were able to enjoy a relaxing stroll into the centre on the Friday morning, each with an umbrella because the forecast had proved correct. Once most had arrived by air and road by lunchtime, our first trip of the programme was to Naval Air Wing 5

where we had seen the helicopter land the previous day. We were given a talk in perfect English by a young officer who told us about the SAR and operational roles of their Sea Kings. We headed from there to Knoop Estate, home of a local Rotary member, where we had a reception and buffet dinner.

On Saturday morning we headed off to a very hi-tech boatyard which built racing yachts and had built the German America's Cup competitor. Lots of CAD, carbon fibre and composite building techniques. I think you can burn pound notes even quicker in that world than our world of flying light aircraft. We then headed for the docks where we were given a tour of "Color Fantasy" a ferry which works between Oslo and Kiel. To say it was a ferry doesn't do it justice – it's a luxury liner of the finest quality.

Lunch was next and we had a typical fish dish which was absolutely sumptuous. While the German-Austrian section held their AGM we relaxed before the evening's activities. We went to a Raucherhütte, a local smoke house where we were entertained by folk dancers after which we had a meal of hams, cheeses etc. My lunch didn't permit too much participation at dinner!

Sunday morning saw us off to the airport mid morning for departures. Tom and I had arrived first and accepted an invitation to have a coffee in Edi's hangar so we were last to leave. As there were strong headwinds forecast over the North Sea we decided to return along the coast to Texel in northern Holland then headed for Sherburn in Yorkshire where we had a fine Sunday lunch before our final leg to Perth.

Many thanks to Edi for his excellent organisation, good choice of hotel and fascinating programme. Their next meeting is at Speyer in Germany and I for one will be there. Come and join in the good IFFR friendship and hospitality – it's close to Frankfurt if you want to travel by airline.

Ian Kerr

How the best laid plans....Albenga again.

Graham has mentioned that I was able to pick him and Tony up from Albenga airport. That was because Ives Branson and I also had an eventful trip to Albenga.

We were due to meet up with Colin and Jo Walker in Valence on Thursday evening, leaving a couple of hours flying to Albenga for Friday morning. The first leg proved uneventful, if in keeping with the weather for June – a climb through cloud to 3000 feet before a smooth flight to our first stop at Troyes.

We refuelled and went to see the man in the Meteo France office. On hearing that we were going south to Valence he suddenly became agitated and insisted on flicking through many screens of France at various scales and with many different overlays. The only apparent consistency was the line of thunderstorms lying east/west from

somewhere in Germany to the Loire Valley, which was clearly not to be flown through. It was an easy decision to cancel our hotel in Valence and stop for the night at the convenient Novotel near the airport at Troyes. We had stayed there before but little did I realise how familiar I was going to become with it over the next few weeks.

Friday morning dawned misty with a low cloud base, not VFR but the Meteo man thought it would clear “sometime”. As a result there was no need for a rushed pre-flight and I leisurely checked the Airedale. On inspecting the starboard exhaust I saw a faint dark line at the point that the port exhaust had cracked some years ago. I gave it a rub but that did not remove it, so I got hold of the exhaust and tried to bend it – lo and behold a crack appeared running half way around the circumference of the pipe!

We went over to the very helpful Troyes Aviation, who agreed to strip the cowlings off after the weekend and have the exhaust welded, although for some reason they were not happy to put it back together again – so much for “European” maintenance licensing! Having made the arrangements, we called for a cab to take us to a car hire firm in town as we both still wanted to get to Albenga. At about 12.30 we were installed in our Clio diesel and set off for Albenga, having installed the Garmin and been a bit concerned at the “850km to destination”. We had missed lunch but was dinner possible ?

Whilst were going to fly down the Rhone valley and turn east at the end, not having to fly over the Alps meant that we were able to take a shorter and more scenic route by car, via Chambéry (which we flew in to a few years ago for a French section meeting), the Frejus Tunnel and the outskirts of Turin before striking south to Savona and Albenga.

We eventually arrived at the hotel, too late to join the main party but not too late to enjoy a delightful dinner at our hotel. We were joined by Feroz and Raye, who were staying in our hotel, after dinner and joined the main party for the Saturday programme. Our programme included a tour of Albenga which has its roots as an important settlement in the Roman Empire. We also visited Alassio, just along the coast, which I had last visited in 1963 on a holiday that included taking our car Lydd – Le Touquet by Bristol Freighter! During the day we kept in touch with Graham’s progress until I had the call to pick him and Tony up from the airfield.

Whilst we had been enjoying the delights of Albenga, Patricia had been busy on the Internet booking train tickets from Troyes to Paris and onwards to London. In order to ensure that we arrived back in Troyes for the 15.00 train for Paris we left Albenga on Sunday at 05.00 stopping only for a fuel, sandwich and comfort stop, arriving in Troyes in time for lunch.

You might think that that was the end of our woes – unfortunately not! We had 1st class reservations on the train to Paris in Car 11. After some considerable difficulty for us and others we found that Car 11 was still in Mulhouse, unserviceable, and all those who had reservations found themselves standing or sitting on the floor in Car

12.... We arrived home at about 11pm having had a long day but a very enjoyable weekend in spite of the difficulties.

That left me with an aeroplane in Troyes, hopefully to be mended during the next week. Peter Kember at Laddingford kindly offered to fly me back to Troyes so that I could reassemble and fly 'CC back but the June weather was not prepared to assist us, so very early on the Friday I set off for the Channel Tunnel and Troyes in a car loaded with tools, arriving late morning. Six hours later all was in good working order, or at least the aeroplane was. I was shattered, so decided to stay at the Novotel for another night, flying back on Saturday dodging showers and a number of CBs.

So we now had a car at Troyes but the Airedale safely back in the hangar. Not a problem as I had a spare car and was happy to wait until Peter could fly me down to Troyes to pick up the car rather than 'CC. At least not a problem until 8am on the Monday morning when my second car was rammed whilst Harry and I were sitting in it outside his school. I just managed to drive it to the coachworks but it was not going any further. Needless to say the June weather continued to prevent a flight down to Troyes to pick up the other car, so on the last Friday in June I went back by train to Troyes, arriving at 7pm and drove back home that night, arriving at midnight.

I am looking forward to more IFFR meetings next year but shall be very happy if they do not turn out to be as eventful as Albenga. I am sure Graham will agree!

John Bowden

LUXEMBOURG : 4th – 6th May 2007

Patricia Bowden

John and I left Laddingford for our first trip from our new base and had an uneventful flight to Luxembourg. I cannot tell you much about it as I travel with my eyes shut – either asleep or just snoozing as, if I do that, I feel better when I arrive. When we landed we had to double park our aeroplane in the back row of a large apron blocking in Charles Strasser and Ulrich Starke's aircraft as apparently the rest of the apron was reserved for turbine aircraft, in spite of the fact that there were only three of them parked in front of us.

We were picked up and taken to our hotel (the Sofitel in the European Quarter) and met up with the other UK members we had not met on the apron. The hotel was very impressive. It did not have the usual hotel corridors. The rooms had deck access and you could look down to the ground floor or up to the atrium. It was one large open space with plants along the glass balustrade and glass lifts at one end – probably rather like your local shopping centre but with more plants! Anyway, it made a nice change from the usual hotel corridors.

That evening we met all the other members and dined at the hotel. There was a little misunderstanding with the hotel over the menu, which was a shame as most of us had missed lunch but we enjoyed ourselves all the same. Then on Saturday morning we had a walking tour of the old part of

Luxembourgville which was very interesting. We then went on to the Bernard Massard winery on the German border where we had lunch and a tour around and, of course, a chance to taste and buy some of their produce. It was then back to our hotel for a rest before dinner in the hotel. This was in a different restaurant from the night before – this one was furnished in a German/Austrian manner.

On Sunday morning we walked to the Museum of Modern Art. This was an interesting trip – perhaps you managed to choose a picture you liked, but probably only if you have a playroom to put it in as most was not “art as we know it”. However, the new building housing the exhibition was impressive and worth visiting in its own right.

We then went to the Novotel adjoining our hotel where there was a splendid buffet lunch. Unfortunately most people were not able to do justice to all the food as we had the benefit of an hotel breakfast only a couple of hours before, but I’m sure they enjoyed what they had.

We were taken back to the airport by my cousin who had joined us for lunch. We managed to make a quick exit from the Luxembourg terminal as I was appointed ‘crew’ and therefore was able to pass through security with John rather than having to wait for him to come back to collect me after paying all the fees, which Luxembourg prefers to do now. We then we had a good journey home.

I apologize to all you Flying Rotarians for the lack of flying details – maybe John won’t ask me to do this again!.

Trip To Visby , Gotland Summer 2007, 16-19th August.

Thursday August 16th.

After staying overnight chez the Walkers; John & Rodney set off with Colin and Jo from Gamston on route to Visby in Gotland, a Swedish island in the Baltic, via Sønderburg in Denmark where we stopped for lunch.

Due to some inclement weather over the North Sea, we decided to file an IFR flightplan which kept us above all the cloud and rain and up in the bright sunshine. The only consideration was that between Retford and Denmark there is a mid-air refueling sector which means that the base of the airway starts at 18,000 ft and since we were transiting eastwards this meant that we had to climb to 19,000 ft and remain there (breathing oxygen) until we were past the FIR boundary from whence we were able to descend to a comfortable 12,000 ft – still above the weather but conserving the oxygen supply. After a light lunch at Sønderburg we set out to continue on into Sweden for the start of the meeting of the Scandanavian Section.

We landed at Visby in the afternoon where we were met with local food and beer served in the flying club, and later on we were transported to the Hamn Hotel which

was a modern, camping style hotel near to the ferries and docks. This was originally built to house participants in the Olympic Games in Lillehammer, Norway. That evening we enjoyed a jovial get-together where we renewed our acquaintance with other regulars.

On the Friday (17th) after a Scandinavian breakfast we spent the day in Visby. We begin with a guided walking tour of the city along the old cobbled streets and a visit to the botanical gardens, the county museum and the cathedral.

Visby is a mediaeval city with sturdy walls to protect the rich merchants from marauding pirates who were keen to relieve the local townsfolk of their quite significant wealth gained from the Hanseatic trade. In the afternoon, there was free time for us to explore Visby, eat lunch, and do a spot of shopping.

That evening we had a gala dinner at the Freemasons lodge which included some highly entertaining and very innovative musical accompaniment played on, amongst other instruments; a bicycle, a ski, wine bottles, wine glasses, and an enormous wooden construction that was described as the worlds largest flute! The highlight of this evening was the presentation to John and Mary Ritchie of the Nordic Trophy in well deserved recognition to their contribution to the Scandinavian section of IFFR.

On Saturday (18th) we were picked up from our hotel in the morning and then went on a guided coach tour of northern Gotland. The island is a solid plate of limestone that had been compressed by glacial forces which led to some very interesting scenery and rock formations. The limestone outcrops have been extensively mined in the north to make concrete and we passed through imaginatively named towns such as Concreta.

The tour ended on the island of Fårö, where we were introduced to a variety of traditional games based on old Viking “training” games. Colin managed to excel at nearly all of these, beating all comers and he even managing to “toss the caber” the Viking version of which is a bit harder than the Scottish version since the participant has to pick up and hold aloft the “caber” without assistance before “tossing it”, later on after some local brewed wheat beer we had a delicious dinner in a traditional “longhouse” at Stora Gåsemora, Fårö.

Sunday was the day when the Scandinavian Section held its annual meeting but for the rest of us it was time to make tracks towards home and so we left Visby airport to make the return journey back to Retford, stopping again at Sønderburg for a snack – unfortunately as it was Sunday the dining room was not open and so we had to raid the vending machines for some nourishment before we made our way back to Gamston.

We all enjoyed the weekend and having the company of John and Rodney in the aircraft made the journey even more enjoyable proving the adage that “a pleasure shared is a pleasure doubled”.

Thanks to Bo Johnsson and his team for a delightful weekend.

Jo Walker