



February 2018

SKYWRITINGS

Newsletter of the *Kent Strut*



Two seemingly difficult tasks

Can you fly to Menorca in a day?

By Gary Smith and Ron Parker.

For the last 4 years Ron Parker and I have joined fellow Vans RV owners on their summer vacations, flying to various locations around Europe. In 2017 Robin Taylor from Devon suggested we go to Menorca and put together some loose plans that could best be described as "the same way – the same day". This means everybody is responsible for their own flight planning, immigration etc, we may cross paths at refuelling stops but endeavour to meet up in the evenings.

Menorca is the most easterly of the three Mediterranean Balearic Islands and the furthest from the Spanish mainland, requiring an over water flight of 140nm. People have various attitudes towards long water crossings but with good aircraft maintenance, suitable survival equipment and good flight planning I consider the risks to be acceptable. (The fact that the engine has run faultlessly for 500+ hours and does not



Nigel Read - Editor

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22nd February Meeting
German Jet Bomber Arado Ar 234
Cobtree Manor Golf Club, ME14 3AZ 20:00hrs

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know or care if it is over water adds to the case).

Our original plan was :- Day 1 (Thursday), route to Caen for Immigration, south to Saumur for fuel and on to Carcassonne for our first "overnight" stop. Day 2 (Friday) hop over the Spanish border to Emperia Brava parachute club for the night. Day 3 (Saturday), depart Spanish mainland and route directly to San Luis on Menorca. Stay two days on the island then make tracks for home.

When planning trans-European trips it is important to obtain long term weather forecasts and understand how they may affect your plans. Weather systems in the Caribbean may seem irrelevant when flying "locally" but within a few days their affects could mean Europe switching from "sunshine" to "submerged" and your plans left in tatter.

This year's weather (2017) was troublesome. A broad sweeping cold front was forecast to pass across the whole of France mid-week (West to East) and some group members left early while the going was good. We kept to our plans, loaded up the aeroplane on Thursday morning in reasonable weather but the TAF's and METARS showed we would not be going far. The cold front had broadened and pushed up into the English Channel preventing a safe water crossing and any progress south. Further interpretation showed another cold front following closely behind the first, potentially ruining Friday as well, but the cold sector behind this double system meant Saturday was likely to be much better. We went home and replanned for Saturday in the knowledge that we would have to do the whole trip in one day.

Saturday morning 09:30 (20th May 2017), departed Farthing corner in fine weather for the one hour flight to Caen (France). Discovered Caen now require 24 hours' notice for immigration but if you say sorry enough times they start feeling guilty and let go on your way (tee hee!).

1.5 hours further south we stopped for fuel at Samur (on the Loire) knowing they had a self service pump which accepts British debit cards. With nobody around we filled up and were soon on our way. For those looking to stay a little longer the town is very pretty, has a fantastic chateaux, choice of hotels and is perfect for a weekend break.

The early afternoon flight to Perpignan was "interesting" as low cloud to the south west (remains of the second cold front) forced us towards the mountains of the Massif Central. The technique in France seems to be :- "talk to somebody", if you need to venture into controlled airspace then simply ask and it's no big problem. Long distance touring will generate such obstacles and if you want to go places you will have to learn to deal with them.

In the end we were cleared straight through Rodez's zone and two and a half hours later arrived at Perpignan. Obtaining fuel without a "Total fuel card" provided its challenges and with no Wi-Fi we had to file our flight plan over the phone. It's often windy in this corner of France where the Pyrenees Mountains funnel air down the valley and this day was no exception. Having weighed up the options of a 2km back track or a direct departure with a stiff cross wind we opted for the latter, made one of our special diagonal take offs and were on our way.

Once out of the valley the wind dropped and we took the scenic route down the coast to the Spanish border. Emperia Brava parachute club were active as we flew past. We had no time to stop so headed to the "BOC" VOR, set course 175 degrees and started our 140nm sea crossing. The Med' is not like the English Channel, it's almost devoid of boats, you can't see the other side and there is no shortage of blue (i.e. blue sea, blue sky, blue wings and precious little else). We listened to the holiday jets being vectored around the Med and within no time it was our turn to descend from flight level 60, join at point echo (with easily identifiable light house) and report final for San Luis, the municipal airport.

It's worth mentioning that whilst Menorca is a small island it has two airports. The original 1200m concrete strip was given over to G.A. in the 1970's when the new commercial airport opened, but being parallel, visually similar and $\frac{3}{4}$ miles apart they are often mixed up. One of our group (Mr X to spare his embarrassment) was heard calling finals for St Luis but failed to arrive. 30 minutes later he taxied up relaying a tale of ignorance - not knowing there were two airports - being marshalled between jet liners at the main airport and having had a "proper" landing fee extracted from his wallet. To add insult to injury they required a flight plan for the $\frac{3}{4}$ mile flight to the "little airport" and a full confession over dinner provided much amusement.

The port of Mahon is one of the largest natural harbours in the Mediterranean and 17 of us took a table on Saturday evening overlooking the cruise ships on the quay side, swapping stories of our outbound adventures.

Perfect weather ensured we did not miss the Sunday morning bus tour Robin had organised. The guide provided a fascinating history



of the Island throughout the ages and this included several spectacular views and a visit to some Neolithic ruins. Back at the hotel we took over the swimming pool and with so many pilots splashing around it looked like "aviation soup".

Monday morning we took a boat cruise along the harbour, viewing numerous Napoleonic and WWII fortifications of which there were many, all too soon it was time to plan for our homeward journey.

Some were planning to route back through Carcassonne but not having a "Total" or "Air BP" fuel card we elected to use Lesiagn (France), about 30nm further north, which had manned pumps. (It's worth noting that many medium sized French airfields now have self service fuel pumps but unfortunately they do NOT accept standard UK credit or debit cards).

We were hoping to make it back home in a day so departed San Luis 09:30 Tuesday (23rd May 2017) routing for Lesiagn. The wind was calm over the Med but as we turned into "windy valley" on the north side of the Pyrenees we picked up a 30kt knot head wind on the approach, luckily it was straight down the runway. Extreme caution was needed when taxiing to the pumps and we parked in the lee of the control tower to check the weather and contemplate our next move.

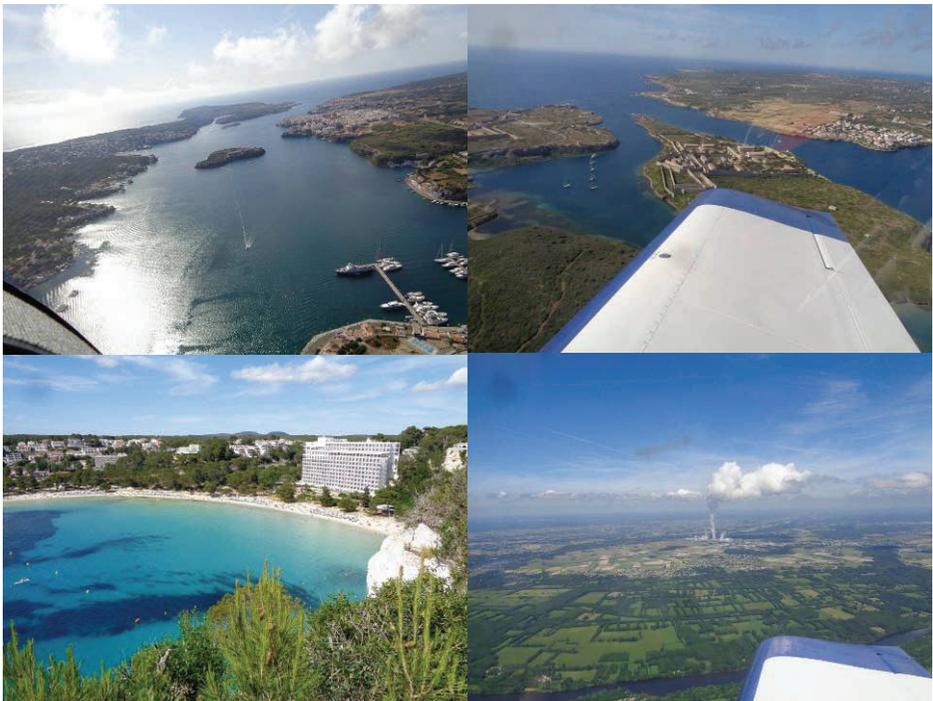
A high pressure weather system was now residing over south west France which sounded perfect for our next leg but it did not turn out to be the case. High pressure is often associated with bringing fine weather but bringing "settled weather" would be a better description. Soon after departing Lesiagn into blue skies we came across a thin layer of cloud at 2000ft. A quick look on top showed the layer was only 200ft thick with good definition and since it was going to be settled (high pressure) we elected to run for 20 minutes and see how things went. The tanks were full giving sufficient range to reach Caen or England (or return to Spain) so it was just a matter of letting "Annie the autopilot" steer us along the GPS line and if the holes closed up, decide when we should turn back. The thin layer of cloud went all the way to the horizon and we appeared to be the only aircraft working the Flight Information services up through France. At one point "Toulouse information" asked if we were still VFR and we replied "yes, but its patchy". We were not convinced they believed us when they replied sarcastically "Really!!"

10nm from Saumur the cloud dissipated (as expected), we landed, fuelled and phoned Caen to reserve immigration back to the UK. Our original plan had been to "clear" out of La Rochelle and we had faxed them 24 hours previously. Unfortunately they were closed due to the low cloud so we resorted to plan B, exit via Caen. The phone call did not go well, Caen had

always been 2 hours' notice but decided on that day they NEEDED 24 hours' notice. With a bit of negotiating they called us back and said we could come in... immigration would not be there, but we could go to England anyway (how bazar).

A flight plan problem at Caen delayed us an hour (the airport staff faxed our paperwork to Le Tesco instead of Le Swanwick ATC) and made our early evening cross channel flight a bit dubious, but finally we arrived back at farthing corner in time for supper.....on the same day.

Our journey to Menorca and back was 1515nm, 6.3 flying hours outbound, 6.1 hours return and we achieved an average speed of 120kt. There seemed to be an uplift in bureaucracy and officialdom this year but perhaps this was exaggerated by the tight time schedule and use of larger airports. We learnt a lot of new things, made new friends and got a few more obscure airfields in the log book. For 2018 I think the masses are



planning to visit Croatia, so let's see what the weather gods bring.

Happy flying, Gary and Ron in the RV9.

The Hawker Typhoon Preservation Group Mike Negus

On the last Sunday of January myself, Ron Parker and Paddy Jordan made a trip down to a business unit at Uckfield which houses an almost unique project to bring back from almost extinction one of the most recognisable aircraft from WW2 the Hawker Typhoon. The RAF Museum owns the only complete example currently on loan to the Rockcliffe Museum in Canada in which country there is a similar project to reconstruct a Typhoon.

This is the home of a registered charity who will be overseeing the restoration of Hawker Typhoon RB396, a genuine No.121 Wing; No.83 Group; Second Tactical Air Force combat veteran with the intention of returning the aircraft to flight powered by a Napier Sabre engine – something that hasn't been seen, or heard, for nearly 70 years.

As with a lot of similar projects this restoration is centred round a substantial section of fuselage still in original colours with the aircraft serial number extant.

In 1999 Dave Robinson, project founder started the process of locating parts of the Hawker Typhoon still in existence from private collectors, museums and from sales off the web. In late 2013, Sam Worthington-Leese was researching his grandfather's wartime service, in particular his time on 184 squadron flying the Hawker Typhoon and contacted Dave as he understood he may have some parts recovered from the crash from his grandfather's aircraft. From this meeting the Group was set up and on 29th October 2016 the project was officially launched to the public at a ceremony held at the Boulton Flight Academy, Goodwood.

This is a supremely ambitious project estimated to cost £6 million over 6 years but having seen and heard the dedication and professionalism which propels the Group there is belief that they will succeed. Major acquisitions include a Napier Sabre engine which has never run and been inhibited, most of the drawings required and a significant quantity of parts for inclusion in the build or reverse engineered.

Of course many hurdles need to be overcome not the least of which is raising money but I have joined the Group and will be supporting the project in some small way. If you wish to find out more use the link below to find out more.

<https://hawkertyphoon.com/>

Mike will also be giving a talk on the German Jet Bomber held over from the AGM with research provided by Ian Park.



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In next months newsletter Nic Orchard's "Dawn to Dusk"

Dates for your Diary 2018

22nd February German Jet bomber,
presentation by Mike Negus

29th March

26th April

31st May

28th June

26th July

30? August

27th September

25th October

29th November

Christmas Dinner December TBA