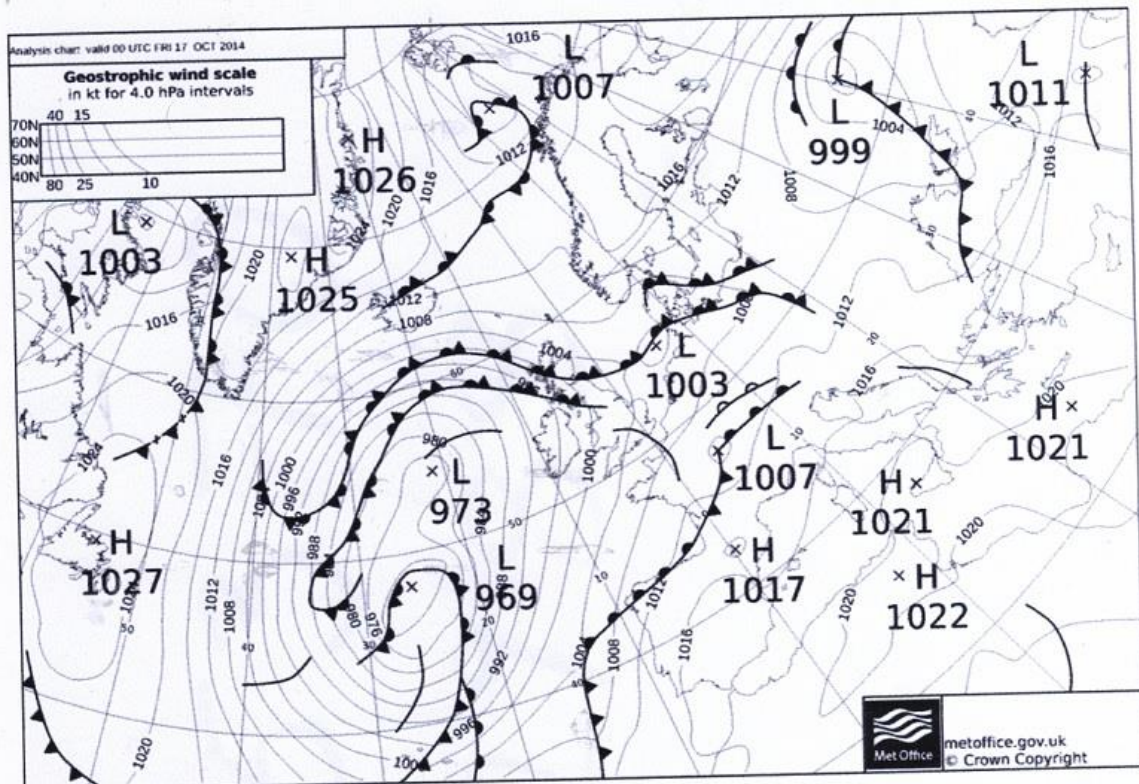


THE 2014 LONG JUMP WITH LADYBIRD



BRILLIANT. Fantastic. I well and truly beat my target distance of 200 miles. The flight was my longest yet for both distance and duration, as well as my highest. Two more categories towards my gold badge. How exciting. We also commemorated Anthony Smith and his forth coming book, *The Old Man of the Sea*, by spending nearly half of the flight, about 100 miles, over the sea.

The preparation



Back in the summer I

read through many GBLJ reports dating back to 1998 and noticed that nobody had made a significant flight from Devon let alone Cornwall. A half million chart was laid on the living room floor and with a long ruler, several tracks were possible. I monitored a weather web site and Mike asked his forecaster, Paul Hignet, for help. Friday 3 October looked possible with a south westerly forecast. It had a great route with few control zones and no danger areas once clear of Salisbury Plain. I felt that the winds particularly the upper winds would not be fast enough and our Ladybird is getting on a bit [like its owner, not the pilot]. Ladybird isn't happy when loaded to the gunnals with fuel.

The following Friday's forecast was more westerly but with slower 850 HPA wind, possibly ONLY 20 knots. Ideal for Tom Hilditch who was planning to fly with more tanks than one could shake a stick at.

Low and behold, the third Friday's forecast met my ambition to fly from Cornwall. though with more southerly in it. I then spent hours on google earth to find a suitable area to launch from.

Mike rang Chris Pugh and Ian Wadey to see if they were available. pleased to say they were.



Redruth was chosen as it would be between fronts with upper winds forecast to be 250 a trip towards the Wash was on the cards. The Notams gave good news with Peranporths ATC zone cancelled on 1 October so we could start further west, also it didn't open until 09.30. Newquay, formerly RAF St Mawgan, is now open 24 hours to give help [and hinderance].Good news.

We set off on Thursday afternoon and had an uneventful journey until we reached west Somerset where we encountered the front. Quite an active one with heavy rain, thunder and sheet lightning. As we were going in the opposite direction, we didnt take long to clear it. We found a B&B in a village called Weal Rose. No I am not putting on a Jonathon Woss accent, this really was its name.

It was blowing a hooley as we arrived at the B&B, but it was on a ridge. This made us more determined to find a field that offered shelter from southerly winds just in case the the hooley was still blowing in the morning. At this point we did not have an actual take off sight so out we went at gone 9pm to find one with the name of a village given to us by the landlady. The B&B owners told us of a big country house hotel on the north side of the ridge where helicopters had landed.

So off we went even though it was a few miles down wind. It was a lot lower but as dead as a doe doe. Trying to remember our way back along country lanes, we came across The Miners Arms at Mithiam. Mike insisted that we stopped for a pint and to our surprise, its car park was large enough to launch Ladybird.

After a friendly welcome from Anouska, the landlady, we were offered the field next to the car park. Much better and gratefully accepted. Relieved at having a launch field, we enjoyed a couple of rounds in this really good, traditional pub.

The flight

Sure enough, it was still windy in the morning and being so far west, sunrise was half an hour later. The helium balloon, whilst we could see it, tracked 020. OK as we expected to head 045 or even 050 at height. Ladybird did a merry dance during the inflation and just as it was rising, its light weight crown line broke, [Camerons line weighed a hefty 2.7 kg so had been replaced]. Held down by the crew, Anouska and her partner, Ladybird was well heated before the inflation tank was passed out. Then off we went like a rocket, 900 fpm. I glanced at the GPS and felt and my heart went in to overdrive. We were tracking 336. On this heading, we would miss Wales. How could we miss an entire country? I was really worried as a crossing over water wasn't planned. Mike was calm and said the wind will take us right as we climb. As we crossed the coast, our heading changed to 035. Panic over. Time to look for landmarks between the clouds [land would do] and plot our position on the half million chart. My view of land was often interrupted by lower clouds. I could see the ships on the Bristol Channel which was clear of clouds. Why did the clouds only cover the important bit?



I set the frequency for London Flight Information and Mike did all the chit chat. We've both got RT licences, but I could get on with the flying and more importantly, the navigation.

I took my iPad out of its protective flight bag after several minutes of pfaing with the damn thing, I could not get Memory Map nor the overlays to open. The new data sim card had failed on the way down so Chris and Ian had set it up to work through Mike's iPhone. This worked fine in the car but, rather anoyingly, when needed Mike had paid £109 for the Memory maps last year and was emailed just before we set off by the company that we couldn't continue to use the maps unless he paid more money. I had no choice but to buy a cheaper version for £25. Is there a balloonist who can show me how to set u the iPad in a fail safe mode? Oh well, back the printed version.

Our climb continued at a slower rate with the track reaching a comfortable 043 and 37 knots at Flight Level 75. Venturing up to FL 10, our speed dropped so I felt that we would be better at FL85. This was the highest that

I had flown in a balloon. Mike passed me the camera to take pictures of the altimeters for my silver badge.



London Information requested our position and transferred us to Newquay Radar. As we were still over water and we had oxygen aboard, I wanted to see if we could get back over land if we flew much higher. Newquay Radar would not let us above FL 100 as we did not have a transponder. Is this a new rule? We'd left the transponder in the car to save weight, give more space in the basket and didn't think it would be needed.

Newquay Radar asked us to report overhead Tintagel. Finding a tiny place like tis on an air chart was rather like looking for the proverbial needle but I found it. Amazingly, we flew only a mile to its north and still over water. Mike rummaged in a red bag and dug out a flask of coffee and tea cakes. Really welcome.

Heading for the Welsh coast, Mike was told to contact Cardiff Radar who asked more questions than the Spanish Inquisition. A balloon approaching their airspace from the south west was a new experience for them. What was our destination? I extended our track on the chart and suggested Wolverhampton. It kept them quiet for a few minutes but then asked where we would cross the coast? Being really helpful, we had to call before changing height and not to enter controlled airspace. With my compass rose, I calculated that our track needed to be less than 028. We had 042 so a descent was required asap. Clearance was given to go to FL 75 but this didn't give enough left. Mike requested descent to FL65 which was grudgingly approved but no lower as we would be over a parachute site with a top to its airspace of FL62. No problem. FL 65 gave a great direction, 025 and we crossed the coast a few miles east of Port Talbot.

We could hear that Cardiff Radar was very busy with lots of commercial traffic and thought that we'd be left alone. Wrong. Airway L9 was a few miles ahead, how were we going to cross it and there was an active gliding site close by and with an upper limit of FL 70. L9 had a base of FL 75, so we settled at FL 72 which kept them happy for awhile. The northern boundary of L9 was 28 miles from the coast and as our speed had varied between 26 and 31 knots, it would take 50 minutes [say 55 mins for safety] before we could climb. The gaps in the lower cloud hadn't been large enough to identify places then the Welsh valleys and Merther Tidfil became clear. Great. For the first time for half an hour, I could accurately plot our track. Just as well because Cardiff Radar had enough of us and passed us back to London Information who immediately wanted our position and destination. Shawbury had become our revised destination. That didn't go down too well for a few minutes later the controller said that under no circumstances would we be allowed to land at Shawbury. It was



Poets day so nobody would be on duty except those in ATC.

Shobden, with its microlights, was passed on our left as we headed towards Shrewsbury. Mike made phone contact with Chris and Ian for the first time during the flight, they were on the M5 and making good progress. They had plotted a rough track for the balloon and wisely decided not to visit Wales. What a relief.

We were passed to Shawbury LARS and lots more discussion followed about our probable destination. The controller was pleased when Mike said that we would pass to the east of the airfield and passed us to nearby Tern Hill. Mike got a really friendly and helpful reception, with permission to land on the airfield. The airfield wind was 160/12 gusting 19 knots so we donned our helmets and pilot restraints [note plural] and prepared for a fast landing. I had left our descent from FL80 as late as possible to minimise our time in slower winds at low level. Ladybird, without her scoop,

was very stable as she descended at almost 1,000 fpm. There was a really dense haze between about 2,500 ft and 800 ft so I was pleased to be back in clear air. Our track had backed by 50 degrees but couldn't see the airfield. Our descent had been a couple of minutes too late. Mike advised the controller that we'd be landing to the east of the airfield. A helicopter was asked to watch and check that we landed safely. It flew low and relatively close during the last half mile as we skimmed over crops hoping that the narrow grass field before the trees would be big enough. With about 200 metres to go, the balloon started to climb so I asked Mike to pull the smart vent for a few seconds then reseal it. This did the trick and we just cleared the fence, making a small bounce. The smart vent was pulled much harder and the balloon stopped in only 7 metres. The helicopter had kindly hovered nearby so after extracting ourselves from the basket we signalled that we were OK.



A lady walking her red setter had seen the landing and came over. She was Alexandra Gardiner, wife of the CO of 1 Royal Irish Regiment whose barracks were the other side of the trees. Alexandra kindly helped by telling Chris and Ian her postcode for their sat nav, meeting them and guiding them to the field. She also showed the farmer's house to me so I went to ask permission for Ian and Chris to drive on.

The farmer and his wife walked across to the basket as we were loading. He was concerned about his fence and was pleased to find that we'd missed it.

An absolutely brilliant day

Thank You Ian and Chris for your help and input we couldn't have done it without you

I will need to practice my low level accuracy for the target section of the

silver badge