

# ***DEVON STRUT NEWS***

The Newsletter of the Devon Strut of the Popular Flying Association. December 2005.

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## **CO-ORDINATOR'S COMMENTS**

**by Christopher Howell**

Guy Fawkes has risen again, we have had a good go at blowing our heads off with fireworks and various celebrities have been wheeled out to switch on the Christmas lights. So begins the season of hammering the credit cards to give us all the Christmas we deserve!! That's November, Oh well, only 24 shopping day's to Christmas!

Martin Collins, with his slide show detailing his time with Avro Lancaster 'Just Jane', was our guest speaker for November. My task was to supply a slide projector and screen. No problem I thought, bang out a few emails and wait for the offers. How wrong I was!. It was the last week running up to the November Strut talk and I did not secure a machine until the morning of the Strut meeting. I did have in reserve the opportunity to hire a spare machine, I declined that move and the evening was somewhat spoiled by a blown bulb. If I had a jig saw under my chair I would have cut a hole in the floorboards and vacated the building! Martin was kind enough to soldier on with some excellent stories of his life forty years ago. It was good to hear that the Avro Lancaster is now resident at East Kirkby and has regular engine runs. [http://www.controltowers.co.uk/E/East\\_Kirkby\\_PHOTO.htm](http://www.controltowers.co.uk/E/East_Kirkby_PHOTO.htm) Many Thanks to Mike and Jenny King for acting as host to Martin and getting him back to catch his train on the Friday.

Flying high above the road traffic is absolute bliss; small snag that most of us have to drive a motorcar to get to the airfield. Road works and a greater traffic volume are making this an ever-increasing stressful burden. Cars in the UK have been reported in excess of 30 million. Road works in the West Country are reported to be draining £10 Million a week from our local economy. The drive up the A38 past Ashburton and Buckfastleigh is a particular torture and worse still, you have to sit in a snarl up of traffic and watch a bunch of half wits scratching around on the other side pretending to work. I am writing to Tim Jones, Chairman of the Devon and Cornwall Business Council, to voice my disgust. There are many other road works, the A303 fiasco but to name but one. I have to say once one has reached the airfield traffic jams melt away as we launch into the air. Reality hits me again when we land and the Domestic Wasp is burning up my Nokia and demands my early return!! "But, but" I splutter, "the road works, long drive, difficult to estimate my ETA at home". As usual I find I am holding a one way conversation with an empty telephone, the old broomstick has long bounced off many walls and taken the old wasp into cyber space. By God, I suffer when I eventually drag myself home!!

Plans abound for The Devon Strut and the local community during the 2006 season. The PFA is celebrating its Sixtieth Anniversary during 2006 so to show our support we plan to hold a Hangar Dance at Bodmin on July 1<sup>st</sup>. This will be a fly-in and evening party and then onto Manstage on Sunday. Pete White, Reg McComish and Alan Crutcher plan to visit sixty airfields around the West Country and then throw down the gauntlet for members to follow their blue print. Jim Gale is organising a fly-out to the Scilly Isles during May; we have a 2006 Scout Camp planned for Belle Vue during first weekend in June; Joe Thomas has been busy organising the Branscombe Air Day and Pete White will be resident with The Aeronca Club on the Saturday before the Branscombe Air Day on the Sunday. There is a fairly extensive list of Devon Strut fly-in events planned but we need to hold back so PFA HQ can finalise when and where the 2006 Rally will be held.

John Beattie Royal Navy Historic Flight and Display Pilot is our Guest Speaker for the December meeting, rest assured this will run with military precision.

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## The Aeronca Club On Tour

by Pete White

The Aeronca Club of Great Britain usually has five or six fly-ins a year at different locations around the UK but the highlight is our annual fly-out. After a successful Irish trip in 2004, this year we were returning to France and e-mails and phone calls were buzzing across the airwaves tying up last minute details and forming this year's 'squadron'!

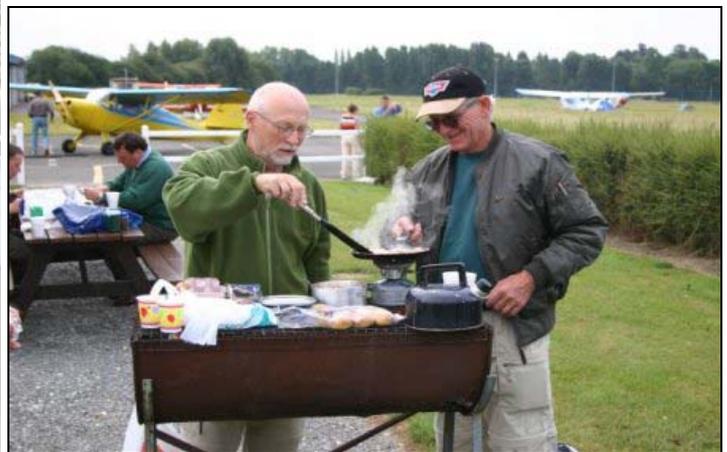
On Friday 26<sup>th</sup> August at our launch point of Bembridge on the Isle of Wight, we assembled 5 Aeroncas, 1 Citabria, 1 Stinson 108, 1 Pietenpol Air Camper and 1 Jabiru (wishing he was an Aeronca). For a Club event the weather was pretty good as we set off in open formation towards Cherbourg and arrived in time for lunch. During the logistics of fuelling 9 aircraft, when the French wanted their lunch, it was discovered that the Pietenpol's fuel problem was a leaking tank. The decision was made to leave 'KR at Cherbourg and its contents were distributed amongst the remaining aeroplanes.

Heading south over the oyster beds on the west coast, we could clearly see Jersey to our right and I remember I would be there on business in a couple of weeks time but that was ages away. Still in our 'gaggle' formation we circumnavigated the serene Mon Saint Michel before over-flying the strangely isolated aerodrome of Avranches. Our time had been gobbled up at Cherbourg so some of our planned stops were saved for another trip and we pressed on to Flers. A small crowd gathered to watch the motley crew of antiques (and the aircraft) land in close succession on the tarmac strip.

As we erected our tents the President of the Flers Aero Club and others arrived to open up the facilities and then ferry us to an eatery and drinking establishment. It's fun when we all get together and look back over the day, - *joyous times!*

After cooking breakfast for our crew outside the clubhouse (we bring most of what we need with us!), it was a stream take-off and our target was Chartres. Scenery when flying is always captivating but when it's new to us it is almost mystical.

A 2.5 hour pit-stop and the 'squadron' lifted off for the south of Paris and carefully negotiating TMA's etc. past the airfields of Etampes and Moret and then headed in a northerly direction towards our night stop of Le Plessis Belle Ville. The ex WW1 and WW2 aerodrome Le Plessis is the home of the recently restored Aeronca Defender G-BTUV and it looks wonderful in its military marks and French tri-colour rudder. The Aeronca Club had a very successful stay here 2 years ago and it was great to meet up with old friends and while the night away sustained by good food, good wine, good company and lots of fun.



Sunday morning was spent doing a little local flying and socialising with our hosts before the Aeronca team headed west along the narrow corridor around the N and NW of Paris. The views of the Eiffel Tower, La Defence, Montparnasse and Charles De Gaulle airport were magnificent in the gin clear

skies. After leaving the city suburbs and flying over flat farmland our attention was taken by the numbers of chateaus and large farmhouses before setting course for our final night stop at Bernay, Normandy.

The tents were up again and we all enjoyed the facilities available including a hot shower. Our trusty steeds were all fuelled up and parked for the night while we watched a local CAP 10B aerobating in the evening sun. The pilot was a 20-year-old lass who practiced twice a day, six days a week and the standard of flying was very high (her other obvious assets are beyond the scope of this article!). A French registered Tiger Moth was busy locally and I remembered seeing it in a previous life when working as a crop sprayer G-APIG in the UK. Another evening on the town with much merriment which in true Aeronca fashion continued on back at camp.

We passed many WW1 and WW2 sites during our little tour but the most memorable for all of us was our trip that Monday morning from Bernay to Cherbourg over the 1944 invasion beaches. The memorials, gun emplacements, cemeteries and Mulberry harbour remains were a grim reminder of the sacrifice that others made so we have the freedom to roam as we do!

Cherbourg again and after another lunch two of the party stayed on to attend to the ailing Pietenpol whilst the rest of us reluctantly returned to 'Old Blighty' via Sandown (IoW). Bank Holiday and plenty of sun made Sandown very busy and one of the visitors was Aeronca Club member Nigel Minchin in his delightful and rare Aeronca K, G-ONKA. The party split and headed their ways homeward, a little weary but full of memories that would periodically appear over the next little while until the next Aeronca Club adventure. Remember, Have fun – Fly an Aeronca.



The 2005 Aeronca Club Squadron.

G-IVOR	Aeronca 11AC Chief	Pete White and Steve Waddy.
G-BRCW	Aeronca 11BC Super Chief	Reg McComish.
G-BRWR	Aeronca 11AC Chief	Alan Crutcher.
G-BPFM	Aeronca 7AC Champion	Derek Boyce.
NC33884	Aeronca 65CA Super Chief	John and Trish Kempton.
G-BRJW	Champion Citabria	Craig and Rae Orinmore Brown.
G-BPTA	Stinson 108 Voyager	Martin Ryan.
G-CCKR	Pietenpol Air Camper	Terry (Tug) and Sandra Wilson.
G-BZLV	Jabiru (Aeronca)	Geoff Dalton.

*Many members will recall their visit to one of the strut's more challenging summer fly-ins. Maurice describes the origins and history of this unique venue.*

In September 1933, several years after a visit by Sir Alan Cobham's nationwide Municipal Aerodrome Campaign, Barnstaple's Chamber of Commerce and local councillors finally got around to seriously considering proposals for a local airport but any concrete plans were forestalled by a lack of funds. Fortunately, their deliberations coincided with the arrival in the area of Robert T Boyd on the lookout for a base for his two Gipsy Moths (G-AAIM & AABK). An experienced charter and commercial pilot associated with Rollason's of Croydon and fresh from running the flying school at Ford Aerodrome near Bognor, the young 'Bob' Boyd was soon joined by another well-known pre-war aviation personality, TWJ 'Tommy' Nash AFC, former RFC pilot and member of Cobham's Air Circus display team. The pair soon established a landing ground at Heanton Court on the Taw Estuary, which was officially opened as the Barnstaple and North Devon Aerodrome on 13<sup>th</sup> June, 1934 and much later, evolved into the adjacent RAF Chivenor.

From the outset Boyd had his eye on Lundy Island as a possible destination for a commercial service and had acquired a DH Dragon (G-ACCR) with which to operate the route. On its second visit to the island in April 1934, Boyd flew Lundy's owner, Martin Coles Harmon, back to the island. Coles Harmon, the self-styled King of Lundy, was initially resistant to the idea of a landing ground on his property, but was eventually persuaded of the potential benefits and subsequently the Air Ministry licensed a more or less level area between the Lighthouse Wall and the Quarter Wall for this purpose.



Opening Day, Barnstaple & North Devon Aerodrome 13th June 1934  
L to R: Klemm L.25-1 G-AAWE, Avro 504K G-ACCX, Blackburn B.2 G-ABUW

Unfortunately, the Dragon's third visit on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1934 proved to be its last; landing in a strong easterly wind, it clipped a granite wall and nosed over, shearing the undercarriage and damaging the propellers. The aircraft was shipped back to the mainland for repair on the island's vessel *Lerina*, no doubt to the satisfaction of the ship's master at the demise of his potential rival.



R. T. 'Bob' Boyd pioneer of Lundy air services



Atlantic Coast Short Scion 2 G-ACUW approaching Barnstaple over the Taw Estuary

Following this mishap the AM ordered lengthening of the NW/SE runway. Undaunted, Boyd continued to operate numerous charters to the island with the Moths and a GAL Monospar (G-ACCP). With the arrival of Short Scion (G-ACUW) a scheduled service under the title Atlantic Coast Air Services commenced in April 1935 and operated daily at fares of 15s (75p) return. The coming of regular flights brought a measure of prosperity to the island, not least to the Manor Farm Hotel with an increase in summer visitors and day-trippers, while islanders also benefited from the rapid provision of emergency medical aid. Items of perishable freight and small livestock (sheep and pigs) were also carried. An especially unusual consignment consisted of a cage of red squirrels to be released on the island in an attempt to preserve the species. Mail was also carried under specially issued Lundy stamps, not subject to the Royal Mail's postal monopoly. The almost perfect regularity of the service (over 2,200 return flights by September 1939) was a tribute to Boyd's piloting skills, which led him to develop the technique of approaching low in the lee Lundy's cliffs to 'pancake' on to the runway, where the islanders would grab the aircraft and restrain it against the strong gusts of wind until he was ready to depart after just a few minutes. On one momentous occasion he successfully landed the Monospar in complete darkness carrying a local doctor to attend a midnight medical emergency. Following the acquisition of a second Scion (G-AETT), in April 1937 the company was formally registered as Lundy & Atlantic Coast Airlines, by which time additional routes to Cardiff, Jersey and Plymouth were in operation, with onward connections to major cities throughout country.

Upon the outbreak of WWII, services appear to have been maintained until the spring of 1940 when Scion 'ETT' was lost in a crash at Barnstaple, followed by the impressment of 'CUW' into the RAF in May. Thereafter the airstrip fell into disuse for almost a decade; its only claim to fame being the crash landing of a Heinkel 1-11 bomber (IG+AL, 1/KG27, based at Tours) on 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 1941, and the capture of its crew. Boyd became a flying instructor with the RAF and his company continued in existence throughout the war as a government contractor repairing damaged Tiger Moths.

When peace returned there was no immediate move to re-start air services, at least until 1950, when former RAF Flt-Lt J Drabble formed the Wrafton Flying Club at Chivenor. Shortly afterwards he registered Devon Air Travel and obtained a DH Rapide (G-AKNY) with which to resume the air link. However, after a very short period the venture failed and the assets were taken over by the rival North Devon Flying Club, which in December 1952 came under the management of yet another new organisation, Devonair Ltd. This outfit was formed by Maurice Looker, who succeeded in the 1980s to the management of White Waltham Aerodrome in Berkshire. Amongst Devonair's other directors was Walter J Bond, who had been company secretary for Bob Boyd's various interests. Devonair made few flights (and hairy take-offs in the hands of a Czech pilot) in a Miles Aerovan (G-AJOG), but

plans to use this machine foundered in dispute over its legal ownership. Instead, regular flights to Lundy were maintained by the Club's Austers (G-AJEA & 'JXC) until late in August 1955 when 'JEA ditched in Barnstaple Bay. The MTCA then restricted single-engined operations to fine weather conditions and with the commissioning of a new supply ship, the *MV Lundy Gannet*, in 1956 the air link lost its importance.



Unloading supplies at Lundy from Devonair's Auster 5 G-AJXC



Among the occasional visitors to Lundy in the 1950s was Cambrian Air Services  
Cambrian Air Services J/1 Alpha G-AGYT

*At our October strut meeting Martin Robinson of AOPA mentioned talking with Mike Collett of Air Atlantique about the CAA and regulation of GA in the UK. Mike's comments on the GA situation were also reported in Air & Business Travel News, a weekly on-line magazine distributed by OAG (formerly ABC World Airways Guide) and makes interesting reading.* (Maurice Wickstead)

## **ON THE SOAPBOX: Mike Collett – Chairman and CEO of Air Atlantique**

Mike Collett epitomises general aviation (virtually everything in the flying world except for the military and the airline business, from microlights to executive jets and including ballooning and flying clubs). Mike is a large and genial Yorkshireman. In a somewhat muddled beginning he gained an RAF scholarship, read textiles at Leeds University and through the sponsorship of British United Airlines gained a commercial pilot's licence at the then school at Perth. After various pilot jobs, including joy riding at Blackpool, he somehow finished up in Jersey in the late sixties, his base ever since. His creation, Air Atlantique, has prospered over the years (with the odd hiccup), operated scheduled services, owned Coventry Airport organising its fabulous air shows, created Atlantic Airlines, and somehow collected the nearly 30 aircraft that today form the basis of the Air Atlantique Classic fleet. He certainly knows about general aviation.

Recently the BBGA (British Business and General Aviation Association) – introduced last year when the old GAMTA (General Aviation Manufacturers and Traders Association) and BAUA (Business Aviation Users Association) joined to create the new and much stronger organisation – has been arguing GA's cause in the JRT (Joint Review Team). It seems that the major airlines want GA to pay a much larger share of the CAA's costs. The airlines, the airports and it looks like even the CAA, have lost sight of the fact that GA runs through the veins of our aviation industry, and is a very important component of it. It makes a big, often indirect, contribution in a number of fields. It may not employ as many people as the airlines, or make, or spend as much money as they do, but it is almost criminal to neglect it.

We, in Britain, used to appreciate the importance of GA. But in recent years there has been an increasing focus on airline operations by the airports and an increasingly narrow-minded attitude by the airlines, driven by the urge to make profits. New airport and airline management do not know much about GA: they just consider it "noise". Yet it helps everyone, and particularly the airlines, and

should cost very little to regulate. How many commercial pilots are trained from scratch by commercial schools (which are in any event really part of GA)? Very few. The vast majority have learnt to fly in flying clubs, where they learned what flying was all about. Their enthusiasm led them to choose to fly professionally. Without GA the airlines would have a different category of pilot flying their aircraft, and a much more expensive category, directly and indirectly. The big airlines want GA "to pay its way". They want the cost of running the CAA to be apportioned in a manner that will result in their paying a very small amount less, whilst the GA community pay a huge amount more. This could spell the death-knell of GA as we know it, and if they win, it could turn out to be a pyrrhic victory.

There are some fatuous ideas about how GA gets a free ride. These are usually absolute rubbish, as GA generally has far higher costs than a big airline. For a start it has VAT to consider: there is a VAT exemption above 8000 kg. Then it has duty on fuel. Avgas duty makes it the most expensive of fuels, costing four times or more as much as turbine fuel. Insurance rates are higher, maintenance costs are a lot higher. It is not rare to find the annual maintenance cost of a small twin to be in excess of £20,000 a year for only 200 hours utilisation, with only one or two people on board. But airlines are not the only culprits: Airport managers today seem to want to boot GA out of their airports. The charges are phenomenal. These people are really running monopoly, or near-monopoly, operations, yet they strive to attract the likes of Ryanair and EasyJet, and offer them absurdly low airport charges, whilst forcing GA to pay full whack and to have compulsory handling. A Cherokee landing at many British airports now pays more than a Boeing 737 in airport charges. I have recently had to pay in excess of £100 to land (including compulsory handling) at Southampton, and £60 (without compulsory handling) at Blackpool, and these have been for short stops in a 35 year-old Cessna 310. Airports that used to be GA friendly, such as any medium to large airport near you, now don't really want GA. They are a nuisance. Yet generally GA does not incur them any incremental cost. In the USA GA can land free of charge at most airports, and in France the charges are minute. What is wrong with the British that makes us determined to maintain our reputation as "rip-off Britain"?

The third guilty party, and in a sense, the worst (because they should not have the profit motive to the same extent) is the CAA. There are some good people in the CAA, make no mistake. But as a body they can be very disappointing. They should see what is happening and take some steps to stop the deterioration. They should not let myopic airline and airport management destroy GA. Furthermore, they are patently too expensive and sophisticated to look after GA: they should outsource the job. UK GA could probably be overseen and regulated by six professionals and their support staff, based in a modular building in the middle of England. Why does it have to share a cost that has 99% arisen because of the needs of the airlines? The CAA should point this out to the airlines, reminding them that GA is an important component of our industry, and should be allowed to flourish. They should not help the airlines and the airports price it out of business. *Mike Collett Chairman and Chief Executive – The Air Atlantique Group*

*There have also been recent parliamentary comments by Gerald Howarth, (Conservative MP for Aldershot), who, with Nigel Griffiths (the Deputy Leader of the House of Commons and MP for Edinburgh South) and Lembit Öpik (MP for Montgomeryshire) together with Lords Goschen, Rotherwick, Trefgarne and Stevens, (from the "other place") have formed the parliamentary aviators club and intend to give a cross-party voice to GA.*

[http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmhansrd/cm051011/debtext/51011-39.htm#51011-39\\_head1](http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmhansrd/cm051011/debtext/51011-39.htm#51011-39_head1)

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## MEMBERS' NEWS

Two projects that are active at Dunkeswell are Brendan Procter's Sipa 903 G-DWEL (that Brendan used to own many years ago when it was registered G-ASXC) and the ex-Francis Donaldson

CurrieWot G-BFWD that Brendan and Dave Silsbury are restoring as an Se5a replica and has just been re-engined with a zero-houred O-200.



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## December Free Landings

Pilot: Enstone, Lundy Island, Panshangar, Seething, Shipdham, Tatenhill.  
Flyer: Bodmin, Huddersfield, Old Sarum, Stapleford.  
Today's Pilot: Land's End, Popham, Sherburn-in-Elmet and White Waltham.

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## Less Is More – Anon.

One fine hot summer's afternoon saw a Cessna 150 flying circuits at a quiet country airfield. The Instructor was getting quite bothered with the student's inability to hold circuit height in the thermals and was getting impatient at sometimes having to take over the controls. Just then he saw a twin engine Cessna 5,000ft above him and thought "Another 1,000 hrs of this and I qualify for that twin charter job! Aaahh.. to be a real pilot.. going somewhere!"

The Cessna 402 was already late and the boss told him this charter was for one of the Company's premier clients. He'd already set MCT and the cylinders didn't like it in the heat of this Summer's day. He was at 6,000ft and the winds were now a 20kt headwind. Today was the 6th day straight and he was pretty damn tired. Maybe if he got 10,000ft out of them the wind might die off... geez those cylinder temps! He looked out momentarily and saw a B737 leaving a contrail at 33,000ft in the serene blue sky. "Oh man" he thought, "My interview is next month. I hope I just don't blow it! Outa G/A, nice jet job, above the weather... no snotty passengers to wait for.. aahhh."

The Boeing 737 bucked and weaved in the heavy CAT at FL330 and ATC advised that lower levels were not available due traffic. The Captain, who was only recently advised that his destination was below RVR minimums had slowed to LRC to try and hold off a possible in-flight diversion, and arrange an ETA that would helpfully ensure the fog had lifted to CATII minima. The Company negotiations broke down yesterday and looked as if everyone was going to take a damn pay cut. The F/O's will be particularly hard hit as their pay wasn't anything to speak of anyway. Finally deciding on a speed compromise between LRC and turbulence penetration, the Captain looked up and saw Concorde at Mach 2+. Tapping his F/O's shoulder as the 737 took another bashing, he said "Now THAT'S what we should be on... huge pay packet... super fast... not too many routes... not too many sectors... above the CAT... yep! What a life...!"

FL590 was not what he wanted anyway and considered FL570. Already the TAT was creeping up again and either they would have to descend or slow down. That damn rear fuel transfer pump was becoming unreliable and the F/E had said moments ago that the radiation meter was not reading numbers that he'd like to see. Concorde descended to FL570 but the radiation was still quite high even though the Notam indicated hunky dory below FL610. Fuel flow was up and the transfer pump was intermittent. Evening turned into night as they passed over the Atlantic. Looking up, the F/O could see a tiny white dot moving against the backdrop of a myriad of stars. "Hey Captain" he called as he pointed. "Must be the Shuttle." The Captain looked for a moment and agreed. Quietly he thought how a Shuttle mission, whilst complicated, must be the be all and end all in aviation. Above the crap, no radiation problems, no damn fuel transfer problems... aaah. Must be a great way to earn a quid."

Discovery was into its 27th orbit and perigee was 200ft out from nominated rendezvous altitude with the commsat. The robot arm was virtually U/S and a walk may become necessary. The 200ft predicted error would necessitate a corrective burn and Discovery needed that fuel if a walk was to be required. Houston continually asked what the Commander wanted to do but the advice they proffered wasn't much help. The Commander had already been 12 hours on station sorting out the problem and just wanted 10 bloody minutes to himself to take a leak. Just then a mission specialist, who had tilted the telescope down to the surface for a minute or two, called the Commander to the scope. "Have a look at this Sir, isn't this the kinda flying you said you wanted to do after you finish up with NASA?" The Commander peered through the telescope and cried "Oooooohhhh yeah! Now THAT'S flying! Man, that's what it's all about! Geez, I'd give my left nut just to be doing THAT down there!"

What the Discovery Commander was looking at was a Cessna 150 flying circuits at a quiet country airfield on a nice bright sunny afternoon.

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### **Next Meeting**

Dec. 8<sup>th</sup> John Beattie, RN Historic Flight, Yeovilton  
Stowey Arms, Exminster, 7.30 for 8.00

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### **Future Meetings, 2006**

Jan. 12<sup>th</sup> AGM.  
Feb. 9<sup>th</sup> John Evans, author and commercial pilot,  
March 9<sup>th</sup> Peter Vacher - the recovery and restoration of Hawker Hurricane R4118.  
April 13<sup>th</sup> Alex Kimbell, ex Army Air Corp pilot & author.

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### **NOTICE OF DEVON STRUT AGM.**

12th January 2006, 7.30 for 8.00, Stowey Arms, Exminster.

#### **AGENDA**

1. Apologies for Absence.
  2. Minutes of the last meeting.
  3. Co-ordinators Report.
  4. Treasurer's Report
  5. Fly-In Report
  6. National Council Report.
  7. Election of Officers. (Nominations *are invited for new Safety Officer, one received so far.*)
  8. Presentation of Strut Cup & Les Dray Trophy.
  9. Any Other Business
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