

LOCAL GEMS

By Steve Robson

It took me 22 months to complete a stem-to-stern restoration of my Condor G-AXGV. As the various stages came and went the excuses for not flying eventually ran out. After giving the aircraft a good going over with Les, I sent him off on the test flight programme in September 2003. I would have loved to do it myself but I had had my medical certificate suspended after a run-in with encephalitis. This was fitting in a way as I had done the test flight programme on his Condor some years earlier. The permit duly arrived and I got my medical certificate back after a 'medical test flight', which was a new one on me.

Spring arrived and fine weather beckoned. One day I asked HM the wife if she fancied a trip away and she agreed. This came as a bit of surprise as she is not a good passenger in any form of transport, sometimes not even on her own feet. The plan was to go to the G-VFWE as a gaggle from Watchford over two days. This worked well and we all had a splendid time made even better by the fine weather and lots of interesting aeroplanes at Abingdon.



Steve & Alison Robson in their Condor G-AXGV at the G-VFWE, Abingdon

The following week she proclaimed that she wanted to go to the beach so I offered her the chance of another trip, this time to Bolt Head and she agreed.

The first time I flew in with Les the beauty of the coastline in that area impressed me. After paying the landing fee we took the short walk down to South Sands where we had a nice, if expensive, lunch at the local restaurant. It became an ambition of mine to get 'she who must be obeyed' down to tread a few footpaths in the area as we are both quite keen walkers. Our flugenfurher, Chris, is a local so I gave him a call to find out more about the area. He gave some very good advice to follow a route the other way towards Hope Cove via Soar Mill Cove and the Port Light Restaurant, so armed with this information off we went.

The airstrip is very easy to find. Belle Vue has a radio mast to help with location but Bolt Head goes one better and has a large concrete bunker as well. The 600m strip is in superb condition and has good approaches from both ends. The flight down was pleasant if a bit rough for the talking baggage, or so she said, and we did a mini tour of the area during the circuit that is always on the seaward side.



Bolt Head from the east. Hope Cove is to the west at the top of the picture, with the lane to Soar Mill Cove running to the southwest from the far end of the strip.

After one of my better landings, which received no comment let alone praise, we had a quick chat with John Kempton who was tinkering with his Aeronca Chief. He confirmed Chris's advice including a warning about the Soar Mill Hotel's high prices so we chose to give it a miss, which is shame, as it looked a nice place. Off we strolled and within five minutes we were rewarded with the beautiful Soar Mill Cove. We have so many pretty coves around our coastline that can be reached by road, but not this one, hence it not very crowded. We continued on and after another twenty minutes we reached the Port Light where we stopped for a coffee. The weather being perfect we then continued on into Hope Cove for an ice cream and a pause to take in the views before starting back. As planned we stopped off on the beach at Soar Mill Cove for a couple of hours before returning to the airstrip where with had another chat with John and Trish before the flight back to Watchford.

It delights me to know that in just 45 minutes I can fly from Watchford to Bolt Head but it could be a thousand miles away. It's great to fly to aviation events but it also nice to be able to combine it with one of my other favourite activities, walking. We have some real gems in our part of the world and a lot of them are in our own back yard. Go and explore, locally!