

# **FRENCH FROLIC - OCT 2004 or THE 2 WEEK, 6 DAY TRIP**

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When the invitation arrived in July it sounded great. My best friends 50<sup>th</sup> birthday bash at a rented chateau in the Massise Central for a week at the beginning of October. The perfect excuse for a flying visit. Indeed, like most of us I suspect, when Phil and his wife had first moved to France I loaded Navbox instantly to see where the closest airfield was to their village of Blauzac. Uzes and Ales-Deaux were approximately 10-15km away. Perfect. Then a quick check of the diary put a dash to all hopes as I was committed to work in Devon over the entire period.

Happily, things change, the work was delayed and in early September I found I would be free to take my 4 week break as contracted and "pop" over for six days or so. My overseas experience was limited having only flown to France for a few day trips to Deauville, Abbeville and Le Touquet. I've flown mostly Cubs, Chippies and Austers for the last few years and was not surprised to find my last cross channel trip had been back in August 98! New French charts were ordered from Transair and I downloaded the latest French restriction zones from the DGAC/SIA site for good measure. I then began to prepare a route that would take in some of the places I'd wanted to visit in France and possibly parts of Northern Spain as well.

My plan was to take my recently acquired Yak 18 with its new Hungarian registration and C of A on a proper familiarisation trip. I would route from Eaglescott in Devon to Popham for fuel and on to Deauville for Customs. After that everything would be new to me. The route from Deauville took me south overhead L'Aigle and on to either Romorantin or Issoudun for an overnight stop. The second day I would head for Montlucon, then to Briod and Lagogne and finally to Ales or Uzes. At a 64% power setting the Yak trundles along very economically at 120kt which makes flight planning and map reading easy and the wonderful Navbox program told me 620nm trip would take just over 5 hours in all. Now all I needed was good weather.

After a call to France it was decided that for security reasons I'd go to Ales not Uzes. The latter is very remote and insecure and as I would be leaving the Yak for 2-3 days we felt it best to go to Ales. Birthday boy Phil also asked if I could collect another friend of his who I had met a few times and bring him down with me. By now there were nearly 20 people visiting for this party, some coming from as far as the USA. Phil's friend Peter lives near Bath so it was arranged that I would pick him up at Garston Farm early on Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> Sept.

Someone once said to me "If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans". They were so right.

On Thursday morning, fog covered Devon and so with the knowledge that this would probably not burn off until after midday I arranged to collect Peter from Garston at approximately 1pm. Leaving home at 11:30 to prep the plane it was still not looking good but hopes were high. At Eaglescott with covers off, plane loaded with tool roll, spare 3 litre air cylinder (just in case) oil checked and ready for action the weather finally cleared and a short flight NE to Garston Farm followed. My passenger, Peter arrived shortly afterward and keen to get off we loaded up and took off having been given a clearance to route over Lyneham direct to Popham for fuel and flight plans. In my haste to get away I did not really brief Peter very well and he was a little alarmed at the noise and acceleration of the Yak and especially the air noises and clunks when retracting the gear. I made up for this by doing a pre-flight with him in tow and giving him a much more detailed briefing prior to our crossing the channel.

Having checked the Deauville weather we left Popham in clearing skies at 4.30 and set a direct course for the Cherbourg NDB. Heading out across the channel we were treated to wonderful cloud formations all around us. Peter was knocked out by this as he was on every flight. I confessed that 15 years on, I too was thrown by the beauty of flight and still considered leaving the ground in control of an aircraft one of life's truly great privileges.

10 miles from the French coast things took a turn for the worse and we had to descend to 1000' to remain VFR. Not a problem but much less comfortable than the 5500ft we had enjoyed until then. As we approached the coast the clag got progressively worse but a call to Deauville confirmed cloud base there at 1200ft and 10k vis so we followed the coast along the Normandy beaches at 5-600 feet until approaching Deauville where the weather did improve. Flying this low along the beaches of the D-Day landings it is impossible not think of the loss of life here just 60 years ago, a point not lost on Peter (an antique dealer and one time militaria specialist) who was deeply moved.

Landing at Deauville at just past 7pm local, we found a large conference had taken all the rooms in Deauville AND Honfleur but the very helpful airport staff eventually found a hotel with vacancies in the town of Lisieux to the South. The cab was expensive at €70 but the Grand Hotel del L'Esperance was comfortable, cheap and had an excellent restaurant where we dined well after a walk to explore the town and catch up on each others news. It was truly wonderful to share this foreign trip with a first time flyer and I'd highly recommend this element of the journey to anyone going overseas with a spare seat!

Friday dawned and after breakfast a cab whisked us back to the airfield for half the price of the previous evening trip? A weather check revealed murky low cloud conditions to the south expected to clear as the day went on so in no haste we returned to the plane. Here we met an Australian Falcon 500 pilot who was keen to see inside and talk light aircraft. Peter was keen to see inside the Falcon! This he did and was impressed, if a little shocked by its purchase price. The Falcon departed for Geneva and it was then Peter told me how stunned he had been to see the co-pilot cleaning the passenger windows "with Evian water"! This was POSH. I didn't have the heart to tell him it was probably just tap water in old Evian bottles such was his joy at his discovery. He also noticed that the pilot would clearly rather have been in the Yak with us! A few photos of Peter by the plane and we set off for Ales just before midday in glorious sunshine.



**HA-YAV at Deauville – Friday 1<sup>st</sup> Oct 2004**

40 minutes southbound and not far past L'Aigle the weather began to look decidedly unpleasant ahead so after cross checking the map I decided it best to divert to Mortagne to the west and wait it out. On the ground at the deserted Mortagne I pulled out all the maps and had a rethink. With the bad weather pushing through to the East quite quickly I decided to re-route via Le Mans and thence south to Rodez where we could refuel and, if necessary, overnight if the cloud hadn't yet cleared the Massive which required us to fly at 6000'. Although deserted we were very impressed by the beautifully designed hangars and offices at Mortagne. Municipal funds are available to many small French airfields and this was very evident here.



**At Mortagne with beautifully designed hangars and offices behind**

Taking off again at 1pm, hunger set in and as the weather still looked forbidding to the south east I called Le Mans.

Le Mans, HA-YAV 10 miles to the north. Do you have fuel?

"But of Course Monsieur".

Le Mans, Alpha Victor. Do you have a restaurant?

"But of course Monsieur"

One look at Peter and our decision was made. Refuelling at Le Mans would make it possible to go direct to Ales with plenty in reserve and we were hungry.

Le Mans, HA-YAV, we'd like to come in to you for fuel and food.

"Alpha Yankee, pas de problem, call airfield in sight". Not once in France did an airfield get my Hungarian call sign correct.

Landing at the famous race track was an unexpected pleasure and whilst I set about refuelling Peter went to ensure our table at the restaurant. He returned with a plastic cup of espresso for me and a glum expression. The restaurant appeared to be the café at the petrol station opposite the airfield entrance on the main road. This was not what I had in mind. We needn't have worried, the food at the café was delicious and cheap.



**At the famous Le Mans race track**

We could now see the weather clearing quickly to the east and took our time departing at 4.20 for Rodez and (hopefully) Ales where Phil and his wife would be waiting at 7pm. The weather was now gin clear all the way to Rodez. This 240nm route took us east of Tours and overhead Limoges before reaching the higher ground now in glorious sunshine. Peter had by now got into map reading and was becoming quite proficient. His map folding left much to be desired but, let's face it, that is an art. Approaching Rodez we asked for the weather conditions at Nimes near Ales and found we could indeed make it all the way on this leg so turned onto 110 and immediately picked up the tailwind that was clearing all the weather. Showing 145kts on the GPS we crossed the Massive Central in stunned silence.

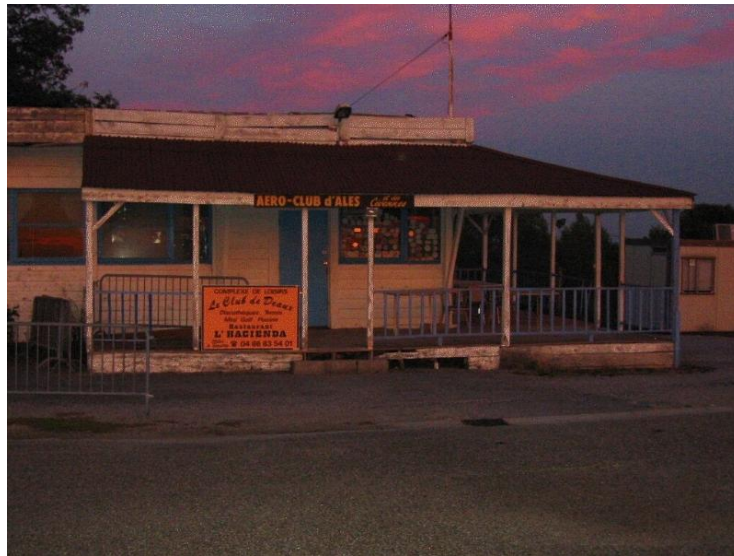


**Over the Massive Central at 6000ft**

The scale of it took us both by surprise. It made my local Dartmoor look like a city park and the slowly setting sun bathed it in a lovely soft light setting off all the ravines and valleys beautifully. We were just able to pick out the gliding field of Florac nestled in the mountains at 3000ft as we cruised by to the south at 6000ft.

25 miles before reaching Ales the Garmin was telling me to start a descent but with a lot of high ground still ahead I realised we'd have to lose height rather faster than normal closer to our destination. Ales closed at 6pm but I had permission to land later and park near the club house. The high ground finally gave way and as the sun was

now setting we made blind calls and started to descend into the much darker valley for the airfield at 670ft amsl. With the airfield in sight I set up a long curved approach from the east to lose all my excess height. We landed on runway 19 at 7.10pm and taxied to the club house which looked like something out of “The High Chaparral”.



**Ales Clubhouse at 7pm**

Unloading the aircraft in 90 degree heat and making secure with the sun setting behind the Massive will forever be etched in my memory. Sensational colours. It should be noted that the standard Yak seats are not very comfortable. Actually that's not true. They are extremely uncomfortable and after a three hour leg both Peter and I were delighted to get out to stretch legs and rub numb buttocks. Our own I hasten to add. Phil and Laura were a little late arriving to collect us so we had a gloriously quiet few minutes watching the sun disappear and taking pictures. The Vedenyev radial engine on the Yak crackling and cooling happily was the only sound to be heard. She hadn't missed a beat and I was one very happy owner.



A 20 minute drive to Phil's home in Blauzac was followed by a long supper on the porch with much to talk about before bed and party preparations the following day. We had arrived.



Saturday was spent in the balmy 100° heat of Southern France, exploring the small village of Blauzac and brushing up on my long unused French. Phil and Laura did frequent runs to Nimes to collect other party goers and by early evening most had arrived. We then piled supplies and people into four vehicles and headed into the Massive Central to Chateau Bussas near St Jean du Garde.



**Blauzac where Phil and Laura now live**

Arriving in the dark we unloaded, were allocated rooms in the very nicely furnished chateau and tucked into the inevitable pate, olives, cheese and salamis before heading for bed. Sunday dawned and we all got our first sight of Bussas in daylight. What a great place! This is a beautiful, secluded spot and a very pleasant, if a little rowdy, few days were had by all. Parts of the chateau date back to the 13thC and it has been beautifully restored by some very dedicated people who now let it out. Details are available at <http://www.bussas.com/>. Recommended.



**Chateau Bussas nr St Jean du Garde**

The Chateau had been rented for the week but bad weather returned on Monday and Tuesday and I felt I must try to head back. Phil drove me to Ales on Wednesday morning so I could at least be near the plane if the weather improved. With the weather looking very poor to the north I hoped to get down to Sabadell nr Barcelona and then across to San Sebastian before heading North from there where things looked much better. I also wanted to visit Biarritz if possible.

A talk with local pilots at Ales confirmed that Wednesday was a washout but that things looked better to the south on Thursday. The Yak had caused much interest at the airfield as they had never seen an 18 before and an ex mirage pilot was particularly smitten. I headed into town and booked into the Ibis where I would have time to plan new routes and get weather. Ales itself is an old industrial town and whilst not unattractive is comparatively poor for the region. As always good food is easy to find and I had a very nice lunch and dinner watching the drizzle from each restaurant window. The down side was that my mobile kept ringing with messages from the office now needing me back urgently. So much for my four week break. At the Chateau no mobile signals had meant blessed peace.

Thursday looked much better in the afternoon so after a quick visit to an internet café and armed with reasonable TAF's for Perpignan, Girona and Barcelona I set off for the airfield confident of making Sabadell at least. After refuelling in the very humid weather I was not charged for my landing or parking and asked to return soon. What a nice attitude. Taking off at 12.40 I quickly realised the TAF's were not to be believed as the cloud base was 2000' not 5000 and worsening as I travelled south toward Perpignan. By the time I got to Narbonne just south of Beziers it was down to 1000' and a mountain crossing to Girona was definitely not an option.



**Lowering visibility near Narbonne**

On contacting Perpignan they suggested I route around the coast and asked for the cloud base where I was which I passed on. I agreed to try the coast route hoping for clearer skies south of the mountains as forecast but suggested I may need to divert to them if things got worse. This was acknowledged and not a problem. Things did get worse and to my shame I must confess to being GPS lead as I tracked the coast southward in ever decreasing visibility. Just north of the Spanish border I saw the madness of it and at 300ft in very poor conditions I finally turned through 180 over a catamaran below me (for visual reference) and returned to Perpignan in increasingly marginal conditions. I later learned that just 2 hours later a jet ranger from Beziers was forced to land on the beach at Perpignan as he could not get over the City to the airfield! So much for TAF's and weather in Southern France. With hindsight I am absolutely sure that without the GPS I would have returned to Perpignan much earlier. Another lesson learned!



**Safe on the ground at Perpignan**

The local weather phenomenon is that if the wind is south easterly all the moisture off the Mediterranean bottles up in this corner of France and with mountainous terrain in all directions to the north, south and west, this results in appalling visibility for days on end until the wind direction changes. Even commercial flights can be severely affected. Perpignan itself is delightful which was just as well as I was to be stuck here for three nights.

It was great to be somewhere new at least and being a sizeable town there was much to explore. Eating alone constantly was not much fun and I began to wish I had some of my Eggesford chums around for company. My French improved though and I learnt how to buy essentials, like socks and underpants and apology presents for the family who were beginning to miss me as much as my employers. I did go to the airfield and internet café on both Friday and Saturday but soon understood that the wind needed to change before I was going anywhere.



**One of the many attractive streets in Perpignan**



A particular favourite for supper was the Café Vienna which is reasonably priced and serves excellent food in a delightful atmosphere. After two nights in the clean but rather boring Ibis Hotel I moved to the Hotel Francais for a change. By chance, I found that it had a strong aviation connection as both Antoine de Saint-Exupery and his close friend Guillaumet had stayed often and had once spent three weeks here when converting an aircraft to floats. There are pictures and letters in the dining room but I could not make out the aircraft type. It looked like a Hawker Hind but much larger.



**Antoine de Saint-Exupery and mystery plane**

Late on Saturday afternoon I was able to sit quietly in a café and watch the Perpignan fashion show. This is not a formal thing, just all the men and women dressed to kill and thrill on the main shopping streets. I felt positively scruffy and very stuck.

On Sunday, the wind changed. I had by now created half a dozen routes home but still wanted to see Biarritz if possible. Spain was no longer an option as I now needed to get back home. The TAF's clearly showed the South and West coast to be best so I chose to route to Carcassonne for fuel, then along the north of the Pyrenees via Cazares, Castlenau and Pau all the way to Biarritz for a lunch stop. I would then route north along the coast as far as possible hoping to at least get to the Channel Islands before dark. The hotel manager, whose English was worse than my French, asked me to wait whilst he got his son to see me. The son came out in bedclothes to translate and told me that his father was "desolated" that he could not put me in the room Saint-Exupery had stayed in and that should I return I must let him know in advance. I thanked him thinking I'd probably done Perpignan now, but you never know. It all depends on the wind.



### **Blue skies return and I can finally leave Perpignan**

Departing at 10.15 I made Carcassonne in 30 minutes having to climb to 4000ft to clear the wind farm on top of a hill on my track. The town of Carcassonne is one I'd have liked to have more time to see but after a quick refuel I set off for a stunning flight west across the Northern Pyrenees in glorious weather all the way. French ATC units were ever helpful, if still unable to grasp my call sign, and I was soon on a 15 mile final for runway 27 at Biarritz. The wind was now a very strong southerly and 7 miles out I realised it was very close to the x-wind limit for the Yak. With its hand and rudder operated brakes and steering this was going to be interesting. Cleared to land I set up to land diagonally across the runway to minimize the cross wind and in the event the landing was uneventful. Taxiing to the terminal was fun as the left brake began to fade while I fought to keep straight on the long taxiway without any rudder authority. Nice to park between a Piper Mirage and another private jet too. I looked quite antique. Lovely.



**Wind farm on hills at 4000ft**

A taxi quickly took me into Biarritz and I quickly realised it was a mistake. I had always held on to some romantic thought that Biarritz would be a little like Casablanca or at least in some way exotic. In actuality it reminded me of Brighton or Worthing. I could not get out fast enough and dashed back to the airport for a baguette in the main terminal. After lunch I returned to the very smart GA office and collected the latest weather info. Channel Islands impossible, the channel itself very unlikely. I talked with a very bored American Astra pilot (parked next to me) who thought I might get to Dinard but he was generally miserable and unhelpful and seemed to get no joy from flying at all. I paid the €26 for landing and handling (not bad given the free coffee, met and leather sofas, showers etc) and set off north.



### **Biarritz was a disappointment**

Just out of Biarritz at I had a problem with a sticking PTT button and had to use the P2 button to clear the area. Once away it was a rather dull flight up the west coast and the P1 PTT seemed to clear itself. The weather on the other hand did not and I soon realised that La Rochelle would probably be as far as I could safely get today. Setting up for a right downwind for 28 at La Rochelle a Lear started backtracking and despite an orbit I must have been six miles out before I was eventually cleared to turn final. The cloud base was now at 1000', winds were westerly and very strong but straight down the runway. Landing was fine but I did not want to park on the apron in the strong wind and asked for the grass to the East of, and in the shelter of the Tower. This was a very, very good move!



### **La Rochelle is absolutely beautiful and superbly lit**

By 8pm I was in the very lovely Hotel Francoise 1<sup>st</sup> and thinking of a proper meal after my light lunch. The drizzle had now started but did not stop me having a good explore of this beautiful old town and harbour on the Atlantic Coast. I managed yet another excellent meal, although it must be said I was now very bored to be eating alone yet again. I had brought a copy of Richard Bach's book of short stories "A Gift of Wings" and this made for excellent reading between courses. I had also begun to break the boredom of some of these occasions by phoning home to tell my children how good the profiteroles were or to annoy my wife with tales of large portions langoustines and superb duck fillets in fig sauce. They were now missing me too. I wandered back to the hotel through the beautifully lit streets in rather more persistent rain, not too hopeful about flying the following day.

A trip to the internet café for satellite pictures on Monday showed I would definitely not be flying as a large storm brewed off the coast and the wind had already arrived. Looking at the image of the storm I could see it was heading straight for us and was extremely glad I had parked and tied down where I did. Forecast was for 30-40mph westerly winds as the day progressed. Unable to fly I settled into the hotel to get on with some work on the laptop as I had now received calls numerous from the office expecting my return. One of these announced that an all day meeting had been arranged for me in Dartmouth on Thursday! I ventured out into the gales for lunch and on leaving the restaurant could barely hear the cars on the roads due to the noise of the halyards whipping against mast of moored boats in the winds. I saw one poor woman out with a pram which was practically blown over.

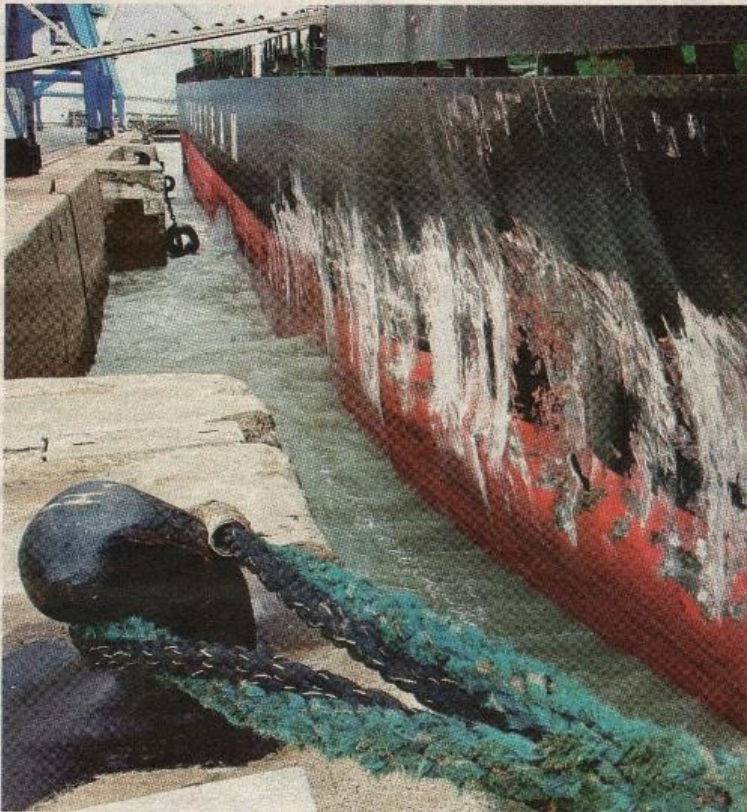


#### **Atrocious weather in La Rochelle for two days**

Beating a retreat to the hotel, a call to the airfield confirmed the Yak was okay in its sheltered position. Another meal that evening and as I walked home the wind had not dropped at all. If anything it was worse. This was confirmed on Tuesday morning.

On Tuesday the weather had passed through and I found would be able to get away. The local papers were full of the story of a 160m petrol tanker being brought in with the harbour pilot aboard on the Monday night. It had succumbed to 60mph winds with gusts over 70 and had been blown into the bridge connecting La Rochelle to Ile de Re. Not surprisingly, a fair amount of damage had been done to both. Given its load it was probably lucky than nothing worse occurred. I dashed out to the airfield to see if my Yak was still there!

# Les remorqueurs perdent le cargo



Hier matin, lors d'une manœuvre de remorquage du céréalier « Gardno », les aussières tendues entre le cargo et les deux Abeilles ont cédé. Le navire de 158 mètres a heurté violemment le viaduc du môle d'escale, lui occasionnant d'importants dommages → CAHIER LOCAL PAGE 2 2

Well chocked and tied down it had withstood the gales and we were back in action. TAF's confirmed low cloud to the North worsening during the day but I still felt I should get off asap and hopefully beat the worst of it. I would stop at Cherbourg to review the Channel crossing. Ah yes. Plans.....

First problem was oil. I needed another 5 litres of W100 and after checking with the local aero club which did not keep straight oil I was directed to a maintenance facility at the east end of the airfield 10 minutes walk away near the aircraft. They found me five litres but it took nearly an hour! Finally loaded and started up the next problem was revealed. Calling for radio check and taxi instructions I got no response. Repeated calls were met by silence. I could see up to the tower and they were gesticulating in that way the French do so well. Frantically.

I shut down, climbed out and climbed the tower. They could hear me but I was not receiving. Hoping that this was just a moisture issue after the torrential storm I return to the maintenance facility to locate some WD40. It is now 12:00 and they are closed for lunch. Back at the aero club, it too is deserted. At the adjacent hangar there is a King Air inside and I wander in hopeful of finding life. I open an office door from where I hear voices and step in to find an avionics workshop. Joy of joys!

Back at the aircraft armed with the French equivalent of WD40 I remove the radio and spray all the connectors liberally. Just to be sure I open up the inside of the PTT button and give that a squirt too. A quick start (for a Yak) and radio check confirms I have now restored two way communications but by the time I have returned the WD, it is 13:30. Fuel will be available again at 15:00. Ah well. Lunch. Body and aircraft refuelled, I set off at 3.30 delayed further by the bird scarer having to clear the runway prior to my departure. Once airborne I headed north at 2000' and enjoyed much more interesting country than the run up from Biarritz. That had been flat and rather dull. On this stretch there were many beautiful small towns and villages to be seen. Talking to Nantes with a fully operational radio I asked about the weather further north at Rennes as it was already looking poor in the distance. 5km and 700ft at Rennes, worse to the north. I was kippered.

Not wishing to land at Nantes International I diverted to the delightful little airfield at Ancenis on the River Loire. Although the weather was still good here I could now see the wall of rain and cloud ahead and having only got 75 miles or so resigned myself to yet another hotel. Landing at Ancenis and entering times in my log book I saw that I had just passed the grand total of 500hrs by 10minutes. A cause for celebration and as the aircraft was now surrounded by interested observers I persuaded one of them to take my picture by the aircraft. If only the weather behind me to the south east in this shot had been ahead of me to the north. The beautiful new tower complex at Ancenis is again worthy of mention. Recently built on the edge of an Industrial Estate just outside the town, it was instrumental in attracting both Toyota and Manitou to the area. Huge employment and investment followed. If only our own county and district councils could see the benefits and income this airfield had brought into the region.



#### **500 hours as a private pilot**

A taxi ran me into town and dropped me at what is currently the only hotel as the other had burned down in the summer. As the taxi drove away the receptionist informed they had not one room left in the town. Asking for my options she suggested I go into Nantes, some 30km south west on the TGV. Dreading this as my occasional experience of expensive trains from Exeter to London frequently end in tears, I walked the  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile to the station.

WOW. €5, 15 minutes, on time, spotlessly clean, beautifully lit and best of all, I could sit down. Great Western Railways could learn more than a thing or two here. In Nantes I decamped into the nearest hotel and went for an explore. I regret not having more time in Nantes as one evening can not do it justice. I was immediately struck by the cosmopolitan atmosphere after the cities of southern France. Here we had a huge ethnic mix and lively, carefully selected music was coming from all the bars, shops and restaurants. I say this because so many of the other restaurants and cafes I had been in further south would just have any old radio station on. Rap at 10pm whilst sipping my espresso had not been my idea of good taste. Joy of joys, I was also able to eat Chinese again. After 11 days of Haute Cuisine I needed a break.

Walking back to the hotel I was able to see the enormous restoration work in progress on the Castle in the city centre and also the beautiful cathedral which, even unlit, looked well worth a visit. I made a mental note to return with my wife for a few days.

Wednesday dawned grey and drizzly. Routing via Alderney I was just over 2 hours from Exeter and home. The TGV had me back at Ancenis by 08:30 and the ever helpful staff there fetched all available weather for me but it was not to be. Sitting in the new tower looking at HA-YAV on the ramp (just visible in the murk) I was stunned. She would have to stay here and I would have to make other arrangements to get home today.



**Alpha Victor in the murk at Ancenis**

Here my saviour arrived in the shape of Jerome Binachon. An ex Air France pilot he was now based at Ancenis manufacturing the Alsim range of flight simulators. Jerome had his office find flights and connections to Exeter. Microlights were moved from his hangar into another and the Yak safely tucked away under cover. I could fly to Guernsey with Aurigny and then on to Exeter with FlyBe. Seats were booked and I prepared to return to Nantes knowing the plane was safe. Then we found there was NO public transport between Nantes and Dinard from where the Aurigny flight departed.

Jerome was quick to offer to drive me to Dinard some 140 miles to the north.

“But your work?” I asked. “Are you sure?”

“Work is boring today.” He said. And then laughing. “Besides, I know a very good restaurant in Dinan nearby. You can buy me lunch. Deal?”

“Absolutely!” I said relieved to be finally going home, even if not in YAV.

Jerome whose English is excellent proved to be great entertainment after my frequent periods alone and his tales of Air France and his early training are worthy of a story on their own. Having given up commercial flying to design and manufacture simulators he has done very well for himself and now has an IFR Twin Star on order along with an Eclipse Jet when they are ready.

His true passion now though is his microlights. Real flying he says. A superb lunch was had in Dinan and I am eternally grateful to him for making my trip home as easy as it was. He had trained at Dinard so knew his way well. The journey time was 3 hours through torrential rain and storms clearing as we approached the coast as expected. Maddening!



**My saviour at Ancenis – Jerome Binachon**

After saying our goodbyes and promising to take him up in the Yak on my return I wandered into Dinard departures. Having trained at Southampton myself I was familiar with Aurigny's Trislanders and quite looking forward to getting on one. Strapping in for the 30 minute flight to Guernsey and watching the very careful loading procedure to prevent it falling on its tail was amusing and we were finally set to go. Engines started and taxiing to the runway it felt almost like a toy plane compared to the incredibly solidly built Yak. Lined up, three engines up to takeoff power and off we went. My God! I thought they were noisy from the outside. The weather was broken cloud at 2500-3000' over the channel to Guernsey.

A long wait at Guernsey for my connection to Exeter in the Dash 8 enabled me to arrange collection by wife and children, confirm with the office that I'd be in Dartmouth for the meeting the next day and generally reflect on the whole trip which had now taken 14 days!

The Dash 8 Landed at Exeter at 8.45pm on 13<sup>th</sup> October in scattered rain showers. My wife and children were happy to have me back and pleased with the presents I obtained in Perpignan. I too was glad to be back and had thoroughly enjoyed my first long trip even if the aircraft was still in France.

And of course we'll soon go to collect it. Won't we?



## POSTSCRIPT

After numerous arranged, but weather abandoned attempts to collect the Yak the three co-owners finally made it across to collect it on 5<sup>th</sup> of November. I was able to check out a new share holder in the afternoon and persuaded Jerome to join us for an evening meal in Ancenis. We all had a good evening and after staying in the local, very pleasant hotel (vacancies this time) we arrived to fly HA-YAV home on 6<sup>th</sup>. I was also able to give Jerome the promised flight in the Yak 18 which he thoroughly enjoyed.

Whilst preparing for our final departure I was called to the tower and was expecting to pay for hangarage and a landing fee. The airfield manager instead insisted this was all free and also gave me a beautiful book on the Loire Valley and begged that I return soon. "Perhaps with more English pilots?". I certainly shall try. Nantes and Ancenis both have much to offer.

An 11:00 departure saw HA-YAV return to it's winter base at Exeter after crossing the channel via Cherbourg at 1300ft just under the cloud base. Not the forecast 3000'. So much for plans....

I can't wait to do Spain next!

### TRIP DETAILS:

Total distance	1680nm
Airborne time	14:00
Average speed	120kt
Diversions	6
Oil	16l
Fuel	714l

