



LFC Newsletter

The Newsletter of the Limerick Flying Club

www.limerickflyingclub.com

May 2010

Redbird – Flight of Defiance...

By Gerry Humphreys



Eyafjallajökull volcano (meaning Island-Mountain under a glacier) erupted spectacularly on 20 March 2010, after having been dormant for almost 200 years. During its most violent phase, the subglacial eruption produced large ash plumes that drifted over Europe and forced an unprecedented closure of airspace over most of Europe for several days in mid April.

Volcanic ash is nasty stuff, with very fine silicate abrasive particles that act like 3-dimensional airborne sandpaper; not the sort of stuff you want to fly through in large quantities.

The main problem with volcanic ash is that it melts inside the core of modern turbine engines causing irreversible damage. The spectacular incident where Capt Eric Moody's BA 747 had all 4 engines shut down near Jakarta in June 1982 is well known, however it is not uncommon for aircraft to inadvertently fly through ash. A NASA DC8 had an unplanned ash encounter in Feb 2000 which resulted in a \$3.2M bill to repair its engines. They published a comprehensive report which is available online and makes interesting reading.

Another problem with volcanic ash is that it is very difficult to detect once it has dispersed away from the initial plume. Models have been developed which take into account the many variables (atmospheric conditions, particle amounts and size, eruption conditions etc) but are really a best guess. ICAO has long been aware of the hazards and has produced a comprehensive manual (Doc 9691) which is available online and makes interesting bedtime reading.

Unusual high pressure over the North Atlantic at the time of the Eyafjallajökull eruption resulted in the ash cloud heading straight for some of the busiest airspace in the world controlled by a large group of individual nations who each had to decide quickly what to do.



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The decision to close airspace to IFR traffic was made (largely because of a 'zero tolerance' approach recommended by the ICAO document at the time); quickly everyone followed suit. The Dutch went one better and banned VFR traffic also; their neighbours in Belgium then did the same as did Luxembourg and others, eventually there was virtual chaos across Europe with even Balloons and Gliders grounded in many countries and the public becoming traumatised from fear of plummeting aircraft. After several days of glorious blue skies the GA community as well as the Airlines were up in arms – some of the best weather ever seen, skies completely empty, people stranded all over Europe and no-one allowed to get airborne. Then the French pulled a rail strike!!! My phone was melting with calls from friends stranded all over Europe; sadly I could only fly VFR in Ireland and the UK; North West Europe was completely closed. Eventually the authorities reluctantly agreed that their reaction had been completely over the top and reluctantly allowed a trickle of GA to go and 'sniff the air'. Some of the NOTAMS from this period were hilarious;

On 19th April I could not help thinking it highly ironic that the authorities in a country that allows the public to make sensible decisions about alcohol, drugs and prostitution publishes this:-

DUE TO VOLCANIC ACTIVITY IN ICELAND AND THE RESULTING ASHCLOUDS IN THE AMSTERDAM FIR, ALL CIVIL IFR AND VFR OPERATIONS ARE PROHIBITED.

then on 20th this appeared (presumably to provide amusement):-

AFTER CAREFUL CONSIDERATION CAA-NL HAS DECIDED TO EXEMPT NON-MOTORIZED AIRCRAFT, I.E. GLIDERS, HOT AIR BALLOONS, NON MOTORIZED

HANGGLIDERS AND PARAGLIDERS FROM THE CLOSURE OF THE AMSTERDAM FIR DUE TO THE VOLCANIC ASH CLOUD. NEVERTHELESS, CAA-NL RECOMMENDS INCREASED MONITORING OF THE FLIGHT SPEED AND HEIGHT INDICATION AND WINDSCREEN TRANSPARENCY DURING FLIGHT IN THE RISK AREA.

Meanwhile the French, while allowing private VFR flights below FL115 were obviously trying to get a few new words into the Oxford English dictionary:-

IT IS STRONGLY REQUIRED TO VFR FLIGHTS TO CONSULT SIGMET, NOTAM AND ASHTAM BEFORE ANY FLIGHT. PILOTS HAVE TO PAY ATTENTION OF THE PHENOMENOUS DANGEROUSNESS AND OF THE RISKS FOR ANY ACFT ENTERING THE VOLCANIC ASH CLOUD.

During all of this my friend Boyd Munro was desperately trying to get to Europe from Australia to see, as he put it, the 'European Emperor's new clothes'. Boyd is a highly experienced aviator with several FAI world records to his name and a healthy disdain for petty bureaucracy. His magnificent Cessna Caravan 'Redbird' has been parked at my strip since his visit last summer and he asked me to fly him to see the volcano.

Since I could not do much else while GA in North West Europe was paralysed, I agreed and started planning. Boyd got as far as Barcelona from Sydney using the airlines, a superhuman effort considering the air transport chaos at the time, but the French rail strike was the last straw!

We decided the best plan was to rescue him in the Caravan. At the last minute I asked if Harry could come along (he would miss school for a few days, but I figured this was an



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opportunity not to be missed), besides it turned out that only 1 of the guests Boyd had invited along could come so there would be plenty of room.

Next morning at first light we set off from Brittas, straight line to Sabadel, a sort of Weston-equivalent GA field North of Barcelona (but without the lovely Vanessa to greet us ☺). We went mostly at FL 135 – perfectly acceptable in an unpressurised aeroplane. We had a little oxygen in the tank and took the occasional hit to keep us alert. We found Boyd via e-mail and set off north across the Pyrenees again through a deserted middle airspace in France until we came to the virtual brick wall of Class A around the Paris TMA. I was reminded of the dog in the manger story; no VFR allowed in Class A; No IFR allowed because of all the ash; so we had to descend to below 2500 ft into what I can only describe as shark infested custard... hazy vis and a 2000 ft layer full of light aircraft.... **sometimes the law really is an ass...**

Le Touquet next where ATC had gone home since no-one could fly IFR, but no-one took any notice and we landed amidst a steady stream of light aircraft coming and going despite the contamination. We managed to refuel and discovered that the airfield did not open until 09:00 local next day. However, the airfield manager helpfully showed us the hole in the fence that we broke through at first light next morning to get airborne. You gotta love flying in France.

Across the channel to the UK and an instant life story was required on the radio by London info, with every man and his dog airborne, it seemed, rescuing friends stranded across Europe. Added to that a rash of practice pans on 121.5 and I soon took Boyd's advice and turned the radios down to enjoy the scenery up the whole length of the UK to Wick. There we were met by Andy, proprietor of Far North

Aviation; specialist in seeing off intrepid travellers on their way across the North Atlantic. A quick fill of Oxygen and fuel and we were ready for the off, however, Boyd and I did not like the look of the weather in Iceland – freezing level on the deck and the likelihood of icing in cloud (not good in a Caravan) coupled with headwinds, meant things could have got tense. In addition, the fact that the ash cloud that we had been somewhat cynical about until now was, in fact, likely to be blowing right in our path, albeit above our planned level, meant discretion was the better part of valour. We considered landing in Vagar, a sort of 'halfway' strip in the Faroe Islands, however, it is a notoriously tricky spot in anything but the most benign of conditions. Boyd decided his castle near Perth was a much more attractive option than a night in Vagar, so we backtracked to Strathallen and had some haggis for tea!

Next day looked much better, so we set off again and this time made it all the way to Iceland in just under 6 hours via Wick once more. Having cleared customs in Eskifjörður, a regional airport in the North East, we filed VFR along the coast to Reykjavik and had our first look at the terrifying monster that had the whole of Europe in its grip. I must admit to some trepidation approaching what looked like a cross between a nuclear explosion and a huge Cumulo-nimbus. However, I was confident that as long as we stayed a safe distance upwind we would come to no harm.





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The Caravan is fitted with an inertial separator in its engine intake, a simple but effective device which is designed to filter out any foreign objects from the engine; when selected 'on' there is a small performance loss, but one is protected from dust, debris, water droplets and the like. While I had no intention of trying it out for real, it certainly was nice to have, and was 'on' whenever we were in the vicinity of the volcano.

Our first few passes were truly awe inspiring, massive clouds of steam and ash billowed up to 15,000 ft or so and we could hear and feel regular

explosions as it appeared more fuel was added to what was already a fiercely burning furnace. My Blackberry worked all the time while airborne over Iceland and with 3 laptops permanently fired up 'down the back' we were able to post regular live updates on Facebook; **"just seen the entrance to hell"** with a picture was pretty accurate.

We decided to call into Bakki – a small airstrip almost at the base of the glacier, partly to check out the plane, and partly because we could! To my surprise there was a guy in the tower and an islander in the circuit doing a regular passenger run from the nearby island of Vestmannaeyjar – right under the nose of the volcano that had the whole of Europe at a standstill – as if nothing was amiss. The Icelanders are used to volcanoes!

I enquired about landing fees and the tower guy looked at me in surprise – "we don't charge landing fees in Iceland"... Harry slipped him a bottle of Tesco's finest Red plonk and he was our new best friend; our 'volcano diversion airfield' was sorted for the rest of the visit.

Next we went to Reykjavik where we had to walk almost 30 yards from the plane to the

hotel. Severe clear weather still, but next morning things got serious as the wind changed to South East and both Reykjavik and Keflavik, the Military base nearby, were closed to IFR traffic. In fact the only field open to international traffic was Akureyri, a smallish field on the North coast at the end of a Fjord with interesting IFR approaches. Boyd's only guest was due to arrive there next day instead of Reykjavik, having been diverted via Glasgow from LA.

A slight snag appeared in the form of a NOTAM banning all but essential traffic from Akureyri due to anticipated congestion, however, we decided to press on and see what happened. As it turned out, no-one in the tower seemed to have read the NOTAM and we were cheerfully welcomed after a pleasant hour's tourism over what can only be described as a frozen moonscape. There is not a sign of life anywhere as far as the eye can see in central Iceland. Usually covered in cloud, we had perfect vis and no cloud so were privileged to witness one of the most barren landscapes on the planet from close up. The tower let us park on the grass, freeing up space for the airliners that later descended on the normally sleepy little airport.

One of these had Boyd's guest from LA - Millie, minus her bags, who, despite having endured 7 airports and 36 hours without sleep was raring to go and see the volcano. Naturally we felt we had to oblige so away we went on a 'local VFR flight 2 hours' – no-one batted an eyelid. Unfortunately despite CAVOK conditions all across the highlands of central Iceland, as we approached the Eyafjallajökull area the cloud built up and it was clear that we were not going to see much. However, as we got closer we could see the top of the volcano poking up through the broken cloud layer. As we circled we could see shockwaves in the cloud below and hear regular bangs over the noise of the engine as the earth vented its fury.



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I must admit I very soon had enough of volcano tourism on that occasion and we left it to its own devices.

Overnight in the 'hotel with a view' and we woke up to another clear blue sky. This time even Akureyri airport had fallen foul of the 'ash map' and was now closed to all IFR traffic. All the 757s were trapped on the ground and some had their engine intakes hurriedly sealed with makeshift plastic covers to prevent dust ingestion. (At least the ones visible to the press & TV cameras from the terminal were – I can't help thinking it was a PR exercise).

We decided to take one last look and since we had probably stretched our luck with the weather, head for home. That last visit was the best. The volcano was less 'angry' but still spectacular. We got some great shots and said farewell to our now relatively gentle giant.



More wonderful scenery along the South Iceland coast to Hornafjörður which was closed, but where we had arranged for a friendly local to come in and refuel us. Some nice tailwinds on the way home meant 3 hours to Wick, a quick refuel and a nostalgic low level trip down Scotland at a pace far more suited to tourism than in a Hunter or Harrier with a

couple of bombs aboard. We did the Great Glen – (no sign of Nessie) then on to Strathallen for a thorough debrief at the Castle before a bleary-eyed trip home next day.

We had a great adventure, with no drama. The only heart-stopping moment was climbing out of Shannon after a final refuel en route to Brittas when Harry beside me suddenly shouts "Oh my God!!!" ... "**Whats up???**" I said, thinking how ironic, we do 36 hours, bait a volcano and now this.... "Oh my God... I've just seen the place where the 'Rubberbandits' did the Willie O'Dea video!!!!!" "**Yeahhhh, Thanks for that Harry!!**"

The total grounding of aviation was probably the biggest arse-covering operation in the history of aviation! Both the owner and I were anxious to de-bunk some of the voodoo that was being spread about. No doubt it will continue for years to come with millions more to be spent on un-necessary engineering checks being invented to assuage the ignorant... Bah!!

Link to an excellent youtube video of the trip
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ul_HlJe4aFU

Club Social Activities

A fly-out is planned for the weekend of 22/23 May. The route will include Enniskillen, Sligo and Donegal before a return to Coonagh. There is a planned overnight stop in Sligo, no doubt for some refreshments and even some sleep. Full details are available from Harry Mc who is the social events co-ordinator. He has issued emails and also there is more info in the Lfc Forum social activities page.

The postponed treasure hunt will be scheduled again soon. Young Eagles day on 20 June.



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Raffle...

As most of you are aware there is a raffle being run at the moment, with the intended prize to have been the last hour of flight in EI-BFP. However events have overtaken this arrangement due to the speedy sale of the aircraft, so now the prize will be a flight in any aircraft of your choice, within reason I suppose. The proceeds of the raffle are intended as a contribution to the new field development.

From our chairperson

By Joe Johnston

Hi all. First I would like to thank the members who spent their Sunday afternoon working very hard cleaning the soil on the side of the runway and general cleaning up of the airfield. So the next time you taxi to the alpha hold enter and back track 28 have a look out to the side and admire the wonderful job your fellow club members did for our club, and if you are 1 of the 80% of members who did not bother turning up, then feel a little guilty. If this lack of support continues, expect to pay more for your flying in the future as the club will have to pay someone to do this necessary work, as it's unfair to expect the usual members to do it every time. In the next week or two Mark Lloyd will be asking for members to take on certain tasks around the club in an attempt to have a more organised airfield maintenance system. If this is not taken up by the vast majority of members then the flying fees will have to go up as the airfield maintenance is just as important as aircraft maintenance (no runway no flying).

Moving on EI-BFP took off from runway 28 at around 1420hr on Monday 26/04/10 for the last time bound for Waterford where she was to undergo some work before

going to her new home at an airport outside Birmingham. If all has gone to plan our resident volcanologist (HUM) will have flown her to her new owner who wants the engine for a Cessna racer. In all, this was a good deal for the club as we got €5000 for her, a very fair price for a clapped out Ralleye. This is why we had to move so quickly on the sale and were unable to fly off the last hour in the draw as planned. So I have, with the consent of all the owners involved, changed the draw to offer one hour flying in any aircraft in EICN. The choice will be yours, and all this for €10. So all the times you looked and thought "I'd love a go in that" could be in the past so don't delay and fill in a docket today.

As you may have noticed, the fuel bowser has gone for renovation and is expected back around the middle to end of May, so for the time being we will only be supplying fuel to club aircraft. Any problems contact me.

The committee has decided to allow Gerry and Trevor to keep their sport cruiser in FP'S spot in the hanger until such time as the club replace FP with another aircraft. At that point the spot will revert back for club aircraft only.

Unfortunately it was also decided to put €10 per hour onto the price of flying from 1st June. This is due to the increase in fuel prices and the fall off in voucher sales. It is never easy to put up prices but even with this rise we still remain the cheapest club to fly within Ireland and with our improvement in aircraft and instructor availability I think we are still good value. If any of the members have any suggestions on how we might save money on our day to day running costs I would like to hear them.

As from the start of next month I intend to start looking for ferry pilots by means of putting the plane and date of flight to Waterford on our members email system. It will be on a first



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come first serve basis. Flights are charged at 50% of normal rate. **It is important to understand if you commit to a flight you must fly it as it will have been scheduled with our maintenance provider.**



Neil welcomes one of our newest members Alan McLaughlin. Hope that you enjoy your time with us Alan.

Foncy and Jim to Newtownards

By Foncy Hobbins and Jim Keane

Now that the days are getting long again and there is an improvement in the weather it is time to looking at doing some cross country trips. After some deliberation and observing the weather forecast we felt a trip to Newtownards (EGAD) was on the cards.

On the evening of the 10th March the forecast was quite good so the decision was made to 'give it a lash' and we opted to take 'OY'. This aeroplane was declared airworthy in every aspect, all 'ships papers' were in order. As we were crossing an International Boundary, filing a flight plan with ATC is mandatory. Both flight plans were filed, outward and return. This saves time on the day of departure. A Further requirement as our first stop was EGAD, was to comply with 'PRIVATE AIRCRAFT COMMON TRAVEL AREA FLIGHTS/TERRORISM ACT 2000', to submit a

'General Aviation Report' which was downloaded from the internet, a copy filled up and faxed to the police in Northern Ireland (fax 004890901242), all very straight forward and simple. A quick phone call was made to Newtownards the evening before (not essential just courtesy) re our intended visit re fuel availability etc.

On Thursday morning first thing, a detailed weather report was obtained courtesy of Met Eireann (via Internet), got the metars for the main airports, long TAFS, LAF, the Low level Wind and Temp chart for FL050 and Low level Sig weather. Judgement was made that the weather was very favourable. Also did a check on the notams through the internet. It was all systems go. We met at Coonagh at 0930. Final touches were put to the flight plan, a pencil, ruler and computer job, 'GPS to be used for entertainment only preferably'. Pre flighted the aeroplane, fuelled up as per estimated requirements, checked weight and balance, take off figures etc. The 2000' wind was almost smack on the nose at 17 knots. We elected to go at 2k', higher would be preferable but that would give a stronger headwind and reduced ground speed.

Though we had almost full fuel on board with a slight head wind OY performed superbly on take off on RWY10. We did a left hand turn out and headed directly for Killaloe/EGAD. We immediately made contact with EINN TWR who passed us over to EINN Area (127.5), with next reporting point abeam Birr. We were then advised that the military and give them a call on 122.0. They informed us there was no military traffic to affect us. Later we transferred over to Dublin and again confirmed remaining west of military airspace, were asked for estimated time and location for crossing the FIR boundary. We gave them the time and location south of Newry. At the boundary we called again and were handed over to Belfast. We were cleared direct to EGAD VFR. We



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routed Newry, Downpatrick, EGAD. Radio contact was lost with Belfast approaching Downpatrick. We made contact with EGAD, got all the local information and proceeded. At about 5 miles the tower was vacant and we relied on the information originally received and contact with local aeroplanes in the circuit. The surface wind was almost straight down RWY34 so arrival was comfortable.

By the time we taxied in the TWR was manned again and we were cleared to park 'anywhere we liked, just don't obstruct anybody'! How wonderful and informal.

We shut down the aeroplane and made it safe and secure, completed all the paper work, donned our high vis jackets and made our way to the terminal building. As we had not yet closed our flight plan due to the radio failure with Belfast we got the appropriate phone No. in EGAD and did the necessary immediately. Next item was the filling of the anti terrorism cards for entry to the 'UK', departure cards are also necessary. We filled those at the same time and put them in the appropriate box. Landing fees were next at £12 but we had our voucher from pilot magazine so no charge.

After all that the sambos were most welcome. We had a chat with the locals and decided it was time to move on. A few words with the controller, confirmed departure procedures, out to the aeroplane, preflighted, final check on the paper work, all set, requested start up, no reply (TWR unmanned again! No prob) proceeded with start up etc. Made all the usual radio calls and taxied out, (VFR rules apply) power checks, on to active RWY34 and departed with a left hand turn to due south for the 'Irish Republic'. The flight south was uneventful a more or less a reciprocal of the flight North in the AM. In every respect it was a delightful trip, simple, straight forward, crossing an international boundary, incorporating many aspects of navigation and radio procedures,

but a trip that is well within the capabilities of any PPL. Have a go and enjoy! (Any one wishing to do this flight Foncy or Jim will gladly talk to you about it).

The Club Officers 2010

By Foncy Hobbins

Following the AGM which took place in March this year the following persons have been appointed to their respective positions of responsibility

Chairman	Joe Johnson
Secretary	Joe Sullivan
Treasurer	Finian Gaule
Membership Sec.	Mark Burkley
Membership Liaison	Foncy Hobbins
Events Co-ordinator	Harry McNamara
Airfield Maintenance	Mark Lloyd.
C.F.I.	Brendan Beegan

Articles

The LFC Newsletter is published monthly, in the first week of the month. All articles, letters, etc. must reach the Editor at least two days before distribution. All club members, and non-members who are interested in our club, or flying, are invited to publish articles. Please submit your article by email to newscoonagh@gmail.com or in person or by post. They may on any subject you wish, information, gossip, fun, logistics, or anything else.

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