

## Gyrocopter Experience Team On Tour Around Europe

4 Gyro pilots are off to fly around Europe from Friday 5th June to Monday 15th June.? You can follow their progress in this BLOG.

SATURDAY EVENING: We're home!



[Click here to view the entire GPS route in Google Earth](#)

(if google earth does not open automatically, right click on the link and save the file.??You must

change the extension of the file to .kml?then click?on the file you have just saved.)?

Last updated Sunday 14th at 14:00

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### **Updated Saturday 6th at 14.00?**

DAY 1

Friday 5th June saw Phil Harwood (Instructor, based at York) and Kati Hedger (Events Coordinator, also based at York) set off to join Kevin Robinson (Instructor based at Oxford) and Mike Elliot (based at Shotteswell) on a gyrocopter trip into Europe.?? The plan?was for the 4 pilots to each fly a gyro across the Channel and tour across Europe for around a week.??We planned to head over the water to France, across Belgium and into Holland.? Thereafter the plan was to head to the Rotorsport factory in Hildesheim Germany, spend a couple of days there and head to Denmark for a fly-in at Stauning before making our way back across the coast the following weekend.

The first leg of the journey saw Phil (flying G-CEHN) and Kati (flying G-CFCG) head off from York to join Kevin at Oxford.? Friday morning?s weather forecast for the afternoon and into the weekend was pretty grim and so the plan for a 2pm departure was hastily revised and we planned to depart as soon after noon as possible.? None the less it was still about 1.45pm when we finally left the ground, well laden with camping equipment, spare parts, about 16 maps not to mention a few things to wear.?? The plan was to head south as quickly as possible to try to stay ahead of the bad weather that was sweeping down from the North.? The journey was to be about 160 miles and we hoped to do it one go expecting our journey time to be around 3 hours.?

It all started quite well.? Visibility was good, we were flying into a headwind of 10 ? 20 miles per

hour but for once that was working in our favour as it was holding the bad weather back. Visibility was good and there wasn't much in the way of other traffic. Having reached Northampton we changed heading and starting heading across the country. We flew close to Silverstone which was fascinating to see from the air. There were some cars circuiting the tracks but they looked to be touring rather than formula one cars.

At this point, the visibility was deteriorating and we could see some areas of rain ahead. We started to route around the weather, picking the clearer sections and adapting our route as we went. Speaking to RAF Benson on the radio, we took the decision to turn back and land at a Glider airfield that we'd spotted. However whilst initially the weather was better once we'd turned back, the further we travelled, the more the weather seemed to be getting worse. It was raining quite hard at this point although as we were travelling through the air, we weren't getting too wet. We circled round again and decided that to carry on to our destination (we were now only about 30 minutes away). However the weather really set in and we finally had to concede defeat so we informed RAF Benson of our plans and made an emergency landing at a training airfield at Abingdon Army base.

Having landed at the airfield we struggled to find where we should report to. We routed down one long runway only to discover it was fenced off at the bottom. So we turned the gyros around and headed off in a different direction and finally taxied our way to the security gatehouse. We made our soggy way to report to the gatehouse only to be asked to show ID. We hadn't expected to need to use our passports quite so early in the trip.

We waited out the bad weather and took off again about an hour later to make our way the final 20 minutes to Chiltern Air Park, where Kevin was waiting for us. We landed on the grass strip and taxied across the road to the hangar. Well so that was Day 1 of the trip complete. We planned to meet up with Mike at Chiltern for a 9am departure Saturday morning.

## DAY 2

Well that was the plan at least! We woke up Saturday morning to more pouring rain. So the 9am departure plan was put on hold and we are currently sitting it out waiting for the rain to stop so that we can get off on our adventure. We'll update you on our progress when we can.

**Updated Sunday 7th at 08.00**

Waiting for the rain to stop on the Saturday Kati, Phil and Kevin watched DVD's and spent time pouring over maps of the route and alternative plans based upon the weather forecast for the week.

The rain ceased about 5pm and it was time to head back to Chiltern Air Park to get ready for more flying.? The plan now was to fly to Marc Lhermette's place near Whitstable and stay the night - there would be no time to cross the channel.

Aircraft checked, refuelled, luggage repacked, GPS's set we waited for Kevin to fly down to meet us - his machine was hangared at RAF Benson. Mike had arrived whilst we were getting ready.

We departed at 18:45 for a flight of about an hour and a half.? Visibility was good, our loose formation was taken up and we flew around the outskirts of Reading.? Kevin was our "blue leader" followed by Mike "blue",? Kati "yellow" and Phil "red".? Our transit was to be at 80mph at a height of about 1500ft.

Kevin established a basic air traffic service with Farnborough who watch over us as we passed through the corridor between Heathrow and Gatwick airports.? It was a little unnerving to start with to see so many jets in the holding pattern a few 1000ft above our heads but we soon got used to it.

Visibility was ok, we could see Heathrow airport and the City of London to the North and we could see Gatwick airport to the South.? We clearly saw the O2 arena and Canary Wharf in the distance.? We transferred to Biggin Hill ATC who allowed us to transit overhead at 2000ft as there was a helicopter in the circuit.

Now it was time for the stretch to Marc's landing site. Our hour and a half was up and we still had 50 minutes showing on the GPS.? We were in a 35mph headwind all the way covering about 45mph on the ground at all time.? The last stretch seemed a long haul as we were getting cold and the cloud base was getting a little lower.

Marc's field came into sight.? Kevin worked out the circuit and the landing sequence and landed first, followed by Mike, Kati and finally Phil.? Excellent, Marc had cut his grass especially for us.

We refuelled and moved our gear into Marcs office where we have spent the night.? It is now the following morning and, as predicted it is raining.? It is due to stop about 11am, at which time we expect to take off into a headwind to cross the channel and up the coast to land at Ostend airfield in Belgium.? We'll keep in touch with you.

### **UPDATED TUESDAY 9TH AT 17:00**

Day 3

Checked weather at 4am.? There was a front due to pass through Kent early morning across into Europe and up the coast (just as we planned to do!).? The forecast now indicated the weather front was likely to clear Oostend just after 12noon which meant that the very early start we'd planned to take advantage of the weather window was no longer needed (hooray!). So we went back to sleep and emerged at a more civilised hour.

After breakfast at the Little chef along with some final planning, we completed our pre-flight checks, loaded up the aircraft and finally left Marc's at 1pm travelling directly from Whitstable across the Kent countryside to Dover and then across the channel towards calais.

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We couldn't reach London information on the radio with a reliable signal, they know we were there but the communication was very broken.? Not great for our confidence!?

Although we were initially a little nervous at the prospect of crossing the stretch of water, in practice the weather was beautiful and we really enjoyed it.? The sun shone, the skies were blue and with a tail wind we scooted across the Channel in double-quick time.? We generally flew at around 1200ft and didn't cross the shortest part due to the northerly component of the tailwind.?

As we reached halfway across the channel, we spoke to Calais radio then Oostende as we travelled along the coastline of France and Belgium.? It was the most amazing and enjoyable flight.

As we reached Oostende we suddenly had to route back out to sea to avoid the conflicting traffic (big jet!!) taking off from Oostend airport.? Once clear of the end of the runway, we were cleared to return to the coast and continue our journey across Belgium.

At this point the weather was still good so we decided to continue into the Netherlands towards Zeeland Airport.? Once we were within about 10 miles of Zeeland we finally caught up with the front which had been forecast to pass northwards.? The visibility deteriorated, it started to rain a little and we dropped lower.? After a few minutes we decided to divert to an alternative airstrip to wait for the weather to pass.? Mike had used his GPS to locate an alternative airstrip and we headed towards it at a low level.? However on reaching the point where Mike's GPS indicated the airstrip to be located, all we could see below us was a ploughed field!? No alternative airstrip seemed to exist after all.

Thus we moved to Plan C and decided to head for Zeeland once again.? The visibility was a little better and we managed to cross the water to the part of The Netherlands where Zeeland sits but once again, the weather deteriorated and we couldn't quite reach our destination. By this point it was clear that the weather front was passing through the area, we all had plenty of fuel remaining and so we took the decision (given the absence of alternative choices) to circle around in the clear weather and wait it out.? We spent the next hour circling ever closer to our final destination as the weather front passed - always managing to move about a mile closer with each circuit.? Finally Zeeland appeared through the mist and we cruised in and landed.

We were met with a fantastic welcome.? Zeeland was actually home to a gyrocopter aviation museum, and the owner, Richard, came across to meet us and invited us to the museum and to pitch our tents just outside.? We spent a very enjoyable afternoon and evening touring the museum and enjoying a well deserved drink with Richard, Simon (another gyro enthusiast) and others.? We'd done it - we'd really taken our gyros and flown out of the UK, across the channel and up into Europe. What a feeling!

### Day 4

Although there had been heavy rain during the night, we woke to glorious sunshine and met to plan the days flying.? Kevin had promised to give Simon a flight in the gyro (gyro flying not being allowed in the Netherlands at present) so as they set off to fly we were going to work on the route. However Kev's plans were initially thwarted due to a minor problem with the pre-rotator so it was a little while before they actually took off.? Meanwhile, Phil, Kati and Mike did the detailed route planning and worked with the very friendly guy in the control tower to check the forecast weather on route and applicable notams.? Once completed, we put together a flight plan and then returned to take down the tents (now dry thanks to the sunshine) and

repack the gyros ready to depart.? Once ready we returned to the control tower to file our flight plan, only to discover that we had to wait at least one hour after submitting the flight plan, before we were permitted to depart.? Another lesson learned.? So we had some lunch in the sunshine, did the planning for the second leg of our journey that day and finally left at about 1pm.

The first part of that day's flying was to travel across the Netherlands and cross the border into Germany at a place called Stadtlohn.? As we took off and waved farewell to our Dutch friends, the weather was good, the wind was slightly in our favour and we made good speed across the ground.? Kati's mapcase blew outside of the gyro whilst crossing the strip of water back to the mainland, and although attached, the turbulence created managed to blow the map cleanly away! Kati was now reliant on the gps and keeping apace with the other 3 gyros to reach the planned destination.? The advantage of this being that without having to worry about navigation vs the map, she could really enjoy the flight across the Dutch countryside.? The flight distance to Stadtlohn was about 140 miles and we reached our destination 2 hours after taking off from Zeeland.

At Stadtlohn, we registered our arrival in the control tower (currently being refurbished which explained why we had been unable to reach them by phone before departing) as within the control tower itself was sat a man with a radio, a fantastic view and not a lot else!? We refueled the aircraft, checked our plans and then took off again at about 5pm.? The second leg of the journey was uneventful.?

We flew over masses of forest and up into the hills, across some really superb scenery, and finally landed at Hildesheim (the home of Autogyro the Germany company that manufactures the gyros that we fly) at around 7pm.? This was another new experience - normally whenever we landed we were quite an unusual sight and attracted a lot of attention.? Not so in Hildesheim, we would probably have stood out more if we were anything other than gyrocopters!? we'd never seen as many gyros in one place in our lives.?

We were given a great welcome by Thomas Kiggen and his flight school.? They arranged accommodation for us (hotel accommodation as we planned to stay for 2 nights), arranged transport to get us there and generally made us welcome. We unloaded the gyros, refueled ready for the next leg of the journey and taxied the machines across the large hangar that was to be their home for the next two nights.? We then made our way to our hotel and had a drink together before making our way into the centre of Hildesheim for a very enjoyable (and rather posh) meal out.? We had a very enjoyable meal in this hotel before making our way back to the hotel and crashing out for the night

### Day 5

This was planned as a no flying day to build some r&r into the busy schedule. We met for breakfast at 9am after which we returned to the airfield and to the Autogyro factory. We were made very welcome at the factory (despite turning up a day earlier than planned) and were given a most fascinating tour of all the different rooms (the room where they made the bodywork, did the painting, wired all the electrical parts, put the build packages together, welded the framework right through to where the machines were actually put together. We met Otmar, the MD of Autogyro, and took advantage of our location to have some work done on Phil and Kevin's gyro. In fact a fault had just arisen on Phil's gyro for which we would have had to ground the machine had we been anywhere else so we couldn't have been luckier to be within taxiing distance of the factory when this arose. Whilst in the office we spotted the German version of Phil's book for the first time. This had been released the previous week, co authored by Phil and Werner Iberler, who took the English version, translated into German and added some text of his own. We had known that the book had just been released but we'd left home before our copies arrive (not that we can read the text). Tomorrow we hope to travel back across Germany and into Denmark, however at 6pm the weather isn't looking too promising so we will just have to see where we end up!

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### UPDATED THURSDAY 11TH AT 08:00

### Day 6

When we woke up on day 6 it was sunny but the trees were bending with the wind, not a good sign. A quick weather check showed that a front was passing and moving north and that the wind would die down a little later. We had breakfast and discussed our route ahead.

We arrived at Thomas's flying school, pulled out and checked over the aircraft and leisurely cleaned them and packed them. An 11am start was planned to a place called St Michaelsdorg, a flight of 2 hours. With no rush this morning, some hot chocolate was welcomed.

We all lined up on the runway at Hidesheim to try and quicken up our departure as the circuit was busy, each person moving off once the person in front was fully airborne and started their climbout to ensure our safe separation. This worked extremely well and meant that Phil was not in catch-up mode for the first few miles of travelling.

Heading north we had to follow the autobahn in order to transit Hanover airspace. Although the



wind had died down from what it was earlier in the morning it was still the bumpiest flight of the trip so far.? It was a good trip, visibility was very good, just a little bumpy.

We then saw the most evil looking cloud since our experience on day 2 which looked as if it was going to block our track.? There was a gap to the left of it which Kevin steered us towards and fortunately it was clear skies after it, no diversion this time.

We had never seen so many windfarms and wind turbines, literally hundreds of them all over the place.? We had been a little scared flying over them however by the end of this trip it was second nature, very similar to the experience flying over water.

We landed in St Michaelsdorg in extremely strong winds, fortunately heading straight down the runway.? At 1000ft, Phil managed to get his GPS showing a forward speed of zero whilst his airspeed indicated still showed 45mph.? Landings were almost vertical - cool.

This airfield was a simple but lovely airfield with a camp site next to it and a nice restaurant.? Goulash soup was the order of the day and very welcome.? We only stayed here for a couple of hours, enough time to refuel both the machines and ourselves.

The next flight should have been our final flight to reach our furthest away desination of Stauning in Demark, as we were crossing an international boundary we needed a flight plan which was filed by Kevin.

We took off in our loose formation again and headed north.? Another lovely flight.? The wind was very strong from the west making us all crab 45 degrees to the path we were travelling.? A strange experience following roads whilst pointing sideways!?! This was to be our longest leg of the trip at 140 miles scheduled to take about 2 and a half hours.?

After about an hour the cloud base started lowering - this was not forcasted.? We continued flying lower to keep out of the cloud when we could see in the distance that the tips of the wind turbines were disappearing into the cloud.? There would be no way to continue flying above the wind farms, the only way would be to slalom between them....not something we were prepared

to try.

Time for a diversion, our GPS showed that we were 4 miles from a small strip near a place called Bredstedt. We found this tiny grass strip and landed on it. The wind was about 45 degrees from the runway and still very strong so landings across the grass runway were the order of the day. This was the first time that Mike and Kati has done this kind of landing since their training and both did excellent landings and were well chuffed with themselves.

The airfield owner came to greet us. He was extremely helpful and friendly. Kevin had to phone immediately to cancel the flight plan to stop the rescue system being put into action. The airfield owner took us all to his house a few miles away to check the weather...there was no indication of the low cloud or any reason to not continue...back to the airfield.

We could check the weather at individual airfields from Phils i-phone and each of them were reporting low cloud. The forecast did not match the actuals, typical. Having filed another flight plan, we decided to call it a day, we postponed the flight plan again and packed all the Gyros into a hanger. Excellent. Time for a hotel.

So we are presently about 40 miles south of Denmark, staying in a hotel and looking at the rain out of the window. There is a warm front at the moment and we dont know how long it will be here.

## **UPDATED SATURDAY 12TH (written PM friday)**

Thursday was a day in the rain so no flying. Otto and Barney from the airfield were absolute starw and looked after us. We had a tour around an aircraft factory and also some big boys farm toys learning about farming in Germany. The rest of the time seemed to be spent eating and drinking beer and wine and sleeping. Not bad really! Many thanks Barney and Otto.

We had a big team debate about where to go next, continue north to Stauning or cut and run and head south to try and ensure that we get back before the end of the weekend. A detailed look at the weather said that going south was the sensible decision, we were disappointed not to reach our goal of the Stauning event, but that's flying!

Friday, we arranged an early breakfast and down to the airfield.? The sun was shining but it was windy - and right across the runway.? The take offs were the most difficult of the trip but everyone coped.? We quickly created our formation and headed south with the wind behind us, excellent.? But this was short lived, the wind picked up and there were a few too many heavy showers.? The wind also turned direction and became a significant headwind, reducing our speed to a measly 40mph across the ground.

A lot of this trip was across the most amazing mudflats, some of which we transited at 500ft.? Miles and miles of them.? We also crossed hundreds of windfarms, a truly fantastic experience.

2 hours later we arrived at an airfield called Wilhelmshaven to refuel.? This was a challenging landing into 25kt winds which were not quite straight down the runway!?! Refuel, hot chocolate and replan!?! Midway through the planning, the heavens opened and 4 gyronaughts rushed out to put on the covers on the Gyros.? The gyros were dry, the pilots were soaking.? The nice man behind the bar took pity on us and handed out bar towels to dry ourselves.

The next flight would be into The Netherlands so a flight plan was filed, We all lined up ready to taxi.? As we set out to the runway, the sky darkened and a storm popped out from behind a hangar and was heading our way.? The wind became incredibly strong very quickly and blew Kati in her gyro off the edge the runway onto the grass.? The take off was aborted and we all returned to the hangar to let it pass.? A false start!

Half an hour later and we were finally off.? This was to be an easy leg of about an hour and a half. Not so, the wind was the strongest yet with everyone hanging on as we entered a headwind of about 50mph.? This was a long long drag and we finally reached Teuge two and a half hours later.? A lot of concentration, with us all realising that the Gyros were fantastic in windy conditions and has given us all a lot of confidence.

In the evening, food and beer and the tents pitched. We are looking forward to an early start tomorrow to continue heading south hopefully crossing the Channel late afternoon!

**Updated Sunday 14th 14:00**

Saturday 12th

Up at 7:30am, everyone quietly unpitched the tents and packed for the day ahead. By now we had a routine for getting ready and we were all tired from the freezing cold during the night causing a restless sleep.

Kevin had negotiated breakfast with the local parachute school at 8am, excellent, we were aiming to leave at 9am. Today the sky was sunny and there was virtually no wind, this looked like a promising day for enjoying the flying.

The scheduled 2 hour flight back to Zeeland was absolutely stunning. With little wind to heed our progress we made good time and arrived in Zeeland in under 2 hours. We didnt have to concentrate on the flying and we all marvelled at the scenery below us. Along the rivers and motorways it was fantastic - the most enjoyable flight yet. We also had that "getting home" feeling. Our only incident on this trip was getting too close to a firing range danger area which was active, but the helpful people on the Dutch Military radar advised us of our error and checked that we hadnt been shot down (seriously!). Apologies made and accepted.

As before, the greeting at Zeeland was fantastic. They were having an open day and the circuit was extremely busy, adding 4 Gyrocopters to the event was welcomed. Refuelled and fed, we had a shorter stop than usual as we were now keen to get back to the UK. There was a threatened warm front due and we wanted to make sure we had the most contingency.

We took off in our perfected formation, all lining up on the runway and taking off in sequence when the person in front was clear...and then we had the best flight of the adventure. We had saved the best til last. Again we had no issues with the wind, making a good 80mph along the ground. This time we flew mile after mile along the beautiful coasts of the Netherlands, Belgium and France. Sandy beaches as far as the eye could see, flying about 600ft just over the waters edge. Words cannot describe the feeling, this is what Gyro flying is all about.

Time to cross the channel again, the sun was shining and the wind was behind us. The visibily was a little hazy and when we set out from the coast of France we couldnt actually see the English coast. No worries as by now we had done lots of water flying on the trip and the confidence in our machines was higher than ever. It only took about 5 minutes before the white cliffs of Dover started to appear. What a Gorgeous sight. The 20 minute crossing was fantastic. We crossed the channel between 500 and 800ft, the waters below calm and almost inviting. There were lots of boats around and we felt that any rescue would have been quick if we had needed it.

Reaching England it seemed a short hop to our destination of Southend, a "proper" international airport.? Again a friendly welcome and we refuelled for the last time.? Unfortunately they closed the cafe so it was a trip to MacDonalds for something to eat and drink.

We all took off in formation for one last time, we would all be going our separate ways during the trip.? Kati and Phil would head north between Luton and Stansead airports and on towards York.? Kevin and Mike would head west for a while together and then they would separate and head back to their home airfields.

Kati and Phil still had 3 hours to fly, and they already had flown 4 hours previously.? The plan was to stop overnight at Peterborough Connington however with the tail wind, progress was a good 90mph across the ground and the sun was still shining.? They made it all the way back home to Rufforth in York in 2 hours and 45 minutes.

What a fantastic day.? We had flown all the way from the north of Holland to York in under 7 hours and with only two stops.? We were euphoric but extremely tired.? We had the largest Gyrocopter Grins on our face all evening. We believe that Kati is the first British woman Gyrocopter pilot in the UK to fly this distance around Europe, what a special achievement.

Many thanks to Kevin for leading this trip, he did a sterling job. At the end of each flight we had a "what did we learn" debrief...and believe me, we learned a lot.? Thanks also to the many people who we met along the way, and they went out of their way to help us.? We hope that we will get an opportunity to return the favours if they get to the UK.

Over 26 hours of flying and over 1700 miles covered. This is what we live for.? What an adventure.

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