

Aberdeen & District Soarers

November 2000 Newsletter

With our AGM firmly behind us, and less than 30 shoplifting days to Christmas, it's a seasonal yo ho ho from the new committee.

Chairman – Keith Donaldson 01358 743322
Secretary / Treasurer – Neil Davidson 07901 584459
Events Organiser – Derek Robertson 01224 821368

As you can see, only one change from last year, with George Wheelan vacating the post of Chairman, in order to dedicate himself to a more full and exciting life in the world of home DIY. George is also unable to continue producing the club newsletter, but our thanks for all his previous hard work both on the "field" and in "print".

We hope to continue with a slimmed down version of the bi-monthly newsletter, which will be either E-mailed directly to you, posted, or handed over at one of the regular "meets". I think it likely that the odd picture or two could be included in future editions. If any of you lot out there, have news, views, or an amusing incident you would like to share with the rest of the membership, commit crayon to paper and pass on to any of the above, or E-mail me direct at, d Robertson@btinternet.com

Back to the AGM

Much of the evening was taken up with a line by line analysis of the new, updated version of the Club constitution, prepared by Neil Davidson. The discussed changes are now in hand, and every member should receive a copy of this document sometime before Xmas.

ADS affiliation to the SAA also the subject of much heated debate during the AGM. Because of a general dissatisfaction with the overall service (or lack of it!) provided by the SAA, last year's committee looked at several alternatives, which included arranging our own insurance, and forming links with either the BMFA, or BARCS. In light of the information made available, the majority of members present felt that there would be no clear benefit from such a move. ADS remain affiliated to the SAA.

For interested parties, the SAA will hold it's AGM in The Terraces Hotel, Stirling at 13:30 on Sunday 10th December 2000.

A modest rise in club fees was also agreed upon, as follows

ADULT	£12.50	+	£20.00 SAA	total payable	£32.50
JUNIOR	£6.25	+	£10.00 SAA	total payable	£16.25
SENIOR CITIZEN	£6.25	+	£20.00 SAA	total payable	£26.25

Please note that the above fee must be received by our secretary before 31st December 2000. Club members leaving it until after this date before renewing their subs. will have to arrange payments to the SAA personally. Remember, non payment to SAA means no insurance and therefore no flying!
You have been warned!

This year's winter programme will take the form of regular meetings on the 2nd Tuesday of every month at 19:30 in the Cove Bay Hotel. In order to cover costs, a nominal fee of £1.50 will be collected from all of those who attend.

The first meeting on Tues. 12th December will include a mud wrestling demonstration oops, wrong club! Amongst other things, we will need to sort out a suitable calendar of events for the

forthcoming year, and possibly have a look at the results of the survey. Feel free to bring along your current project and your wallet. The former to provoke discussion, the latter to win friends and influence people.

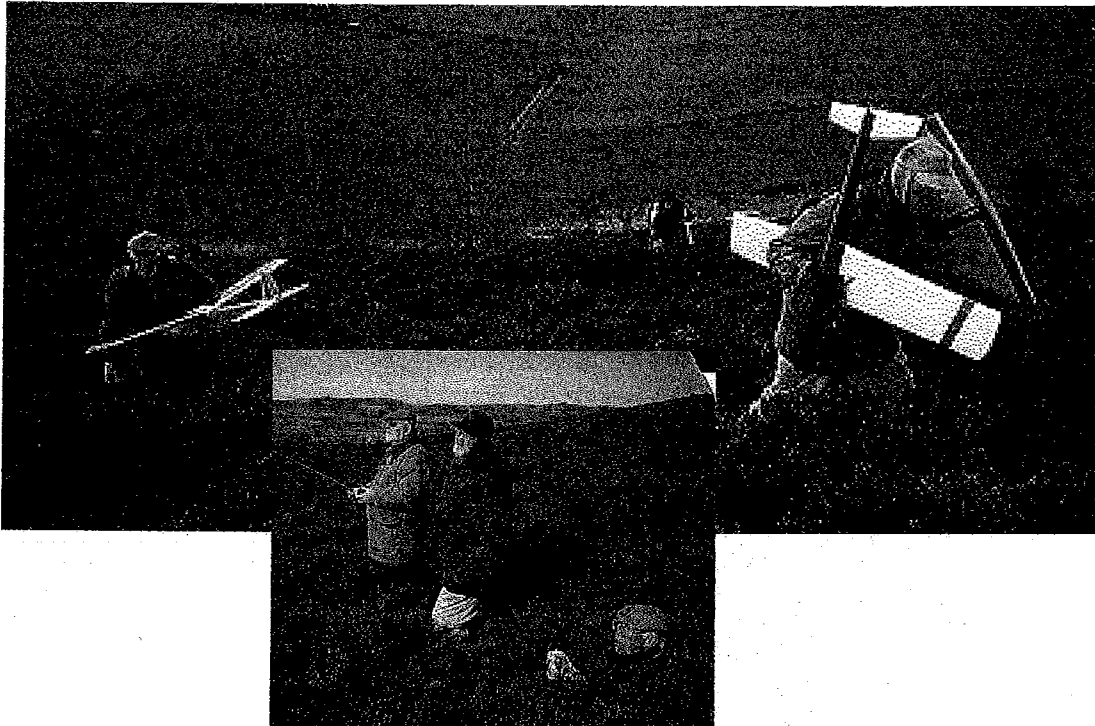
A new "phone round" list will be distributed soon, taking into account the changes in the committee, plus a couple of additional names. This will operate throughout the winter season, and may incorporate Sunday flying too. Anyone else wishing to be added to this list should let me know ASAP.

Flying for fun?

With the likelihood that a "bronze" qualification for solo flying may become mandatory in the not too distant future, the committee would like to offer all interested parties the opportunity to practise the SAA bronze schedules for both thermal and slope flying. Checking your SAA Safety Code & Achievement Scheme booklet will give an indication of just how basic the requirement is. This, of course, will be run on a purely voluntary basis, and will not detract from the normal fly for fun aspect. I'm quite happy to act as "observer", and run with this as of now. However, if any of our more experienced glider – guiders out there would like to get involved, and add a bit more credibility to the proceedings, I would be one grateful rookie.

Following the article about ADS that appeared in the club page of the Evening Express, I've had three enquires from people interested in getting involved in the hobby, but alas no word as of yet, from a friendly farmer with a bit of ground to spare. Keith Donaldson will be dealing with the District Council, but is unlikely to make much progress until the Scottish Office gives final approval for the Calder Park development. We'll keep you posted!

Slope flying the SW side of Barmekin Hill earlier this year. Norrie discovers an abundance of lift, meanwhile, Jim Ruxton uncovers the only rabbit hole on the hill.



Parting shot a full, unedited copy of John Barnes's letter, on the "Pitreavie question", which was sent to SAA chairman, Harry West.

Briefly, John's letter is a response to the self inflicted loss of a premier flying site (home of the Scottish Soaring Nats. for yonks) on the grounds of safety, and closer to home, the implications on our future use of the likes of Hazlehead, or even Calder Park.

Derek Robertson 01224 821368

Dear Harry,

Subject: SAA musings – the Pitreavie Question

A butterfly flaps it's wings.....

The boy looks at the aircraft and the men around it, curious. The field at the back of the Keilkraft factory in Essex is bathed in afternoon sunshine, the grass agitated in the blustery wind. The boy is glad of the chance to stand and work the stiffness out of his body. A long drive down, his father delivering another batch of boat kits to the factory, the boy old enough to be taken along for company this time. The van has not been unloaded. The cramped pair have been taken straight to the field by a man who chatters excitedly to the father. A group of men are standing around a small aircraft, something the boy has never seen before. To one side is a long, substantial aerial coming out of a large black box, with thick cables to a bank of batteries and a smaller black box which has some switches on one side of it. After a while the aircraft's engine is started, fiddled with. A man picks up the box with the switches. The aircraft is released into the blustery sky. It doesn't go forward much, rises to a modest height. The men around the boy seem excited about something. The boy watches the aircraft. The aircraft keeps trying to turn away from the wind, left, right, left, right, but is constrained to its seesawing heading by some unseen force. The man with the box watches the aircraft, clicking a switch rapidly. He and the other men shout to each other constantly. The boy and father stand silent, necks craned. The engine eventually stops and the aircraft seesaws safely back to the ground. The men erupt into a cacophony of wild laughs, backslapping, handshaking, shouts of unbridled joy at something the boy doesn't comprehend yet. The boy, not knowing why, is caught up by this wild avalanche of contagious, overwhelmingly unrestrained adult enthusiasm. Like the model aircraft, something else new. The untainted, genuine expression of joy, of achievement, of success. He hasn't seen that before, in the grey light of recovering post-war Britain. He doesn't know it yet, but he will spend the rest of his life unaccountably drawn towards activities and people, career and personal, which carry the potential for a sense of such sublime achievement values.

Preamble

Introductions, Harry. I am a member of Aberdeen and District Soarers (ADS) and BARCS. I am a former SAA member. I have an interest in r/c modelling, after fun with free-flight and control-line pursuits during that delightfully uncomplicated pre-“Hello, girls” time in early life. I have a keen interest in r/c gliders, and particularly thermal soaring competitions. I attended the spectacular 1983 F3B World Champs at York. I was an F3J team member at the first World Championship event for that discipline held at Upton-on-Severn in 1998, another hugely successful event.

When work has allowed, I have supported and flown in a number Scottish thermal soaring competitions, from small local comps to the Scottish Nationals and RadioGlide. To date, without exception, I have failed to score well at any of them! What I have always achieved though is that wonderful sensation of enthusiasm, community, humour, support, companionship and new friends which can occur whenever like-minded enthusiasts gather to do battle, swap stories, renew acquaintances. It is this latter factor by which I score my own card, judge how successful the venture has been.

The motivation to travel the long distances to most Scottish events has come from the hardworking, eternally good-natured, supportive and inspirational efforts of the CD's and backup teams involved in the running of these events, the Pat Spiers, Brian Sharps, Andy

and Dot Lewis', et al, of the Scottish soaring community. Their success is best exemplified by the fact that soaring enthusiasts have been prepared to travel from all corners of the UK to compete in the Scottish RadioGlide events, as BARCS premiere annual soaring jamboree has ventured north of the border in its four-yearly cycle around the UK. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to be involved in it all.

To The Point

I am deeply concerned by the unexpected loss of Pitreavie, site of the Scottish Nationals and RadioGlide events for many years, and the ramifications of the reasons for this loss (as explained by Brian Sharp in the Issue 3 2000 Airtime) for the future of Scottish r/c flying. Although I am not presently an SAA member, the following thoughts may also be held by others who are. I proffer them simply as one supporter's perspective on the matter.

In Airtime Issue 3, under your column Chairtime, you lament having to miss the 2000 Scottish Soaring and Power Nationals through other commitments. You state "I will miss being there as I have not missed either for a few years". Many years ago, if memory serves, Gerry Marchbanks attended a Scottish RadioGlide event at Pitreavie, handing out the trophies too, I think. Maybe the first thermal soaring event he had seen, one of the things he passed comment on then was being mightily impressed by the high level of discipline utilised to run such a large event successfully. As you may know, sound organisation and transmitter control is crucial to such events, and Scottish CD's and Dot ("Touch that tranny and you're dead"!) Lewis have masterminded and managed such successful events with military precision and great skill.

The point in mentioning these things is that, through exposure to such events, you will have been aware that thermal soaring gliders are often flown a considerable distance from their launch point, either in an effort to find lift or to stay within it once found. One vagary of the scoring system used in thermal competitions requires a competitor to land precisely at the same site he or she launched from, so landing back at the Pitreavie field has never been optional! In my experience at the site, cases of aircraft not making it back to the field have been extremely rare, even the dense tree cover surrounding the site exhibiting the most modest of appetites.

In his Silent Circles column, Brian states that the SAA safety committee, once it had looked at the Pitreavie site, asked "can you fly a thermal soaring competition here without overflying the new road, dual carriageway or endangering users". From this statement I can only assume that the SAA safety committee was not familiar with the nature of thermal soaring events. I assume, through your visits, that you are.

Brian mentions "God, but we've been lucky", in connection with a variety of potential safety-related scenarios, concerns which he has apparently had for a number of years. Although I have flown in many events at Pitreavie, I had not been aware that Brian was worryingly concerned about such things until I read his latest column. In my experience at Pitreavie events, luck has had little to do with the success of the meetings from a safety perspective. As noted above, the SAA organisation, rigorous transmitter control and general piloting skills have ensured a great event year after year with barely a hiccup. Luck? Is this really the only term available to describe the outcome of my rigorous checking of equipment prior to an event, nicad cycling and capacity verification of both transmitter and flight packs, new transmitter aerial every season or two, pre-attendance flights to ensure systems are functioning satisfactorily at that time, etc, etc. What on

earth has changed in our perceptive capabilities to have brought about Brian's alarm of the event? Or are there factors of which Brian is aware, but those of us on the fringes ignorant of?

Also in his column, in connection with seeking an alternative site to Pitreavie, Brian lays down the specifications for the replacement. Brian specifies a site free of buildings, then wishes the site also has a pavilion, toilets, showers, power, water, etc. Which, of course, is exactly like Pitreavie. No surprise really, because among all of the long-travelling competitors I've spoken to post the loss of Pitreavie, all have noted that the extensive Pitreavie site facilities were the very reason why they were prepared to come so far to attend a competition. The Pitreavie facilities allowed them to bring the whole family, great camp site area, great facilities, great Saturday night assault on the Dunfermline restaurants. Ah, Harry, what wonderful times have been enjoyed as a result of that site and the marvellous organisational flair which made it such a success.

Further thoughts

This year's soaring Nats were held at Mossmorran, not the best of sites (facilities = 0), a modest attendance this time, but, as usual, run very well by the organisers who had managed to scrape something together after the unexpected loss of Pitreavie. For this was an unexpected loss to the general soaring community. Prior to commencement of the Mossmorran event, the organisers advised us about restrictions on the airspace we were to use. I do not know if this has become an SAA requirement. What I do know is that during the event a lot of gliders flew far and high in all directions (as usual), possibly outside the notional airspace limits mentioned. I have no way of knowing, but this is the nature of thermal soaring competition worldwide. My awareness of the distance my glider is from me is based on smaller, larger, higher or lower (larger and lower normally in my case!). Physical measurement parameters are not a part of this visual conceptualisation process. Even if there was some way of knowing what distances and heights actually were, such data would seem to be of curiosity value only, for piloting judgement (at least mine) is not based on such things. But, far and high is the nature of thermal soaring competition, as are the onerous precision landing requirements. A good event despite the high winds, even the control tent managing to put in a flight score!

“can you fly a thermal soaring competition here without overflying the new road, dual carriageway or endangering users”

Without exception, including the World Championship venues I've attended, I do not know of a flying site in the UK for which the answer to this question could be “YES”. In fact, with respect to “endangering users”, no-one, soarer or power flyer, with a grain of experience, could ever answer “YES”, emphatically and without qualification, to this question. There always has, and always will be, a risk that something in the chain may fail, a receiver, battery or switch failure, transmitter failure, fail-safe lockout, interference, a flyaway, structural failure or just plain piloting error. It is for these reasons that all responsible pilots of any type of aircraft carry insurance. It appears to me paradoxical that if I could truly answer “YES” to the Pitreavie Question I would not require insurance in the first place.

I am of the impression that the highly successful Pitreavie venue has been lost not because something serious has occurred, but because of the potential for something adverse to happen. From one perspective this is, of course, a highly responsible approach. But using the same perspective, I can find little justification for selfishly

exposing myself to the risks inherent in automotive travel to attend totally non-essential flying events. I carry insurance to cover the possibility of the latter, and I thought I was carrying insurance to cover the possibility of the former.

Is this Pitreavie Question approach something the SAA itself has decided upon, or is it more to do with the requirements of the SAA insurance providers? I do wish to try and understand this situation, Harry, for it has major implications for all flyers (not just thermal pilots) and clubs. If it is an insurance-based philosophy, I note that none, repeat none, of the sites I fly from locally or have flown from in Scotland or England can meet the specific requirements of the SAA Pitreavie Question. By implication, to me this means that SAA insurance may not be valid for any sites which cannot answer "YES" to the question. Or, put another way, the SAA does not/cannot support sites which do not match its fundamentally unattainable Pitreavie Question parameters.

Unattainable? Well, to me "safe" means being free from risk, peril, danger, harm, jeopardy. This is an absolute, not a relative condition. To not be "endangered" means I am safe. I'm also probably living on another planet, because here I participate in the gloriously outrageous benefits of a technically advancing society. To enjoy those benefits I have to forego being "safe", not just for myself but on behalf of society, and while much has been done to make such benefits safer, it certainly does not mean freedom from risk. Sensible discipline on a club flying field will make attendance for pilots and public less hazardous than a general free-for-all. Less hazardous. Less risk. Less danger. But not no hazard, no risk, no danger.

It appears to me that the only way the SAA can achieve its condition of non-endangerment (an absolute, not a relative condition), is to withdraw support for any risk-inherent flight activity. Which would appear to require the termination of support for non-tethered flight activities in Scotland for a start! I am not trying to be pedantic about this, Harry, but there is a world of difference between the language you and I use and understand, compared to the brutally unforgiving, rigorous interpretations of the same language from which QC's make such a comfortable living. Surely, Harry, the SAA's mission statement cannot be founded on the basis of a complete and total absence of risk from aeromodelling activities, for such a basis would indeed be cream for the Rumpole cat. Aeromodelling prospers on the principles of risk acknowledgement, risk acceptance, and risk control. It cannot exist in a risk avoidance environment.

If it follows the SAA Pitreavie approach, my club will find itself without a flying site. It will also lose its annual two-day summer public outing at the Hazelhead Park site in Aberdeen, a great site which fails the Pitreavie Question by a mile. I think it unlikely the club will wish to incur the immediate loss of its hard fought for sites. The club does not have a choice of site, this being solely a matter of local council generosity. I suppose it has the option to break ties with the SAA and obtain insurance cover elsewhere. While this may keep club members flying, it also means that anyone with SAA insurance will not be able to fly at the sites because they won't be covered for such venues, surely a divisively bizarre situation.

As noted earlier, I do not know of a single UK thermal soaring venue I've visited which meets the requirements of the Pitreavie Question. It seems likely that the SAA safety committee would have suffered group heart failure had it been in the vicinity of Upton-upon-Severn at the time of the '98 F3J World Champs. The prevailing wind direction meant that aircraft were launched straight out over the huge camp site area and Upton

itself. Gliders were flown out to great distances in all directions (someone of a mathematical bent might be able to tell me how far away a 3.5m span glider is when it has a perceived wingspan of 3mm?). This happened every day for seven days (immediately followed by the ballistic grace of a major F3B soaring competition). The World Championship event was considered to be a huge success, especially by the Upton tavern owners who got drunk dry every night (sorry Gerry!). It therefore seems likely that Scottish thermal soaring pilots with SAA-sourced insurance could find that it is, in effect, invalid for the majority of UK sites.

I am also aware that the SAA approach may finally turn out to be the first in its field, a portent of things to come UK-wide in our litigiously-driven society which so readily attempts to punish those prepared to shoulder the responsibility of risk-inherent activity of any type when something adverse occurs. I observe that a number of perfectly legal activities I enjoyed as a youngster have evolved into criminal offences. Is untethered model flying, and thermal soarer flying particularly, ultimately doomed to this fate at the hands of the same risk-avoidance-at-any-cost principle? If it is, how much may we have contributed to its demise by self-specifying an unattainable control objective which, at least to these ageing grey cells, seems so clearly to carry a real cruncher of a petard/hoisted connotation?

The bottom line

My club holds its AGM soon. This may be decision time for the way ahead with regards to SAA links and insurance matters. If it decides to sever links with the SAA in an attempt to retain its flying sites, it will be because of uncertainty concerning the nature of the SAA's support for r/c flying in Scotland, ultimately not so much because of the loss of the highly successful Pitreavie site, but for the Pitreavie Question, to which no responsible pilot could ever answer with an unequivocal "YES".

The reason for this letter is to provide you with feedback based on the personal observations and experiences of a modeller who has prospered in many ways from his support for SAA events. It is intended simply as a positive, constructive critique of matters as seen from his perspective. Whether it is of the slightest value to SAA considerations is for you to judge. These may, after all, simply be the ramblings of someone who has sniffed balsa cement once too often. But I prefer the slings and arrows of outrageous lampooning from fellow modellers at my ignorance, at completely missing some simple point, than remain mute and have history show that silence at this time was an inappropriate response.

Oh, and Harry, the old Keilkraft field fails the Pitreavie Question as well...

Yours sincerely,

John Barnes