



Getting a Guinness



**by Fiona & Angus
Macaskill on 7th July 2020**

**'Most airfields visited in 12 hours
by fixed-wing aircraft'**



As a child, my favourite Christmas present was always a copy of the latest Guinness World Record annual. I spent hours pouring over endless pages, reading about people who had done extraordinary things and got themselves into the record books. I dreamt that one day I would be in that magical book.

Who would have thought that a tea-towel would inspire our Guinness World Record attempt?

While taking our grandchildren out for a morning snack at a WW2 themed café called Poppylands on the east coast of Norfolk a couple of years ago, Angus, my husband and I spotted a tea-towel showing all the airfields that British and American air forces had built during the 1940s.



As we both enjoy flying light aircraft we started to investigate how many of these airfields are still operational. As it turned out, many of them are still being used and still more had been established by local aviators.

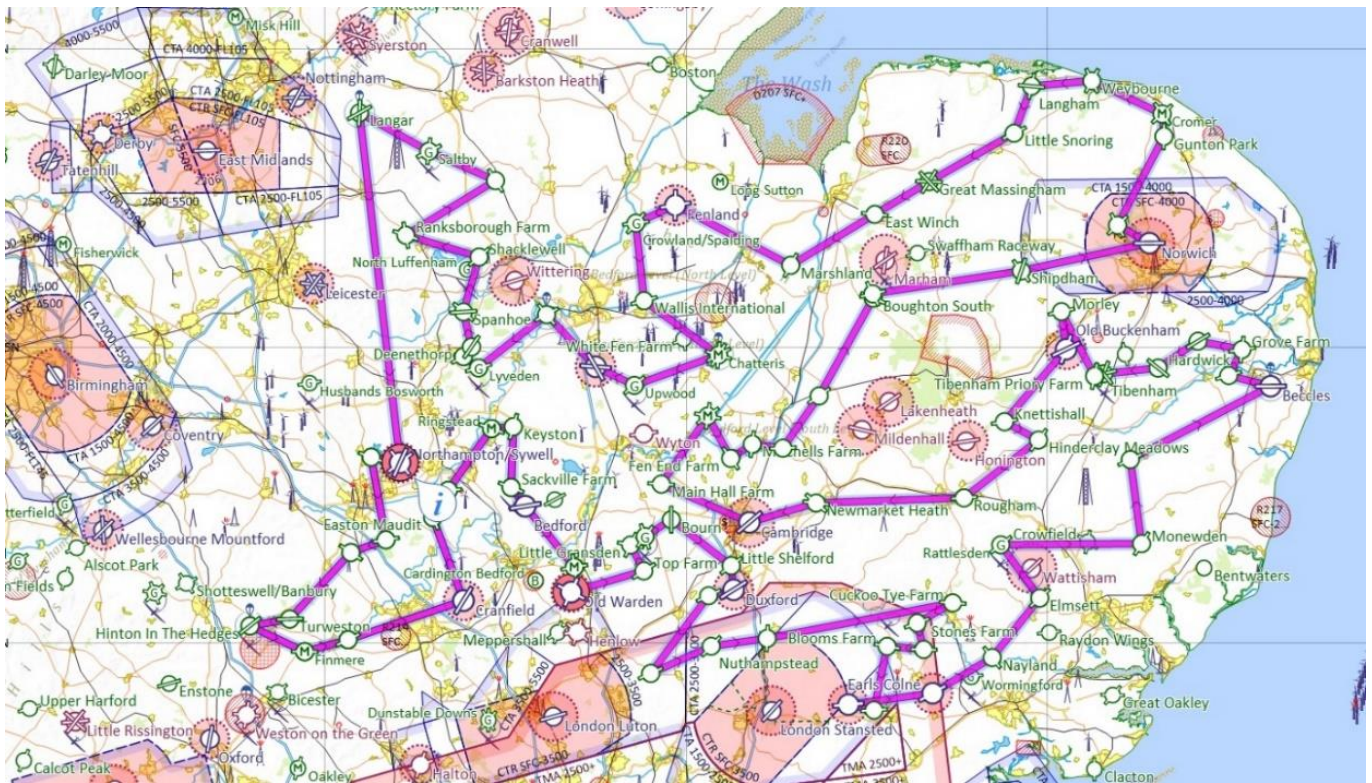
We thought that attempting a Guinness World Record, landing at as many airfields as possible in twelve hours, would be a fun thing to do.

It also provided the perfect opportunity to enter the Pooleys Dawn to Dusk competition.

We also felt that the challenge was interesting enough to turn it into a fund raiser for the Air Ambulance so set up a JustGiving page; we now had a triple focus ...



Our work was about to begin!



The Route:

I started by looking at air maps to find where there was a high density of airfields. (Guinness only allow airfields longer than 300m and ones that were marked on an air-map). Our Bolkow Monsun can't land on an airfield shorter than 400m so the length constraint was not a limitation.

East Anglia was used by the RAF and the American Airforce in WW2 and many of their bases are now shortened but are still being used for aviation. In addition, a large number of farm strips have now been established. The terrain was mostly flat and sometimes airfields were only 2 or 3 nm apart. Sky Demon became my primary tool to work out the most efficient route around a mass of airfields, many that I never knew existed.

I then started to phone around to ask them if I could include their airfield in my world record attempt. The pill was sweetened by saying that the attempt was also raising money for the Air Ambulance Service. I telephoned over 100 airfields, emphasising the fund raising aspect of the attempt. When contacting the airfields to explain what we were trying to do and request permission to land, every single one that was

open for use agreed to waive their landing fees to support the fund raiser. The normal landing fees would have come to around £500 so we set our fund-raising target to that amount. Any more than that, and it would be a bonus. As it turned out people gave very generously, and we eventually quadrupled our original target and have raised over £2,000 + gift aid for the Air Ambulance.

I re-adjusted and re-drew the route over 18 times and wrote several thousand e-mails to airfields, media outlets, LAA clubs and a growing band of volunteers.



Planning the Timing & Landings:

As the Covid-19 lock-down eased we decided to fly a three-hour trial run. We started at Oaksey Park, which was just west of the planned route and covered 17 airfields. We were not sure of the actual time needed per airfield or what our speed between airfields would be.



We had guessed that 4½ minutes per airfield would be sufficient time, but after the trial we changed this to 5 minutes per airfield where this included a backtrack after a fullstop landing and this wherever the runway length was less than 900m. On analysing the track log, we confirmed we could fly at around 100 knots between airfields but we also found a 2 second fullstop did not always show up on Sky Demon and that the two flights were treated as one. From this we decided that a 5 second stop was necessary.

Accordingly, we adjusted all our timings and re-worked all the figures again, reducing our re-fuelling time down to 12 minutes in the hope of an absolute maximum of 87 airfields in 12 hours with 50 airfields as the minimum to gain the world record.

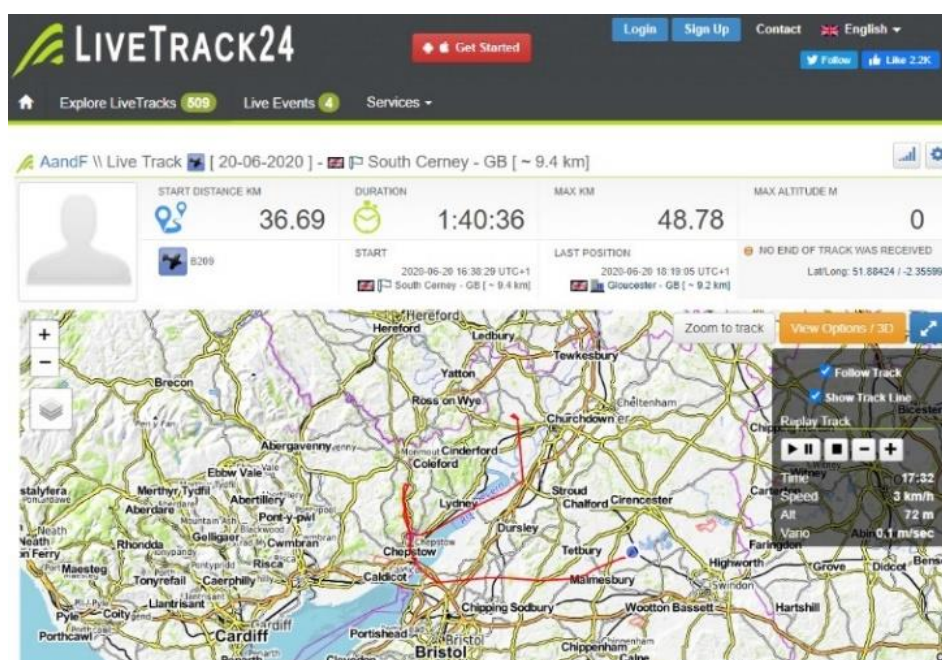
Planning the Recording Equipment:

Angus spent many hours testing cameras and tracking systems.

We eventually recruited 28 people to 'witness' our flight from the comfort of their own homes by watching our live flight path using Livetrack24 on their PCs: we needed at least two people watching throughout the day as well as a couple of witnesses at the start and finish.



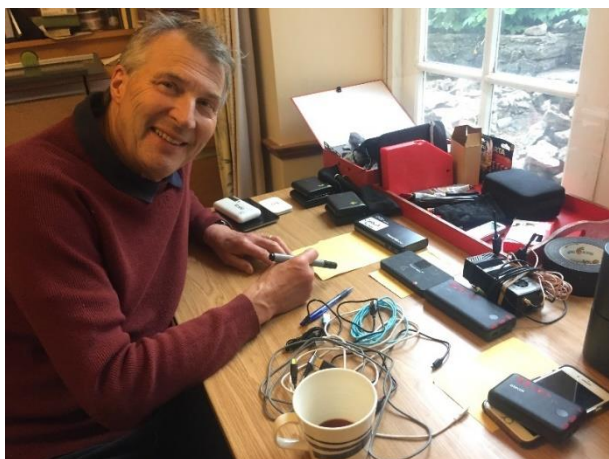
We had asked our initial ground witnesses to watch our practice on LiveTrack 24 and by doing so many of the things that could have gone wrong for the witnesses did. We set up a WhatsApp group and this was used during the record day to coordinate changeovers as seamlessly as possible and help those who had any issues. As a result, our witnesses were well prepared on the day of the attempt itself.





After several more flight tests which involved re-positioning and testing all the equipment, our recording equipment included:

1. SkyDemon on an iPad (Fiona's preferred software)
2. Runway HD on an iPhone 7+ (Angus' preferred software)
3. Go Pro camera on the wing tip
4. Dragon 4K video camera in the cockpit
5. iPhone 7 used for video of the 'fullstop' at each airfield
6. Livetrack24 which was 'fed' by the FlySkyHigh App on an iPhone 6
7. A backup LiveTrack 24 'fed' from an Huawei Android tablet
8. Pilot Aware internal tracking log
9. Pilot Aware ground station logging, fed from a 2nd Pilot Aware
10. Fiona's iPhone 6 (taking photos at every airfield)



Planning the date:

We decided to make the attempt as close to the longest day as possible. The route was to start and finish at Sywell and The Aviator hotel were taking guests from Saturday, 4th July. So, having decided that a mid-week attempt would be best (gliders and airfields would be busy at weekends but often shut on a Mondays) we provisionally booked to stay on the 6th - 8th July with the 13th - 16th set as a back-up date.

July 2020 — Sun in Northampton

- [June](#)
- [July](#)
- [August](#)

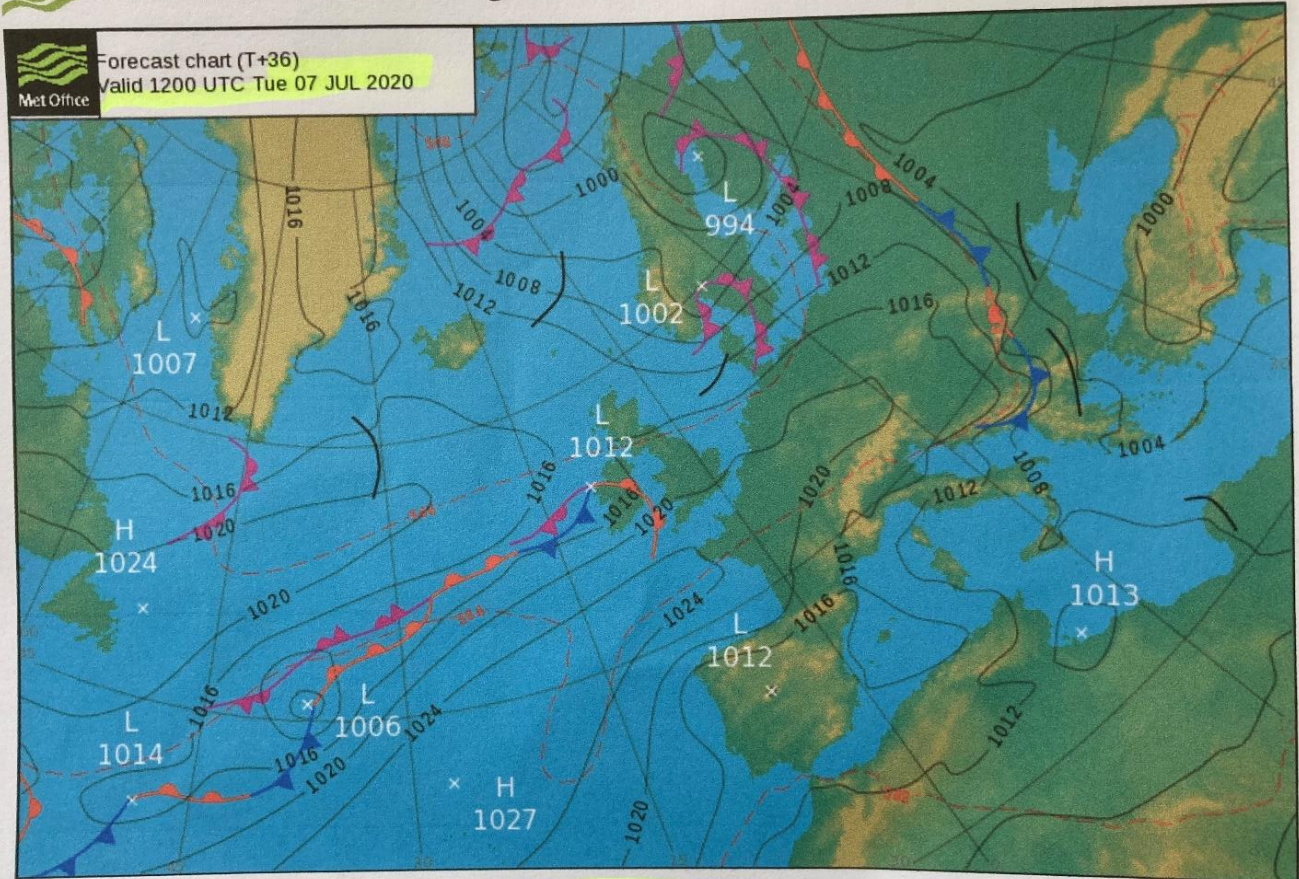
Month: Year:

2020	Sunrise/Sunset		Daylength		Astronomical Twilight	
	Sunrise	Sunset	Length	Difference	Start	End
Jul						
1	04:46 ↑ (49°)	21:27 ↑ (311°)	16:40:52	-1:02	Rest of night	
2	04:47 ↑ (49°)	21:27 ↑ (311°)	16:39:44	-1:08	Rest of night	
3	04:48 ↑ (49°)	21:26 ↑ (311°)	16:38:30	-1:14	Rest of night	
4	04:49 ↑ (49°)	21:26 ↑ (311°)	16:37:10	-1:19	Rest of night	
5	04:50 ↑ (49°)	21:25 ↑ (310°)	16:35:44	-1:25	Rest of night	
6	04:51 ↑ (50°)	21:25 ↑ (310°)	16:34:13	-1:30	Rest of night	
7	04:52 ↑ (50°)	21:24 ↑ (310°)	16:32:37	-1:36	Rest of night	
8	04:52 ↑ (50°)	21:23 ↑ (310°)	16:30:55	-1:41	Rest of night	
9	04:54 ↑ (50°)	21:23 ↑ (310°)	16:29:08	-1:46	Rest of night	
10	04:55 ↑ (51°)	21:22 ↑ (309°)	16:27:16	-1:52	Rest of night	

Most of June had a high pressure system over the UK resulting in great flying weather so we may have got lulled into a slight sense that most days would be very flyable. At the start of July the pressure dropped but it soon started to rise again and the forecast looked good so we confirmed our booking at Sywell and gave all 87 airfields an ETA, requesting them, if they were able, to photo our landing and return the witness statement I had sent them, as future evidence for Guinness.

We checked the forecast before flying to Sywell on the 6th July, the day before the attempt: although a trough was developing over Scotland, things were looking good

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The decision was to go for it, let the airfields and our 28 ground witnesses know and set ourselves up at Sywell with David Conolly, our 'on the ground' official observer, for our attempt the next day.

The Flight (71 Flights actually!):

We woke at 0530 on the 7th July and checked the weather forecast one more time. It showed that an occluded front had developed overnight and was moving towards the north east later in the evening but, on balance, we decided we were good to go.



Preparing on the morning, David Conolly, the Official Observer, stopwatch, megaphone and camera in hand

David joined us on the airfield at 0645 to sound a loud horn to announce the start (a rather bizarre requirement by Guinness), to time and to photograph our start. We also asked the night watchman, Alexandra Bobosco, to join us as Guinness required two people to witness the start (and finish) of the attempt.

I had prepared coffee in thermoses, water, sandwiches and snacks to keep us going all day. A video camera was fixed onto the wing and another inside the aircraft. All the GPS systems were set on 'go'. The sky was blue, there was a light south westerly and we were ready.

'Sywell Traffic, lining up 23' and we were off at 0715 precisely.



Departing Sywell on 23 at 0715

Angus navigated and radioed each airfield as we approached, while I flew the aircraft.

The first couple of hours were spent landing at the airfields we had visited a couple of weeks earlier: on that day it was an easterly so the 'view' was totally different to the one on 7th July - more confusing than we had imagined.



We first approached the wrong field at New Farm

We didn't find New Farm on the first approach: the strip is tucked behind tall trees and difficult to see when approaching from the east. It required a go-around to check we were landing in the right place, so this added a few precious minutes to our route.

Quite a number of the airfields were nicely into wind and we succeeded in several full stop landings and immediate take offs without having to back track on most of the airfields longer than 800m rather than just ones over 900m as planned. (We had confirmed that we could stop in under 300m on level runways.)

Duxford was airfield number 22 and we landed for fuel at 0947, 15 minutes ahead of our scheduled time, which made us very happy as we wanted to keep ahead of our planned timing so as to allow for some unforeseen hiccoughs - this airfield turned out to be the first of several delays around the route!



We had allowed for a 12 minute stop for each re-fuelling but this one took 28 minutes! We had requested, in advance, that the fuel bowser would be on stand-by at the parking area so we could re-fuel and get away quickly. As it turned out, the bowser's engine would not start so we 'lost' 16 minutes of precious time. Added to that, the toilet that I badly needed, was a 6 minute walk away from the parking area!

Angus now took the role of P1 as we had decided to alternate this after every fuel stop. As we continued on our route, we tried to have a sandwich and coffee from a thermos but the time between taking off and final approach to the next airfield was usually so short, sometimes just 2 minutes, that this proved almost impossible.

We were totally focused on the task, every landing and take-off had to be spot on of course so we had very little time to eat or drink, but we did managed occasional sips of water and a few biscuits which kept us rehydrated and alert.

Our second fuel stop was at Old Buckenham in Norfolk. We were 8 minutes behind our planned arrival, landing at 13:33, it had started to drizzle and we had problems with the payment card reader due to the rain. The stop eventually lasted 19 minutes so we were now 15 minutes late. Cloud base was dropping, and although horizontal visibility remained good, we were getting occasional showers.



Fiona took the role of P1 and we flew west. After landing at Cambridge, we received a call from Norwich: they said that the visibility was deteriorating, cloud base had dropped to 800ft and they did not advise us to land there.



We therefore decided, in the air, to cut out seven of the east coast airfields where the weather was worse and fly directly north from Shipdham to Great Massingham.

Fenland was our third and final fuel stop. We arrived in the pouring rain at 1649. Two wonderful volunteers were waiting for us, outside in the wet and we quickly refuelled.



We took a couple of minutes to re-consider our route. Angus took on the role of P1. We had already landed at 64 airfields; being more than 50 this put our world record 'in the bag' (!) We decided to miss out the last 10 airfields and head back to Northampton, landing at a few airfields on the way but not attempt to fly north into more rain.

The weather did improve slightly as we headed west again but we could see more poor weather coming from the north. On the way back we landed at our penultimate airfield before Sywell. That would have made 72 in total ... but touched down rather late, so did a go around and in view of the cloudbase being pretty low decided not to re-try and proceeded direct to Sywell.

We arrived at Sywell to improved visibility, stopping at 18:15, airfield number 71. We had beaten our target of 50 airfields and had decided, by then, to call it a day as VFR flight to the north would have been very difficult and not within our safety boundaries.



We had to read our 'Finish Declaration' to video

Submitting the Evidence to Guinness:

On returning home, Angus & I spent the next week collecting witness statements and photos, thanking over 100 ground and airfield witnesses for their support and help. We assembled all the photos, video footage, GPS track logs and witness statements. We uploaded over 500 files onto the Guinness record attempt application pages and sent it off: Two months after the attempt the record was ratified.

On Reflection:

This was a very well worthwhile project.

- The Air Ambulance has benefitted from people's generosity and gained over £2,400.
- It has been great fun getting a World Record. We are as Guinness stress: **OFFICIALLY AMAZING !!!**
- We have thoroughly enjoyed planning the route, talking to so many airfield owners and visiting so many wonderful airfields.
- Preparing to land and take off from each airfield required a great deal of preparation. We printed and studied the Pooleys plate and approach using Google Earth for each airfield. We noted airfield height, runway direction and length, frequency and 'special notes' for each of these.
- Finding some of the airfields proved far more challenging than we have anticipated. Many of the strips in the Fens ran in the same direction as the very narrow fields and we had to abort one approach 50 ft above the surface when we lined up on a very narrow crop field parallel to the runway! Quite a few of the airfields did not have a hangar or even a windsock.
- As we flew low level most of the time, finding some strips which were tucked behind trees proved challenging and we had to orbit several airfields before we could find them.
- Using Sky Demon to line up for each runway 1 - 2 miles out proved to be the most effective way of making the correct approach: I adjusted the route after every take off to create a clear line down which to fly. As the day progressed I got more adept at this.
- Arranging all the airfield witnesses was very challenging: Guinness wanted two witnesses to take a photo of us doing a full stop landing at every airfield (quite an ask when we could not give them a precise ETA and some were before 0800 and some after 1700!). During the preparation and after some emails with Guinness, they did relax on this requirement, but we tried to meet their expectations as much as we could. Around 80% of the airfields did take a photo of our landing and fill in the witness statement for which we were very grateful.
- Recruiting and co-ordinating 'on the ground' witnesses to monitor our flights throughout the day was fun but very time consuming. We set this up a couple of weeks before the challenge and organising it was a big task to undertake just before the actual attempt. Setting up a WhatsApp group proved really useful as people communicated to each other throughout the day: over 500 messages were sent.
- Planning the most time-efficient route, remaining in class G airspace (except for a few airfields with class D where we planned to land) was incredibly complicated.
- Although landing at airfields only 3 miles apart was most efficient, we appreciated the occasional 10 miles gap when we were able to have a sip of fluid and a biscuit.
- Now we have succeeded in getting the 12 hour record we would like to have a go at the 24 hour record next year. We'll have to beat the current record of 92 airfields in 24 hours: this was achieved in the US by an American in 2019. It would be good for the record to be beaten in the UK, preferably by us ... But we'll see about THAT!