



By plane through Eastern Europe Hans Gutmann Memorial Rally 2013



A sad occasion brings together every year pilots from all over Europe to commemorate Hans Gutmann. Hans Gutmann, the famous Austrian flight instructor, rally pilot, round-the-world-flight pilot and highly respected participant in national and international bodies of General Aviation, died in 2011 in a tragic plane crash. The annual Hans Gutmann Memorial Flight Rally commemorates this unforgettable fellow aviator. Jean Birgen, Technical Officer FAI – GAC, has taken over the charge to organize the remembrance rally. This year, the rally originated from Luxembourg on course to the Eastern European countries of Poland, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia and Hungary. The rally was originally scheduled to finish in Austria. However, since no Austrian team participated, the official rally ended in Hungary.



Hans Gutmann †

The number of registered participants amounted to 9 teams from Luxembourg, France, the Netherlands, Romania, Switzerland and the USA. Unfortunately the number shrank to only four because, at short notice, illness and various technical problems prevented the participation of some pilot friends .



Since it is not so simple for pilots as it should be to fly in the new EU member States, some additional preparations were required to guarantee a smooth running of the competition. Romania and Bulgaria are not members of the Schengen area. This requires landing at a customs airport when entering and leaving these countries. Bulgaria also requires a specific entry permit prior to landing. All this not only led to considerable loss of time but also to the payment of a number of extra fees/charges.

The rally was supposed to proceed through Ukraine and Moldova. However administrative difficulties and very high fees at airfields, including handling charges, prevented the organizer from flying through these countries.

Luxembourg - Mielec

The first meeting point on 9 August 2013 was Mielec in Eastern Poland. The Socata Trinidad LX-SAR with Jean Birgen, Gilbert Conte and Reinhard Krommes on-board and the fast Lancair homebuilt LX-DIN with Piera and Dino Quaresimin on board arrived from Luxembourg. Douwe de Boer and his wife in a Lancair PH-DBO arrived from The Netherlands, whereas Dan Aurel and his family arrived from Switzerland in the Pilatus PC12 turboprop N221XX.



Lancairs in Mielec

An extensive area of rain and showers over southern Central Europe forced us to deviate from the planned route via Erfurt, Dresden, Wroclaw and Katowice

where we mostly encountered good flying weather conditions except for a weak weather front that we had to circumnavigate. After about four hours flight time and 1000km we landed in Mielec.

Mielec is an industrial city located 100km North-East of Krakow. The well-developed airport primarily serves the resident Sikorsky aircraft plant, an EADS manufacturing plant, maintenance facilities and a flight school. In earlier times also Mig 15 and Mig 17 fighter jets were built there.

We were greeted by our friends of the Fly Polska flight school. Pawel Winiarz provided a warm welcome and a perfect support for our aircraft. In the evening a big barbecue was set up on the apron, but later a thunderstorm forced us into the hangar. But this did not alter the good mood.

Our hosts tested our vodka suitability. Understandably, getting up the next morning was somewhat difficult, but luckily no flight activity was programmed. A specially appointed tourist guide and two ladies of the flight school accompanied us on the bus to the Salt Museum in Wieliczka and to Kraków.



Hangar party

Our hosts tested our vodka suitability. Understandably, getting up the next morning was somewhat difficult, but luckily no flight activity was programmed. A specially appointed tourist guide and two ladies of the flight school accompanied us on the bus to the Salt Museum in Wieliczka and to Kraków.

Our hosts tested our vodka suitability. Understandably, getting up the next morning was somewhat difficult, but luckily no flight activity was programmed. A specially appointed tourist guide and two ladies of the flight school accompanied us on the bus to the Salt Museum in Wieliczka and to Kraków.

The Salt Museum is a disused salt mine. An elevator took us to a 130m deep shaft with mysterious and often branched tunnels and passages. Several statues and figurines are carved in the rock. This provides a realistic image of the hard working condition that prevailed in former times. One of the highlights is the chapel of Saint Kinga, which is also carved in the rock.



Wieliczka saltmuseum - St Kinga church

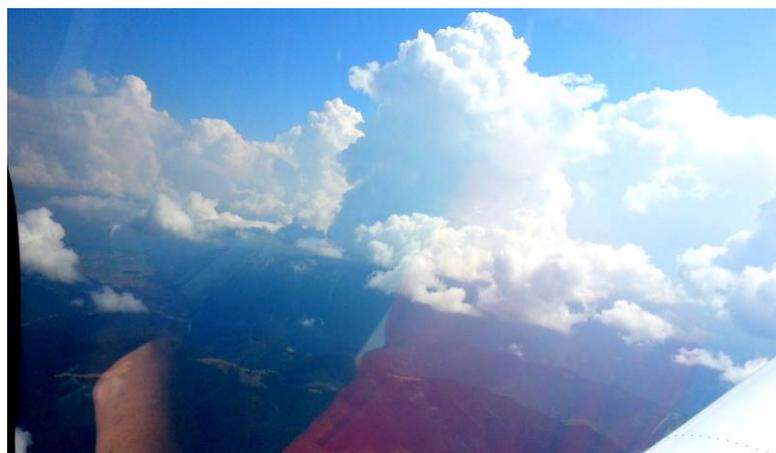
After three hours we re-emerged from the underworld and continued our trip to Krakow. This beautiful city on the Vistula impresses us every time we come to visit, mainly because the city has remained intact through the centuries. A young population plus tourists make up for a lively atmosphere. After the visit we headed back to Mielec to

rest before next day's flight to Romania.

Mielec - Bucharest - Tuzla / Constanta

Our goal on 11 August 2013 was Tuzla, close to Constanta on the Black Sea in Romania. Since we had to fly from "Schengen area" country Poland into the "non-Schengen area" country Romania, we had to stop first at a customs airport in Poland then at a customs airport in Romania. Our hope that the border police would come to Mielec for our departure did not materialize. Which forced us to land first at Rzeszów International Airport, resulting in the payment of landing fees, air traffic charges and handling fees including two lengthy passages through the airport security check before take-off.

After two hours and several hundred zloty poorer, we could take off to Bucharest Baneasa in Romania to once again fulfil immigration formalities. The weather on our trip was good and we passed Ukraine, Slovakia and Hungary on our way to Romania. The landscape of Transylvania rolled past below us as we navigated and tried to cope with the flight information service of Bucharest, which was not very helpful. Between Sibiu and Brasov the main ridge of the Carpathians came closer. It was partly covered by the very popular cumulonimbus clouds (also known as Krommolonimbus in Luxembourg...). We had the choice to fly through or below the clouds to avoid, the latter



CB's over the Karpaten

being the obvious choice. So we followed a mountain pass to get into the Danube valley and to Bucharest.

Baneasa airport is close to the International Airport of Otopeni. The Tower led us onto the final approach. We hardly saw the runway through the haze, but eventually we landed on runway 25. Same procedure: entry formalities had to be fulfilled, aircraft refuel to be done, various fees and taxes had to be paid. Thereafter we were clear to continue to Tuzla .



Constanta

In the evening sun the small grass runway of Tuzla came into sight, which turned out to be more of a ploughed field after touchdown. The Dutch and the Swiss therefore preferred to land on the larger airport in Constanta. The remaining teams were greeted warmly by the Tuzla airport manager Dorin Ivascu . The latter had already arranged for transportation to the hotel in

Constanta. Jean Birgen was immediately asked to attend the press conference on the next day. On that occasion he campaigned for the expansion of the airfield as well as for a simplification of the entry and exit checks by customs and border police.

We stayed in a nice hotel on the Black Sea. The next day Dan Aurel, who comes originally from Romania, arranged for a visit of the old city of Constanta, which appears as a huge construction site. One gets the impression that the whole city is being restored and/or refurbished. At this time one can only imagine the beauty of this area. Highlights were the Greek Orthodox Church and the old casino built in the Art Deco style.

Constanta - Danube Delta - Varna / Balchik

Before departing to the airfield of Balchik/Bulgaria on 13 August, which is only 50km away, we had to land in Constanta to fulfil departure formalities. This of course attracted appropriate fees. Dan Aurel had planned a scenic flight over the Danube Delta as a rally test. We had to make photos at turning points and other specific points he had indicated on the route.



Donaudelta

Because of the nature reserves and the rich bird life we had to fly at a higher altitude. Nevertheless we could gather beautiful impressions of one of the last remaining wilderness

in Europe, extending between Constanta and Ukraine. Ancient Greek and Roman ruins and cities such as Histria Capidavia could also be admired.



Balchik Botanical Garden

Immediately afterwards, we continued on course to Balchik, Varna North. This is a civil/military used airfield. After a target landing and time control, we were greeted by the President of AOPA Bulgaria. He had arranged for a smooth entry clearance and process right on the spot. We stayed at Sandy Beach Hotel beach of Albena. Despite the high season and the immense

tourist infrastructure our stay was surprisingly pleasant. Next day we stayed on the beach and we had time to visit the botanical garden in Balchik. The picturesque village of Balchik once belonged to Romania. The Queen had created the garden in the twenties of last century at her summer residence. She is believed to have used her summer residence to host her lovers. A wine tasting and an excellent lunch at the harbour rounded off the visit.

Balchik - Sármellék - Siofok

On 15 August we had to say farewell to Bulgaria and the hospitable and helpful fellow pilots in Balchik, who also supplied us with fuel. Our final destination was Siofok at Lake Balaton in Hungary. As we flew back to the Schengen area, exit and entry control was mandatory. In Balchik the friendly border policeman we knew already was again on duty. But before we could land at the destination Siofok in Hungary we had to stop at the International Airport Sármellék.



Ready in Balchik AB



Old arches of the Danube at the Serbian-Hungarian border

Apart from a rain shower we flew the total distance of almost 1200km in good weather conditions, passing through Bulgaria, Serbia and Hungary. Worth mentioning is the exemplary service of air traffic control units on the whole trip. The stopover for immigration control in Sármellék was short and easy. We knew this very busy modern airport from previous visits. Surprisingly

we noted on arrival that the place looked deserted. Previously Ryanair operated scheduled flights into Sármellék several times a day, but then deleted the destination from their schedule. No replacement is in sight.

After a small hop over the lake Balaton we arrived in Siófok- Kiliti. This exemplary general aviation airfield has a very well maintained grass runway, which can compete with some concrete runway surface as far as quality is concerned. It has all the facilities that a pilot could dream of, including hotel and restaurant. The staff is generally warm and helpful -



Balaton and Tihany Peninsula Abbey

aviator Heaven cannot be far. After the long flight, we needed a few beers before we were taken to our beautiful spa hotel on the lake.

Lake Balaton is also a recreation area for Hungarians. In the high season Siófok "Ballermann" atmosphere prevails, which we had to visit of course. But Siófok offers also a well-designed city centre with a pedestrian zone and shopping malls. The following day was devoted to a boat trip on Lake Balaton and the visit of the beautiful baroque Benedictine abbey of Tihany .

Siófok - Luxembourg

Our week-long rally that took us over 5000km and 22 flight hours through Eastern Europe comes to an end. Despite the awkward entry and exit procedures, many new impressions and encounters were gathered. On 17 August, we took off heading towards our respective home bases. Again, "severe CAVOK " (super good weather for flying) prevailed, which allowed for a direct flight over the Alps. What a great end to a great trip!



The next rally in 2015 is already in the planning stage. The destination will be either the North Cape (Sweden, Norway, Finland, Mourmansk ;St. Petersburg Estonia ,Poland) or Morocco (France, Portugal , Spain). Please advice your preferred destination

Report: Jean Birgen

Pictures : Reinhard Krommes