



**ROYAL
AERONAUTICAL
SOCIETY**
Loughborough Branch

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**Microlight Across the Atlantic
Eddie McCallum**

This was a relaxed presentation delivered in dulcet Northumberland tones by a small airfield owner and a microlight pilot from those parts who conveyed a passion for flying, and came to describe the challenge of flying from his home strip, Athey's Moor, to Oshkosh, in Wisconsin, USA. This proved to be a delivery that was always informative and never overstated. It was multi-faceted too, keeping us aware of cultures and meteorology, gastronomy and aviation idiosyncrasies flavouring the story of joyful, albeit occasionally close to heart stopping, numerous steps from Britain, through Iceland, around Greenland, and across Baffin Island and mainland Canada and many states on the east side of the USA before he reached his final objective. After a brief stop he followed a similar route back home, and all within a few weeks in June/July 2014.

He flew a Flight Design CTSW (SW is the short-wing variant) microlight (Figure 1). His two-seat,



(photo © David Johnstone jnr)

Figure 1 – Eddie McCallum's CTSW

110kts cruise airspeed and 450kg max take-off weight steed was packed with survival gear, and was well-instrumented, with a recently installed autopilot complementing basic flight instrumentation, VHF radio/nav receivers and multiple GPS receivers. Fuel capacity was quoted to be 130 litres (35.8 imp.gallons), and it had a 74.5kW (100hp) Rotax 912ULS engine. Brochure stated maximum range for the aircraft is around 1,850kms (1,000n.m.).



Figure 2 - Snow-covered volcano on Iceland
(Heroubreio – in Icelandic, the Queen)

The presentation was a pictorial diary, and recorded events in chronological order. It started with weather, the usual inclemency of a European summer having presented fair rather than exceptional conditions, but on commencement he was able to fly along the Scottish coast to Wick, then to skip his contingency stop at Faroes and head straight to Iceland, his first stopping point being Egilsstader¹ on the SE corner of the island. On the following day he crossed Iceland, admiring the unique scenery which included snow-covered volcanoes (Figure 2)

¹ Subsequent to the lecture event both outbound and inbound routes have been charted as comprehensively as possible and airport names quoted are those used in aerodrome databases.

and the Icelandic rift valley created by the mid-Atlantic ridge (Figure 3) and night-stopped (a minimal period of darkness) at Isafjordur on the NW corner of Iceland.

Coincidentally, at Wick he had met a team of largely British pilots also flying the same route as himself as far as Quebec, in Canada. The team of five had an R44 helicopter and PA46 Malibu, about as diverse a choice in the 'light aircraft' category as imaginable, and this suited the speaker as the helicopter has similar sensitivity to meteorological conditions as his own machine and the pressurised Malibu could press ahead, passing back weather reports, checking places to stay, fuel supplies, and so on.



Figure 3

The post-Iceland sector was across a wide stretch of water, around 350n.m., to reach Greenland. Only the fixed-wing aircraft reached the coastal airport at Kutusuk, almost due west from Iceland, as the helicopter returned to the UK. National rules forbid flying light aircraft other than between 0900-1600 daily, and no flying is allowed on Sundays, so an overnight stopover was necessary – and losing a wager that required him to don his wet-suit required a cold dunking that presumably led to a calorific usage that offset the sumptuous food he confessed to enjoying (although he did not recommend whale meat).

Following this he travelled down the east coast of the large ice-covered landmass, doing a fuel stop at Narsarsauq near the tip, and then flew up the west coast to the official capital, Nuuk, which



Figure 4

altogether was about 600n.m. of flying. His showed slides of the ice-laden sea on Greenland's east coast, and the much clearer seas on the west. Whilst flying south he sought to climb, eyeing the possibility of reducing flight time with a short-cut, but the chance was slim, and it proved to be the case as the aircraft iced up quickly and they had to stay low near the coast for the full distance to Narsarsauq. After flying north, at Nuuk they were able to tuck into good food again and met some of the people who lived there.

The next stage was a push northwards to Sisimiut, a small strip on the fiord edge, and strategically it minimised the sea crossing to Baffin Island. He described the crossing as straight forward, reaching Cape Dyer - the island's east tip - and then flying up the deeply-indented north-east facing coastline to Qikiqtarjuaq, on a coastal island. He remarked on the warnings given to flyers about offering alcohol at many of the smaller and remote communities they passed through, because boredom is a prime contributor

to self-harm. He commented however on the genuine welcome that youngsters often displayed to visitors (Figure 4).

His stage to Iqaluit involved a weaving track as Baffin Island which, contrary to the idea that maps promote, is not so much an extension of the Canadian tundra mainland as the nation's hidden 'Rockies'. This is a rugged island, and the flight traversed the landmass through its major canyon, with the lofty Mount Thor (he quoted a 1,450m sheer rock face) perhaps the most significant peak in a spectacular landscape. It was while on this stage that he sought to overfly, and succeeded in doing so, the resting place of a Douglas DC-3 (Figure 5) which had to alight on the snow in the 1960s, and which is still almost full preserved. The tale of its demise is also a joyful tale, in that all on-board survived and were rescued.



Figure 5 - The abandoned Douglas DC-3 on Baffin Island

Iqaluit is what old maps refer to as Frobisher Bay, and is a major Eskimo (Inuit) settlement, so no fuel storage complaints at this stop, and time to push on to the mainland. The route to the mainland was towards Cape Chidley, the north tip of Labrador, and he alighted on the coast at Kangigsualujjuaq where the Malibu had preceded him and pilot Kevin had left a fuel

stash. He then flew inland to Wabush, a long sector across a pock-marked and almost featureless land crossing, and he commented at one point on how useless a map was in this area, as the water-logged tundra is a jigsaw-like grid of hills and lakes, with little habitation – and he commented too that had he have flown the route a month or so later he could have expected a mosquito infestation, with all the discomfort that might entail.

Pressing southwards he reached the St Lawrence river and this unmistakable landmark acted as his guide to fly to Quebec. He had been on his own since Iqaluit and from Quebec he continued further along the river, to Montreal St Hubert airport, before heading south into the USA. He commented on how many airports there were to choose from, but these were numerous because this was a populated space, unlike the sparsely-used regions crossed until this point. He stopped at Burlington, in Vermont, and then further south at Griffis. His route then threaded westward through Cuyahoga, Ohio (near the airship mecca of Akron) and Cleveland. He kept on the US-side of the Great Lakes and in East Michigan he made a fuel stop at Tulip City. It was from here that he flew to Milwaukee, and as this was a 45 mins sector over Lake Michigan the survival suit was donned again. After a stopover there was a final, similar length, leg to the Oshkosh Wittman regional airport. This is the venue for an annual fly-in by owners/fliers of homebuilt, vintage and personal design light aircraft, often quoted to be the busiest airport in the world for a few days each year. He was greeted by a US Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) representative who had assisted with the paperwork necessary for him to obtain access to the US in his own aircraft.

Return trip

He left Oshkosh a few days after he his arrival, and headed home. Usually an eastbound operation should benefit from a tailwind. He did not backtrack but headed northward reaching Canadian customs at Sault Ste Marie, and chose to cross the treacherously featureless tundra region, aiming

to join the outbound route at Wabush. The plan to follow his route in reverse was abandoned when bad weather set in beyond Wabush, and he curtailed the sector (aiming for Kangigsualujjuaq) with a precautionary landing at Schefferville. After the weather improved he headed north, and at Kuujjuaq on the Labrador coast he refuelled before heading overwater to Iqaluit, on Baffin Island. There were severe difficulties that compromised his progress, including a complete failure of the autopilot, which proved to be a blown fuse. Aviators can always find a friend when in need and on this occasion his system was restored by helpful on-lookers who knew where to get the appropriate new fuses. When he was airborne on the next leg, he resumed map-reading and navigating while the autopilot steered.

From there he shortened his route considerably, no doubt confident of a tailwind with a direct crossing to Nuuk on Greenland, after which the same route via Narsarsauq to Kulusuk was used. The long trip southwards then northwards again was essential. The Greenland Ice Cap is high enough (over 10,000ft of ice in places, with protruding mountain summits) to impede small aircraft, and in addition to the physical impediment is unpredictable icing and wind conditions, with visibility issues and no landing sites. Any approval for such a flight in such a small aircraft will be refused by Greenland authorities.

At Kulusuk the weather did prove problematic. He started out optimistically, but was confronted by a rough and substantial headwind, almost 40kts, and this thwarted any chance of flying the desired course, direct to Reykjavik, without taking a severe risk. Without hesitation he returned – fast! – to Kulusuk. Eventually, and still with a headwind, but forecast to be down at a manageable impact, he set out for Iceland after a one-day delay, and arrived at his planned destination with a decent fuel reserve.



Figure 6 - Eddie McCallum wearing overwater kit

The journey from Reykjavik took the aircraft over the southern part of Iceland, and his final night stop was where he had conducted his first, at Egilsstader. The winds were favourable enough for him to fly the next morning to Wick, to refuel in Scotland, and to fly down to Athey's Moor, where no doubt the welcome from family and friends was memorable.

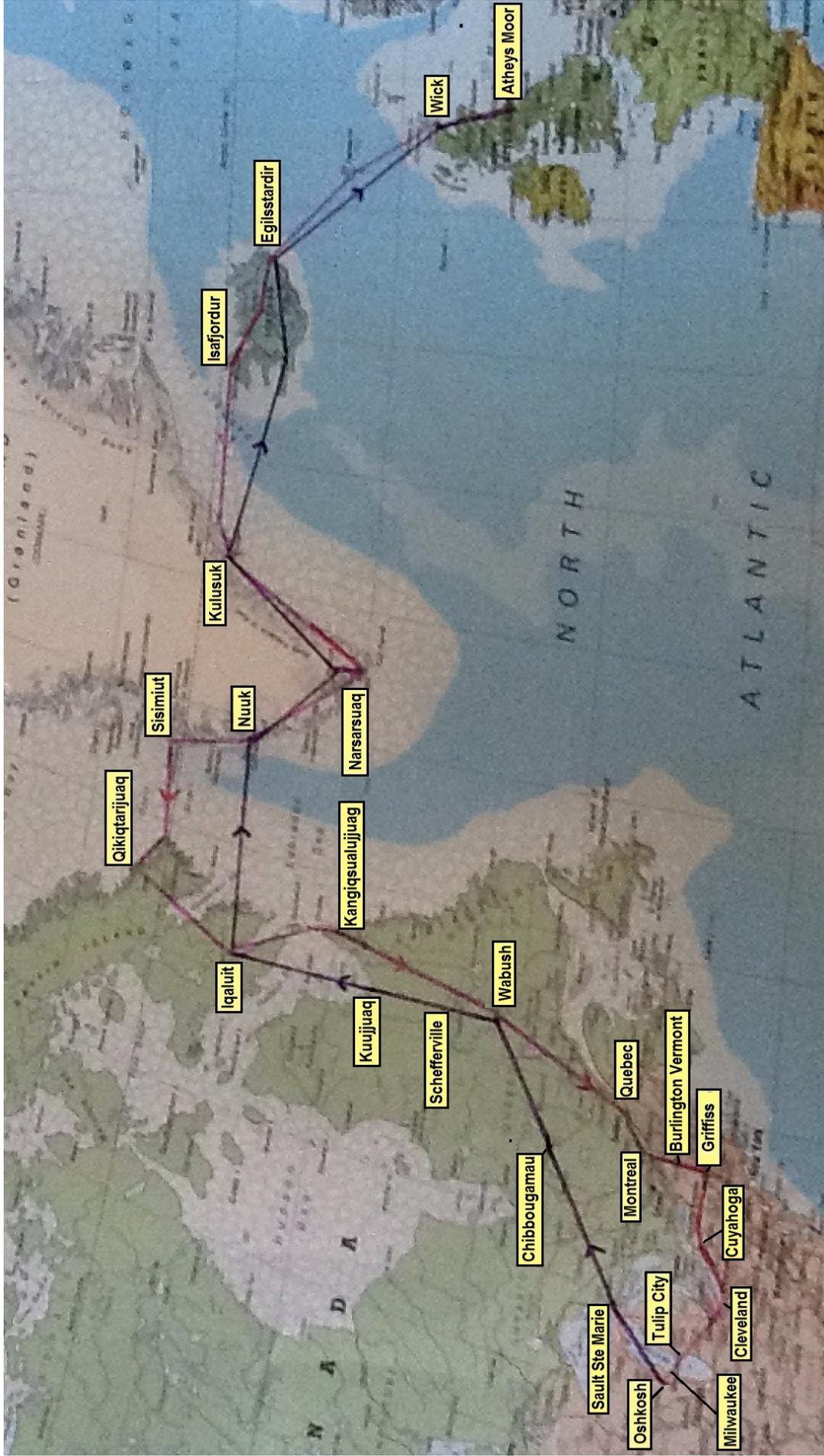
In the course of planning and executing the journey described, a UNICEF fund-raising programme was implemented, and on completion of the flight and associated events, a contribution of £17,000 was made to UNICEF funds. Estimations passed on by the pilot

since the presentation has estimated time and distance for the out and back flights as 110 hours and 11,000 nautical miles.

This was not the first, and it seems certain to say that it will not be the last of this kind of fund-raising task that Mr McCallum will take on. The 120 or so Branch members and visitors present enjoyed the evening and expressed their gratitude for his most interesting contribution to our programme. We wish him well with any future endeavours.

Lecture notes © Mike Hirst

'Annotated' map follows on final page



Map of Eddie McCallum's Flights
(locations added by author of notes)