

McArdle's Flight to East Boldre – July 2010

McArdle's epic flight back to East Boldre from Southbourne on Sea on Tuesday July 19th 1910

"Tuesday, July 19th, three days after the close of the first International aviation week held at Bournemouth, I decided to fly our Bleriot monoplane — the same machine which I flew to Bournemouth the day previous to the opening of the meeting — back to Beaulieu to the school ground. The distance as the crow flies is about 20 miles, but to avoid rather bad forest ground we prefer the sea route, which is about 6 or 8 miles longer. Glancing at the watch strapped in front of me, I noticed it was 6.15 p.m., and setting my motor (Gnome) to run 1,200 revs, per minute, I rose steadily from the aerodrome. Drexel had left just 8 minutes before, accompanied by Harry Delacombe. Before leaving the ground I could easily see them in the distance making for the same place as I intended. I at once went up to 500 feet. Unlike our big machine I had no occasion to circle the aerodrome, as I reached this altitude before passing Hengistbury Head, although the machine did not rise as quick as usual owing to a following wind of about 15 miles an hour. Banks of mist at once loomed ominously ahead, and looking towards the land I noticed the mist was much worse than over the sea. I determined therefore to head direct for Hurst Lighthouse. Flying over the sea the whole way, and rising up to 1,000 ft., on my way, I passed through several banks of mist. I thought it rather strange that these banks of mist should linger idly about, especially considering that it had been blowing fairly hard all day, but the air has a lot of secrets yet to be discovered.

"Passing over Hurst Castle I saw it was 6.25. By that it is evident I was travelling more than a mile a minute, the wind being directly behind. At the moment though I did not think much about pace, except that I appeared to be travelling rather slowly than the reverse. Looking below at Hurst I thought how easy it would be to take a 'snap' of the place, and for a foreigner to disclose some of our naval secrets, should any be visible from above.

"Leaving Hurst behind about three miles, I turned over the mainland direct for our Beaulieu school-ground, on which I calculated I ought to have landed in a few minutes. To the right I saw Southampton, and such a thing as losing my way never occurred to me for a moment, as the whole of the forest and the surrounding country is so entirely familiar to me from having motored over it for the past ten years. Again glancing at my clock I saw it was sixteen minutes to seven. I at once realised that I must have passed my destination. It seemed incredible that I could do this, as the flying grounds are nearly 5,000 acres, I believe, in extent. What height could I be up to have done this? Referring to my recorder I found it registered 1,200 feet, from which height I should have seen it easily. However, facts are facts, so I decided to drop down a little and circle round to pick up a bearing. The third circle brought me into a white cloud of mist which enveloped me for a minute or so, thus completing my mystification. After this nothing

appeared familiar that might have helped me out of my quandary, although even then I felt I would find my way. So I dropped low enough to follow a road, which I felt sure would give me a clue. But in this I was disappointed. Road after road I picked out and followed with the same result. Small villages that I must have motored through dozens of times were all alike, unrecognisable. Not until 7.30 did I give up hope of getting to Beaulieu. As a last resource, why not try to find the sea, I thought? I had found it very easy to distinguish water from land at almost any height within sight. So I determined I would mount up, spy out the sea, and return to Bournemouth. After steadily rising to over 2,000 ft. or so, I had, however, to give up this idea, as glancing at my petrol and oil, I found it was nearly all gone. Then and not before did I really realise the distance I must have travelled to have used 10 gals, of petrol and 41 gals, of oil. I quickly made up my mind to find a landing spot. Descending at once to a low level I found I was over the heart of the forest, whereas before my final effort to discover the sea I had noticed plenty of possible decent landing places, had I wished to regain terra firma. Now flying straight on in as direct a line as possible, in a very few minutes I was over fields and a small town. The fields, although very small, at least offered fairly safe landing, and selecting what appeared to be the largest. I was forced to switch off my motor and do a vol plane. Levelling my machine up just before reaching the earth. I let her fall flat, the tail slightly low. Unfortunately my propeller had stopped in an upright position and stuck in the earth, causing the machine to heel up. Alighting from the front instead of the usual back way, I caught hold of the tail and pulled her down straight, when I found the two front cross-pieces, top and bottom, were damaged. The propeller had a split from the boss down to about a foot from the end. Previous to landing I saw a lot of people, who now rushed up. One of the locals demanded 'Who be 'e?' To which I replied. 'I hardly know myself. Where am I?' 'Thee be about a mile from Fordingbridge'. came the prompt reply. And it was then about ten minutes to eight, one hour and thirty-five minutes since I left Bournemouth. I must, therefore, have travelled, circles and straight, something over 70 miles. Dismantling my machine, I proceeded at best speed by motor, hired in the village, to Beaulieu to relieve the anxiety of my wife and friends who were following me by cars. I arrived at 10 p.m. but so difficult a course to follow had I flown that poor Drexel, Grace, Delacombe and Spottiswood hunted the Forest till five o'clock next morning before locating the place of my descent. Hearing at last that I was safe, they at once turned for Beaulieu and rest after nearly nine hours' search. They told me afterwards that I passed right over the ground and sheds — in fact, clean over the machine which Drexel and Delacombe came in. I was then about eight or ten hundred feet high. Believing I was making for Southampton they did not worry about me until it began to get dark. My wife, who was present, assured them I knew the Forest too well to lose myself; I must, therefore, have come down somewhere, owing to motor or other troubles. That I had lost my way never entered anybody's mind.

"Now the real cause of my losing my way was due to my motor not being sufficiently guarded to restrain the oil from flying in my face. Almost impossible as it may be to believe, this formed a film right over my eyes without my being aware of the fact! The consequence of this was that I thought I was in a dense mist until I bathed my face in hot water. After which the mist disappeared, as if by magic, thus accounting for my passing over the school ground and sheds without seeing them. Upon reflection my

route must have been as follows:- Bournemouth direct to 3 or 4 miles beyond Hurst, up the Solent, across Beaulieu Heath and village, Hythe. Sowley, across the railway at Lyndhurst Road direct for Lyndhurst. circled over part of the Forest in the direction of Cadnam, back over the Lyndhurst Road Station, turned again near Totton direct for Salisbury, finally circling over Fordingbridge, and landing in an oatfield one mile out."