

A Visit to Poland

[The Polish gliding centre at Bezmiechova, near the Carpathian mountains, has been already described in a journal by M. Lutoslawski, but hitherto no one in this country has ever been there. This year, at the suggestion of Count Golejewski, who was visiting the London Gliding Club, three members of the club went to take a course of instruction in Poland at this centre, and the enjoyable time they had is described by one of them in the following article.]

THE deepening darkness as we crossed the frontier, the strangeness of our new travelling companions, and their vociferous, unintelligible speech, all combined to make us feel a long, long way from England. Finding ourselves in a densely packed railway carriage with a conductor of threatening military bearing howling unintelligible invective at us, this feeling increased. However, the Polish occupants of the carriage howled back at him, full bore, producing an indescribable uproar. We discovered afterwards that they were taking our part against the conductor, who wanted us to pay extra fare for travelling on the night line. This solicitude on our behalf, we found, was just typical of the country in which we three London Gliding Club Ridge Rangers were rather anxiously hoping to spend a gliding holiday. The rest of that night was spent on a station waiting-room table (the name unpronounceable), and by 5.30 a.m. the authorities had found a gliding pilot to accompany us to Lesko. He shared with us his breakfast chicken, but spoke no English, so we were still in suspense as to what we would find at the Gliding Club—probably a couple of dangerous DAGLINGS and a putrefying PRÜFLING. At that moment, however, came the vision—training machines on every hill . . . thousands of 'em! Gosh! The sketches and signs we learned that this was the military gliding camp, where later we were delightfully entertained as their first English visitors. The numbers of both training machines and secondary machines ran into hundreds, and the weeding operations amongst aspiring power pilots save thousands of pounds by eliminating the more expensive power crashes. This excitement removed the weariness produced by twenty-eight hours' continuous travel, and we actually enjoyed the crazy cross-country run from the Wildcat Station to Bezmiechova. Five murderous miles (which a light tank would have frowned), and our exceedingly primitive cart brought us within sight of the flying school. We saw a glorious white club house mounting seven hundred feet of very presentable height possessing every possible gliding requisite and power wires. Barefooted boys staggered up the hill with our luggage. One glance at the hangars and we knew that we had reached the Right Place. The somewhat lengthy questionnaire of admittance was completed by the language difficulty, but assisted by

demonstrations and words like "cracksa" and "chimney" (thermal) which speak for themselves, the forms were duly completed. Then the army doctor who, incidentally, must be present whenever gliding is taking place, examined us, and the ceremony was complete. Remembering the difficulty of this first meeting, it is remarkable that in three or four days we could converse easily (in English, of course) with at least four people, and we soon knew everybody well.

One expects gliding folk all over the world to be Good Eggs, but it is difficult to describe the charm and good-fellowship we found in Poland. From the Director and Chief Instructor downwards they did everything possible to help us, and when good conditions were rare no one showed the least resentment at a bunch of foreigners being given all sorts of advantages. No one stays at Bezmiechova for less than a fortnight (almost everyone in well-regulated Poland has a month's holiday), so it is easy to divide the forty or fifty residents into groups, each under one instructor. One is expected to follow his instructions implicitly—not to leave the group even for meals without his permission, and to have very special permission before leaving the club.

One pulls at least five times after flying, and the instructor decides who shall fly. He has signals for faster, slower, farther, nearer, and large ground signals for the superior cloud-hoppers. All this works extremely well without becoming too martial.

The club is fortunate in having one of Poland's network of well-equipped meteorological stations on the premises so that flying weather can be predicted. When this happens the Director orders all pilots to bed at 9 p.m. (so they said; salt may be required!), and all out on the "Start" at 4 a.m. Dunstable people, attend! We actually were carrying machines out at this hour—only twelve, because conditions were not yet good.



A "Komma" sailplane being prepared for a launch from the north slope at Bezmiechova, the Polish gliding centre. This is the most frequently used sailplane at the school; it has a span of 50 feet, is highly loaded and very efficient, and most of the "Silver C" certificates in Poland have been obtained on the type.



An "S-G 3" type sailplane flying in Poland. It is a full-cantilever cabin machine of 60 ft. span.

A covered waggon containing large quantities of parachutes, barographs and sorbo-cushions came out from the incredibly neat and well-equipped stores, and flying was in full swing by 4.30 a.m. When there is a normal possibility of flying one retires at 10 p.m. and flying begins at 6.30 a.m.

In light winds this ridge is possibly inferior to Dunstable's insignificant but clearly defined outline, but in good winds...! And the thermals! They make one's pants tickle. We were told that in September they sometimes have regular thermal lift all along the ridge to a height of three thousand feet. The steep northern slope is joined by a patchwork of fields stretching to infinity, and there is an ill-defined field about a mile away for primary landings. Legend has it that a "B" pilot who funked his turns once landed in a straight line five miles away.

The south side has three slopes with short connecting flats and all sailplanes make uphill down-wind landings, usually on the top slope (C). The knowing say that in winds of forty to fifty miles per hour one should choose the sheltered "A" slope, and be careful not to be blown in a semi-stalled condition clean over the top of the ridge.

As a member of a club transport committee I was particularly pleased with their transport arrangements; about ten pairs of horses with trailers attended by peasants, the cost of which I believe to be about nine-pence per hour each. The horses are weedy looking, but they seem absolutely tireless.

Should you ever need stimulation, watch an open CHIKA soaring over the tree-tops—amazing sight. Brave men have flown for five hours in these ZÖGLING type machines (box struts everywhere), and, with a "cabin cover" added, twenty-five miles across country.

A tight circle thrown by a learner with a perilously individual view of the forest leaves is a good sight, too. We flew COMMAS, awfully nice machines covered with instruments and always carrying a parachute and a barograph.

SALAMANDERS, bright orange, like their reptile namesakes (the last word in Nacelled ZÖGLING type) are also to be found at thousands of feet. After the five COMMAS there are five or six limousine machines of various types with enormous spans and performances which compare favourably with those found in Germany. As an intermediate machine they use a SCROCA, which has a COMMA fuselage and CHIKA (open) wings, so that it is literally intermediate. One is not then bothered by the COMMA's

span, but the handling and feel of the machine is similar and it soars reasonably well.

Training is carried out rather ingeniously in an open machine which is suspended on a ball joint attachment fixed to the upper tail strut above the C.G. If the wind is high this stationary machine controls normally. Otherwise instructors on the wing tip and tail follow the pilot's movements.

One thing is rather interesting; all the real gents machines are fitted with electric lights for night flying, and apparently they do quite a lot. (Record by Mr. Dyragalla: 22 hours.) As in Germany, theory is taken very seriously and the club walls are papered with maps, charts and graphs.

It is rumoured that next year a water tank or a net is to be used for practising parachute jumps with only the harness attached. By the way, can you beat this for coolness? On a day when the "chimneys" were good an army pilot entered a cloud with a COMMA. Finding his air speed at zero he wanged the "k-nepel" (stick) forwards and executed a very rapid bunt, for which the COMMA is not designed. "Cracksa" wing! In this condition the hero on board carefully removed the instrument board and barograph before departing by parachute, bringing them down safely!

During our stay, Collins and I became members of the Beggar's Club. This consists of pilots who, on a windless day, have flown for ten minutes searching in vain for thermals at a very low altitude over the trees. Its badge is a Polish barograph seal.

On a bad day we were watching the struggle carefully and one pilot did appear occasionally to gain a little. "K-nepel thermic" quoth the instructor.

Now don't imagine we all marched back semi-haloed with "Silver C's." We had our ambitions, but we also had the usual gliding weather. Still, it was a pleasure just to be there. The Casino, or restaurant (rather less than the name implies), was the scene of some very cheery parties, and Box upheld his country's name in the Anglia-Polske contests of American billiards.

'Tis said that Collins could handle a pretty stoup of Vodka with the cheery instructors. They are normally in strict training but occasionally broke out in search of internal "chimneys." They gave us a party which really was "some party" (pronounced American). It even brought the police to the club next day!

The Polish food has the colour variety of a kaleidoscope, and they deal with enormous quantities, all servings being on the scale of the four-egg omelette. We doubled our consumption in four days, but still we lagged behind. Some dishes had to be swallowed quickly with closed eyes, but it was all very good. We soon learnt to like black bread, and when the "anything once" spirit failed we could always fall back on eggs boiled for ten minutes (the club is pretty high up)—stable and unchanging.

We were sorry indeed to leave Poland and, *entre nous*, the intrepid bird-women were partly responsible. They are intrepid and very charming, too.

What a pity it is that a school with such an agreeable atmosphere should be so far away. However, continental railways are better than one is led to believe, and we are strongly hoping to meet some of our Polish friends one day in England. To all of them we say: "Thank you very much for our very pleasant holiday!"

BARRY BUCKNELL.