

Federation of European Women Pilots conference

As a member of the British Women Pilots' Association (BWPA) this was my first time to join the annual conference of the Federation of European Women Pilots (FEWP), on 1st – 3rd June 2018.

This year the meeting was organised by the British contingent (thank you Sharon Nicolson and team) and to be held at the Wyboston Lakes Executive Centre and Old Warden Airfield, Bedfordshire.

I couldn't resist packing our van with two little balloons, just in case. Lisa Humphrey, easyJet pilot and balloon PuT, was to attend along with her husband, Simon and their daughter Clara – men, and children, were welcome! We hoped to do a sneaky training flight in between the full-on programme.

Many delegates from all around Europe, including Cyprus, Romania, Spain, France, Serbia and Slovenia arrived on Friday for check-



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Above: Allie Dunnington describes her 'Beech and Balloon' expedition to delegates at the FEWP conference.



Above: Allie (front centre) and other participants during their tour of the Shuttleworth Collection.

in at Old Warden. Sadly the weather was too unstable, with thunderstorms and low cloud, for many to fly in with their own aircraft, but one German helicopter made it across as they had departed a few days earlier. Nevertheless, we spent a lovely, albeit slightly wet, evening with a buffet BBQ in the garden of the hotel.

Saturday turned beautifully sunny and 80 of us enjoyed a two-hour guided tour around the fascinating hangars of the Shuttleworth Collection. This is certainly worth seeing

for anybody interested in aviation, and includes displays of balloons and airships. A stroll around the beautifully landscaped Swiss Gardens followed.

I rushed off trying to find a suitable launch site for our planned balloon flight on Sunday morning. To my astonishment the hotel refused to allow a balloon launch from their massive empty grassy grounds due to 'health and safety' issues, although they had hosted the World Championships of

helicopters a few years ago, and Old Warden was too busy as it was their big air display the next day. So now what?

Luckily I was in touch with Mark Jeffries, who owns a private airstrip at Little Gransden. Mark kindly allowed me a launch for the morning.

Back at the hotel I gave my presentation of our 'Beech and Balloon' expedition in front of a full audience. The AGM followed and three new member countries were voted in: Cyprus, Serbia and Romania. Each of the 12 main delegates read a short report on their country's activities. There is certainly a lot of encouragement going on for more women to get enthused about aviation.

Finally, on Sunday morning my small team with Lisa, Sophie Schackert from Germany and Joost von Tilberg from The Netherlands, drove out to Little Gransden airfield only to find ourselves fogged in. Nevertheless, we took the opportunity to rig G-HEXE, my baby hopper, and everybody enjoyed a few minutes sitting in the chair. Eventually I went off for a five-minute free flight down the runway.

Next year's FEWP conference will be held in Cyprus.

Allie Dunnington

For more on the British and European women pilots organisations:

FEWP – www.fewp.info/
Who-we-are/

BWPA – www.bwpa.co.uk. Representatives of the BWPA will be at the Bristol Balloon Fiesta, so look out for them.

Shuttleworth Collection opening times – www.shuttleworth.org



Above: L-R, Sophie, Joost and Lisa enjoy their first experience up close to a hopper, as each takes a turn in the seat.