



**VINTAGE TWIN
COMPLETES THE FIRST
LEG OF AN EPIC
GLOBAL ADVENTURE**
BY RICHARD PAVER

On The Beech

Back during the summer of 2014, balloonists and adventurers Phil and Allie Dunnington were visiting an aviation exhibition when they saw advertised for sale a lovely Beech 18 carrying the British civil registration G-BKGM.

Both Phil and Allie had long harbored the idea of travelling around the world in a vintage aircraft carrying one of their balloons in order to create a unique and exciting new adventure to see many far-flung places from which they could fly their balloon.

Spotting the availability of this vintage Beech, Phil quickly saw an opportunity to turn this idea into reality. After a detailed inspection of the Beech, which included testing to see if their travelling lightweight balloon could safely fit into it for long flights, they purchased the aircraft.

In the spring of 2015 the Twin Beech was temporarily sprayed to appear in a BBC TV “reality” program called *Prized Apart*, shot at historic Farnborough airfield, before transfer to the Dunningtons. Detailed planning then commenced and the project, which became known as “On the Beech,” was born.

The aircraft was christened *Betty* and the project would be managed and conducted by “Gone with the Wind Ltd.” which

is an enterprise based in Bristol, England, specializing in operating and flying Bristol-made Cameron balloons jointly owned by Phil and Allie.

“Gone with the Wind” operates balloons all over the world for commercial, tourist and film-making flights and have been involved with various wildlife documentaries for BBC productions and others in Europe.

The original intention was to set off in May 2016 and fly the Beech from the UK westbound around the world to New Zealand starting with the first

major sector comprising a series of long legs to Cuba via the Faroes, Greenland, Canada, and the USA. The plan was also to carry their two-person Cameron Voyager balloon, including propane fuel, enabling Phil and Allie to get airborne in the balloon at every stop and to log as many different and unusual locations as possible for a balloon flight. Many of the far-flung

destinations en route had never seen a balloon before and so this would make for a hugely unusual and unique aviation experience.

While the aircraft was airworthy when purchased, it still required a major overhaul and a great deal of pre-emptive maintenance before such an intense period of flying could be contemplated and this work was carried out at Gloucester Airport by RGV Aviation, which has been based at that airfield since 1973. The engineer at RGV responsible for the Beech project was Roger Shepherd, who

worked for many years for the late Ray and Mark Hanna as Chief Engineer for Old Flying Machine Company at Duxford. Roger has a huge amount of experience of operating and maintaining historic aircraft as he worked on, and was responsible for, the continued airworthiness of all of the OFMC fleet between 1984 and 2006.

Roger completed a very detailed and thorough complete overhaul of the Beech and this included fitting a new left-hand engine and prop. Many other problems and engineering issues were encountered during the overhaul project but all of these were eventually overcome.

One of only two airworthy examples currently registered in United Kingdom, this particular Beech is well known to British aviation enthusiasts as it was owned and operated by Antony Hutton during the 1980s/1990s while it was based at North Weald Airfield.

The Twin Beech was built in Wichita, Kansas, during 1952 for the Royal Canadian Air Force as an Expeditor navigational trainer and then after ten-years of RCAF service it

was sold to become a survey aircraft and registered CF-SUQ in Canada.

The Beech was retired from photo mapping work in 1981 and subsequently acquired by Graham Warner who flew it from Duxford in 1982 and then he sold it to Anthony Hutton who moved it to North Weald in 1983. Anthony took it to many UK and European airshows throughout the 1980s and it was also used as the mother ship for the Harvard formation team carrying engineers and spares around the UK air-show circuit.



A key component for this adventure’s success was that the tour had to be accomplished in a suitable vintage aircraft with lots of character and the Beech 18 admirably fitted the bill.



Winging its way over a classic British landscape, Twin Beech G-BKGM is one of only two flying in the United Kingdom, which is surprising given the type’s classic appeal, affordability, and ease of maintenance.



Phil refuelling *Betty* by hand.



Phil and Allie in Isafjador.