

THEY TOUCHED THE SKY

Why did PPL holder Robert Vallier walk 370 miles over 35 days, summit Mount Snowdon and take youngsters flying at five aero clubs along the way?

By Dan Tye Photos Laura Morrow



TOP Robert stops for a breather halfway up the Pyg Track to the top of Snowdon.

LEFT Pilot's Dan Tye with Robert on the summit.

RIGHT Robert was joined on the Snowdon climb by his sister, his son, two daughters, nephew and Ufosa staff. The walk raised £9,500.

On this September morning, private pilots are buzzing over the 3080ft peak of Mount Snowdon. I turn to Robert Vallier who looks at me with a slight grimace and says, "This would be so much easier in one of those planes!"

For Robert, the final walk up Snowdon is the culmination of 35 days of walking from 12 to 20 miles per day. He began his 370 mile trek in Battle, East Sussex on 22 August, visiting five flying clubs along the way to Snowdon. With help from the clubs, he took seriously ill or handicapped children up for a taste of flying. The clubs all kindly provided Robert with an aircraft for free to fly the youngsters and their parents in the local area of each airfield. By putting himself through the hardship of a 370

mile trek which included blisters, sore feet, cold nights and very few hot showers, Robert has also raised money for a charity which he started three years ago called the Ufosa Foundation (United Funding Of Special Areas). Robert explains how he came up with the charity, "On one particular visit to South Africa I saw such poverty and desperation in a local village, I knew that I had to help, if I could."

Robert launched Ufosa by flying 2,500 miles in a Cessna 182 to needy communities. Ufosa collects donated UK books and sponsors British Airways take them to South Africa and Ufosa places 1,000-book libraries in schools.

Touch The Sky is Ufosa's UK programme. He plans to extend the campaign nationally in 2011 to take 100 families up flying at 50 aero clubs using local pilots. Can you help out? Email admin@ufosafoundation.org

ANDREW BISHOP



FAIROAKS - SYNERGY AVIATION

Robert flew his checkride with Andrew Bishop, at Synergy Aviation Ltd, Fair Oaks. "He was very cool, very efficient, very pleasant," says Robert, adding, "Jane Thompson the Marketing Director of Synergy was wonderful putting it all in place for me and Jenny Tye couldn't have been more helpful."

JOE IS 8 and has Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy. It's a terminal progressive muscle wasting disease. His long term prognosis isn't good. He is likely to be in a wheelchair by the time he is 12 and will probably lose the use of his muscles in his teens, so is not likely to reach his 20th birthday. Joe also has Aspergers syndrome.



JOE AGE 8

JACK IS 10 and his brother **JAMES IS 6**. They suffer with Glycogen Storage Disease. Their livers don't function properly and don't release their stored glucose. The boys also have a low immune system, which means winters are difficult as illnesses can last eight times as long. As they get older, there is a risk of liver cancer and kidney failure.



JACK AGE 10



JAMES AGE 6

BIGGIN HILL - TROPAIR AIRSERVICES

Paul Barker at Tropair Airservices at Biggin Hill was the first flying club to come on board to help Touch the Sky when Robert was putting the idea together. Robert says,



PAUL BARKER

"I first met Paul when I was getting ready to fly in South Africa on the Unity Flight. Paul had a 182 which was the same aircraft I was using out there and I had to get current here first. He was a great help to me and enthusiastic. And of course, flying out of Biggin Hill just has something special about it. During the photo sessions before the flights he gave us all a treat by opening up the adjoining hangar... inside was a Spitfire and I now treasure the picture I have of me standing in front of it."



LAUREN AGE 16

LAUREN IS 16. She has leukaemia. In leukaemia bone marrow is unable to

produce healthy blood cells. In 2000, approximately 256,000 children and adults around the world developed some form of leukaemia, and 209,000 died from it. Lauren is still undergoing treatment.

GURMUKA IS 17. He recently had 8 inches of his left leg bone and knee removed because of cancer. His type is called Osteosarcoma. Ill for several months, he is presently in remission and now hoping to be able to take flying lessons himself.



GURMUKA AGE 17

SLEAP - SHROPSHIRE AERO CLUB

RHY AND LUKE both have Aspergers Syndrome, which mainly is a 'hidden disability'. This means that you can't tell that someone has the condition from their outward appearance. People with the condition have difficulties in three main areas: social communication, social interaction and social imagination. While there are similarities with autism, people with Aspergers Syndrome don't have so many problems with speaking and are often of average, or above average, intelligence. They do not usually have the accompanying learning disabilities associated with autism, but they may have specific learning difficulties, including dyslexia and dyspraxia or other conditions such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and epilepsy. Sufferers often have sensory difficulties too, which can impair sight, sound, smell, touch, or taste.

NATHAN CROSS is the Operations Manager for the Shropshire Aero Club at Sleaf and helped Robert to fly in PA-28. Robert says, "It was a cold, cold day and so you can tell which of us is the local lad. Pilot ran an article about the aircraft Kilo Whiskey and about the pilot who flew to Scotland to get a Kilo of Whiskey. The Ufosa flights were made in the same aircraft."



RHYS AGE 7



LUKE AGE 8



NATHAN CROSS

WOODY AGE 6



SHOBDON - HEREFORDSHIRE AERO CLUB

WOODY IS 6. He has cerebral palsy. Cerebral palsy is an umbrella term encompassing a group of non-progressive, non-contagious motor conditions that cause physical disability in human development, chiefly in the various areas of body movement. It is caused by damage to the motor control centres of the developing brain and can occur during pregnancy, during childbirth or after birth up to about age three. Usually, medical intervention is limited to the treatment and prevention of complications arising from cerebral palsy's effects. There is no known cure.

JOSH IS 11. He has Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy. It's a terminal progressive muscle wasting disease. He can stand on his legs at the moment with help, but he needed to be lifted into the aircraft and into his seat. Symptoms later in life may include abnormal bone development leading to skeletal deformities, including curvature of the spine. Loss of movement occurs eventually leading to paralysis. His long term prognosis isn't good. He is likely to be in a wheelchair in a few years time and will probably lose the use of his muscles and body towards the end of his teens. He is unlikely to reach his 20th birthday.

MATTHEW STOCKER is the Airfield Manager at Herefordshire Aero Club Shobdon, shown in a picture here with Josh, just before his Touch The Sky flight. "Matt was immensely helpful," says Robert. "The aircraft was a lovely one to fly and I felt quite at home."

Before the flight Robert flew a check ride with James Peplow. "James was one of those pilots who were just totally at one with their machine in the air," says Robert. "It was a real privilege to fly with him and when I can, I will go back to Shobdon just for my own personal learning of skills, to fly with him again. Amazing guy. He had a lovely dog called Captain who waited patiently on the ground for us to return."



GLOUCESTER - AEROS

MISHA IS 8 years old and was diagnosed with purine nucleoside phosphorylase, a rare form of SCID. She received a bone marrow transplant for this at eight weeks old and had to have another at 12 months old. Due to complications Misha now has cerebral palsy, which affects her mobility. She also has hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, which is an enlargement defect of the muscle tissue in the heart and retinal dystrophy which causes loss of sight. As a result Misha is blind in her left eye and partially sighted in her right eye. In addition, she also has hypothyroidism and alopecia totalis (hair loss) but she rarely complains and when she does it's about having no hair as, just like any other girl, how she looks really matters to her.

JOSHUA IS 6. He has cerebral palsy. It is caused by damage to the motor control centres of the developing brain and can occur during pregnancy, during childbirth or after birth up to about age three. Usually, medical intervention is limited to the treatment and prevention of complications arising from cerebral palsy's effects. There is no known cure.

ROBERT is pictured here with Paul Jocelyn at Aeros, Gloucester who was also quick to support the programme. Robert says, "Ruth Goater in Aeros Operations was very helpful but she wasn't there on the day so it was Paul who was there to help out. I went back in the next day to collect something and met Aeros owner Tom Dunn. It was he of course who had given the thumbs up to Aeros getting involved. Incidentally, they had also offered their involvement at Wellesbourne, Filton and Cardiff as well as at Gloucester."

"I think of all the flights I made throughout my walk, it is of little Misha that I have the fondest memories. She was just so stricken with illnesses, yet so very brave, and so enthusiastic."



OXFORD - OXFORD AVIATION ACADEMY

Lorraine Aust, the Brand Manager at OAA, was also one of the early clubs on board with their support for Touch The Sky.

Robert hasn't been able to fly there yet once because of a cancellation by one of the families (decline in health of the child) and then because of weather. Robert says, "We have children standing by, ready for when all

(including me) can be co-ordinated. Lorraine has been very supportive and Kirsteen Dow is the flight instructor with whom I am set to do my check ride. It will happen in due course!"