



Heritage Notes

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*"I stumble out of the plane and sink to my knees in muck and stand there foolishly staring, not at the lifeless land, but at my watch. Twenty-one hours and twenty-five minutes. Atlantic flight. Abingdon, England, to a nameless swamp -- non-stop. A Cape Breton Islander found me -- a fisherman trudging over the bog saw the Gull with her tail in the air and her nose buried, and then he saw me floundering in the embracing soil of his native land."*¹

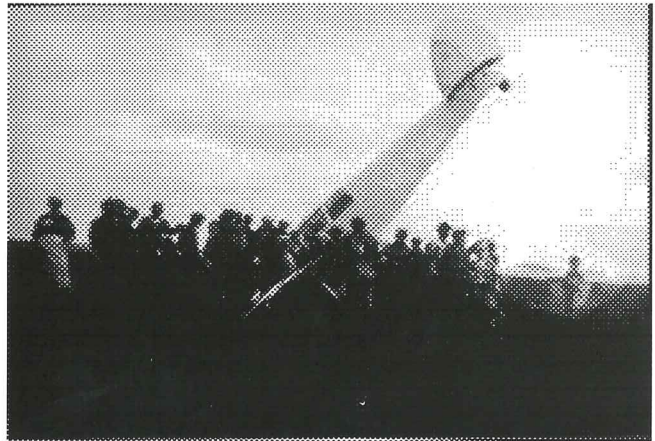
BERYL MARKHAM'S GREAT ADVENTURE: ABINGDON TO BALEINE, SEPTEMBER 5, 1936

Charles A. Burke

In *West With The Night*, Beryl Markham described her Kenyan childhood and subsequent career as bush-pilot, big game spotter, horse breeder and successful transatlantic flyer. The book enjoyed immense popularity, but despite praise for one of the century's most remarkable persons, her deeds were forgotten. Except in Cape Breton where, for a brief period in 1936, this fearless pioneer aviator put Cape Breton in the news, and allowed the people of Baleine to witness her aerial conquest of the Atlantic Ocean.

Beryl Clutterbuck was born in England in 1902, emigrating with her father to Kenya in 1906. Her extraordinary early life was spent on a vast farm in the remote Kenyan Highlands where she learned African languages and acquired the skill to spear a lion. As a teenager, Beryl turned to training her father's horses and within a year captured a prestigious Derby. By twenty-four, she had won most of Kenya's racing prizes and was one of the Colony's most prominent young women.

In 1927, Beryl married Mansfield Markham and moved to London. When the marriage failed, Beryl returned to Nairobi where she met the renowned big game hunter Denys Finch Hatton. Finch Hatton soon introduced Beryl to flying and she mastered aviation with Tom Campbell Black, a respected pilot of the era. She obtained her licence in 1930 and, at twenty-eight, was the first woman to hold a commercial licence in Kenya. In 1931, she undertook a solo flight between Nairobi and London in a single-engine plane without a radio or directional device. The twenty-three-day flight over vast uncharted regions of the Sudan, the Sahara and over the Mediterranean to Europe and London was a formidable



Beryl Markham's plane "The Messenger" after her landing in Baleine on September 5, 1936

accomplishment. Within several years Beryl acquired an enviable record flying mail and passengers throughout East Africa. At twenty-nine she owned two planes, had pioneered aerial big-game spotting, and knew the great white hunters, from Ernest Hemingway to the Prince of Wales.

By 1936, Beryl had flown the Nairobi to London route six times and now turned to aviation's final prize. She resolved to fly solo from England to America the hard way, east to west against the prevailing winds. Many of the thirty-nine transatlantic attempts to 1936 had failed. Only Jim Mollison had made the eastern crossing and Beryl hoped to beat his shorter 1932 flight from Ireland to New Brunswick. To make "the waterjump" Beryl required a new plane which Lord Carberry, a Kenyan acquaintance