



The Balsa Beavers at the Dawn of Time

As model clubs go, the Balsa Beavers is an old organization, and the fact that it is still around today astounds me as much as anybody!

Ross Melhuish, the first president, had a huge role to play in the early development of the club, including persuading the City of Etobicoke to provide space for us in the newly constructed Centennial Park. The flying circles were operational in 1968, and have had continuous use by the Club since that time.

The club newspaper, "The Airfoil", was edited by both John Easton, and Frank Anderson, in succession. This was a newsletter which literally went around the world, in exchange for other club newsletters, and provided club information, plans, sometimes scurrilous, but good natured comment on members, plus news of happenings in aeromodelling from all over!

I accidentally ran into the Balsa Beavers as a young person when I thought that I had heard the sound of model aircraft engines in a nearby park. It seems that the Beavers were putting on a flying display for a local baseball league, and I was astounded with what they could do with airplanes that flew on wires. I was already flying some Control Line models with friends at a local school, but the flying that I saw that day far eclipsed anything that we had managed to accomplish.

Immediately I enquired about the possibility of becoming a member. I then organized a ride with Bill Bell, one of the members who lived close to me, and set off for my first meeting.

It was kind of like the “aha” moment in the “Harry Potter” books, when the hero finds out he is a wizard, and is immediately accepted into the fraternity of others who are similarly endowed! This was indeed a new world for me!

The learning curve was a bit slow at the start, and after wrecking a few models, I learned how to do horizontal eights and fly inverted. My dreams were almost realized in my opinion, but, I also knew that further development of my skills would have to take place if I was ever to have any hope of placing in a contest, or two.

It wasn't long before I was the Treasurer (nobody wants the job, so guess how I got it!), and writing the odd little article for “The Airfoil”.

Basically, the Balsa Beavers either flew Control Line, or Free Flight. Most did both, but at the expense of the one they were less proficient at. The number of original models being designed by club members in those days was impressive, and the Balsa Beavers became a force to be reckoned with, especially when they crossed the border to compete in the United States! It was a time of great energy and creativity. Unfortunately, we are not likely to see that level of involvement again.

In the Seventy's some members were off trying to learn to fly Radio Control as the equipment was getting a bit cheaper, and analogue/proportional radios were making R/C a lot easier to learn.

Our group got regrettably a bit smaller, but the opportunity to be involved in FAI Competition by a revitalized national organization got things started up again. Also, MAAC had run some successful National contests at Centralia, near London, Ontario, and things were again looking up!

After some sixty odd years of being a Club, we are still at it. I deeply regret that Ross, Frank, Bill Poole, and other great members are no longer with us. They provided younger members, like myself, immediate acceptance, and mature wisdom when required. Also, a chance to speak like equals to adults, without being treated like juveniles.



For myself, I am glad that I didn't miss the experience. When I see people nowadays leave their working lives with no interest in doing anything, I realize that I have been blessed to have been accepted by the Club, and fortunate to have been an aeromodeller.



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