

Rory Smith

This summer I was one of the few fortunate aspiring aviation enthusiasts to be awarded this year's HCAP's gliding scholarship. An unforgettable experience which was truly the highlight of my year so far, reinforcing my desire to pursue a career in aviation and now a passion for gliding! I cannot thank the team and members at both the HCAP and the LGC enough.

I arrived late on Sunday to the almost deserted airfield and found my key pinned up to the noticeboard in an unassuming envelope inscribed with my name; sort of James Bond style, very cool. After waking up and getting ready on the Monday morning I was immediately put at ease after meeting my instructor for the week, István Toth and fellow scholarship winner, Ronan Graven. We were then briefed about the basics of flying a glider and before 12 o'clock that day I was taking my first flight in a K21 and told that I would have control of the whole aircraft once up to 3,000 after an aerotow. After taking the controls and getting used to the feel of the glider I was instructed to head for the thicker, darker clouds as they would have thermals we could use to get even higher, a task easier said than done. However, by the end of the day I had got used to controlling the glider with both the stick and rudder and was left hungry for more the next day.

On the second day both Ronan and myself completed two 45-60 minute flights off the aerotow under the scorching heat of the mid July heatwave. After brushing up on the basics and getting to grips with the very slight adjustments the glider needs to fly smoothly on the first and second flight I managed to land the glider relatively smoothly on the South-West runway at the end of the day. A huge milestone for myself.

Day three was our first taste of winch launching and what an experience that is. 0-60 knots in under 3 seconds really wakes you up in the morning and after 8 short flights with István honing my landings and part of the takeoffs I was thrown in at the deep end with another instructor, Yarik, who asked me to fly without any input from himself. Between these flights I was able to speak to the members from the club who all have such an amazing passion for gliding and were very happy to answer my many questions about gliding and aviation in general. The members are such a huge part of the club without their help in the control tower or manning the winch launch we could not have flown.

Day 4 was another tough day in the glider, South-Easterly winds forced us to use the west runway and our flight time was very short, around 5 minutes on average however this enabled Ronan and myself to have more winch runs and really get to grips with the take offs. After another delicious lunch prepared by Trevor the chef, we were joined by the instructor course in the afternoon and continued to winch launch between their winch failure tests.

On the final day Ronan and myself managed to fit in a handful of winch launches which had become second nature by this point. I even managed to do a few flights with no interruption from Istvan, another massive milestone which has left me wanting to go solo at my local club, which I intend to join after having such a great time this past week.

I feel so lucky that I have had this opportunity and would particularly like to extend my thanks to István my instructor who I can only describe as the most patient and inspiring instructor there is. He made my time at LGC one I couldn't forget and has motivated me to follow my dream of a career in aviation.