

Tyler Oxley The Duke Scholarship



Driving along the airfield perimeter track and seeing the gliders soaring peacefully through the summer sky above; I couldn't contain my excitement for the long-anticipated week ahead. CGC, the Cambridge Gliding Club, was the club that accommodated us for our week of gliding at their historic airfield of Great Gransden. The club members were very welcoming and immediately from arrival were looking after us which created a very inclusive feeling from the first evening.

With the weather for our week off to a good start, on Monday we began with the unpacking of the gliders from the hangar and kitting each glider with parachutes and batteries to ensure a swift start. Supporting the preparation every morning, from the brief to getting all the kit to the launch point, it gave me insight into how teamwork is required for the gliding club to be functional. During the first day, we introduced ourselves to James who was our instructor for the week and James gave us a tour of our glider, the Perkoz. In the first few days I was getting to grips with the basic procedures such as fluency in the pre-flight checklist, stick and rudder coordination, and general handling of the Perkoz in flight. Aside from this, we also looked into how the surrounding environment can provide a glider pilot with hints of where there may be substantial thermals.

Our week, thankfully, was one of the hottest weeks of the year with fantastic weather, the sun beating down on us each day and clouds dotted around the sky so only a few hours on one evening in the simulator was necessary to practice winch launching procedures, stalls and circuits for the following day. The second day brought about almost perfect conditions for gliding, with many of us having flights of over an hour, staying up and in most cases climbing through very high rates of rise. This allowed us to get to know the handling of the glider and using the stick and rudder together to remain in a controlled turn whilst thermalling.

As our confidence steadily grew, we were able to carry out winch launches, plan and carry out our own circuits, climbing in thermals and landing with minimal input from our instructors. With the hope that it will not be necessary in future, we practised the different stalls and James demonstrated two spins along with the recoveries (I wanted to experience a spin)! The proudest moment of the week was being



able to carry out a stable approach, a well timed flare and smooth landing. Topping the week off, we took one last flight with an aerotow up to 2500ft and managed to thermal up to the 5000ft limit in the local airspace. The feeling of floating through the air so high up in a non-powered aircraft and staying up above all the busy roads and towns is a feeling I will never take for granted, but will equally treasure for the rest of my life.



Aside from the gliding, I also really enjoyed and found it insightful being able to contribute to the running of the daily operations at the club. When on the ground, I was involved in supporting the winch marshal by retrieving cables and gliders swiftly when needed using a Hilux pick-up or a golf cart, and keeping the flight log updated. We also supported each flight by attaching the correct weak link to the gliders and wing running during winch launches. One of the beauties of gliding I realised through the week was how even when you're not gliding you are involved in the other operations with everyone working towards the same aim.

I really cannot thank the Honourable Company of Air Pilots and every sponsor enough for providing me with this invaluable opportunity and their time in the whole selection process. Equally, I want to send my appreciation to all the members at CGC in the week who supported Alex and I on our course, in particular James Kellerman who had volunteered for the week and was the best instructor that we could have asked for. This scholarship has given me the foundations to which I look forward to building upon and continuing gliding at a local gliding club!

