

Thomas Needham – Gliding Report

From being dropped off on the Sunday evening to leaving on Saturday morning I loved every minute of the week. It was quite surreal to start with as my father drove me up the gliding club in the idyllic setting of the Peak District, surrounded by beautiful scenery I realized then how lucky I was to be flying from Camphill for a whole week. The clubhouse and other facilities provided to us by the club were second to none and we were given the opportunity to utilize these straight from arrival on the Sunday. For example, we were given on the Sunday a very quick lesson on how to drive the club tractors which became vital for the whole week to recover the gliders as quick as possible to get as much flying in before the poor weather which plagued the week hit. This lesson was given to us by a very helpful member which set the tone for the amazing hospitality we received throughout the week from the members. On Sunday evening we were introduced to our instructors for the week, Peter and Alan, who were superb at supporting us, most of us starting the week with minimal flying experience to being able to do circuits by the end of the week. They supported us through every launch no matter what happened. By the end of the week, personally I had 17 launches which amassed just under 2 and a half hours in the air.

On the Monday, we had a long day interrupted by rain in the afternoon. Monday was the most tiring day of the week as it was a massive learning curve, learning a new aircraft, new people and new skills on the ground in one day which was over 9 hours on the airfield. On the Tuesday, we had the best weather of the week which was seen by the large number of members also present. This was one of the best days as you were able to exchange conversations with the members and hear stories about gliding from a wide range of experiences. This was very similar for the rest of the week when members were present, whether talking about the micro-climate of Camphill or gliding in the alps and abroad they were all more than happy to chat to us. On the Wednesday, the weather was not great but enough for another 4 launches reinforcing the principles preached to us by our instructors for the previous two days, with added challenges such as covering our altimeter. We also had the added challenge of landing as close to a point marked out on the airfield by our instructors. With lots of members and their gliders also present the landings were very perilous with the landing site littered with Puchacz's, K13's and the occasional K18. On Thursday, the wind was the biggest issue as it brought strong gusts which were hard to deal with whilst launching and in the air. It also brought heavy rain clouds which curtailed the day to our disappointment, especially after an early start to try beat the weather. On the last flight I was lucky enough to be shown a cross wind landing by my instructor Peter which massively helped my development. On Friday I only got 1 flight due to unflyable weather in the morning with a little change in positioning on the airfield led to a really unique and amazing experience, Hill soaring and thermals along the ridge. This led to me having a flight which lasted 42 minutes, 42 hard but rewarding minutes. On a flight like this you have to be very cautious of other gliders flying in the same airspace as they also try and utilize the conditions and fly your glider to the best of your ability on top of this.

On Friday night, we were lucky to have a member of the air pilots come to Camphill and award us our certificates which was an amazing way to end the week. This led to us being kindly invited to join the club's Facebook group by amazing chairwomen Liz. Overall, the week was the best week of my life surrounded by amazing people in an amazing location. It was a once in a life time opportunity which I will always be grateful of and it strengthened my desire and has given me the confidence to pursue my love of flying which I hope I will be able to make a career out of.