



FINAL GLIDE

Issue 42: December 2025



Photo: Geoff Jones

In photo: Theo, Liisi, Jon H

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New year, New Chairman by Geoff Stephens



My appointment as chairman came as a bit of a challenge having not served on the committee before. One of the first things that struck me was the amount of volunteering that goes on to make the club tick. The second was the amazing sense of community at the club, although that won't come as a surprise to most members.



In January a small group of members made an 'ad hoc' visit to Bletchley Park, where we learned a lot about the intriguing work that went on there in WW2. March saw our usual start-of-season BBQ, this time organised by Rob Jefford and Yana. The start of the year also saw Vincent Fitzsimons taking over the role of organizing group flying on Friday evenings and the planning for the up-coming season started straight away. This had previously been done very successfully for several years by Richard Markham, to whom the club is very grateful.

In April we held our annual club expedition, held jointly with OUGC. The venue was the Lancashire and Derbyshire GC at Camphill in the Peak District. The flying conditions were distinctly sub-optimal but we took full advantage of all the recreational opportunities in the area, including a very enjoyable 7-mile walk through Millers Dale expertly led by Richie Hale.



A good soaring season saw many personal accomplishments including Tulip qualifying as a BI. This was rounded off in September with an end-of-season BBQ hosted by our Polish friends. This also doubled up as a Families Day with some keen future members attending.



At the end of 2024 Neil Swinton agreed that he would serve as CFI for one more year. We were especially pleased that he did so as 2025 turned out to be an exceptionally busy year, not just with the (abortive) planning for RAFSPA parachuting, but also with SPL conversions, the report on the Hinton accident, and much more. David McGrath reluctantly stepped down from his position as Deputy CFI following his job move to Madrid, but we were pleased that Jon Hunt stepped up to replace him. Jon has subsequently been appointed CFI and another busy year lies ahead for which he will need everyone's cooperation, especially as we engage with the new CAA regulatory framework.

In November Rupert Taylor-Atkins took over the voucher and booking systems. This is no mean feat as it entails dealing with the general public, which can be both rewarding and, on occasions, challenging, as our best-laid plans for flying visitors are scuppered by the weather.

They are not the most photogenic or glamorous of topics, but in the last quarter of 2025 a colossal amount of work has gone into the implementation of our new membership and log systems. This work has been done quietly behind the scenes by our Treasurer and IT Officer, Paul Smith. The benefits of these changes will be felt by us all for many years to come.

The year rounded off with our usual Christmas Party, this time held at The Clifden Arms, Worminghall with home-grown entertainment provided by our very own, Jess Dudzik.

Geoff Stephens, Chairman

Gliding at Oxford Gliding Club 2025 by Theo Whiteside

I've written an article about my amazing first year at the club and I've also attached some photos.

In March this year, I joined Oxford gliding Club as a junior member, and I've had a blast of a time throughout. My first ever glider flight was with Garry Cuthill in Daisy, and it was a flight I will never forget.

My first ever flight in a glider and my first ever winch launch. I must admit, I was rather nervous while waiting to launch. However once in the air, the views, the wind, the feeling of flight erased that fear in an instant. Extra thanks to Garry for making my first flight an amazing flight!





Since then, I have accumulated 65 launches (at the time of writing) and had some amazing experiences with the club.

Another stand out moment this year was an aerobatics flight with an instructor from Kenley, Malcom Kerley. It was at the start of August and we found a nice strong thermal which we rode all the way up to 4000 ft. It is still currently my height record however I strive to beat that this coming summer. I then had the opportunity to do some aerobatics which is a moment I'll never forget. Looking up and seeing the ground is a bit of a strange feeling but still exhilarating and fun, nonetheless.



Finally, the day the Spitfire landed on the airfield was a moment I will forever remember. Watching that incredible machine do aerobatics above our heads and hearing the roar of the great Merlin engine was a spectacular experience.

One of my most memorable days was the AGM. The social scene, atmosphere, food and people made this such a warm, lovely way to end that day of flying. I loved hearing the review of the year and seeing awards and achievements being handed out, finished off with a lovely meal from the OUGC team. I really felt part of this gliding family.

Thank you to everyone at the club for making me so welcome in my first year and I can't wait to see what the future holds for me at the club.

Gliding in Australia by Siobhan Tobin

Your southern hemisphere correspondent reports

G'day from Down Under. I moved to Sydney in September 2024 but did not get around to doing any gliding until October of this year. I've joined the Bathurst Soaring Club (BSC) and thought I would share some notes on my experience so far...

Bathurst is a large country town 200km west of Sydney, beyond the Blue Mountains, which form part of Australia's Great Dividing Range that stretches along the east coast. As such Bathurst's weather is less volatile than Sydney's, but it's not quite in the vast flat thermic heartlands of places like Narromine and Temora (both internationally acclaimed gliding spots). Piper's Airfield, where the club is based, is an odd shape and not flat (it's a bit like Dunstable in that respect). The topography around the airfield is even less flat, though with no soarable ridges.



Mount Panorama racing circuit near Bathurst.

OGC and BSC have some similarities: both have origins tied with university gliding clubs, the fleets both have DG505s and ASK21s as training gliders, there's the usual roster of duty pilots and instructors, and both have around 150 members. However there are a few differences too as I have discovered! For starters, the prelaunch checklist in Australia is "CHAOTICCC", which I find a little disruptive: shouldn't you be thinking cool, calm and collected instead? Second, winch launching is much rarer in Australia: BSC is an aerotow-only club, and low-tow is the norm (being well below the slipstream of the tug), and you should always turn right when releasing from the tug. Third: there's not a big culture of wearing parachutes unless you are going cross-country. Nevertheless there are sufficient parachutes for all club gliders, and I wear one all the time! Finally (and perhaps most obviously), the weather.

My first days at RAF WOTG (~October 2020) I was kitted out in 5 layers including 2 pairs of gloves. Rituals included waiting for gliders to defrost in the faint sunlight peeking through the fog, and avoiding canopy misting at the end of the day. In contrast, I can report that BSC boasts a shadecloth shelter at the launchpoint, everyone's walking around with broad brim hats (some with fly nets), and yes there are 100 million smashed flies on the wings of Aussie gliders by lunchtime. Sooo much sunscreen needed!

BSC's membership is about 50 % Bathurst local, 50 % Sydneysider. Many of the latter cohort stay for the whole weekend and there's 3 bunkrooms and 2 caravans (all airconditioned!) for club members, plus a bunch more private caravans. On the other side of town, Bathurst Airport hosts the Australian Air Force Cadets gliding school, so there's often other gliders in the sky.



Left: soaring! Right: dinner in the Bathurst Soaring clubhouse

I kicked off my return to gliding with 7 days at BSC in October for their *ab initio* course. Yes I did give them a spoiler alert that I was not really a beginner! On my first flight, I soared with a [wedge-tailed eagle](#) (*Aquila audax* or the eagle who dares), Australia's biggest bird of prey with a wingspan up to 2.8 m. It approached the glider with talons extended and I met its eye before it wheeled away, deciding the DG505 was not the company it wanted to keep. Day 5 was lost to thunderstorms, all the other days were 25°C+ and usually blue. Thermals topped out at 5000'-6000' typically.

Everyone was quite complimentary of my flying though I was pretty nervous. By Day 6 I had convinced the locals and myself I had restored my gliding skills and I was sent solo in the DG505: first Aussie solo, and first solo in that type for me. Then I had the traditional bucket of water thrown on me!



Solo again! Wearing my OUGC bucket hat of course.



Post-(re)-solo celebrations, instructor Brian doing the honours

Thanks OGC instructors for standing me in good stead! Particular thanks to Cecilia and Dave B who suffered through my initial aerotows in the DG505 at Sutton Bank in 2022. My main instructor for the week Brian put me through all the usual exercises and got me to land on 5 different strips (runways would be too generous a term for some of them) and also we flew across to Mount Panorama (sort of like Silverstone but not quite). The club has a few strips on the airfield they use for field/paddock landing training. There's also an agreement with several local farmers regarding paddocks that they actually get students to land in (then aerotow out of) for the XC endorsement equivalent, but I haven't gotten that far yet.

I do miss the morning bike rides out of Oxford and awesome (and very good value) winching out of Weston, plus all the OGC/OUgc friends and instructors that really are the reason I was determined to return to gliding despite a confidence knock. In 2026 I am looking forward to doing more gliding with BSC, please come and visit me!!!

And for the record, my accent is not the broadest on the airwaves ;)

From the sublime to the ridiculous by Jon Gatfield

Many of you will know I have (hopefully temporarily) lost the Class 2 medical required to fly in Europe. You may also know I love my mountain flying so being unable to fly a single seater in the Alps has come as a painful blow.

However, I am in the very fortunate position of now owning a share in an Arcus M self – launching sailplane that our syndicate plan to largely fly overseas. The intention is that if I fly with someone who holds a Class 2 medical and the right licences, I can still get my fix of mountain flying. The Arcus was delivered late, in July, but one of my syndicate partners and I were still able to fly the Italian Rieti competition in early August and had a great time racing around the Appenines in strong thermals to 10,000' at speeds of up to 125kph and finishing 4th out of the 10 competitors. **Sublime.**



A sparkly new Arcus waiting for my first flight in it, at Aosta airport, Italy



The new Arcus in flight in Rieti. What a lovely wing.

Late August saw the opposite end of the scale. Each year the St Crepin gliding club near Briancon, in the French Alps, hold a get together for K13's. This attracts c20 of the wooden two-seaters many of which have brightly coloured paint schemes (my favourite was the Dutch "Nemo").



Nemo!

I was privileged to be invited to join a couple of Lasham chums in their K13 “L99”. This is not a serious competition but is much more of a social get together focussed on the beer and food in the hangar each night. All launching is by winch onto the nearby hill, from which one can transition onto the Prachaval mountain and, when conditions are right, into wave to FL195. However, there are daily tasks of up to 300kms one of which we completed at an unhandicapped 90kph. **Ridiculous.** It’s a hoot to bumble around the mountains encountering a bunch of fellow K13’s on the way.

L99, Nemo and one other were able to remove the conventional canopies and replace them with a “Cabrio” open cockpit arrangement. One evening we arranged a 9,000’ formation photoshoot above the Prachaval mountain. Bloody freezing but some great photos. For those able to source a K13 I can thoroughly recommend the event!



L99, Nemo and friend on an evening sortie



Posing and freezing at 9,000'

“Pressure, What Pressure?” Tales from my calm (mostly) world of gliding by Jess Dudzik



Back in April, Peter Boulton let me fly his Skylark 4. I loved every single moment of my time in it and grateful for this opportunity. This was the same day I tried to do my 5 hours but failed miserably! (Out of many attempts at my 5 hours).



Fast forward to July, I went to the Sherington Regionals and helped with rope running! As this was my long summer holidays before I went back to college for my final year, I decided to actually do something with myself and not get bored. It was a very hot week, but it was worth it. I even got to sit in the backseat of a Chipmunk for a 20-minute flight! I also had my 17th birthday at the Regionals, which was fun!



A couple weeks after the regionals (August), I did my xc endorsement! After putting it off for a very long time, I ran out of excuses not to do it (college, assignments, exams, the list goes on and on...) So, I knew it was time to do it before the SPL deadline. On the 11th of August, I went up to Hinton and did my endorsement. It was a very hot day, but I managed to complete my whole cross-country endorsement that day!





I got to fly the Junior, that was brought to Weston by a couple members from Kenley. A Junior has been on my list of single seaters to fly since I've gone solo. I remember thinking to myself "they're not going to let me fly it", but after debating that with myself for 2 hours, I asked. The worst thing that could be said is no, right? So, I did ask! And they let me! Don't think I've had a bigger smile on my face in ages before this. This was the same week I completed my xc endorsement and got my first college exam results back. All was a success, what a great week that was!

This was my first time being on the committee as well. What a pleasure it is to be a part of this and help around.

This year was more proof of how chaotic my life is (and I actually try to do stuff with my flying!). I want to say a big thank you to everyone who's made the weekends such a joy. Don't think I would be able to find a better hobby and place to be than at the airfield.

As many of you know, I've been at the club for 10 years now. These 10 years at the club have shaped me in ways I never expected. The airfield has become a second home. A place where I've grown up, made countless memories, and found a deep sense of belonging. Helping out, no matter if it's launching gliders, packing/unpacking the hangar, or sharing a fun moment between flights, has shown me the beauty of being part of something that lifts others as much as it lifts you. The friendships, the early mornings, the laughter, they've all

become threads in the fabric of who I am. After a decade here, it gave me more of a reason to believe that it's not just about flying; it's about the people, the purpose, and the quiet joy of giving back to the place that taught me to fly and be myself.

Jess

From gardening to gliding By Dr Sanjoo Paddea, Steeple Claydon



There are some conversations you remember—not because they were planned, but because they happened in the most ordinary of places. Mine began on a quiet walk to my allotment in Steeple Claydon.

I was on my way to my plot, ready for the usual battle with weeds, when I passed my neighbour Geoff. His allotment borders the pathway, so we often exchange the familiar greetings: “Morning, Geoff.”

“Morning, Sanjoo. Lovely weather... or at least it was five minutes ago.”

There’s always a bit of friendly teasing too—usually me reminding him (again) that he really ought to stop growing tomato leaves and give his plants a proper prune. He insists they’re “going to be fine,” and we agree to disagree before laughing about the ever-unpredictable British skies. Then, as usual, we both head off to tend our vegetables plots.

But on this particular day, the conversation took a slightly different turn. Geoff wandered over a little later and asked what I did for work. I explained that I’m a Business Manager at Cranfield University. Before I could say much more, his eyes lit up, “Aerospace?” he asked. I laughed and admitted that although my current role isn’t in aerospace, my background very much is. I studied aerospace engineering as an undergraduate and later specialised in materials for safety-critical applications.

That’s when things got interesting. Geoff told me he was training to be a glider pilot. I was intrigued; gliding had always seemed like one of those quietly magical activities—part science, part instinct, part pure freedom. Without hesitation, he invited me to an introductory flight.

A couple of weeks later, I found myself at the airfield with my wife and little one, who came as enthusiastic spectators. The weather, for once, was on our side. The sky had that clear, open quality that makes you feel something extraordinary might happen. And it did.

I ended up having not one but three flights. The first two were thrilling enough, but on the third, I had the chance to take the controls myself—a gentle, careful introduction to what it really feels like to fly. My pilot for the day was Paula Aitken, who I later learned is a well-respected and highly accomplished glider pilot. Sitting in that cockpit as the ground fell away, guided by quiet expertise, I felt a calm exhilaration unlike anything else.

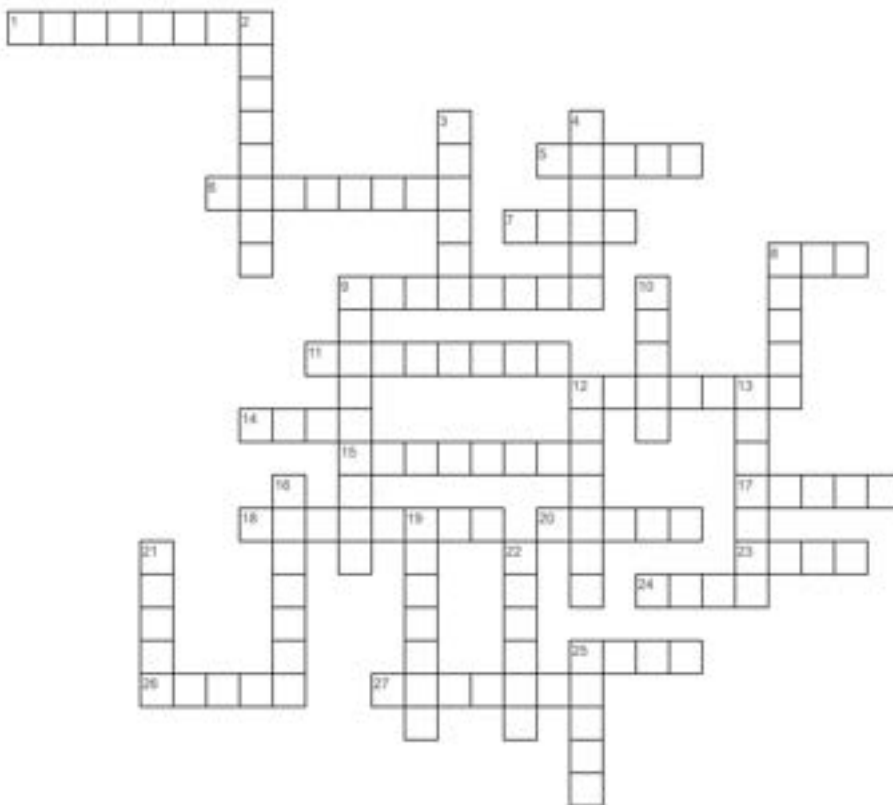


It struck me how easily life's everyday routines—like a walk to the allotment—can open the door to something completely new. One moment I was thinking about potatoes and compost; the next, I was rediscovering the spark that first drew me to aerospace all those years ago.

If you've ever wondered what it's like to soar silently above the countryside, I would wholeheartedly encourage you to give gliding a try. You don't need any experience—just a bit of curiosity and a willingness to see the world from a different angle. You never know where a simple conversation, even one about tomato plants or the weather, might lead you.

Editor's Note: No Sanjoo's son didn't get a flight!

Paul Smith's Crossword



Across

- 1 It's getting cold so put them on
- 5 Gets excited in a thermal
- 6 A pilot's leader is in the breeze coming from the front
- 7 Going down the plughole
- 8 At the end Monsieur
- 9 Keep an eye on the reference point during this maneuver
- 11 Having the right one of these will get you further
- 12 Sampson is mixed up but can still find the way
- 14 Takes the load off
- 15 Love rate, a mix, used in to get pitch perfect
- 17 Clint's heartbreak
- 18 See fuel gas mixed around the main body
- 20 A cheat to avoid an angry farmer
- 23 Out front
- 24 Not that sort of queen
- 25 PINS are scattered to turn quickly
- 26 All tied up at this rate
- 27 Male bird is placed in a small hole for the crew's station

Down

- 2 Look away from your screen now
- 3 At the back, not for turning
- 4 Countdown begins a space mission
- 8 All in a tizz
- 9 A mere tilt is wrong for this instrument
- 10 Maximise this to increase your speed
- 12 Closed path for current
- 13 Birds are masters at this
- 16 Like puffy cotton-wool
- 19 A role in changed banking control
- 21 Fetched by rovers
- 22 Any cop mixed up cover for pilot
- 25 Tails, oddly, leading to a sudden loss of lift

Answers will be in the editors' notes!

First flight at Dunstable. A dream from my childhood by Geoff Jones

When I was a child in the “fifties” my father bought his first car. Driving out at the weekend with Mum, Dad and my sister was a treat. A picnic on Dunstable Downs was a favourite destination. My grandfather used to take my father there too when he was a child. For some reason we always went via Whipsnade Hill which caused our 11hp Ford Anglia to wheeze a bit. On one occasion with Gran and Gramp onboard it overheated halfway up. You didn’t rush anywhere in an old Ford Anglia.

I loved watching the gliders at Dunstable and that love stayed with me into my sixties when I started gliding. For some reason as a child a flight at Dunstable seemed an impossible dream. On one memorable day gliders flew all day on the ridge. I remember the distinctive whistle of the slipstream as they flew overhead, that lovely sound.

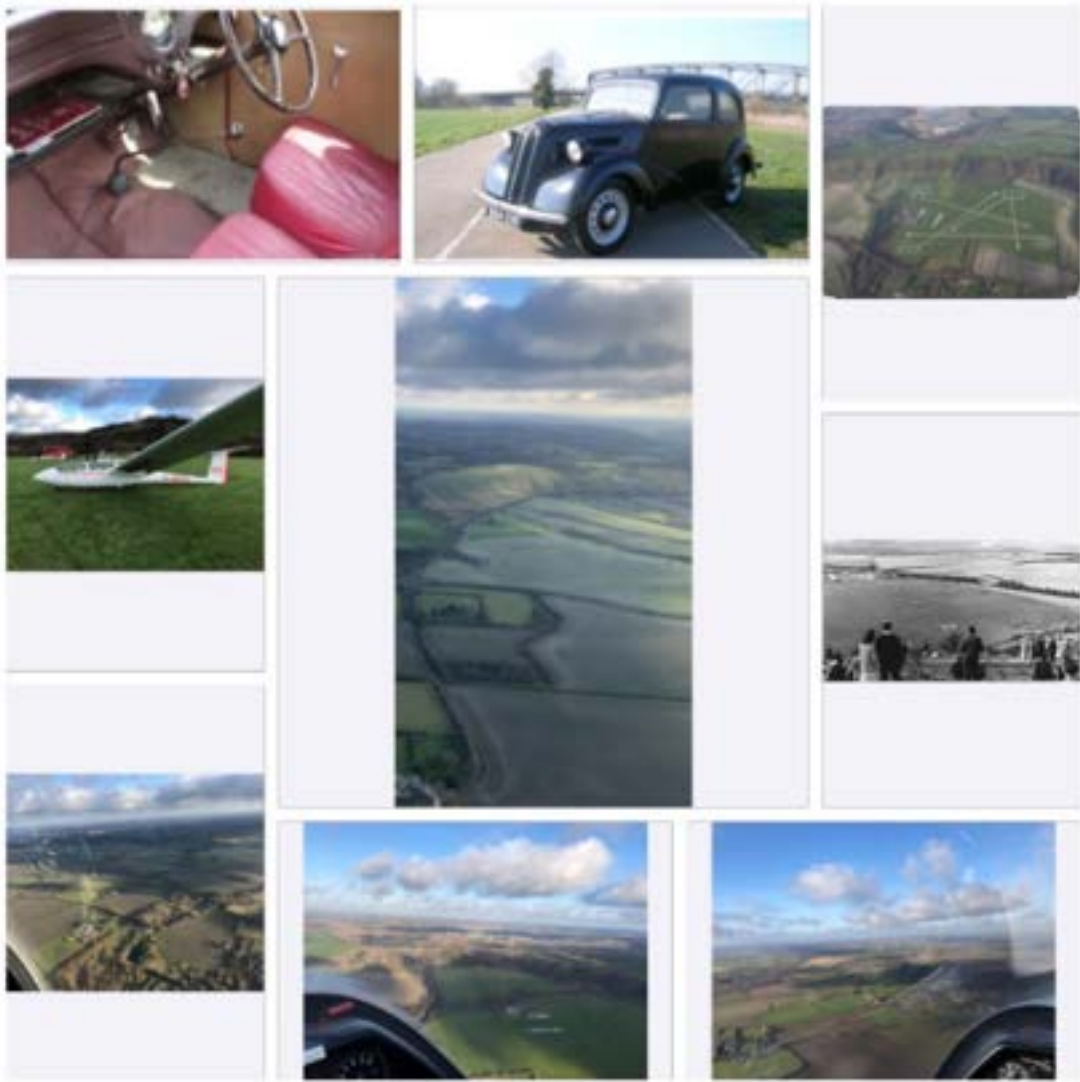
Once I started gliding and got solo the opportunity to fly at Dunstable became a reality. I asked Claudia if we could fly there together. Cloudy took me on my first ever cross- country flight from Weston on the Green. I wrote a previous article about this in Final Glide.

On the 14th of December 2024 I made my first flight at the London Gliding Club. It was over sixty years since I first went there. It’s always strange visiting somewhere you are familiar with on the outside but have never been inside. It was the same going round the top-secret rocket factory at Westcott for the first time after it closed. I was made very welcome at Dunstable as I entered the unique art deco clubhouse. The restaurant is fabulous with views out across the airfield. Tell your friends about the café because its open to everyone and much better than the National Trust one on top of the Downs.

We walked the gliders out to the launch-point at the foot of the hill. The airfield is like the fairways at St Andrews. It’s difficult to find a flat piece! A third person always walks in front of the glider to prevent roll aways. I managed the crosswind take off all right, but the low-level turbulence caught me out and Claudia came to my rescue. We were quickly up to 2200ft towed by the Robin tug.



I pulled the release and off we went. Edlesborough church with its diagonal powerlines marks one of the boundaries and the pig-farm marks the no go area above 1000ft towards the hill.



We were lucky to catch the one day with a beautiful break in the weather. Waddesdon Hill was clear on the horizon. I remember picking out the chalk lion cut into the hill from Waddesdon as a child. After a few runs up and down the ridge it was time to land. We left the hill at about 600 ft, flew away towards the west and turned back towards the airfield, making the unusual turning approach from the abbreviated circuit. Claudia did the landing as I overshot the paving stone marker. It's quite tricky for a newbie at Dunstable. It was cold so it felt good to get back to the warmth of the café and a mug of tea.

A very fulfilling day, it's always a buzz to achieve a lifetime ambition. Thank you Cloudy.





Varsity Match 2025 by Teddy Ong



The Oxford team consisted of Adam Hu, Teddy Ong, Brooke Ma, and Sergey Ichtchenko. We owe many thanks to Pete Atkinson for towing ESB there and back, as well as instructing on the days. We also thank Simon Smith from CGC for helping us with check flights and running the airfield.

The first day's scores were scrubbed due to less-than-ideal weather—though, in hindsight it was acceptable. The second day brought improved weather, with the Cambridge team producing the top scorer, but Oxford having a higher normalised team score. The third day had the best weather with strong thermals that went above 5000ft. Sergey was sent solo by Pete onto the Junior, and made a rapid improvement in his flight times. Adam also achieved the highest score on the Oxford team.

The Oxford-Cambridge Varsity match was held at Gransden Lodge from 16 to 19th June. The Oxford team consisted of Adam Hu, Teddy Ong, Brooke Ma, and Sergey Ichtchenko. We owe many thanks to Pete Atkinson for towing ESB there and back, as well as instructing on the days. We also thank Simon Smith from CGC for helping us with check flights and running the airfield.



The rules were to have as much cumulative height gain as possible in at most 50 minutes. Teddy went for a broken climb strategy - every 500 to 1000ft, he left the climb if a better one was in sight. This did not work out too well, especially since a few climbs were declared invalid as they were less than 500 ft. Others went for a more traditional strategy of taking climbs to the top, and then air-braking down as much as possible.

The last day was very blue and hot. Only Thibaut (from Cambridge) and Brooke successfully stayed up for any significant amount of time. The day was scrubbed whilst Brooke was still in the air, but she managed to stay up and outclimb a paraglider who had to land-out at GRL!

Only 2 out of the 4 days counted towards scores. Victory was declared for OUGC!

(Raw scores)

Day 1: Teddy: 141, Brooke: 137, Adam: 61, Sergey: 73

Day 2: Teddy: 167, Brooke: 151, Adam: 188, Sergey: 106



Team Photo (from left): Brooke Ma, Teddy Ong, Adam Hu, Sergey Ichtchenko (absent). Darren Lim, Chenxuan Ji (formerly OUGC), Darius Danaei, Thibaut Perami. Sunset on the last day, ESB de-rigged and ready to go home.



Thanks to all who helped to de-rig and rig ESB at Weston!

An Expedition of (Literally) Ups and Downs by Adam Hu + Haixuan Liu



Earlier this year in spring, OGC made a trip to Camphill for its annual expedition on the 14th to 18th April. Following a rather impromptu decision, four members of OUGC (Yana, Adam, Kester, Haixuan) decided to tag along. Everyone had loads of fun in the end despite numerous setbacks along the way. In many ways, this was a successful and unforgettable expedition! We are very grateful to Richard Markham for organising the trip and to our hosts at the Derbyshire and Lancashire Gliding Club for this opportunity to experience their magnificent airfield.

As we were originally planning to join for the whole week, we arrived at Camphill late in the evening on the Sunday before. A few days prior, all weather forecasts were already not looking the greatest, but seeing as we had already booked a lovely Cotswold Airbnb to stay at, we had to remain optimistic. As expected, we were greeted by little sunshine and strong winds on our first day, and most of it was spent on familiarising ourselves with the airfield.

Sitting on a hilltop with sloped terrain, the airfield was a stark contrast to the flat and large piece of land at WOTG, both in terms of ground operations and flying. The relatively harsh

weather conditions were definitely not helping (a cable break (dyneema) landed on top of the bus)!

It was also around then when all of us at Camphill found out that Cecilia and Gordon had run into issues with their trailer while transporting their DG-1000 glider - it had to be brought back to WOTG... What was originally supposed to be a routine transport became a huge back and forth, but they pressed on and made it to Camphill in the evening, albeit without their glider.



Just when you think it couldn't have gotten any worse on the second day, it did... To begin with, the weather was still unimpressive, but events soon took a rather *downhill turn*, and it's probably best to leave it at that... At the end of the day, everyone gathered at the clubhouse for a beer and dinner, followed by a group photo. The tractor had been down there before and was already in need of a new bonnet!



Day three flying was cancelled as it was raining all day. This gave us all time to have a much-needed lie-in (Yana was sick). We went shopping at Morrisons, and cooked some delicious food. Kester turned out to be an amazing cook, and we had dinner while watching the Champions League, where Arsenal beat Real Madrid.



Note imposter in photo!

On the fourth day, the weather has slightly improved, and most of us managed to get a flight or two in. The ridge was also working somewhat on that day, so some of our members managed to do a bit of ridge flying! Adam also passed his Bronze theory exam!

By this point, since the weather had not been the greatest for the whole week, almost everyone decided that it was not worth the time to make a trip to the airfield on our final

day. Most of us opted to go on a hike (led by Richie) instead! Although the hike was originally planned to be around 40 minutes long, it ended up being much longer as we took multiple detours (or wrong turns perhaps). Nevertheless, the hike was quite scenic and we came across several interesting



Including a garlic field and a beaver(?) shaped rock.



On Saturday, we got up at 4:30am to get to Weston on the Green at 8:30am. We then proceeded to fly more on that day than the entire expedition combined.

The Big one (27.5.1990) by Phil Hawkins

[In 1990 John Giddins and I had recently sold our Std Cirrus (873) in which I had flown regional competitions and many big tasks throughout the 1980s, although I had never yet done 500km. For the 1990 season I was flying an insurance share in an ASW-19 (877) belonging to Tony Boyce, who had just bought a DG-202.

Modern wizardry including mobile phones, moving map displays and GPS loggers were all in the future ~ in this era 35 years ago phones were still wired in to your house. We used clockwork barographs scratching lines on smoky paper, cameras with black and white film, and navigated with actual paper maps. The John Willy calculator was a sort of circular slide rule device made from bits of white plastic, marked up according to the approximate L/D ratio of your glider.]

After the TV news the phone rang: it was Tony. "Hey, Phil," he said. "What do you think of the weather for tomorrow?"

"Okay" I answered. "What's up?"

"Well, you know John has just done two five hundreds in a row."

"Oh, yeah."

"No, really. He managed to switch off the barograph on the first one while he was stowing his spare clothes before takeoff."

This I could believe. "So he went and did another one the next day?" I said incredulously.

"How about tomorrow?" he prompted.

"Three five hundred days in a row? That's asking a bit much."

"The pressure is still high."

"That isn't necessarily a good thing," I pointed out. "It might be blue."

"I've got the task worked out. Westbury Chimney, Bedford, Ludlow."

"Let's see what it looks like in the morning," I said. I put the phone down and spent two hours gazing at the map. I drew a triangle around Ely Cathedral and Pen y Fan, then rubbed it out and went to bed.

Next morning the sky was full of bad omens. Mind you, I'm not an expert. *Don't listen to the experts.* I've decided that it *isn't* necessarily a bad thing if the contrails are long and broad and the sky is full of tangled cirrus. The only thing this affects is your morale after reading too

many articles by the experts. Consequently, I didn't go to the airfield early enough and I rigged the ASW-19 with a fairly low morale.

The wind was light south-westerly but was forecast to be south-easterly by the time launching started. The launch point was therefore positioned at the west end of the airfield which I thought was placing altogether too much reliance on the forecasters getting it right. However, the wind direction probably wouldn't matter too much since it was very light, and the winch had recently been beefed up with its hydraulic drive system. This gave an exceptionally smooth takeoff and rotation into the climb, together with an increased cable speed in nil wind conditions.

Tony was doing his best to get me organised, giving me the turning points and a blank declaration form to fill in. I had to make a return trip to my home to fetch forgotten items such as camera film and hat, but eventually I got to the end of the checklist and pushed the glider into the launch queue. Tony was in front of me in his DG-202.

We had taken things easy thus far because no club gliders had yet been spotted in soaring flight. Contrails were no longer persisting, and as if by magic all the cirrus clouds had disappeared. It was very warm but the time was now 11.30 and still no sign of cumulus.

As soon as the K-8 appeared to be circling above winch height we took our launches. As I feared it was hot, scratchy and horrible for the first half-hour but thermal tops were rising and lift strengths were gradually improving. Even at this stage I gained the impression from radio chatter that the first leg of our task, away to the south-west, was in the wrong direction. From the top of the inversion, cumulus could be seen in the distance to the north-east. I began to wish that I hadn't rubbed out my Ely task.

At one point a voice said on the radio: "One of the big boys will do a thousand today." At the time I was scratching at 1200 feet. *Not over Oxford they won't*, I thought.

We began our task at exactly 12.30 at around 3000 feet near the airfield. I suggested to Tony that we should see what was over Oxford, but at this time it was a half-hearted suggestion at best. Encouragingly, however, the Oxford built-up area produced strong lift peaking to 8 knots which took us to over 4000 feet.

"We'll get cumulus before long with lift like this," I said to Tony.

"You think so?"

"On the other hand, who needs clouds with thermals like this?"

"As long as you can find them," he remarked.

Nominal track for the first leg was over Faringdon but I headed more to the south towards Wantage since faint cumulus threads could be seen in the distance over the Downs. After a long glide we found another equally strong thermal which went even higher, and again I was lured to the south by faint clouds which did not seem to be getting any closer.

The next few thermals were somewhat disappointing, even one with a wispy cloud at the top of it. I slowed down a bit and tried to stay high since it was obvious that the inversion was coming down as we made progress towards the south-west. The visibility was not as good as it had been near Oxford and I spent some time identifying the roads in the Marlborough – Calne – Devizes area. The major junction half way from Marlborough to Calne is quite prominent.

Approaching Devizes I said to Tony: “Can you see the turning point?”

“Affirm,” he replied. A wisp of white smoke could be seen in the distance beyond Keevil airfield.

“I’m quite glad we haven’t got much further to go in this direction,” I told him. Over Devizes itself there was a large confused area of weak lift which we played with for a couple of turns without getting anywhere. Feeling a tilt under the high wing I changed the direction of turn and wandered around for a bit, and suddenly there was 4 knots of lift in a small core.

“How did you know that was there?” Tony asked.

“I booked it,” I joked.

However, this thermal didn’t go very high and the next top-out near Keevil was the lowest since Weston-on-the-Green. I started a glide towards the turning point in persistent sink. Tony asked me which side my camera was mounted. As I was using my hand-held Olympus it didn’t matter, but I elected to turn to the right. I realised that he was going to turn the other way, but he was slightly behind me. I looked at my watch and estimated the first leg (about 95km) had taken about 1¼ hours, which seemed reasonable with the slow start.

After making certain I was in the correct zone I took two rather hurried photos and headed back towards Keevil in unremitting sink. I was hoping there would be local soarers to help with thermal spotting, but we were out of luck. A yellow K-6 was the only glider in sight and he was too far away and too high to be of any use to us. Horrors! Down to 1400ft and blundering about, I found a patch of zero sink and cradled it lovingly whilst wondering what to do.

The queue of gliders waiting to be launched on the runway below was not an encouraging sight at this point, I have to say. Presumably Keevil pilots are as adept as any, and it would have been nice to see them dotted around the sky rather than in line astern at 0 feet.

After several minutes of scratching during which we gained practically nothing, I noticed that the local wind was north-east since we were drifting back towards the chimney. I decided to take a chance and flew directly into wind i.e. back towards the centre of Keevil airfield in the hope of finding a better thermal bubble in the wake of the first. Luckily this paid off and we were soon climbing again at a healthy rate.

The next glide brought us back to the high ground north of Devizes and the thermals there were markedly better. I told Tony the difficult bit was over, then began to dolphin towards some more wisps of cloud north of Marlborough. Miles away to the north, probably somewhere near Swindon, a big black column of smoke could be seen.

My dolphin ended over the M4 motorway about midway between Membury and Swindon. I was in the strongest thermal yet under a thin but heaving cloud and the vario was peaking at 8 to 10 knots. I looked around for Tony but couldn't see him.

"Are you still with me?" I asked.

"Dropping behind a bit," he commented shortly.

The climb finished at around 5000 feet and another long blue gap was visible ahead. I was longing to reach the good cumulus which could be seen in the far distance, but I estimated they were still beyond Oxford.

Cruising across the Vale of the White Horse towards Abingdon at about 70 knots I opened my packet of crisps which at this height had doubled in size until it was popped. After the crisps my honey and banana sandwich was very tempting but I decided to leave it until later.

I also had a plastic bottle of orange juice which kept getting in the way no matter where I put it. In the Cirrus we used to have a mounted bottle behind my shoulder, with a sucking tube fixed to the microphone boom. I had always considered this as a bit of a gimmick which we allowed ourselves, but now I realised that the alternative was nothing but a nuisance. I couldn't put the bottle anywhere on the right side of the cockpit because it got in the way of my elbow during stick movements. Nor could it rest on the left side because then I couldn't get at the trim knob with my left hand. There wasn't room on my lap because this restricted the backward movement of the stick, and if I put it over either of my shoulders I was afraid that it would disappear out of reach behind the seat back. In the end I rested it in the valley between my upper left arm and my chest. A better solution must be found, I feel.

A climb at Abingdon gave me nearly 5000 feet although this one was "only" about 6 knots, and the next long glide took me to a point over the new M40 roadworks a couple of miles south of Bicester. There was something big with long floppy wings above me here.

At this time the cumulus formations were still frustratingly far ahead and seemed to be receding, which may or may not have been an illusion. My next glide was towards Calvert where I could see a definite cloud shadow on the ground. When I got there it had gone but the lift was breathtaking ~ a steady 10 knots plus from 3000 to 5500 feet. Examination of the barograph trace shows that this was the strongest thermal of the day since it is the only climb which leans backwards.

I spoke to Tony again here and learned that he was at Bicester only about 12 miles behind me, so he was still doing well. Back into dolphin mode for a while under the clouds, with a fairly short climb at Milton Keynes, I reached the second turning point at 3.40pm, three hours and ten minutes into the flight. The 150km second leg had taken just under two hours.

The turning point was at Bromham about two miles west of Bedford, where the A428 crosses the river Ouse. I noticed there were in fact two bridges: an old stone bridge with several arches and a new bypass bridge just south of the town. I was fairly sure that it was the latter which Tony had identified as the actual TP, but just to be sure I took photographs which included both bridges and which would be in the correct zone for either one.

Heading west the sun was in my eyes and the visibility was poor. Ludlow was 150km away but already I knew that I was going to have lots of trouble finding it, situated as it is in the middle of a rather featureless area on the half-million map. However, the clouds were big, high, widely spaced and fruity. There was no more dolphin flying to be had but I was enjoying myself immensely all the same. It had become a classic climb-and-glide day.

Another 5000ft thermal near Olney, then I headed to the left of the nominal track line, mainly to give myself the extra thousand feet of clearance over Daventry CTA. The next climb was found a few miles short of Chipping Warden with the Byfield mast visible on a hill to the north-west. Skirting the edge of the lower shelf in the CTA I headed for Stratford, reaching this at the bottom of my height band, around 2500 feet.

I had not heard from Tony for some time and he was not answering my radio calls. He recently had some sort of radio problem with the DG-202 so I hoped he was still making good progress. The cloud at Stratford was booming and I reached a new high of 5900 feet. These long high glides were a good opportunity to relax and have a drink. I was hungry but hadn't yet eaten my sandwich: I had promised it to myself if I reached Ludlow.

I began to feel concerned about the cloud development since the visibility had deteriorated so badly that at times the whole sky seemed to be filled with solid cloud. In places the ground below was noticeably darker. It was reaching the stage where I knew from experience that some pilots would have given up, but perhaps competition flying has given me not only general experience of other pilots' capabilities but a sort of dogged persistence of my own.

This persistence takes many forms: here are a couple of them, and when I say never I really mean never:

a) I never use a speed-to-fly ring or a speed director.

b) I never switch the radio off in flight.

My inter-thermal speed depends entirely upon my level of confidence at the time, which can change from moment to moment, and has nothing to do with tedious mechanical wimwams like speed-to-fly rings or their electronic equivalent. It ranges from 50 knots (survival mode) to 80 knots (stubble fire dead ahead). Flying faster than 80 in a Standard Class glider is strictly for crossing finish lines and other aerobatics. On this occasion I was pootling along at around 60 knots towards Droitwich and concentrating 100% on map reading and studying the clouds. Continual speed variations supposedly based on fluctuations in the sink rate are drag-inducing and a sheer waste of valuable *thinking* time in my opinion.

My second "never-do" was responsible for a considerable lift in my spirits at this time: I heard a pilot (Triple Echo) reporting that he was passing Stourport at 6000 feet. This was 20 miles ahead and right on track. I could hear other pilots enjoying themselves near Shobdon. This kind of thing is tremendously reassuring when the sky looks grey and doubtful. It means that you are definitely not trying to fly into a gradually deteriorating weather situation, and that some effort in getting across a local duff patch will be worthwhile.

After passing Alcester I was making a mediocre climb in the middle of nowhere when I saw a large bank of almost black cloud slowly coming into view in the direction of Worcester. It was tall but virtually shapeless apart from the fact that parts of the base were firm and flat. It was quite a long way off my track, but I headed for it after thinking more about the problem of navigating into Ludlow.

My reasoning was that to find Ludlow in the poor visibility it would be necessary to fly on a compass heading for a timed period, and this would only be possible if I was starting from a good height. I have tried before to find Ludlow using ground features and it is quite difficult unless the visibility is good enough for the white aerials on the hill to the east of Ludlow to be seen. I would be lucky to spot them today.

Fortunately, the black cloud at Worcester produced strong lift to the highest point of the day ~ just on 7000 feet after a short cloud climb. I estimated that Ludlow was 20 nautical miles away on compass course 300 degrees. The ground from this height was very hazy and indistinct. I noted the time (it was 4.55pm) and set off at 60 knots for a 20-minute glide.

Virtually on cue a large town appeared through the murk ahead, but the road and railway patterns didn't look right and there was no castle to be seen. It didn't take long to realise that this was Leominster and I was about 9 miles south of where I should have been. In theory this indicated that the upper wind in this area was northerly at about 25 knots but this didn't seem believable. The other possibility is that the compass needs adjusting. This was the first time since I began flying the ASW-19 that I had needed to rely on the compass in this way.

The sky was perhaps not quite so dark as in the Worcester area, but generally speaking it looked rather dead. The sun was still fairly bright but seemed to have no discernible warmth. I was thinking that a land-out was inevitable since the afternoon was drawing to a close and home seemed a long way away. I had brief fantasies of landing at Shobdon followed by a long aerotow retrieve.

The only cloud mass visible from Leominster (you wouldn't have described it as a single cloud) was to the north-west and I headed for that to top up my height. The nearest parts of it were directly over a large quarry on the side of a hill, but it extended for several miles to the north. Shobdon was nearby but I couldn't see it, nevertheless I could sense it as an oasis of help in the cold grey desert of the sky.

There was a familiar voice on the radio: "Oxford base, I can't raise 877. Haven't heard from him recently." It was Chris Reynolds in his Skylark 4.

"438, 877 is near Ludlow," I said at a convenient moment. "It's looking a bit doubtful here."

"Have you been round Ludlow yet?" he asked.

"Not yet," I replied. I didn't tell him the reason, which was faulty navigation. He relayed the message back to Oxford.

"877 from 79?" said a woman's voice. This was Jane Randle flying her Nimbus out of Aston Down.

"79 go ahead."

"I'm in six knots under a cloud street at Worcester, Phil. Keep going," she advised.

"That's where I need to get back to," I agreed, thinking that the blank countryside between Ludlow and Worcester was something of a psychological barrier.

Following a curving path more and more northwards towards Ludlow I wandered underneath the blackest parts of the cloud but could not immediately find any lift. Then I noticed that the hanging edge of the cloud to my left was frothy and rimmed with rising tendrils, dark against the sun-bright haze in the background. An abrupt 90 degree turn was required, and within a few seconds there was 8 knots of lift, which was the strongest for a long time. This took me to just over 6000 feet once more, and I knew that I just had to follow the cloud north-eastwards until Ludlow came into view. The last ramparts of this enormous floating structure in the sky coincided with the end of the hill as it sloped down to Ludlow ahead. The correlation was not lost on me.

Now I was imagining the cloud as a fertile island in an endless grey ocean. I took advantage of the last dark edge to climb to its base at 6800 feet before venturing out into the calm air beyond. The sandy brown castle at Ludlow was clearly visible now and I took a series of pictures whilst cruising gently in a wide arc around the western side of the city. This isn't exactly classic turning point technique but was tired. I did remember to check the time: it was 5.35pm.

At last I could eat my sandwich! Cruising ahead on course 110 I munched it gratefully as if savouring a hard-won trophy. The nominal track for home was 125 degrees but I was making a correction to allow for the northerly wind which I thought I might be in. The sky ahead was quite grey for a while but gradually a few weak-looking lumps of cumulus came into view.

When I next located my position I was much nearer to Stourport than Worcester, which was a great puzzle to me. It was as if the wind which had blown me off course on the outward track had suddenly stopped. Dismissing this as one of the mysteries of life I worked on weak lift to the south-west of Stourport, followed by another calm glide towards Droitwich. A similar fragmented cloud was found there. At this time of day (it was now after 6pm) the most important thing was to stay high since the conditions were likely to be largely unsoarable below about half the height of cloudbase. Nevertheless, I could not yet quite believe that I was going to get home.

Gliding peacefully on after Droitwich the little gremlin on my shoulder started whispering in my ear about landing at Bidford but I didn't listen to him. The only cloud in the Evesham area was thin and insubstantial but it gave about two knots back up to 5500 feet, in the company of a flock of soaring gulls.

I measured the distance to go using the edge of the John Willy calculator. This told me that Enstone was already "well in" and that Weston-on-the-Green was "probable" so I pushed gently on. Looking out at the wing leading edges I noted what seemed like a thousand bugs per metre robbing me of vital performance.

Then I saw the ridge beyond Honeybourne also had feeble looking clouds above it, and I detoured towards these in the hope of getting another five hundred feet or so. I heard John Gibbons on the radio, told him that I was about 25 miles out and heard him relaying the message to Weston-on-the-Green. I realised the voice at Weston was Tony, so he was back on the ground there.

The Honeybourne cloud was actually slightly better than the one at Evesham, and from a height of 6000 feet I began my final glide in totally calm air. The visibility was slightly better than it had been around Ludlow, but there were no more clouds to be seen. The sky was ending the day with a sort of uniform brassy sheen to it. I had been high for some time and was getting quite cold, especially my feet.

As the miles drifted by I was nervously measuring and re-measuring the remaining distance, but need not have worried. As is often the case I had several hundred feet of excess height which was burnt off in the last few miles after passing Enstone. Nearing home, I diverted slightly to the south to avoid over-flying the hangar, and then made a pretty good competition-style finish over the heads of a small group of spectators at the launch point. At the risk of under-stating the obvious I can report this was quite a nice feeling!

Tony had apparently returned to the airfield about three hours before me after reaching Milton Keynes, without going round the Bedford turning point. He had already hitched up the ASW-19 trailer as if expecting a retrieve. He claimed this was to ensure I got back, but I reckon he's got no faith in me. The trouble is, sometimes I haven't either.

With all the excitement I forgot to note my finish time but estimated it as 7.16pm from the barograph trace later. I had been 6hr 46min on task (507km) for a handicap speed of 83.25kph. The flight was worth over 3000 ladder points.

I believe that every flight should teach you something, and this flight taught me two things:

- 1) It is a complete myth that you need thermals by 10am and fair-weather cumulus all day long in order to complete a task of this size.
- 2) On a day which does start early and provides more uniform distribution of clouds in the classic pattern, 750km is possible in a Standard Class glider. I shall do it.

[I never did, of course. A very much shorter version of this tale was published in the April/May 1991 edition of Sailplane & Gliding. I remember the editor particularly liked the last three paragraphs and asked me not to touch them.]

After 1990 I wasn't regularly flying Standard Class gliders. I bought the Mini-Nimbus (147) in 1991 together with Tom Lamb, and spent the next two or three years learning how to fly it properly. I loved it and made two more 500km flights (Salisbury-Lincoln and Ely-Talybont) but I never attempted anything bigger. By the mid-1990s it had become necessary to embrace the electronics revolution for badge claims and competitions,

and I never really bought into that in a big way. I did, however, continue to participate in the Inter Club League for many years.

If you are bored and really have nothing better to do, there are more of my stories available to view on the Cairngorm Gliding Club web site (www.gliding.org) ~ see the About/Trivia page.]

Editors Notes

1. A big thank you to Eifion for all his previous editions of Final Glide.
2. Also thank you to Jess for her IT skills. Without her help I couldn't have published this. Jess also composed the front cover.
3. Thanks to everyone who has written an article. I know some of you lead very busy lives so special thanks to you.
4. If you have enjoyed Final Glide why not keep up the tradition and have a go at an article next year. (Preferably in Word format with Jpeg images!)
5. Take a few photos of your specialist subject during 2026. I know I always look forward to seeing Final Glide on Christmas Eve.

Solution to Paul Smith's crossword puzzle:

