

Honourable Company of Air Pilots Gliding Scholarship Report

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During the summer of 2024, I had the privilege of being awarded a gliding scholarship from the Honourable Company of Air Pilots, which I completed alongside another scholar at the Scottish Gliding Centre in Portmoak. The week was incredibly rewarding, and I am surprised to say that I enjoyed gliding even more than I expected (and I had pretty high expectations). If you are a prospective applicant but are unsure if it's right for you, I hope that by the end of this report you will be convinced!

Structure of the course

After arriving at Portmoak on Monday, I was introduced to the other HCAP scholar, Joy, who I was happy to learn was also an RAF Air Cadet, and our instructor, David. I was given a brief tour of the airfield and before I knew it, I was up in the air. This fast pace set the tone for the rest of the week. Our day began around 9 AM with the weather briefing, during which we had the chance to meet other pilots and club members, all of which were very inviting and happy to chat or give us advice. We then went to the hangars to perform the daily inspection on the gliders and tow them out to the launch point; helping out with the pre-flight procedures was a great way to gain insight into how the airfield operates and the teamwork that is required to keep things flying smoothly. Before every flight we had to complete a walkaround checklist, which soon became second nature.

As the week progressed, we moved from practising basic to more complex (fun) manoeuvres, such as recovering from stalls, spins, and spiral dives. If anyone has the chance to fly with David, ask him to put the glider into a spin. He's brilliant.

When not flying, the next best thing was driving the utility vehicles out to tow the landed gliders, despite the airfield's humble speed limit.

My most memorable flight was also my longest one, 1 hour and 17 minutes, during which I mostly practised ridge soaring and David demonstrated different types of stalls such as a reduced-G and a wing drop stall.

The most challenging lesson for me was flying the landing circuit, which clicked only after I had done it in the simulator more times than I can count. As is the norm in Scotland, we were at the mercy of the volatile weather, which added an extra level of difficulty to the manoeuvres (Watch the horizon? What horizon!?). Despite a few rain-rushed landings, we were thankfully able to fly every day of the week.

Flying usually ended around 5 PM, and in the evenings it was lovely to relax and have dinner with everyone. We also had the opportunity to see some behind-the-scenes glider maintenance in the workshop and on one occasion we went hiking up to the ridge; not only was it lovely to

walk on the hills we had been flying over every day but David also made sure to make a lesson out of it, and had us estimating angles of elevation from our altitude to the airfield. There is so much I could say about my week at Portmoak that this report does not do it justice, but I will say that the best aspect of it was the gradual build in confidence that I felt when flying, which is a testament to everyone at the club who worked hard to coordinate an efficient flying schedule for us over the course of the week. IDEAL!

The numbers

- Over the course of the week I completed 15 launches.
- 3 of them were by aerotow; the rest were winch.
- My total gliding time adds up to just over 8 hours. The duration of flights were variable depending on weather and the lesson: my shortest was 8 minutes; a launch solely focused on coordinating the landing circuit and flying the approach with airbrakes.
- We flew two types of aircraft - first the K21 and later the Perkoz. Personally, I felt a lot more confident once we started flying in the Perkoz - it must be that Polish engineering!

My advice

If you are considering applying for the scholarship...first of all, I cannot recommend it highly enough. Gliding is wonderful, and you truly do get out what you put in. To make the most of your time at a gliding club, my best advice for you is to get involved on the ground as much as possible. Speak to everyone - there is so much you can learn from other pilots and instructors. Some of them know some great jokes as well.

Thank you to the Honourable Company of Air Pilots for giving me this opportunity to get up in the air for the first time, and a big thank you to everyone at the SGC for making the week so memorable; you know who you are, and I hope to see you all again soon!

