

Gliding Scholarship Report James Nicholas

I am James Nicholas, and I am one of the very privileged 2024 Honourable Company of Air Pilots Gliding Scholarship Winners. My scholarship took place at the Derbyshire and Lancashire Gliding Club which is on top of a hill. Not only did it provide the opportunity of ridge soaring with a strong south westerly wind it also gave us an incredible view of the surrounding Peak District. Pete, my instructor was so familiar with the area there wasn't a land feature on the horizon he couldn't name and explain to us.

One of the many highlights was the catering provided by our amazing hosts Sylvia and John. The welcoming Sunday roast on the evening of our arrival really set the tone for the brilliant week ahead. Our rooms were also cozy and perfectly prepared for our arrival. We were quick to find the pool table and crown an unbeaten winner for the rest of the week. In fact the entire building felt very homely and friendly.



I first looked at the weather throughout the week on Sunday and I was glad to discover we couldn't be luckier as it was predicted to be sunny all week. However, it never felt too warm at the airfield as cliff soaring came at a price of a cold wind chill on the ground. That Sunday evening, we were also taught how to drive the various tractors and gator to prepare us for the many aircraft retrievals to come.

We also got the chance to watch how the members of the club put the many gliders away into the hangar and what a jigsaw puzzle it was. However, we were still positive about being able to help out the next day.

On Monday we all arrived to breakfast in anticipation of our first launch. I started the day with a full English throughout the entire week – I wouldn't have it any other way! We then made our way to the hanger and helped move the aircraft onto the launch area where we were shown by Pete how to help with the Daily Inspection (DI) of the gliders. After the aircraft was DI'd we collected parachutes and towed the aircraft to the launch point.

On my first launch Pete demonstrated the effects of controls and then allowed me to control the glider so that I could practice what he had taught me. What I found extraordinary was how short the ground roll was until we were up and into the launch. It felt like I was being sling shotted off of a hill!





One of my most privileged experiences was taking control for the entire flight which includes the launch, circuit and landing with Pete in the back. It brought together all of my previous knowledge and what I had learnt during the week. On my last launch I practiced a high cable failure. All I heard was a ping and I felt a reduction in power so I did what Pete had taught me and recovered the aircraft. It didn't occur to me that the cable release had been pulled until after we landed. It was exciting to learn what to do when things go wrong during the launch.

Every Thursday a few club members stay out on the airfield until 30 minutes after sunset to fly during the evening. After hearing about the toughy group organised by Pete many years ago, we couldn't pass up the opportunity to help the club out. I'm very thankful I chose to stay because the views during sunset were phenomenal. The atmosphere between all the people who were there was also great to share with all of the scholars. This is an experience I will never forget.

The club members were also extremely helpful in teaching us how to complete all the different jobs on the launch point. They always kept us on our toes and were patient when we were still learning. I am grateful for the fellow scholars and club member Harrison, with whom I made friends this week. I'm excited to see most of them on national events with the Air Cadets in the future.

This was my first gliding experience and I am very grateful for the opportunity that the Air Pilots has given me. Aside from the gliding skills that I now have, I believe I learnt invaluable lessons of decision making, teamwork, effective communication and awareness of my surroundings throughout the week. I'm sure that this experience I have gained will be crucial in any aviation career and especially the one I want to pursue.

