

ICGC Spring Tour

Cotswold Gliding Club, Aston Down, Gloucestershire

Attendance

3 current Imperial students & 1 Alumni. (1 committee member)

Dates of Tour

27th of March 2010 to the 4th of April 2010.

Tour Report

The tour began with an early train from Paddington to Swindon on March 27th 2010. Upon arrival in Swindon, those who had travelled by train met with a Hannah, who has a car, and travelled the final miles to the Airfield by road. Much of the rest of Saturday was spent preparing for the week ahead: tents were pitched, 496 rigged and supplies brought in. We also met Mike Randell who would be our instructor for the week and Andy Cockerell, an Imperial College Alumni who is also an instructor and member of the Cotswold Gliding Club

Sunday was the first flying day, the weather was particularly good and all three students were able to fly. I was almost solo at this point and had three short flights practicing Circuits at the unfamiliar site with Andy. Hannah and Chris both flew for over an hour each in good thermic conditions. This was particularly useful for Chris; the long flight provided a great opportunity for him to get lots of time on the controls and practice the essential coordinated control inputs of stick and rudder together.

The weather took a turn for the worse from Monday to Friday. Flights were still possible in between showers and all three of us were able to make good progress. Mike Randell, who as well as being an experienced gliding instructor is an ex-RAF fast jet pilot, was impressed with the Handling of 496 and Chris took particular pleasure in enjoying the demonstration of some interesting manoeuvres. By Thursday I was ready to go solo for the first time, however the crosswind was too strong. During the week the benefits of having the Airfield to ourselves were clear; we achieved far more launches than would have been possible at Lasham in similar weather conditions.

Come the second weekend the weather had improved considerably. On Saturday I was able to fly solo for the first time, after a final check flight with Mike. The three solo circuits which followed were all over eight minutes long and I felt a great sense of pride in this achievement. Hannah also flew on Saturday, although Chris had to return to London for an urgent appointment.

Both Hannah and I flew on Sunday, this time with Andy. The weather was thermic, like the previous Sunday, and I was able to fly with Andy for over an hour. His coaching in the science of finding thermals proved most useful and upon my return to Lasham the following weekend I was able to fly

for 92 minutes solo. Hannah and Chris were both able to make progress towards going solo themselves throughout the week, with both getting many ticks on their progress cards.

The advantages of having the Airfield to ourselves on the weekdays were clear; despite the poor weather for much of the week everyone was able to get far more flights than would be possible at the busier Lasham in similar conditions.

The benefits of flying from a different Airfield were felt by all. It is particularly useful in developing good planning and flying of circuits. When one becomes accustomed to flying at the same airfield, it is all too easy to judge circuits by always flying the same path. For example – “I need to be over this piece of road at this height and over that house at such and such a height”. This is a bad habit to get into, since when pilots reach cross country standard it’s quite likely to have to land in fields or at a different airfield to which you took off from. It is therefore essential to develop good circuit judgement early on. Flying from Aston Down highlighted this to us all and I’m certain all three of us would agree that our circuits are now far more precise, dynamic and safer. Despite always being aware of this issue myself and trying to consciously make an effort to judge every circuit as it’s flown, I have certainly noticed that I now tend to land much closer to where I plan and with much shorter ground roll.

As well as the flying, much fun was had during the evenings. We visited many local country pubs and experienced some delightful, traditional food. Of particular note were the massive two-in-one Steak and Cauliflower Cheese pies. The members of Aston Down were all very friendly and accommodating; we felt most welcome. The adventure of Camping in rain and strong winds proved a little too much for some on one occasion, with two attendees electing to sleep on the sofa in the clubhouse for an evening!

Improvements for the future:

Although the tour can be considered a success in that three members were all able to have a considerable number of flights and each make great progress in their personal flying careers, the low attendance was somewhat disappointing. This was largely attributed to many club members having examinations in the first weeks of summer term. In the future this will be taken into account and next year we will try to make our tour more compatible with the exam period.

Financial state of the Tour

Students paid for their own accommodation, food bills and launch fees directly. The club also waived soaring fees (normally 24p per minute) for the duration of the tour; this a club tradition.

Originally it was planned to take a minibus, however due to the small number of attendees it was felt best to instead travel by train and members cars. The main cost to the club therefore was in towing 496 to Aston Down and back again. We are currently awaiting fuel receipts to reimburse those involved.

Clubs and Societies Board
11.05.10

Photographs:

Away we go:



About to take off on first solo:



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496 at Aston Down Launch Point:

