

Varsity 2015: Two Blue(s) days

As most will know, there is a bit of a rivalry between Oxford and Cambridge University. This is also the case for the gliding clubs at both universities, leading to the annual Varsity match between the Oxford University Gliding Club (OUGC) and the Cambridge University Gliding Club (CUGC). Participating in a Varsity match also means you might earn a prestigious blue jacket!

The Gliding Varsity is a soaring competition. Points are scored for flight duration and height gain. There is a max duration of 50 minutes per flight, with points deducted for every minute over 50. Best scoring flight of the day for each pilot is scored.

Last year's edition was held at Gransden Lodge, home of CUGC, and OUGC emerged victorious there. The 2013 edition was held at Bicester and was also won by OUGC. This year's edition was held on the 2nd and 3rd of July, returning to Bicester, where we would have the home advantage again. Expectations were high, and our captain Arthur selected OUGC's top pilots to compete: Anthony, Ashley, Chris, me and Hayden.

Unfortunately, CUGC could only find three worthy pilots to compete: Joe, Richard and Bonan. An agreement was reached to combine 4 of our pilots in 2 pilot pairs, with only the best flight between the two counting towards the score. Unfortunately, CUGC's ASW-19 was declared unserviceable just before the match, and CUGC was unable to provide a replacement. In true gentlemanly fashion, we agreed to share 'our' gliders with them.

Because the competition was held on weekdays with relatively poor weather, we were able to use GAM, FEF, BBU and T19.

The first day started with an overcast sky, which gave plenty of time to give the CUGC pilots the necessary site checks and some conversion checks for OUGC pilots. Ashley and I converted to BBU, and Hayden converted to FEF. Late in the afternoon, some lift started to form under the overcast sky, and Hayden took off in GAM for the first soaring flight of the day, scoring 103 points. But Joe took off in our Astir shortly after Hayden's launch, and found multiple climbs for a total of 375 points! As soon as he landed, Chris jumped in the cockpit of FEF to try to make up for the difference, managing 257 points on his flight. Ashley (in BBU) and Bonan (in GAM) managed to stay up for a while in zero sink, while Richard and I only managed 5 minute circuits.

The total scores after one day: Oxford 390 – Cambridge 436. Cambridge was in the lead!



Bonan flying GAM, with Ashley in BBU to mid-left, and Chris in FEF to the top right.

The BBQ was lit up, and with Ashley showing off his grilling skills we started hoping for a good soaring day for day 2, so we could make up for the score.



BBQ in progress, plenty of meat to go around

Our prayers were heard, and all pilots were up early on the second day to rig and DI the gliders, so we would be ready to launch as soon as there was reliable lift. First to connect with some lift was Hayden, soaring FEF for 18 minutes on weak lift. Ashley launched in BBU shortly after, staying up for 39 minutes and finding some decent climbs. But then Joe set off in T19, flew for 49 minutes and scoring 5000ft height gain for 94 points.

Eager to make up for my poor performance on day one, I seated myself in BBU's cockpit. After the launch I found a nice 2kt thermal to take me to 3400ft before it started to peter out. Diving back with full airbrakes, to 2000ft, and then climbing again to 3000ft. Diving again, this time to 1200ft, and then I lost the thermal. Oh oh, I was only up for 20 minutes! After wasting some minutes and about to join the circuit, I luckily stumbled upon which turned into a nice 3 kt climb to 3000ft again. After diving back again, more time was wasted looking for the good lift. Making sure I didn't land too late, I came back after 45 minutes. In total I gained almost 7000ft, scoring 117 points for the flight!

However, Chris set off in T19 about 20 minutes after me, and he managed to get a whopping 8381ft height gain, landing after 51 minutes, beating my score by scoring 135 points! Anthony took FEF up for a 45 minute flight, scoring 113 points, while Joe took T19 again and bettered his flight by a 4 points to 98, landing after 49 minutes and 58 seconds! That's some precision timing!

Richard flew in GAM, for 47 minutes, but little height gain, scoring 69 points. After we handed BBU over to junior pilot Jack King so he could practice for his Silver Duration, Ashley took HAL up for a 48 minute flight, scoring 102 points. Bonan then took GAM up for his scoring flight, scoring 90 points after 49 minutes.

The total day scores were: Oxford: 350 - Cambridge: 256

This meant that the final score became: Oxford 740 – Cambridge 692. Victory!

We would like to thank Tony for keeping the bar open till late on quiet days so we could have a nice pint with the Cambridge pilots. We would also like to thank Julian for doing all the check-flights and supervising both OUGC and CUGC (although we are suspicious that he was rooting for the wrong team). Also many thanks to Twiggy and the weekday team, for running the launch point and being able to accommodate all our wishes while also overseeing the large number of trial lessons. And of course to Bicester Gliding Centre for making the gliders available and accommodating this year's match at Bicester. Next year we go to Gransden again, to continue our winning streak.

Dinant Riks, OUGC



The competitors, from left to right. For CUGC: Richard and Joe (Bonan left just before to catch the X5 back to Cambridge). For OUGC: Hayden, Anthony, Ashley, me and Chris