

Berwick

# Life

Thursday, September 15, 2011

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# Beginner's luck helped me land glider safely at my first attempt

Advertiser reporter *Adam Drummond* was nervous when taking a seat in the cockpit, but discovered he could be a natural

**T**HE thought of flying around the foothills of the Cheviots in a glider was a prospect that filled me with both trepidation and a degree of excitement.

The weather did try its best to put a halt to flying on the day photographer Kimberley Powell and I visited the Border Gliding Club at Milfield, near Wooler, but thankfully the skies cleared and we both got the opportunity to fly along with the club's chief flying instructor Keith Latty in a dual-control glider.

On arrival at the former RAF base we were met by club members and a group of visiting flyers from Popham, who had spent the week at the club.

The time quickly passed as we were shown around the club's facilities, much of it provided by British Gas in the late 1990s after they decided they wanted to create a gas pumping station at the end of the club's old runway at Galewood, where it had moved to in the late 80s after gravel extraction at the airfield had left the club with no other option.

As the morning wore on everyone was glancing out the clubroom windows to see the progression of the dark band of rain, or the more technically savvy were doing so on their iPads. Eventually the clouds began to break and aircraft were wheeled out. It was time to get in the air.

After Kimberley was kitted out in a parachute – not a requirement, but certainly a reassurance – Keith took her for a spin in a two-seat glider.

Once they were in the air it was my turn to get a parachute on and settled into the cockpit of another two-seater, ready for Keith to join me once he landed. Sitting there waiting, there was a fair bit of nervous energy, especially as Keith had told me that I could take the controls for a time once we were up in the air. That concerned me more than the turbulence we had been told to expect.

With Keith strapped in the rear seat and the tug aircraft hooked up, very quickly we were hurled along the grass airfield and after a few seconds the glider got lift and took to the air.

Watching the tug ahead meant I could anticipate the dips and surges as we headed towards 2,500ft, although one caught me by surprise when I glanced out the side of the cockpit – my stomach temporarily feeling like it had been left several feet below my body. But, as we rose above the College Valley the tug suddenly banked away. We were free and there was a sudden smoothness to the flight.

Keith found a patch of calm air and began to run through the controls, before letting me loose with the stick to make some turns. The very small, subtle movements needed to level the



Berwick Advertiser reporter Adam Drummond sits in one of the Border Gliding Club's dual-control gliders and (inset) an aerial view from high above the airfield at Millfield.

Pictures by: Kimberley Powell

glider's nose when straightening up was incredible. Keith then let me into the secret of why the turns had gone so easily – he'd been controlling the glider's rudder with the foot controls. But, he then left that up to me too.

It felt like being given control of a car for the first time, but everything just seemed to click, and marrying the movements of the stick with the rudder pedals somehow came naturally – even though I'd never flown anything before other than on a computer game. After a flight of around 20

minutes, we could see dark clouds and more rain heading towards us, so Keith told me to head for the airfield. A 180-degree turn was required for this, but he left the controls to me, and with a bit of quiet reassurance from Keith we were on the right heading.

Then, told to turn right and line the glider up to the right of the airfield's windsock, the cross-wind seemed to take hold, and seemed intent on lining me up squarely with the large post on which I was very aware the windsock hung from. Eventually

I had us heading to open ground, and Keith calmly instructed me to take the glider lower. This being my first experience of flying I think I subconsciously thought that really he was in control and not me, because it all happened so smoothly.

On heading close to the ground at what seemed like a very high speed I will admit I was rather concerned as Keith still hadn't told me to pull back on the stick, but then he once again calmly said 'now' and I eased back on the stick and felt the front and

then rear wheel of the glider touch down and bump across the ground to a halt.

Keith's voice, in a slightly more excited tone, then came through from behind my right ear. "You've just landed the bloody glider by yourself," he shouted.

I couldn't quite believe it, and that feeling grew stronger when Keith later added that he'd only flown with a couple of other people who landed a glider on their own on their first flight.

Being told I was a 'natural' pilot is not something I'd ever expected

to hear, ever. Even less so on my first flying experience outside of being a commercial airline passenger.

Despite it not being a great flying day, the views from several thousand feet were stunning, and once free of the tug the flight was so smooth and calming – even with me at the controls.

One thing for sure is that I will be back. The club members could not have been more helpful or welcoming, and despite a few hours of waiting it all seemed to go in a flash once we were

airborne. The club has been in existence for 43 years, but new blood is always needed, and new members, especially younger people are being sought.

Considering the experience you get, it is not that expensive to get involved, and having done it I believe everyone should give it a go – it will not be an experience you will forget in a hurry.

For more information on the club, and to arrange an 'experience flight', visit their website at [www.bordersgliding.co.uk](http://www.bordersgliding.co.uk)

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