

As I write this ,its throwing it down with rain. It's the 4th October and we have had two days of non-stop rain with Storm Alex looking to go on for several days yet. Late September, and I began to wonder if the GBLJ would be going ahead or cancelled due to Covid 19. A quick note to the BBAC forum and first of all nothing, but then Robin Batchelor posted it was ON.

This was likely to be my last chance to 'have a go' as nobody seems to know what is going to happen with our sport come 2021 , so let's see what we could do . A quick text to my ballooning buddy Rob Clements and he was up for it as he now has a recently acquired 105. We arranged a socially distanced meeting and poured over the air-map and made a few notes, we had a bit of breathing space to get thing organised as the weather was still terrible.

FLIGHT CYINDERS, between us we owned enough tanks for a six hour flight but they were not logged with his balloon so had to arrange an IR7, sort enough straps and things to hold it all together etc.

RETRIEVE CREW, our good mate Ken Scott stepped up to the plate but is being very careful to keep safe from the virus so would do the job on his own, but we were thinking it would be better to do the event in one day only, so as not to expose any of us to unnecessary risks.

Rob and I arranged to meet veteran Long Jumper Rob Bayly who was happy to pass on some tips to us L.J. virgins, that was on Thursday 8th October, and sooner than we thought, Sunday 11th looked possible with a NNW wind at 17 to 25 knots. Rob made contact with a balloon pilot friend in Oswestry who could arrange a launch site at a oft-used golf club, if we could get the predicted wind, we calculated we should pass over Gloucester, missing Bristol International to the east and end up in south Wiltshire/Dorset.

An early start on Sunday 11th. With dawn breaking as we turned off the M6 at Birmingham and the cloud cover was broken at about 3000ft, looked Ok, however the nearer we got to Oswestry the cloud was bubbling up and some with very black bases, but the lower stuff was scudding along nicely! We didn't want to take off too early because we planned to be landing about 1700hrs. so we took our time to get everything sorted, we were stood up by 0935, double check of our load and took off at 0945 into a VERY steady wind due South at 10knt.wrong direction and too slow, beautiful scenery though! we needed more speed, but we also wanted more left, the two didn't equate, but we had to try something so we eased it up to cloud-base and made a note of the wind at different hights. We got a bit more speed...Not much 20kts. best, but never a good direction , we occasionally got 150 and 160 deg. but not consistently and never fast enough. The scenery remained beautiful!

Neither of us wanted to venture above the cloud all-be-it patchy , looking behind us it was simply too lumpy and no guarantee it would give us the direction required , almost certainly not . Due south was going to take us to towards Cardiff, not what we wanted, and we would need some serious speed and a lot more gas if we wanted to get to the Minehead on the Somerset coast.

Our best direction was lower down so we trundled on at 12 / 17kts about 1000ft and enjoyed the scenery , as we approached Ross-on-Wye and the Forest of Dean, we were

down to our last two tanks both big 40s', Question = are we going over the Severn (it's quite wide just there!) or should we land, we're going pretty slowly now (sub 10) down to one and a smidgin tanks, We are going over! quick call to Ken and we are just over the river-bank, suddenly we have abandoned our south-westerly drift to a southerly, hey we don't want this ! The Bristol Channel is dammed wide! Hang on, we are now back on track! That was a relief . One tank down to 20% , the other Just registering and the sensitive area of the Slimbridge Wildfowl centre in front of us, we kept it fairly high until we passed the edge and Rob put it nicely into a dry grass field as I waved to the likely land-owner and family. As it turned out it was, we were plied with cups of tea and Orio biscuits, but we had finished them off before Ken got to the field!(As it turned out Ken had kept us in sight for the whole flights but had to detour to cross the Severn via Gloucester, so was delayed just enough to let us pack it away). Landing time 1625hrs, 6hrs 40 mins, 83 mls. Zero drag

We knew we were not going to win any prizes, but we both enjoyed the flight immensely .

Ray Shortall.

Long (ish) Jump 11th October 2020. Ray Shortall/Rob Clements G-JIMA Z-105 – Bristol & Avon Transport Ltd.

Notes from Rob, to supplement those from Ray.

The preparationClearly a flight of this type requires some proper attention to flight planning. Being much more familiar with short bimbles out of Bath rather than distance or duration flying, this was breaking new ground for me. Whilst not looking for or expecting to be breaking any records, merely pushing ones personal boundaries was the primary motivation. Consideration needed to be given to things we might not be worried out during normal flying. For example, fuel and hanging cylinders safely outside the basket. OK, so not that complicated but getting it wrong would have had consequences so the advice was sought from people in the know and was gratefully received. Food, water, maps, radios, ATC, danger areas – all these things flying locally you either don't have to worry about or you know already where the problems are. Long distance flying is going to need focus and it was obvious that good planning was going to lead to a better and more enjoyable flight. So plan we did!

The other matter in the forefront of the mind of any long jumper is where to go from and landing opportunities, with how much air traffic on the way. For ease we decided it's probably good to either go from or aim to land at your home location, to avoid a long drive either before or after the flight. Due to wind direction a flight from Bath would have taken us into Somerset/Dorset and not much in terms of distance, hence we opted to go north and fly home! A quick call to Andy Marshall and the local Oswestry Balloon Club were very supportive in identifying a launchsite at a golf club. Fantastic.



The flight.....



The flying was shared with both of us busy either navigating or on the burner. A long distance flight might seem an unusual opportunity to try out some navigation software for the first time (we did have paper in case of failure) but this was the case, thankfully it worked although the pad was munching through the battery very quickly. Glad a battery bank was available. Speed and direction were limited by cloud base and when we did go high the direction was less desirable, but we were broadly heading in the correct direction hence all looked fine. Fuel management was kept simple – if the tank has a cover on it then it has not been used. Obvious to say but burning out the tanks fully

leaves you with little way of establishing if full or empty. Sometimes simple is the best, and it worked for us.



On our route there were limited aerodromes but we were expecting a few. In the end Shobden was our closest encounter and I did try very hard to speak to them, I really did. But, even on trying the spare radio they still couldn't hear me hence I assume it was because of altitude and geography, as we could hear them clearly, it was quite busy and we could see the traffic all around us. We decided to leave it until closer to them on account of by then hopefully they might be able to hear us...but just as I was about to press the button to speak again their operator announced he needed a 5 minute break and all calls were to remain unanswered! Awful timing from my perspective, so in the end we altered height and flew lower/slower to ensure remaining clear of the controlled zone. Not really what you want to be doing on a long distance flight but needs must.

Towards the end of the flight the fuel was lasting that little bit longer and we decided to go over the Severn - not normally a concern but with not much left in the two remaining tanks the last place you want to be is over water. But, the track and speed were there hence we went over, plus gave Slimbridge and the former nuclear power station at Berkely the required height (even though I am told this stopped producing power in 1979 and is now just an empty shell...) and landed afterwards in grassy field with a super friendly landowner. In the end we were not that far north of Bristol so we did achieve one of our aims - to fly home. Travelling at 10-15 kts were never going to break any records but the 6hr 45 flight was enjoyable and an experience well worthwhile, a great day was

spent with friends in a year when we have all seen less of one another, and I am very happy with the 83 miles.

Thanks need to be given to some fabulously helpful people who without this flight would not have happened:-

Simon Wrighton. Air traffic supremo and knowledgeable fellow on such matters, plus loan of cylinders.

Colin and Julia Wolstenholme. Last minute certification of cylinders and all round valuable advice.

Rob Bayly. Sharing weather forecasting sites (particularly long range distance/duration forecasting) and being particularly generous with helpful information, even to fellow competitors.

Ken Scott. Top crew and solo crew at that, hence spent the entire day behind the wheel, and for asking for nothing bar a werthers original.

Andy Marshall and The Oswestry Balloon Club. Help with arranging a launchsite at short notice and helping with the launch.

Rob Clements