

Our 2020 Long Jump that nearly became a swimathon! in!

In September, in a phone call to the honourable Judge, we were pleased to hear that the GBLJ Competition was going ahead this year. After all, balloons take off from and land in fields so keeping away from the great unwashed, I.e Covid safe. Tentative plans were put in place for an attempt on a Sunday or Monday as work commitments would make a flight on other days very difficult. Also, Monday 19 had to be avoided as we were celebrating Mike's Mum's 99th birthday.

The medium range forecasts from several sources suggested that Sunday 11th would be great for a north-south flight. As the day drew nearer, the weather looked better with 60knot wind at 10,000ft and 75knots at 15,000 feet. For a while, we thought that our flight was going to be a low one as our normal oxygen kit supplier was not available. After some frantic phone calls, some suitable kit was tracked down but their courier wouldn't carry full cylinders. Then Celia and Colin felt unwell and pulled out. It never rains but pours!

Things started to pick up. We didn't like the thought of one person doing such a long retrieve solo so we were pleased when Andrew Strange was able to crew at short notice. was found and Late on Friday morning, Mike found a company that could fill the tanks with aviation grade oxygen. A £15 taxi ride later, Mike had to use all of his powers of persuasion to get the cylinders filled that day and not the usual 24 hour turn round. With a sigh of relief, we set off on Saturday morning via Richard Penny's house to pick up the Ultramagic demonstrator, being a 105 it should provide better endurance than our light weight 90.

Checks revealed that all types of aviation were taking place in Scotland outside the central belt. The Scotland.gov web site stated that visitors from England could drive through the belt which we did without stopping until reaching our hotel well to the north.

Mark Stelling had worked hard to find a few launch sites and the airfield at Blair Atholl seemed ideal as it was out in the wilds at the edge of The Cairngorms and may possibly be the most northerly take off point used in a GBLJ flight. [Over to you, Robin.]

THE FLIGHT

Deborah had planned to take off at 0600GMT but the remains of an unexpected front were still present and it was too gusty. 30 minutes later, calm prevailed and inflation began. We had a lovely stable take off at exactly 0700 to have some stunning views between the broken cloud. Our heading was good but where had the wind gone? It was lower than forecast at 5,000ft with 34kts so the climb continued in earnest. WE donned our oxygen mask and canular just below 10,000ft and saw only 28kts rather than the 60kts expected. It was even slower at over 13,000ft so we cut our losses and descended to FL55 as the speed was reasonable and this flight level would take us under an airway, in due course! As we reached the base of the airway, we were granted clearance to climb into it as higher cloud was ahead, but the speed dropped. Even though we were above broken cloud and in clear air, we noticed that solar warming was much weaker at this latitude with the first 60litre tank lasting two hours.

About 3 miles from the Edinburgh CTA Scottish Control wouldn't give us clearance to over fly the Edinburgh/Glasgow CTA so we had to descend to below 6,000ft and contact Edinburgh Radar who were extremely helpful. Not only had the speed dropped but our heading now had too much west. A projection on the iPad suggested that this heading could take us west of Conwy which was a Covid no entry area. We asked ATC if they could give us the wind speed direction at 3,000 ft and a Norwegian flight kindly obliged.

We descended to find the left and stayed low for about an hour giving us the opportunity of a longer flight.

We gained some height and speed but it was a struggle to stay less than 180 degrees.

Near Moffat the iPad lost signal and only returned once we were past the Lowther hills which were beautiful.

Overhead Dumfries we received lots of cheers which was lovely.

We started to turn left and climbed to FL 90 and were disappointed to find only 5 kts and 220 heading decent was our only option as we crossed the coastline with a heading of 170 this

was a safe option speed dropped to between 1 and 5 it's so we spent the next two hours pootling across the water by Blackshore Bank having to stay low to retain a safe direction as above 50 ft the direction was 220, great for a visit to isle of man.

A dark cloud caught us and took us on a SW heading for about a mile or more so I concentrated hard and stayed as low as I dare this gave a reverse track and my goal became to get to land.

We zigzagged over the water for another hour finally landing on the beach at the hamlet of Allonby .

A couple Leslie and Malcolm walking back from their Sunday lunch were very helpful and witnessed our landing

The total straight-line distance was 139.8 miles and 8 hours flying time. We were relieved to reach land even though we had two hours of fuel left. Very many thanks to everyone who kindly helped especially Simon, Andrew and Mark.