

Norfolk ACF Skydive Expedition 2022

Author: Staff Sgt Sean Richards – Cadet Force Adult Volunteer (CFAV) support for Expedition

Intro

On 15 April 2022 Norfolk ACF completed their expedition to Skydive Hibaldstow returning home after more than 500 skydives in total with 9 cadets as newly licenced skydivers and 7 more cadets and Cadet Force Adult Volunteers (CFAVs) hoping to achieve their licences over the coming weeks.

Background

This journey started back in 2018 when Norfolk ACF decided to organise a two-week residential skydiving expedition to Spain for cadets following past successes with shorter courses at the Army Parachute Association Netheravon. I had learnt to skydive as a cadet and was proud to be included in the plans for the expedition as a Cadet Force Adult Volunteer.

The aim of the expedition was to teach cadets and CFAVs to skydive via the internationally recognised Accelerated Freefall (AFF) method to become licenced skydivers and achieve their first skydive qualification, the British Skydiving A licence.

Students who achieved A licence would be encouraged to progress skills and learn formation skydiving in order to build teams to take part in the Armed Forces Parachute Championships and the Skydive National Championships as representatives of Norfolk ACF.

Skydiving involves controlled exposure to risk to develop multiple skills. We work towards an increase in confidence, leadership and teamwork in all participants.

Skydiving is both mentally and physically challenging - but success at each level is hugely morale boosting. We aimed to help each cadet achieve their own personal goals, as well as supporting each other in the process. We also hoped to have lots of fun!

The expedition was to take place at Skydive Spain in Seville - where weather conditions allow skydive students to make safe and rapid progress. Cadets interested in joining the expedition were chosen for their regular detachment attendance and contribution to the Cadet Force. We then set about a 2-year fundraising campaign via supermarket bag packs and other local activities to raise money for the expedition which, together with donations to individuals from The Mason Trust and others, helped us reach our target. The group were scheduled to depart on 04 April 2020 when Covid19 struck and we went into lockdown. Hopes for a rearranged expedition in 2021 were soon dashed and eventually it was agreed that the expedition would take place at Skydive Hibaldstow (sister drop zone to Skydive Spain) in North Lincolnshire during the Easter school holidays 2022.

Preparatory Ground School

The group comprised 20 students (2 CFAVs and 18 cadets) plus myself 2 other licenced CFAV skydivers plus 2 CFAV ground support.

Despite the long 4 year wait, most of the original group of cadets were still keen to attend, although some having reached age 18 had now become Staff Cadets. On the weekend of 26-27 March 2022 this dedication was finally rewarded as the group headed to Skydive Hibaldstow for ground school – the preparatory training which is a pre-requisite for the AFF skydive course. The course was headed up by Maj John Horne (ret), former OC Joint Services Parachute Wing Netheravon, who had kindly volunteered his services for free, and was ably assisted by other experienced AFF Instructors,

including Milko Hodgkinson – one of the most experienced skydivers in the world and a member of the British formation skydiving team. The ground school covers all the emergency safety drills, plane exits, the procedure for the first AFF level, deployment of parachutes and safe landings.

The AFF course consists of 7 levels: during Levels 1-3 the student is accompanied in freefall by two instructors, and for Levels 4-7 they are accompanied by one instructor, but in all cases they would be deploying and landing their own parachute so preparation on the ground is vital.

After a busy weekend the group returned to Norfolk ready to head back to Hibaldstow the following weekend for the start of the actual expedition!

Days 1-2

There was a lot of nervous anticipation as the students kitted up for their first every skydives from 15,000 feet, but by the end of day 2, everyone was able to congratulate themselves on the achievement of completing at least two AFF levels – some even getting as far as Level 3.

"I love the teamwork aspect of the course and helping each other. It's amazing that even the tiniest movement has such a huge impact in freefall"- Staff Cadet UO Macy Ladd

Days 3-5

Unfortunately on Day 3 the winds were too strong for jumping so the group were given an introduction to parachute rigging and packing by a member of the instructor team, Karen Saunders, who is a Rigger Examiner and also in charge of Tom Cruise's rigs for the Mission Impossible films!

As the weather continued to be poor the group went bowling in the morning of day 4 and to a climbing wall in the afternoon. On day 5 they visited the Royal Armoury at Leeds – which proved popular and interesting.

Days 6-10

Finally the sun came out again and jumping progressed for the next 4 days. By day 10, four of the cadets had completed all 7 levels of the AFF course – and each one was announced over the tannoy at Skydive Hibaldstow to applause!

"I love the freefall. I'm really looking forward to starting the solo jumps" – Staff Cadet Sgt Major Olaf Donn

"I'm proud to look back on the first jumps and see how much progress we've made" – Staff Cadet Staff Sgt Bethan Greaves

Days 11-12

We fell foul of the weather again, so the group had a canopy handling theory session delivered by one of the advanced instructors and everyone took the theory test which is a requirement of the British Skydiving A licence. On day 12 we went wall climbing again.

Days 13-15

Finally the weather turned and jumping resumed.

For those students who had completed the AFF course, they now had to pass Level 8 – a “hop n pop” low altitude jump from 6,000 feet and then go on to do ten consolidated (solo) jumps practising various manoeuvres under the watchful eye of their instructors, before they could achieve A licence.

During the course 4 students decided not to continue and returned home early – but every single one of them felt proud that they had had such an amazing experience and achieved at least 2 AFF levels.

For those that completed the course and have learned to love skydiving, we’re hoping to organise continuous training. Sian Stokes, a member of the UK’s foremost female skydiving team, who regularly competes internationally, was in attendance during the course and has offered to coach those cadets keen to form a team and enter the UK Skydiving National Championships, while Milko has said he will be their cameraman (formation teams require a cameraman to record their footage in freefall for the competition).

I think everyone who attended the expedition is to be commended on their resilience for sticking with it despite the extra 2 years it took due to the postponement, and I believe every member of the group feels proud of their own personal achievements.

“It was a unique experience, not many people can say they’ve learned to skydive!” - Staff Cadet Sgt Maj Jacob Baugh

We are all very grateful to The Mason Trust and our other donors for their support which helped to make this expedition possible.

Link to our two videos:

<https://www.facebook.com/NorfolkACF/videos/462217158986737>

<https://www.facebook.com/NorfolkACF/videos/1362315900930036>

There are other photos here: <https://www.facebook.com/NorfolkACF/>





