

# Walk before you can fly



Like many budding airline pilots, 15-year-old Ella Bartczak is besotted with flying. Unfortunately, like many 15 year olds, she hasn't got any money – but she's not going to let a little thing like that stand in the way of her ambitions.

Ella is embarking on a 100-mile sponsored walk carrying a propeller to raise funds to set her on the road to fulfilling her dream, and is seeking help from anyone who understands what it is to desperately want to fly.

Ella has been fascinated with flying for as long as she can remember, having been introduced to aviation by a family friend who was involved in buying and selling Iskra jet trainers from Poland. "I remember sitting in an Iskra at the age of about five when the engine was turned on," she says. "It was an overwhelming experience – I loved it."

"I first flew at the age of ten when some people arranged for me to get a ride in a Skytruck at Shoreham. Later I was able to get a flight in a Cessna doing banner-towing along the south coast – my stepfather used to run the microlight strip at Bracklesham Bay, and the Cessna was operating from there. We were airborne for about three quarters of an hour and I'll remember it for the rest of my life."

Ella has been a member of Brighton 226 Squadron Air Cadets for 18 months and has also done some air experience flights in a Grob Tutor as well as trying her hand at gliding. "I've learned some very useful things, like basic principles of flight, air law, and the history of the RAF," she says. "I'm hoping to do a gliding scholarship this summer."

"I'm not sure about joining the RAF – I think you'd have to be absolutely certain that was what you wanted before you decided on a career in the RAF, and I'm not sure about it. I would like to fly airliners."

Ella has spent a lot of time hanging around Shoreham Airport and is doing work experience with Dorothy Pooley there. She is also looking at applying for PPL scholarships from various sources, although she is too young to put her name down for some of the better-known ones.

She has done a certain amount of research on basic licences and while she originally planned to try to do a PPL in the United States in six weeks, she finds that the more people she speaks to, the more she realises she should look at a wider range of options.

Ella, who goes to Brighton and Hove High School, says: "Maths and physics are not my favourite subjects, and I know I have to make extra effort to score well in them. I know that you can't be an airline pilot without mastering



those subjects, and as they're an important part of flying then I'm determined to do well in them."

Ella's school friends know of her ambitions, and most are supportive. "They think it's very exciting," she says. "Some of them say they want to come to France with me as soon as I've got my licence."

The 100-mile sponsored walk will take her along the South Downs Way from near Goodwood to Eastbourne. The propeller she will be carrying has come from her stepfather's microlight. "It's made of wood and while it's not too heavy, it's quite awkward and difficult to carry," Ella says.

"Obviously it's there to signify why I'm doing the walk. It's never going to be used on an aircraft again so it doesn't matter if I drop it."

Ella has practised walking with the propeller

and she reckons the walk will take her five days. "I'm doing my Duke of Edinburgh's Silver Award, so I've had some practice at walking and camping," she says. "I know it will be difficult, but if it gets me closer to learning to fly, it will all be worthwhile."

AOPA chairman George Done says: "We've decided to make Ella an honorary student member of AOPA even though she hasn't started her training yet. We wish her every success – I'm sure that with her determination she will one day step onto an airliner flight deck. She's got a long way to go, both on her walk and in her career, but we'll back her every step of the way."

Ella has started a website to support her project, and if you feel moved to help her, her contact details can be found on it. Check out [www.projectwingwalk.co.uk](http://www.projectwingwalk.co.uk). ■

