

Bristol Airspace - Bath Gap Procedures

BGGC Airspace Notes are articles produced by experienced Club instructors and pundits. The commentary provides information about local airspace operations and any special arrangements the Club may have in place. The notes must be read in conjunction with current NOTAMs.

Background

Four years ago, following eastward expansion of the Class D Bristol Controlled airspace (CTA), a letter of agreement (LOA) between the BGA and National Air Traffic Services Bristol (Bristol ATC) was drawn up to facilitate glider transits of what became known as the Bath Gap airspace. After feedback from both parties and the resulting consultation process, the LOA has been revised and new procedures put in place with effect from 1st April 2010. The full LOA can be found in the airspace file in the BGGC briefing room or downloaded from the BGA website airspace section at:
<http://www.gliding.co.uk/bgainfo/airspace/bristol-loa.pdf>

The Bath Gap is that arc of Bristol CTA east of the foot of the Cotswold escarpment, which extends north from Bath with a base of 3,500 feet Bristol QNH and extends upwards to 4,500 feet Bristol QNH. Note the revised agreement specifically excludes a section of Bristol CTA-6 to the west of the Cotswold escarpment, which was previously included in the old Bath Gap agreement. The revised agreement introduces the Bath Gap B, a wider area of airspace encompassing both the Bath Gap airspace and the adjacent Bristol CTA with base at 4,500 feet, extending upwards to 5,000 feet Bristol QNH.

The LOA allows for VFR crossings (i.e. stay clear of cloud) of the designated airspace by appropriately briefed pilots (self study of the LOA or formal briefing) and ensures that glider pilots have reasonable assurance that crossing clearance through the Bath Gap and Bath Gap B airspace will be approved.

Contact Details:

- Bath Gap Gliding Activity Status telephone no: 01275 473820.
- Bristol ATIS broadcast (will announce if Bath Gap active and Bristol QNH): 126.025 MHz or Tel: 0844 8481022
- Bristol ATC Watch Manager Tel no: 01275 473857 or 473712
- Bristol Radar: 125.650 MHz.

Procedures:

To facilitate fair and flexible sharing of airspace in the Bristol CTA, pilots of radio equipped gliders who are confident to do so should use radio procedures for crossing Bath Gap airspace. There are subtle differences between Bath Gap and Bath Gap B procedures.

Bath Gap - Radio Procedures:

First establish if the Bath Gap is already open using either the activity status telephone number, or Bristol ATIS. Note the Bristol QNH from the ATIS broadcast. If the Bath Gap is already active, you may cross below 4,500 feet Bristol QNH during the hours of activation without further clearance.

If the Bath Gap is not active, radio gliders must request a crossing clearance of the Bath Gap airspace from Bristol Radar. ATC will, subject to a short delay to separate traffic, authorise crossing clearance of the Bath Gap airspace below 4,500 feet Bristol QNH. Obviously this will take a bit of time to arrange so the more notice you can give Bristol ATC, the less likely that you will experience an inconvenient delay (suggest 5 minutes minimum notice, preferably 10 minutes). There is no requirement in the LOA to monitor Bristol Radar during crossing although it would be good practice to do so and in any case advise them if leaving the frequency. Tell Bristol Radar when leaving the Bath Gap airspace.

Only radio equipped gliders may request activation of Bath Gap B on an individual basis from Bristol Radar. Activation can be expected within 5 minutes of the request, but once again the more notice you can give, the better. There is a specific requirement to monitor Bristol Radar whilst in Bath Gap B. Report leaving controlled airspace; this will deactivate Bath Gap B.

Consider making an advance courtesy phone call to Bristol ATC to pre warn them that radio equipped gliders will be coming. Whilst this is not a requirement, it might help to expedite your clearance when you call on the radio. Bear in mind that soaring and simultaneously using the radio for ATC clearances significantly increases your workload. If ATC offers you a choice of radar service, to reduce your workload I strongly recommend that you request a **basic service** only. Plan ahead – anything you are able to do in advance will reduce your workload. Don't forget to maintain a good lookout as other VFR traffic could still be using this airspace.

Bath Gap - Non Radio Procedures

The Bath Gap may be activated for non radio crossings by authorised persons of one of the local gliding clubs specified in the LOA (at BGGC the authorised person would be Duty Instructor, Cross Country Coach or other specifically delegated person), or by the Director of a National or Regional Competition. Firstly listen to the Bath Gap Gliding Activity status number to ascertain if the Bath Gap is already active for the period you require.

To activate the Bath Gap or extend the hours, telephone the Bristol ATC Watch Manager. State who is calling and from where and give your contact number. Request activation in time blocks of multiples of one hour. Activation should only be requested for the time period that gliders are realistically likely to need use of the airspace. Don't request activation if cloud base is low and you only expect to be running the ridge. Be clear whether you are discussing time in UTC or BST. Make a note of the activation times in the Bath Gap Record Sheet. Request and make a note of the Bristol QNH on the record sheet. If activation is refused, request and make a brief note of the reason why on the record sheet. Advise the Duty Instructor.

Once the Bath Gap is activated, during the hours of activation appropriately briefed pilots may transit the Bath Gap airspace at altitudes up to 4,500 feet Bristol QNH without further clearance. If operating without radio they must obtain the Bristol QNH before flight.

Non radio gliders must not use Bath Gap B at any time.

Note

Nothing in the LOA prevents any glider from requesting a Class D airspace crossing by radio from Bristol ATC on a tactical basis at any time through any part of their airspace. If the Bath Gap is not active for any reason, nothing prevents any glider from flying underneath the Bath Gap airspace in the open FIR at altitudes below 3,500 feet Bristol QNH or for that matter underneath the Bristol CTA at any other point.

Andy Davis 19th April 2010.