



GSL Scenery Design For Combat Flight Simulator 2

Tools and Techniques

GSL Scenery Design

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Introduction

CFS2 introduced a new sort of scenery to augment the traditional BGL scenery system inherited from earlier versions of Flight Simulator. This new scenery is Global Scenery Layer (GSL) scenery.

It has one major advantage over the more normal scenery methods. It provides objects that appear in the permanent scenery but act like objects placed as part of a mission. They are fully crashable and destroyable even during Free Flight and Quick Combat.

It can also display any currently installed Aircraft or Ship as a static object.

Global Scenery Layer

This consists of 3 main components. Firstly a single GSL file containing all the instructions where to display what. Secondly a series of Library BGL files that contain the drawing code for all the objects that can be displayed by GSL. Thirdly for each object that is used in the GSL an individual Damage Profile (DP) file.

The single GSL file is called CFS2.GSL and is found in the GSL folder in CFS2.

The Library files can be located in any valid scenery folder. The default ones are contained in the Inf (buildings) and Veh (vehicles) folders. As well as Library objects GSL can utilise anything installed with an MDL file (basically Aircraft and Ships).

The Library object DP files are all located in the OBJECTS_DP folder in CFS2. Aircraft and Ships have their own DP files in their own folders and do not require one in OBJECTS_DP.

There are also other support files such as the entries in Descrip.dat and the thumbnails of individual objects in the INFO folder. These are not required by GSL but are mainly there for when you are designing a mission in Mission Builder.

The Global Scenery Layer consists of a fixed grid covering the whole Earth. Each section of this grid is a Gob area (**G**lobal **O**bject area). Each gob area can contain a single group of objects. This is important to remember as you need to be aware of the fact that placing a new group in a gob area that already contains objects will replace the current objects rather than add to them. There are ways to take this into account that will be discussed later.

Global Objects

The following object types can be displayed in GSL scenery

- Any Library object that has a matching DP file in OBJECTS_DP
- Any Aircraft that is installed in your Aircraft Folder (including the AI-only ones)
- Any Ship that is installed in your Ships folder

Basically it means that, with a few exceptions, anything that can be placed in Mission Builder as an Infrastructure object can also be utilised in GSL. This is not really surprising as GSL is in fact a specialised form of mission that is always present in all flight modes.

The following object types can **not** be displayed by GSL and need to be placed using normal BGL methods.

- FS Runways
- Ground polygons
- FS default Buildings
- FS Roads, Rivers, Railways, Taxiways
- Flattens and Excludes
- Navigation Aids

Although actually most normal FS scenery objects can be used with GSL if you first make them into Library objects.

The Tools

To design GSL scenery for CFS2 you need a basic set of tools

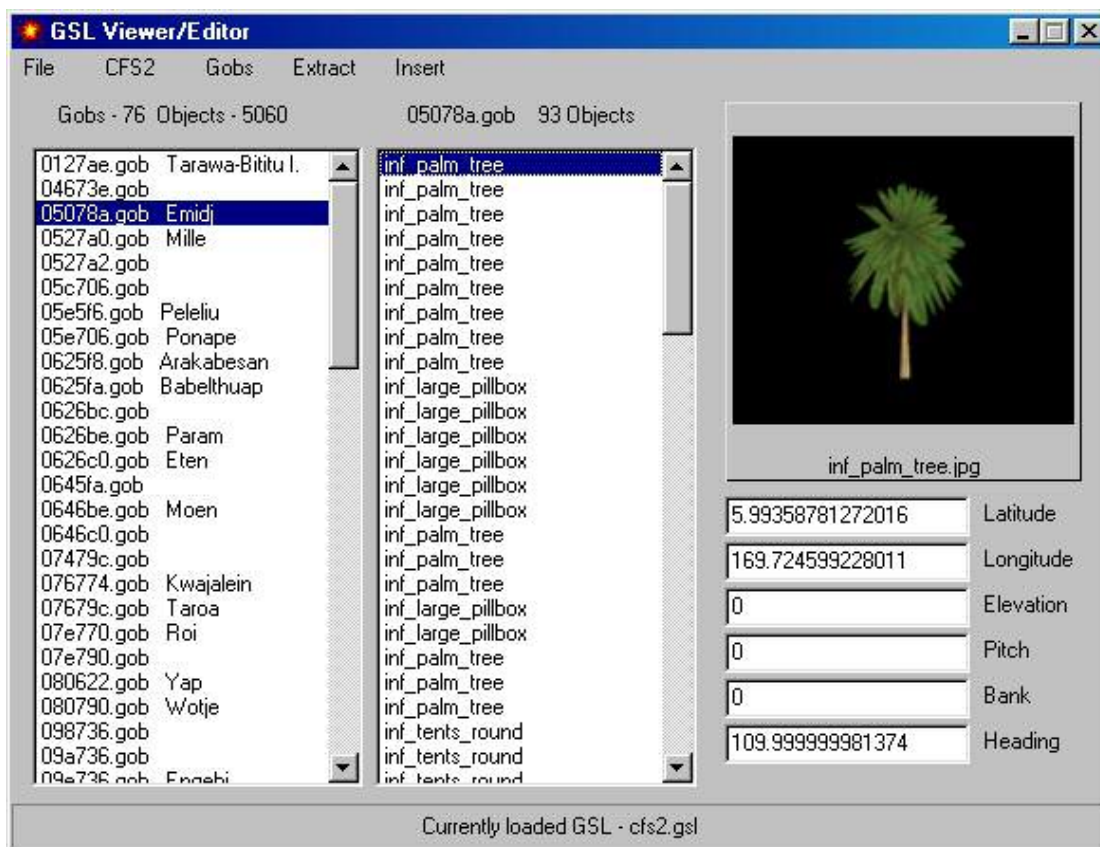
1. The CFS2 **Mission Builder**. This is what you use to actually design the placement of objects and then save out as “Layouts” for conversion to GSL
2. **GobCheck**. This tool will take Layout files exported from Mission Builder and split them (if necessary) into multiple layouts. This is necessary when your layout covers more than one gob area. Even small sceneries, depending on where you place them, may fall on the border between 2 gob areas.
3. **GSLEdit**. This is the tool that actually puts layout data into the GSL. It is used initially to import your data into the standard GSL and then to export from the standard GSL and import into a separate GSL so that the GSL scenery can be distributed to other users.
4. **Distribution Tools**. These are needed when you want to pass on your wonderful new scenery for others to enjoy. These vary from simple command-line programs to more sophisticated tools.
5. A normal **Scenery Designing program** such as Airport or FSSC. This will be needed for designing any non-GSL parts of your scenery.

As well as the above you need a reasonable knowledge of Scenery design techniques and a working familiarity with the CFS2 Mission Builder. This document is not designed for people just taking their first steps into design but rather for existing designers who want to expand their expertise into this new area.

GSLEdit – a brief description

The main tool that makes alteration to the default CFS2 GSL possible is the GSL Editor. This is a program that will display all the data contained in the GSL database, let you extract or remove existing data and to insert new data of your own design.

The interface is fairly straightforward.



The leftmost list displays all the individual areas (“gobs”) contained in the database. Where they correspond to a known Airbase the name will also be displayed.

Clicking on an entry in this list will fill the 2nd list with a list of all the objects contained in that gob.

Clicking on any of these will display various information on that individual object – position, heading and, if available, a picture.

Existing gob entries can be removed from the database or they can be extracted either as “mini-gsl” files or as Layout files that can be loaded and edited using the CFS2 Mission Builder.

Layouts that you have edited or designed from scratch in Mission Builder can be inserted into the current GSL database.

I won’t go into too much detail on the various functions of the program. The main ones you are going to need are the “Extract” and “Insert” functions and these are discussed later in the tutorials.

Step by Step Simple GSL

This is an example of the method for creating GSL scenery in a new location where none presently exists. If you intend to create new or additional scenery for an already-existing airbase then you need to see the “Modifying existing GSL scenery” section after reading through the step-by-step before you actually try creating.

Step 1 : Preparing the area

If your scenery is going to involve non-GSL objects such as Ground textures and runways then the best approach is to design that first using whatever scenery design program you normally use. Once the BGL scenery is created and installed you will be able to see it in the scenery at the next design stage and you will be able to place GSL objects exactly where you want them in relation to the fixed BGL scenery.

Just design a bare-bones scenery consisting of the bits you can’t do via GSL. Flatten the area, put down surface textures, place the runways, add roads, taxiways or railways.

There are several free programs for designing the BGL part of the scenery. The main ones are “Airport” and “FS Scenery Creator” (FSSC). If all you wish to add is a runway then this can be done using my MkAFD program.

For information on creating normal BGL scenery these programs come with useful tutorials and there are many sources of information on the web. FSSC has a user’s forum where questions can usually be answered.

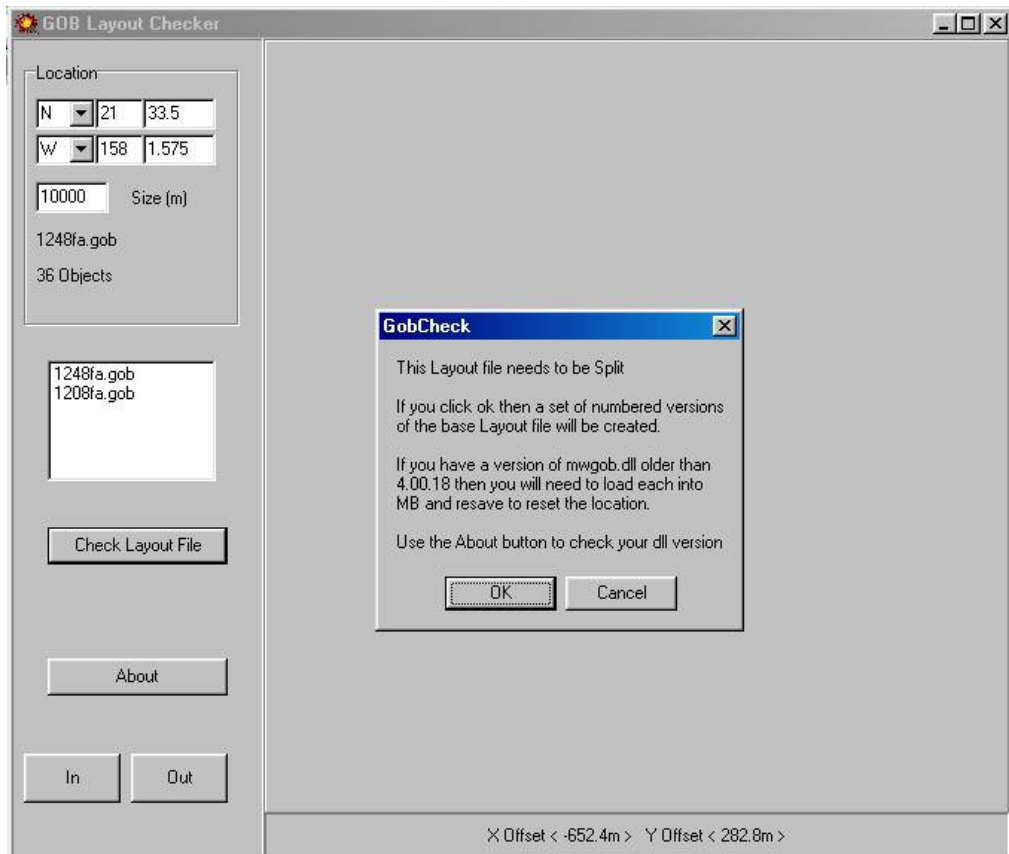
It is not compulsory to create any BGL scenery. You can place GSL objects without any BGL scenery being present. However the best visual results will be when you have something other than bare terrain to arrange your objects on.

Step 2 : Designing the source scenery

- Start up Mission Builder
- Move to the location where you wish to place the scenery. You can do this by creating a new mission that starts from the location you want (or somewhere near) and then moving the display around until you are over your chosen spot. Zoom in fairly close.
- Start placing objects exactly as if you were creating scenery to appear in a mission. You should always use the “Infrastructure” option when placing objects. You can still select from the Vehicle, Aircraft or Ships lists even when working in Infrastructure mode and they will then be placed as static objects rather than as part of a moving “unit”. Moving objects will not appear in GSL.
- When you are happy with your scenery click on one object. Now hold down the Shift key and drag out a rectangle that covers all the objects in the scenery. They should now all show as selected (green)
- Press Ctrl+W. This will bring up a dialog to save the selected objects as a layout (LAY) file. These files are always saved to the LAYOUTS folder in CFS2.
- In case you want to come back and edit the scenery again you should save the current mission. This can be reloaded later and you can edit the scenery objects before saving out a new layout.
- You can also reload Layouts into Mission Builder. Just start Mission Builder and then press Ctrl+L. This will bring up a dialog to load a layout. It is important that you make sure the “Place Layout at original World location” box is checked before clicking ok. Mission Builder will then place the objects take you to correct location. If this box is not checked then you will be expected to manually place the layout. This can sometimes be useful if you want to duplicate an existing scenery somewhere else.

Step 3 : Checking the Gob area

- Run the GobCheck program.
- Click “Check Layout file” and browse to the LAY file you saved earlier.
- If the whole of the layout falls within one gob area then you will just see a simple display of the objects and their distribution. If this appears with no warning messages then the layout is ok as it is and you can skip to the next section. Before doing so make a note of the gob number (eg 1248fa.gob) displayed. This may be needed later on.

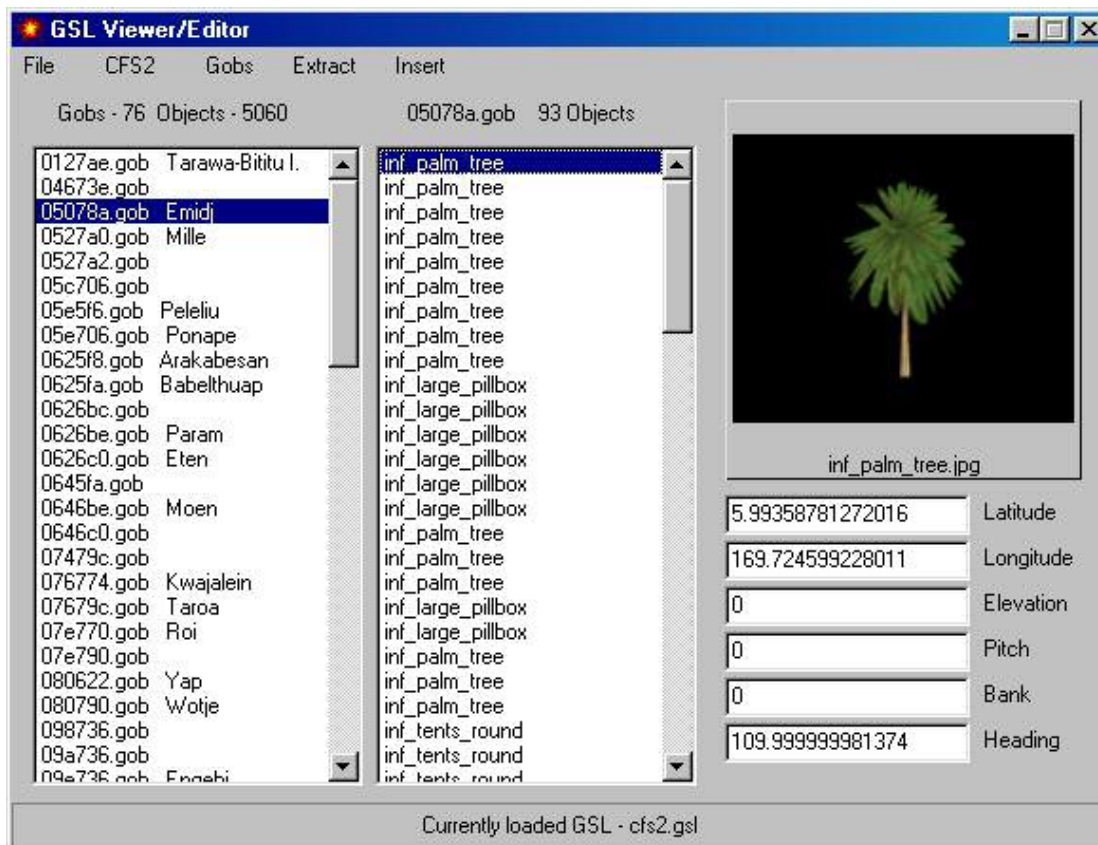


- If you get a warning that the objects fall into more than one gob area then you will be offered the option to split the file into separate areas. You should click ok. If you don't split the file up you will only see some of your objects appearing in CFS2
- If you have reached this stage you will find that your original LAY file has been joined by 2 (or more) new ones in the same folder. If, for instance, your original LAY file was called “Dover.lay” then you will see “Dover00.lay”, “Dover01.lay” etc appearing. These numbered files are the ones you need to use at the next stage. Your original LAY file should now be discarded.
- Before leaving GobCheck make a note of the gob numbers listed in the small list box. You will need these to keep track of your scenery later.

Step 4 : Adding your Layout to the default GSL

This is the crucial stage that will actually get your new scenery appearing in CFS2.

Start GSLEdit and you should see a window something like this.....



If you are getting nothing displayed in the lists then you may need to manually Open CFS2.gsl. This can be done from the File menu by selecting "Open GSL" and then browsing the CFS2 GSL folder and selecting cfs2.gsl.

The display lists every gob contained in the current GSL. Some of them will have Airbase names showing. These are the gobs that actually contain the Airbase scenery. The others contain either non-airbase scenery or sometimes portions of an airbase scenery that fall outside the gob containing the main part.

If you are getting no Airbases listed then go to the CFS2 menu and select "Update Airfield List". The Airfield list is generated from the CFS2 Airbases.dat file so will contain all airfields that have been entered in there. If you create a new airfield and you want its name to appear in GSLEdit you will have to add the data to Airbases.dat. My MkAFD program provides a facility for generating the necessary text or you can just do it manually. To get your new Airbase entries displaying in GSLEdit use the "Update Airfield List" function to get GSLEdit to rebuild its list using your updated Airbases.dat.

From the "Insert" menu select "Mission Builder Layout" and browse to the Layout you wish to insert. Once you ok the Open dialog the GSL will be rebuilt with your new layout added.

Repeat for as many layouts as you wish to insert.

Start CFS2 FreeFlight and go and admire your new scenery (or blow it up.....)

Modifying Existing GSL Scenery

The previous step-by-step assumed the simplest case where you want to create a new scenery where none has been present before.

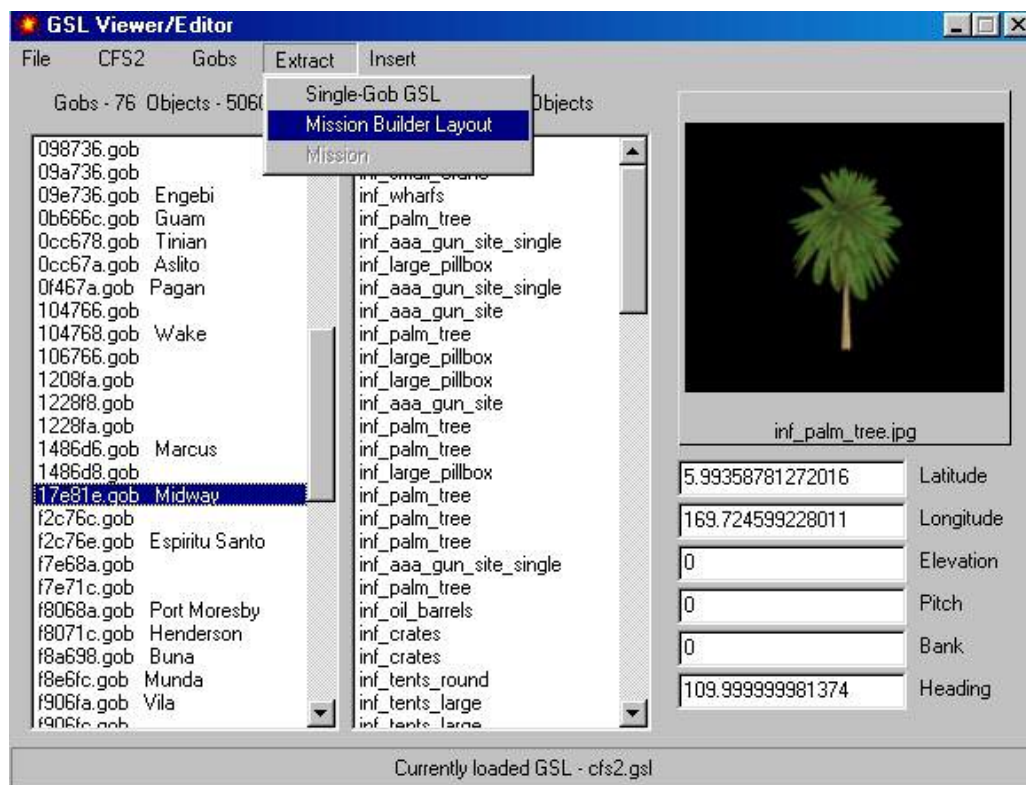
Often you might want to add extra objects to an existing airfield or place an additional scenery in close proximity to existing objects.

As noted earlier “there can be only one” as far as gobs are concerned. If you want to add a single hangar to an existing airbase and you create your scenery following the simple example you will find that the airbase now only has your new hangar. All the rest will have disappeared. This is because your new gob (containing just the single hangar) has taken the place of the original gob (containing all the original scenery objects).

In cases like this the method needs to be modified. The example below shows how to add extra objects to the scenery at the Midway airbase. The same principles apply whatever gob area you wish to modify.

Exporting Existing Scenery for Modification (Midway example)

- Run GSLEdit. Locate the gob containing Midway.
- Select this gob and then select “Mission Builder Layout” from the Extract menu



- Save this to your CFS2 Layouts folder as Midway.lay

Modifying the scenery in Mission Builder

Start Mission Builder, Press Ctrl-L to bring up the “Load Layout” dialog.



Highlight the midway.lay entry. Put a check in the “Place Layout at original World Location” box and then click ok.



You will now be taken to Midway airbase and you will see all the objects contained in the gob displayed as infrastructure icons.

You can now add new objects in the normal Mission Builder way. You can also move or remove any of the original objects. Take note however that there are in effect 2 of each object at the moment. The ones with the infrastructure icons and the ones underneath them that are still part of the GSL. It may seem confusing but you need to ignore the “underneath” ones. If you move one of the objects the object with the icon will move but the original will still be visible at the original location. When the GSL is rebuilt using your modified layout these “underneath” ones will vanish and the new GSL will contain just the objects and positions from your layout.

Once you are happy with your modifications follow the same steps as for the Simple example to export your scenery from Mission Builder as a Layout file and then import this Layout file into the default GSL using GSLEdit. The imported layout will completely replace the original gob and you will now have scenery that is taken from your modified layout.

Other Program functions

Run Mission Builder

This menu option just provides a quick way to run the CFS2 Mission Builder.

Run MB with selected Gob

This option will start up the CFS2 Mission Builder with a temporary layout loaded in a specific location. The location and layout is decided by which gob is currently highlighted in the Gob list.

This provides a quick way to view or edit a particular gob.

Fly

This is basically the same as “Run MB with selected gob” but creates the temporary mission in such a way that the player aircraft is placed a distance south of the scenery layout.

If you click “Fly” in Mission Builder and then “Fly Now” you start flying north and heading towards the scenery.

Quick Edit

Sometimes all you want to do is remove a single object from a gob area or perhaps change a building from one type to another.

If you double-click on any entry in the gob list you will see Notepad open up with the text of a Layout file loaded. This can be edited by removing the line(s) for the object(s) you wish to remove or by changing the object name at the beginning of a line to a different object name.

If you save this file after editing you can import it back into the current GSL by using “Mission Builder Layout” from the “Insert” menu and selecting the “__Last_Edit” layout file that will have appeared in your Layouts folder.

Warning – Manual editing of Layout files is only recommended if you know what you are doing!

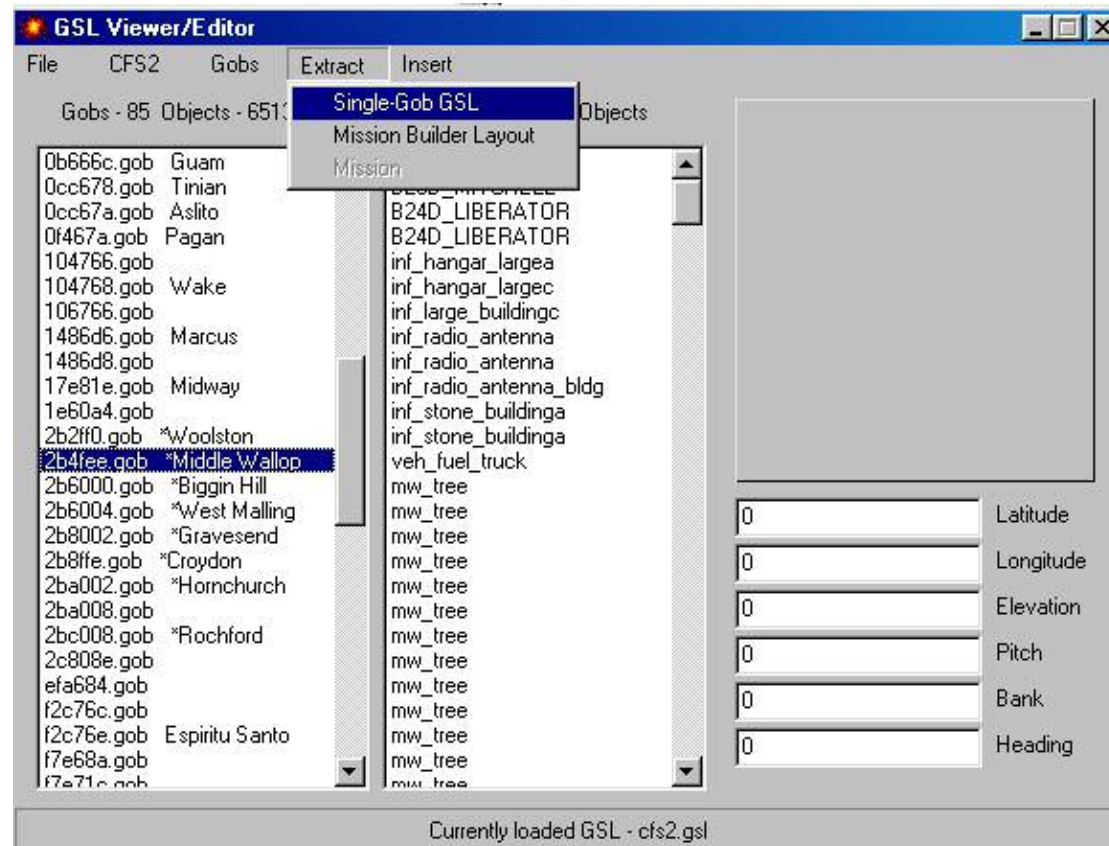
Preparing your scenery for Distribution

Things to consider

- Does your scenery use any non-default library objects or anything else that might not be present in every copy of CFS2? If so then you will need to include the necessary files in with your distribution package. These may be library BGL files, Textures for the objects, DP files or even complete Aircraft. Your install package will need to be able to install these to the correct places and, if necessary, update the scenery library. Wherever possible you should stick to the default objects when designing in order to minimise the risk of things not being present on the target computer.
- Does your scenery require a BGL component? If you have designed a “backdrop” BGL scenery containing Runways, ground textures and any other non-GSL scenery then you need to include all the necessary BGL files and Textures as well as routines (or instructions) for installing them so they will appear correctly in CFS2. All the usual rules for distributing a “normal” scenery package apply here.
- Does any of your GSL scenery replace default GSL gob areas? If so then you need to consider how to cover the situation where the user may wish to revert back to the original. This can be just making a backup of the user’s existing cfs2.gsl before installing your replacements or it could be done more flexibly by providing, as part of the package, copies of the individual default gob areas concerned exported from an unmodified copy of cfs2.gsl. The user could then use the distribution tools to selectively put back the default gob areas they wish.

Extracting the data

To distribute your scenery you need to create GSL files containing your new scenery. This is easily done by running GSLEdit and locating the individual entries containing your new scenery. This is the reason you should have made a note of the gob numbers revealed by GobCheck earlier.



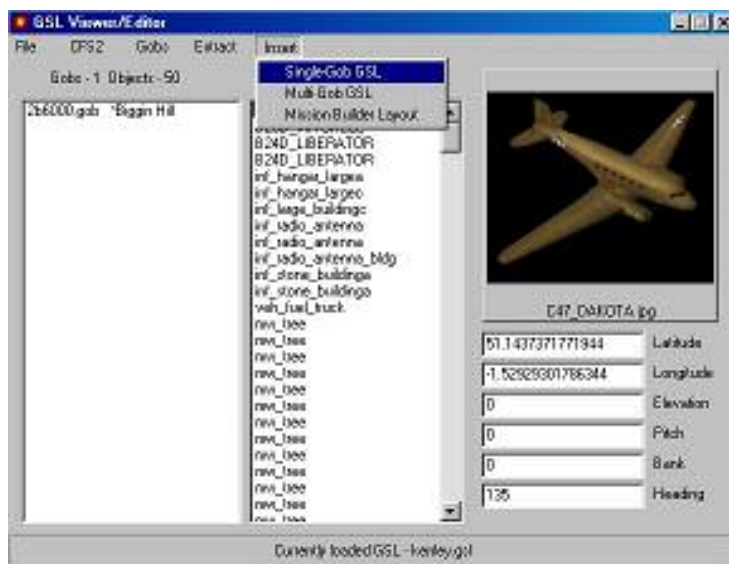
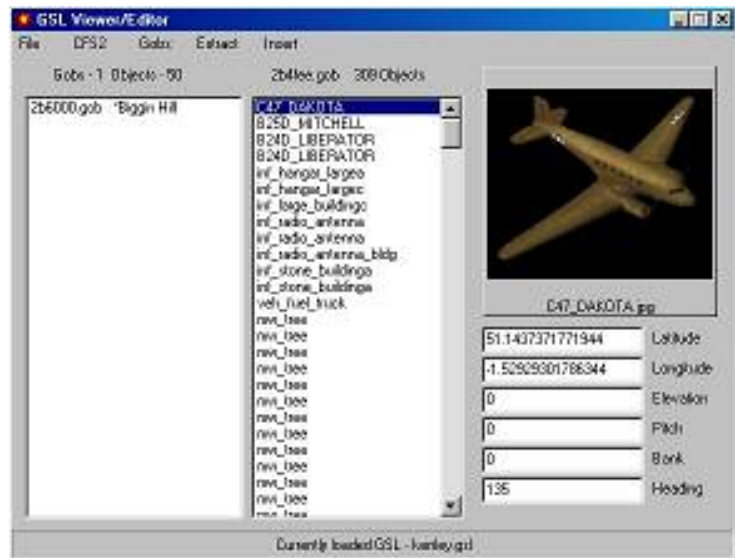
One by one find the gob areas that correspond to your sceneries and use Extract, Single Gob GSL. You can either accept the offered filename (taken from the gob entry name) or choose your own more meaningful one.

Combining multiple individual GSL files

While you can just distribute your scenery as a collection of individual GSL files exported from GSLEdit this is a bit untidy.

The best method is to create a single custom GSL file containing all your gob areas.

To do this select “Open GSL” from the File menu and select one of the individual GSL files you have just extracted. The list window will now show just that gob area

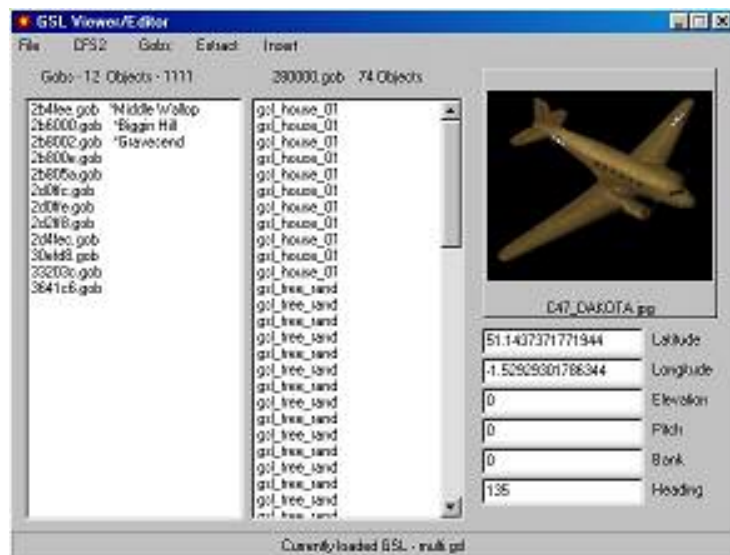


Now select “Single Gob GSL” from the Insert menu and select one of the other individual GSL files you extracted.

Repeat until you have imported all the individual GSL files containing your sceneries.

You now have your initially loaded GSL file which contains all the data for your GSL scenery in a single GSL file.

This is the file you need to install in the end user's default GSL file.



Distributing your scenery

This is not as straightforward as it might seem. For various reasons (legal and practical) you can't just pass around modified copies of cfs2.gsl for others to enjoy your scenery. The legal problem is that the file is owned by Microsoft. More importantly distributing cfs2.gsl is not practical because it will replace the one the user already has. If their current GSL already contains additional scenery then all this will be lost when their cfs2.gsl is replaced with yours. And when you create your next scenery people won't be able to use it without losing your previous scenery. This is the reason for the actions described in the "Preparing your scenery for Distribution" section.

Obviously what is needed is a system that will let the user just insert the new data in their existing GSL. If they also have GSLEdit then they could use that to insert or remove your scenery.

Far better though to have some simple system of just doing the inserting and removing functions. Either as part of a general Install setup or manually by the user.

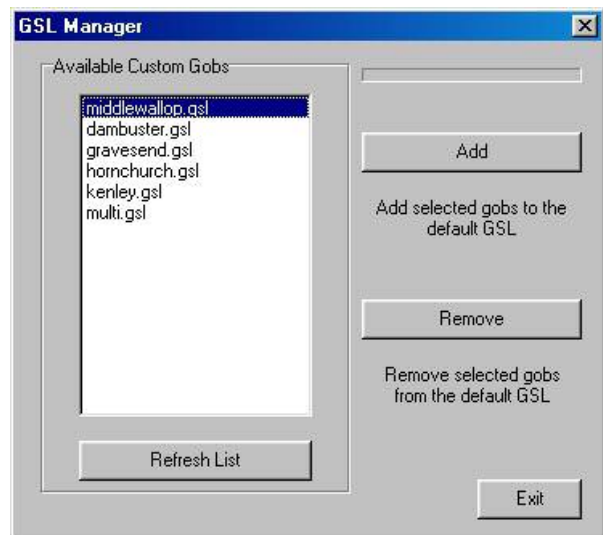
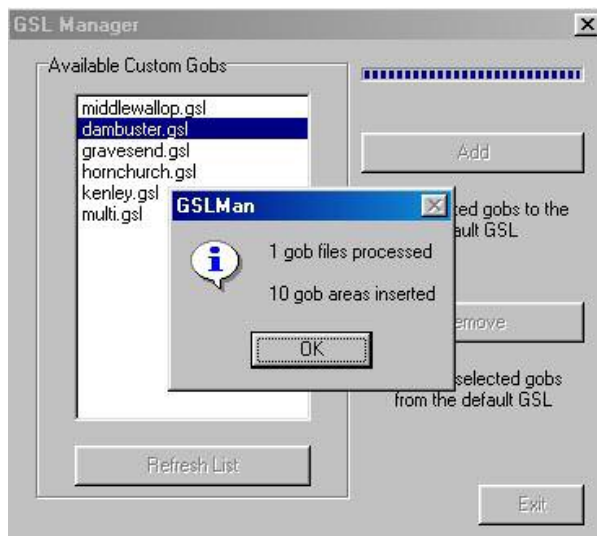
The GSL Distribution Pack contains a set of files to assist with installing and uninstalling custom gsl data on the end users PC. They depend on your install routine correctly placing the files into the CFS2 GSL folder but the install routine can be as simple as a zip file containing the correct folder structure or even just simple instruction to the user to unzip to the GSL folder.

It is **not** permitted to distribute GSLEdit with your scenery. The risk of the average user accidentally messing up their default GSL by clicking on the wrong thing is just too high. GSLEdit remains as part of the Developers GSL package where it can be hoped that anyone tinkering with it will have a basic knowledge of scenery design and the way that CFS2 works.

There are 2 methods for installing GSL scenery on a destination PC :-

Using GSLMan

GSLMan is a very simplified version of GSLEdit that will only let the user add and remove data for which they have a custom gsl file available. This avoids the possibility of inadvertently removing default gob areas.



It will only work correctly when located in the CFS2 GSL folder.

In this scenario you would install a copy of GSLMan.exe and your custom GSL file(s) to the user's CFS2 GSL folder as part of the general installation of your scenery. They can then be instructed to run GSLMan from that location and select your named gsl file(s) before clicking the "Add" button (or "Remove" if they wish to uninstall your custom GSL scenery)

Using the commandline tools

The programs `GSL_Add.exe` and `GSL_Rem.exe` are console applications that will perform the actions of adding (or removing) custom GSL data.

Syntax :-

```
GSL_Add <"custom.gsl"> ["Destination.gsl"]
GSL_Rem <"custom.gsl"> ["Destination.gsl"]
```

`Destination.gsl` is optional but if you leave off this parameter the programs will default to `"cfs2.gsl"` without any path.

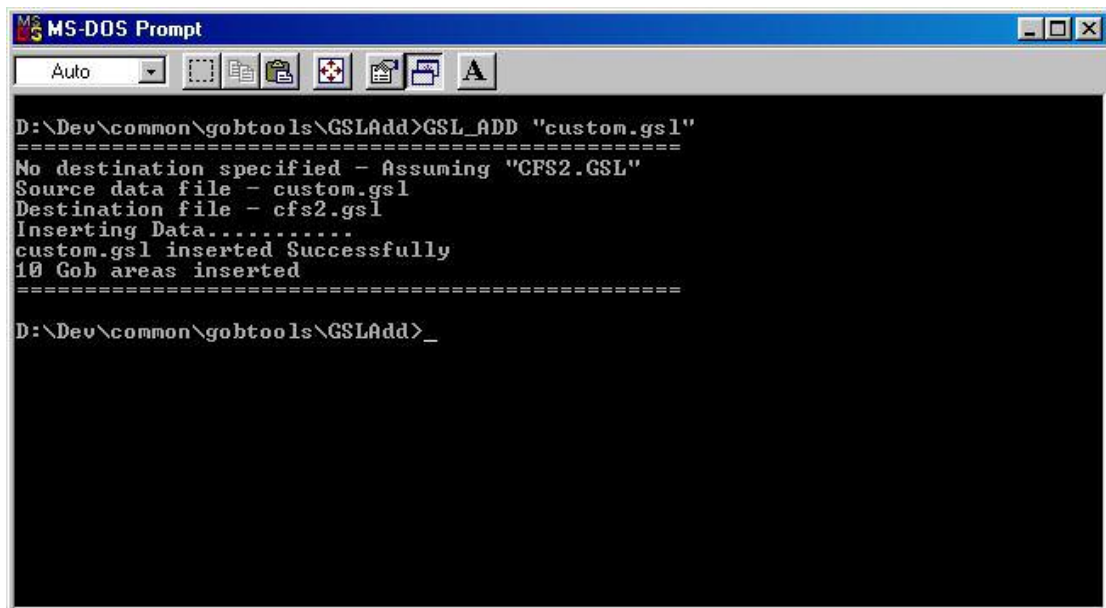
Examples :-

```
GSL_Add "mynew.gsl"
(adds mynew.gsl to cfs2.gsl in the current directory)
```

```
GSL_Add "mynew.gsl" "c:\Games\CFS2\GSL\cfs2.gsl"
(adds mynew.gsl from the current directory to the cfs2.gsl in the specified location)
```

```
GSL_Add "C:\windows\temp\mynew.gsl" "c:\Games\CFS2\GSL\cfs2.gsl"
(adds mynew.gsl from the specified location to cfs2.gsl in the specified location)
```

If you use `GSL_Rem` instead of `GSL_Add` then the action will be to remove the data rather than add it.



```
MS-DOS Prompt
Auto
D:\Dev\common\gobtools\GSLAdd>GSL_ADD "custom.gsl"
=====
No destination specified - Assuming "CFS2.GSL"
Source data file - custom.gsl
Destination file - cfs2.gsl
Inserting Data.....
custom.gsl inserted Successfully
10 Gob areas inserted
=====
D:\Dev\common\gobtools\GSLAdd>_
```

When run the programs will display information to the command window. If any errors were encountered then this will be displayed.

It is easiest if you install them to the user's CFS2 GSL folder but they can be run from anywhere. The drawback if you run them from elsewhere is that you need to know the full path to the default cfs2.gsl file in order to get them to work.

When placed in the CFS2 GSL folder you can do several things :-

- Instruct the user to drag your custom gsl file and drop it on the appropriate program icon. This will perform the required action.
- Instruct the user to open up a dos prompt, CD to the CFS2 GSL folder and type in the commands manually (not recommended...)
- Install Batch files at the same time and instruct the user to run them (or run them yourself as part of the install routine). These batch files would just contain the necessary commandline to Add (or remove) your custom GSL

For example a batch file called "Add_Dover GSL.BAT" containing just the single line

```
GSL_Add "dover.gsl"
```

Make a backup!

Whichever method you use for distributing your scenery it is **highly recommended** that part of your installation routine or instructions involve making a backup copy of the user's existing cfs2.gsl file before performing any modifications to it.

Nothing is completely foolproof and I will take no responsibility for any damage caused to the user's GSL scenery. It is important that you, as the scenery distributor, provide some option for restoring the previous status if all goes wrong as the result of a power failure or system problem.

The code used by the GSL Tools has been extensively tested and has proved reliable but it is impossible to take account of every variation of system and CFS2-setup.

Appendices

Setting up GSLEdit

Normally GSLEdit will set itself up automatically using registry setting for the location of CFS2 and the various files and folders.

If you have invalid registry settings or if you have more than one installation of CFS2 then you may need to set some features manually.

From the CFS2 Menu select "Locate CFS2" and browse to the correct copy of cfs2.exe. This is needed so that the program can locate the necessary programs and folders and also so that the Airfields list can be correctly updated. Then select "Open GSL" from the File menu and browse to CFS2.gsl which can be found in the GSL folder of your CFS2 installation.

Mwgfx.dll

GSLEdit uses mwgfx.dll for the display of object images. If you are getting no images displayed even when you have selected a default object then this may be because you do not have mwgfx.dll installed on your system. The mwgfx dll package can be obtained from the website listed in the contacts section.

Mission Builder problems

The CFS2 Mission Builder is not an independent program. It is just CFS2 itself run in a special mode.

If you have lost your Mission Builder shortcut you can create a new one by making a copy of your existing CFS2 shortcut, right-clicking on the copy and selecting "Properties". In the "Target" box you will see the path to your CFS2.exe program.

To the very end of this line add a space and then /BUILDER

This new shortcut will now run CFS2 in Mission Builder mode. Rename the shortcut to something suitable.

If you get a warning that the Databases are corrupt when you try to run Mission Builder the most likely cause is that you have too many Aircraft installed. Move out some of your addon aircraft and try again.

Note that the CFS2 Mission Builder requires a screen resolution of at least 1024x768 in order to run. If you are running a resolution lower than this then Mission Builder will fail to run.

Problems with GobCheck on non-English systems

There has been identified a problem with the use of GobCheck on systems that have the decimal delimiters set different from the standard English/American use of the period (dot) for the decimal point and the comma for the “thousands”. This shows up as the incorrect splitting of layouts.

On these systems you may need to set the numbering system to English or US to get the correct output.

Problems with Addon Aircraft

GSL allows the display of any installed aircraft (flyable or AI-only). However these will be displayed using the standard CFS2 aircraft variables to place them “Wheels down and engine off”. This can cause problems with aircraft designed using different animation systems. Most addon aircraft will have been designed using FSDS or AF99 along with AircraftAnimator. These use totally different variables for animation and so may appear incorrectly when placed as GSL scenery objects. Typically they will appear with their landing gear not visible and sometimes they will appear with no propellers or with the props turning. This is the same effect as when you use older addon aircraft as wingmen in missions. You will find that they sit on the runway with no landing gear and often with no prop.

The latest generation of addon aircraft designed using Gmax or FSDS2 should appear correctly but older addons may have to be avoided in GSL scenery.

CFS3 Notes

The tools and techniques in this package are designed for CFS2 only.

CFS3 uses a system that has some similarities on the surface but is very different underneath. Any attempt to use the programs from this package on the CFS3 GSL files **will** fail and may also corrupt the CFS3 files themselves.

Adapting scenery objects for GSL use

GSL scenery can only utilise objects that are in the CFS2 object system. This means only Library objects and Aircraft/Ship MDL files.

Many scenery objects are available as macros to be used in scenery design programs. These cannot be used by GSL. In order to make them usable they need to be converted to Library objects contained in Library BGL files. The process of modifying code and creating library BGLs is outside the scope of this document. It should be noted that as well as creating the Library objects you must also create a DP file of the same name as each library object for placement in the OBJECTS_DP folder in CFS2.

The easiest way to create a DP file for a custom object is to make a copy of a similar default one. For example if you have a custom Hangar object called my_hangar then make a copy of the DP file of the default hangar closest in size to your design and rename this to "my_hangar.dp". You can of course design a completely custom DP with custom damage values and effects but that is a more complex process and is best left for people with experience of Damage Profile design.

Unfortunately the main object design programs provide no direct Library-format output. FSDDS will allow the output of scasm source code that can be manually edited to the correct format before compiling. The "FSRegen" program (<http://www.nhreas.com/fsregen.html>) has a Library tool that can convert the output from Gmax to a library format. There are also tutorials available around the Web on the subject of Libraries and the creation of CFS2 weapons libraries (exactly the same principle is used for creating scenery object libraries).

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