



BHPA Incident Report: GBR-2014-1313

INCIDENT

Aircraft Type:	Sky Atis 3 paraglider. Size large.
Certification:	EN B
Manufacture Date:	2011. 140 hours flown.
Location:	Combe Gibbet, Berkshire.
Date and Time:	29th July 2014. 12:14 BST
Type of Flight:	Ridge soaring.
Persons Involved:	Paraglider pilot.
Injuries:	Fatal.
Nature of Damage:	No damage.
Pilot's Rating/Licence:	BHPA Club Pilot (novice) Rating.
Pilot's Age:	64
Pilot's Experience:	152 logged hours since June 2011. 34 hours in previous 6 months.
Information Source:	Witness statements, Met Office report.

Synopsis

Shortly after launching at Combe Gibbet near Hungerford in Berkshire, a paraglider pilot encountered severe turbulence at approximately 30 – 40m above ground level. The wing collapsed losing height rapidly. Before the pilot could regain control he impacted the slope sustaining fatal injuries.

History of the flight

Pilot A arrived at the Combe Gibbet take-off at approximately 8.45am on Tuesday 29th July 2014. There were approximately 4 or 5 other pilots there at that time. Pilot A was seen flying for what is believed to have been about an hour, without incident between approximately 9.30 and 10.30am. During this time he was seen at or around cloudbase, approximately 1200 - 1500ft above take-off.

At this time the wind was noted by witnesses as being north northwesterly, with some thermic activity and winds of approximately 10 – 14mph.

Throughout the morning more pilots arrived and began flying. By approximately mid-day it is estimated that there were 7 to 10 pilots in the air, most to the west of take-off and 2 or 3 in front and to the east. There were also a number of pilots on the ground.

At approximately 12.10 Pilot A took off and was seen to get into difficulty almost immediately, and at approximately 30 to 40m above the slope, his paraglider sustained a series of collapses resulting in rapid height loss. The glider began to recover but in doing so ended up in a diving turn to the left, which caused the pilot to swing out to the side in a pendulum motion, impacting the slope at high speed.

Pilot A was immediately attended by other pilots who controlled the situation, called the emergency services and administered CPR. The emergency services arrived within ten minutes.

Focus

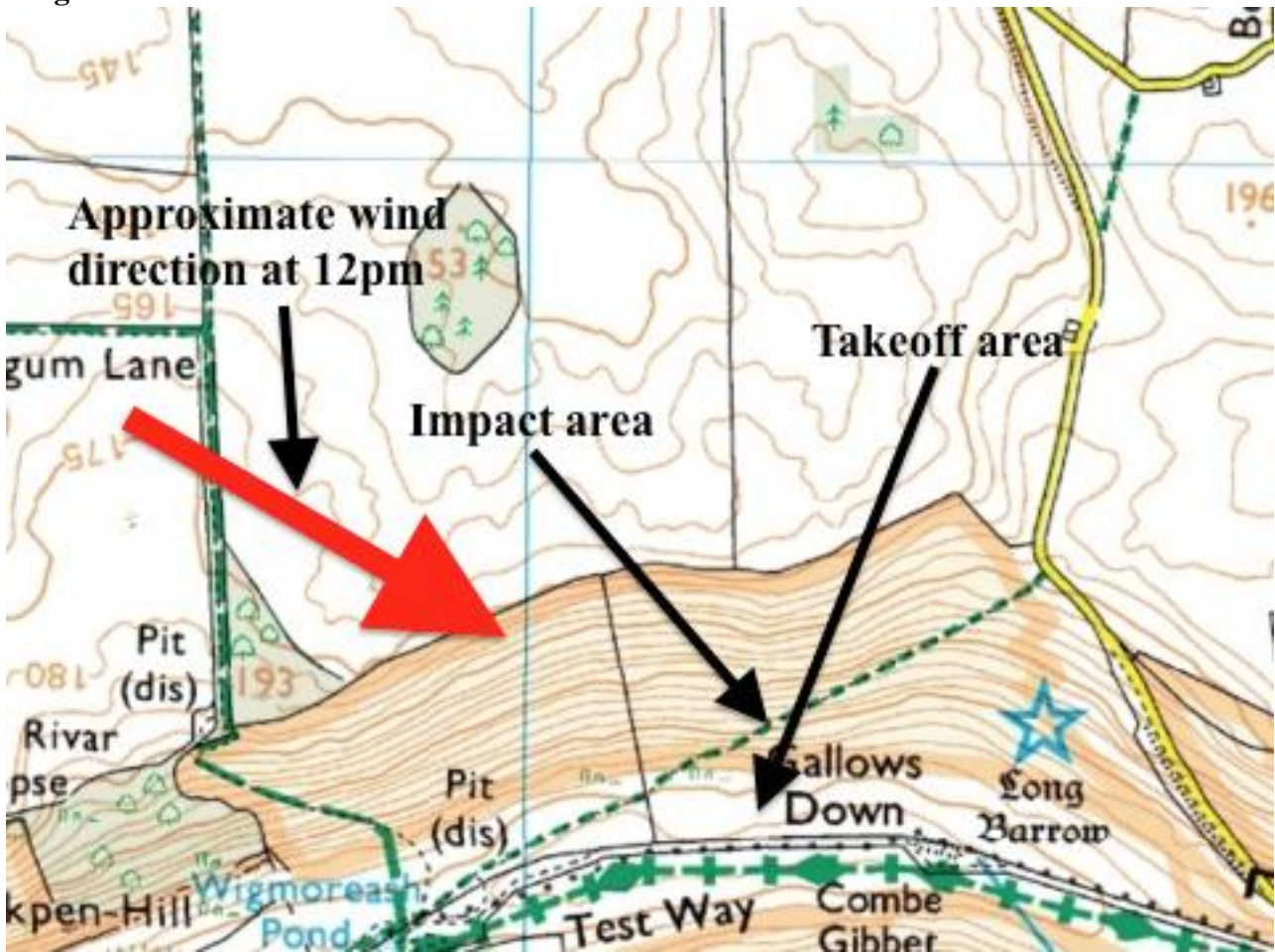
Based on the information available, including the witness statements, Pilot A's documented experience/currency and the Met Office report, the investigation focused on the weather conditions at the time of the incident.

Additional information

The Met Office report describes how a stable, light northwesterly airflow covered the area. A weak frontal system was approaching from the west. Visibility was very good and there was slight amount of "fair weather cloud". Cloudbase was set to rise from 2000ft in the morning up to 3000 – 4000ft as the morning progressed. Observations from a local weather station (approx. 20 miles away) at 12.00 (UTC) recorded the winds as being between 10 and 15kts (11-17mph) and west northwesterly up to 2000ft.

To a large extent statements from the pilots present on the day were in line with the Met Office report. Conditions in the morning were favourable for paragliding with a steady north northwesterly 10 to 14mph breeze. There was some early thermic activity (enough for pilots to get to cloudbase) but the thermals were not considered to be rough. This was probably due to the time of day and the fact that the wind was directly on the hill. As the morning progressed however, the wind backed further to the west and the thermals became progressively stronger and more turbulent as the sun became higher in the sky. A number of pilots commented that they experienced progressively rougher conditions as the morning went on. Because of this some decided to stop flying and considered moving to another flying site more suitable to the westerly wind direction. At the time of the incident the Chief Coach for the local club had noticed that the air felt "fresher" (colder) and that the wind was at times in excess of 45 degrees off the slope to the west. This may possibly have been as a result of the weak front mentioned by the Met Office, as the apparent change in air temperature was accompanied by a more definite line of established cumulus cloud. He also commented that the thermals were strong and gusty. The combination of the wind being significantly off the hill, the air mass becoming cooler and the thermals becoming stronger meant the air had become particularly turbulent and potentially dangerous in the area in front of launch. (see diagram 1 below).

Diagram 1



Findings

The investigation found that the incident occurred as a result of Pilot A encountering severe turbulence in the area in front of take-off and losing control of his glider at an altitude that made recovery unlikely.

Recommendations

There are no recommendations.