
BHPA Incident Report: GBR-2017-4192

INCIDENT

Aircraft Type:	Paraglider: Swing Arcus 6/26; Harness: Swing Connect Reverse harness fitted with Swing Nano Protect Emergency Parachute; Flymaster GPS electronic flight instrument.
Certification:	Paraglider certification EN-B.
Location:	Sarangkot, Pokhara, Nepal.
Date and Time:	22 nd January 2017, approximately 15:30 local time (UTC + 5h 45).
Type of Flight:	Ridge soaring / thermic flight.
Persons Involved:	Pilot A
Injuries:	Fatal
Nature of Damage:	The glider and harness were damaged as a result of the incident or during the recovery of the equipment.
Pilot's Rating/Licence:	BHPA Paragliding CP (Hill) rating.
Pilot's Age:	67
Pilot's Experience:	Total flying hours unknown. Approximately 10 logged flying hours recorded in the previous 6 months.
Information Source:	Track log information from Pilot A's electronic flight instrument; Pilot A's equipment inspection; witness statements from Pilots B and C and Instructors D and E.

Synopsis.

The pilot landed in the top of a tree during a hill soaring flight in Sarangkot, Nepal. After unclipping from his harness, the pilot fell to the ground sustaining fatal injuries.

History of the flight.

Pilot A was on a guided paragliding trip in Nepal. Instructors D and E were acting as guides on the trip and were on the launch area. Pilot A launched and flew away from the hill on a descending glide in calm conditions. He was seen to be adjusting and getting comfortable in his harness in the air. He appeared to encounter small areas of light lift and flew soaring beats without accumulating height. After approximately 2 minutes of flight he was seen by

Instructor D to turn gently towards a tree, with which he collided. His paraglider wing came to rest in the top of the tree canopy, approximately 12-15m above the ground level. Pilot C and Instructor D both made contact with Pilot A by radio, who responded that he was in a tree and was "ok". Pilot A was then advised by radio to stay where he was and to wait for assistance, and Instructor E ran down the hill to assist him. When Instructor E reached Pilot A, he was found to be on a stretcher, and was being attended to by local passers-by. Pilot A was evacuated to hospital, where he died later that day from the injuries he had sustained.

Focus.

Based on the information available, the Investigation considered the experience and currency of Pilot A, the site, the local flying conditions, the flight log data from Pilot A's electronic flight instrument, the equipment used by Pilot A, and the evidence from the witnesses.

Pilot A's Flymaster GPS contains flight log files indicating just under 10 hours' flying activity in the six months prior to the incident, with some flights being in thermic or ridge soaring conditions. He last flew one month before the incident.

The flying site where the incident occurred is a mountain of forested areas and fields. It is popular with paraglider and hang glider pilots and is well known for leisure flying. The site was being flown by several pilots on the incident day.

The witness statements from Instructors D and E describe the conditions on the incident day as being calm with little lift, with 0-3mph wind on take-off, in light thermic cycles. This information was supported by the evaluation of data from Pilot A's Flymaster flight instrument.

Pilot A's GPS track indicates that he flew a descending glide through generally calm air and small areas of light lift. Although the GPS track indicates an increased sink rate in the final four seconds of the flight, it is not possible to ascertain whether Pilot A encountered turbulent air that caused a departure from normal flight. The general flying conditions reported by the witnesses do not point to excessively turbulent air. Further, a departure from normal flight was not reported by Instructor D, who observed Pilot A's glider prior to it impacting the tree.

Pilot A's paraglider and harness remained in the top of the tree and were recovered the day after the incident, when the tree was felled by the local police (in the presence of Instructor D). The harness was immediately examined by Instructor D, who noted that it had a "Safe-T lock" arrangement of leg and chest strap buckles, and all four buckles were found to be unfastened. In his statement, Instructor D referred to information from local police, who reported to Instructor D that the local people who had attended to Pilot A had seen him attempt to climb down the tree, whereupon he fell to the ground when a branch snapped.

Pilot A's glider was damaged by the tree landing or the subsequent recovery. On 16th January 2017, it had been inspected by a paraglider testing centre. Upon examination by the testing centre after the incident, the glider was found to be slightly out of trim. The testing centre reported that this was most likely to have occurred as a result of the tree landing, but had the trim issue been present before the incident flight, it was deemed unlikely to have significantly affected the glider's handling. The Investigation does not consider the airworthiness of the glider to be a causal factor that led Pilot A to land in a tree.

Pilot A's harness was examined, with particular attention to the type and condition of

buckles. The “Safe-T lock” harness buckle arrangement is designed to stop pilots from slipping from the harness if leg loop buckles are unfastened. The buckles were manufactured by AustriAlpin (Cobra Compact model), and upon examination were found to be operating and releasing correctly. The Investigation concluded that on the incident flight the buckles did not all self-release.

The buckles were either unfastened by Pilot A, or were inadvertently not fastened at all during the incident flight. Whilst it is possible for a paraglider to be flown with a completely unfastened harness, the Investigation considered this extremely unlikely on the incident flight. The effects of an unfastened harness on Pilot A’s paraglider would have been evident to Instructors D and E both during the launch and the flight, and therefore reported in their statements.

The Investigation concluded that Pilot A intentionally unfastened all four harness buckles, and this would have been carried out when he had landed in the tree.

Findings

The Investigation determined from the available evidence that on the balance of probabilities, Pilot A landed in a tree after misjudging his flight path and proximity to the trees, and fell to the ground after intentionally unclipping from his harness.

Recommendations.

Pilots shall be reminded through the Association’s magazine Skywings of the dangers of falling following a tree landing, and the importance of securing themselves in the tree to reduce the risk of injury from falling.