

British Hang Gliding and Paragliding Association

REPORT

**Investigation of a paragliding accident
which occurred at Staddon Heights, Plymouth,
on 28th August 2010
in which the pilot suffered fatal injury.**

Introduction

On 28th August 2010 the British Hang Gliding and Paragliding Association (BHPA) received reports of an air accident at Staddon Heights, Plymouth that had resulted in the death of the pilot. The BHPA is authorised to carry out investigations into serious and fatal hang gliding and paragliding accidents by the Air Accident Investigation Branch of the Department for Transport and to produce reports under its delegated authority. The BHPA tasked Mr David Thompson, BHPA Senior Technical Officer, to investigate the accident and submit a report to the Flying and Safety Committee (FSC) of the BHPA for ratification.

BHPA investigation serial number: IR 10/127

Summary

On Saturday 28th August 2010 a non-BHPA paraglider pilot arrived at an area known locally as Jennycliff, at Staddon Heights, Plymouth. He was seen to launch his Ozone Rush paraglider, with some difficulty, in windy and gusty conditions. He immediately ascended approximately fifteen to twenty metres before sustaining an asymmetric collapse on the right side of the wing. The wing turned right and dived into the ground. The investigation concluded that the incident occurred as a result of the pilot failing to recover from a low level asymmetric collapse, brought about by turbulence due to a combination of prevailing weather conditions and site topography.

This document is confidential until ratified.

Date ratified by the BHPA Flying and Safety Committee: 7th February 2011

THE STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

The structure of this report conforms to that recommended in the BHPA Technical Manual and is intended to follow the principles pertaining to AAIB reports. It is divided into five sections.

Section 1 - Factual information

Section 2 - Analysis

Section 3 - Conclusions

Section 4 - Safety Recommendations

SECTION 1 - FACTUAL INFORMATION

1.1 History of the flight

At approximately 4.45pm on Saturday 28th August a paraglider pilot was seen preparing to launch at an area known as Jennycliff, Staddon Heights in Plymouth. After a couple of minutes, apparently struggling with the glider in the windy and gusty conditions, he was able to launch. The glider was seen to ascend almost vertically and quickly got to a height of approximately 15 – 20 metres where it was seen to suffer an asymmetric collapse on the right side of the wing. The wing was then seen to turn right and dive down, into the hill.

The pilot was quickly attended by passers-by who had witnessed the fall. The first was a registered nurse who commenced CPR and arranged for the emergency services to be called. The nurse was soon assisted by others, one of which was a Royal Navy medic. The air ambulance then arrived and paramedics took over. The pilot died from the injuries sustained.

1.2 Injuries to persons

Injuries	Crew	Passengers	Others
Fatal	1	-	-
Serious	-	-	-
Minor / None	-	-	-

1.3 Damage to the aircraft

The paraglider was undamaged.

1.4 Other damage

N/A

1.5 Personnel information

The pilot was a 43-year-old male weighing 68kg. He joined the BHPA in March 2008 and completed a course of training at a BHPA paragliding school, gaining his Club Pilot (Tow) rating in June 2008. He then went on to complete a ‘hill conversion’ course with the same paragliding school on the 8th September 2008, though the pilot never logged this with the BHPA. The pilot did not renew his BHPA membership and it lapsed in April 2009.

There is no evidence to indicate the pilot’s experience level. His flight log showed only two entries dating back to June 2008 and did not include flight times.

1.6 Aircraft information

Paraglider: Ozone Rush (small 70-90kg). Serial no. RS-G-16A-023. Date of manufacture April 2005. Certified DHV 1/2. The glider was independently inspected and found to be in serviceable condition. A test flight was not carried out. The glider would have been considered a suitable type and size for this pilot.

The harness was a SupAir Altix (medium). The chest strap was set to 46cm. The harness contained an Apco Mayday 18 parachute. The parachute deployment system was checked and found to be operational. The harness and parachute were found to be in serviceable condition.

The pilot’s Charley Insider helmet was found approximately 10 feet from where he lay. The chinstrap was fastened, but extremely loose.

1.7 Meteorological information

Witnesses describe the conditions on the day as both windy and gusty. One witness, who is also an experienced paraglider pilot, stated that he considered the wind to be fifteen to twenty miles per hour and very gusty. He stated that in his opinion it was “too windy and gusty to paraglide”.

The Met Office aftercast confirms that the wind was from the north-west and would have been approximately ten to fifteen knots (11 - 17 mph) gusting to over 20 knots (23mph).

1.8 Aids to navigation

N/A

1.9 Communications

N/A

1.10 Aerodrome and approved facilities

The pilot launched from an area known as Jennycliff on Staddon Heights, Plymouth. The actual take-off area chosen by the pilot comprised of wheat crop that had been flattened by recent storms. Immediately in front of the chosen launch area is a row of mature hawthorn bushes forming a barrier between the field and the coastal path just below.



The hill then drops off more steeply into coastal scrub and then cliffs before dropping down to the bay. The hawthorn bushes were up to four metres high in places, and in a position on the brow of the slope such that wind associated turbulence would reasonably be expected.

The area is occasionally flown by local club members but from an area in front of the hawthorn bushes that has been cleared of scrub. It is an unofficial site and does not appear in the club site guide.

1.11 Flight recorders

N/A

1.12 Wreckage and impact information

N/A

1.13 Medical and pathological information

Cause of death was given as ‘multiple injuries’.

1.14 Fire

N/A

SECTION 2 – ANALYSIS

The investigation considered the weather conditions. The weather on the day was fine and bright with some cumulus cloud. There was an unstable northwesterly airflow with winds gusting from 15 to 20-plus miles per hour. These conditions would be considered potentially dangerous for paragliding due to the turbulence associated with strong, gusting winds. The investigation considered the weather conditions to be a major factor in this incident.

The Investigation considered the choice of take-off area. The pilot took off from an area immediately behind a row of mature hawthorn bushes. The row of bushes was high enough to disrupt any air flowing up and over the hill, giving rise to obstacle-induced turbulence. Given the strength and gustiness of the wind on the day the area behind the bushes would have been extremely turbulent, possibly explaining why the pilot had difficulty in attempting to launch. The investigation considered the choice of take-off area in conjunction with the prevailing weather conditions to be a major factor in this incident.

SECTION 3 – CONCLUSIONS

The investigation concluded that the incident occurred as a result of the pilot failing to recover from a low level asymmetric collapse, brought about by turbulence due to a combination of prevailing weather conditions and site topography.

SECTION 4 - SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS

There are no safety recommendations.