



BHPA Incident Report: GBR-2017-4623

INCIDENT

Aircraft Type:	The aircraft was an Advance Sigma 9 paraglider, size 29 in white, blue and yellow. Serial number 4308P60071. The glider was independently inspected and found to be in excellent condition. The harness was a Kortel Kuik 2 modular pod harness with airbag back protection. Serial number A1404-mk-L-43. On inspection it was found to be in very good condition. The harness contained an Independence Annular Evo 22 parachute. Serial number 16415. It had not been deployed in the incident. On inspection it was found to be in good condition and correctly installed.
Certification:	Paraglider certification EN-C
Manufacture Date:	Date of manufacture was 2014. Glider hours are unknown.
Location: which is situated	The incident occurred at Spencer's Bowl on White Sheet Downs, approximately 2km north northwest of Mere in Wiltshire. OS Grid Ref: ST803350. The site is a small southwesterly facing bowl approximately 600m across and with a top to bottom height of approximately 100m. The north end of the bowl is formed by a steep sided ridge, which extends out in a southwesterly direction for approximately 400m.
Date and Time:	22/5/2017 approximately 18:40
Type of Flight:	Ridge soaring.
Persons Involved:	Paraglider pilot
Injuries:	Fatal
Nature of Damage:	None
Pilot's Rating/Licence:	The pilot held a BHPA Pilot rating. This rating was attained in February 2013. The pilot held a BHPA club coach licence, having attended the training course in February 2014.
Pilot's Age:	55

Pilot's Experience: The pilot joined the BHPA in August 2008. He gained his BHPA Club Pilot rating in April 2009. Inspection of the flight log in the pilot's Brauniger IQ Alti variometer showed that he had logged approximately 19 hours between 30th July and 11th September 2016, and a further 28 hours between 22nd January and 21st May 2017. Six of the forty logged flights (IQ Alto memory flight log max is 40) were in excess of 2 hours duration.
The pilot's total hours and experience are unknown.

Information Source: Witness statements, Pilot flight instruments, Met Office aftercast, Avon Hang Gliding and Paragliding sites guide and independent glider inspection report.

Synopsis

Immediately after launching at the site known locally as Spencer's Bowl on White Sheet Down in Wiltshire, a paraglider pilot encountered severe turbulence. The wing suffered a series of collapses and lost height rapidly. Before the pilot could regain control he impacted the lower slope sustaining fatal injuries.

History of the flight

On the afternoon of 22nd May 2017 Pilot A arrived at Spencer's Bowl on White Sheet Down with the intention of paragliding, though the exact time of arrival is unknown. At approximately 17:00 Pilot A had a conversation with a radio-controlled modeler about the weather conditions, after which he returned to his car.

At 17:50 Pilot A was joined on the hill by Pilot B. The two discussed the wind conditions and agreed to wait, as they assessed the wind to be too strong, estimating it to be in the region of 18mph. They also discussed the possibility of moving round to the northwesterly take-off, as the wind appeared to be moving round towards the northwest as had been forecast.

Shortly after this another pilot (Pilot C) arrived and began to set up his glider to attempt a launch. Pilot C attempted to launch his glider but had difficulty keeping the glider inflated. During this period two further paraglider pilots arrived on site though they did not unpack their gliders.

At Approximately 18:10, noting that the wind appeared to have eased, Pilot A informed Pilot B that he would get his wing out and test the conditions by attempting to inflate his glider. Pilot A clipped into his harness and moved to the edge of the hill. He inflated his glider but could not keep it stable above his head. He then moved a few metres to his left in a southerly direction and had a further attempt to inflate the glider. This met with the same result in that Pilot A was unable to keep the glider inflated and stable. He then moved further left to an area where the bowl was more west facing. Pilot A inflated his glider successfully and took off. Pilot A was seen to fly straight out from the hill without getting into his harness. Almost immediately the glider suffered a number of small tip collapses followed by a series of larger collapses, losing height rapidly. The glider then entered an uncontrolled spiral and Pilot A impacted the slope approximately 40-50m below take off. Pilot A was immediately attended by the other pilots who called the emergency services and administered first aid. The emergency services arrived within twenty minutes. Pilot A was declared dead at the scene.

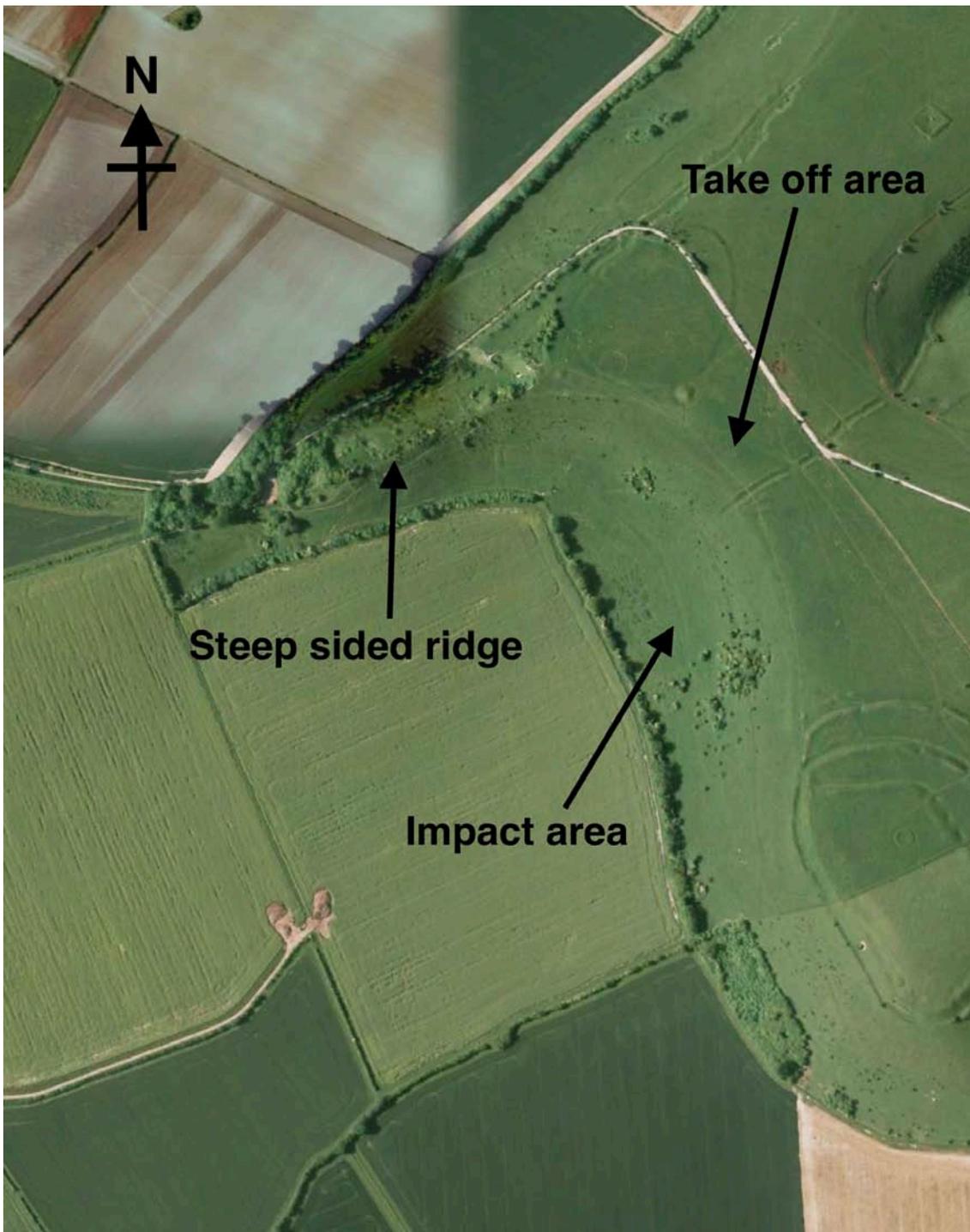
Additional information

The Met Office aftercast supplied by the Air Accident Investigation Branch (AAIB) states the following:

“The figures detailed above show that at 19:00 BST on the 22nd May 2017, the area of White Sheet Hill was affected by a weak and decaying occluded front. There would have been no significant precipitation. I would assess that the air temperature would have been around 17°C and a dew point of 12°C. Moderate thermals from the surface to around 2500ft AMSL being aided by a west or northwest wind giving uplift on the western side of the escarpment, probably leading to moderate turbulence.”

The Met Office aftercast is very much in line with the weather conditions witnessed by the pilots on the hill in that the wind was from a west to northwesterly direction at the time of the incident.

The bowl at White Sheet Hill faces in a southwesterly direction. See Photo below.



When the wind comes from the west, or north of west, it has to flow over the steep sided ridge shown on the left of the photo. This will give rise to extremely turbulent air in the area of the bowl.

The Avon Hang Gliding and Paragliding Club site guide states the following for Spencer's Bowl in the section "Local flying/Hazards";

"If the wind direction is to the right of Alfred's Tower, it is better to fly the NW ridge as the north spur creates turbulence."

The site guide states that the suitable wind directions for Spencer's Bowl are south-southwest through to west-southwest.

Findings

The Investigation found that the incident occurred as a result of Pilot A taking off into turbulent air, in the lee of the ridge at the northern end of Spencer's Bowl, and losing control of his paraglider at a height from which recovery was unlikely.

Recommendations

The Investigation recommends that the Avon Hang Gliding and Paragliding Club review the entry in the site guide for Spencer's Bowl, placing particular emphasis on the potential severity of the turbulence when the wind is off to the north, and on the importance of clarifying the true wind direction before flying.