

## *safety matters*

# The dangers of flying close to the terrain

More than one recent BHPA Formal Investigation report has drawn attention to the dangers of flying close to the terrain in thermic conditions. Two incidents in the IR digest below also involve these conditions. 'Close to the terrain' doesn't just mean low flying, where a pilot doesn't have the height or the time to deal with even a partial deflation. It also refers to scratching along slopes and steep cliffs, where a thermal gust or a minor deflation – or a moment's inattention – can cause a collision with the ground or with a prominent tree or bush.

This warning doesn't just apply to paraglider pilots; hang glider pilots too have been tipped into the scenery when scratching slopes and cliffs. It can be tempting, to avoid landing

on the slope or at the bottom of the hill, to try and eke out intermittent lift close to the terrain. This is especially true when the prospect of a big distance flight has been dangled by the weather forecast. This is often when the air is at its most turbulent, even if only intermittently.

All pilots are advised to consider how they might handle unwelcome turbulence at just the wrong moment when flying close to the terrain. If you are unable to see how you might recover control in case of a sudden deflation or uncommanded turn, you need to fly away immediately until you have a safe clearance. If this isn't possible, slope land or go down. An unwanted collision with the terrain rarely has a happy outcome.