safety matters

Harness chest strap setting (distance between risers)

A paraglider's stability (i.e. its tendency to remain undisturbed by turbulence) and its recovery characteristics (its ability to recover to normal flight after an upset) are both significantly affected by the geometry of the pilot's harness. The most critical part of the harness geometry is the distance between the main riser carabiners - which is set by the pilot by adjusting the 'chest strap'. When paragliders are certified, the test pilot sets his harness at the appropriate setting: 38cm for small gliders (<50kg pilot weight), 42cm for medium gliders and 46cm for large gliders (>80kg pilot weight). All the flight tests are carried out at this setting.

Flying with the carabiner distance set wider than the certified setting means that you are a test pilot - and that you should expect considerably increased difficulties in recovering the wing to normal flight in the event of a collapse. Recovery may in fact be impossible - especially if your height is limited and you are not extremely well practised in the SIV arts! (This applies to all classes of glider: an EN 'B' is only a 'B' if the chest strap is set correctly.) Don't become the next wide chest strap asymmetric collapse 'fashion victim' fatality. Make sure you do not omit the 'Elbow to Knuckles' check from your pre-flight checks. [The distance from your elbow to your knuckles is close to 40cm for most people. So your 'elbow to knuckles' should be a snug fit between the carabiners.]

Flight planning

We are all required by law to ensure that our flights can be made safely. This means that even if you only plan some ridge-soaring at your local site, you should be aware of any local airspace restrictions and you should take the steps outlined below. If you plan to fly cross-country then your flight planning will obviously need to include checking a great swathe of the country for possible restrictions.

Whenever you fly you should call Freefone 0500 354802 to check on Royal flights, Red Arrows displays and other Temporary Restricted Airspace (RA[T]).

You should also check the NOTAMs for any other activities that may affect your flight. You can subscribe to a NOTAM service or to a twice-weekly Temporary Navigational Warning information bulletins (TNWs) postal service; or you can use the Web to access all the NOTAMs for that day at www.ais.org.uk (there's no need to register, just enter the username: 'BHPAuser' and password 'password'). If you use the postal service, you should be aware that details may have changed after the bulletins were printed and posted.

Additionally, if you are flying midweek (non English Bank Holiday) you should let the military pilots know. There are two linked systems for this.

Five hundred of the busiest flying sites have allocated Site Codes. (The codes for your club's sites will be in your club site guide.) On these sites it is possible to activate a temporary avoidance zone around the notified site (1nm diameter/1000ft agl) by contacting the Low Flying Booking Cell by 20:00 the day before (16:00 on Sun). (Later submissions will still be passed on to military pilots, but as a warning rather than creating a temporary avoidance zone.)

For all other sites the standard CANP (Civil Aircraft Notification Procedure) should be used if five or more gliders are likely to be operating. This does not establish an avoidance area but it does ensure that military pilots will be alerted to your presence. Because it can take up to four hours to get the information out to all the military pilots before they take off, the notification procedure should be started as soon as possible - ideally the evening before.

In both cases take the following steps:

Use Freefone 0800 515544 (or fax 0800 3892225, or e-mail witlfos-lbfc@wittering.raf.mod.uk). Provide the following details:

(a) Activity. Hang/paragliding (If the site is one of those with a site code then state 'Hang/paragliding Avoidance Area' here.)

(b) Location: Site grid reference (2 letter 6 figure) and name. (If the site is one of those with a site code then state that first.)

(c) Area of operation. (With the notification system this is a maximum of 2nm radius. With the avoidance area system it is always 1nm diameter.)

(d) Date and time flying will start/finish.

(e) Expected number of gliders.

(f) Contact telephone number (ideally a mobile that will work on the site).

(g) Normal contact details (if different to (f)).

You will be given a unique Reference Number to note.

The Low Flying Booking Cell is manned Monday to Thursday 07:00 - 23:00 and Friday to Sunday 07:00 - 17:00. If you use the fax or e-mail contact out-of-hours you will be called back by phone with the Reference Number when the office is next manned and the associated notification has been passed to military pilots. You can only assume that you have avoidance/notification status once you have received this.

If at any stage it becomes clear that the site won't be used after all you should cancel by calling 0800 515544, quoting the Reference Number and amending the details.

The personnel manning the Low Flying Booking Cell are a helpful bunch whose sole aim is keeping us all safe. If your flying situation doesn't exactly match the criteria above it is still worth giving them a call for advice - they might still be able to do something to help.

Fatal accident: Formal Investigation report summary

On March 19th 2009 Martin Hume, aged 63, a BHPA Club Pilot (Novice) rated pilot, was flying his UP Kantega 2 DHV1-2 paraglider at a site in Algodonales, Spain while on a paragliding holiday. Shortly after 2pm, having been in the air a few minutes and gaining some height, he was seen by witnesses to be in a rapid spiral dive. He did not appear to make any attempt to recover from the spiral or to deploy his emergency parachute, and spiralled down until crashing into the hill amongst rocks and thorny vegetation. He died from the injuries sustained before reaching hospital. This incident was not reported until four weeks after the event, a delay that seriously compromised the investigation. From the limited evidence available the investigation was unable to positively establish a reason for the accident though it is suspected that an asymmetric collapse initiated the spiral dive. The Investigation therefore concluded that Mr Hume died from injuries sustained, having spiralled into the ground at high speed.

BHPA courses

November 21 - 22	BHPA Club Coach	Guernsey Paragliding Club	Roger Le Poidevin	07781 113272	rip@intersurgical.co.uk
January 16 - 17 (2010)	BHPA Club Coach	Wessex Club (Ringwood)	Roy Menage	07967 338800	coach@wessexhgpg.org.uk
February 6 - 7 (2010)	BHPA Club Coach	Cumbria Soaring Club	Lance Greenhalgh	07770 808497	lance.greenhalgh@itmanaged.net
March 13 - 14 (2010)	BHPA Club Coach	North Devon Club	Anne Willis	07970 592813	willan108@aol.com
March 27 – 29 (2010)	BHPA Instructor	Lilleshall National Sports Centre, Shropshire		0116 261 1322	stephanie-blankley@bhpa.co.uk