



Accident to the Centrair Pégase C101 A registered F-CGSH

on 30 May 2019

at Castillon-en-Couserans (Ariège)

⁽¹⁾ Unless otherwise
stated, all times
given in this report
are in local time.

Time	Around 17:20 ⁽¹⁾
Operator	Aéroclub de l'Ariège
Type of flight	Local flight
Persons on board	Pilot
Consequences and damage	Pilot slightly injured, glider severely damaged
This is a courtesy translation by the BEA of the Final Report on the Safety Investigation published in May 2020. As accurate as the translation may be, the original text in French is the work of reference.	

Collision with vegetation during a slope soaring flight

1 - HISTORY OF THE FLIGHT

Note: the following information is based mainly on statements and data from the glider's FLARM.

The pilot made a towed take-off at about 14:35 for a local flight to the south of Saint-Girons Antichan aerodrome (Ariège).

After about 2 hours and 45 minutes of flying, the pilot was slope soaring over a forest close to the departure aerodrome. Wishing to continue his flight, he headed south without gaining height. The glider approached the terrain. The pilot was no longer able to pull away towards the valley. The glider collided with the treetops and came to rest in the trees, with the cockpit pointing downwards.

The pilot, who had suffered a minor head injury, notified the Aero club by phone. He was airlifted by helicopter and transported to a hospital at around 19:00.

2 - ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

2.1 Pilot information

The 66-year-old pilot, who held a glider pilot licence issued in 2014, had logged 245 flight hours on gliders, including 92 flight hours on type. He had made about 12 flights since the beginning of the year. Many flights were for longer than two hours.

The pilot indicated that he had prepared the flight with an instructor by reviewing the significant weather charts (SIGWX) and wind charts (WITEM). He estimated that the uplift could be used up to an altitude of about 2,000 m and that a northerly breeze of about 15 kt would allow for slope soaring to the south of the aerodrome.

He added that, after the release, he reached an altitude of about 1,500 metres. The inversion layer was blocking the uplift at that altitude. He tried to get through the inversion layer by flying to the south side of the terrain. This attempt was unsuccessful, so he returned to the north side and managed, with some difficulty, to regain height. He again tried to head round to the south side of the terrain, but he felt a downdraught, which caused the glider to descend into the trees.

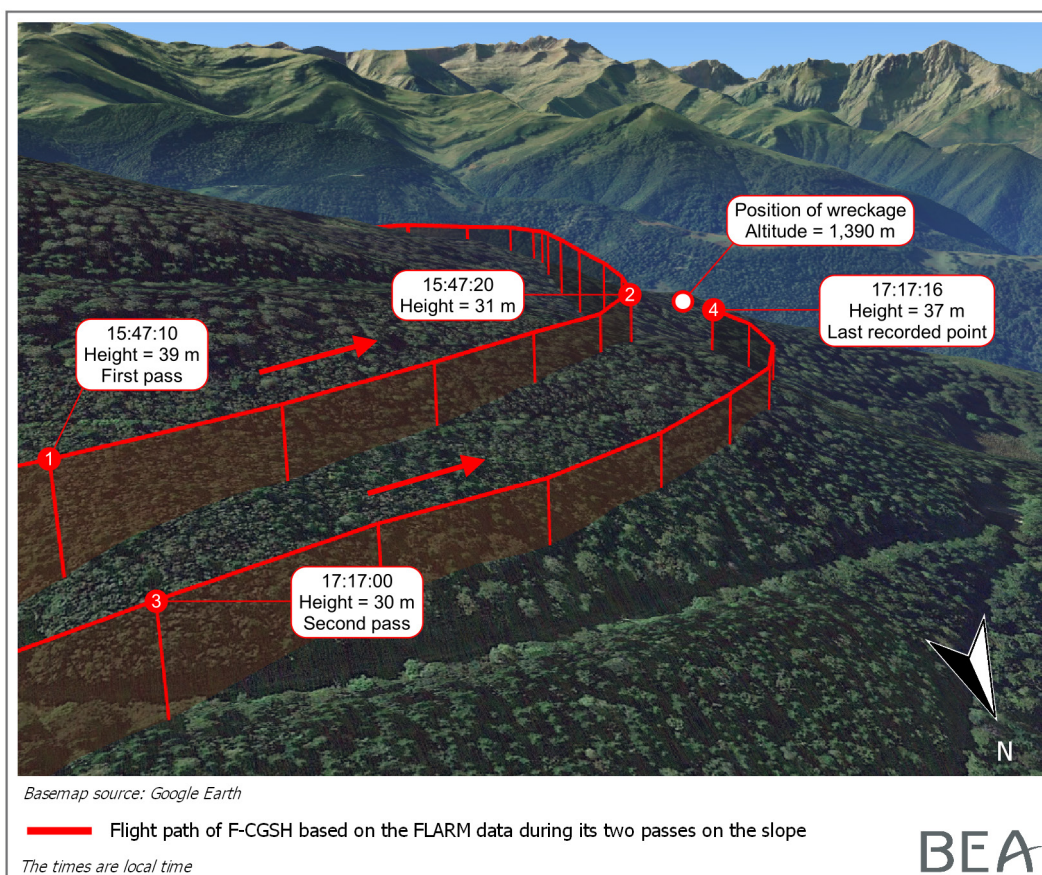
He added that the difficulty encountered in exploiting the uplift made the flight strenuous and probably caused fatigue. He thought that his desire to get above the inversion layer had led him to fly too close to the terrain.

2.2 Meteorological conditions

The meteorological conditions estimated at the accident site by Météo-France were as follows: westerly wind, 5 to 10 knots, visibility greater than 10 km, few cumulus clouds at an altitude of 1,300 m, temperature 12 °C. The thermal uplift that could be exploited did not exceed an altitude of 1,500 m.

2.3 Examination of the FLARM computer

The glider was equipped with a FLARM computer. The flight path was reconstructed from the data taken from the computer read-out. It shows that the pilot made two nearly identical passes on the accident slope: the first at about 15:45 and the second around 17:15. The two passes were made at comparable heights, between 30 and 40 m. During the second pass, the ground speed was about 100 km/h, 10 km/h lower than for the first pass.



3 - CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions are solely based on the information which came to the knowledge of the BEA during the investigation. They are not intended to apportion blame or liability.

Scenario

The flight took place in unfavourable aerological conditions: thermal uplift was weak and the slope effects were not very marked, especially in the late afternoon. After a flight of 2 hours 45 minutes in the area around Saint-Girons Antichan aerodrome, the pilot elected to continue the flight to the south. He flew at low altitude over a slope over which he had passed 1 hour 30 minutes earlier. Due to the change in air flow observed during the afternoon, it is probable that the slope effects encountered on the first pass had abated. The flight path adopted did not allow for a sufficient margin of energy to be maintained in relation to the terrain. The pilot was unable to pull away towards the valley and the glider struck the treetops.

Contributing factors

The following factors may have contributed to the collision:

- ☐ a strong performance-driven motivation to continue the flight;
- ☐ impaired judgement and perception due to fatigue caused by the duration of the flight and the difficulty in finding uplift, which meant that the pilot did not realise that the aerological conditions had changed.