

AIRPROX REPORT No 2011141

Date/Time: 15 Oct 2011 1315Z (Saturday)

Position: 5106N 00216W (1½nm SSW of The Park GLS – nr Mere, Wilts)

Airspace: London FIR (Class: G)

Reporting Ac Reported Ac

Type: Sigma Paraglider KA6 Glider

Operator: Civ Pte Civ Pte

Alt/FL: 2400ft 1535ft
amsl aal

Weather: VMC CLBC VMC CLBC

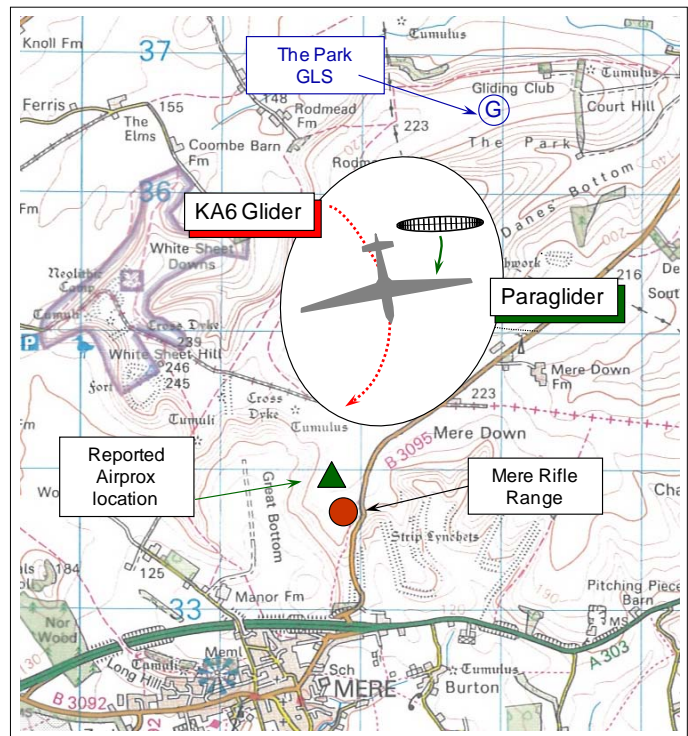
Visibility: >10km >5nm

Reported Separation:

5ft V/Nil H 100ft V/Nil H

Recorded Separation:

Not recorded



PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

THE SIGMA 8 PARAGLIDER PILOT reports he was flying his bright orange paraglider just to the N of the town of Mere, Wiltshire. He had been flying for about 1hr in a gentle autumn thermal between 1400ft and 3400ft ALT up to the cloudbase for most of this period, and so he must have been clearly visible to all the pilots operating from the nearby Park Glider Launching Site. Other gliders had earlier flown across the location and it is common for paraglider pilots to fly there in S'yly winds. He pulled forward to join a white glider that was below him, and well ahead, over the town of Mere. The glider appeared to be in light lift, turning very gently and they were the only two ac in the vicinity. The paraglider pilot tried to head to the centre of where he gauged the thermal to be and was flying straight, maintaining altitude as he entered the gently rising air. The glider pilot continued to fly slow lazy RH turns and at this stage the glider's presence give him no cause for concern or to alter his track.

He saw the glider pass to his R, perhaps 50ft below, and several hundred metres away and waved to its pilot. The glider passed behind him before he picked it up again to his L; they were now at a similar height and in a similar slow turn to the R. Although he judged that they were on a collision course, with a speed of just 12kt he was unable to make any effective manoeuvre away. He is aware that glider pilots see paragliders as effectively stationary and was content that the glider pilot would modify his flat slow turn to the R slightly to miss his paraglider easily; however the gliders turn continued and he could see that they were very clearly on a collision course as he headed S. There was no waggle of the wings or any indication at all that control was being applied by the pilot as the glider passed directly beneath his paraglider with no more than 5ft of vertical separation at a position NW of Rifle Range Hill. Had the glider struck his paraglider it would have been about 2/3rds along the outboard wing. He saw the wing of the glider in very close detail and was screaming at this point, the slightest wiggle to tighten the turn would have led to a collision and would have killed him; the Risk was assessed as 'high'. He noted the time and looked for any ID numbers to help him identify the glider.

Amassing about 1500hr over 17 years of flying hang gliders and paragliders including extensive cross country experience, he is a Club Coach and frequently a Meet Director. He has had other incidents over the years, but this one was upsetting as it was completely unnecessary; the conditions

were totally benign and they had loads of height. This was a very close call and he has been suffering from delayed shock. Paragliders and gliders can fly well together and they can easily share the same sky.

The white glider was from the Park so he visited the launching site and spoke to the Club Chairman about the Airprox.

THE SCHLEICHER KA 6E GLIDER (KA6) PILOT reports he was airborne on a local flight from The Park Glider Launching Site (GLS); his glider is coloured white with red wing tips and rudder. He was released from the aerotow at 2000ft QFE about 2.3nm SSE of the Park and turned N, then W, before finding weak lift. At this point, about 8-10min before the Airprox, he saw a paraglider about 2nm to the W flying close to the cloud base at 2800ft ALT. He flew to the N but found no lift so turned towards Mere. Encountering lift, he made three thermal turns to the R at 48kt which produced minimal lift. Flying about 1000ft below cloud at 1535ft QFE – about 2232ft ALT - with an in-flight visibility of >5nm, he had not seen the paraglider for several minutes when he was shocked to see it fly over about 100ft above his glider with a 'high' Risk of collision. At this point he flew out of the area. The angle of approach had prevented him sighting the paraglider beforehand.

THE CFI OF THE KA6 PILOT'S GLIDING CLUB reports this was a privately owned and operated glider flown by a club member. The CFI spent several hours analysing both logger traces and has concluded that the glider and paraglider passed extremely close to each other - possibly just a few feet. He has informed all of the Club pilots of the difficulties of soaring near paragliders and the need to maintain adequate separation at all times.

UKAB Note (1): The UK AIP at ENR 5-5-1-6 notifies the Glider Launching Site at The Park, Kingston Deverill, Wiltshire, as active from Sunrise to Sunset and where winch launching takes place to 3000ft about the site elevation of 697ft amsl.

UKAB Note (2): This Airprox occurred outwith recorded radar coverage.

THE BHPA comments that data from the loggers analysed by the gliding club's CFI will have provided an accurate picture of what happened. Whilst glider and paraglider pilots are used to thermalling in what other pilots would consider very close proximity to other aircraft of the same speed range, the factor of four speed difference between the types does necessitate that more care be taken when sharing a thermal. The speed disparity leaves a paraglider pilot with very few practical collision avoidance options available to them. The proactive actions of the CFI to inform the Club's pilots of the lessons to be learnt from this unfortunate incident could well be of use throughout the BGA.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available included reports from the pilots of both ac.

It was evident to the Board that this was a close encounter between dissimilar ac types of disparate performance. Although these were the only ac flying in the vicinity, this is a very popular location for paragliding activities and the KA6 pilot as a local operator should have been well aware of that. The BGA Member suggested that the KA6 glider pilot might have been flying too fast as his reported speed of 48kt is not the ideal speed for thermalling this type of glider. Nevertheless, it was apparent that his search for what minimal lift existed in the vicinity might have been focussing his attention to the detriment of an all-round look-out scan. Having seen the paraglider beforehand, the KA6 pilot reports that he had lost sight of it during the thermalling turns. Nevertheless, Members recognised the orange paraglider was there to be seen and the glider pilot had a responsibility to afford this relatively slow and unmanoeuvrable ac appropriate separation. In the event, the KA6 pilot did not see the paraglider again until he flew underneath it and by that stage it was too late to increase the miss distance. Whilst the Board noted the paraglider pilot's comment that paragliders and conventional gliders can fly well together and easily share the same sky, the BGA Member opined

that in such circumstances it behoves glider pilots to maintain a keen lookout and afford as wider berth as practicable to the slower and less manoeuvrable paragliders. This view was reinforced by the BHPA highlighting the relative inability of the paraglider pilot to take any effective avoiding action as he cannot get out of the way at these low speeds, leaving little scope to affect the outcome at close quarters. The BGA Member recognised that this was a learning point and undertook to follow this up within the association. The Members agreed unanimously that this Airprox had resulted from effectively, a nonsighting by the KA6 pilot and that an actual Risk of a collision had existed in the circumstances conscientiously reported here.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: Effectively a non-sighting by the KA6 pilot.

Degree of Risk: A.