



AIRPROX *Insight*

DIRECTOR UKAB'S MONTHLY UPDATE

May 2024



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AIRPROX OF THE MONTH

Making the best of MATZ

Military Aerodrome Traffic Zones – do you communicate, ignore or avoid....?

I've recently been talking about pre-flight preparation and things we can consider before getting airborne, and this month I want to tackle the question of Military Aerodrome Traffic Zones (MATZ) and their importance (or otherwise) to civilian pilots.

I imagine it's pretty widely known that, although marked on CAA VFR aeronautical charts, MATZ can be considered by civilian pilots to not be present – i.e., there is no requirement for a civilian pilot to seek permission to gain entry to a MATZ and neither are they required to avoid it if contact with the controlling authority cannot be made.

However, while the regulations permit it, is it wise to enter a MATZ without at least trying to contact the military ATC unit that controls it? What should we do if we do try to get hold of ATC but cannot? Should we just enter the MATZ anyway? After all, we (as civilian pilots) are not required to avoid it...

The UKAB sees a number of Airprox involving aircraft either in a MATZ or skirting around the outside of it, and the Airprox I have chosen to discuss this month is **Airprox 2023236**, which involved an ASK21 glider and a DA42 close to the Sutton Bank gliding site.

The glider pilot was returning to Sutton Bank following a ridge-soaring exercise on the western edge of the North Yorkshire Moors, while the DA42 pilot was flying southbound from the Teesside area, navigating between the Leeming Combined MATZ (CMATZ) and the North Yorkshire Moors.

The DA42 pilot was flying with an examiner, who is also an experienced glider pilot and who had sighted the glider and assessed that there was no need to take any avoiding action. Although the glider was equipped with FLARM (as many gliders are) there was nothing on the DA42 that could interact with that type of electronic conspicuity (EC) equipment and so the glider pilot was completely unaware of the approaching aircraft until they sighted it.

To further complicate matters, it seems that the weather was deteriorating and the DA42 pilot had been trying to remain in VMC below a decreasing cloudbase. The two aircraft passed each other with a separation of around 0.1 miles horizontally and about 175ft vertically.

On their northbound leg, the DA42 pilot had attempted to contact Leeming for permission to enter the CMATZ. As this was a

Saturday, Leeming had not been open and so no contact could be made. However, there's a second aerodrome within the Leeming CMATZ – Topcliffe – which was operating with glider activity.

In accordance with CMATZ rules, whenever any of the airfields within the CMATZ is operating then the whole CMATZ becomes active. Although a civilian pilot does not need to gain permission to penetrate a MATZ/CMATZ, the military certainly prefers pilots to do so; this doesn't mean, though, that a civilian pilot cannot enter the MATZ/CMATZ if they are unable to make contact with the controlling authority.

In this case, the DA42 pilot had elected to fly above the CMATZ on their northbound leg when they had been unable to contact Leeming, and it seems likely that they had then decided to avoid the CMATZ laterally when they returned southbound. Of course, this then gave them very little room to manoeuvre between the edge of the CMATZ and the Moors, and Sutton Bank sits right in the middle of this 'gap'.

So, what would you have done in this situation? Would you have headed towards an area where a high density of gliders are known

to operate, or would you have penetrated the CMATZ anyway in order to give Sutton Bank a wider berth?

It's certainly not an easy decision, because there are also a couple of minor airfields inside the Leeming CMATZ (Felixkirk and Bagby) that we also need to take into consideration. Add to this a cloudbase that prevents us climbing up to provide some vertical separation and we're in a bit of a tight spot. What about calling Sutton Bank?

The frequency is printed on the CAA VFR chart (and available on all good in-flight navigation software applications!) and a call, while perhaps unlikely to be answered by someone on the ground, might just give any other pilot on the frequency that little bit of extra situational awareness that could make a big difference. An alternative might be to enter the CMATZ anyway, but perhaps make a 'blind call' on the frequency so that others operating on that frequency are aware of our presence.

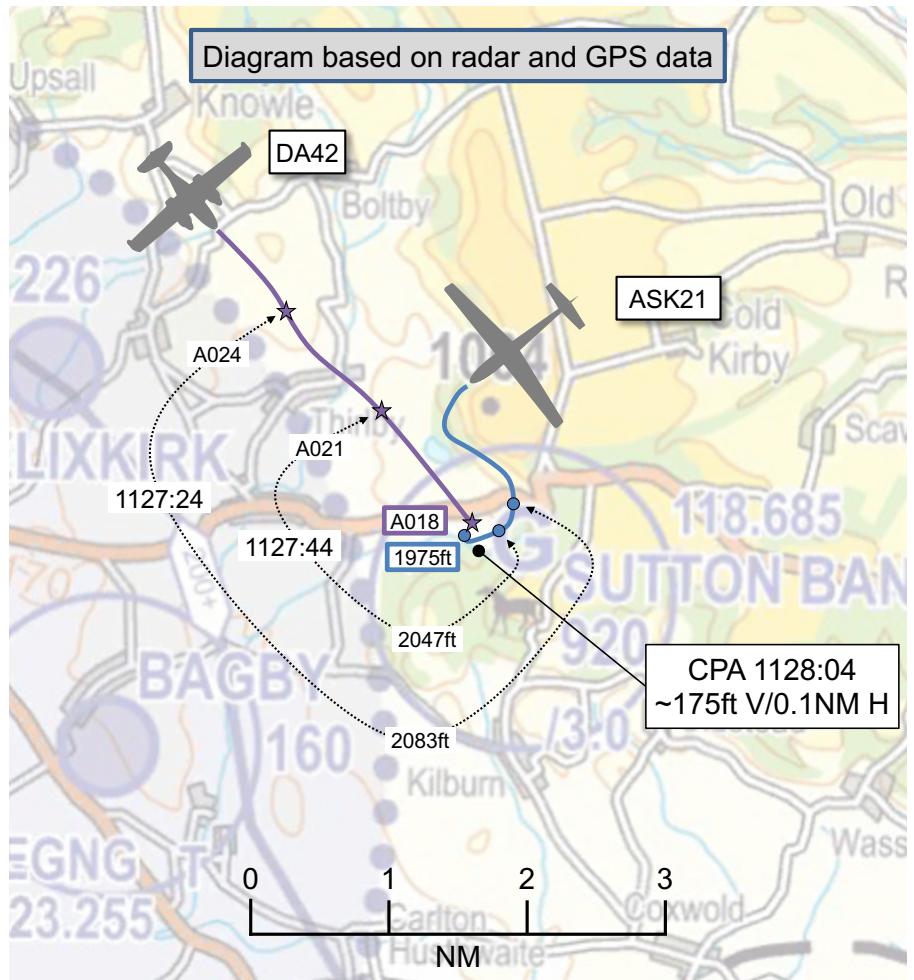
All of the above is something to think about before getting airborne. As can be seen, there are lots of different things to consider when flying in or around the Vale of York (and there are plenty of similar areas in the UK, so this isn't just reserved for Yorkshire). When a plan needs adjusting while airborne – as it inevitably does – then it's useful to have thought through a couple of scenarios to assist with our decision-making when we need it most.

UKAB MONTHLY ROUND-UP

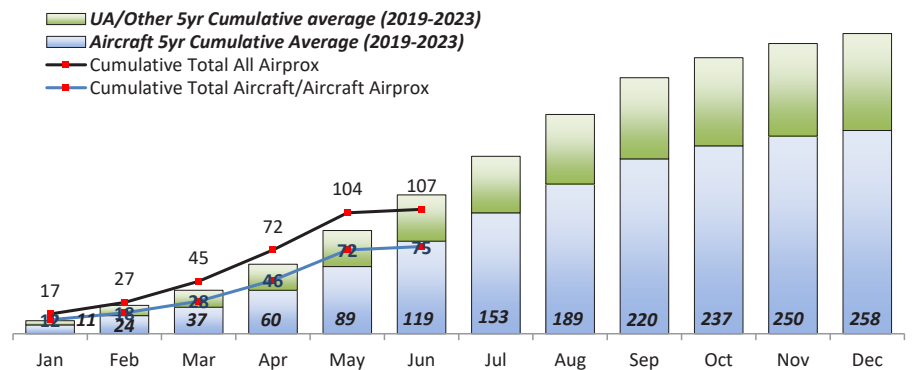
The Board evaluated 27 Airprox, this month, including six UA/Other events, all of which were reported by the piloted aircraft. Of the 21 full evaluations, four were classified as risk-bearing – one as category A and three as category B. The Board also made three Safety Recommendations, all of which were related to the event on which this month's article is based.

During the evaluation of **Airprox 2023236** it came to light that the hours of operation of a MATZ/CMATZ are not easily found in the UK AIP, so Recommendation 1 addresses that potential issue.

Recommendations 2 & 3 are directly linked to the point that the Leeming CMATZ is active when Topcliffe is operating but, as there are no air traffic controllers at Topcliffe, no one is qualified to give pilots permission to penetrate the CMATZ. So Recommendation 2 says: 'Leeming and Topcliffe review their Letter of Agreement to ensure that authority to grant CMATZ/MATZ penetration is defined whenever either aerodrome is operating'. Recommendation 3 adds: 'The MAA to review MAGROCC (Military Air Ground Radio



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Operator's Certificate of Competence) holders' privileges with regards to the authority to grant CMATZ/MATZ penetration'.

It makes sense that if the military wants civilian pilots to communicate before entering a MATZ, that needs to be facilitated, and this is what these two Recommendations aim to address.

I have included the very latest figures for Airprox reporting so far in 2024 in the graphic above. Reporting remains higher so far in 2024 than we would normally expect, though it is perhaps a bit early to be alarmist about the numbers!

With more predictable weather on the horizon, I anticipate a steady flow of Airprox reports over the summer; I hope my recent articles have provided food for thought and that many of you will take the time to consider how you might mitigate the risk of an Airprox when you find yourselves flying in areas constrained by airspace etc.

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