



AIRPROX *Insight*

DIRECTOR UKAB'S MONTHLY UPDATE

February 2023



Photo for illustration purposes only

AIRPROX OF THE MONTH

What might be lurking ahead?

How about a steel cable? Avoiding issues is all about the preparation

There's little doubt that the proliferation of electronic planning aids has made both pre-flight planning and navigation much more straightforward nowadays, but do we place too much reliance on electronic 'gadgets' to the detriment of the safe execution of every flight?

This month's featured Airprox (2022173) involves a Cessna 401 and an ASK 13 glider which came quite close to each other in the overhead of a glider site.

The Cessna pilot had just departed Kemble and turned right towards their destination. The track took them straight through the overhead of Aston Down glider site and, because this was shortly after take-off, below the maximum height of the winch launch. The glider pilot had only just released the launch cable when they saw the Cessna and had to take avoiding action; for their part, the

Cessna pilot reported sighting the glider and taking action to ensure separation, although the Board was unable to determine how much separation there had actually been.

I'm sure we're all aware that there's no allocated airspace associated with glider sites – they are mostly situated in Class G airspace – and it's down to individual pilots to consider how they want to account for a site while planning. However, over recent times the UK Airprox Board has discussed a number of events where pilots of powered aircraft have flown through, or very near to, the overhead of a glider site.

It should be obvious to most that routing near or overhead an active glider site increases the likelihood of encountering gliders taking-off, returning to land or simply soaring under the clouds, but there's an additional

consideration that, while not strictly related to Airprox, is worth noting. Many cables used for winch-launching gliders are made of high tensile-strength steel, so contact with the cable mid-launch is likely to have catastrophic consequences, not only for the glider but also for the aircraft.

The British Gliding Association (BGA) is rightly concerned about the number of reported overflights of glider sites by powered aircraft and takes every opportunity to highlight the potential dangers.

So, what does this mean when it comes to trying to avoid having an Airprox? Well, avoiding the site obviously decreases the chances of encountering a glider in a critical stage of flight, though we all know that gliders can be met just about anywhere in Class G. Therefore, studying the chart (or referring to an electronic 'gadget') pre-flight should give us

information we need to take account of – where the site is relative to our intended track; whether winch-launching takes place, and if it does the maximum altitude of the winch; likely areas where gliders might be soaring or looking for thermal lift, and a frequency to call the site to establish the level of activity.

Furthermore, for airfields that have glider sites nearby there are often local procedures to enhance everybody’s awareness of adjacent activity – in this case there are procedures for the Kemble AFISO to inform pilots of the activity at Aston Down if they are aware that the pilot is routing in that direction. In this example, though, the Cessna pilot hadn’t told the AFISO that they intended to route to the north and so the opportunity to warn them of the gliding had been lost.

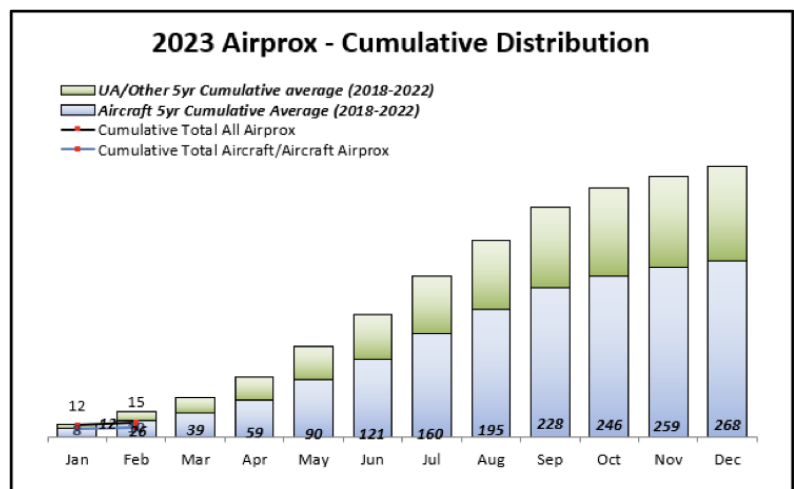
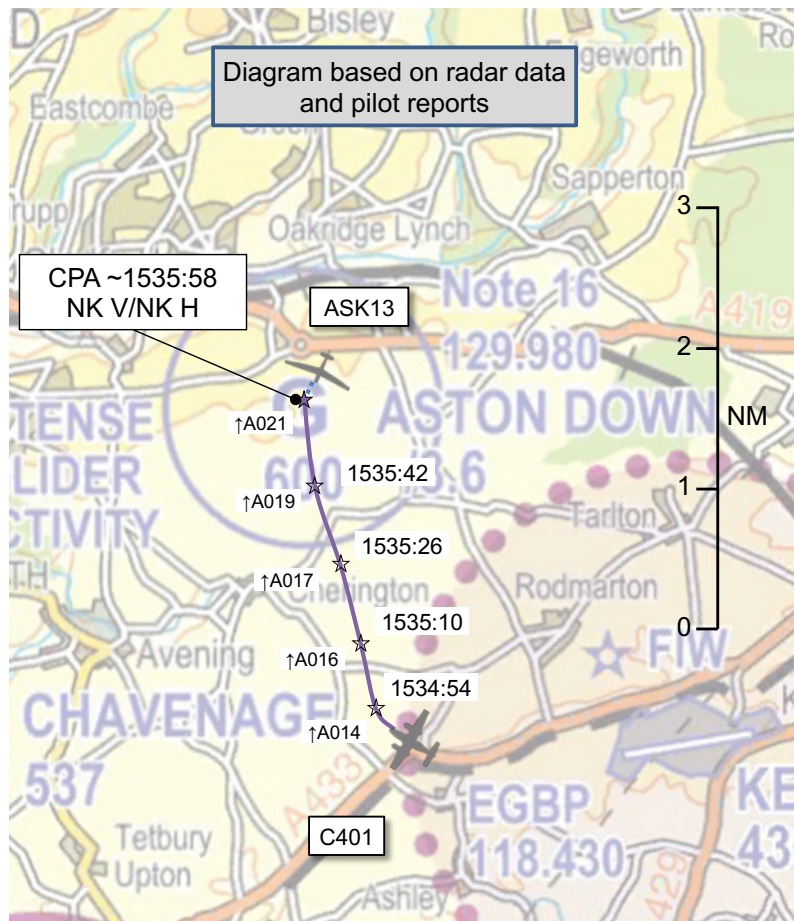
I’m probably not alone in thinking that gliders can be really difficult to spot from certain aspects, so relying purely on see-and-avoid is probably not always going to work as well as it might with a more visually conspicuous aircraft.

If you carry any form of electronic conspicuity equipment, will it detect – and display – glider traffic to you? If not, does that change how you might wish to plan your route and/or altitudes? Time spent preparing for the flight is seldom, if ever, wasted and I’d encourage everyone to take a good look at what’s on or around an intended route during planning and take the time to think about what you might want to make a note of ‘just in case it’s needed’.

UKAB MONTHLY ROUND-UP

This month we evaluated 23 Airprox, including three UA/Other events (all of which were reported by the piloted aircraft). Of the 20 full evaluations, nine were classified as risk-bearing – four were category A and five category B.

The Board made two Safety Recommendations at its February meeting: that *‘The CAA considers reviewing the extant guidance to flight instructors for conducting exercises on quiet frequencies and include a recommendation that the flight be conducted in receipt of an appropriate level of ATS,’* and that *‘Aston Down and Cotswold Airport work together to establish a mechanism to facilitate the notification of Aston Down’s activity to pilots operating to, or from, Cotswold Airport.’*



The graphic above shows that it’s been a steady start to 2023 in terms of reporting. This follows the trend of previous years and is probably no surprise when one considers the weather across the UK in the early part of the year.

As we all prepare for the season ahead, why not take the time to consider what we can do to ensure that we have an enjoyable, and safe, 2023? Think about what you might do differently from previous years to enhance your

awareness of aircraft around you, be that by purchasing some additional electronic conspicuity equipment (the DfT rebate on certain types of EC equipment is still available until the end of March this year), talking to ATC more often, or simply asking yourself ‘what if...?’ one more time.

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