

AIRPROX REPORT No 2013148

Date/Time: 5 Oct 2013 11:30Z (Saturday)

Position: 5429N 00336W
(St Bees)

Airspace: Lon FIR (Class: G)

Aircraft 1 Aircraft 2

Type: Swing Stratus
Paraglider NK

Operator: Civ Club

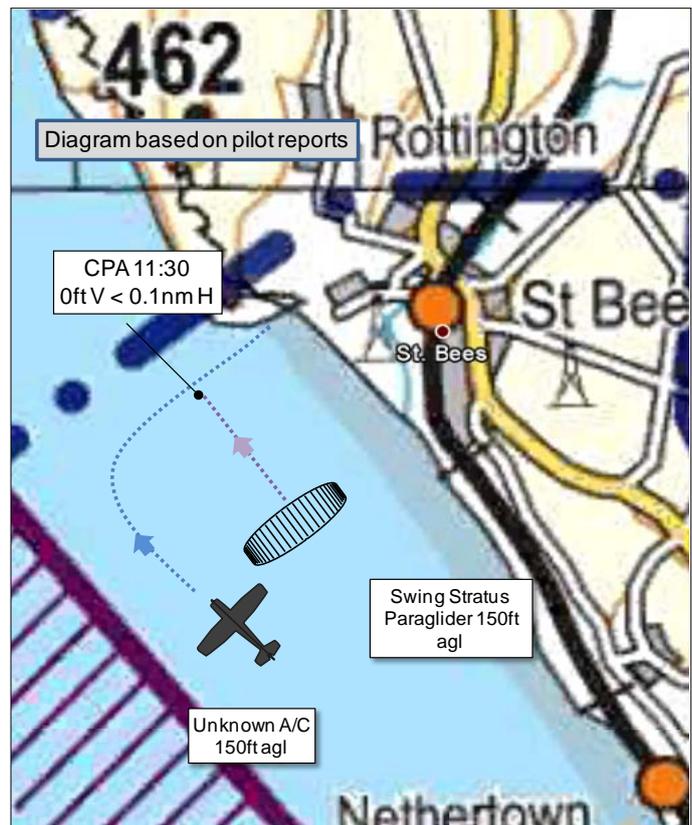
Alt/FL: 150ft NK
agl

Conditions: VMC

Visibility: 50km NK

Reported Separation:
0ft V/75m H NK

Recorded Separation:
NK



PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

THE SWING STRATUS PILOT reports flying a white and orange paraglider without lights, SSR transponder or any collision avoidance system, at 150ft and 12kt. The pilot was ridge-soaring along the cliffs near St Bees golf course heading northwest when he spotted a small, white, high-winged aircraft, with a partially enclosed fixed undercarriage. The aircraft was slightly behind him, to his left, and at the same height. It turned in front of him to head inland, and passed approximately 75m ahead. The paraglider pilot was unable to take any avoiding action because there wasn't enough time, but had to prepare for any possible wake turbulence. He reported that the tide was in, causing a lot of noise on the pebble beach, which was probably why he hadn't heard the aircraft approaching.

He assessed the risk of collision as 'Low'.

THE LIGHT AIRCRAFT: The Swing Status pilot reports seeing a white aircraft with black lettering. Unfortunately the incident does not show on any of the NATS radars and the aircraft could not be traced.

Factual Background

The weather at Blackpool was recorded as follows:

METAR EGNH 051120Z 24010KT 9999 FEW015 BKN042 15/12 Q1020

Analysis and Investigation

UKAB Secretariat

Both pilots were operating under VFR, in VMC, in Class G airspace, and had an equal responsibility for collision avoidance¹; the paraglider had right of way². The incident was not apparent on radar and, regrettably, the light aircraft pilot could not be traced.

¹ Rules of the Air 2007 (as amended), Rule 8, Avoiding aerial collisions.

² Rules of the Air 2007 (as amended), Rule 9.

Summary

A Swing Stratus paraglider pilot was ridge soaring along St Bees cliffs at 150ft agl when an untraced light aircraft reportedly flew 75m in front of the paraglider, causing him concern.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

The Board first discussed the actions of the light aircraft pilot; although both pilots were equally responsible for avoiding a collision, the light aircraft was required to give way to the paraglider. There was some discussion about whether the light aircraft pilot saw the paraglider or not, and it was opined that the paraglider could well have been in his blind spot to his right if he was flying in the left-hand seat. If he had seen the paraglider, then some members felt that the light aircraft pilot had perhaps been ill-advised to turn as close as he did; on the other hand, the paraglider pilot had stated that he had not needed to take avoiding action (and therefore had considered that the actual risk of collision was low), and there was no corroborating evidence to substantiate the paraglider pilot's estimate of distance, so the light aircraft may well have turned at a reasonable separation.

In pursuing this train of thought, some Board members queried the the paraglider pilot's estimate of distance and height. Information provided by the BHPA assured them that many paraglider pilots use modern hand-held flight instruments which provide GPS, speed and an altimeter. Because this pilot had provided a GPS position and detailed knowledge of his speed, the Board considered that it was reasonable to deduce that his height had also probably been determined from an instrument pack.

When coastal flying, the Board highlighted the need for pilots to be aware of the potential for hang-gliders and paragliders to be operating from cliff-top sites, and that meteorological conditions needed to be taken into consideration when estimating where they might be encountered. It was noted that there was no site marked on the UK flying charts in the immediate vicinity of the incident, and that the paraglider was possibly operating from an ad-hoc location; however, it was also noted that certain places on the coastline were frequently used when the prevailing meteorological conditions allowed, and that these were likely to be well known to the hang-gliding/paragliding community. This led the Board to recommend that the BHPA publish all site information to the wider aviation community in the interests of increasing SA. Although it was probably not practical to annotate maps with all such sites, an easily searchable database (with 'Google-like' map display functionality) would allow others to check the area of their intended flights to at least be aware of where they might encounter launching activity for particular wind and weather conditions. Such a database needed to be widely promulgated on electronic planning systems (such as SkyDemon etc) as an overlay perhaps.

In the end, when considering the cause and risk, the Board decided that, given the circumstances, it was probable that the light aircraft pilot had seen the paraglider. Because the paraglider pilot had assessed the risk as low, and had not needed to take avoiding action, it was agreed that the degree of risk was C.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

<u>Cause:</u>	A late sighting by the Swing Stratus pilot, and a possible late sighting by the light aircraft pilot.
<u>Degree of Risk:</u>	C
<u>ERC Score³:</u>	20
<u>Recommendation:</u>	The BHPA publicise the location of commonly used launch sites to the wider aviation community.

³ Although the Event Risk Classification (ERC) trial had been formally terminated for future development at the time of the Board, for data continuity and consistency purposes, Director UKAB and the UKAB Secretariat provided a shadow assessment of ERC.