



Accident to the Schleicher K8B
registered **D-3036**
on Friday 2 August 2024
at Percey

Time	Around 12:50 ¹
Operator	Gliding Adventures Europe (Netherlands)
Type of flight	Instruction
Persons on board	Student pilot
Consequences and damage	Student pilot injured, glider destroyed
This is a courtesy translation by the BEA of the Final Report on the Safety Investigation. As accurate as the translation may be, the original text in French is the work of reference.	

Late precautionary landing, collision with trees during off-airfield landing, in solo instruction

1 HISTORY OF THE FLIGHT

Note: the following information is principally based on statements made by the student pilot and the glider's FLARM data.

In the scope of his glider pilot training, the student pilot planned to carry out his solo cross-country flight of at least 50 km, between Saint-Florentin-Chéu aerodrome and Châtillon-sur-Seine aerodrome, passing close to the town of Tonnerre.

He carried out a winch take-off from LH runway 25 at 12:22. After releasing the cable at a height of 350 m, he found several uplifts close to the aerodrome which allowed him to reach a height of 450 m at around 12:35 (see **Figure 1**, points **1** and **2**). He continued the flight heading towards Tonnerre, but rapidly lost height in the following minutes.

Between 12:39 (point **3**) and 12:43 (point **4**), he found an area of uplifts close to the town of Percey which enabled him to climb from a height of 220 m to 380 m. On perceiving a line of clouds stretching out in the desired direction and thinking that he would be able to reach this potential zone of uplifts, he continued in this direction. He then realised that he was losing altitude faster than he had anticipated.

Observing that he was too low to return to the aerodrome, he decided to carry out a precautionary landing.

At 12:46, at a height of around 260 m, he carried out a U-turn (point **5**) to return to the previous area of uplifts and look for a suitable field. He identified a field of harvested wheat bordered by trees, with a power line situated in the middle of it. He flew figures of eight to lose altitude and observe the field. After flying over the power line which corresponded to his base leg, he observed that his speed was too high to land in the chosen field.

¹ Except where otherwise indicated, the times in this report are in local time.

He then identified another field to the north-north-east on the other side of the river and turned right (point 6). He nosed up to clear another power line and trees and the left wing struck a tree. The glider turned over and came to a stop in a ditch at the edge of the road.

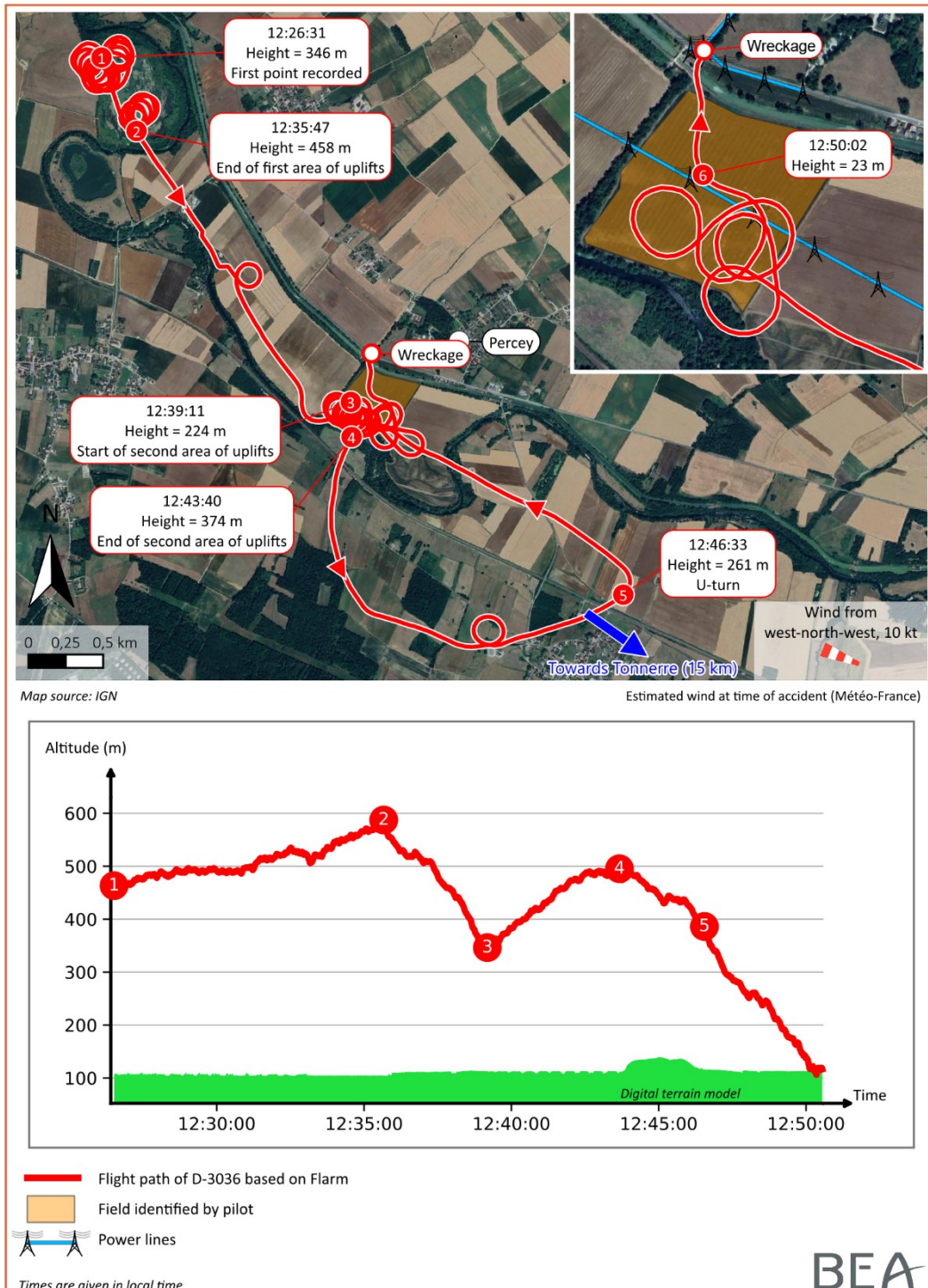


Figure 1: flight path of D-3036

2 ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

2.1 Glider and accident site information

The D-3036 was an Alexander Schleicher K8 single-seater high-wing glider. It had a maximum lift-to-drag ratio of 25.

As the pilot indicated that there had been no technical problem with the glider, the BEA did not go to the accident site and did not carry out an examination of the wreckage.



Figure 2: D-3036 after coming to a stop in ditch (source: student pilot)

2.2 Student pilot information

The day of the accident, the Dutch student pilot was 33 years old. He had started flying gliders in March 2007 and had then stopped this activity between 2008 and 2023. At the time of the accident, he had logged approximately 58 glider flight hours, including 32 hours on type. He had carried out just over 50 flight hours since resuming flying in 2023.

2.3 Student pilot's statement

The student pilot indicated that he had successfully passed all the theoretical examinations and carried out all the practical exercises of his training. He just had to carry out a solo flight of at least 50 km in order to be able to take the sailplane pilot licence (SPL) exam. He had come to France to take part in a two-week course organized by his gliding club based in the Netherlands. He wanted to carry out this flight before returning to the Netherlands the day after the accident flight.

He specified that he had followed training in the search for landing fields, the off-airfield landing procedure and the actions to be taken in the event of a loss of uplifts. He particularly remembered a lesson on the 7-5-3 rule (start looking for a landing field at a height of 700 m, choose the field at a height of 500 m and initiate the landing at 300 m).

On 27 July 2024, he had attempted a flight between Saint-Florentin-Chéu and Pont-sur-Yonne aerodromes. That day, he had anticipated aborting the flight if he was unable to reach a height of at least 1,000 m close to the departure aerodrome. The meteorological air conditions were adverse and he only reached a height of 750 m. He then aborted the flight and returned to land at Saint-Florentin-Chéu.

Before the accident flight, he had consulted several internet sites which gave the following meteorological information: west-north-west wind of 10 km/h, cumulus cloud cover of about 4/8 based at 1,300 m, average strength thermals from noon up to 1,200 m, then cloud cover forecast at around 14:00 (2/8 to 4/8) in the east and south-east.

He therefore thought that departing between 12:00 and 13:00 would give him a good chance of success. As he had to cover 50 km, he wanted to fly in the direction of the wind and looked for aerodromes in the east. He chose Châtillon-sur-Seine aerodrome and discussed this with his instructor (chief pilot) who considered this a suitable option. Another experienced pilot advised him to first head southward to take better advantage of the uplifts close to the hills. He specified that there were numerous possible landing fields in the region. He explained that he had seen, the day of the accident flight, pilots carrying out flights and others coming back to land without having found thermal uplifts, however the situation seemed to be improving at the end of the morning.

He specified that he could have understood that the air conditions, after releasing the cable, would not be sufficient for accomplishing the flight. He explained that his motivation for carrying out the flight encouraged him to continue toward Tonnerre.

He added that at a distance that he considered would still allow him to return to the departure aerodrome, he found an uplift overhead Percey and climbed to a height of 400 m. He then saw a line of clouds in the desired direction (east-south-east) and thought he could reach it. En route, he rapidly lost altitude. On arriving below the clouds that he had spotted, he descended even more quickly (around -2 m/s). He then carried out a U-turn. He specified that he had been concentrating on climbing towards the clouds and that he had not anticipated an off-airfield landing. At a height of around 280 m, he started looking for a field and decided to return to the last area where there had been uplifts. He added that, stressed and in a hurry, he got the wind direction wrong, believing it was coming from the east instead of the west. He looked for a field, preferably a field where the wheat had been harvested, which was flat, free of obstacles and quite long. He hesitated between irregular shaped meadows and a field of harvested wheat with trees on each side, a river and a power line in the middle. He considered that the areas either side of the power line were sufficient (see green square in **Figure 3**).



Figure 3: initial field (in green) then final field (in orange) chosen by the pilot. The green arrows indicate the initially planned base leg and final approach.

When he was on the base leg overhead the power line, he checked his speed and extended the airbrakes. He observed that he did not descend as quickly as he had expected and that his ground speed was high. This was not consistent with his indicated airspeed of 85 km/h. He understood that he had mistaken the wind direction and that he was going to exceed the field and finish in the trees or the river.

He decided not to carry out a complete 90° turn but to use the diagonal length of the field (see **Figure 1**, point 6 and **Figure 3**, letter A). He then chose to fly over the river and land in the second field chosen (see **Figure 3**, arrow and orange square).

He tried to gain some speed by pitching down and retracting the airbrakes in order to land in the other field (letter B and red arrow). He flew over another power line and a few trees to reach the chosen field. He then realised that he was going to strike a house (letter C). He managed to avoid the house but the left wing of the glider struck a tree. He touched down in the grass next to the road and the glider finished its run in a deep ditch.

2.4 Off-airfield landing technique

The glider pilot manual² recommends above flat land, that the pilot select a suitable field for landing as soon as the glider's height falls below 400 or 500 m. Once the field has been identified, the pilot can attempt to gain altitude within the limits of the local flight cone. It is recommended to stop any spiral at a height of less than 200 m.

The manual warns pilots about the common mistake of flying the L-shaped landing pattern too tight for fear of losing sight of the chosen field. This leads to final turns that are too low, or final approaches that are short or too high. The manual also strongly advises against doing a three sixty if the pilot considers that he is too high, as this would cause him to lose sight of the terrain and place him in a dangerous situation. It states that it is preferable to extend the base leg beyond the axis of the final approach and then resume a base leg on the other side followed by a final turn, without ever losing sight of the ground.

2.5 Meteorological information

Météo - France indicated that at Auxerre - Branches airport, situated at a distance of 35 km, the sky was overcast between 12:30 and 13:00 with several cloud layers at 2,000 ft (610 m) and at 2,800 ft (850 m) with cumulonimbus embedded in the cloud mass. Visibility was greater than 10 km and no precipitation had been recorded.

The wind values recorded by the stations close to the accident site indicated a more or less west-north-west wind from 13:00. However, the values communicated in the METAR indicated a high degree of wind variability.

² Collectif, 15th ed. June 2024, published by Cépaduès.

3 CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions are solely based on the information which came to the knowledge of the BEA during the investigation.

Scenario

In rather unfavourable air conditions, the student pilot increased his distance from the aerodrome in the search for uplifts and did not identify that he was continuously losing altitude. He was late in realising that he was going to have to abort the flight and found himself in a situation where he was too low to have the necessary time to suitably prepare the precautionary landing (choice of field, carrying out an approach circuit and preparing the landing).

This situation led to a non-stabilized final approach (inadequate height, glider configuration and speed). Seeing that he could not land in the field initially chosen, the student pilot tried to land in the next field but was unable to avoid striking vegetation.

Contributing factors

The following factors may have contributed to the decision to continue the flight and the late decision to abort it:

- the student pilot's motivation to carry out this flight before the end of his course;
- the student pilot focusing on his search for uplifts rather than on monitoring his height.

The BEA investigations are conducted with the sole objective of improving aviation safety and are not intended to apportion blame or liabilities.