BEA
Bureau d'Enquêtes et d'Analyses
pour la sécurité de l'aviation civile

www.bea.aero

SAFETY INVESTIGATION REPORT

Accident to the ROLLADEN SCHNEIDER LS8 registered D-7488 on Saturday 9 August 2025 at La Mure-Argens

Time	Around 12:15[1]
Operator	Private
Type of flight	Cross country
Persons on board	Pilot
Consequences and damage	Pilot seriously injured, glider substantially damaged
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.	

Collision with vegetation and then ground, while searching for uplifts in mountainous area

1 HISTORY OF THE FLIGHT

Note: the following information is principally based on statements and flight data from the SeeYou Navigator application used by the pilot on his smartphone and from the LX9000 computer installed on the glider.

The pilot carried out a towed take-off from Puimoisson aerodrome at around 11:30 for a flight bound for Maurienne valley. It was a training flight by the German national gliding team on a two-week course at the aerodrome.

After the cable release at an altitude of 1,600 m near Serre de Montdenier, the pilot used the first uplifts and was able to reach an altitude of around 2,000 m (see **Figure 1**, point 1). He joined two team members who had taken off a few minutes earlier and they continued together to mount Chiran where they reached an altitude of around 2,500 m (point 2) before continuing north.

Once at Cordœil mountain, they observed a cumulus around 500 m above the summit, a sign of possible thermal uplifts. They separated to look for them more effectively. The pilot headed west of the summit (see **Figure 1** and **Figure 2**, point 3), another pilot headed north and the third, south-east. As the pilot did not find any uplifts, he turned around (see **Figure 2**, point 4) to head east to where his teammate indicated he had found one.

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

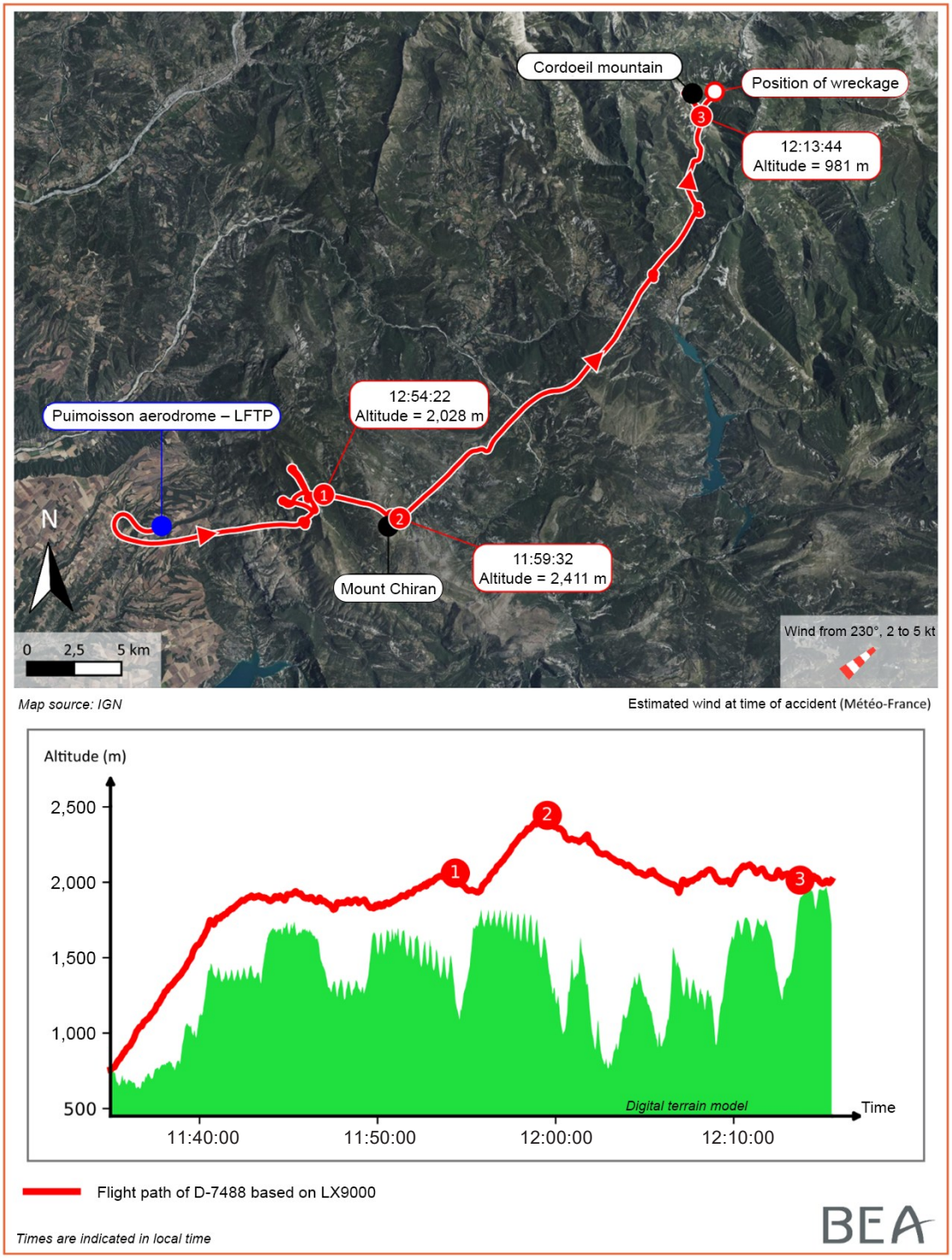

Figure 1: overall flight path of accident flight

Believing that he was at a sufficient height, the pilot carried out a left-hand turn (point 5) towards the terrain in order to join his teammate and the uplift. At this point, the altitude of the glider was around 2,070 m and the terrain ahead, around 2,000 m. A few seconds later, the pilot felt the glider sink under the influence of a downdraft. He was unable to turn right due to the high ground and thus continued his left-hand turn while monitoring his speed in order not to stall.

The glider came into contact with vegetation and then the ground. The pilot exited the aircraft unaided and contacted his teammates so that they could warn the emergency services.

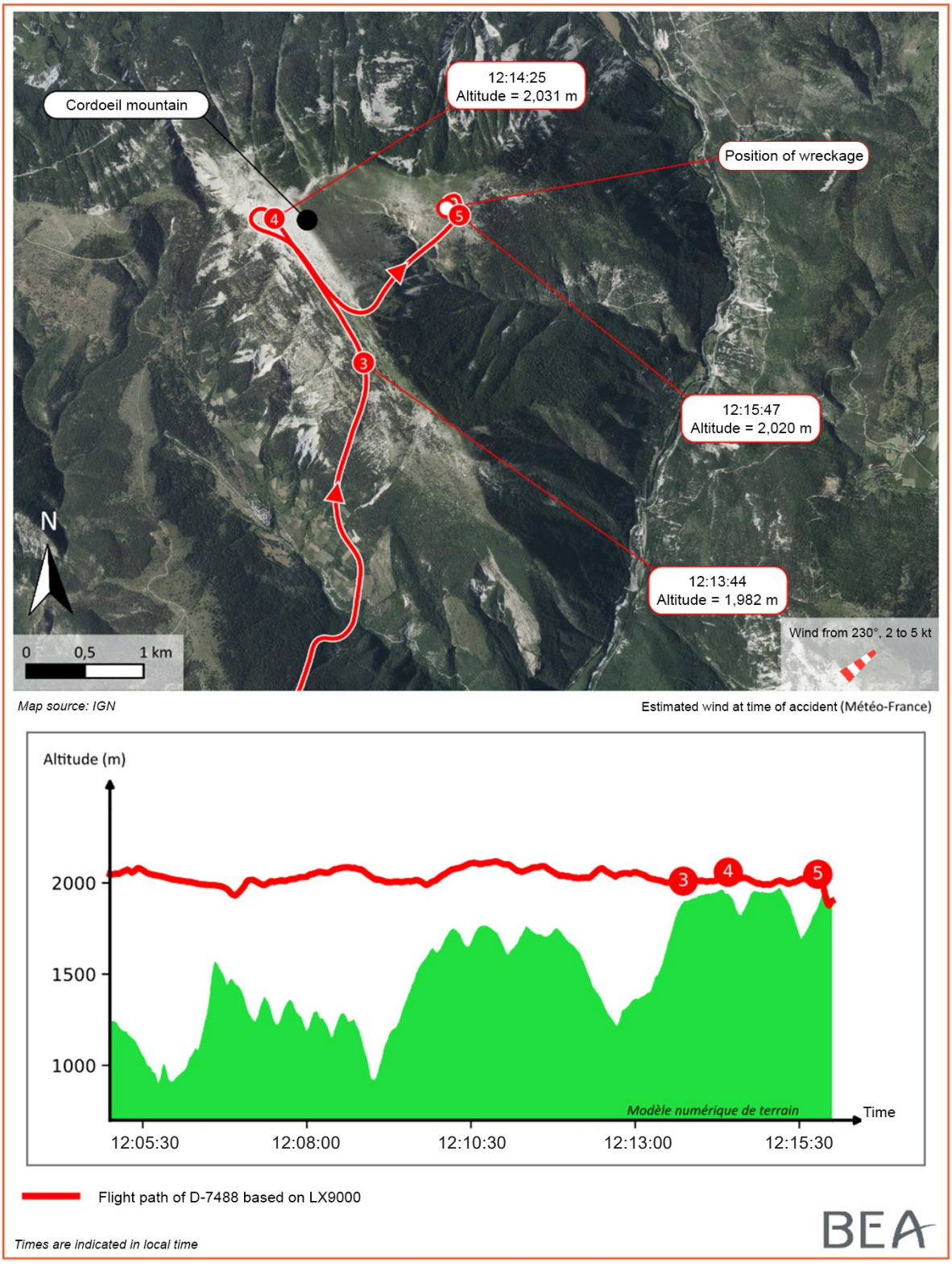

Figure 2: end of flight path of accident flight

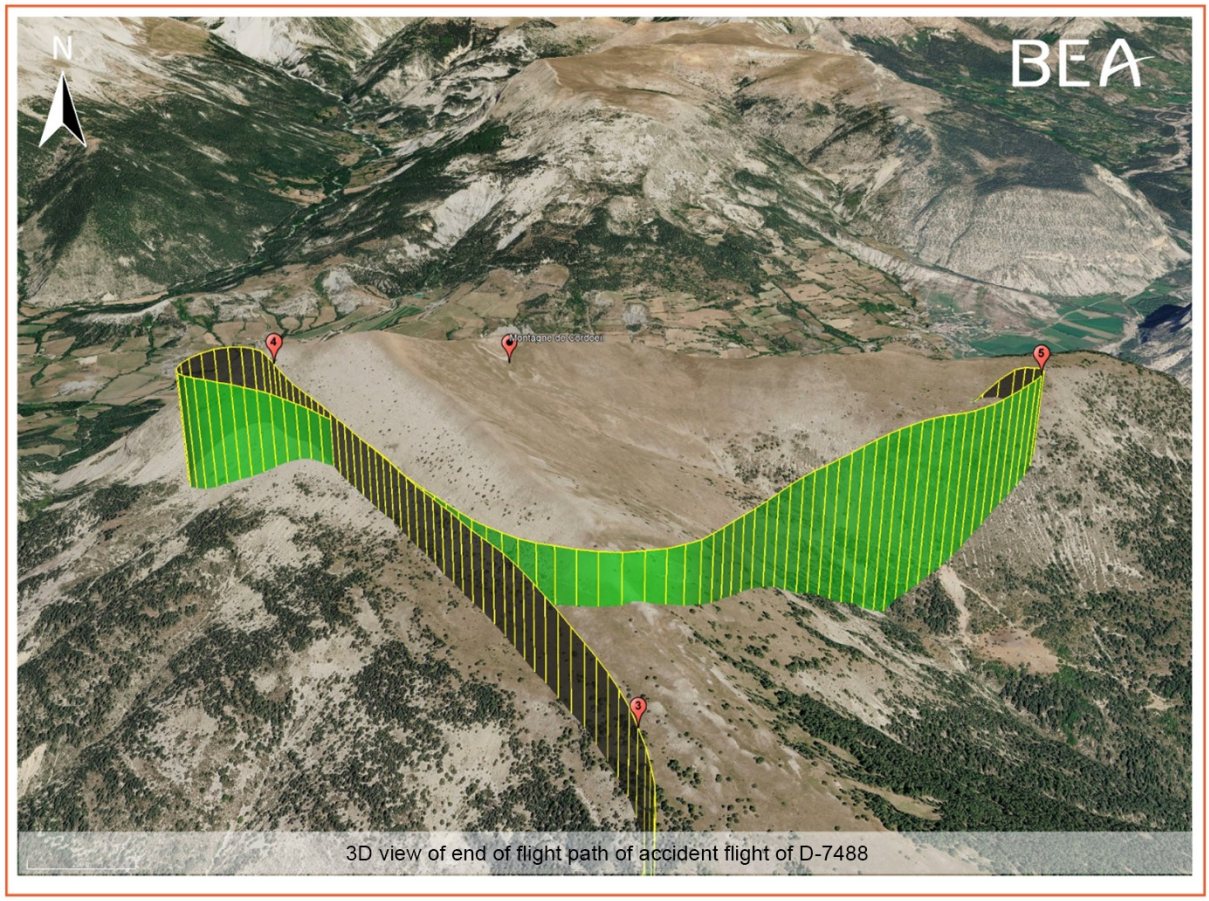

Figure 3: 3D view of end of flight path of accident flight

2 ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

2.1 Pilot information

At the time of the accident, the 22-year-old pilot held a sailplane pilot license obtained in 2019. He had logged approximately 1,350 flight hours including 190 hours on type. He had flown around 200 hours in the Alps.

He had been gliding since 2016 and taking part in competitions, including the world championship since 2021. He had already carried out around 150 flight hours in the mountains in the Vinon-sur-Verdon and Puimoisson region in 2023 during a previous course.

The course during which the accident occurred had started two days earlier with the pilot familiarising himself once again with the region around Puimoisson.

The day of the accident, after the team's weather briefing (websites used included Skysight, Meteoblue and Topmeteo) and considering that the conditions were favourable with the first thermal uplifts expected at around 11:00, the team decided to take off from 11:15 and head for Courchevel.

According to the pilot, his increased experience and confidence may have been accompanied by a progressive decrease in his safety margins.

2.2 Meteorological information

The Météo-France analysis of the weather data for the area of the accident indicated an anticyclonic situation (pressure at sea level of 1,023 hPa), clear sky without clouds, calm and dry.

The south-westerly wind was light with little turbulence except that due to thermal uplifts. The 0°C isotherm was at around 4,800 m.

2.3 Site and wreckage information

The glider wreckage was lying on a mountain side with a roughly 20° slope. The BEA did not go to the accident site.

The glider had sustained substantial damage, including the failure of the right-hand wing and left-hand wing tip, the failure of the left-hand horizontal stabilizer and bending failures level with the cockpit and tail.

All of the damage was the result of the collision with the vegetation and the ground.

Figure 4: position of wreckage (source: pilot and team member in flight)

3 CONCLUSIONS

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

Scenario

During a flight in the mountainous region of Cordœil, the pilot, after unsuccessfully searching for uplifts on the west slope, turned around to fly to an area where a fellow team member had indicated there was a thermal uplift. Although the glider was flying close to the mountain, the pilot started a left-hand turn towards the high ground. The glider encountered a downdraft which resulted in a rapid decrease in altitude. Confined by the high ground, the pilot continued his turn and was unable to prevent the collision with the vegetation and the ground. His piloting skills and monitoring of the glider speed probably helped prevent an in-flight loss of control, thereby mitigating the consequences of the accident.

Contributing factors

The following factors may have contributed to the collision with the vegetation and the ground:

- an inadequate assessment of the available altitude margin for manoeuvring in the immediate vicinity of the high ground while searching for uplifts;
- a reduction in safety margins in a context where both the pilot's experience and confidence were increasing;
- turning towards the high ground rather than to the exterior;
- the inherent vulnerability in flying at low height close to the terrain, making it difficult to manage a sudden downdraft.

Safety message: safety margin in relation to terrain

As recalled in the BEA's 2025 glider safety lessons[2]: *"It is usual for a glider to use thermal and dynamic lift close to the terrain. Slope soaring is a phase where the safety margins are reduced, and particularly calls on the pilot's attention and cognitive resources. It is essential that pilots are aware of these specificities and their risks, particularly after a long flight in high mountains. The manoeuvring height does not always permit the pilot to regain control of the glider in the event of an unforeseeable event.*

The "Safety in Mountain Flying" guide available on the French national gliding centre (CNVV) website, contains fundamental recommendations on mountain flying techniques. In particular, it addresses the techniques of flying near the terrain and the associated aerological traps. This guide is available in several languages. Likewise, the book, "Dancing with the wind"[3] details the specificities of mountain flying such as the numerous hazards of slope soaring.

It indicates that a favourable environment for uplifts does not always guarantee their presence and that the glider pilot must always maintain a sufficient height margin and have an alternate option.

[2] This topic has appeared in every annual glider safety review by the BEA since the publication of these reviews began in 2020.

[3] Dancing with the Wind, Jean-Marie Clément, 2015, Published by TopFly.

The glider pilot manual[4] reminds pilots that spiralling in thermal uplifts must always be carried out at a sufficient height above the terrain and at least at 150 to 200 m. Below this height, figures-of-eight should be carried out into the wind, with the glider flying towards the slope on a tangent path from a wide turn started at a distance from the terrain.

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

[4] Manuel du pilote vol à voile, Collectif, 15th iss. 2024, published by Cépaduès.