



Accident to the SCHLEICHER ASW20 registered **D-8631** on Saturday 5 April 2025 at Saint-Geniez

Time	Around 14:40 ¹
Operator	Private
Type of flight	Local
Persons on board	Pilot
Consequences and damage	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.	

Collision with a power line during an off-field landing

1 HISTORY OF THE FLIGHT

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

At 12:30, the pilot carried out a towed take-off from unpaved runway 35 at Sisteron - Vaumeilh aerodrome. After being towed for seven minutes (see **Figure 1**, point ②), the pilot released the cable. He then headed east using the uplifts (zones ① ②), until reaching the region of Vernet (point ③), and then north to Morgon peak (south of Serre-Ponçon lake) that he reached after a flight time of 1 h and 15 min.

He again used the uplifts to gain altitude (zone ④) for approximately 15 min. The pilot decided to return home and left the area (point ⑤) taking south (point ⑥) and then south-west headings. While navigating towards the south-west, he observed that the glider was rapidly losing altitude. He decided (point ⑦) to head to the departure aerodrome. However, he was unable to gain sufficient height to cross the ridgeline on his course. He chose to carry out a precautionary landing in a field (see **Figure 2**, point ⑧).

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

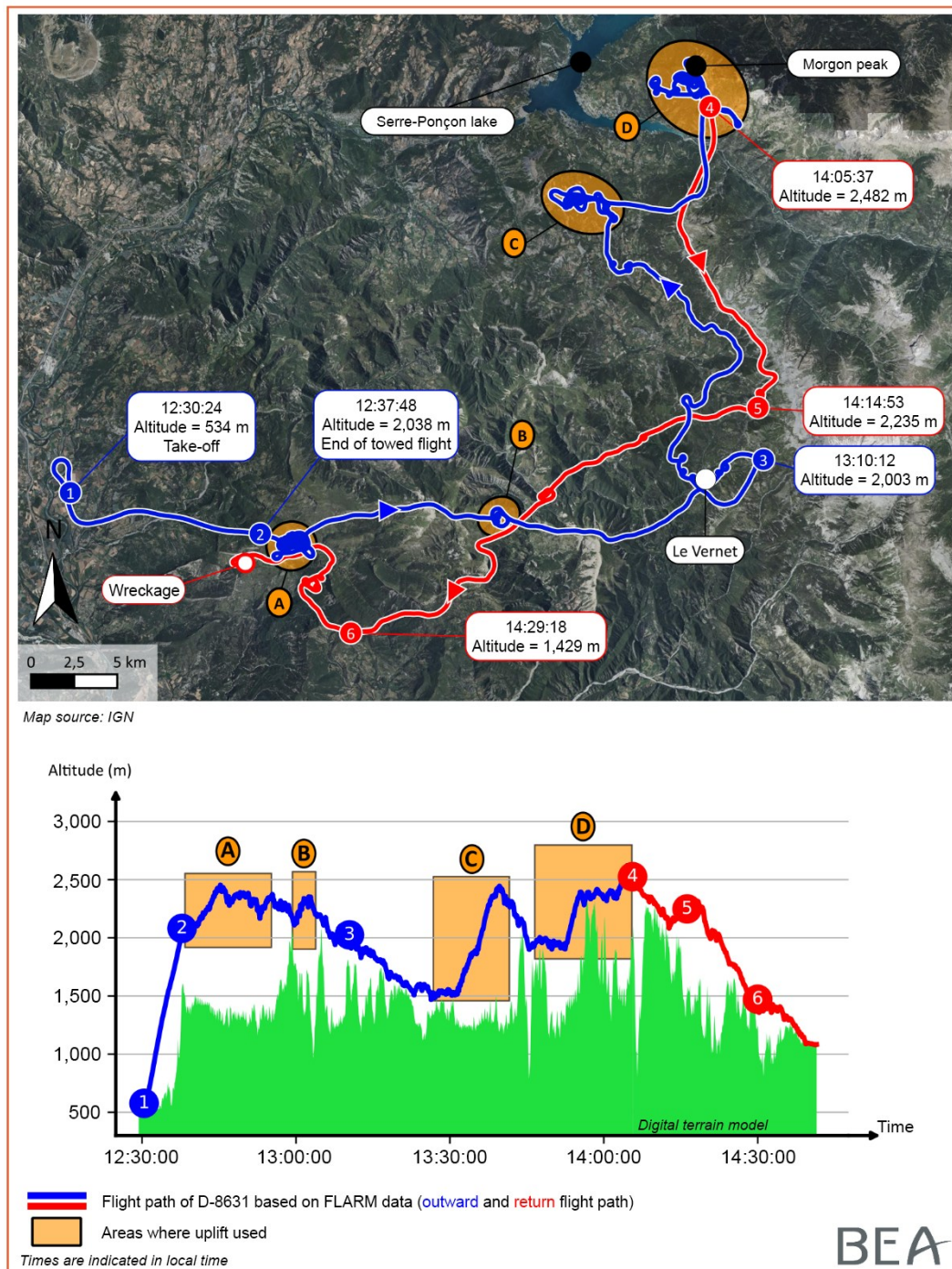


Figure 1: overall flight path

After passing close to the field that he had identified, the pilot started his landing pattern (point ⑧). In the last turn (point ⑨), the glider quickly lost altitude. On final, the tail of the glider struck the cable of a low voltage power line situated at the beginning of the field which caused an electric arc. The glider was destabilized and collided with the ground before coming to a stop a few metres further on.

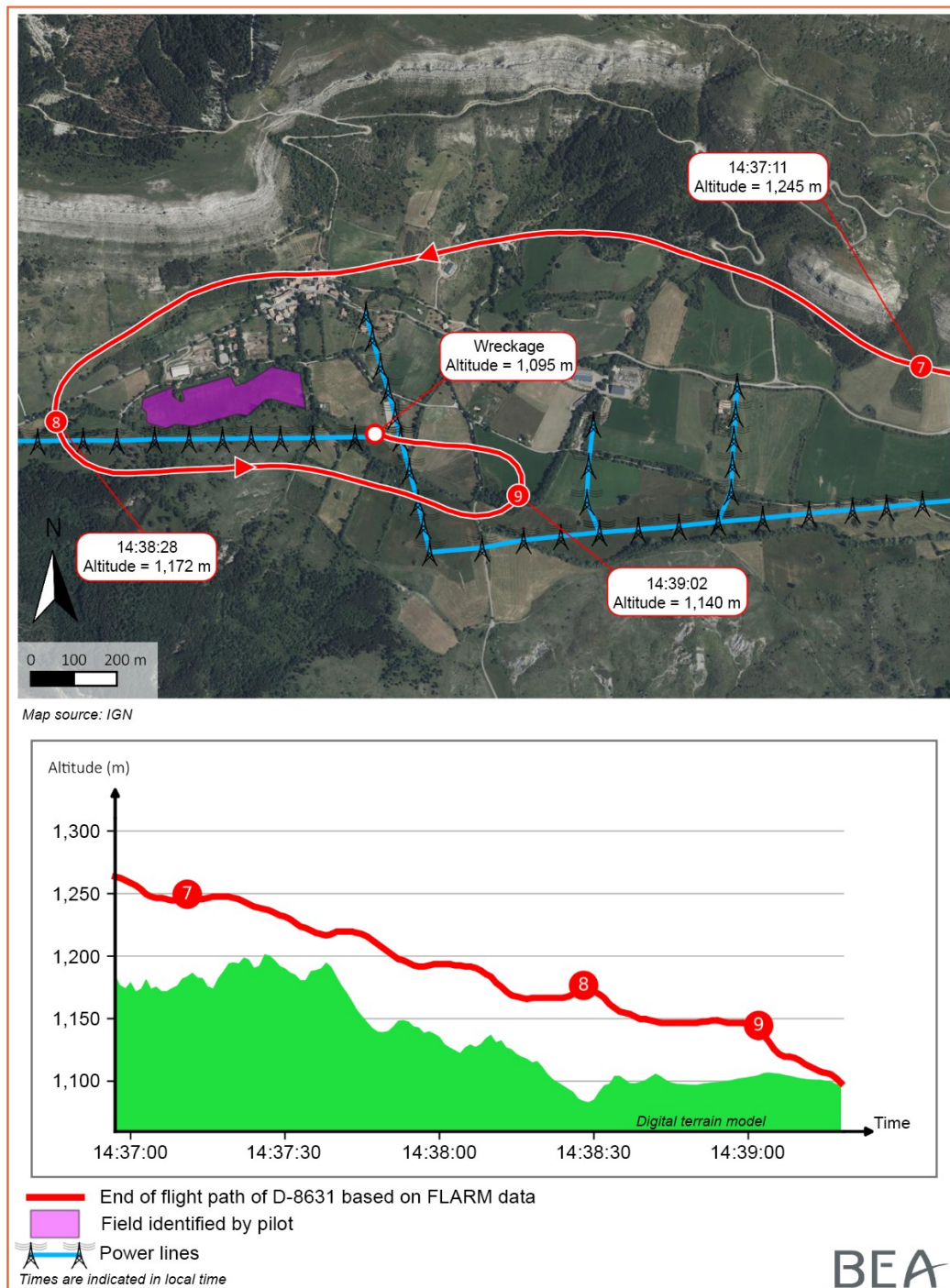


Figure 2: final flight path

2 ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

2.1 Site and wreckage information

The accident site was situated at an altitude of 1,100 m and approximately 11 km south-east of Sisteron aerodrome. The glider wreckage was complete and lying on its belly in a field of soft ground, near the power line. Two marks were visible in the ground, one corresponding to the nose of the glider (see **Figure 3**, detail ①) and the other, to the leading edge and tip of the right wing (detail ②).

The nose of the glider was destroyed (detail ©) and the canopy broken. The right-wing tip showed signs of contact with the ground (detail Ⓓ). The tail of the glider had ruptured and rub marks with the power line were observed (detail Ⓔ). Burn marks (detail Ⓔ) level with the metal hinge of the wing flap were visible, confirming the electric arc.

The flight controls were continuous. The landing gear was extended and the flaps deflected downwards without it being possible to determine their exact position.

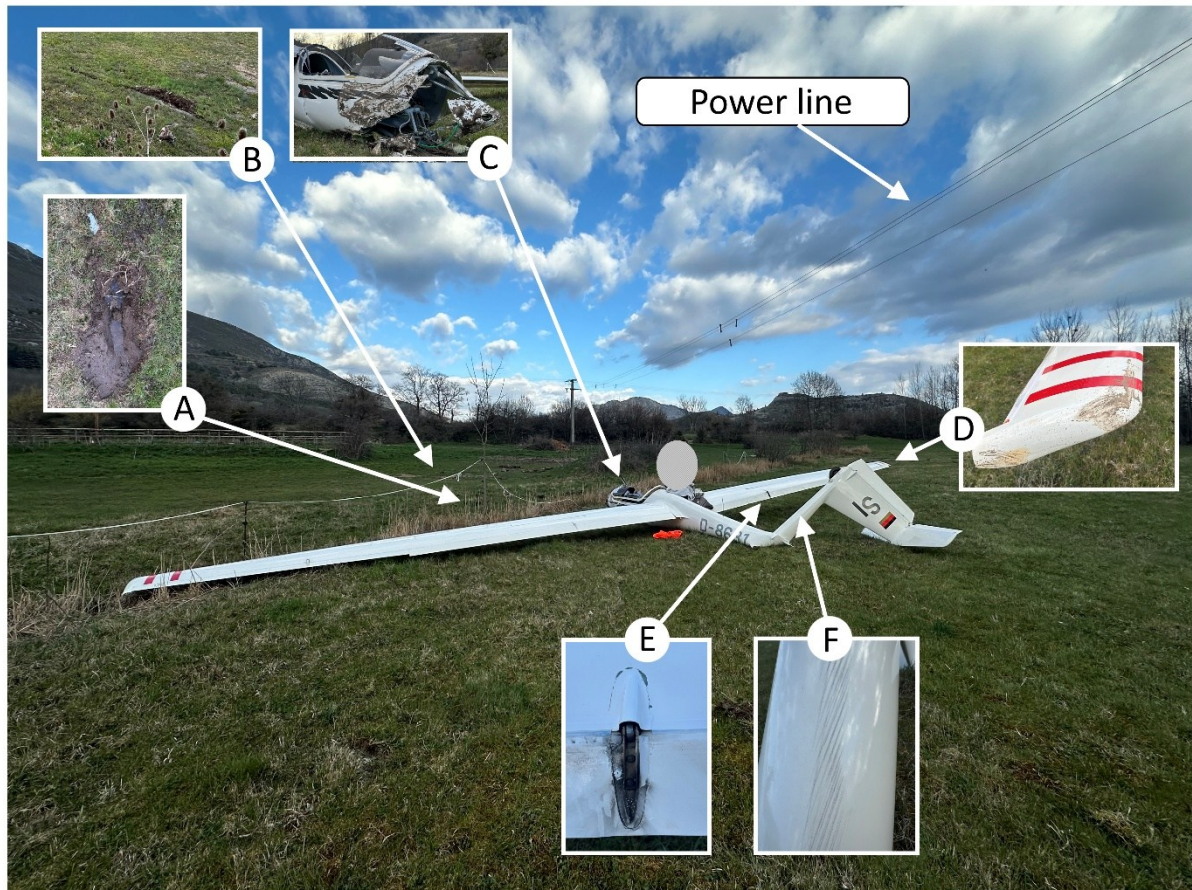


Figure 3: detail view of site and damage (source: BEA)

2.2 Glider information

D-8631 was a ASW20 single-seater glider with a 15-m wingspan, a retractable landing gear and was equipped with upper surface airbrakes and wing flaps. Its maximum lift-to-drag ratio was 43. The pilot was the owner of the glider.

2.3 Meteorological information

The general weather conditions in the region east and north-east of Sisteron were calm with a light east to south-east wind varying in direction. Visibility was greater than 10 km, the scattered cumulus were of small development based at a height of between 500 and 1,000 m. Turbulence was nil to light. The air mass was stable and not conducive to thermal uplifts.

In the area around the site of the accident, the wind was light, varying in direction in the lower layers, turbulence was nil to light. The uplifts were reduced to light valley breezes on the slopes of the surrounding high ground and could not be readily used.

2.4 Pilot information

2.4.1 Experience

Age	66 years (German)
Licence(s) (type and date of issue)	SPL issued on 15 October 2020
Ratings	Towing and winching
Medical certificate	Valid

Total experience	400 flight hours, including 100 hours on the D-8631 in the previous 12 months
Experience in last 30 days	22 flight hours (including 21 hours on the D-8631)

2.4.2 Additional information

The pilot had arrived at Sisteron aerodrome on 29 March 2025. He had carried out four flights for a total time of approximately 17 h 30 min between 30 March and 4 April (day before accident).

It was the first time that he had come to this region of France. He had not carried out a flight with an instructor to discover the region and its specificities before starting his solo flights.

2.4.3 Statement

The pilot indicated that he had attended the weather briefing at the aerodrome in the morning. He specified that he did not have the list of fields for off-field landings. He specified that the previous days, he had stayed within glide distance to the aerodrome and that he had not had the intention of leaving the local area the day of the accident. He added that on the return leg to the aerodrome, he flew over slopes that he had already used the previous days and did not find any usable uplifts. He progressively lost altitude. He then decided to land in a field that he had identified. He added that on final, the rate of sink increased and he was unable to avoid the power line.

The pilot also indicated that when he took the decision to head north-west, he knew of the presence of Château-Arnoux - Saint-Auban aerodrome situated south-east of his position but preferred returning to the departure aerodrome. He added that in hindsight, he had become aware of the risks associated with flying in mountainous areas and considered that he was going to have to carry out flights with an instructor in order to acquire the necessary knowledge to safely fly in the mountains and to better know the region.

2.5 Analysis of four flights preceding accident flight

Date of flight	Sector	Max distance from aerodrome	Max altitude	Flight time	Comments
30 March	East close to Saint-Geniez	15 km	1,750 m	04 h 45 min	Close to site of accident
31 March	west	36 km	2,190 m	05 h 15 min	
3 April	North-east	25 km	2,310 m	04 h 40 min	
4 April	North-east	25 km	2,210 m	02 h 50 min	

The analysis of the flight paths taken during the four preceding flights confirmed that the pilot had stayed within glide distance to the departure aerodrome, flying either at an altitude which allowed him to take a direct course back to the aerodrome or close to a valley which allowed him to return to the aerodrome by following the valley without having to cross a pass or ridgeline.

For the accident flight, the analysis of the flight path found that given the high ground between points ③ and ⑤ (see **Figure 1**) and the flight path followed, the pilot was no longer within glide distance to Sisteron - Vaumeilh aerodrome², but was within glide distance to the private Seyne-les-Alpes aerodrome and to several listed fields for off-field landings. The pilot did not know of these fallback areas.

For the part of the flight between points ⑤ and ⑥, the pilot was limited by the orientation and altitude of the ridgelines and had to follow a south-westerly course which extended his flight. At point ⑥, the pilot theoretically had sufficient altitude to get back to the aerodrome on a direct course given the glider's performance but in practice, it was insufficient to fly over the high ground separating him from the aerodrome.

² The glide distance to the aerodrome was not exceeded due to an excessive distance relative to the glider's lift-to-drag ratio and therefore insufficient altitude, but to the presence of high ground which interfered with the flight path and could no longer be flown over.

3 CONCLUSIONS

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

Scenario

On the return leg, the pilot did not manage to find uplifts. When he was around 20 km from Sisteron - Vaumeilh aerodrome, at an altitude of 1,400 m, the pilot was unable to cross the last ridgeline separating him from the valley in which the aerodrome was situated. He was forced to abort the flight and look for a field to land in. The pilot searched for and found an obstacle-free area which seemed to be suitable and started his landing pattern. In the last turn, the glider quickly lost altitude and the pilot was not able to prevent the tail of the glider from coming into contact with a power line situated on the final path.

Contributing factors

The following factor may have contributed to the pilot's late decision to abort the flight:

- the pilot's small amount of experience in mountainous areas: he thought he was within glide distance to the aerodrome and did not sufficiently take into account the topography of the area and the ridgelines which can significantly modify the notion of glide distance to an aerodrome, particularly in a mountainous area.

Safety messages

Staying within glide distance to an aerodrome or a listed field

As a general rule, when calculating the lift-to-drag ratio of a glider, wind should be taken into account to determine the local flight limits. Obstacles should also be taken into account in mountain flying: if there is high ground between the glider's position and the intended landing site, the pilot is recommended to remain within glide distance of the lowest mountain pass.

Regions with listed safe landing areas for off-field landings

The "*Guide to Safe Landing Areas in the Alps*" published by the FFVP allows the pilot to locate the most appropriate places for an off-field landing. It is recommended to scrupulously remain within glide distance to an aerodrome, or fields clearly recognized and listed as suitable alternate fields.

Glider flight in mountainous terrain

Flying a glider in mountainous terrain requires particular knowledge linked to a more difficult environment than flatland.

[The "Safety in Mountain Flying" guide available on the CNVV website](#), reminds pilots of the basic rules of mountain flying techniques. This guide is available in five languages (French, English, German, Italian and Polish).

As stated in the introduction, this guide is a supplement to two-seater or single-seater flight training accompanied by briefings and debriefings in order for the pilot to familiarize himself with the mountain environment.

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