

Preliminary Report
Schutte Sails Kea 146 Hang Glider Accident, Paekakariki Hill,
Wellington
27 February 2011

Abstract

At approximately 1900 hours New Zealand Daylight Time¹ on 27 February 2011 a Schutte Sails Kea 146 hang glider took off from a private airstrip situated on the north-western slopes of the Paekakariki Hill, 19nm north of Wellington. The hang glider was ridge soaring in moderate westerly winds when it failed to land at a pre-determined landing location on Paekakariki Beach. A search was initiated and located the hang glider wreckage, the following morning, to the east of the take-off location. The pilot had received fatal injuries.

Factual Information

The purpose of the flight was for the pilot to experience ridge soaring after recently gaining his Novice Rating issued by the New Zealand Hang Gliding and Paragliding Association (NZHGPA), and as such was under the supervision of an Advanced Pilot.

The accident flight was the last in a series of three flights that day. However, it was the pilot's first flight at this location and first flight utilising this model of hang glider.

The pilot and the Advanced Pilot drove from Manakau, just north of Otaki, to the Paekakariki Hill, arriving in the vicinity of the airstrip at approximately 1900 hours in the pilot's car. On the way up the Paekakariki Hill, the pilots stopped at the summit car park, where flying conditions as well as the location of the landing site were discussed.

The Novice Rated pilot was the first pilot to take off, and was watched by the Advanced Pilot for approximately 10 minutes before he also, took off.

After approximately 15 minutes of both pilots ridge soaring, the Advanced Pilot elected to land on the beach beneath the area in which they were currently flying. The decision to land, which was made by the Advanced Pilot, was a deliberate decision, conducted to show the Novice Rated pilot where to land.

After landing, the Advanced Pilot looked up to see how the Novice Rated pilot was going, and noted that he was nowhere to be seen.

After an initial unsuccessful search by the Advanced Pilot, Police were notified and conducted their own search. The hang glider wreckage and deceased pilot were located the following morning.

Injuries to persons

The pilot received fatal injuries.

¹The 24 hour clock is used in this report to describe the local time of day, New Zealand Daylight Saving Time (NZDT), at which particular events occurred. NZDT is Co-ordinated Universal Time (UTC) plus 13 hours.

Pilot information

The pilot held a Temporary Student Pilot Certificate for hang gliding and had achieved a Novice Rating. The Novice Rating was issued by the NZHGPA on 26 February 2011. The pilot had flown a total of 40 flights, not including the flight during which the accident occurred.

Weather conditions

On the day of the accident, the automatic weather station at Paraparaumu recorded the wind direction as 340 degrees magnetic, at a speed of 10 knots and with a temperature of 18 degrees Celsius. The routine weather report (METAR) for Wellington Aerodrome recorded that the wind direction at Wellington Aerodrome was 330 degrees magnetic at 16 knots. It also recorded the Mt Kaukau wind as 340 degrees magnetic at 25 knots.

The Advanced Pilot indicated that the conditions at the airstrip on the Paekakariki Hill were as follows: "The wind strength was about 18 to 20 knots. It was blowing from the south end of Kapiti Island."

Wreckage and impact information

The hang glider was located on the eastern side (leeward) of a small spur, 400 metres southeast of the airstrip, which had been used for takeoff.

The hang glider wreckage was contained in a small area, and all components were accounted for at the accident site. There was a moderate amount of disruption and general tangling of the hang glider.

The hang glider was facing in a southwesterly direction, on an increasing falling slope of approximately 26 degrees.

Ongoing investigation activities

The investigation is continuing and will include examination of:

- The aircraft's maintenance history;
- Post mortem report;
- The pilot's background and experience;
- Prevailing weather conditions at the airstrip;
- Possible human factors that might have influenced the pilot's decision making.

If any person has information which may assist with the investigation of this accident then they may contact the Civil Aviation Authority of New Zealand at isi@caa.govt.nz. CAA accident investigations are conducted in accordance with ICAO guidelines. The sole objective of such investigations is the prevention of accidents by determining the contributing factors or causes and then implementing appropriate preventive measures - in other words restoring safety margins to provide an acceptable level of risk.

The focus of CAA safety investigations is to establish the causes of the accident on the balance of probability. Accident investigations do not always identify one dominant or 'proximate' cause. Often, an aviation accident is the last event in a chain of several events or factors, each of which may contribute to a greater or lesser degree, to the final outcome.

*The sole objective of the investigation of an accident or incident shall be the **prevention** of accidents and incidents. It is **not** the purpose of this activity to **apportion blame or liability**.*