

GA1335

Posted on 28.02.2023 by Steve Forward

Category: [General Aviation](#)

Report Title Drop Zone penetration

Initial Report

Before setting off on a local flight from [Home airfield], a fellow pilot invited me to go to nearby [minor airfield], each in our own craft. The flight started in very calm conditions but, during the flight, my GPS failed and could not be restarted. Because I had been there many times, I knew where the field was. Just before arriving I identified a ground feature which is close to [minor airfield], but the colour was different to what I have seen before, this put some doubt about my position, and the wind strength had increased to what we later estimated to be over 35/40mph. The wind direction was from SE/E, and the intended runway was [SSW]. I identified the runway and started to descend on Final. At about 10ft above the runway, a strong gust caught my wing and the starboard wing dropped violently, I immediately decided to do a go-around.

I climbed to 500ft and started another circuit; at this point the other pilot had not reported his position and I was unsure of his position. Whilst looking for him I was travelling further north than I have ever done before and entered the Drop Zone for [Parachute centre], which is only 1 mile north of [minor airfield]. I could see the drop plane on the ground but could not see any parachutists. When the instructor at [minor airfield] landed after a lesson, they informed me that the parachute centre had reported to him the infringement and would I contact the parachute centre to discuss the incident. During our conversation I was shocked/upset to find that there were 8 parachutists descending while I flew over the DZ. In future I will stay well south of [minor airfield] until I can identify positively the runway and, if [SSW] runway is being used, I will fly a tighter base leg.

Comment

We are grateful to the reporter for their frank and open report that highlights the dangers of becoming distracted when operating at airfields with other adjacent sites. In this case, although the incident was not an infringement *per se* because a Drop Zone is not controlled or regulated airspace, Drop Zones should be avoided in a similar manner to Glider Sites because of the obvious safety implications. Importantly, the fact that an aircraft might be visible on the ground at a Drop Zone does not mean that there might not be other aircraft dropping parachutists and so this is not a reliable way of assessing a Drop Zone's activity. Furthermore, it is highly unlikely that parachutists will be seen prior to opening their parachutes, and difficult even when the parachutes are open. For

that reason, Drop Zones should always be given a wide berth during their promulgated operating hours because the chances of seeing and avoiding parachutists in the air is slim. Finally, the report also illustrates the pitfalls of relying on electronic navigation devices without a suitable back-up plan should they fail. Such equipment can fail or run out of battery at the most inopportune times and so a visual navigation Plan B must always be available incorporating recognisable ground features (ideally with vertical extent) that can be invoked at any time.

Key Issues

Dirty Dozen Human Factors

The following 'Dirty Dozen' Human Factors elements were a key part of the CHIRP discussions about this report and are intended to provide food for thought when considering aspects that might be pertinent in similar circumstances.

Resources – failure of GPS resulting in navigation doubt

Distraction – attention diverted by looking for second aircraft

Awareness – location of Drop Zone not assimilated during visual circuit

Communication – lack of communication with second aircraft regarding its position

Deviation – did not fly a suitable circuit pattern to avoid the Drop Zone

lack_of_resourcesResources

distractionDistraction

loss_of_awarenessAwareness

poor_communicationCommunication

normalisation_of_deviationDeviation



