

Accidents will happen!

Dave Broughton checks into a flying-centred First Aid clinic

Flying accidents don't just happen. They are caused - almost invariably by pilot error. Whatever the circumstances, free-flying is a risk sport and accidents resulting in serious injury will be an inevitable and regular outcome. As a paraglider pilot flying regularly for nearly ten years I have had two crashes resulting in serious injury and needing hospitalisation, and a fair number of my flying buddies have been carted away by various means for similar medical attention. There is a very good chance that one day you'll be first on the scene when another pilot has been injured or falls ill. Do you know what to do? Do you have the confidence and skill to do it? Even though I'd attended a First Aid training course some years ago, I wasn't sure that I did.

To update my First Aid skills and gain confidence, and to acquire the qualification needed as a Trainee Instructor I decided to attend the course run by Marlin Training in conjunction with Butterfly Paragliding at their Isle of Wight base. The training, is given by a qualified adult teacher and Emergency Medical Technician (& Fellow of the Royal Society of Health), It's based on Marlin's excellent First Aid in Outdoor Pursuits course with additional features specifically relating to flying situations, and is approved by many organisations including the BHPA.

The course is run over two very busy days. It includes interesting (and surprisingly informative) illustrated talks based around a newly produced manual. Topics include incident management, self-protection, casualty assessment and treatment, self-evacuation and the role of the Emergency Medical Services and other rescue agencies. There is lots of hands-on practice and lots of First Aid equipment available for use: several mannequins (both adult and child) for practising rescue breathing and CPR, and the innovative SAM splint for immobilising fractures. Practice sessions take place in small groups to ensure that everyone acquires the necessary skills without the pressure of performing in front of the whole class. There's no end-of-course exam to worry about as the instructor continuously assesses each trainee's progress. Some of the more notable features of the course were:

- The importance given to awareness of the possibility of spinal injury and the handling of such cases - exceptional circumstances may dictate that the casualty has to be moved.

course content

Day 1

Mountain rescue
First aider safety
Communication and delegation
Primary survey: trauma/non-trauma
Recovery position
Rescue breathing and CPR
The chain of survival
Choking and shock management
Control of bleeding
First aid kits

Day 2

Illness assessment
Illness recognition and typical illnesses
Injury assessment
Treating common injuries
Lifting and moving casualties
Self-evacuation methods
Environmental problems
Record keeping and the law



Assessing a casualty



Fitting a support collar

- The additional steps you may need to take if the emergency services are likely to take a long time to reach you or you need to evacuate a casualty yourself (mobile phones don't always work in the areas where we fly!),

- The psychology of resuscitation - many people faced with an unconscious patient who is not breathing and has no heartbeat may do nothing for fear of harming him! If he's already dead you can't hurt him, so start rescue breathing and CPR immediately! Even if you can't remember exactly how to do it, do the best you can.

- The fact that CPR will not restart a casualty's heart, it will only maintain a minimal blood flow to stave off brain damage and death. Having started CPR you should continue until the emergency services arrive or someone else can take over

- The emphasis on First Aiders protecting him or herself from infectious diseases by the use of appropriate barriers (latex gloves and resuscitation shields) and from hazards associated with the incident: equipment, weather high-voltage power cables, etc.

A further useful feature of the course was the advice given on specifying various sizes of First Aid kit for use by individuals or groups in the outdoors (Marlin can supply these at rea-

sonable cost). For paragliding, the inclusion in your harness pocket of a wire saw (for cutting tree branches) and a roll of dental floss (for pulling up a rescue rope if you land in a tree!) are ideas worth considering.

In summary the training was a very positive experience which I would recommend to any flier who is not confident about their First Aid skills. The hospitality at Butterfly Paragliding, organised by the admirable Miranda, was excellent. We had two good nights in the local pub, offering real ales and bar meals, and I even got in a couple of days flying at Chillerton Down and Compton Cliffs. All in all, a very good weekend. If you are interested in attending a future course contact Lynn or Stuart at Marlin Training on 0121 471 3431, e-mail: training@marlin-net.co.uk.

Practicing rescue breathing

