



**Australian Government**

**Australian Transport Safety Bureau**

# Collision with terrain involving Pilatus Britten-Norman BN2A, VH-OBL

101km WSW of Hobart, Tasmania, on 8 December 2018

**ATSB Transport Safety Report**  
Aviation Occurrence Investigation  
AO-2018-078  
Preliminary – 4 February 2019

# Preliminary Report

## What happened

On 8 December 2018, a Pilatus Britten-Norman BN-2A-20 Islander, registered VH-OBL, operated by Par Avion, was conducting a charter ferry flight from Cambridge Aerodrome to Bathurst Harbour, Tasmania. The aircraft departed the aerodrome at 0748 Eastern Daylight Time (EDT),<sup>1</sup> and was scheduled to arrive at Bathurst Harbour about 0845 to pick up five passengers for the return flight to Cambridge Aerodrome.

At 0829, the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) received advice that an emergency locator transmitter (ELT) allocated to VH-OBL had activated. AMSA advised the Tasmanian Police and the aircraft operator of the activation, and initiated search and rescue efforts. The rescue efforts included two helicopters and a Challenger 604 search and rescue jet aeroplane. The Challenger arrived over the beacon signal location at around 0925; however, due to cloud cover it was unable to visually identify its precise location. Multiple attempts were made throughout the day to locate the accident site, however, due to low-level cloud, the search and rescue operation was unable to confirm visual location of the aircraft until about 1900. The aircraft wreckage was located in mountainous terrain near the Western Arthur Ranges in the Southwest National Park. The search and rescue crew determined that the accident was unlikely to have been survivable. The search and rescue helicopter crew considered winching personnel to the site; however, due to a number of risks, including potential for cloud reforming, the time of day and lighting, and other hazards associated with the mountainous location, the helicopter departed the area. The aircraft wreckage was accessed the following day, when it was confirmed that the pilot, the sole occupant of the aircraft, was fatally injured.

Position and altitude information was obtained from FlightAware, which recorded a combination of ADS-B<sup>2</sup> and Spidertracks<sup>3</sup> data. The data showed the aircraft tracking to the southwest towards Bathurst Harbour (Figure 1). At approximately 0816, the aircraft entered a valley near the West Portal in the Western Arthur Ranges, and proceeded to conduct a number of turns. The final ADS-B data point recorded was at 0828.

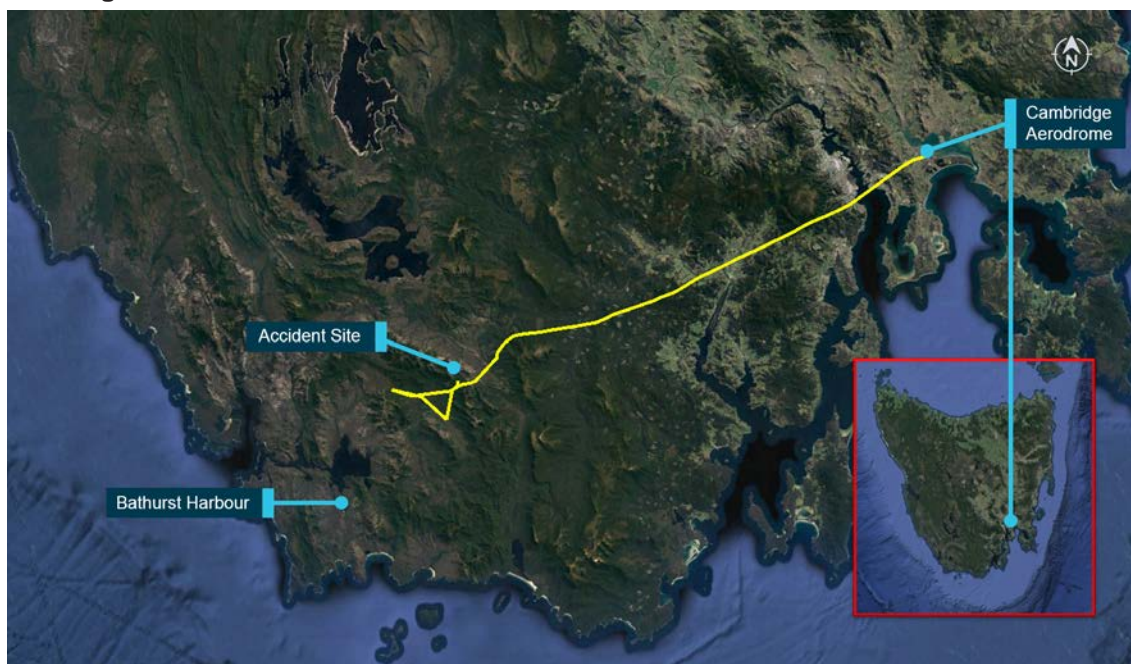
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<sup>1</sup> Australian Eastern Daylight Time (EDT): Coordinated Universal Time (UTC) + 11 hours.

<sup>2</sup> Automatic dependent surveillance—broadcast is a surveillance technology in which an aircraft determines its position via satellite navigation and periodically broadcasts it, enabling it to be tracked.

<sup>3</sup> Spidertracks is a commercial satellite based tracking system, enabling the aircraft position to be monitored remotely. It includes an SOS button, which can be manually activated by the crew in an emergency.

**Figure 1: Track of VH-OBL from Cambridge Aerodrome towards Bathurst Harbour, showing the accident location**



Source: Google earth and FlightAware, modified by ATSB

## Site and wreckage

ATSB investigators travelled to Hobart, Tasmania as part of this investigation. However, due to the remote location and access difficulties, and other risks associated with the mountainous location of the wreckage, the ATSB did not attend the accident site. Investigators conducted numerous interviews, gathered relevant information and worked closely with the Tasmanian Police to gain an understanding of the accident. A number of items recovered from the wreckage and detailed photographs by the Tasmania Police forensic investigators will be examined by the ATSB.

**Figure 2: Accident location of VH-OBL in the Western Arthur Ranges**



Source: Tasmania Police

## Pilot information

The pilot held a current Commercial Pilot (Aeroplane) Licence and had completed a flight review on 25 May 2017. The pilot also held a Class 1 Aviation Medical Certificate that was valid until 26 February 2019. The available information indicated that the pilot had about 540 hours total aeronautical experience, with 82.5 hours on Islander aircraft.

## Ongoing investigation

The investigation is continuing and will include examination of the following:

- recovered components and available electronic data
- aircraft maintenance documentation
- weather conditions
- pilot qualifications and experience
- operator procedures
- research and previous occurrences.

## Acknowledgements

The ATSB acknowledges the support of Tasmania Police for their assistance during this investigation.

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*The information contained in this preliminary report is released in accordance with section 25 of the Transport Safety Investigation Act 2003 and is derived from the initial investigation of the occurrence. Readers are cautioned that new evidence will become available as the investigation progresses that will enhance the ATSB's understanding of the accident as outlined in this report. As such, no analysis or findings are included in this update.*