Serious Incident

Aircraft Type and Registration:	Cameron Z-133, G-CLZI
No & Type of Engines:	N/A
Year of Manufacture:	2021 (Serial no: 12455)
Date & Time (UTC):	29 May 2026 at 0730 hrs
Location:	Field at Langley Green, Warwickshire
Type of Flight:	Commercial Air Transport (Passenger)
Persons on Board:	Crew - 2 Passengers - 4
Injuries:	Crew - None Passengers - None
Nature of Damage:	None to the balloon
Commander's Licence:	Commercial Pilot's Licence
Commander's Age:	54 years
Commander's Flying Experience:	1,898 hours (of which 1,898 were on the same or similar type) Last 90 days - 9 hours Last 28 days - 5 hours
Information Source:	Aircraft Accident Report Form submitted by the pilot

Synopsis

The balloon was on the final approach to a field in Langley Green, Warwickshire when the pilot spotted a set of 'domestic' type electricity cables. Despite attempting to climb, the front lower edge of the basket struck the cables, which shorted against each other and fell to the ground. There was no damage to the balloon or basket and no injuries to its occupants. The balloon landed safely further down the field.

Pilots must identify cables visually because only the high-tension sets are marked on charts and maps. Spotting them can be challenging both due to the light conditions at the time balloons generally fly and the location of the cables, which can be obscured by trees and structures. The investigation found that there was no comprehensive database recording the locations of electricity and telecommunications cables from which an electronic map for pilots could be generated.

History of the flight

G-CLZI lifted from Ragley Hall, Warwickshire at approximately 0645 hrs with four passengers and two crew members on board. The flight was part of a mass ascent during the Midlands Air Festival. The weather was reported as excellent for a balloon flight with good visibility and light winds. The balloon flew roughly north-east climbing to a maximum height of around 900 ft agl before descending to lower levels.

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After 45 minutes the pilot began to look to locate a suitable landing site. He saw what he considered to be a suitably sized paddock and began a shallow and slow approach. He noted there were power lines visible to his right, but considered there was sufficient separation. The approach passed through a large gap between two trees, and as the balloon was passing through this gap with a very low rate of descent and a ground speed of less than 5 kt, the pilot saw further power lines directly in front at a distance of 20 m.

Realising that if he attempted to land short of the power lines this was likely to risk a full collision, he engaged the burners in order to climb. The lower front edge of the basket struck the first line of the cables, which then arced against each other before the cable broke and dropped to the ground. The pilot then opened the vent at the top of the balloon to release some of the air and allow the balloon to descend to a vertical landing in the intended field. There was no damage to the balloon and basket and no injuries to its occupants.

The fallen cables emitted a significant amount of smoke, but no fire developed. The fire service attended as a precaution.

Landing site

The balloon was approaching the field from the south-west, shown by the yellow dashed line in Figure 1. The area was crossed by three small 'domestic' type electricity cables, shown by black lines in the figure. The pilot could see the cables he passed over, which were on his right as he approached the landing field. The cables struck by the lower edge of the basket were only visible to the pilot once he had passed the trees. Figure 2 shows a street level view demonstrating how the cables are largely obscured by the trees and boundary planting.

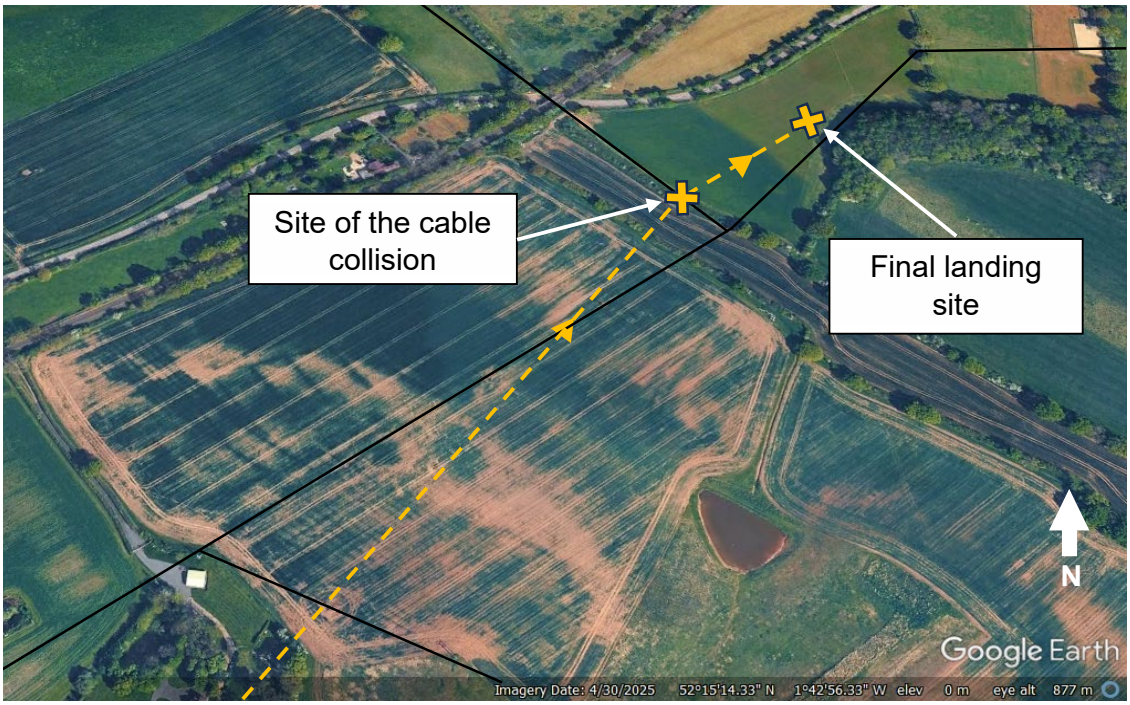


Figure 1

Landing site overview



Figure 2

Google Street view showing the cables

Other information

The pilot of G-CLZI flew with an electronic device with a GPS based navigation application installed. This application can show satellite imaging, Ordnance Survey (OS) maps of various scales and aeronautical charts. The pilot also had the 1:25,000 scale aeronautical chart as back up. The OS maps and aeronautical charts are marked with large high-tension cables, but they do not have the smaller 'domestic' cables marked, which feed villages, towns and rural areas. The pilots rely on a good lookout for cables and obstacles as well as any sensitive areas such as livestock, especially when coming into land. However, power lines can blend into the background or be obscured (as was the case here) by trees or structures. Balloons also tend to fly just after sunrise and during the hour before sunset, and this can increase the difficulty of spotting cables especially when looking into a low sun.

The responsibility for power lines lies with a number of companies across the UK. Enquiries were made by the AAIB into whether there is a database of the location of the lines. The response received was that whilst there is some detailed mapping, the local smaller lines may not be marked or located correctly due to the historical nature of the network. Much of the rural network connections were installed between the 1940s and the 1960s. With no GPS available, accurate mapping was more difficult and, as a result, the quality of data held today depends on whether the lines have had their accurate position recorded. A request for information about telecommunication lines received a very similar response.

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Analysis

The pilot of G-CLZI was bringing the balloon into land in a suitable field. On the final part of the approach, he spotted cables about 20 m in front of the balloon and, despite climbing to avoid them, the front lower edge struck the first cable. The balloon landed safely in the field beyond the cables and there was no damage to the basket, and no injuries to the crew or passengers. The cable had snapped and although there was a significant amount of smoke there was no fire.

Although both OS maps and aeronautical charts mark high-tension cables, there are no markings for the smaller 'domestic' cables on any chart and so balloon pilots must rely on spotting them early enough to avoid them. This can be challenging as the cables and poles can be obscured by trees or structures and can be difficult to spot with the sun low on the horizon. Electronic devices can be used by pilots, which could theoretically show all cables when at a suitable scale, but at the time of publication there appeared to be no complete database of power or telecommunications cables that could be used either.

Conclusion

During an approach to land in a field the front underside of the basket struck cables. The cable broke and although there was a significant amount of smoke there was no fire. There was no damage to the basket and no injuries to its occupants.

Whilst aeronautical charts, OS Maps and some electronic pilot applications show the larger high-tension cable network, there is no national accurate mapping of either electrical or telecommunications cables. Pilots are therefore reliant on spotting the cables which can be challenging as they are often obscured, and the timing of flights often means a low sun causes additional difficulties.

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