



NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Office of Aviation Safety
Western Pacific Region

January 25, 2020

ACCIDENT SITE EXAMINATION SUMMARY

WPR20FA079

This document contains 9 embedded photos.

A. ACCIDENT

Location:	Payson, Arizona
Date:	January 24, 2020
Aircraft:	N1682G, American Champion-7KCAB
NTSB Investigator-in-Charge:	Andrew Swick

On January 24, 2020, about 0911 mountain standard time, a Piper PA28-140, airplane, N3672K, impacted terrain while in the Mazatzal Mountain Range, about 10 miles southwest of Payson Airport (PAN), Payson, Arizona. The private pilot and one passenger were seriously injured, another passenger was fatally injured. The airplane was destroyed, and a postaccident fire ensued. The airplane was registered to and operated by the pilot under the provisions of Title 14 Code of Federal Regulations Part 91 as a personal cross-country flight. Visual meteorological conditions prevailed, and no flight plan was filed for the flight that originated from PAN, at about 0900.

The pilot stated in an interview that after a flight earlier that morning from Falcon Field Airport (FFZ), Mesa, Arizona, he landed in PAN, refueled, and departed for the return flight back to FFZ. During the return flight, the pilot decided to fly over the mountains southwest of their position. He stated that he flew about 1,000 ft above ground level (agl) over the mountains, while the passengers were spotting wildlife on the terrain below. The pilot stated the airplane was running well and doesn't remember anything else until waking up in a small creek at the accident site.

Preliminary flight track data showed the airplane depart PAN and fly to the Mazatzal Mountain Range. While maintaining an altitude of about 1,000 ft agl above the mountainous terrain, the airplane made a 280° turning maneuver, then descended over a canyon. About a half mile from the accident site, the flight track turned left and the turn radius increased before the track data ceased. The last recorded flight track data point was located about 500 ft from the accident site and about 200 ft agl.

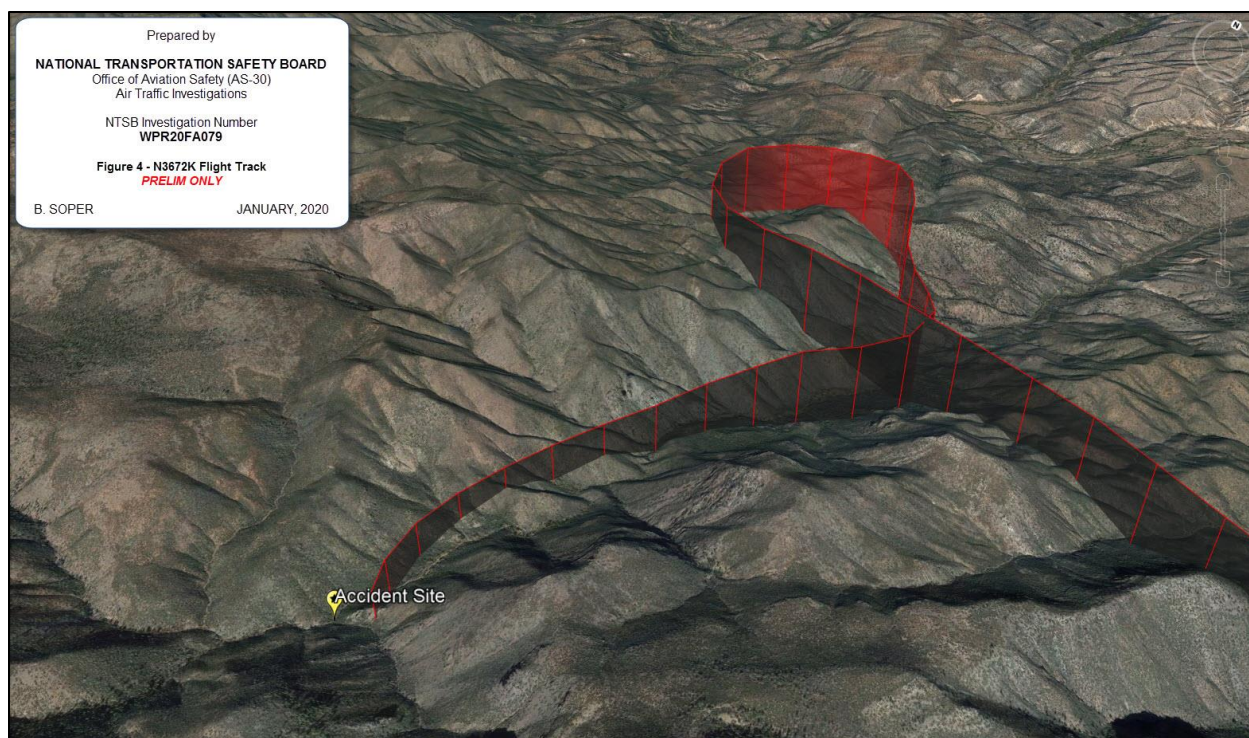


Figure 1-Flight track data and the accident site location

B. PARTICIPANTS

Andrew Swick-NTSB IIC (onsite January 25, 2020)

Scott Hutson-FAA FSDO (onsite January 25, 2020)

Pete Kelly-FAA FSDO (onsite January 25, 2020)

Kathryn Whitaker.-Piper Aircraft (Party Member) (onsite January 25, 2020)

Mark W. Platt-Lycoming Engines (Party Member)

C. ACCIDENT SITE EXAMINATION

Examination of the accident site was on January 25th, 2020. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Piper Aircraft and the NTSB-IIC were airlifted by the Arizona Department of Public Safety from PAN to the accident site. The accident site is located near the top of the City River Canyon in the Mazatzal Mountain Range, about 10-1/2 miles southwest of PAN. The canyon runs downslope to the north and the sides of the canyon are about 40-45 degree slope. The eastern side of the canyon rises to about 300 ft, the western side rises to about 400 ft and the southern side rises to about 800 ft above the accident site. At the bottom of the canyon, two small streams fork together at the accident site. The stream is about 6 ft across and has an average depth of about 6 inches.

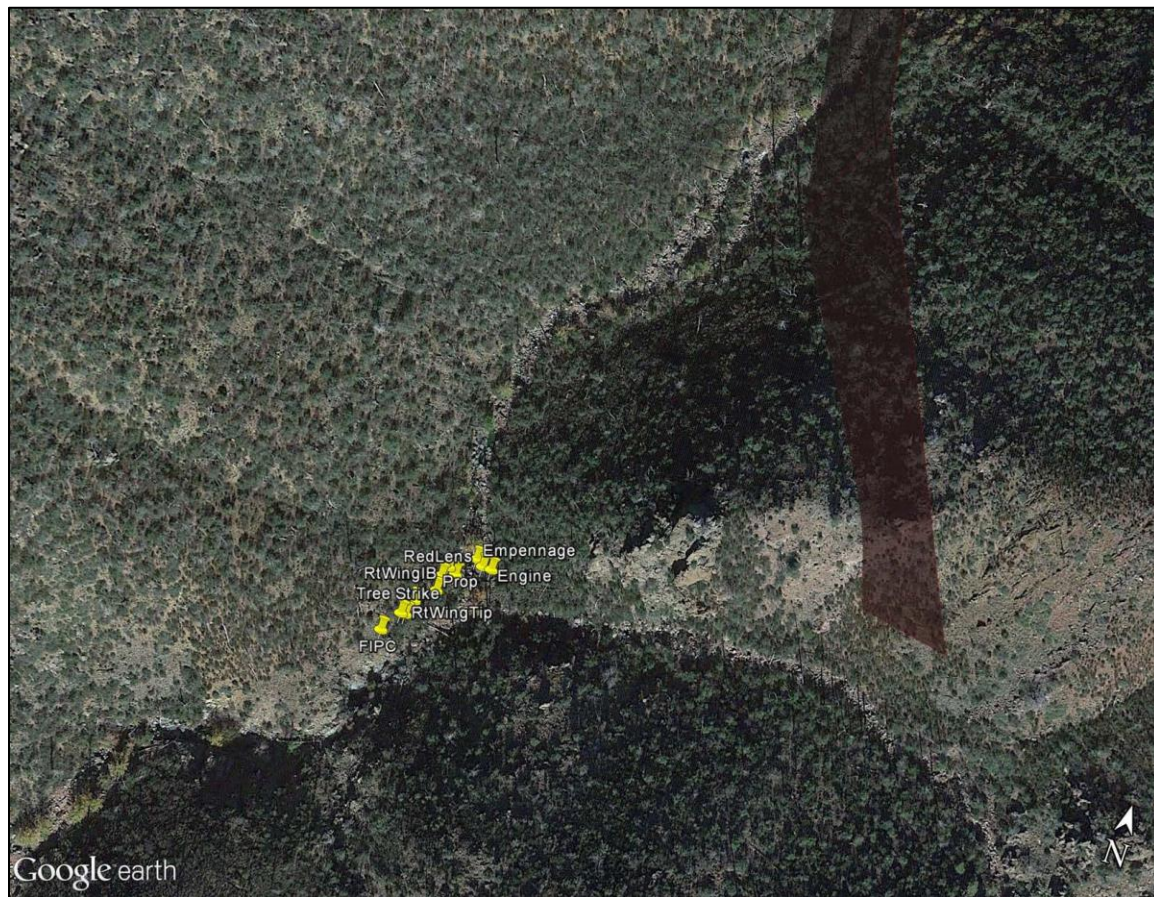


Figure 2-Google earth view of the accident site and radar track

The debris field was about 145 ft long and about 12 ft wide, on a directional heading of about 35° magnetic, paralleling, and uphill from a small stream. The first identified point of contact (FIPC) were strike marks found on several small trees and bushes about 5 to 7 ft tall.



Figure 3-Accident site aerial view, view to the South

About 30 ft further in the debris field, the trunk of a large standing tree revealed scoring. To the left of the large tree was evidence of another tree similar in size where only a short tree trunk remained. Broken tree sections were found further down the debris field. To the right of the large tree were two sections of the outboard right wing.



Figure 4-Accident site and debris path, view to the North

The outboard right wing sections revealed leading edge impact damage, similar in size and shape to the large tree and location of the tree trunk. The circular impact damage was found on the lower forward side of the wing near the leading edge, suggesting that the airplane was positioned in a nose up attitude at the time of impact with the ground.



Figure 5-Right wing lower surface and tree strikes

About 15 ft further along the debris field was the right wing tank found on the right side of the debris field and was breached. To the left of the tank in the center of the debris field was an area of disturbed rock and dirt, consistent with the engine impacting the ground in this area. The debris field continued through dense brush revealing about 70 ft of disturbed ground and rock. About 30 ft further along the debris field was the propeller and spinner back plate. The propeller had heavy leading edge gouging at the tips and about 4 inches of material was missing at one blade tip. About 20 ft further down and on the left side of the debris field broken red lens near a rock with impact marks.



Figure 6-Propeller assembly

The inboard right wing section was found at the end of the disturbed ground and rock. Several small trees and bushes remained standing and were found between the inboard right wing section and the main wreckage. The right wing portion had the landing gear partially attached by the brake line, and impact damage to the leading edge and wing root area. The wing spar was visible and had various bending and twisting. The nose landing gear wheel and lower strut was found near the right wing inboard section.



Figure 7-Inboard section of the right wing

The main wreckage came to rest alongside a large boulder and was partially submerged in a pool about 10 ft in diameter and about 4 feet deep. The main wreckage had postimpact fire damage. The left wing and fuselage remained partially attached. The cabin and forward fuselage was mostly consumed by fire. The cabin floor was found upright and the firewall and engine remained attached to each other and came to rest against the large boulder. The engine was found in a nose-down position and the propeller separated from the crankshaft flange. The engine cowling was mostly consumed by postimpact fire. The left wing was found attached to the fuselage and was resting alongside the boulder. The wing tip fairing separated from the wing, and the outboard 3 ft of the wing remained partially attached by the upper wing skin. The left wing had buckling throughout. The left wing fuel tank appeared to be intact with fire damage near the leading edge. The fuel cap was not fully engaged and had a small tree twig wedged between the cap and top of the tank. The tank was tapped and appeared to be empty.



Figure 8-Main wreckage, south view

The empennage remained partially attached to the cabin floor by control cables and some structure and came to rest on its right side and had postimpact fire near the cabin area. The empennage came to rest on the right horizontal stabilator that was submerged in the pool. The right elevator and horizontal stabilator was buckled throughout and crushed near the tip. The left elevator and horizontal stabilator had leading edge dents and the elevator was crushed downward. The vertical stabilizer was undamaged, and the rudder was buckled throughout. The ELT was found on top of the empennage. The pilot and surviving passenger locations, after they were ejected from the airplane during the accident sequence, were about 10 ft upstream from the main wreckage near a small sandy area between large rocks on the east side of the stream. The fatal passenger was found on the west side of the stream up against a large boulder. No occupants showed any type of thermal injuries from the accident.



Figure 9-Main wreckage, west view

The wreckage was recovered by Air Transport and transported to Air Transport in Phoenix, Arizona for further examination.

Submitted by: Andrew Swick