



A solemn warning to Wingsuit flyers

Air, Wingsuit Flying | April 28, 2010 by lolajones

- 1 Geoffrey Robson was a qualified mechanical engineer and mathematician who happened to love to wingsuit fly.
- 2 The fantastic video below ([fmalan1](#)) taken in early April, shows Robson opening a new route from the Groot Drakenstein mountains above Boschendal, near Stellenbosch, South Africa. It was recorded on his helmet-mounted video camera and shows graphically why this is such a seriously extreme sport:
- 3 Robson completed his Master's degree at the University of Stellenbosch, and was a PhD student at the ETH in Switzerland, where he conducted research on wingsuit flying. He considered himself lucky enough to be able to combine his interests in one study: aerodynamics and wingsuit flying and aimed to combine maths and science to improve wingsuit flying.
- 4 He had been studying wingsuit flight to unprecedented accuracy by using a highly sensitive instrument which measured 3D location by GPS and inertial measurement, flyer attitude and heading, altitude, and air pressure during many wingsuit Base jumps.
- 5 Robson was said to be the only person in the world who combined the scientific capacity for this kind of research with the ability to test it himself in the air.

Thank you to [zurichminds](#) for this fascinating video.

Today Geoffrey Robson is dead.

- 6 Early in the morning of Monday, 12th April, he tried the same route, but this time he wanted to cross the ridge between Devil's Tooth (the peak to the front, right) and the mountain. His calculations were wrong, and he failed to clear the ridge, resulting in his death at the age of 31.
- 7 "If he were two metres higher, he would have survived" said his jumping companions, and that is the name of the game with wingsuit flying. It is an inherently dangerous sport, but a sport participated in by people with huge skydiving experience and a deep love of adventure, of setting themselves new challenges and of taking on the ultimate challenge – wingsuit flying or 'proximity flying' as it is also known.

- 8 All extreme sports are dangerous, some more than others, and wingsuit flying and BASEjumping probably the most dangerous of all. We found this little list of statistics on fatalities in extreme sports over the past 5 years per 1,000 participants. Anyone with an ambition to climb K2 might take note of these figures too!

Skydiving:	3.3
Base Jumping:	44
Hang Gliding/Paragliding:	3.8
Summiting K2:	104
ATV Riding:	0.5
Scuba Diving:	.06
Snowboarding:	.05

- 9 Although wingsuit flying is not on the list (there is probably not enough data to work with yet) it is probably somewhere between skydiving and BASEjumping. It is an interesting aside, though, that fatality rates were very high during the developmental period for this extreme sport. Between 1930 and 1961, 71 out of 75 people died trying to perfect a wingsuit.
- 10 But it is immensely popular with a small handful of hardcore adventurers. ‘To fly like a bird’ has always been man’s ambition, and with wingsuit flying you are nearly there...
- 11 ***“Wingsuit flying was his life”*** said his friend and jump companion Leander Lacey. Robson’s father, Bill, described his eldest son as a ***“brilliant mathematician” who was most comfortable in the outdoors. “He came here for a Base-jumping holiday. There is an element of danger, but this is just so tragic,”*** he said.

Our commiserations go to Geoffrey Robson’s family and friends.