



Planning the flight



Sleeping Bear

Soaring the Sand Dunes

by Arthur B. Schultz*

SAND—soft as sugar—yet the tow car runs over it like a scared rabbit. And at the end of a thousand foot wire a sailplane—climbing steeply for altitude. At one side the blue lake—stretching westward as far as the eye can see—and its heavy surf pounding the narrow beach. On the other side the sand dune—stretching for miles—its smooth gleaming face sweeping gracefully upwards to its five hundred foot crest. The wire drops—the sailplane turns toward the ridge and then along it, the smooth upcurrents from the lake breeze striking the bluffs carry it higher and higher, as it cruises idly down the ridge.

Meanwhile the tow car has picked up the dropped end of the tow wire, has carried it back down the beach, hooked it onto a second ship, and is roaring down the beach again. This time a two seated glider soars the ridge—not so high as its more graceful sister—but high enough for its non-pilot second passenger to get the thrill of a lifetime—to look down upon the hawks, gulls and eagles—and to see stretching for mile after mile in the distance the diminishing yellow streak of sand, which, with its accompanying line of white surf, marks the dividing line between the endless blue lake and the undulating hills and forests of the mainland. And above all—the cloud flecked blue sky with its continual promise of fair winds and fair weather.

A third ship takes the air—and after a short time joins the second, soaring side by side for company—just like the gulls—yet far enough apart to insure absolute safety in case of a quirk in the wind.

Hours later, when the wind dies, or sooner if the pilot so desires, all three will make graceful landings on the beach below. If several pilots are on hand to fly the same ship, landings and takeoffs will be frequent. If the

ship has a sole owner, or if an attempt at endurance is under way, the duration of the wind will be the duration of the flight.

Most pilots are more than satisfied after one or two hours of this. If they have company, however, they may stay it out for four or five hours. Some gluttons for flying, though, have stayed up as long as 9½ hours on end.

That is the picture of the Middle-West's new soaring terrain at Sleeping Bear Sand Dune, near Traverse City, Michigan. In years gone by a legendary spot for the Indians, later an outstanding landmark for the early French voyageurs, and more recently famous as the world's largest living sand dune, it is fast becoming a mecca for midwest soaring enthusiasts.

Situated in Michigan's choicest vacation land, and adjacent to the well known Glen Lake, Sleeping Bear Sand Dune and the neighboring Empire Bluffs stand boldly facing the prevailing westerlies blowing steadily across the broad unbroken expanse of Lake Michigan. They present abrupt slopes facing most of the prevailing wind directions—an ideal combination for the soaring pilot.

Soaring the sand dunes has for years been a live topic for discussion by midwest glider pilots. Activated by the records of Octave Chanute's extensive gliding experiments during the early part of the century from the dunes near Gary, Indiana, modern advocates of the sport have finally succeeded in successfully soaring them.

Chanute hauled his glider atop the dune by hard labor or with a team of horses. His flights were merely glides from the top of the dune to the beach and of only a few seconds duration.

More recently gliders have been auto towed from fields or roads along the top of the bluffs near St. Joseph,

*Photos by the Author