

Flying over the
University of Arizona
in the level country
near Tucson



Photos
by the author

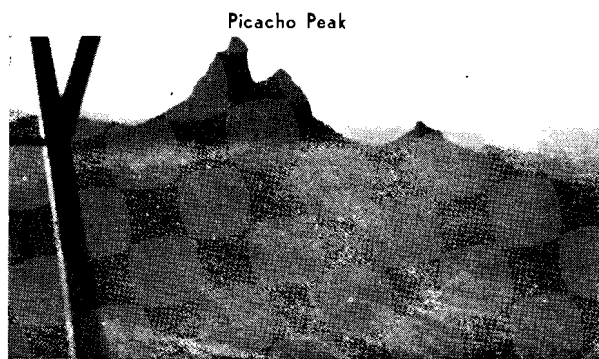
ARIZONA POSSIBILITIES

by Robert T. Luepke

Since thermal updrafts seem to be essential to the sailplane pilot, the behaviour in them of the new Cub light airplane should be of interest as being comparable with that of a glider. Learning from this magazine the conditions prescribed for soaring and with the limited experience I've had with flying, I thought it would be of interest to the glider enthusiast to know of my experiences in flying a light airplane in Arizona.

On one of Tucson's hottest days I distinctly remember one exciting take-off when the Cub was hovering over the cactus forest at the end of the field about a hundred feet up when suddenly it began to settle fast. Gunning the motor as hard as it could "rev" we finally pulled through the downdraft just above the spiny tops of the giant cacti. Climbing to a 500 foot altitude, distant objects appeared to quiver in the hot atmosphere, and the horizon all around was scalloped with high jagged mountain ranges—the desert below a greasy aspect of shimmering heat.

For awhile everything went well until all at once we hit rough air, up and down drafts. The plane pitched violently here and there in crazy maneuvers until my head began to swim. Such a direct contact with strong desert air currents as experienced by an amateur pilot was at first startling. After being well shaken up we decided to land. The sock indicated an approach over



Picacho Peak

EDITOR'S NOTE: At last we have an Arizonan who appreciates the soaring possibilities in his state! Our first experience of desert thermals was on a flight in an old Fokker Universal between Tucson and Los Angeles in 1928 when we were bumped about unmercifully. In 1932 we again had a taste of these conditions when we flew a party of friends across the continent in a Waco cabin. Only last May we flew a Monocoupe around Phoenix and hit very strong thermals over the Salt River Valley. All that day fine soaring flights could have been made from auto tow on the Phoenix airport and how we wished we had had our sailplane. It is probable that Arizona has the best thermal soaring conditions to be found in America and so far there has never been a sailplane out there with which to try them!

the northeast corner of the airport. As we glided in, a group of sombreroed Mexican farmers nearby leaned on their hoes to watch the antics of the airplane through the cloudless sky. The up currents required a low approach over the corner of the field and almost above the farmers who took to a nearby arroya for safety. In the next instant we were hurled upward for almost 200 feet by a powerful thermal updraft. From their crouching positions the superstitious Mexicans must have thought that the protecting god of their Aztec ancestors had reached an invisible hand down and had drawn the noisy menacing machine away from them. A hard right bank and a spiral brought us down and away from the strong



Crossing the desert mountains

lift and we landed farther down the field toward the American Airlines building. This was my first taste of desert thermals.

To contrast, the changing nature of Arizona's atmosphere can be illustrated in a flight from Tucson to Phoenix and return. My friend and I climbed into the Cub one perfect spring morning during the early hours when it was still cool. We took off as the sun rose over the Rincon mountains and headed straight for Picacho Peak lying directly on our route, with its base mystically shrouded in the early morning haze. At 2,000 feet my friend unfolded his camera and began looking for picture possibilities through the mist. The air was as smooth as glass and once having the stabilizer set, a slight touch of the stick now and then was all that was necessary to maintain level flight. Abruptly from the desert rises Picacho Peak with surrounding hillocks covered with heaps of rock and cacti. Upon crossing the Peak, the Cub began to bounce over the rough air caused by contours below. However, upon leaving this conspicuous landmark, the air resumed its original glass-like texture and the remainder of the flight was easily accomplished. Our return flight in the evening was just

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