

White MOUNTAIN WINDS

Story of New Hampshire Expedition

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by Lewin B. Barringer

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It started more than two years ago and seven thousand miles away. One evening, while watching the sunset through the broken columns of the ruins at Persepolis in southern Iran, I told Eliot Noyes about the wonders of soaring flight. Becoming quite interested, he told me about the country near his summer home in the White Mountains near Intervale, New Hampshire, and wondered if this region might not be suitable for soaring.

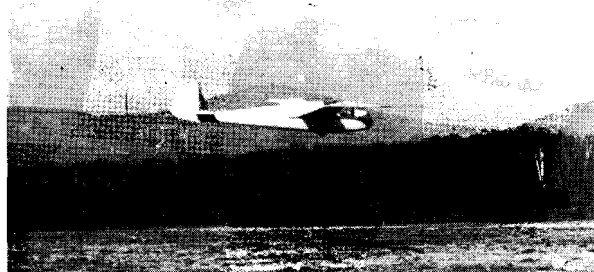
Readers of SOARING will remember the account in the October, 1937 issue, telling how Eliot became a soaring pilot with the five hour leg for his Silver C less than a week after his first gliding lesson. During the Midwest Contest that year, he again brought up the subject of the White Mountain ridges, saying he felt they offered real possibilities. As there were many other important things at hand, the idea was temporarily forgotten.

It was revived by C. B. Colby, editor of *Air Trails*, who suggested it to me at Elmira this year and again more recently by Eliot who invited us up there. We went to Intervale the first week in October and, as reported in the November SOARING, did some exploring with an Aeronca that indicated real possibilities. Especially promising was the nearness of the White Mountain airport at North Conway to a 1,000 foot ridge, so plans and a budget were drawn up for a week's expedition before we left.

The more I thought of soaring in this region, the more it seemed good to me, provided, of course, that the conditions were right. North Conway is 25 miles south of Mt. Washington and the center of the skiing activity of the east—which is still growing with special ski trains all the way from New York. Skiing and soaring should go together. Not only should the latter sport appeal to devotees of the former but it should give them a thrilling activity to carry on in the same beautiful country during the non-skiing months.

So it was with a glad heart that I received a wire from El saying that the North Conway Chamber of Commerce had voted to put up the money for the expedition. Another wire brought Ted Bellak on the run to take again a valuable part in another pioneering venture.

Rolling into the White Mountain Airport on Sunday morning, October 23rd, we were met by the veteran pilot, Wylie Apte. Wylie is one of the very few airplane pilots, without sailplane experience, I have ever met who has a real understanding of upcurrents and the reverse. He acted as towplane pilot for all our flights.



Eliot Noyes
Looking north as the Ibis takes off to Pequawket Mountain, center, and Hurricane Mountain, right.

While El and some of his friends from Boston helped me to assemble the Ross "Ibis", Ted made up a release to fit on the tail wheel of Wylie's Waco cabin powered with a 210 Continental engine. This took some time, so it was dusk before we got off. However, with the sky overcast and a lack of wind precluding soaring, we lost no flying time. We made this flight to demonstrate the ship and to familiarize Wylie with airplane towing.

With the field barely two thousand feet long, we cut the rope to 280 feet, which proved a practical length. The take off was smooth, as was the tow to 3,500 feet with the airspeed seldom over 60 m.p.h. in very quiet air. When I released, neither Wylie nor I felt it. It was a joy to be up in this fine ship once again, to hear the slight whistling of the wind and feel the excellent control. With the variometer seldom moving from —.6m/sec. (about 2 feet per second) I glided gradually back to the airport. It was so dark when I landed that the spectators did not see me come in until I rolled up to the hangar.

Monday it rained all day, so we spent the time smoking barographs and making arrangements with Mr. Howe to receive daily weather reports from the station on Mt. Washington over his short-wave radio. Ted received these each day and they were a great help in planning our work and giving us the necessary data for our test flights.

Tuesday, October 25th, looked good with a fresh W-NW wind and every indication of unstable conditions. It would be this day that Wylie had to be away for a funeral. Frantic telephoning finally located a pilot named Labbe, in Portland, Maine. When he arrived after 75 miles of driving, it was late morning. Although he also had never towed a sailplane, he had had banner towing experience, which was a help.

The take off was made at noon into a WNW wind of 15 m.p.h. with the temperature at 65° and the relative humidity 40%. Right after leaving the airport and flying over a field, we hit a strong thermal but I hesitated to cut loose at 300 feet altitude with so many trees around. Instead, I hung on to the appointed place of release, over Hurricane Mountain (see map page 10). Labbe must have misunderstood the height at which I told him I wanted to release by a thousand feet as I was at 3000 when I cut loose. Otherwise the flight that followed would really have been the record the papers reported.

Almost immediately, I felt strong lift of 1 to 3 meters per second as I flew along over the ridge toward the airport. Everywhere along this ridge there was lift, and, in