

LOOKING BACK ON THE EIGHTH ANNUAL NATIONAL SOARING CONTEST

by The Chairman of the Contest Board *Carl Lang*

The Soaring Contests of the Soaring Society of America serve three distinct purposes:

1. To stimulate top performances in soaring and to introduce new soaring technique.
2. To introduce and maintain safe methods of motorless flying.
3. To encourage new glider pilots.

In each of the last eight years, an Annual National Soaring Contest has been held to take care of these needs.

The Contests have taken place at Elmira, New York, because there exists a fairly natural setting for gliding activities, and City, County and other agencies give generous support to the Contests.

For the purposes of the National Contests, the Soaring Society of America, with the cooperation of the National Aeronautic Association and of Elmira and Chemung County, has provided special facilities and services:

Prizes and prize money were awarded not only for the most outstanding performances of the contestants but also for good performances of beginners and of groups.

Good equipment for shock cord, auto tow, winch tow, and airplane tow were provided.

An honorary staff of S.S.A. glider experts directed and supervised the Contests to guarantee safe and sportsmanlike conduct in accordance with N.A.A. and F.A.I. regulations.

Official N.A.A. observers verified all flights to certify license and good performances.

Inspectors of the U. S. Department of Commerce attended to the licensing of pilots and gliders.

A technical staff of the S.S.A. judged on design and construction competitions and acted in an advisory capacity to glider designers.

A special weather bureau was maintained for the benefit of the contestants.

A barograph service was maintained, dispensing with official calibration at Washington, D. C.

Radio communication between centers of activity was established.

An emergency station, under direction of a doctor, was maintained.

A press relations service and an information service were maintained.

Traffic was regulated and thousands of visitors and their cars were taken care of.

Entertainment programs were carried out.

Housing and camping facilities for hundreds of contestants were maintained.

Repair facilities were provided.

Foreign contestants and guests were entertained.

Lectures on soaring and technical subjects were provided.

As a whole, the Annual National Soaring Contest has, in these eight years, grown to be not just a soaring competition, but also a licensing bureau and a glider school, where the majority of the nation's glider students take their final examinations. About one-half of all contestants, and of all contesting gliders, qualified every year for Department of Commerce licenses at Elmira!

The Eighth Annual National Soaring Contest brought 54 gliders and 147 pilots to Elmira, twice the number of the previous year. Moreover, most of the contestants lived on the soaring site. There was, naturally, a large number of experienced pilots, but there were also a great many novices. There were sailplanes of the most advanced designs, and also intermediate types and many utilities. Unfortunately, things were complicated by an enormous influx of visitors and by exceptionally poor soaring weather.

The fund for administration of the Contest was the same as the previous year, but the staff of volunteers of the Contest Board was smaller than that of other years and nothing could be done about it. However, the Contest turned out to be the most successful one on record. This was only possible because a number of hardships were imposed on everyone, especially the management itself, and this should be avoided in the future.

First of all, there were more gliders than could efficiently be operated on Harris Hill. Even by using the most modern launching equipment, there were periods of several hours after favorable conditions commenced before the last glider could leave the ground. To avoid discrimination, the order of launching had to be the order of application for it, even in cases when it was obvious to the official that only sailplanes could soar. This presented a serious handicap to those equipped for record flights.

Soaring time on the ridge had to be restricted, to avoid crowding. On this account, a number of cross country flights had to be started before a real good opportunity arose. Moreover, the experienced pilots had to pay too much attention to the beginners, and could not concentrate wholly on their soaring technique.

Landing back on the ridge was often hazardous to pilots and visitors, as continued launchings of gliders prevented free passage of visitors and caused them to enter the field.

Because there was insufficient hangar space for all the gliders, no one could have the privilege and convenience of having his glider set up and ready to go at any time.

Free airplane tows had to be given indiscriminately to every competitor who was technically qualified for it. This privilege was frequently used when it was rather obvious that there was no chance to soar. This was expensive and did not directly serve the purpose of the Contest, but the Contest Board did not wish to prevent any attempt for soaring flights.

The Soaring Society of America has established an excellent safety record during its Annual Contests, through strict regulations and their competent enforcement. Last year, these not too well liked measures had to be even stricter, on account of a large number of new and inexperienced pilots and the heterogeneous composition of the glider equipment. Weak winds and the necessity of utilizing new soaring sites added danger. Gliding activities in as many as four places at once spread the staff of competent officials all over the Elmira area. It was, therefore, necessary to introduce an amount of red tape and restrictions which are very undesirable. The experienced pilots, who came to take part in the national outstanding soaring event, had to subordinate themselves to the order of a glider school, probably much to their disadvantage in competition. Those of the S.S.A. Directors who had put themselves at the disposition of the Contest manager as officials had to devote themselves largely to the unpleasant task of enforcing restrictive measures. Also, the novice pilots failed to receive their full share out of the Contest. It was found that they could not get in a very large amount of soaring because the Elmira Hills proved inadequate for beginners under unfavorable weather conditions.

The new building facilities on Harris Hill were not entirely sufficient for so many residents and the feeding of the multi-tude at Rhodes' Farm presented a major problem.

There were not enough safe landing fields for beginners, as demonstrated by a crash that damaged three of the most expensive sailplanes in this country, and there is no airport for unrestricted use for gliding purposes.

A search for the solution of the problems points in two directions. Either the Annual National Soaring Contest is to be conducted in essentially the same manner as before, i.e., in uniting all U. S. glider pilots once a year for one huge meet, or in breaking the National Contest up into a number of contests at different dates and different locations. On account of the tremendous growth of the soaring movement during the last two years, the first mentioned solution would necessitate moving the Contest from Elmira to a more suitable location, since the Elmira site could not possibly accommodate more competitors than last year. However, at the present time there is no other site fully enough developed to be host to a larger contest than Elmira's. It is, therefore, necessary to hold two contests in 1938. The Soaring Society of America will hold the Ninth Annual National Soaring Contest from June 25th to July 10th, at Elmira, and the American Open Soaring Contest at Frankfort, Michigan, from August 29th to September 7th.

Frankfort, with its long dunes and steady winds, constitutes a site where it is expected that much soaring can be done with

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