

# SOARING SITES - I

## The ALTAMOUNT PASS SITE

by Gilbert Waters

SSNC Photos by Al Hoefflich



Located on a grass-covered, treeless hill five and a half miles northeast of the town of Livermore, California, the Altamount Pass site is now the chief center of soaring activity of the Soaring Society of Northern California. To place it more exactly, we can say that it is at Latitude  $121^{\circ} 39' W$  and Longitude  $34^{\circ} 44' N$ , which puts it two miles SSW of Altamount and one and a half miles ESE of Greenville station on the Niles and Sacramento Line of the Southern Pacific Railroad. A dirt road through fields leads directly to the top and can easily be negotiated by a car and trailer

except during the brief rainy season in the winter. A drive of an hour and a half along U. S. Route 50 brings you to the

site from San Francisco, which is about fifty miles to the west.

The take-off site is on the rounded top of a hill approximately half a mile long by 350 yards wide, with the side of the ridge facing southwest. It is 1,350 feet above sea level and drops off 700 feet to the westward in gentle slopes to the floor of the Livermore Valley, which runs about fifteen miles east and west and averages five miles wide. The slope soaring terrain includes a range of hills continuing nearly three miles to the southeast and from 700 to 1,000 feet above the valley. Only about a mile is a clearly defined ridge, the rest being rather cut up by ravines.

The prevailing wind direction is from the west, and many days of fine cumulus clouds seem to indicate that they bring moist air from the Pacific which creates an ideal thermal breeding condition, as this air encounters the dry heat of the valley. During the summer months, when there is practically no rain, the winds can usually be relied on to blow about 15 m.p.h., after 2 p.m., which, coupled with the thermal lift, boosts you from 500 to 1,000 feet above the hill.

No distance flights have yet been made from the site, but it seems entirely possible to soar north to Mt. Diablo, which is on a continuation of the same range of hills and 3,800 feet high. From this



EDITOR'S NOTE: With this article by Mr. Walters, a leading soaring pilot of the west coast and Vice-President of the Soaring Society of Northern California, we inaugurate a new series of articles, giving the location, history, topographical features and meteorological conditions of different established soaring sites. It is possible that some people reading these articles will discover that undeveloped sites exist in their localities. If this does occur, we hope they will get in touch with us, so that we can help them to have these potential ridges tested. Later on, we expect to run an article on an ideal soaring site.



Dan Sanborn makes a landing down the slope while the author stays aloft in the Pegasus.



Above: Sanborn gains altitude.

Below: The author soaring at Altamount in his sailplane, the Pegasus.



Atherton, Langley, Miss Washer, and Jim Gough watch Dan Sanborn circle in the Grunau in a thermal in front of the launching hill.

