

Soaring SITES VIII

PALOS VERDES HILLS

by Jay Buxton

Photographs by The Author



In 1928 we began using the hills south of Redondo Beach for gliding—just gliding and not exactly flat glides, either. We did not use them with a view to soaring possibilities, but rather because the hills were not far from home and looked like they might be good to slide down on. Of course, we never dreamed of ten hour flights with a passenger or "trips up the coast" or miles out to sea, either.

To be sure, a few hilltops were tried out, or rather just used, before finally discovering a little lift over the present one while giving the weeds a clipping with our primary. Perhaps the nearness of the highway at the base of the hill was the deciding factor in its final use, rather than its possibilities for soaring. As the slope of the hill about equaled the gliding angle of our bird cage, there was little worry other than reaching the pole line or highway at the base.

It was nearly a year before a reckless pilot, going up for altitude, squeaked over the 'phone line and landed "away over on the other side of the road." Of course, this cross-country flight was preceded by such cautious reconnaissance as flying under the 'phone wires. Inspired by this great flight, the Los Angeles Glider Club put a nacelle on their primary and brought it out on a Sunday that happened to be ideal for soaring. Ted Jenks took off in it and surprised even himself by not only going over the wires with yards to spare, but even reaching the cliffs above the beach. By turning and



Upper: Looking north toward Los Angeles.
Lower: The Jap gardens, on which the boys are so fond of landing.

following the cliff, Ted not only held his own, but made some altitude. By careful maneuvering, he stayed up for three and a half hours. Although we had not gone out to discover a soaring site, we had discovered soaring at our gliding site.

With soaring possible, the Palos Verdes Hills became very popular for ships from cities even some distance inland. A number of meets were held that attracted gliders from all over California. While some of the pilots were brushing up for a coming contest, Milt Stoughton, then a California tenderfoot, thought well enough of the soaring prospects to hop his Ford back to Detroit for the "Peapod" he and Bert Wilson had stored there. Incidentally, with the "Peapod", Wilson would have made the duration money for that contest, but, tiring of making half mile round trips along the beach for over three hours, he tried tickling spectators along the cliff with his wing tip. However, it was the crowd's turn to be amused when he snagged a wing and dumped over, just missing by inches a crash to the bottom. For that bit of horseplay, I now have a nice tall cup that he had right in the bag.

There have been quite a few accidents, some of which were fatal, but, without doubt, all were avoidable by just ordinary precautions. Typical of such crashes was that of an "early bird". A good sailplane he had built was quite tail heavy, so he merely cut off a section of the fuselage rear end and moved the empennage forward that much. A few days out in the rain before being recovered softened the unpainted glue joints enough to let the tail wobble around, even in handling on the ground. The tail held on somehow till a few weeks later he took off in a stiff squall from off the ocean, when at about seventy-five feet up, the empennage twisted off and the ship nose dived into the ground, killing him instantly. This crash, with photographs of wreckage, made the front page of nearly all California papers.

