

SOARING SITES XII

Step toe Butte

by Gene E. Davidson

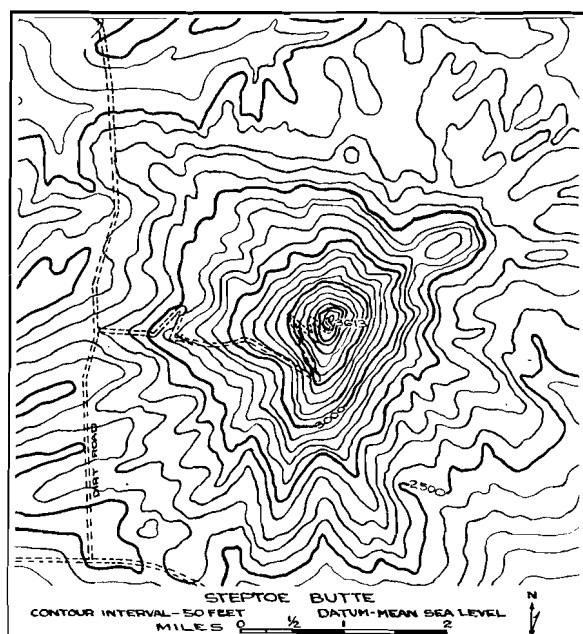


An old landmark with an interesting historical significance in the "Inland Empire", Step toe Butte was named in honor of Colonel Step toe, who battled the Palouse Indians in the early days on the site of the present city of Rosalia. It is located on a paved highway just 50 miles south of the city of Spokane. Following this same highway 27 miles further brings us to Pullman, home of Washington State College and our gliding club.

From the highway, the butte is reached by a five-mile drive on a good dirt road, which zig-zags up the face to the top. It is necessary only to go part way up to reach the take-off area. This road, a relic of horse and buggy days, served a once stately hotel and amusement center atop the butte. The remainder of the way up has not been kept up since fire destroyed the hotel years ago, but a few minor repairs would make it usable.

Step toe Butte has been designated as Site No. 2 for the Northwest because of its rank as a soaring site and also because it was the second in this section to be used for gliding—Mount Hull, near Oroville, Washington, being the first. Third and fourth rank are held by Badger Mountain, near Wenatchee, and the Tramway Site on the Snake River Bluffs, respectively, which will be described at some future time.

Step toe Butte is interesting to enthusiasts of motorless flying for several important reasons. It is readily ac-



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Looking northwest from Kamiak Butte—showing Step toe Butte and surrounding wheat fields in the distance.



cessible, except in very bad weather. It is a 1,100 foot conical peak, facilitating take-off in any direction; and is surrounded by thousands of acres of wheat land, providing excellent landing fields for miles around. It has a peculiar formation of two ridges, one extending approximately west and the other nearly south, which give a funnel action to the air, resulting in a strong slope current with a relatively small cross-country wind. This is particularly advantageous in that the prevailing wind is from the southwest. The roads and surrounding country provide good conditions for auto or winch tow, although Step toe itself is best adapted to shock-cord launching at present.

Kamiak Butte, a 1,200 foot, wooded ridge, 8 miles to the southeast, 5 miles long and half a mile wide, extending east and west, is the nearest slope offering slope currents of appreciable size. While the greatest possibilities for records as well as sport lie in thermals, there are few of us who have made a soaring flight without the welcome support of hill or ridge. Although we have not used them for this purpose as yet, it is

reasonable to suppose that they are frequent and strong enough for flights.

The Step toe soaring area was pioneered by the Washington State College Aero Club and the late Cloyd Artman, who made the first soaring flight in a Mead primary over the butte in the spring of 1935. Since then, the site has been used every year by the members of the club and several successful meets have been held there. Most outstanding of these was the Annual Spring Meet, April 5 to 12, 1936. The best flights of the first six contestants are listed below:

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