



Looking down on the Verde Golf Course.

Soaring SITES XIII

by Robert T. Luepke

POSSIBLE SITES IN ARIZONA

[*Editor's Note:* Although it has been our policy to describe soaring sites already known and proven, we feel that it is a healthy thing to interrupt this series now and then with an article like this one showing some of the superb potential sites that still remain to be tried. Mr. Luepke is the premier soaring enthusiast of his native state; he has yet to own a glider (there are none in Arizona) but knows enough of the subject to campaign for it most vigorously.]

Following the writing of my article which appeared in the November, 1937, issue of this magazine, I have travelled quite a bit around Arizona and have come across a number of potential sites which look to me as if they would offer truly marvelous soaring possibilities on many days throughout the year.

Generally speaking, it is probable that in Arizona are produced some of the most powerful thermal currents to be found anywhere in the United States. When you couple this fact with the additional one that in many parts of the state you will find steep slopes of mountain ranges rising two to five thousand feet from the desert valleys where the thermals originate, you have a combination that, at least in theory, is hard to beat.

One place that I have in mind is the level Verde Valley in the central part of the state east of the old capitol of Prescott. It averages about 3000 ft. above sea level and is bordered by a range of mountains culminating in peaks like Mt. Mingus, 4500 ft. above the

valley bottom. During the summer months I can remember few days on which the sky was not filled with towering cumulus clouds. Occasionally some of these develop into violent local thunderstorms usually called cloud-bursts because of the sudden and enormous precipitation of water.

Along the Verde River there is a most unusual site which should be of great value for preliminary slope as well as thermal soaring. Completely encircling a bend of the river is a continuous ring of 45 degree cliffs of remarkably even contour which rise about 500 feet above the river. Having walked around the top I can testify to the strength of the vertical currents that blow up the cliffs if the wind is anywhere into this natural bowl. The river at this point is really a lake impounded by a dam built for power and irrigation purposes. The direction of the wind can therefore be clearly seen on the surface of the water.

Launchings can be made either from the top by shock cord or from the Verde Golf Course in the bend of the river. The location of this course makes easy, safe landings possible at any time. Permission has already been granted for gliders to land here! All that remains is for someone to come here with a good sailplane and really test soaring conditions which I feel confident are capable of producing new records in the two important categories of distance and altitude.

Looking down from the top of Mt. Mingus. Arrow shows site shown in panorama.



Cumulus clouds over the Verde Valley.

