

# We Went To Bishop

By GEORGE and MARGARET DOWNSBROUGH

The authors hail from New Jersey, have done most of their soaring in the gentle country of Philadelphia, Elmira and Wurtsboro. After a business trip to San Francisco, they had an opportunity to fly up to Bishop, Calif., for a soaring vacation they will long remember.

Early one Saturday morning in September an airliner whisked them away from the coastal fog and up over the top of Fresno. Harland Ross of Bishop met them there with his Piper Clipper, climbed them to 13,000 ft., and brought them straight across the towering Sierra Nevada Mountains. We pick them up as they near Bishop.

THE country was rugged and beautiful. The east side of the Sierras is very steep and falls off immediately to the Owens Valley, which at Bishop is about twenty miles wide, with the White Mountain range on the east. Once clear of the mountain peaks with their occasional patches of snow, Harland turned off the engine, pulled up the nose until the propeller stopped windmilling, and glided out over the valley. The White Mountains appeared to be just a short distance away. It was evident that we flat-country people would have to be careful or we would get caught short of the airport, and not by a little but by miles—we had never seen such clear air and broad expanses.

Soon we were over the town of Bishop, a pretty green patch on the extensive, arid valley floor, so the motor was started and we prepared to land—7500 ft. of runway—a beautiful ex-service field.

On the ground we changed our clothes, got the barograph ready (so we thought), went to town for oxygen, in the middle of the Labor Day weekend Rodeo. (If you ever go to Bishop during this weekend make your reservation for a room early!)

Next we checked with the Weather Bureau which maintains observers at the airport sixteen hours a day. They are very cooperative and pretty well educated in the needs of the soaring fraternity. The winds aloft were moderate and swung through 360° as you went up, but worst of all the air mass was fairly stable. Then we looked over Harland's TG-3 which we had chartered for our flights. It was in excellent shape, had been thermally insulated, equipped with oxygen, and made good and tight in preparation for a dual high altitude flight in the Bishop standing wave.

The first flight was for orientation purposes and my wife dutifully let me be the guinea pig. Harland briefed us in Bishop soaring technique for reaching high altitude. We were to release over the valley and get all the altitude we could before heading for the foothills of the White Mountains, a good six miles east of the airport. At the foothills we were to catch thermals popping off the slopes from the afternoon sun. With each thermal we were to work higher up the mountains until we reached the top, which was 10 - 11,000 ft. and four miles further from the field. BUT—don't fly up the canyons and don't land on the back side of the mountains—it is really



The authors back East with their L-K.

desolate and there is no trailer for the ship. Just to impress this on our minds, we were told of a couple of airplane landings in the high country and shown graphic pictures.

A little after three in the afternoon we were ready for take-off—first time in a TG-3, first time behind a BT towplane and first time in California. The airport altitude is 4120 ft. above sea level. (All altitudes referred to are asl.)

I released over the airport at 6200 and worked a nice thermal to 8500. This was it, so I headed for Silver Peak in the foothills. After working rather hard, often close to some good-sized mountains, I reached the top of the ridge with 11,000. This seemed the time for oxygen. The lift on the top was excellent, several times I had 600—feet per minute climb. I worked several thermals and soon had a height of 16,700 ft. With my Golden "C" altitude now in the bag I set out to explore the White Mountain range and headed for the southern point of Black Mountain, elevation 9075.

The TG-3 handled very nicely although it seemed a little heavy on the controls after our L-K. I soon reached Black Mountain with a comfortable distance between me and the mighty peaks, or at least so it seemed after an hour or more of flying in this rugged terrain. I now retraced my path up the ridge a distance of fifteen miles to the Twin Peaks. The lift continued good and I was never below 12,500 after going on oxygen. On the way back I hit a rather rough but good thermal with fairly consistent lift peaking occasionally at 500 fpm and worked this one to the best of my ability, reaching 17,400 with an outside air temperature of  $-5^{\circ}\text{C}$ . In the bright sun, the ship, with its thermal insulation and tight canopy was surprisingly warm, and I was very comfortable even in my shirt sleeves and without gloves.

As the sun was getting down near the peaks of the Sierras I headed out over the valley. There was a lift