



Warren Watson

The "Zanonia," here skimming the cliffs, went to 33,800 ft. on Jan. 1, 1950.

A Mile a Minute

From *The Thermal*

JOHAN ROBINSON and his "Zanonia" are a tough combination to beat under any circumstances.

Thermals were too weak for cross-country during the 1949 San Diego contest. Robinson was the only one who decided to attempt it on Saturday, Feb. 26th. Let's go along and see what happened:

"After losing out on duration I elected to go cross-country, via the slope wind, from winch tow. For many years soaring pilots have talked about trying to slope soar north along the cliffs from Torrey Pines, going as far as possible, but no one had ever tried it.

"There are several qualifications for such an enterprise: low tide (giving the pilot a wide beach on which to land), sufficient slope wind out of the SW, a crew for retrieving, a 'do it now' incentive. All the above conditions existed at 4 p.m. on Saturday. A winch tow netted about 600 feet altitude, which I increased a little over the high cliffs as I started north. Altitude above the beach was 1050 feet.

"The first break in the cliffs at Torrey Pines wasn't too noticeable, but the next gap north of Del Mar let me down to about 300 feet. The slope wind would maintain my altitude over the cliffs, but normal sink developed while gliding along the beach in the gaps where there were no cliffs. I was letting down in steps between succeeding rows of cliffs, without ever regaining any lost altitude. The cliffs became progressively lower. So did I.

"Leaving Solana Beach I was only 50 feet above the edge, and the cliffs are less than 100 feet. I stretched the glide past 'George's Place' in what I considered a hopeless attempt to reach the next bluff, which couldn't

have been more than 40 or 50 feet high. Most of the time there was a good beach below. When I reached the bluff, the lift area of the slope wind was so narrow I could feel it only on my right wing. It was sustaining, however, and I gained perhaps 20 or 30 feet while passing cars on the highway bound in the opposite direction. Some of the drivers looked worried; others stopped and climbed out.

"Over a cove where several seagulls were soaring, I managed a couple of figure 8's and eked out a gain of 40 feet. This sounds silly compared with altitude gains for most cross-country soaring. However, this bit of gain made the continuance of the flight possible. I passed Encinitas so low I felt I was intruding on the privacy of many homes with swimming pools.

"It was an amazing feeling to soar silently mile after mile, less than 100 feet above the beach. Soon it was only 50, but I continued, expecting to land at any moment. Scanning the beach for obstructions now required almost constant attention. Rocks I thought could be avoided by steering with the rudder, but fishermen standing with their poles presented a much greater problem. They might move at the wrong moment. Several did not even see me as I passed silently 50 feet over their heads.

"South of Oceanside even the 20 to 30 foot cliffs flattened out into the sand, and I knew that I must land. A southbound car on the highway ahead stopped. Several figures, waving wildly, jumped out. As they passed below me I recognized Mia Klemperer and her daughter. As 10 feet was hardly enough altitude, I slid to a stop on a very clear section of the beach below the cliffs. Happily the Klemperers were contest-bound and took me back with them to contact John Olley, who was with my car and trailer.

"This flight, which required 22 minutes to cover 21.3 miles, is not much when compared with thermal flights. But it will always be outstanding in my memory for the extremely low altitude at which it was accomplished, though I don't recommend such procedure!"