

Annual National Contests

When a national soaring contest was first considered, the question of a suitable launching site arose. Although much soaring had been accomplished abroad the originators of the idea for a national contest in the United States were of the opinion that slope soaring was the first step in developing the science-sport of gliding and soaring in this country. Dr. Wolfgang Klemperer was assigned the task of deciding upon a site for a contest and he made expeditions to several parts of the country.

Finally the decision was made to test the hills of Chemung County, New York, in and around Elmira. So to Elmira came Dr. Klemperer to meet Sherman P. Voorhees, Chairman of the Association of Commerce Aeronautical Committee, and Warren E. Eaton who had been delegated to prepare data relative to the possibilities of conducting the first national contest in the vicinity of Elmira. Their information so impressed Klemperer that after an on-the-spot investigation of the terrain he was convinced that here was the locale comparable to what he, Klemperer had been familiar with in Germany. Of course, terrain alone was not the complete answer, as such an undertaking required finances plus a group willing to underwrite the expense involved. Both of these factors were considered and agreed upon and so Klemperer advised J. K. (Jack) O'Meara, who was then at Akron, Ohio, to come to Elmira and make an exploratory soaring flight.

In July, 1930, O'Meara arrived in Elmira, and guided by Mr. Voorhees, drove at once to the farm of the Walsh sisters atop South Mountain overlooking the valley of the Chemung River and the City of Elmira, New York. A willing crew of local citizens assisted O'Meara in assembling his Baker-McMillan "Cadet" glider. In a short time the glider was ready for launching and again local volunteers argued for the "privilege" of stretching the rubber "rope" in

sling-shot or vee form. The launching was successful and the volunteers stepped back to watch "a glide to the valley!" One hour and thirty-eight minutes later O'Meara landed.



Wolf Hirth

During the 1930 contest at Elmira, New York, Wolf Hirth of Germany (considered then as even now, one of the world's most accomplished soaring pilots) said for Chemung County's possibilities as a permanent soaring site: "favorable terrain and prevailing wind conditions . . . hills are heavily-wooded and therefore store up heat . . . this energy released toward evening causing thermal up-currents . . . the very best soaring terrain is found on the steep and high ridges east of Horseheads . . . I believe, a new world's endurance record might have been made, if the flights could have been extended into the night . . . first time that such a distance flight (South Mountain to Appalachian, New York) was accomplished under a blue sky without the help of a single cloud . . . my machine was pushed upward with such force that the wings bent and I was pressed into the cockpit . . . it is not too difficult to make world's record for altitude and endurance at Elmira . . . there is also the possibility of making a distance record . . . this possibility is considerably more than

is that of a flight from the Wasserkuppe (Germany) under like weather conditions."

However, the United States is a country of distances, and soaring pilots rightfully decided that other soaring sites would have to be developed if soaring in this country was to occupy a position comparable to that of other countries. So in April, 1938, The Soaring Society of America authorized Lewin B. Barringer to investigate two potential soaring sites; one at Monteagle, 50 miles northwest of Chattanooga, Tennessee, the other at Wichita Falls, Texas. After successfully soaring for three hours at the Monteagle site, Barringer declared, "Site is superior to the Hornberg in Germany and recommend that the State of Tennessee develop."

Next Barringer proceeded to Wichita Falls, Texas, and set up operations at the Wichita Falls airport. The local Chamber of Commerce had announced that the soaring expedition would investigate soaring conditions for four weeks. After many preliminary flights in the vicinity of the airport (primarily to enable Barringer to familiarize himself with winch launching and the surrounding countryside) on April 13, 1938, Barringer soared to Loveland, Oklahoma, after a fifty-five minute soaring flight that covered twenty-eight miles—the first cross-country soaring flight ever made in either Texas or Oklahoma.

Again on April 19, 1938, Barringer was winch-launched at 10:45 in the morning and "caught" a thermal and started soaring to the northeast; with an announced goal of Tulsa, Oklahoma. At 4:35 in the afternoon, Barringer's two-hundred-ten-mile flight broke the then-existing American record and was the first long-distance soaring flight made in America from winch launching on an airport in level country.

So now the annual national soaring contests are alternating between Elmira, New York, and Texas.

Elmira welcomes new industry — For further information contact City Manager, City Hall, Elmira, New York.

—Elmira Association of Commerce, Elmira, New York