

THE GREAT LAKES OPEN SOARING MEET

The Great Lakes Open Soaring Meet sponsored by the Michigan Soaring Association was held on September 23, 24, 25 at Elberta and Frankfort, Michigan. The last two years this meet has been plagued with bad weather so every one was greatly pleased when we caught up with the law of averages this year and had a good taste of the weather for which this part of the country is noted. The attendance figures were up also, with 37 pilots being registered and 13 gliders flying during the three-day meet.

Frankfort and Elberta, Michigan, are located on the East Shore of Lake Michigan, almost directly across the lake from Green Bay, Wisconsin. In many places along this shore the sand dunes and bluffs rise several hundred feet above the lake, giving excellent ridge soaring conditions when the wind is westerly. This region has a very old history of gliding activities since it was the site of Octave Chanute's original gliding tests in 1896.

Operations are generally centered at the Frankfort Airport, about two miles from the lake. If the wind is from the southwest, soaring is done along the ridge by Elberta Beach, and the city of Elberta has cleared a 3,000 foot sand strip between the beach and the bluff for landing purposes. Gliders can be winch launched or aero launched from this strip. If the wind is from the west, the hill by the city of Frankfort is used and landings can be made on the Frankfort Beach, although this is very much smaller than that at Elberta. When the wind is from the northwest, ridge soaring is done along the bluffs at Crystal Downs Beach, which is five miles north of Frankfort. Good landings are possible here, either in Sutter's pasture—a golf course on top of the bluffs, or on the beach below. It was here that Helen Montgomery set the U. S. duration record of 7 hours 28 minutes in 1938.

Friday, September 23rd, found the Frankfort Airport a beehive of activity, with 12 gliders in various states of assembly, and Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio license plates very much in evidence—Chicago, Fort

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Photo: Selvidge

Kit Drew, left, presents the duration award to Dick Schrader at the Great Lakes Open Meet.

Wayne and Toledo, being the outstate representatives. The Vultures had aero towed their 2-22 in from Detroit, a distance of 200 miles, the night before. The sky was overcast and a few sprinkles of rain fell just before the pilot's meeting, at which time the weather reports were read, indicating improving conditions. The sun soon came out but since the wind was from the east, activities on Friday were confined to local flights in the vicinity of the Frankfort Airport. There was some thermal activity in the afternoon for a short time, the longest flight being one of 30 minutes by Tennis Mahoney. Two winches and one tow plane were in operation all day. The spot landing contest was started—contestants being permitted any number of tries during the three days of the meet.

Friday evening there was a dinner at the Park Hotel at Frankfort, attended by pilots and their families—55 persons attended. After the dinner color slides of past glider activities were shown by Chuck Hauke, and there was a discussion of the newly organized Michigan Soaring Association. There were also some remarks by that real old timer in gliding, R. E. Franklin.

During the night, Friday, a trough went through, followed by a wind shift to the northwest, and Saturday

morning dawned with a strato cumulus deck and a 15 to 20 mile per hour wind out of the northwest. This gave promise of moderately good ridge conditions, so Zada Price and Ray Jackson took off in the Cinema on an aerial tow to explore the lift along the Elberta Beach region. A little earlier, Dick Schrader of Toledo had flown his Bonanza over to Crystal Downs, and came back reporting good lift along the ridge there, so as soon as the tow plane returned he got off in his Bowlus for the ridge at Crystal Downs. The Cinema landed on Elberta Beach without finding much lift along that ridge, so on his return. Ray Jackson had his 1-23 aero towed to Crystal Downs. At the same time, John Nowak of Toledo, a member of the Safety Committee, took several new pilots in his car to explore the Crystal Downs Beach on foot to determine its landing qualities close up. After rolling away a few logs which had drifted up, they marked out a big OK with branches while the Bowlus and 1-23 beat back and forth overhead along with a goodly number of eagles and hawks. A little after 10 A.M., Doc Selvidge got an aero tow to the ridge in his 1-26, hoping for his duration leg for his Silver C.

Back at the airport there was plenty of activity, Kemp Trager and John Bierens having arrived with "Alibi." Kemp proved that there were thermals in spite of the wind, having one flight of 52 minutes. The spot landing contest was also still under way.

After noon a large crowd of spectators gathered along the beach and on the ridge at Crystal Downs watching the three ships working back and forth along the mile and a half ridge. The wind blew fairly steadily and while conditions were better than marginal, it took constant attention on the part of the pilots to remain aloft. About 1:30 P.M. Chuck Hauke took time off from his labors at the winch and tow plane and brought his TG-2 over to the ridge. However, the wind had started to die down a little by then and after skimming the tree tops for some 20 minutes, he decided that he would make Sutter's pasture while he still had sufficient altitude