

CROSS-COUNTRY IN NEVADA

by BILL BOWMAR and VIC SAUDEK

For two years we have been employed at a mine in the White Mountains only a few miles east of the California border. Inevitably we discussed Diamond flights, and Bill has made a few tries for 300 km. to a goal. One was about 80% accomplished and others were considerably less successful because of poor weather experienced on days we were free. No dangerous situations were encountered, nor were there any significant problems. We consider this a safe area for cross-country soaring, if properly equipped.

Since there will probably be a number of flights made at the 25th Annual U.S. National Soaring Competitions (from Bishop, Calif.) over this same terrain, this story is presented as a supplement to Dr. Selvidge's excellent "Diamond Prospecting" tales. We hope that helpful hints peculiar to the region may increase safety, performance and enjoyment at the Nationals.

Until we became acquainted with Fish Lake Valley, which lies parallel to and just east of the north end of Owens Valley, it seemed quite a blank place, hence it was terrifying to think of soaring over it. Now, however, we have learned that, though it is enormous and thinly populated, it is rather a hospitable soaring territory, boasting good roads, numerous large, safe landing areas and quite a few good airstrips. The people are very friendly (when you find people) and the scenery is immense. The principal lack is telephones, but good two-way radios overcome this lack. The phone book lists every subscriber in Nevada, including Reno and Las Vegas, and is only one-half inch thick!

In the course of events we found that the other Nevada valleys are much the same, except that the White Mountains, which Fish Lake Valley shares with Owens Valley (Bishop lies in Owens Valley) are the highest in Nevada: 13,000 feet. Most valleys run north and south. The roads go through passes, of course, and are quite uniformly good.

There is almost nothing to belittle in this region except some old wives

tales. Since we are not old wives, we respectfully submit herewith the story of Bowmar's jaunt of 4 August, 1957:

From our 8300 foot perch on the lower slopes of Mustang Mountain, we saw that a small dust devil was starting near the "corn patch," 80 acres of emerald green which looked like an S & H green stamp dropped carelessly on the valley floor. Tentative cu's were starting up near Montgomery Pass; it was about 9:00 A.M. and one Sunday that we would not work on the mill.

Off we went, raiding the cook's pantry for food and drink, loading the station wagon with oxygen tanks, tools, maps, parachute and dozens of gilhooleys and whatnots. Then down a tortuous scratch in the hillsides to

where we were.) All was set at 2:30 P.M. Bowmar got on board and Saudek drove to the end of the wire and hooked up. A look down the pike with binoculars revealed one car coming toward us, about six miles away. At 60 mph, this is six minutes of sitting in a lot of heat. Meanwhile, by radio (Skycrafters) the altimeter was set at the valley floor elevation of 5200 feet; and finally we were off, with Caroline running the wing tip. (Sometimes we have waited an hour for someone to run the sailplane's wing tip; quite necessary to stay out of the ditches.) Bowmar's goal was Ely, Nevada, nearly 200 miles to the east-northeast from our starting point in Fish Lake Valley. It was his hope that he would be able to complete his Gold C and one Diamond by this flight, and it just might be the day for it, the wind was light, and from the south.

He released at 1300 feet above terrain and began to work for lift. Meanwhile, Saudek was dragging the towline off the highway and alongside a little used dirt road, then he dashed back for the glider's trailer.



Photo: Bill Bowmar

A view across Fish Lake Valley, looking east, as seen from Mustang Mountain.

our "neighbors," Arlemont Ranch, only 18 miles away. We dragged the "Rigid Midget" on its trailer from its berth in the abandoned hog shed and headed north on highway 3A. This road climbs gently, but in a straight line (with no posts on the road side or any kind of an obstruction) for five miles. At this point, near the first bend in the road, the sailplane and radios were assembled and the 3000 foot long tow wire was dragged into place. Caroline Bowmar arrived after phoning for clearance, i.e. there were no freshly radio-active clouds up according to A.E.C. (26 miles to the phone, 15 more to

Radio communications were good, so Caroline drove herself and the two babies back to their home by the mine while the station wagon, with trailer, headed off after the sailplane, north on 3A, then east on US 6.

Bowmar was out of sight already and Saudek had his hands full, what with driving, handling the mike, keeping track of progress on a map on one clip board and noting the log of radio communications on another.

The single channel Skycrafters radio, rented from the SCSA's Tuntland Memorial Equipment, was very adequate for the job. In view of the