

FIRST GOLD DISTANCE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA

by GEORGE ASDEL

On March 9, 1962, the first cu began to "pop" at 7:00 A.M. over Mission Peak near the south end of San Francisco Bay. I had never seen them so early in the four years spent in this area, and just knew that this was "the day." But, since it was Friday and a busy work day was waiting, I could only wish it was my day to try for Gold distance. Frequent glances out of the office window verified that it really was a strong day as the clear blue sky filled with strong cloud streets stretching as far as one could see and for an added spice there was a strong northwest wind. To make matters worse, my desk was far from clear by the end of the day. Could I have been watching the clouds too much? At any rate, Saturday would have to be spent catching up on a large backlog of paper work.

Needless to say, Saturday dawned with all indications of being a good day and the weather forecast was for cu with 4,000-foot base over all central California and the entire central valley. So, off to work, but only after plans were made for Dorothy and Robert to pick me up at 9:00 A.M. with lunch packed and all the many items required for a day at the field and a possible cross-country flight.

Hummingbird Haven at Livermore, home base of the Northern California Soaring Association, was reached

L. to R.: Dorothy and George Asdel and Derrill "Gabby" Hansen relax a moment after reassembling 1-26 at Hummingbird Haven following flight.

Photo by Earl O. Menefee



promptly at 10:00 A.M. just as Stan Hall was taking off in his Cherokee II. As we prepared the 1-26, barograph, charts and other gear for the big effort, the local cu started to fade, but a strong street was over the hills about five miles south of the field and extended well out into the valley. I declared Delano as a goal, with not much confidence,

Tow was made to the edge of Livermore and I released at 3,800 ft. asl under a small cu which started to fade almost at once. A dash to the clouds to the south paid off with fair lift, but by the time cloud base was reached the "street" was gone. Small scattered clouds marked the way back to the field where strong lift was found and the possibility of getting away started to grow. As I drifted over the hills and reached cloud base at 4,500 ft. asl, cu started to form toward Tracy. So, off to Tracy, arriving 15 minutes later. Modesto was next. I began to notice that the cloud just left was gone by the time the next one was reached. The timing was marginal; I had better try for more speed before I was cut off. The 40 miles to Modesto took just an hour thanks to strong lift well marked by clouds, and a good tail wind.

A turn toward the southeast brought the Turlock airport off the right wing in half an hour and reduced the speed to 30 miles an hour. Castle Air Force Base lay dead ahead with a cloud street on each side. The one on the right side was over highway 99 and was tempting but that is where the Castle flight pattern is, also, so off I went to the left and over some very lonely country. The fewer the roads and farms, the weaker became the lift! Or was this just my imagination? It must have been as cloud base was reached at 5,500 ft., the highest so far. The clouds led off to the foothills of the Sierras and away from habitation and in just 10 minutes I was down to 2,700 ft. Individual clouds and dry thermals were worked trying to edge toward the towns far to the right. I no longer knew just where I was as no towns had been sighted for some time. Finally came the outskirts of



Map showing track of George Asdel's Gold distance flight.

Madera, an hour and 40 minutes for the 35 miles from east of Castle AFB. With 1,700 ft. of altitude and far down wind of the airport, I rejected as impossible any thought of an airport landing, and just then found weak lift, 1 to 2 feet per second, over rough ground with a couple of landable spots. The lift here was unlike any encountered before and was not caused by thermals. Perhaps a wind shear was the source. At any rate I worked it by flying at minimum sink down wind for perhaps half a minute then a very gentle turn followed by this same pattern repeated over and over. Any other pattern, including normal continuous turns, resulting in losing the lift.