

FOOTPRINTS IN THE SKY

We shall set out to give a factual report of one day's diamond mining at the Black Forest Gliderport at Colorado Springs. Mere words cannot express the thrill and excitements of the day, or of the 13 soaring pilots who found their precious stone in the sky near Pike's Peak.

The day was December 29, 1965. The pilots had gathered from such places as Pennsylvania, Texas, California, Ohio, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and New Mexico. The day dawned bright and crystal clear, with lenticulars visible from Denver to the Spanish Peaks, over 100 miles to the southwest. The wind on the ground was only a whisper, but the winds-aloft report (25-60 mph) promised a workable wave. The prediction was for it to stay put.

The background was well laid. The wave camp opened on December 27. That day Bill Sparks made his Diamond gain in the 2-32. The next day Dave Schmitkons found his Diamond in a 1-26, and John Miller (Skylark 4), Lach Ohman (K-7), and Hugh Damron (1-26) found the Gold. How fitting for country which became famous for the silver and gold in its hills! The briefing of the evening before was complete to the point of time-lapse movies of roll-clouds and lennies over Pike's Peak—courtesy of Mark Wild and his endless patience. Both he and Dave Johnson quietly passed out the little pearls of knowledge needed to climb successfully in their particular back yards.

Marion Cruce started a day with a launch in the 2-32, and armed with a diploma from Bill Sparks' and Len Boyd's course in POSITIVE THINKING. The diploma was the FAI form for his Gold and Diamond gains completely filled out except for the actual altitude figures, and tacked on the bulletin board before take-off. These sparkling fellows offered Marion the course at a reduced rate because he had made seven trips from Oklahoma to Colorado without gaining even the magic 9843 feet. The excitement began when Marion's radio could not relay his altitudes and position, but really started bubbling when he landed shortly after one hour having topped 30,000 feet! By this time all available sailplanes were in the wave. All reported climbing in 300 to 500 fpm lift with a few hot spots of 12-1500 fpm. Those on the ground held their breath for fear the wave would fizzle as the sun heated the mine. But the lennies held steady and actually lasted till well after sunset.

From here on our memory can only recall bright flashes in that dazzling day: The fellow from California who arrived in the afternoon and stated that at Tehachapi they didn't even open the hangar in this little wind (he went on to find his Diamond, however); the amazing teamwork of all the visitors and local people who made the relaunching of every ship with fresh oxygen and barograph and bundled-up pilot an easy chore; the two-place record try when Sparks and Schmitkons fell out of the bottom of the wave in the 2-32 while trying for a good low point; Jeff Yund (age 14) climbing up through 8,000 in 49 Romeo at the same time his father was topping 30,000 in 62 Echo (and finally reporting 28,500 on his altimeter); Lowell Yund wondering how he was going to explain to the 1-26 Association that he made a Diamond in a 2-32; Paul Kolstad (also age 14) of Colo-

rado Springs, gaining his Diamond but being slightly disappointed because he failed to get the Junior state altitude record back from Jeff Yund; the rooting sections which developed on the ground as Paul reported 28,300 and losing the lift (and his mother hearing all this at home on her kitchen VHF radio); the pressure now on the ones who started in mid-afternoon—so far every one who went up solo had found a Diamond—especially since even the 14-year-olds were doing it; Neil Armstrong (Gemini 8 pilot) waiting patiently for a ship and finally landing shortly after 1700 with his Diamond, the last of the day.

Truly this was a great day for sky mining! This must be some kind of a record. No one present could recall so many Diamonds being found at one place in one day. The total altitude gained was almost 50 miles! It is also pleasant to realize that this mine can never be depleted, at least not unless the winds and the mountains are removed. It is of interest to note that between November 14 and December 31, 1965, ten Gold altitude and twenty-two Diamond altitude gains were made at Colorado Springs. Our hat is off to Dave Johnson who, on November 17, flew the highest of all, to 37,500 feet, a new Colorado state record. With Mark Wild, Dave maintains the high quality of equipment and safety necessary for this kind of soaring.

We shall close this report with a few very personal thoughts. Since taking up soaring we have always likened the altitude achievements to elephant hunting. The latter we successfully undertook in the rain forests of West Africa. The prize is elusive, powerful, and can quite easily put an end to the hunter if given a chance. The beast can be near, yet unseen and unheard; the fresh trail leaves foot prints with mud still oozing into them. We shall always thrill at the sight of the foot prints in the sky—the lennies which betray his presence. If the prize is upon us we must take whatever weapon is at hand to bring him down. Our first one was with a .30-06, but in this case all of those were in use, so we had to use the .450 Winchester. Our thanks to the three brothers in Elmira who made both in such a manner that we could confront the giant with confidence.

LOWELL YUND

Assistant Executive Secretary Wanted by SSA

The decision has been made to hire a full-time assistant for the SSA Executive Secretary and a search is under way for someone to fill this new position. Applications from members would be welcome; however, the job will go to the first qualified applicant. Talents must include good typing and ability to compose letters. A knowledge of soaring is desirable, of course, but not necessary, although a willingness to learn would be required. The assistant would help share responsibility for the Society's office located at the Santa Monica, Calif., Airport. The salary is open, depending on the extent of the person's qualifications. Obviously, it is expected that the assistant would earn at least \$500/mo., possibly much more if extra talents were offered. But please, no smokers. Those interested in the position should apply to Lloyd Licher, SSA Executive Secretary, Box 66071, Los Angeles, Calif. 90066. Phone (213) 398-9894 days, (213) 397-4848 evenings.