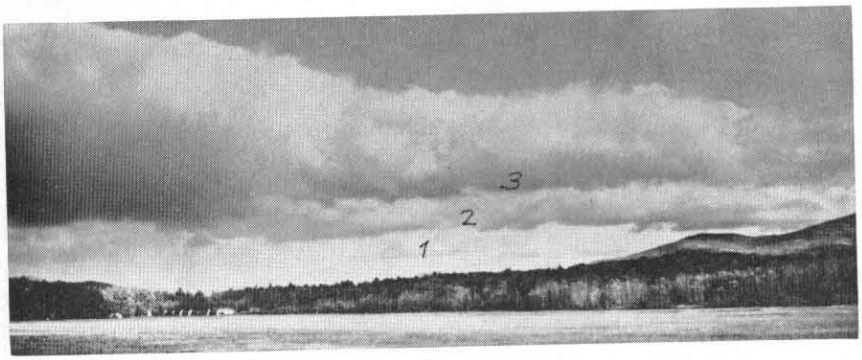


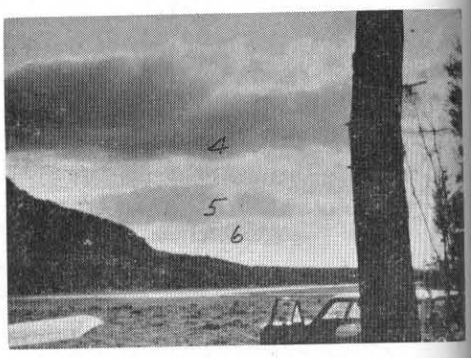


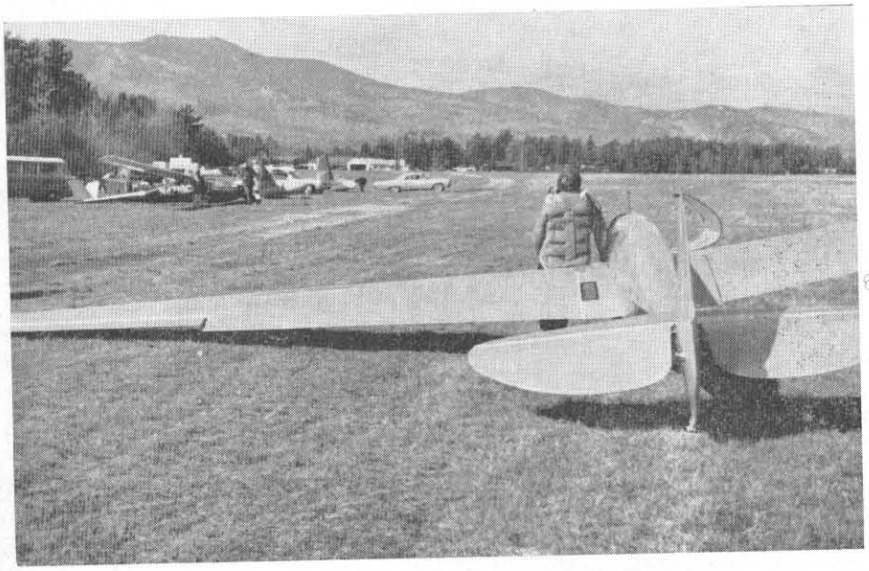

**Upper Photo:** With the camera pointing northeast (through the canopy of the HP-14 prototype), you can see the billowy effect of the primary wave from Mount Washington in the right center of the picture, with a cloud window to the lower left. (All the photos on this page except the bottom one were taken by the author.) **Middle Left:** Looking northwest across White Mountain Airport toward Mount Washington 17 miles away, three separate waves are visible. **Middle Right:** Facing back the opposite direction, three more waves can be seen. **Lower Left** (photo by Bernard Golden): The men and their machines are both transient and fragile; the granite of the mountain will outlast all but their spirit. You're looking at the back of Dana Darling—a man well into his 60's, whose career in soaring spans roughly four decades—as he stares off toward a roll cloud telltaling a phenomenon that he never dared imagine during the early years of the gliding movement. Waiting for a wave tow alongside the LK he purchased surplus more than 20 years ago, Dana stands at North Conway—an aviator unbowed in the twilight of his flying years, still facing resolutely toward the future, a solitary, almost symbolic, figure pitted lovingly against the ageless force and majesty of nature.

# The 1968 Mount Washington Wave Camp

**By Stephen du Pont**

The Mount Washington wave camps in New Hampshire have been conducted and organized by the hard work of Allan MacNicol (in 1966 and 1967) and Bob Sedgeley (in 1968). Unlike many wave sites, including Sugarbush in the neighboring state of Vermont, there is no connection with any commercial glider operation, nor is there any permanent glider base in the area.

The Mount Washington wave camp has produced some of New England's most exciting soaring in all categories from ridge to thermal to wave and back again. Many flights start at less than 1000 feet over Wylie Apte's White Mountain Airport, which is 495 feet msl at North Conway, New Hampshire (17 miles south-southeast of Mount Washington), where—by working one's way north in the ridge, thermal, and wave lift—it is possible to attain climbs of 24,000 feet and altitudes exceeding 27,500 feet (the present New Hampshire record) in the wave off the Presidential range of the White Mountains. With winds aloft of at least 30 knots from west to north, the 50 miles or so of predominant mountain range that forms the White Mountains produces classic wave lift, offering all of the terrible and wonderful rotor characteristics, the cap cloud, the beautiful lenticulars, and the foehn cloud falls. For example, one day I worked a series of waves with 500-fpm lift and 10,000-foot altitudes that allowed me to move tier by tier downwind for seven waves, the sixth occurring 35 miles from the range. Still more waves were visible, but I decided not to venture farther in order to prevent a possible involuntary landing from tying up the towplane or from involving my wife in a trailer retrieve.

The possibilities in this area are nearly endless. In 1967, Mike Stephenson released in the Adirondacks with his trusty 2-32 near New York's Lake Placid, attained altitude in the wave there, flew 60 miles east to the ridges at Sugarbush, climbing in wave, and flew on east 60 more miles to the White Mountains south of Franconia, climbed again and flew along the Presidential range to the northeast to Mount Washington, where he had a leisurely 17-mile glide to the southeast to White Mountain Airport at North Conway—a dogleg flight totaling 170 miles and ending with plenty of altitude to spare. While this is not a long flight, it does show what can be done in the late fall in the Northeast.

While it has only been in recent years that we have made concerted efforts to exploit wave conditions in this region, the first successful attempts at the activity date back further than one might suspect. In late October 1938, Lewin Barringer was towed aloft in the Ross "Ibis" from White Mountain Airport. Releasing at 3000 feet, Lew soon found himself in the strongest upcurrents he had ever encountered—at least 1200 feet per minute. After flying for a while on instruments, he eventually reached 9500 feet. I still have a treasured, yellowing, news clipping from the *Boston Herald* mistakenly reporting that Lew's "motorless sailing plane" had broken Richard du Pont's national altitude gain record of 6804 feet (though, indeed, the record might have been broken if there had not been a misunderstanding with the tow pilot concerning the release altitude). It has been suggested that this was the first sailplane wave flight to take place in North America. Ironically, however, Barringer himself erroneously attributed his lift to thermals.

* * *

Name dropping, or should I say place dropping, can be an annoying affliction if the soaring raconteur's listeners do not know the places. To the man who was there, the names of the places *are* the places, and carry much meaning. In fact, the story of a soaring flight is only half a story unless the progress of the flight can be comprehended by the reader. What are the places we fly over in the White Mountains? Actually they are pretty widely known through a generation of skiers, vacationers, and college student types. They appear in history, too. Names like Pinkham Notch and Crawford Notch, which are the main access valleys to the Mount Washington area; Tuckerman's Ravine, that fabulous snowbowl with its skier-scaring Headwall and house-sized boulders; the Sherbourne Trail and the Fire Trail that lead up to it; the toll road on the northeast; and, of course, the cog railway on the other side.

At the bottom of the toll road is the Glen House, with a meadow that could conceivably serve as an emergency landing strip. This "strip" acts as a ball bearing to support the rotor. They say if you roll your hat down it, the hat will bounce into the air on one of the large bumps, get caught in the rotor, and be carried up until it disappears through the window into the sky 10,000 feet above.

Wildcat Summit is five miles to the southeast of Mount Washington Summit, with Pinkham Notch, the road, and the Glen House in between. Wildcat means a lot to a lot of people, but it has special meaning for one of the members of the Nutmeg Soaring Association. In 1966, this Connecticut pilot released his Ka-6 in Pinkham Notch nice and low so he could get plenty of altitude gain. (FAA-ATC had given us a limit on max altitude that year, so a low release was important.) He found the wave all right, but he was on the

downside of it, with the rotor grinding away from the other side, and he couldn't swim. Down he went into the Notch – he could see the Wildcat parking lot and aimed for that, not that it could be of much use when he got there, which he didn't. He was next seen by a passing motorist at the edge of the forest, thumbing a ride back to North Conway and carrying under his arm, of all things, an instrument panel. That was about the only part of the Ka-6 worth bothering to take home.

Mount Washington by Western standards isn't very high, but it is the second highest spot in North America east of the Rocky Mountains, rising more than a mile above nearby river valleys with names such as Ammonoosuc, Androscoggin, Penugewasset, and Passaconoway. North Conway, the usual towing-off point, is where Hannes Schneider settled more than a generation ago to teach Arlberg skiing, to build the famous Ski-Mobile lift, and to establish skiing as a fashionable crop in these northern hills. Such old corn as "Bend zee knees – $3.00 please" and "Skiing is a way of life" emanated from this locale at roughly the same period that Lew Barringer watched the lenticulars from skis that were nothing more than edgeless hickory planks.

The Presidential range of the White Mountains can be considered as roughly a 20-mile-long range, depending on how you view it, with Mount Washington in the middle, surrounded by 3000 square miles of dense and rocky forest, broken only by deep ravines, narrow roads, occasional small cleared, but rough and rocky, fields, plus a small settlement here and there. The weather station on the summit of Mount Washington has observed the highest wind velocities ever recorded, 231 miles per hour. Light aircraft usually avoid the place, jets fly across it at 35,000 feet, and bears hibernate around Labor Day.

* * *

In 1967, the second Mount Washington wave camp, organized by Allan MacNicol, flew 210 flights, using L-19 towplanes supplied by Jim Doyle's Northeastern Light Aircraft in Salem, N.H. Soaring pioneer Dana Darling set a two-place New Hampshire altitude record, and nine flights were made in excess of 20,000 feet, leading to six new Diamond altitude legs.

The third wave camp, in 1968, during the Vietnam absence of MacNicol, was organized and run by Bob Sedgeley, the SSA State Governor for Maine, who brought his LK with him. There were 30 sailplanes registered, which made 101 tows, mostly behind a Super Cub and mostly with Mike Stephenson or Bob towing. A New Hampshire state altitude record of 27,500 feet was set by Al Speckman, an airline pilot on a postman's holiday with his son Kurt and their AS-K 13. Eight Diamond legs were claimed, two Diamond badges completed, with too many Gold legs to remember, plus many other Diamond and Gold altitude gains not needed for badges. Such old hands were there as: Dana Darling, who watched the first meet at Elmira in 1930 and then purchased and flew a Haller Hawk at the Nationals there in the early thirties; myself, who flew a Franklin at Elmira with the MIT Club in 1935; and Eric Koch, who launched by bungee in Germany as early as 1926.

Then there were: Mike Stephenson, presently the second of four men to attain all three legs of his Diamond badge east of the Mississippi (the first full "Eastern" Diamond badge, U.S. #25, was made from an auto pulley by Kai Gertsen, who was not present); Eberhard Geyer, who acquired his A badge in 1939 in a homebuilt primary and who at this wave camp became the third Eastern Diamond-badge holder (in

An interesting comparison to the series of wave clouds photographed by Steve du Pont in New Hampshire is this similar effect taken recently by Dr. John Armitage at Boulder, Colorado (looking west toward the Continental Divide). Five and a half cycles are visible in the picture, but Dr. Armitage says that there were actually seven—he just wasn't able to fit them all into one shot.

an L.Spatz trailered from Detroit); and Quentin Berg, who used his Schweizer 1-23H to become the fourth (U.S. #98).

* * *

While not the highest flight, nor the greatest altitude gain, nor the longest duration, but certainly the flight surrounded by the most radio interference, was the Diamond flight of "897 Blueboid," relentlessly piloted by kite-maker Ted Pheiffer, who also manufactures the Pheiffer pellet variometer used in Schweizer sailplanes and worries about quality for Uncle Sam as resident Q.A.R. While five other pilots claim Teddy's Diamond jointly, he has steadfastly maintained that he stayed over Wildcat in zero to plus or minus 300-fpm lift, regardless of what advice he received from the rest of us.

Anyhow, Ted was disgusted after sitting on the ridge over the Ski-Mobile at Cranmore for two hours, so he came back to the field and entered the pattern to land. While at 500 feet on the downwind leg, but let him tell it: "No one would believe this is my second goof-up that got me a badge leg. The first goof-up was at Waitesfield-Sugarbush, October 1964. As I was coming in for a landing at 500 feet, having been unable to stay up and wanting a relight, I caught lift and went to 14,000 for my Gold badge. Then this year at North Conway, I come in for a relight at 500 feet on the downwind leg and I slammed into wave lift, at least that's what Grayson Brown said it was. Well, whatever the hell it was, I consider it my best thermal of the year – 1000 feet per minute to 8000 feet, and right in front of a big wave cloud. A funny place to find a thermal, I suppose." He doesn't remember the number of the wave cloud, but Grayson had given it the unusual name of "Tertiary."

"Eavesdropping on my Mentor radio," Ted continued, "I realized that a lot of hard work was in store

for me to reach the required 16,404 feet of gain. Getting to 14,000 wasn't too difficult, but from then on – oy, what a job! I remember the boys talking about 1000 feet per minute, but not for me. I had to settle for a dribble of 200 up, 200 down, zero sink, etc., and I never realized that I had so many friends up there. 'Gee, maybe Teddy is lost.' Boy, that hurt because I knew I was over Wildcat Mountain where all the aces get their 25,000 feet. While very slowly gaining altitude towards 18,000, all hell broke loose on the radio. 'Stay over the ridge, Teddy!' 'Go North!' 'Stay in the window of the wave!' 'You're too far west!' 'Pull back on the stick and climb!' 'You guys sound like a lot of mother gooses trying to lead a duck around.' 'How do you split a Diamond five ways?' 'I've got 400 feet per minute and I'm not proud – I'm staying right here.'" Ted signed his report, "The Wave Chump."

At one point during the camp, Eric Koch decided he was so high he'd better take a cross-country hop, which he did. He hitched a ride back somehow and arrived, quietly as usual, but without his Ka-8. Everyone stood around first on one foot then on the other, each one not wanting to be too aggressive and pushy about Eric not having his Ka-8 along, but finally Teddy couldn't stand it any longer, and someone did ask. It seems that Eric had a "shortcut," right over the top of Mount Kearsarge. Well, not only did Eric's Corvair with the trailer refuse to complete the climb, but Roger Merrill's Corvair couldn't make it either. They backed the trailer and the two Corvairs down Kearsarge on the steep, slippery dirt road until they got to the good road again. Ted Pheiffer is going to write another chapter to *Unsafe at Any Speed*, about how poorly the Corvair handles backwards with all wheels locked while being dragged by a 30-foot trailer.

Ev Keeler, a captain for Seaboard World Airways, brought his Diamant from Connecticut to Sugarbush and then to North Conway and back home again. He says he got one measly flight.

But most had better luck. Grayson Brown was so happy at not having to bring the 1-26 back for other club members who weren't there that he stayed up eight and a half hours one day, while somebody else accused Mike Stephenson of being a member of an organization called "CVSM" – the Commission pour Vol avec Secret Moteur.

Roger and Jane Merrill and their 1-26 hosted and hoisted the wave camp at the Shusverein Ski Club, and many a true New Hampshire meal was enjoyed by all, as well as good clean movies by Mike Stephenson. Some slept there with their sleeping bags, while others took their bags to the Crestwood Motel on the edge of the airport; as a matter of fact, there were at least eight of the registered pilots' wives there to brighten our hours between waves (and at least one of them, Dot Prest, flew the 1-26). Some pilots were suspected of abandoning the wave for such delights.

Much recognition and praise is due Bob Sedgeley for his organizing and running the encampment and for his devoted towing – while his trusty LK lay panting in its trailer, waiting for Bob's birthday, when it knew he would be allowed to fly it. And much thanks is due to Marcia Prest, who kept the books and the money in order and recorded many of these facts accurately and with cheerful spirit.