





# National Soaring Museum Historical Journal

Summer 2022

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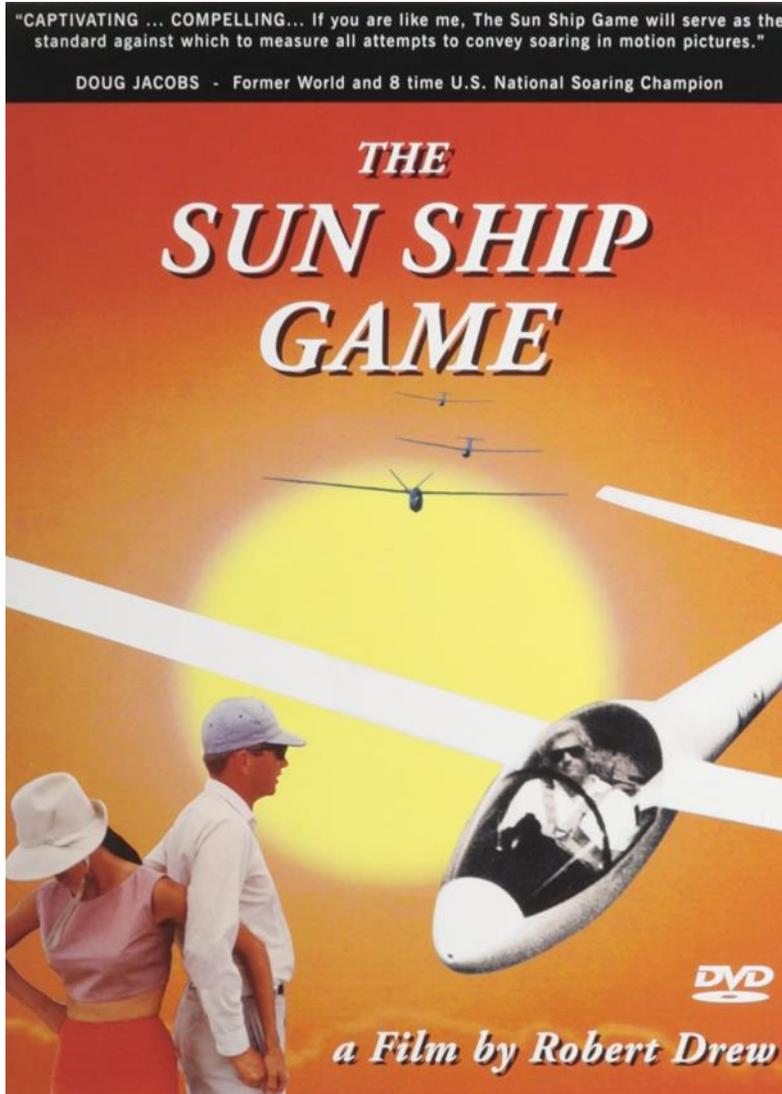
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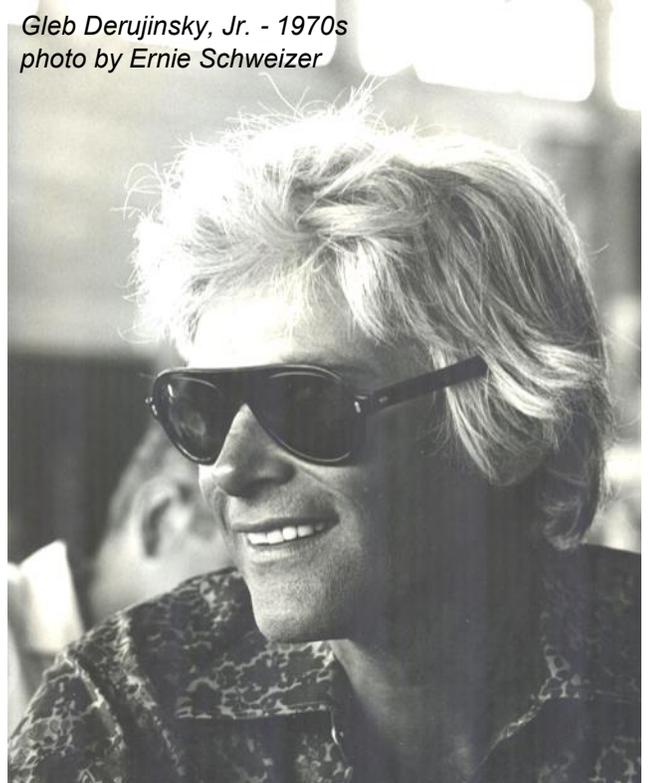
## Gleb Derujinsky - the Ultimate Renaissance Man

- compiled by Jean Doherty in collaboration with Andrea Derujinsky



*Gleb flies the Cirrus on the cover of the Sun Ship Game*

*Gleb Derujinsky, Jr. - 1970s  
photo by Ernie Schweizer*



When I began my position here at the National Soaring Museum more than 6 years ago, I was very interested in the stacks of unidentified close-up photographs stored in the curator's office. One of these photos was the head shot above. Someone knew that these photos had been taken by Ernie Schweizer. Someone else knew that the photo was of "Oh, yeah -"That" Guy! Finally someone identified him as Gleb Derujinsky, and the research began.

A familiar figure on Harris Hill, Gleb was overall champion at the Snowbird Meet on Harris Hill in 1959. He competed in his first National Soaring Competition there in 1963 and won the Bendix trophy that year. Over his decade-long participation in the Nationals, he placed well every year. He placed 5th overall in the 1968 Nationals, flying the only Cirrus in the competition and won the second day, July 4, with a 104-mile out-and-return flight. Gleb, along with George Moffat, was chosen to star in the 1971 documentary film, *The Sun Ship Game*, about competition soaring in the United States. Shot in Cinéma vérité style by filmmaker Robert Drew, the film follows the adventures of George Moffat and Gleb Derujinsky as they vie for the title of US National Champion soaring pilot in 1969. Gleb is shown in his sailplane on the cover of the DVD version of the film, which is still available today. George Moffat was the actual winner of the 1969 competition.

"*The Sun Ship Game*, Bob Drew's remarkable documentary of the 1969 Nationals in Marfa, Texas, has long been the best-ever film of what competition soaring is all about." - George Moffat

"Derujinsky relies most on feel and creative impulse to sense his way through invisible air currents. Moffat does the same but relies more on a hand calculator he constantly works in the cockpit." - Bob Drew

Gleb was already a power pilot and owned his own plane. He took up soaring in the late 1950s and soon thereafter began entering competitions.



Gleb flies the Sisu at the 1964 Nationals

His daughter, Andrea, remembers: *"Weekends were spent at Elmira and for quick jaunts flying out of Stormville and Wurtsboro, NY. I can recall our weekends at Wurtsboro being the place where we were camped out and talking to daddy in the box from our picnic blanket. Daddy bought my sister and me moccasins and we played Indians on a dirt hill."*



Lake Swannanoa

Gleb formed a close friendship with Arthur Zimmerman, designer of the Berkshire Concept 70, helped him with his design, and test-flew the sailplane. Like Gleb, Art had come from the New York City area, although Art had been born in Germany. Art and his wife lived on Lake Swannanoa in New Jersey. Lake Swannanoa is a private residential lake community built within the estate of Ringling Brothers Circus impresario, Alfred T. Ringling. Zimmerman's glider factory was staged in one of the large Ringling barns on the property, which had originally been used to house circus animals during the winter months. Gleb's daughter, Andrea, remembers: *"We spent at least one weekend there as a family. Mrs. Zimmerman made homemade spaetzle and maybe breaded pork or veal. My sister and I spent a lot of time rowing around on the lake. I can't believe my dad let us just row around the lake by ourselves! I realize now that he was watching us the whole time. Later that afternoon I took my dad out rowing all over the lake to show him our discoveries. Zimmerman made one of the gliders Dad flew as an experimental glider. This is all from childhood memory. I remember going to the factory. Seeing the glider being made in a large warehouse or hanger maybe? I think that's where my dad learned about fiberglass. I remember that Dad sawed off*

*the wing tips and lengthened them on one of the gliders he flew. This may have even been the glider Dad flew and the canopy came off in flight! He landed that baby without a canopy! I am not sure where Dad flew out of for the test flights for Art Zimmerman. I am guessing I was maybe 10 or 11 years old at the time - 1971-72? I think this was the summer before Dad moved to LA. We moved with Dad that summer. I turned 12 in January 1973. Life's milestones!"*

Sadly, Art Zimmerman died of cancer in 1974 at age 46. A great loss. Only 21 Concept 70s had been built. One of these is now owned by the National Soaring Museum.

soaring

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Carmen Dell'Orefice



Gleb in the Concept 70

So - if you are wondering, as I did: With all this time spent in soaring - What did Gleb Derujinsky do for a "Day Job"?

Gleb Derujinsky, Jr. was born to Alexandra Michailoff and Gleb Derujinsky, Sr. on March 19, 1925, in New York City. His father, Russian-American sculptor, Gleb Derujinsky, Sr., was descended from the Russian aristocracy and related to the Russian composer, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. Gleb, Sr., was a contemporary and friend of Rodin. They both became prominent artists, and like Rodin, the work of Gleb Derujinsky, Sr. continues to be displayed in museums and private collections around the world. Gleb Jr's. mother, Alexandra, was a talented classical pianist who taught him to play the piano, a skill that led him to perform at Carnegie Hall at the age of five and to a lifetime of musical enjoyment.



*Gleb Derujinsky, Sr. sculpts Lillian Gish, 1924*

Gleb Derujinsky, Jr. was named after his famous father and most certainly inherited the family's artistic genes. But Gleb also lived with the spirit of the brilliant renegade he was. In addition to his musical pursuits, Gleb Derujinsky Jr. was taking, developing and printing his own photos by age six. By the age of ten, he built his own enlarger using a paint can as a light source and a camera as the optical system. By the time he was fifteen, he was the youngest member of the New York Camera Club. There he learned from and worked with some of the most influential photographers of the time. Gleb's first languages were Russian and French, and he went on to learn English while enrolled at the Trinity School in New York. Before the war, he was also a serious top bicycle racer.

In 1942, Gleb became a Corporal in the U. S. Army and due to his initiative, multi-language abilities and negotiating skills, was quickly promoted to Staff Sergeant at age 19. He stayed with the Army until after the end of World War II. He often told the story of his unit needing gravel to build a three-mile-long road to the front. He went into town and convinced the residents, in French, to pull up the

railroad ties and collect the necessary gravel from the railroad bed. Three other teams had previously failed. While in the Army, he mastered Morse Code in just 30 days. After fighting in Europe, he returned to New York City and took out a Veteran's Administration business loan to open a photography studio.

Gleb took his first fashion photos for Condé Nast's *Glamour* in the late 1940s. By February 1948, he had landed his first cover with *Collier's* magazine. Shortly thereafter, he began working for *Harper's Bazaar Jr.*, an offshoot of *Harper's Bazaar*, aimed towards college-age women. He was retained as a freelance photographer.

During this early period, he married a junior model, divorced, and then married another model with whom he had his first child. They were still together when he met Ruth Neumann, a high fashion model, on a trip to Miami for *Harper's Bazaar* in 1954. Ruth was to become his third wife.



*Ruth Neumann-Derujinsky*

His was the era of European haute couture with fashion designers Yves-Saint Laurent and Karl Lagerfeld just starting out. Handpicked by *Harper's Bazaar* editor-in-chief, Carmel Snow, Gleb became one of a select group of photographers who shot for the magazine. Gleb competed for plum assignments, convincing Snow to endorse his radical ideas and expenditures. Gleb Derujinsky was always ahead of this time.

His 18-year career at Harper's bazaar spanned from 1950-1968, and during that time he produced some of the classic images of the era. To this day they stand the test of time. His wife Ruth Neumann and Carmen Dell'Orefice were two of his most brilliant models among so many brilliant, often unknown, models of the day when models were living mannequins and photographers were named on the pages of editorials.



*Carmen Dell'Orefice*

Gleb's brilliant photographs of the 1957 Paris Collections had become a 25-page spread in *Harper's Bazaar*. He photographed the Paris Spring collections from 1953-1963 and was known for his outlandish ideas and travel images taken in remote locations all over the world at time when travel, especially by air, was far from common.



*Gleb on location in Thailand*

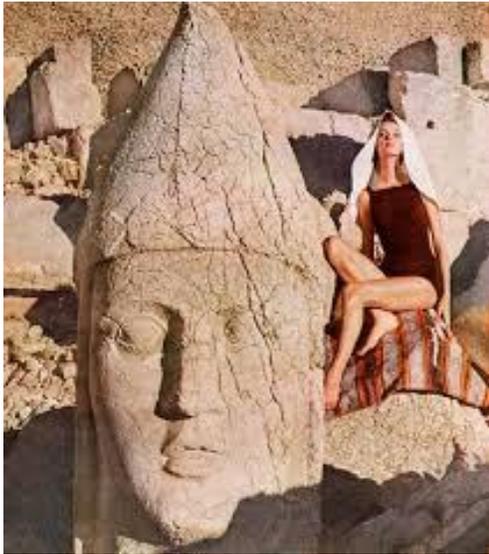
Handsome and brash, exciting and inspiring to work with, Gleb was dubbed “the White Russian”. He worked extensively with top models, Ruth Neumann and Carmen Dell’Orefice. They became a triumvirate of kindred spirits, knowing that fashion was only part of the story Gleb “painted” through his photos. Ruth would be his muse from the seaside harbors of China, to the Nara Deer Park in Japan, and throughout Thailand, Spain and Greece. Gleb Derujinsky was a romantic, and Ruth Neumann became his wife. At age 92, Carmen Dell’Orefice is still modeling today, a record in the fashion industry.

He started photo shoots on the street. His photos of Carmen Dell’Orefice and Ruth Neumann with working class Parisians, like its lamplighters, struck a chord and in spring 1957, he returned to take what his daughter calls “his first important pictures,” with Carmen and Ruth again, that time posing with butchers and oyster shuckers, and in Maxim’s nightclub and an atmospheric wine cellar.



*Ruth Neumann, model*

In 1958, Derujinsky suggested something that had never been done, a trip around the world, a la National Geographic, with the addition of a beautiful girl wearing beautiful clothes. TWA had just inaugurated its new Boeing 707, and likely subsidized the trip for Gleb, Ruth, an editor and an assistant. In 28 days, they took pictures in India, China, Japan, Spain, Thailand, Greece and Italy.



*Stone sculptures on Mt. Nemrut, Turkey*

Adventuresome trips then became Derujinsky’s signature. Just after Gleb and Ruth’s daughter, Andrea, was born in 1961, he thought nothing of dragging Ruth and another model, Nena von Schlebrügge, on foot up Mount Nemrut in Turkey to shoot bathing suits among the 1<sup>st</sup> Century statues at its summit.

On a shoot in Acapulco with model Simone D’Aillencourt, Derujinsky flew the shoot team in on his own plane but then he and a friend disappeared for a day, flying to Mexico City and back, and landed in jail for two days after an official questioned their paperwork and Derujinsky’s traveling companion yelled instead of offering a bribe, says fashion editor, Barbara Slifka. “Trips were not without drama.”

Snow sent Gleb around the world along with the new Boeing 707 on its maiden flight to photograph beautiful models, styled by fashion editor, Diana Vreeland, in expensive gowns, juxtaposed against the rough sands of a far-off desert, a junkyard of cars, a cityscape or airport. Air travel was far from routine, and nothing like this had ever been done before.

Gleb married four models in his lifetime and had daughter, Andrea, with his third wife and cover girl, Ruth Neumann. By the end of the 60s, Gleb had worn out his welcome with Ruth Neumann, and at the *Bazaar*. “Gleb was charming and could get strangers to do anything for him. There was no such thing as “No”. No such thing as “Can’t,” says daughter, Andrea, “But he was also a perfectionist - so difficult, very obstinate, very cranky.” Carmen Dell’Orefice says, “He saw the world in a big way, and that’s how he lived,” adding, “He was also usually late - if he showed up.” Derujinsky was one of the first people to take fashion outside of the studio. He was adventurous and daring and was thus considered something of a maverick.

*“I did many campaigns with him, and one campaign he lost because this was part of Gleb’s nature. I was being paid \$300 an hour, and the client booked me from nine to five. Gleb didn’t show up because he was out gliding in Connecticut and it was too good a day.” - Carmen Dell’Orefice, Model*

*“Gleb Derujinsky was an original, the “Indiana Jones” of fashion photographers. He flew his own private plane to exotic places – models and editors in tow. Wow, the stories that came back!” - Melvin Sokolsky*

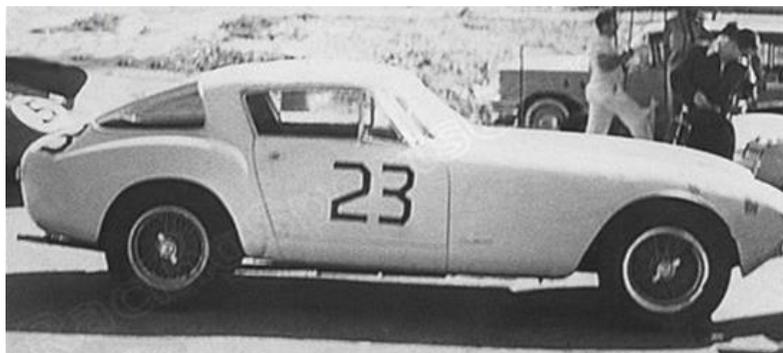
*Ceylon 1958 with  
Ruth Neumann*



*Ruth at Victoria Harbor, 1958*

At some point, along with managing multiple marriages, pursuing a career in fashion photography, and driving for Ferrari America, Gleb found time to learn to fly both single-engine planes and sailplanes.

In 1968, Gleb began shooting television commercials for Union Carbide, Dolly Madison, Johnson & Johnson, Texas Instruments, and Revlon, going on to win several awards at Cannes and Venice. Gleb also worked some of the prime ad campaigns for Dupont, Cadillac, Julius Garfinckel & Co., and Revlon. Eileen Ford, founder of Ford Modeling Agency, described him as an "early visionary on a path that others were to follow".

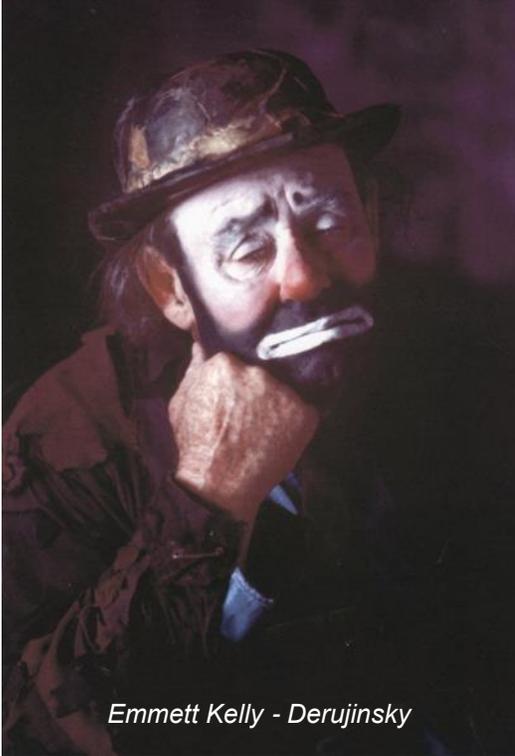


He was a jazz enthusiast and on his own time shot some of the most talented musicians who ever lived, Count Basie, Lester Young, Charlie Parker, Buddy De Franco, Sammy Davis Jr., Harry Belafonte and Tony Award winning actress, Julie Harris.



*Gleb on location*

Gleb saw things that other people didn't. He was never without a camera, and a jacket with lots of pockets for lenses and filters, and an aluminum case for other camera equipment. Throughout his life he continued to shoot photos and did various series of subjects: Still Life, Hollywood Street People of the 70's, Disappearing Fences of America, his children, Ghost Towns and Mining Towns of the Wild West - all of which are rich with history and glamour in a way only Derujinsky could have shot them.



*Emmett Kelly - Derujinsky*



*Pears - Derujinsky*



*Pitchfork and Church - Derujinsky*



*Gold Found Here - Derujinsky*



*Navajo Chief - Derujinsky*



*Balance - Derujinsky*

Andrea: *"Within a short few years, he was driving my mother, along with two little girls and a German Shepherd off to Marfa, where daily accounts of the contest were announced over the microphone while we sat in the giant hanger filled with picnic-type tables - discussing weather conditions, the contest of the day and the order from which pilots would be taking off.*

*During one contest in Marfa, he landed out on a long-distance contest in a farmer's field and while waiting several hours, looking oh so debonnaire, made friends with the farmer. Gleb could meld with anyone. Take to anyone and leave a lasting impression. If one is a soaring pilot and you don't have a story you can't possibly be a glider pilot. And more importantly tell the story and keep everyone engaged and likely laughing! Soaring stories are like fishing stories, large and loud! Trailers that break. I heard one of Gleb's trailers axles broke while on his way to a contest and he somehow got a spare trailer from another pilot, perhaps George Moffat, transferred the glider in the dead of night and made it to the contest on time. He couldn't manage that task as a fashion photographer but if the skies were right he was off to the wild blue yonder!"*

Gleb earned an instructor's rating in sailplanes and was instrumental in starting the Durango Soaring Club at La Plata airport, now known as Animas Air Park.

Gleb's daughter, Andrea, remembers, *"There was a little airport where he would go gliding, leaving my sister and me parked on a picnic blanket while he soared the skies. We talked to Daddy through a box, a radio that sat next to us on the blanket. He could hear us and we could hear him, but he was off gliding high above us on hot summer days. This is how I grew up, none the wiser about who he was or the photographs and reputation he had created long before I was born. Even on photo shoots, his gaze would wander to the clouds, wishing he could be soaring.*

*You know, when my father died, I asked our friend Delvin Gregg, whose family owns the flying school and airport, to take me up to disperse Daddy's ashes. He was more than glad to do it. What a magical morning. We flew up in a single engine Cessna over the Chicago Basin near Durango and released his ashes. Del and I chatted about Dad on our way to the basin. On the way back we were completely silent, just the sound of the wind and engine filled the vacancy.*



*Everything about growing up with a dad like Gleb was unusual, but as children, we thought this was normal. Nothing about our lives was like anyone else's. Both my parents were not like anyone else's parents. We would never fit into this world in the conventional sense.*

*My father wasn't just an artist and photographer; he had a lot of things going through his head. His father was the famous sculptor, Gleb Derujinsky, Sr., who was written up in the New York Times every single time he had a show, so my father had a lot to live up to. He also had a lot of other interests. He liked horses and horseback riding, fox hunting, bicycling, race car driving and gliding, so he would often go off on other tangents in other places and find beauty in those things."*

In 1972, Gleb married Wallis "Wally" Fairfax Gault in Manhattan. In 1974 they moved to Durango, Colorado, where he took his

hobby of jewelry making to the next level, opening a studio called **One Of A Kind**. There he made and designed jewelry for yet another 20 years or so of his life. He discovered the local flavor of Navaho Indians and many other tribes and began adding Indian-inspired Jewelry to his fine line of gold designs. Every piece was designed one at a time and created completely from scratch. He cut his own stones and handcrafted bezels. He was as passionate about his jewelry designs as he had been about photography.

He turned his love of skiing into yet another pursuit when he qualified as an instructor in nearby Purgatory, Colorado, and taught in the children's division for over a decade. Other achievements later in life include building a carbon fiber bicycle, the patented design of which was one of the first to be used in an air tunnel test, as well as being used at the 1984 Olympic trials in Los Angeles. Always passionate about music, he continued to play the piano, focusing especially his favorite, Chopin, and occasionally a little boogie-woogie. Apparently he was quite the life of most any party he was at, and was a heap of fun to be around.



Gleb & Wally

Derujinsky loved his fellow flier. By far more so than anyone he worked with in NYC. He was in his element. It explains why the trip around the world in 1958 was so intriguing to him. It was as much about the 707 as the trip itself.

Gleb participated in contests to win, but what he never would have imagined was that his actual trophy would be for winning over the hearts, minds and imagination of soaring pilots for eternity! Gleb was a man's man, a woman's man and above all things, a pilot. He was invested.

Gleb is still making waves and capturing hearts and minds of pilots the world over. *The Sunship Game* film by Robert Drew holds the attention of pilots everywhere and is known to be watched by enthusiasts at least once if not twice a year. Many pilots can repeat the dialogue from Gleb verbatim! If one can't they haven't seen the film! Even dress up comes to mind. Who's gonna be Gleb?

<https://www.facebook.com/CapturingFashionDerujinsky/posts/pilots-worldwide-still-adore-gleb-and-his-part-in-the-sunship-game-movie-by-robe/1692718737496495/>



Channelling Derujinsky

*I first met Gleb Derujinsky at the U. S. National Championships at Adrian, MI in 1965 when I was 16. It was my first time as a crew member, and my pilot, Dean Svec, went on to win the contest. Gleb, who was flying the same type of glider as Dean, seemed quite unusual to me, a hick from the mid-west, but he was very friendly and entertaining and oddly, paid attention to what I had to say. The 1966 Nationals were at Reno, NV, and I remember cleaning Dean's Sisu several days before the contest started, when Gleb & Co. made their grand entrance, tearing across the tarmac in a filthy Oldsmobile Toronado. Gleb's wife, Ruth, and his son, Peter, were crewing for him. This was the first time I had met Ruth. Dean informed me that he would not be attending the 1967 Nationals, and I immediately panicked as I didn't want to miss out on the excitement. I somehow got Gleb's phone number in New York and decided to call him. He surprisingly said that he would like me to come on board as a crew member.*

*The 1967 Nationals were in Marfa, TX. I remember one day in particular when Gleb landed out on the course during a distance within a prescribed area task, and we got the message that he had landed on a ranch in a very remote area of Texas. It took us until nearly sundown to get there, and when we did, there was Gleb, sitting on the veranda of the ranch house, wearing a wildly-patterned and multi-colored Gucci shirt with his long silver hair, chatting and laughing with the 70-year-old rancher who was dressed in Carhartts and sporting a buzz cut, like they had been best friends for years. Gleb, had this knack for being able to blend in with almost anyone and make them feel like he was "one of their own".*

*Gleb always had me fly to New York several days early to prepare the glider for the upcoming championship and I would stay in Gleb's apartment on 76th St., between Madison and 5th Ave. My first lengthy stay in the Big Apple was in 1968. I quickly learned how to navigate my way around the city by car as Gleg had me running everywhere, not only to get the things we needed for the trip, but to pick up items that he needed for the studio. After the championship, Gleb hired me as a "gopher".*

*I finished crewing for Gleb in 1970, but we remained close. I would get together with him regularly, especially after he and his fourth wife, Wally, moved to Durango. I would stop and spend a day or two with him while on motorcycle trips out west. He would spend a lot of time at the piano with my wife, Lois, discussing the complexities of Chopin.*

*Gleb was one of the most influential people in my life. He broadened my exposure to so many different and wonderful experiences and aspects of life, and for that, he will forever hold a special place in my heart. - John "Boo" Buchanan*

*"He had quite the history,"* said Brandon Donahue, the gallery manager at Open Shutter Gallery, which displayed Derujinsky's work and was one of his hangouts in Durango. *"He's telling all these stories and you're thinking he's crazy! Then you look into it and find out this guy's the real deal. He had all these different facets, and most people only knew him from one or two of them,"* Donahue said. *"It's hard to believe that one man had this incredible scope of life."*

If ever there were a true "Renaissance Man", this was Gleb Derujinsky. In compiling this article, I continued to marvel at his vast array of gifts and talents. Many of us have from time to time been called "Jack of all trades - and master of none!" We are fortunate if we, in our lifetimes, have become masters of even one language, one career, and one hobby! And here's the difference - Gleb actually did become a real master of many things, all within an exciting life of creativity and adventure.

Gleb died as he lived, gone in the blink of an eye, the snap of a shutter. He and his wife, Wally, were killed in a car accident in Durango, CO, on June 9, 2011, when a pick-up truck slammed into the side of their car. At the time of his death he was survived by his daughters, Eugenia Derujinsky of North Carolina and her two children; Andrea Derujinsky of Los Angeles and her two children; and son, Peter Derujinsky, of England; and a sister, Natasha Derujinsky.

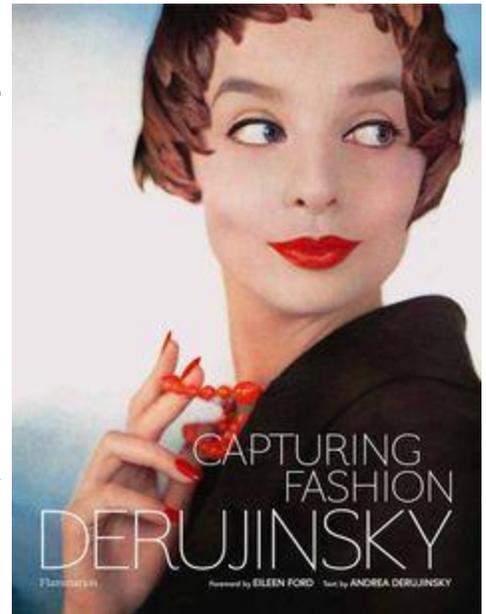
Gleb's daughter, Andrea, has worked tirelessly in the years since his death, to rebuild her father's archives.

*"June 11th, 2011. Two days after my father died, I was in Durango, Colorado, settling his affairs. It was then I discovered Gleb was working on a book of his fashion photography. He and my stepmother, Wally, had scanned and restored over 300 pages of Harper's Bazaar tear sheets to recreate the archives he had so typically either destroyed or lost over the years. It was apparent that Gleb had found a new perspective on his former career and wanted the world to see his work."* - Andrea Derujinsky

By 2016, Andrea was able to compile, and have published, a fabulous book called, **CAPTURING FASHION**, which is a beautiful tribute to her father and his marvelous career in fashion photography. This book is available online from Amazon and other sellers

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- *Soaring Society of America* October 3rd, 2011 *Final Glide*



## A History of Gliding and Soaring in the Inland Empire (1930-1940) - Gary Fogel

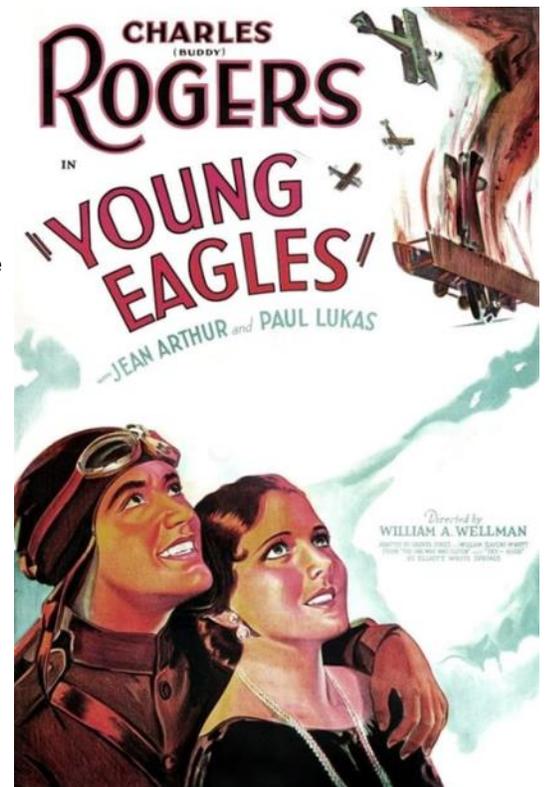
As soaring became increasingly popular in the 1930s, many locations in southern California were adopted as regional "glider bases." These included the well-known Point Loma and Torrey Pines in San Diego, and locations such as Hollywood Riviera and Long Beach in the Los Angeles basin among many others. The majority of sites were coastal as the cliffs and afternoon sea breezes offered ample opportunity for ridge soaring. Knowledge of thermal soaring was only in its infancy. However, as gliding blossomed, aviation-minded folks in inland communities within southern California such as San Bernardino, Redlands, and Riverside also expressed interest in trying the sport. This region, known collectively as the "Inland Empire" has its own important role in regional gliding history that has largely been forgotten. One important location in the Inland Empire was Little Mountain, a site that is still popular for RC soaring. This article reviews the early history of Little Mountain and its more than 90-year connection to motorless flight.

### The San Bernardino Glider Club

In late March and early April of 1930, speed record holder, Frank Hawks, made a well-publicized multi-day transcontinental aerotow across the United States using the Franklin "Eaglet." Each stop from San Diego to New York City was used to promote the sport of gliding nationally. Given this and other popularized gliding activity in southern California, the manager of the local California Theatre in San Bernardino, Mr. M. F. Williams, decided it was time to form the "San Bernardino Glider Club" (SBGC) to convert local model airplane club enthusiasts into manned glider enthusiasts. The local Exchange Club sponsored the new club and news spread quickly. The SBGC wished to purchase a Franklin P-S-2, but during the Great Depression, they could hardly afford it. Supervised by Dr. L. W. Ayers, a member of the Exchange Club interested in aviation, the SBGC managed to collect \$203 in donations (roughly the equivalent of \$3,500 in 2022), most of these as individual \$1 donations from members in the community, with \$20 from the California Milk Producers Association, and \$30 from the California Theatre operated by the Fox Film Corporation. On Saturday April 12, 1930, the midnight showing of the aviation-minded movie "Young Eagles" at the California Theatre was used as a fundraiser and upped the total to \$300 [1-4]. Franklin gliders were difficult to obtain at the time, so interest shifted toward the purchase of a Bowlus sailplane instead for a total of \$460, still just slightly out of reach for the club. A member of the U.S. Army Air Corps by the name of Gordon Corwin volunteered to serve as the club glider instructor and took glider lessons from Al Hastings at the Bowlus Glider School at Mines Field (now Los Angeles International Airport).[5]

Although interest remained high, few if any in San Bernardino had actually seen a glider in action before. Victor "Vic" Evans of the Redondo Beach Glider Club (RBGC) came to the area on June 1, 1930 to give a demonstration of his all-metal primary gliders at Ontario Airport.[6,7] Soon thereafter, Alan Richard "Dick" Essery and other members of the Western Flyers Glider Club from San Diego arrived to provide a gliding demonstration to the SBGC. This event featured a primary glider flown by Essery on July 1, 1930 from the top of the Shandin Hills (Little Mountain) to the flats below, the first recorded glider flight from the location.[8] Primary gliders were also being constructed by local high school students. Armed with the knowledge that Little Mountain was now considered good for gliding, Colton High School student, Noel Sharp, announced that he would soar in his primary glider from Little Mountain south all the way to Colton, over the town of San Bernardino. He noted, "I'm going to take off and then pray for air currents to take me across the valley. I don't have the least idea where I'll land. That's why I'm making the trip, to see how the air currents are off Little Mountain. If I have some luck, I'm going to go out for some real records." [9] Needless to say, there are no reports of his success – it's a long way for a primary glider from Little Mountain to Colton.

Unable to secure funds for their own glider, Dr. Ayers reorganized the SBGC on August 1, 1930 at the Anderson Building in San Bernardino.[10] Eager to attract even more interest in gliding, Dr. Ayers met with Bowlus at the dedication of the Santa Paula Airport in Ventura County. There he convinced Bowlus to provide a glider demonstration for the SBGC sometime in the latter half of August.[11] Armed with this news, Ayers returned to the SBGC, organized a larger set of members on August 13, re-connected with Gordon Corwin as the club instructor, and pushed for success.[12] Corwin was elected President, Ayers Vice President, Carlyle Eikleman as Treasurer/Secretary. Unfortunately, Bowlus's plans changed as he travelled to the east coast and he was never able to address the SBGC.[14]



**Figure 1.** A showing of the movie "Young Eagles" about a World War I aviator was used as a fundraiser for the fledgling San Bernardino Glider Club in 1930. (Photo from <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0021567/>)

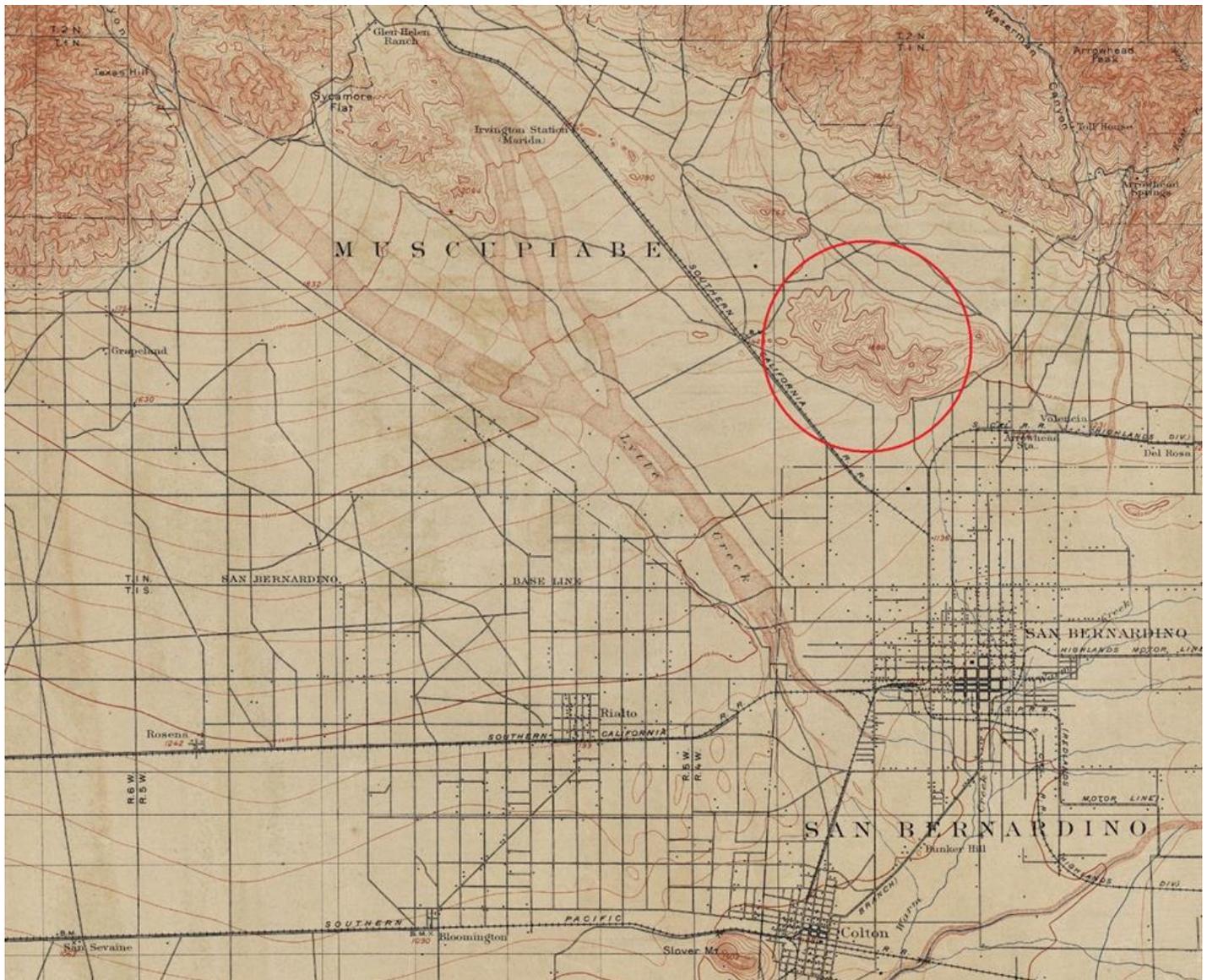


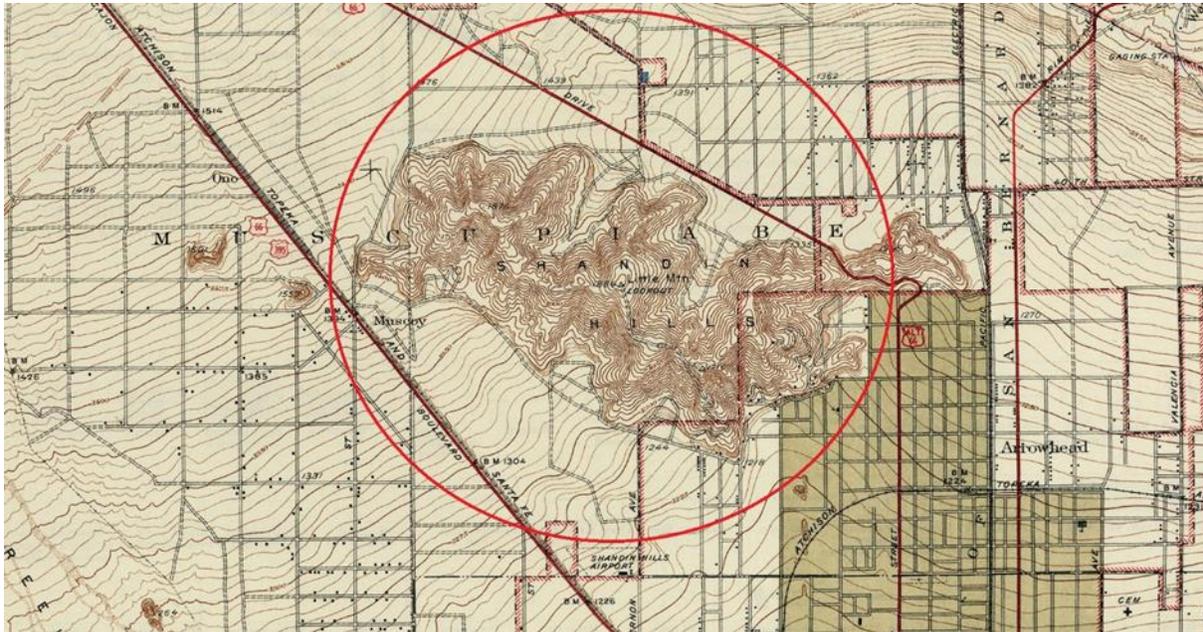
Figure 2. A topographic map from 1894 shows the location of Little Mountain (circled in red) to the north of San Bernardino with Colton pictured even further to the south. Afternoon winds in this area are often from the WSW however in Santa Ana wind events the winds shift to being out of the NNW as the winds come down through the Cajon Pass.

### Other Regional Glider Clubs

In parallel with the SBGC, employees of the San Bernardino Post Office formed their own glider club in April 1930, including P. H. Scheppers, R. E. Barnette, N. K. Jelinek, H. E. Hunt, T. E. Cleveland, Wayne Stadtman, Joe Clapp, A. C. Yeates, Walter Herkelrath, W. E. Schroeder, William A. Leffen, Jr., and Stanley McClellan.[15] Little is known about the success of this venture. In August 1930, the local San Bernardino YMCA announced an affiliation with the national non-profit American Model Aircrafts Club (AMAC) to inspire young boys and girls to take up model aviation and gliding. Dr. Ayers was also involved with this direction.[16] Despite all the interest, the pressures of the Depression made it difficult for clubs to survive, and interest in gliding waned through the latter half of 1930 and into early 1931. The SBGC continued but went back into a dormant mode.

Things were slightly different in Monterey Park, to the west of San Bernardino. There, the Monterey Park Glider Club (MPGC) had a strong core group of fliers, eager to fly their primary gliders from various hillsides. By June 7, 1931, the MPGC had learned of Little Mountain and started flying there. Members of the Riverside Glider Club (RGC), including William "Bill" Atwood, also attended these events.[17] Take offs were made by shock cord from the top of the mountain near a lookout tower operated by the U.S. Forestry Service for the prevention of brush fires.

Milton Jackson, the fireman stationed at the lookout was impressed with the efforts of the young glider pilots. (Being stationed in a fire lookout tower on the top of a mountain was a lonely job, being in the company of glider-minded folks, clearly much more fun!) The following week the glider guiders returned and without any experience whatsoever, Milton Jackson agreed to be launched from the mountain in one of the primary gliders. During his landing, the left wingtip caught on a clump of brush and swung the glider around with considerable force, damaging the glider but without injury to Jackson.



*Figure 3. A topo map from 1936 presents a more detailed view of the Shandin Hills with the lookout tower on the top of Little Mountain at the center. Note that the hills are oriented largely towards the WSW flow, however the north end of the hills could be used during Santa Ana events. Access to the top of Little Mountain was made via the dirt road at the south end of the hills. The Shandin Hills are roughly 300-500 feet above the surrounding terrain.*



**Figure 4.** The Shandin Hills as they are today north of San Bernardino surrounded by development on all sides. (Photo via Google Earth).

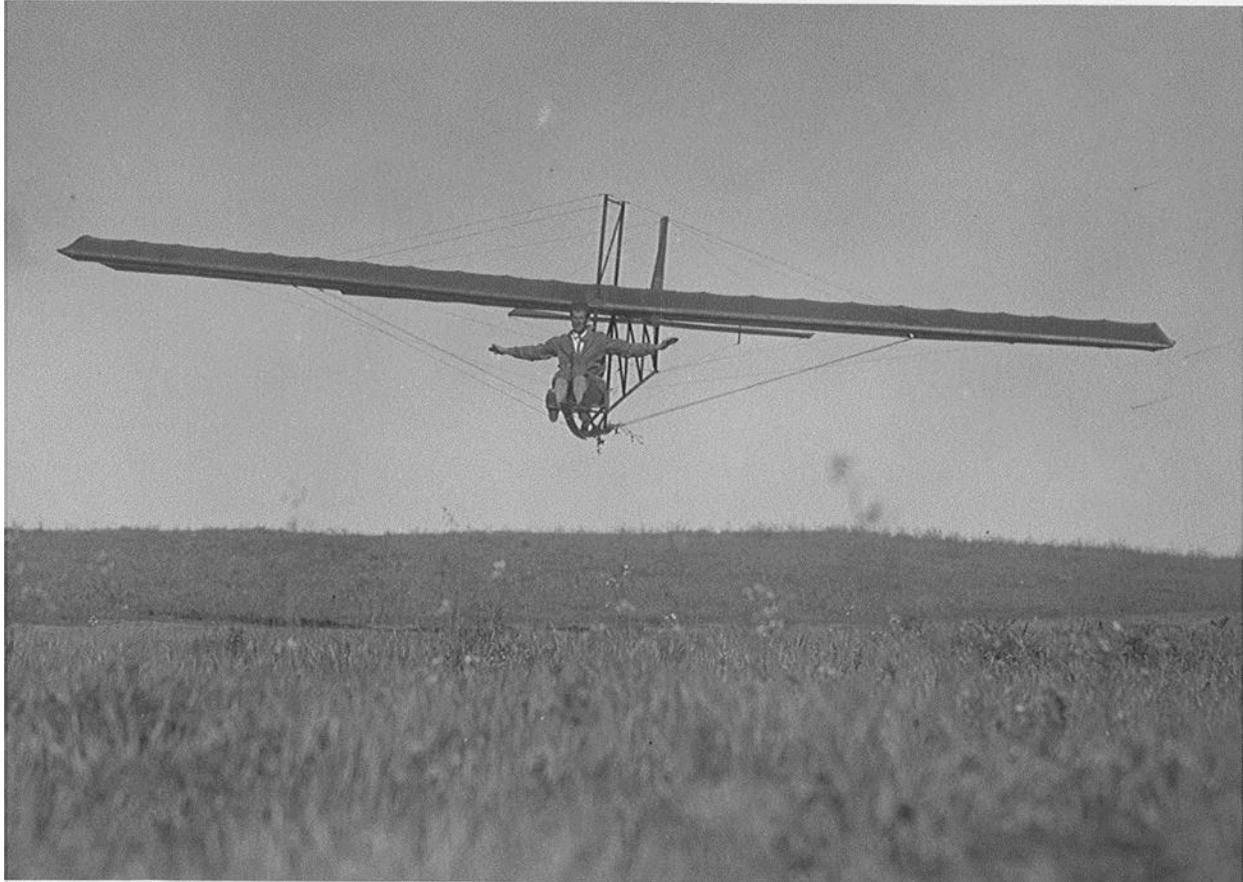
Remaining flights that day were called off.[18] Given the MPGC primary glider was now being repaired, Bill Atwood launched in his new sailplane on July 12, 1931 at Little Mountain and managed to soar for 12 minutes. His flight ended abruptly when he came just a bit too close to the mountain itself and a sudden downdraft caused an unanticipated forced landing, resulting in minor damage to the glider but no injuries to Atwood.[19] This flight caused a local stir in the press and Atwood announced that as a part of repairs he would return in two weeks with a larger rudder and soar for an even longer period of time. Given these activities were happening in their backyard, Dr. Ayers yet again to invigorate the SBGC and the club moved its secondary glider closer to Little Mountain. News of the inland soaring location spread throughout southern California. Members of the Redondo Beach Glider Club (RBGC) and the Time Glider Club of Los Angeles traveled to use Little Mountain.[20] Finally, Little Mountain was on the soaring map



**Figure 5.** A view of Little Mountain today from the same dirt road used in the 1930s, with microwave relay towers where the fire lookout tower once stood. Launches were made to the left (west) from near the towers. The hillside is now largely surrounded by homes and freeways. (photo: <https://peakery.com/little-mountain-lookout-california/>)



**Figure 6.** Members of the Monterey Park Glider Club (MPGC) with their steel tube Evans primary glider, likely at a location near Monterey Park and not at Little Mountain, but during the same time frame. Fred Chambers, a leader of the MPGC is shown in the pilot's seat. (Photo <https://calisphere.org/item/ark:/13030/c8j67dwt/>)



*Figure 7. Vic Evans demonstrating one of his steel-tube primary gliders in southern California. "Look Ma, no hands!" (Photo - Gary Fogel collection).*

### **Soaring at Little Mountain**

On August 1, 1931 Gordon Corwin, SBGC President and Instructor, launched at Little Mountain in the club's silver-winged secondary glider via shock cord at 4:30 p.m. He stayed aloft 57 minutes, setting a new site duration record. The SBGC secondary glider was designed by Arthur Campbell of Riverside, an aeronautical engineer and graduate of Caltech, and built by Vic Evans and his Evans Glider Company. It was becoming clear to many that Little Mountain was a special place, as it faced the prevailing westerly afternoon winds but also allowed for soaring in stronger northerly Santa Ana winds.[21] Corwin returned on August 2nd and made another flight, climbing to over 400 feet above the mountain in a 25-minute flight, which was considered a new site record for altitude.[22]

With so many glider clubs active at the site on the weekends, it was natural for someone to propose a glider meet. This was arranged for Labor Day weekend, September 1931, and sponsored by Milton Jackson and Vic Evans with Dr. Ayers serving as Meet Coordinator. Through connections in the Forestry Service, Jackson began researching the weather in the area to predict when winds would be favorable. Meanwhile, Evans considered this meet as the first of a larger series of "Glider Goodwill Meets" to be held at different locations throughout California once a quarter to foster fun competition.[23] Dr. Ayers hoped for between 6 and 12 gliders for the glider meet. The U.S. Forestry Service even went so far as to provide equipment for a camp on the top of the mountain to house the 25 participants that were expected. In preparation for the glider meet, 6 SBGC members completed their glider license at Tri-City Airport in Colton on August 24th. The licenses required no written exam, only a test of their ability to maneuver the club's secondary glider following an auto-tow, banking, and then landing successfully.[24,25]

Corwin once again returned to Little Mountain on Sunday August 9 to try to break his site records for endurance and altitude. However, insufficient winds prevailed and he landed after scratching for just 5 minutes.[26] John Pierce, a Pasadena resident and founding member of the Long Beach Glider Club, also stopped by to see the activities and noted that he, too, would have his sailplane at the Labor Day glider meet.[27] Corwin returned with the SBGC secondary glider on August 22. Fortunately, that day a solid 13-18kt wind was blowing. He launched in the late afternoon, with Milton Jackson serving as official timer. 1 hour and 20 minutes later the winds subsided and Corwin landed at the base of the mountain having established not only the first 1-hour flight at the site but a new site record of 700 feet in altitude.[28]

On Sunday, August 23, members of the Pasadena Glider Club came to Little Mountain to test out their primary glider. The longest flight was just 2 and half minutes. But this was only because the gusty winds in the afternoon were so strong that flying a primary glider was considered too dangerous.



**Figure 8.** John Pierce during the construction of his sailplane prior to the Labor Day meet. (Photo <https://calisphere.org/item/e88eebcac602b1826c189eeb603e9905/>)

It was soon realized that there was so much interest in the Labor Day glider meet and so little time left to organize, that the meet needed to be postponed. Local papers noted, “popularity of Little Mountain as a glider rendezvous is increasing rapidly due to the fame the location has received this summer. This, coupled with excellent flying conditions and the ever growing number of glidermen visiting the spot from all parts of the Southland, makes a test of skill and endurance imminent, observers assert.”[29]

Despite the postponement, glider guiders showed up anyway on Labor Day weekend to enjoy soaring. On Saturday Sept 5, 1931 John Pierce brought his large 43-foot wingspan sailplane, with test flights made to get the feel of the site.[30] The following day, 15-year-old E. G. “Guy” Rowell, Jr. of Redondo Beach soared in an Evans secondary glider for 1 hour and 18 minutes at Little Mountain at an altitude of 400-450 feet above the summit. It was his first experience at soaring and at times the very gusty wind caused his glider to move erratically, so much so that spectators were convinced he would crash. But each time, he managed to bring the glider back under his control. “On one occasion the wind failed and forced the light ship below the summit of the mountain on the north side. Taking advantage of a breath of light air the youthful pilot gained enough altitude to set the craft down on the summit of the mountain near his point of take-off without a mishap.” Using a similar type of Evans secondary glider, Gordon Corwin soared for 1 hour and 57 minutes the same day. Members of the MPGC and RBGC camped on the hill.[31] Meanwhile, members of the Santa Maria Glider Club on California’s central coast drove all the way with their primary glider in tow just to visit Little Mountain and see what the fuss was about.[32]



**Figure 9.** Gordon Winthrop Corwin later became a California State Assemblyman between 1934-1941. He also became enamored with large-scale model steam locomotives later in life. (photo: [https://www.highlandnews.net/entertainment/gordon-winthrop-corwin-state-assemblyman/article\\_cd2f873c-456c-5e11-a694-21c677d453f1.html](https://www.highlandnews.net/entertainment/gordon-winthrop-corwin-state-assemblyman/article_cd2f873c-456c-5e11-a694-21c677d453f1.html))

Unfortunately, during in the fall of 1931 and into early 1932, tragedy struck. Over the cliffs of Redondo Beach, the wings came off a glider that Vic Evans was piloting and he was killed in the resulting crash.[33-35] In January, 1932, another glider pilot, Frank Slaughter, was killed at Redondo Beach when the tail came off his primary glider.[36] With the deaths of these two popular local glider pilots, interest in gliding once again waned in the region. However, in the summer of 1932, the same summer that brought the Olympic Games to Los Angeles for the first time, an interest in sports of all types, including soaring, was renewed.

On June 19, 1932, Burchard Wilson of Burbank managed to soar in a glider for 1 hour 28 minutes at Little Mountain. He flew as far west as Cajon Road (later known as a part of Route 66) and south of the mountain by nearly a mile. Adverse winds forced him to land at the base of the mountain. That same day two other gliders were flown by Lester Fuller and Frank Wolcott, both of the Glendale Glider Club. A bad landing caused sufficient damage to Fuller's glider that he was unable to fly in the afternoon.[37] While glider pilots would return on some weekends to the site, their flights no longer made local headlines as gliding was now considered more commonplace.

By the spring of 1933, the Redlands Glider Club announced that Little Mountain would become the base for their operations. As a member of this club, Charles D. Wilcox operated a primary glider with a nacelle for drag reduction. The new Shandin Hills Airport, located just to the south of Little Mountain, also gained popularity by hosting an air show on April 23, 1933 complete with stunt flying and parachute jumping. The airport and its proximity to Little Mountain once again revived interest in gliding in the area.[38]

On May 26, 1935, two flights were made at Little Mountain, each more than one hour in duration. Don Stevens soared in his Franklin P-S-2 secondary glider for 1 hour and 10 minutes and Harland Ross soared for 1 hour. At the time, Stevens and Ross were associated with the Bowlus-DuPont company of San Fernando. Wallace Neugent of Glendale was present, as well as other members of the Riverside Glider Club. Milton Jackson, who was still maintaining the forestry lookout tower, served as a timer and witness for the flights.[39]

On May 30, 1935, "Little Joe" Stasneck and a passenger flew in the RGC's large 50-foot wingspan 2-place glider for 1 hour and 18 minutes and to a height of 1,000 feet above Little Mountain. This flight established new site records for 2-place gliders. Other RGC members Morris Slack, George Ferrell, Frank Ferrell, Carson Shade, Meredith Shade and Jesse Veach attended. "Those at the field claimed it was one of the best [sites] they had ever used." Arrangements were made for newsreel cameras to take pictures of the soaring planned for the following weekend June 8-9.[40]

On Sunday June 9, 1935 Stasneck once again returned to Little Mountain and soared for 1 hour 37 minutes in his homebuilt glider, setting a new site record. On June 16, a variety of glider enthusiasts converged on Little Mountain including Don Stevens with his Franklin P-S-2, Franklin Wolcott of Glendale with his Spillane secondary glider, and Joe Stanseck. They noted to the press that, "plans are being made for the future charting of Little Mountain and the regions north extending to the big mountain range. The work will be done by Mr. Stanseck, assisted by Milton Jackson, fire dispatcher and observer at the Little Mountain lookout. The charting will indicate where favorable air currents are and will further opportunities to make cross country altitude and endurance glider records, it was stated. As a value of the air currents in the hills, in a recent contest a rubber band model remained in the air 31 minutes. The world record for glider models is 14 minutes. However, the record-breaking time was unofficial. Mr. Stevens believes that glider supremacy may soon be centered at San Bernardino instead of at Elmira, N.Y., present glider center of America, where records are made and competition is staged constantly." [41]

The manager of the nearby Shandin Hills Airport, Gwin Cook, noted that new hangars should be constructed at the airport for use by glider pilots. "This port is the only one in the country with a glider take-off so close, and the surrounding land is so flat there are always ample opportunities for safe landings." [41] (If one looks carefully at Figure 3, the Shandin Hills Airport can be found just near the bottom of the red circle in the middle of the image). Plans were announced for a July 4th glider contest arranged under the auspices of the American Glider Association. Fred Barnes, Robert "Bob" Stanley, and Bud Hugill of Los Angeles visited the site in late June, 1935 and flew the 2-place 52-foot wingspan Buxton "Transporter" and a similarly large open cockpit sailplane (perhaps the "Sloanlo") to evaluate the merits of the site. Despite this, no records of a July 4, 1935 meet can be found. However, soaring continued at Little Mountain into the late 1930s with exhibitions for newsreels etc. largely arranged by Don Stevens.[42] In 1938 and 1939, the Shandin Hills Airport was used more routinely for glider testing by Frank Wolcott, Bob Heidemann and other members of the newly formed Southern California Soaring Association (SCSA), a club that continues to exist today. [43,44] On June 16, 1939, the famous German glider pilot, Peter Riedel, was launched in a sailplane via auto-tow from the Shandin Hills Airport. Encountering a thermal he rose to over 6,000 feet above San Bernardino before heading to the east for his goal of Palm Springs. However, encountering the strong winds in the San Gorgonio Pass, Riedel was forced to land 1 mile northeast of Banning on the Morongo Indian Reservation after soaring for three hours. The following day he was able to soar over Mt. San Jacinto on a flight from Palm Springs.[45,46] Interestingly, in the late 1930s the Shandin Hills Airport became very popular with model airplane enthusiasts who scheduled several competitions. One of these included Reginald Denny, the Hollywood movie actor who would later play a pivotal role in the development of the Radioplane target drone in World War II.[47]



**Figure 10.** Little Mountain as viewed from near the base in a recent photo.  
(Photo courtesy of <https://www.peakbagger.com/peak.aspx?pid=51855>)

## Conclusions

Many in the RC soaring community of southern California are familiar with Little Mountain for its great slope soaring since the 1970s. However, few realize that the site has its own association with gliding going back to 1930. This places Little Mountain in the same context as Torrey Pines or Redondo Beach as one of the earliest locations for gliding in the region and now in its 92<sup>nd</sup> year. We are fortunate that with all of the development in the surrounding area, Little Mountain still remains, complete with dirt roads that lead to the top of the mountain and its radio towers where a lookout tower once existed. Unfortunately, the nearby Shandin Hills Airport closed about the time of World War II and is now covered by the I-15 freeway and homes. The California Theatre, where the San Bernardino Glider Club first started still remains today as the California Theatre for the Performing Arts and is listed on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places.[47] Few if any photos of the early gliding activities at Little Mountain remain. However, those familiar with the history of aeromodelling and soaring will have already recognized some important names. Bill Atwood later became well known for his many model airplane engine designs as a part of Cox Hobbies. He was inducted into the Academy of Model Aeronautics Hall of Fame in 1982.[49] John Pierce later became an important figure in the field of communications theory and became a co-inventor of pulse code modulation (PCM) that was featured in RC transmitters in the 1980s and 1990s,[50] Harland Ross was the designer of the first 20:1, 30:1, and 40:1 sailplanes in United States history and was inducted into the Soaring Hall of Fame in 1959.[51] Others, like Don Stevens, helped popularize gliding through the motion picture industry. Joe Stasneck continued soaring at a wide variety of locations in southern California, passing away in 2008. And of course, there is a whole other history associated with RC gliding at the site, one that also is poorly recorded. Sites like these are critical to the future of soaring, not only to help interpret the past, but to preserve the future for forms of motorless flight. Little Mountain should continue as a location for RC soaring for many years to come.



*California Theater*

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*Carbon fiber bicycle designed by Gleb Derujinsky*

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