



From the perspective of his hang glider, John Wiseman, '89 MSEE, found the Sandia mountains suddenly formidable—and altogether awesome.

from

SA R peak into sky

BY JOHN WISEMAN

Sandia Peak is considered a world-class hang gliding site, something I had no idea of while living in New Mexico and attending UNM, before I became a solo hang glider. As I read about flying from Sandia Peak, I recalled my memories of it as a casual visitor—the view from the tram of the rocks below, the houses dotting the foothills, and the city stretching out towards the Rio Grande—and decided to return to Sandia to fly my hang glider from the mountain's top.

After almost two years of planning, my dream became reality. I teamed up with a couple of adventurous friends and we shipped our equipment from my home in eastern Pennsylvania to Albuquerque. We met up with some local pilots we had contacted via the Internet, and the next thing I knew I was purchasing a one-way tram ticket as the attendants loaded our gliders on top of the waiting tram car.

The three of us quickly set up our gliders next to the Peak restaurant, attracting quite a crowd of onlookers. I mounted a camera on my glider, knowing I wanted to photograph portions of the flight. When it was my turn to launch, I hooked into my glider and maneuvered it down the rocks toward the edge of the cliff.

The moment I sensed the wind was perfect, I ran as if my life depended on it—because it did from what I could see of the rocks and trees far below! After four or five fast steps in the rarified air, I became airborne and the

ground quickly dropped away, yielding views that made those from the tram seem almost ordinary. With no massive steel cables to hold me up and keep me steady, and no solid floor to block the view straight down, the rocky canyons below appeared much deeper and sharper. The immense rock spires seemed more menacing than they had from the hiking trails. And the sheer rock cliffs hundreds of feet tall proved to be much more intimidating sights from my spindly craft than they had from the safety of the mountaintop.

But I was well prepared by the helpful local pilots. From them I knew what to do and where to fly. Hitching a ride on invisible thermal air currents, I rose up safely above the ridgeline, and relaxed enough to take in the spectacular scenery. I was now flying free as a bird,

with a bird's eye view to match. As I soared more than 1000 feet above the Peak, I was treated to a panoramic view of everything the mountain and the surrounding area had to offer.

In my house in Pennsylvania, I have two large photos on my living room walls to remind me of my times in New Mexico. One is a sunset picture of Albuquerque, taken from the observation deck of the Sandia Peak restaurant. While it is beautiful, it represents a view that has been experienced by many thousands of visitors to the mountain. The other was taken from my glider while soaring high above almost the same exact spot. Looking at it, I realize how lucky I am to be one of a very small number who have experienced New Mexico in this manner.

John Wiseman learned to fly a hang glider over a decade ago. He currently lives in eastern Pennsylvania, where he works as a manager for a local electronics company. He looks forward to the day he can spend more time back in the Land of Enchantment. Friends can contact him at john.r.wiseman@gmail.com.

LOOKING DOWN: John Wiseman soars over the west side of the Sandia Mountains.