

Hang gliders

3 youths descend Mt. Greylock

By STANLEY W. ROBBINS

Three young men "conquered" Mt. Greylock yesterday afternoon, becoming the first to descend from the summit in the air.

Swooping down from the Adams lookout on the east face of the mountain the trio resembled gargantuan birds as they maneuvered their "hang gliders" through the swirl of air currents crisscrossing the state's highest peak.

Led by Douglas Weeks, 28-year-old director of the hang-gliding school at Brodie Mountain, Brooks Ellison, a 21-year-old from Williamstown, and Lee Keeler a 23-year-old from Southbury, Conn., made the descent of approximately 2,000 feet in a little over eight minutes, landing at the base of the ski area under construction by Elco Resort Developers.

Mr. Keeler, who was the first to hit the ground, explained that hang-gliding, which has been popular on the West Coast for the past five years, has only recently taken hold on the East Coast. A former photography student, he holds the East Coast record for the longest flight - a 70-minute glide

over Provincetown.

The glide from Mt. Greylock may have taken only eight minutes, he said, but the trio spent an entire month studying air currents and the topography of the mountain before they were satisfied with the margin of safety.

"The wind currents have to be just right and yesterday and today were the first two days we felt it would be safe to attempt the flight," said Mr. Keeler.

The hang-gliders, which weigh 40 pounds, have a wing span of between 30 and 40-feet and resemble huge kites. The "pilot" sits in a series of straps hanging from the belly of the kite and maneuvers the glider by shifting his weight and moving a bar attached to the kite's frame.

While Mr. Keeler said the sport is "extremely safe", he warned a beginner attempting the descent from Mt. Greylock could "kill himself if he didn't know the finer points of moving with wind currents."

"I, myself have been doing this for about a year

all over the east and I started out on small hills and running across level ground before I even attempted a major flight," he said.

Mr. Weeks stressed the importance of learning the sport from an experienced teacher. The sport can only be safe if individuals take the time to study the risks involved and develop the necessary skill at maneuvering the kite, he said.

"The east is a frontier. Everyone's got the mountains down in the west," said Mr. Keeler. Regarding Mt. Greylock, he said "It was a super ride. The currents across the ridges were excellent and the landing was fantastic."

Joseph R. Dragone, Elco project manager, who witnessed the flight, said enthusiastically, "It's the most amazing thing I've ever seen. When I first looked up and saw them coming down I thought we were being invaded by Martians."

He said the resort developers had no objection to the kites landing at Greylock Glen, adding, "I think it's fantastic. This could really start something big."

The Transcript

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GREYLOCK GLIDER—One of three young men who descended from the Adams Lookout on Mt. Greylock yesterday is shown as he and his hang glider are about to touch down at base of ski area under construction by Elco Resort Developers. Youths became the first to descend from the mountain by air as they used hang gliders to perform the feat. (Transcript photo-Lamb)