

## **A Visit With The Gods**

A couple of years ago I took off from Hana Airport (PHHN) on the island of Maui in a Diamond HK36 Super Dimona motor glider. It was one of the most memorable flights I have ever experienced. My mission was to explore Maui's tallest peak, Haleakalā ("house of the sun") rising 10,023 feet above sea level. Early Hawaiians believed Haleakalā was the "realm of their gods".

After takeoff we climbed leisurely up the eastern side of the now extinct volcano using the upslope breezes to boost our climb, since a motor glider doesn't have stellar rate of climb. The views were breathtaking on the way up and as we passed about 8,000 feet we were above the scattered cloud layer and could see all the way to Mauna Kea the highest point in the state of Hawaii. Upon reaching 12,500 feet ASL, I turned off the motor and soared quietly with the gods, catching thermals to stay up as long as we wanted.

Actually, to say the views were breathtaking is an understatement. The vista that stretched above and beneath was one of lush green tropical flora, a thousand shades of blue ocean water, puffy white clouds, blue sky and the many shades of red ochre of the Haleakalā crater.

At the summit of Haleakalā is "Science City", an astrophysical complex operated by the U.S. Department of Defense, University of Hawaii, Smithsonian Institution, Air Force, Federal Aviation Administration, and others. Some of the telescopes and lasers operated by the U.S. Department of Defense are involved in researching man-made objects (e.g. spacecraft, monitoring satellites and rockets). However, some of the other equipment up there is used for more top secret and classified work.

All too soon it was time to leave the "realm of the gods" and return back to earth in a peaceful and reflective transit to Hana airport. Oh how I envy those Hawaiian Gods!

Gary Sorge