

What Is Soaring?

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The words 'soaring' and 'gliding' are used interchangeably in our sport. Treat them as having the same meaning for now. Technically, "gliding" describes flight from a high altitude to a lower one, while "soaring" implies the ability to climb to a higher altitude. But in our sport we use each word to mean the same... having FUN!

Soaring is motor-less flight, using a sailplane or 'glider' and natural occurring atmospheric phenomena, called "LIFT" , to gain altitude and stay aloft.

A glider is first launched, typically:

by a tow plane.. here's a video of an aerotow at London Ontario Soaring Club ,
or by a winch... click [HERE](#) for a 45 second winch launch to 1900 feet in England ,
or even... click [HERE](#) for a vintage 1930's video of a launch by car!

This is NOT Hang Gliding... another form of flight which uses extremely lightweight fabric and tubing to make an aircraft. A sailplane is a full size, 'sit in it' style, rigid aircraft built for one or two persons, and capable of fast and safe flight in most kinds of fair weather. A sailplane is typically made of composite (fiberglass) materials, has a wingspan of 15 meters or more and weighs 500 to 1,000 pounds or more. Look at the top banner for 2 examples, a 2 seat trainer on the left, and a single seat sailplane on the right.

There are several types of "lift" to give us flight, all of them are fun, but not all types can be found in every location.

'Thermal' lift is the most common, and is caused by the sun heating the earth. We see this in every part of Canada at one time or another. You see it yourself when you look up to view those large puffy clouds called cumulus clouds .

'Ridge' lift is caused by a significant area of ground standing above the 'normal' terrain. A wind blowing up it can cause a constant up-flow of air in which a glider can ride for hours on end! The long ridges of the Appalachian Mountains form the best place in North America for this!

'Wave' lift is caused by winds flowing over a large topographical feature such as a mountain range and setting up waves of lift downwind of the mountains . These waves can go up over 50,000 feet! Go to the Rocky Mountains in southern Alberta at Cowley for this, or, settle for smaller scale wave in Pennsylvania , Lake Placid NY, or Baie St. Paul Quebec! One of our member clubs, York Soaring, has a very nice graphic explanation of lift, click [HERE](#).

Many people hearing the word "glider" may think of "hang gliders" , but that is a different type of soaring aircraft. Typically you sit in a sailplane, and you (of course) hang in a harness under a hang glider. The pictures on this site will clarify the difference. [Getting Started in Soaring](#)

Read the materials here on our web site, and when you decide you want to know more... just visit one of our member clubs . Contact them for specific operating schedules using their web site, phone or email. Most clubs operate May - October. Then, take a drive and enjoy your first 'introductory flight'. You can have a complete training experience from your first flight, or you can just sit back and enjoy the ride.

After your first flight you will know whether this is the sport for you! We hope you will find it as exciting as we do.
[Other Web Places to Learn](#)

The USA national soaring society (SSA) has a great web site, click [HERE](#) to view their section on this topic.

Click [HERE](#) if you like Wikipedia and check what they have to say about our sport.