

WARNING: The descriptions of typical flying conditions listed in this site guide reflect the experience of the authors of the guide. The conditions that you encounter at the site may differ, sometimes substantially, from those encountered by the authors. The descriptions of their experiences may not be relevant to the likely experience of any other pilot, particularly one who is relatively inexperienced or new to the site. **A decision to launch is always that of the individual pilot.** When deciding whether or not to fly, a pilot may wish to take into account the descriptions in this site guide but must also consider numerous other factors including the pilot's training and experience, familiarity with the site, equipment, physical and mental condition and the specific conditions in existence at the time of the decision. Always fly within the USHPA recommended operating limitations for your rating as specified in the [USHPA Pilot Proficiency System](#). Pilots of relatively little experience or who are new to the site are urged to **consult with other local pilots at the site in order to obtain their assessment of the conditions. Always get a site briefing from a local pilot. Do not fly sites alone or without a local pilot present. If locals are not flying, there is likely a reason.**

[ALL PILOTS SHOULD FAMILIARIZE THEMSELVES WITH USHPA'S SAFETY PROCEDURES BEFORE FLIGHT](#)

Sandia Soaring Association Site Guide

The SSA insures, maintains, and regulates several flying sites in the Central New Mexico area. Many Sites are considered sensitive and flying at our sites requires adhering to specific procedures.

The rating listed for a given launch or landing zone does not mean that if you have that rating you will necessarily be able to safely launch or safely land. The rating means you should have knowledge at that level to decide whether it is safe for you to launch or land in the existing conditions.

Always Fly within the recommended operating limitations for your rating; pay attention to changing conditions and [weather forecasts](#). Flying into mid day and peak heating conditions should be reserved for Advanced pilots. Reference USHPA recommended operating limitations for your rating in the USHPA [USHPA Pilot Proficiency System](#).

Cross-country flights from all of our sites fly over National Forest, Tribal Lands, private property, State Park land and controlled airspace. You should familiarize yourself with the locations of legal landing zones and strict no landing areas before venturing XC. Power assisted flight is non recommended or prohibited at most of our foot launch soaring sites due to conditions and/ or use agreements.

Sandia Peak (Peak Launch)

Ensure you read the entire site guide

In order to fly this site you must be a USHPA and SSA Member

Location: 35.196576°, -106.434662° Just north of the Top Terminal of Sandia Peak Tramway

Description: Sandia Peak is the premier flying site in New Mexico. It is a high altitude, Tram accessed site that is home to numerous 100 mile flights and has been the site of the HG World Championships. Evening glass offs while surfing the massive granite walls is a truly amazing experience.

Based on the complexity and difficulty of the launch, combined with the dry, booming, desert thermals this is not a casual flying site. Our mountain is a rock that sticks up 5000ft in the middle of high desert. Wind, changing weather conditions, massive overdevelopment, and eye popping climbs are not out of the ordinary.

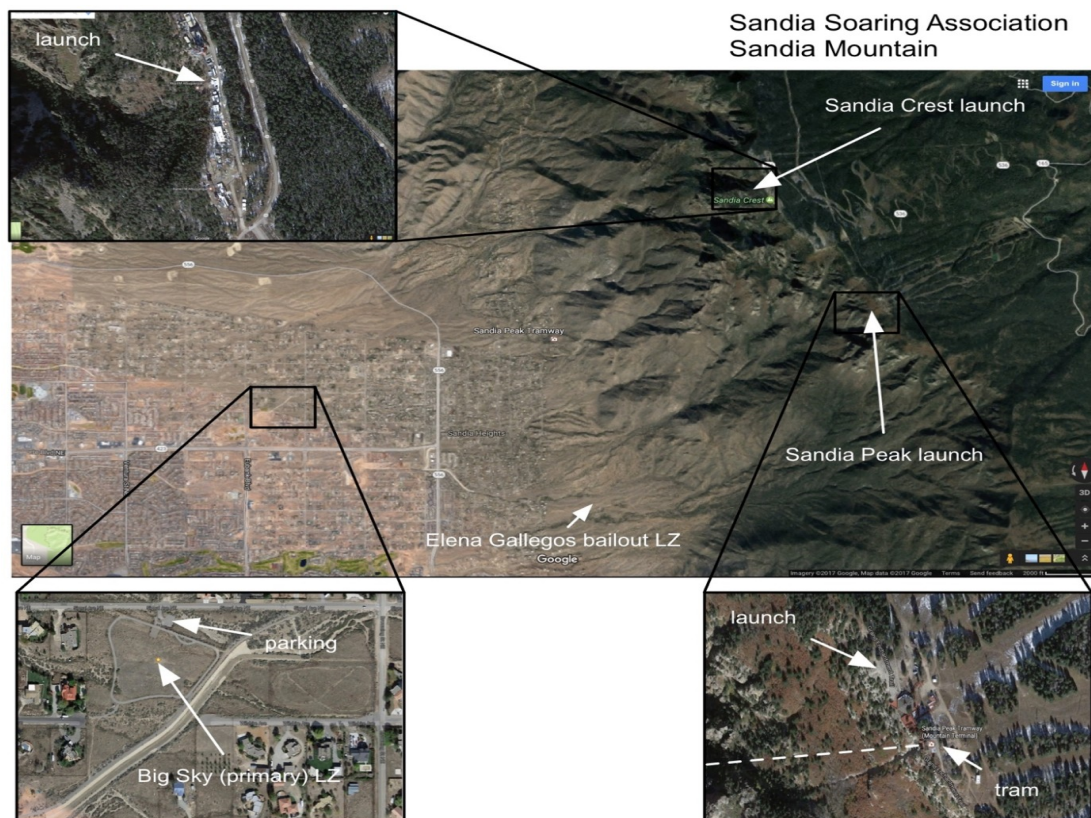


Figure 1: Sandia Launches and Landing Areas

General Information:

1. **Current USHPA and SSA Membership required (Annual or Visiting).**
2. Visiting Pilots/ Temporary Members must have a site introduction with a local Full P4/H4 SSA member for access and site briefing (see below).
3. **Minimum Ratings: H4 / P4** and the CL, FL, TUR and HA special skills. HGs also need RLF.
4. Pilots should have mountain flying experience
5. Mini Wing are currently being evaluated for this site.
6. Tandems must comply with USHPA SOP 12-12 Tandem program and Federal Aviation Administration Tandem exemption #4721. Commercial Tandems must apply for and hold a separate permit with the Forest Service and obtain permission from the Sandia Peak Tramway.
7. Always fly within the USHPA recommended operating limitations for your rating as specified in the USHPA Pilot Proficiency System.
8. Best conditions: 5-10 mph SSW, SW, W
9. Max gust factor: 10mph
10. Best time(s) of day to fly: Afternoon through evening glass off. Mid Day Flying can be turbulent and requires advanced piloting skills.
11. Most flyable season(s): Fall is the classically good season. Winter can be flyable but snow and ice may prevent safe launching and most days are northerly in Winter. The Biggest XC days come in Spring and Early Summer but flying can be very strong, turbulent and windy. Summer is prone to OD because of the Monsoon Season. Very few days are flyable July- Mid August.
12. The primary LZ is a city park field (Sen. Harrison H. Schmitt Big Sky Hang Glider Park (35.18265, -106.51897, 5800 ft), known simply as "Big Sky") that is dedicated to the activity. Many hang gliders consider it a bit small. Pilots should leave the bottom of the Tram area with a minimum of 8500ft to make the Big Sky LZ.
13. A very large and grassy secondary LZ is available at the Balloon Fiesta park (35.19650, -106.59695, 5055 ft). Check for closures before going there (like during the Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta SEP-OCT) and watch for pedestrian uses of the fields.
14. Should pilots not make Big Sky or desire to do so, landing is possible at the Elena Gallegos "bailout" LZ (35.16654, -106.47386, 6400 ft). This landing is in rolling desert terrain with many small bushes and trees and is not maintained. Only land there if you are comfortable outlanding in rough terrain and in potentially turbulent conditions.
15. Peak Launch altitude: 10,275 feet
16. Big Sky Landing zone altitude: 5,790 feet
17. Distance Main Launch to Big Sky LZ: 4.83 miles
18. Straight glide Launch to Main LZ: 5.7
19. Launch access: Via Sandia Peak Tramway (see below for special instructions)

20. All pilots are required to fly with a functioning radio tuned to 151.925 MHz in order to monitor for any need to clear airspace.
21. Flight schools or instructors may not have a physical business presence or set-up a concession operation on site. Site access has been granted for casual recreational use only.

Access and First Time Pilots:

Sandia Peak (Peak Launch) is accessed via the Sandia Peak Tramway. Pilots must purchase a Tram ticket, sign in, show proof of a current USHPA P4/H4 membership, and be on the current SSA roster for full or temporary membership. First time pilots to the Peak must be accompanied by a Full SSA Member with a P4/H4 rating. They will be given a site introduction to include Tram protocols, launch, landing and flying hazards. This is not a guided flight and the pilot must make their own decisions to launch, land and where and when to fly.

Launching:

The Peak launch was initially developed for hang gliders. It is very steep and the surface can be difficult to stand on. The launch holds one glider at a time, and set up should be completed well back from the crown (to the east). Cycles can vary greatly. Take the time to study the cycles and understand the gust differential. To the left of launch is the Tram Top Terminal and the Tram Cables. Upon launching you should fly straight and/or turn to your RIGHT and gain altitude before attempting to cross the Tram cables to the south (Figure 2).



Figure 2: View of Tram and Tram cables as seen from launch area (looking SSW/left from launch)

HG: The Peak launch is an ideal launch for hang gliding. It is at an approximate 35 degree angle, and allows for a long running distance if needed. Be prepared for high density altitude conditions and the need for a strong launch run during light winds in the Summer season.

PG: Forward launches are not recommended. A reverse launch in winds of 5-10 mph is desired. Based on the topography the wind 10ft above where you are standing can be considerably stronger than the wind you feel. As such do not launch in winds over 10mph. The trees up and to the north can be a good guide for wind

strength just over your head. There is high snag and cut potential from large rocks, ledges and micro rocks on the surface of the launch.

Most likely you will lay the glider out on the crest of the launch. Once you are below the crest and ready to launch you will have only a few feet to turn and run after pulling the glider up. As such, a dynamic or low wind reverse is not recommended. Glider management is key on this launch and be prepared to have to walk up the hill as the glider comes up.

Flying:

As a P4/H4 pilot with mountain experience you are expected to make sound decisions within your experience and comfort level. Here are some site specific considerations to take into account:

1. When north of the Tram, getting below the level of the Tram cables between launch and tower 2 can often result in severe turbulence, rotor, and being flushed into an unlandable zone. This is especially true with West, NW and North Winds. Check the wind sock direction at the Tram tower 2. If it's WNW – North, then beware of flying.
2. SSW, SW and West winds are preferred. West winds can make for great flying but be aware of rotor coming off the Tower 2 ridge. In NW and North expect severe turbulence and rotor.
3. Mid day flying in Spring, Summer and early Fall can be quite strong with climbs 1900fpm (10m/s) common during mid day.
4. The West side of the Sandias are composed of large granite cliffs that have many ridges and peaks. When flying near terrain and in these ridges and peaks you should be very aware of meteo wind direction and the potential to fly into rotor.
5. Wonderful XC potential exists when flying from Sandia Peak. The classic routes involve flying East towards Santa Rosa or North towards Santa Fe. If flying XC you will likely need to make the move to fly “over the back” and head east. 3000ft AGL over the top of the mountain (13,500ft) is recommended to avoid the flush and potential rotor when crossing over the back.
6. AIRSPACE: As seen in Figure 3 below, Albuquerque is nearly entirely covered by Class C Airspace.
7. Ski Area: Launch faces SW and the ski area is to the NE. Furthermore, this site is not often flown in winter conditions. Due to these factors, interference with ski

operations is generally a non factor, but pilots should be aware of potential ski operations on the NE side of the mountain.

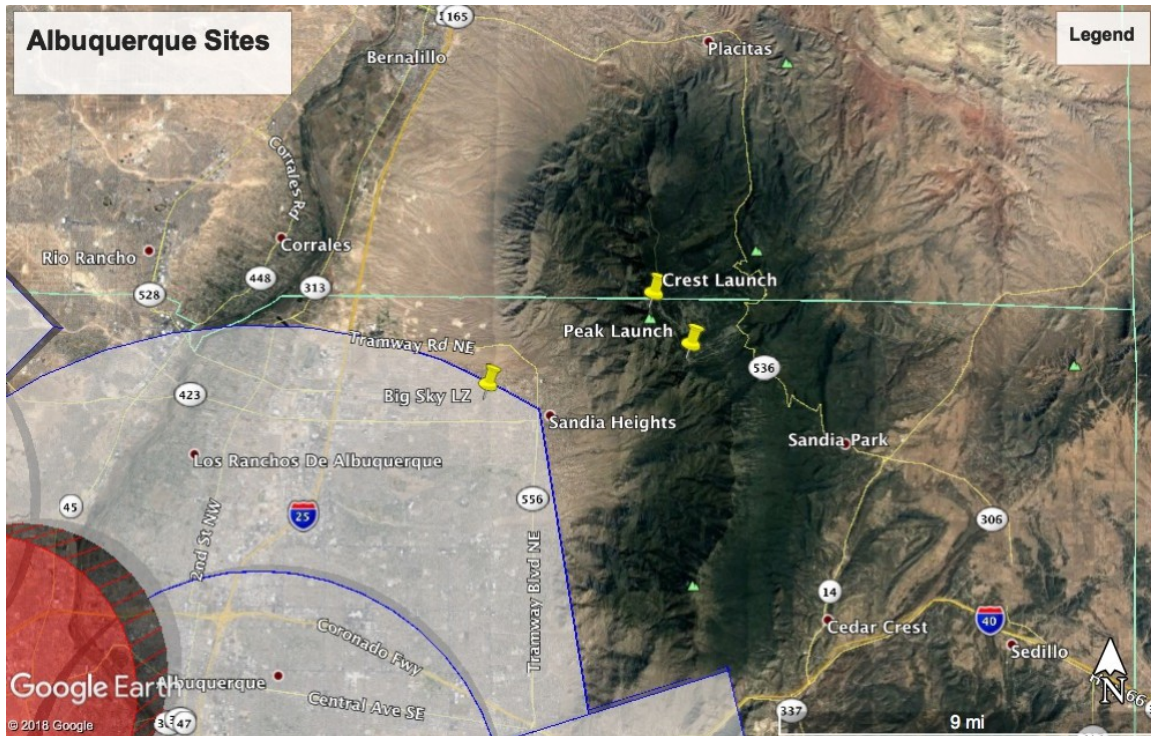


Figure 3: Class C airspace (KABQ)

Landing:

This section will deal primarily with the Big Sky LZ.

When leaving the mountain you will have to over fly a few miles of residential housing before arriving at the LZ. It is recommended that you leave the base of the mountain with at least 8500ft of altitude in light to medium wind conditions. Strong West winds require much higher departure altitude to make the LZ. The Elena Bailout LZ is noted above. There are also many residential lots on the way to the LZ that do not have structures on them. Be aware that many are bordered by power lines and contain large amounts of cactus.

The LZ has a large windsock located in the south west corner of the field. It is surrounded by an asphalt walking path and a low fence. To the immediate east of the LZ is a ditch and additional open space . Be aware of a slight east to west downhill slope in the LZ.

Most of the time you will be landing towards the south or west as those are the dominate flyable wind directions. Be aware of late evening east katabatic flows coming off the mountain.

For paragliders a standard figure 8 landing approach setting up over the houses to the north on a south wind landing or a figure 8 approach setting up in the open space east of the field tends to work the best.

For HG It is highly recommended to walk the Big Sky LZ prior to landing there. In calm winds, the preferred HG approaches are South or East due to the slope of the field. In other wind conditions, North and West approaches may be appropriate but pilots should be aware of the power lines to the south and the concrete arroyo to the southeast of the field.



Figure 4: Big Sky Landing Area. This is the primary LZ for Sandia freeflight operations. Note the power lines highlighted in red to the South and East

Additional Information:

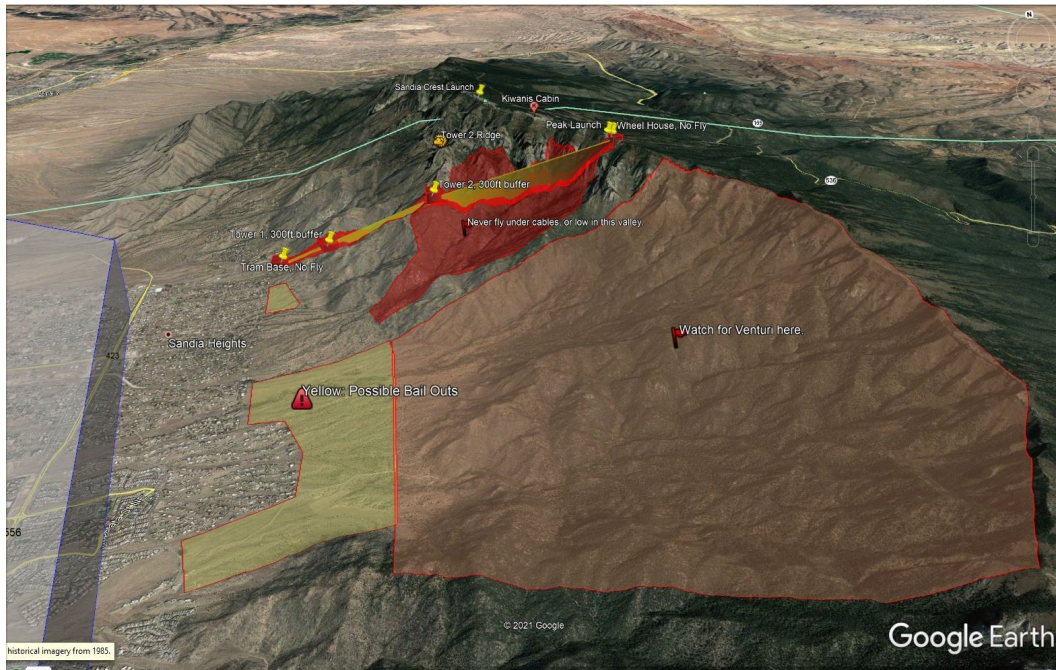


Figure 5: Location of Sandia Peak and Crest launches, and selection of hazards as viewed from the South

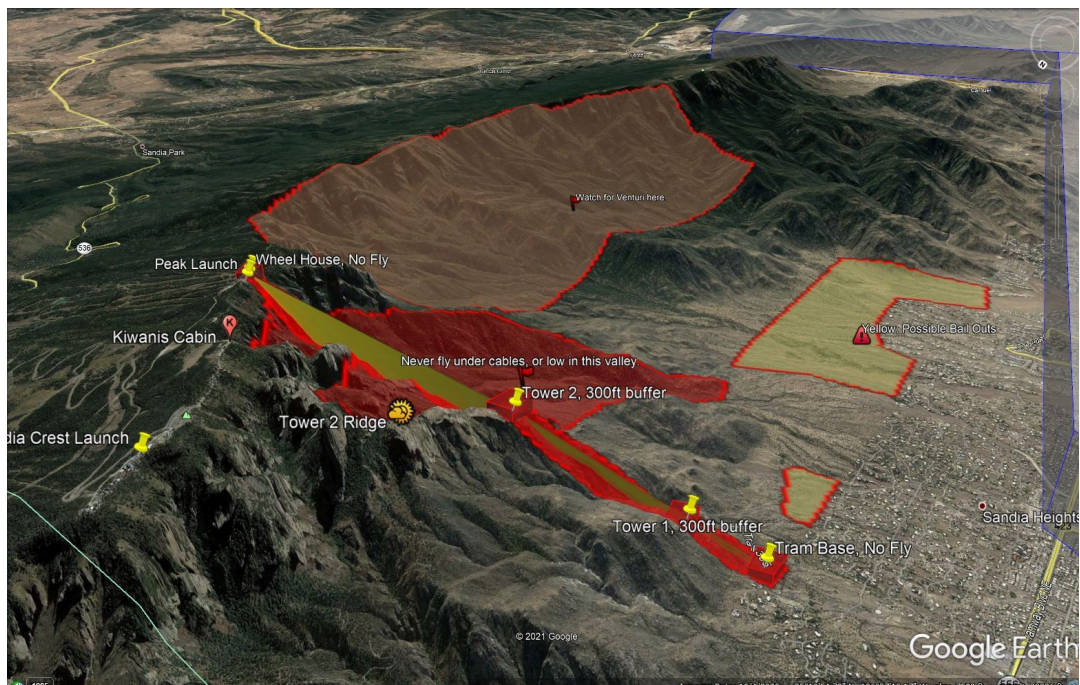


Figure 6: Location of Sandia Peak and Crest Launches and selected hazards as viewed from the North