

EFC NEWS



November/December 2010

Editor's Notes

In this issue I would like to begin by congratulating two of our students on completing their JAR Skills test at Perth. Well done to Robert Menzies and Fraser McKay.

This issue contains the final part of Alastair and Gordon's US trip with some great photos. Those of you who have been in the Club recently may have noticed the lovely book whose cover photo is seen below. The authors, Pat and Angus Macdonald, are two Club members with their own aircraft, G-NG. They have very kindly agreed to do the member profiles. In this issue is a profile of Patricia Macdonald with some absolutely stunning photographs.

As most of you are aware this has been a challenging year for EFC. Like all flying clubs, we have had to cope with the double whammy of declining demand and rising costs as a result of the recession. In addition there have been several changes to security requirements for airside access, which have directly affected us. Access recently has been entirely due to the good auspices of Signature, to whom many thanks.

The committee has been working hard behind the scenes to ensure that the Club continues to operate successfully in 2011. We plan a major recruitment drive in the New Year. The club's overheads have been stripped to the bone, including reductions in instructor retainers and changes to manning arrangements. Price rises are sometimes inevitable, but we always strive to keep them to a minimum. From 1st January the hourly rates will increase to levels comparable to those at other flying organisations in central Scotland - £145 solo for the Tomahawk, £168 solo for the Warrior and Cessna 172, and £172 solo for the Archer. Dual rates add £15 to the solo rate. However the subscription fee will remain at £225 per annum for the membership year 2011-12.

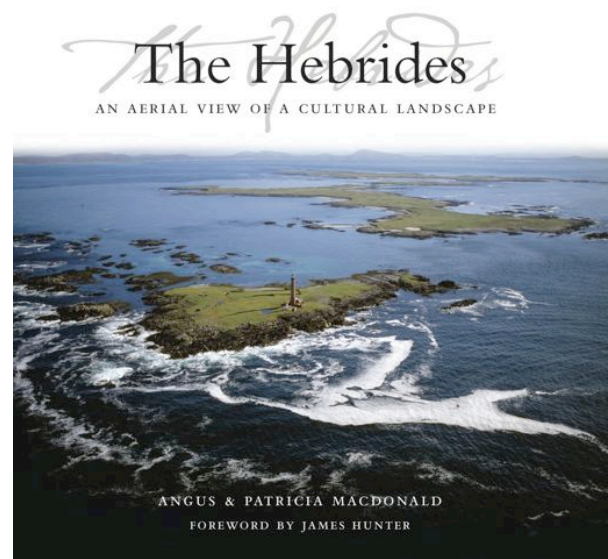
On the airside access front, Malcolm and Jack are engaged in discussions with senior airport

management about future arrangements for the General Aviation apron area. The airport has made a commitment that future access arrangements will be designed to ensure that all operators on the GAT can continue to operate successfully. We expect any new arrangements to be agreed early in the New Year.

In these difficult times there is one very positive thing that you can do to help the Club continue to operate – fly more hours! Members have always rallied to help when times have been hard, and this is no exception. Aim to fly at least once a month in 2011 for example – if everyone did that then we would be in a much stronger position altogether – and if we fly more hours, we can spread our fixed costs and so limit future rises in the flying rates. We can also all be on the lookout for new members!

Finally, can I take this opportunity to wish you all a happy and safe festive season, and a healthy and prosperous New Year and look forward to seeing you in 2011.

Member Profile





Patricia & Angus Macdonald at Mull-Glenforsa
(Joint portrait by Robin Gillanders).

Name: Patricia & Angus Macdonald: Part 1:
Patricia Macdonald (see next issue for Part 2:
Angus Macdonald)

Job: Environmental researcher and artist-
photographer using aerial photography as main
medium;

Partner (with Angus Macdonald – see next issue)
in the Aerographica Partnership
(www.aerographica.org.uk);
Honorary Fellow, Course Organiser and Lecturer
in Cultural Landscape Studies, School of Arts,
Culture and Environment, University of
Edinburgh.

Flying Training: PPL at Edinburgh Flying Club
on Tomahawks, 1983, followed by IMC Rating,
1984. Those were the great days when the EFC
clubhouse, in a collection of Nissen and other
huts, was located on the other side of the airfield,
almost on the threshold of the late-lamented,
'short' runway 26–08, which was so useful for
circuit training, with no need to worry about
turbulent wakes or endless orbits waiting for slots
between the schedules on the main runway. Spot
landing competitions could be watched from the
clubhouse windows (good for the soul and very
damaging to the reputation), and on warm
summer evenings, the welcoming smoke from
Club barbecues greeted visiting pilots arriving at
sunset in Tiger Moths...

After gaining my PPL, I was lucky
enough to do some aerobatic instruction (see
'Worst SNAFU' section below for the flavour of
these sorties), in 1985, '86 and '87, in a Fuji FA
200-160 (a lovely, friendly aircraft) and, in 1988,
in a Slingsby T67C (responsive to the pressure of
a fingertip – very scary), with the renowned Mike

Vickers at CSE Oxford (Mike, who is one of the
most laid-back and modest people that I have
known, began his flying career in the Royal Navy,
flying from carriers in the Pacific in World War
II. He subsequently joined the RAF and became
an Instructor – and Head of Standards – at RAF
Central Flying School, and an Instructor at the
Empire Test Pilot School. He is best known to the
outside world as the pilot who stage-managed and
led the flying sequences for the classic film *The
Battle of Britain*. It was he who managed to
perform the (intentionally – mimicking a pilot
with very few hours) seriously bad Spitfire
landing without writing off the aircraft – although
he did on another occasion succeed in writing off
a Hawk trainer, as a result of a thunderstorm
featuring hailstones the size of tennis balls). It was
a great privilege – and the greatest fun – to fly
with him.

My later flying career (with myself as P1,
that is) – mostly in our own favourite Cessna 172,
G–BSNG, plus a few brief excursions in a well-
loved old Tomahawk – has been fairly tame in
comparison – Angus has, thankfully, been P1 for
most of the exciting bits of our joint flying trips!

Total Hours: A little over 400 (most of the time
that Angus and I are in the air, I'm photographing,
or navigating, or in charge of the bad-French RT
on trips to France, rather than flying...)

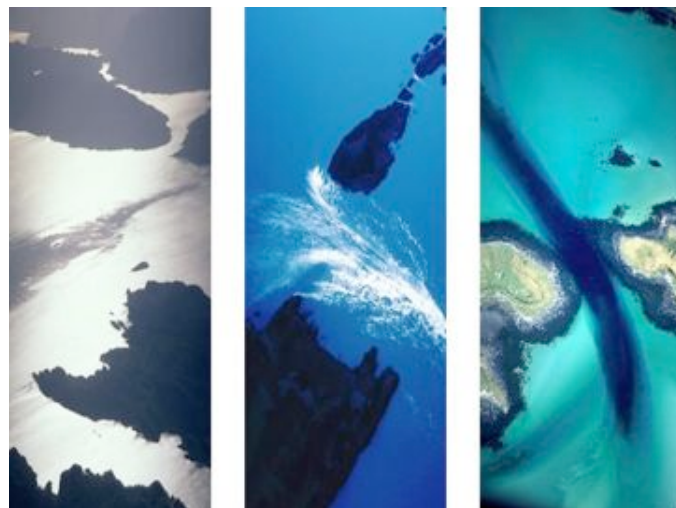
Longest Flight: Edinburgh, across Spain, to
Marrakesh, in the summer of 1992, to make
photographs of desert-margin landscapes for our
fine-art exhibition *Salt.Sand*, which was shown in
Glasgow Art Gallery as part of *Fotofeis* (the
Scottish Festival of Photography). I flew a few
positioning legs on this wonderful, and by no
means non-stop, trip – which took us three weeks
in NG. We had intended to fly through a pass in
the Atlas mountains to Ouarzazate and perhaps
Zagora in the Sahara, but having seen the effect
on the rate of climb and the oil temperature gauge
while crossing the Alpujarra mountains south of
Granada, on days when the air temperature was in
the 40s first thing in the morning, we decided that
Marrakesh would be our furthest point south. We
drove over the Atlas instead, which is a story in
itself, and were heartily glad that we had not
attempted to fly that last part of our planned route.
Look out for some of the highlights and frights
from that trip in Angus's piece in the next issue.

Favourite Routes:

In Scotland: Edinburgh to Oban, Mull–Glenforsa
and other beloved points west – including
Stornoway, Benbecula, Barra and Sollas beach,

North Uist; and, a close second, Edinburgh to Inverness, over the Cairngorms (this route often provides excellent, and sometimes hair-raising, experience of mountain waves – we have occasionally found ourselves suddenly descending faster than the C172's maximum rate of climb – solution: a rapid 180 back to the lowlands, and live to fly another day).

We have spent a great deal of time flying and photographing in the Highlands and Islands over more than two decades – especially in 1985–6 when we made an extended Highland sortie for an exhibition in the National Museums of Scotland; in the late 1980s to the early 2000s while monitoring environmental issues for government agencies and NGOs and working on commissions for the National Galleries of Scotland and others; and, most recently, in the last five years or so, while working on our new book: *The Hebrides: An Aerial View of a Cultural Landscape* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2010), and an exhibition loosely linked with it, *Edge: Hebrides* (first shown in Brussels in 2009 in the European Parliament and in Scotland House, the Scottish Government's EU HQ, and now on tour – see magazine article by art-historian James Lawson in *Portfolio: the catalogue of contemporary photography in Britain*, Issue 52, November 2010).



Sound: Island: Tide races, from the fine-art photographic exhibition *Edge Hebrides* (Patricia & Angus Macdonald).

Further afield: Edinburgh to Annemasse (near Geneva), where we were based while working on another book (*Once in Europa*, London: Bloomsbury, 1999, with the renowned writer John Berger) in which we made aerial photographs in the Savoie and the Jura and close to Mont Blanc (much too close! – but on suitable days in the Alps, the turbulence that we expected from our experience of Scottish mountain flying was blissfully missing).



At the edge: surf on the westernmost shores of the Atlantic outlier islands of *Heidhsgeir*/the Monach Islands, west of *Uist a Tuath*/North Uist, *na h-Eileanan Siar*/Western Isles, from the book *The Hebrides: An Aerial View of a Cultural Landscape* (Patricia & Angus Macdonald).



Close to Mont Blanc, from the book *Once in Europa*, John Berger and Patricia & Angus Macdonald (Patricia & Angus Macdonald).

Another favourite route to France has been Edinburgh to Valence in the Rhone valley – we used to make this trip every summer before the days of anthropogenic climate change (or are we still just stuck in the wrong phase of the North Atlantic Oscillation, which would not be the fault of travellers in Jumbo jets and 4x4s? – if so, could the NAO please switch back to its light-aviation-favourable phase during our flying lifetimes...) – these days, unlike in the 1980s and '90s, there is a very high risk of getting stuck for a fortnight in Southend – nice people, but not highly recommended for your French holiday (yes, done it – G-BSNG out, GNER home).

Worst SNAFU: Stopping the propeller during a mismanaged stall-turn, intended to be part of a 'simple' aerobatic sequence, in the Fuji (a big brother of the Tomahawk – and this is relevant) during training with the great Mike Vickers (see above). I had always thought the propeller would windmill back into action if the aircraft was descending rapidly pointing straight downward. But it did not: it remained neatly parked horizontally, completely stationary – not a happy sight.

– *Terrified student pilot (Pat Macdonald):* 'What do I do now?'

– *Eminent and laid-back instructor (Mike Vickers)*
– *unbelievably, chuckling all the while:* 'Just start it again.'

– *PM:* 'But how?'

– *MV:* 'With the key [*thinks: come on, Blogs...*]!' Being brought up on the Tomahawk, I turned the key, as one does. Nothing happened.

– *Even more terrified PM:* 'What now?'

– *Even more laid-back MV:* 'You don't just turn the key, you *push it in* and then turn it...'

Oops, yes – in a Fuji, that's right... It started immediately of course, and we pulled out of what I had thought might be my last dive.

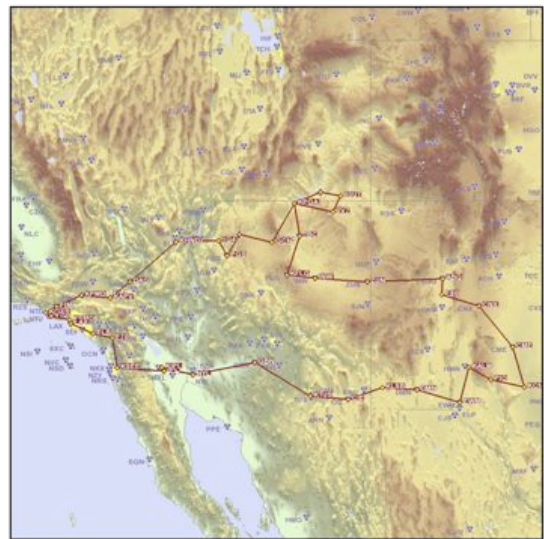
– *MV (immediately):* 'What are you doing now?'

– *PM:* 'Well... [*Thinks: just recovering from near-death experience, actually –*]'

– *MV:* 'We've still got enough height for an aileron roll...'

So we did that. And then another one... Great training for every kind of flying, although the course of my 'simple' sequences never did quite run smooth – still love looking at the Aresti diagrams though.

Ambitions: More flying and photography in Scotland, Europe and North Africa, DV, WP (and probably – and regretfully – minus the aeros).



Monday 21

The very efficient Enterprise car rental picked us up from hotel at just after 8am to go get our rental car and we were on our way to the caverns by 9am. There we took the elevator down 750 feet to the "Big Room" – 1½ hours walking in this massive cavern but still only seeing a fraction of the total. Very impressive, very quiet and muted. I think Gordon would live there if he could.

I phoned the FBO at Alexander to confirm they had a loan car, and then Anglo to check if anyone from FAA had called there for us. They hadn't.

Back at the airport we dumped the rental car and topped up with fuel. I filed the flight plan via notebook & mobile phone again and got a text briefing to save some time. There was only one other aircraft on the whole airport and it was parked so we taxied out to longest runway and departed. I was flying and Gordon was doing the radio with some trepidation. His lack of confidence wasn't helped when Albuquerque radio said they had no flight plan on file to open. I found out later that I'd filed it for the next day as my notebook was still set to UK time. Then we hit moderate turbulence, which lasted for the rest of the flight so Gordon was absolutely not happy.

I first climbed to 8500 feet including a few circuits in a really strong thermal that gave us 1500fpm climb for a few minutes. Then up to

10500 to get out of the worst of the thermals but it was still really bumpy. Finally I climbed to 12500 and watched the ground speed drop to 70 kts in the 30 knot headwind - but it was slightly less bumpy so I accepted the reduction in speed in return from the reduction in noise from the right seat. Tracked Rosewell VOR then Chisum until we hit some gentle mountain wave and couldn't maintain height.

A quick dogleg to the north got us out of the sink and the ground speed back up a bit from 64 knots. Checking the PA28 figures later confirmed that we were operating at about the service ceiling so it was hardly surprising we had problems maintaining altitude.

We descended 30 miles from Alexander / Belen and I was quite glad to get down to warmer air, as 75U was a bit draughty at any speed. There was no other traffic about so I did a passable landing on runway 21 and taxied back to the parking. Mr FBO arrived with a loaner car after just a few minutes and said he'd be at the airport from 7:30am if we wanted to get away earlier than the 9am plan. Gordon was very keen to get going as early as possible to avoid the turbulence later in the day.

We rolled down hill to the hotel with Gordon in control of the car so he could get used to driving in the US. Thankfully there were no casualties. Then we headed into Belen for a Chinese buffet meal and went back to the hotel for flight planning. Tuesday was looking to be a long day with 5 hours flying planned. Gordon wasn't at all keen on my original direct route, Albuquerque to Flagstaff via the VORs, because of the terrain altitude of 8500 feet for 30 miles on the route but, eventually, he agreed that it was OK provided he flew it and could reroute if uncomfortable. I was to fly the second leg from Flagstaff, up to Monument valley, across to Lake Powell then down to Page with Gordon to act as the autopilot if I wanted to take photos through the DV window. Could be a fun day!

I changed my notebook's time zone to Mountain Time to fix the flight plan date problem and filed the flight plan for the morning assuming an 8am departure.

Tuesday 21

Up at 6am for breakfast at the 24-hour American diner next to the hotel. It's going to take months of diet to get this food off again. Went out to plane at 7:30am to find it fuelled and ready to go. The FBO man was already on field (working on

propeller repairs) so settled up, returned the car and headed back to the plane.

Disaster! Gordon wanted to check Albuquerque's ATIS but couldn't get the radios to come on. The temperature was -5 deg C overnight and still about zero so a bit of a shock for an aircraft used to sunny California. I suggested we start the engine to get the battery voltage up and ensure we don't flatten it in the first place just playing with the radios. Also the heat from the engine would help if the electrical problem was just down to temperature. The poor beastie wasn't at all keen to start in the cold but eventually limped into life. I leaned the mixture and immediately stalled the engine. Another few anxious minutes of cranking and the engine was running again. Radio 2 wakes up but box 1 is still dead. In addition the DI is spinning around pretending to be a child's top and I notice that the transponder light is not coming on in the test position. Not good - but I wasn't sure the transponder light was working before. A few minutes later radio 1 comes on and seems to be working OK so we decide to go and hope that the DI problem is just cold grease on gyro bearings. After a final pit stop off we go with Gordon flying and me doing radio.

He decides to try 25 degree of flap and holding on the brakes at full power at the start of runway as Alexander is at 5100 feet. With 6000 feet of runway it shouldn't be an issue but wanted to see how close to book figures 75U performs. The take off is fine with just under half of runway used - about 3000 feet - but the temperature is well below ISA so helps. The DI started working on climb out so we relax a bit.

We head off on track over the Rio Grande then Albuquerque VOR, Zuni, Winslow and onto Flagstaff. The flight plan is active and we have VFR flight following but Gordon is very not happy over the high ground and goes up to 12500 - or at least tries. We got up to about 12,000 when plane ran out of puff. On track for Flagstaff we spotted meteor crater in the distance but my bladder was too full to explore and we plan to come back after Flagstaff.

At Flagstaff we're cleared to join 3 mile left base for 21 following a navy aircraft. Gordon did nice landing on the 7000-foot elevation field. Very efficient FBO at Flagstaff with some really nice offices. We were fuelled and ready to go in a half hour so I filed the flight plan for Meteor Crater, Tuba city, Monument Valley then back to Page on Lake Powell.



I was flying and got a real fright after takeoff with full fuel combined with areas of sink reducing the climb rate to zero at times and even the best rate only averaging 100 – 200 fpm. I slowly climbed out of the pucker area and set course for Meteor Crater. Gordon didn't notice my distress so it couldn't have been that bad...

Gordon flew for a bit so I could take some pictures and activate the flight plan. It was really bouncy, which Gordon absolutely hates, so after a discussion we decided to route direct to Page from Tuba city and do Monument Valley tomorrow - as early as possible. I tried to change the flight plan to reflect this and had the most embarrassing radio exchange with Prescott radio who could hardly hear me anyway. I gave the wrong updated arrival time and had the FSO point out that time was 20 minutes ago. Eventually agreed to leave flight plan as it was and just close it when we got to Page.

I got some pictures of Meteor Crater and then headed north to see the Painted Dessert. This was a bit of a let down as it was not really that impressive from the air. I took control back from Gordon and headed for Page. As we got closer we got the first glimpse of Glen Canyon and start of Grand Canyon off to our left – looks great for later in the week.

At Page and I dropped down from 10,500 to Traffic Pattern Altitude (TPA) of 5100' in the last 10 miles. Joined right downwind for 33 and then made a total mess of the landing. Overshot final turn, too low, too high, didn't pull the power right off and eventually landed almost 1/3 of the way down the runway. Plenty of room to stop on the 6000 foot runway but obviously more tired than I thought after the almost 5 hours of flying. Landed at 15:30 local.

A golf cart met us on the taxi in and led us to a tie down. Then we were faced with the two FBOs linemen at Page both wanting our business and both offering the same fuel cost of \$3.70 - so we went with the guy who met us and parked us - Classic Aviation. We left them to refuel and went to arrange the rental car and a hotel. We ended up in the nice Marriott Courtyard overlooking the Glen Canyon dam.



We dashed off to see the dam before the visitor centre closed at 5pm and managed to book a tour of the generator area for the next day at 2:30pm. The area had some really spectacular scenery even from the ground so we drove around a bit. I caught up with some work email in evening and planned the route for the morning – just up the lake, Monument Valley, land at Kayenta and then back to Page. I had originally planned a second sortie to Bryce Canyon but decided I didn't really fancy the high ground around it and Gordon wasn't keen on flying in the turbulence of the afternoon so we agreed we'll drive up there after the dam tour. I was really tired so we agreed to meet at 6:30am in the morning and headed off for some kip.

Wednesday 22

Up early for breakfast then out to the airport for pre-flight and GPS programming. Gordon did the fuel check and then tried to throw the tester back

into the rear seat - but hit me in the face instead, luckily with the end that doesn't sport a screwdriver bit. After a quick eye count we got airborne by 8:30am with me flying. The take off run seemed a bit extended and I had to pull a bit more than usual to get off the deck but everything seemed normal enough and we were flying in less than half the runway length. Lovely smooth air although still a bit hazy. After take off Gordon flew while I took some photos using the DV window on the left. We first routed up Lake Powell towards Navaho Mountain and went looking for the Rainbow Bridge National Monument. We couldn't spot it and didn't have the exact coordinates to look more closely but no big deal, as Monument Valley is to be the real highlight of the day.



From Lake Powell I routed up to Mexican Hat and then handed over to Gordon for the run down Monument Valley. The scenery was just absolutely incredible. I switched the 296 GPS in front of me over to terrain mode just for a second check as Gordon flew first directly towards the main mesa then parallel to the cliff for photos. At one point the whole 296 display lit up red to indicate less than 100 feet ground clearance up ahead. We were at 5200 feet and the GPS said the ground ahead rose to 5600 so I chickened out and asked Gordon to climb 500 feet or so. Much better!

After photos I took control and routed to Kayenta, a deserted airfield next to a small mining town, for a toilet stop. I tried en-route but was unable to get Prescott radio on any of the frequencies to ask them to close our flight plan. "No problem" I thought "I'll call from cell phone after landing". I joined left downwind for 05 after getting confused and almost entering a right pattern. As I landed I was surprised to find a sudden jerk to the left and then braking effect on touch down. On closer

inspection I found I'd left the parking brake on one notch - so that explained the reluctance to get off the runway at Page. Gordon pointed out what the B in the pre-landing check was for...

On the ground we hit disaster number 2 (or was that 3?). There was no ground telephone or other services, no cell phone coverage and no nearby habitation to close the flight plan. We decided to get aloft as soon as possible and call Prescott when high enough. After a quick pit stop and a few photos with Gordon posing with the Piper Meridian (twin) parked there we took off with him in the left seat. I managed to call Prescott Radio as we reached 9,500 feet. The FSO there was not happy as we were now 45 minutes overdue (due to extensive photos / orbits) and they had initiated search action. I must remember to allow more en-route time than Golden Eagle's default in future...



We landed back at Page and taxied back to FBO behind the golf cart again. It was still only 12 noon so we decided to go drive out to the Rainbow Bridge. After a few minutes driving and looking at the map more closely we realise that there are no roads within 10 miles of it and so turned back. We went back to the hotel for an hour of downtime - Gordon was feeling the pace a bit. After a snooze we headed down to the Glen Canyon dam for the full tour. First the guide takes us in the elevator from the visitor's centre at the rim of the canyon down to the top of the dam then we catch a second elevator, inside the dam itself, down the generator room. The dam is an awesome structure with inspection corridors running through at various levels. The guide explains that the water seeps through the concrete at the rate of several thousand gallons of water per minute. Scary stuff.

After the dam tour we decided to drive to Bryce Canyon, as it's still only 3pm. However the only map we had was my large scale (whole western US) road map so we headed off based on that. It looks about 60 miles or so – an hour and a bit each way. Eventually I find it on my 196 GPS road database and set that up too. Thirty miles north west of Page we turned onto the next road to find a dirt track. We decide to try it for a bit but possibly take the next cut off back to main road, which looks to be about 8 – 10 miles along...

Much later we are 20 miles in and GPS indicates about another 20 to go. The dirt road is seriously scary in places with ruts, overhanging rocks, 30-degree hills and a ford along the way.

Suddenly we reached tarmac... and a sign at the side of the road. This gave the length and cautions against using the road without plenty of water, first aid kit, food and letting someone know where you are. Oops! Why no similar signage at the end where we started? We didn't see anyone else for the whole two hours we were on the road but we did have Gordon's Air band transceiver and could possibly have used that to call someone overhead in an emergency.

We decided to go on and back to Page via the main road past Bryce Canyon. The GPS wants us to go back down the dirt track, all 42 miles of it, but it's now getting dark and that route doesn't seem sensible, even in daylight. Off we set and ignore the GPS until it gives in and finally agrees with us on direction. Bryce Canyon looks impressive even in the twilight as we rush by.

The first sign on the main road with distance to Lake Powell shows 130 miles to go... after driving about 30 mile past Bryce Canyon. We bash on and eventually get back to the hotel at 9pm totally knackered. After getting back I checked the mileage guide in the tourist book and found distance to Bryce on main roads is 153 miles from Page. Total distance driven was about 250 miles over 6 hours.

Tomorrow is Grand Canyon day so we arranged to meet for breakfast at 7am with the intention of getting airborne about 10am after flight planning. I decided not to file a flight plan for the day on the basis that anyone crashing in the Grand Canyon is going to be noticed. I'm still recovering from the last two flight plan incidents.

Thursday 23

Breakfast at Denny's yet again then off to the airport for some serious flight planning. VFR flight is allowed over the Grand Canyon but only above 10,000 feet in the special rules area and there are several "no fly" zones to avoid. Corridors between the "no fly" areas are at 10,500 feet southbound and 11,500 northbound. The ends of the corridors are marked on Grand Canyon VFR chart with exact coordinates. Our first job was to set up user points on both of the GPSs for the various waypoints we need today. There is only one usable VOR so for the first hop and the DME on 75U is u/s so all GPS and visual navigation for a change. After getting the waypoints entered we each set up one of the GPSs with the full route and then compared answers.



The courses and distances all eventually match on both units and we have lots of lines and notes on the charts with one chart each to allow cross checking. Given the "incident" at Whitesands we were obviously a bit nervous about getting this one wrong. We strapped in and headed off with me flying. I departed on runway 33 and headed off south from the downwind. A Cessna took off on runway 15 just as we neared the end of the downwind leg and then climbed up towards us on a converging path. A quick 360 soon after leaving the pattern let him get in front and out of the way. As we worked our way down Marble Canyon I self announced position and heights at each reference point. Gordon took over the flying so I could take photos and some video. The scenery is just spectacular and it's a great privilege to be able to do this. Three passes over the Grand Canyon itself and several orbits later we head for Grand Canyon West airport to land for a comfort break and to plan the rest of the flight with Gordon P1.

I elected to land on runway 33 despite being unable to spot the windsock and no replies on radio. Forecast winds were North / North East and 5 kts. We landed OK and was I was relieved to confirm the wind was as expected after landing. We taxied in and parked to find the airport really busy with busloads of tourist arriving for scenic flights and 2 twins plus about 4 helicopters constantly arriving and departing. It was slightly surreal entering the terminal building to find hordes of Japanese tourists, several of whom were obviously very jet-lagged and sleeping soundly on the chairs and settees in the waiting area.

Eventually we headed off taking off and tracking over the rest of the Grand Canyon and onto Lake Mead. Las Vegas approach gave us a squawk and were generally nice to us – even when we disappeared off their radar for a few circuits of the Hoover dam to take yet more pictures - then in under the Class B to Henderson.

Henderson tower gave us a long spiel on how to join and what runway. Basically “follow that Cessna”. On right base we realise neither of us remembered which of the two runways 35L or R we were supposed to be using so asked tower to confirm – 35R it is then sir. We landed and got cleared to cross 35L where we switched to ground and asked for taxi to parking. I misread the air guide map, and as a result, we then got more than slightly lost on the field and ended up getting progressive taxi instructions from the very patient ground controller.

Rental car people gave us a list of hotels to try with Gordon’s strong preference for a quiet hotel - somewhat difficult to guarantee in Las Vegas I feared. We settled on another Marriott Courtyard to the South East of the city.



With the main part of the trip over as far as I was concerned we looked at the flight planning for Friday. After deciding to drop out the Death Valley detour and route direct to the coast via Applevalley we settled on Oxnard for the Friday overnight mainly based on the non-availability of all the hotels we checked in Santa Barbara – our first choice destination. I booked the Best Western in Oxnard and drew some lines on the chart to check MOA, restricted areas (gulp! - loads of them) and heights.

After settling the plan we drove into Las Vegas to see “The Strip”. We parked up in a casino on the strip then walked up as far as Treasure Island. The whole place is full of massive hotels and casinos with loads of restaurants. As we were walking back down the strip the sidewalk actually went into Bellagio’s (the place with the dancing water fountains outside) where we missed the exit and got a bit lost. It took twenty minutes wandering about inside the hotel before we eventually found our way back out.

Friday 24

First thing we drove out to Hoover Dam for a photo shoot from ground level for a change. The main road (route 63) currently runs over the top of the dam but a new bridge and improved road is under construction. There were serious security checks before going onto bridge with all lorries and RVs stopped and inspected.

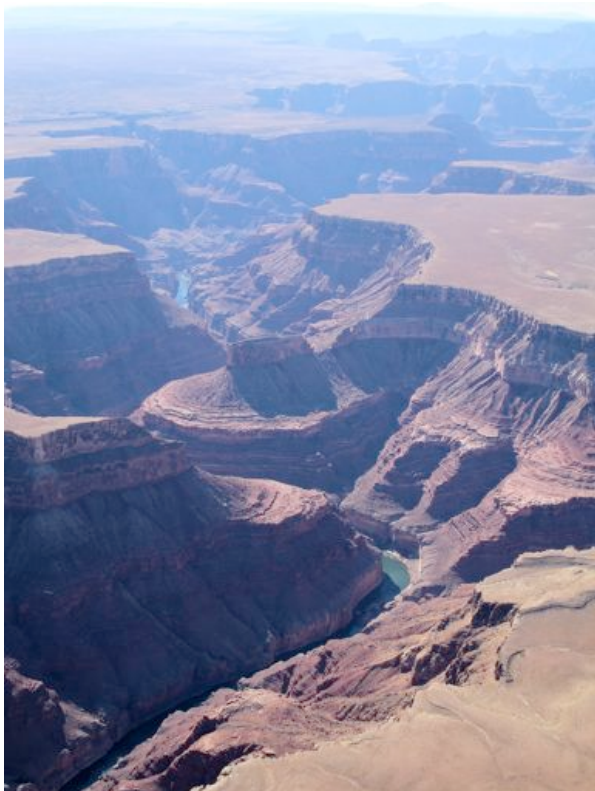


We headed back to Henderson and did flight preparation. This was to be my leg so I planned to route out under Las Vega Class B but still avoiding the mountains to the south at 4800 before climbing to 8500. Gordon was keen to do the radio – no risk of him doing worst than me now. We chose the wrong frequency for Las Vegas approach at first then eventually got them and Gordon requested flight following. Approach, somewhat unsurprisingly given Gordon’s slow

delivery on radio, says that he's too busy for flight following, releases us and suggests we contact LA Centre in 30 miles.

I climbed to 8500 and Gordon called LA Approach after the required 30 miles. LA give us a squawk but we're too low for their radar so up we go to 10,500 feet and pop onto their screen. Gordon switches to Joshua Approach as we near Apple Valley then onto Unicom. On arrival I join downwind and make reasonable landing. We head for the flying club – Midfield Aviation – as Gordon flew here about 6 years ago and he wants to see if the cat he befriended is still about.

We found a very friendly welcome at Midfield as Gordon goes off and finds the cat – now 18 years old. He's happy now. After the grand reunion we taxi down to terminal building ½ mile away at the end of the runway and Gordon plans the next leg to Oxnard.



Weather on the coast is currently clear so we launch into a busy pattern with two locals flying close in circuits and depart. I'm doing the radio again so get flight following from Joshua approach and Gordon climbs to avoid Victorville's class D. Looking ahead visibility looks bad in the LA bowl but that's really not unusual. Over the mountains we go and route to north of Oxnard to Ventura pier on the coast so as to make the join easy – 3 airports close together

each with associated Class D. Yet another disaster as I call the tower and get no side tone on the radio and no reply. After trying box 2 with the same results I'm just about to get handheld out when I realise that I've accidentally knocked the "Auto" source switch off on the audio panel. Resetting this and calling again we get an immediate reply from a slightly exasperated controller to join right hand downwind number 2 to a Cessna on Left downwind.

Gordon does a good landing and we taxi to Signature. The nice people there give us a lift to the hotel in their brand new Jaguar but wouldn't lend us it! We checked in then walked to downtown Oxnard in search of food. Underwhelmed by downtown and not fancying the one "Express Chinese" place we walk back to the hotel and eat in Henry's café just across the road. Then we head back to the hotel to see how best to route back to San Diego – inland or via the coast. We decide to go down the coast then over LA and LAX using the VFR Shoreline route but will need to wait for the weather to clear there in the morning as mist is forecast until 12 noon.

Saturday 25

Last day!

It's misty and low cloud at first so we do the planning for flight to French Valley via the Shoreline route – over LAX at 5500 feet. We're both a bit nervous and double-check everything. As for Grand Canyon we each enter the waypoints in the 2 GPS - one each - and then cross check. Eventually both have the same results and lots of lines on all the maps. Gordon is flying this leg.

The weather improves enough by 10:30am for a local flight but is still too bad to head off south so I decide to go for a jolly to the north. I get a briefing and am asked if I have the security NOTAM. I say "yes" and then immediately go and get it. It turns out that pilots "are requested not to loiter" around things like "POWER STATIONS, DAMS and HYDROELECTIC plants". Hmm. So that would be the Hoover dam then... I just hope no one saw our 3 orbits at 2000 feet. Strange that Las Vega approach didn't complain - but then again they did lose radar contact with us while we were flying about the dam. Once again Gordon was flying so it's his license on the line yet again on this trip. He's getting to be high risk to be around! I took no delight in telling him...



I jump into 75U and head up the coast to Santa Barbara, solo for a change, as Gordon wants to wander round Oxnard airfield. Nice views despite vis 5 – 8 miles at 1500 feet. I climb up to 4000 feet to see over the coastal mountains then back down for approach to Oxnard.

Off we go again with Gordon flying and me doing radio. We get VFR flight following from Point Magu after departure from Oxnard heading first to the North so we can climb up to 5500 feet before routing back over Oxnard. The air is busy with five or six traffic alerts - three less than 2 miles distant and less than 500 foot vertical separation including the one that overtook us from behind 500 feet above and never saw us at all. VFR flight following is great! Socal clear us direct to Santa Monica VOR rather than via our carefully planned waypoints so we intercept the Shoreline LAX VOR radial without using the GPS and chug our way very carefully over LAX, Torrance, past Long Beach then John Wayne. Visibility is not great but I get some good views. Gordon is much too busy keeping height and VOR tracking to see much!

We drop down to French Valley to find several aircraft and a helicopter in the pattern. I'm very busy on the radio and we're both keeping a good lookout. Gordon does a slightly heavy landing (his last this trip). Comfort break and coffee later I plan the route to Gillespie. I decide to route west of the mountains then inbound to Gillespie via the Julian VOR to avoid parachuting, gliding and Palomar observatory. I'm familiar with the route in from Julian VFR having done my PPL here and looking forward to a relaxed flight well clear of the San Diego Class B.

We take off with me flying and Gordon determined to get the hang of the radio into a very

busy circuit between two aircraft doing touch and goes. Gordon gets VFR flight following from Socal as we climb out to 8500. It's no less busy with another couple of traffic alerts including a "stop climb, opposite direction traffic 2 miles, 500 feet above". We get switched frequency a few times and Gordon is now getting a bit stressed out when Socal suddenly clear us direct to Gillespie via the San Diego Class B with a height restriction and requesting we descend VFR. Gordon manages the read back with a bit of prompting but is really struggling with the controller's speed and unfamiliar message content. He switches to Gillespie tower and gets another stream of extremely fast American with me translating and prompting him on replies whilst flying and plotting course direct to Gillespie. It would definitely have been less stressful for me if I had just done the radio too on this leg but we managed. I land a bit heavy on runway 27R and bounce a bit so a less than perfect last touchdown for both of us. We're cleared to cross 27L and switch to ground where Gordon announces us as "G-BDFY" then quickly corrects. Funny how you revert as soon as you relax. The controller thinks it is really funny - nice friendly controllers at Gillespie compared with Oxnard.



I taxi back to the Anglo parking where we grab someone to take some photo of us.

N2575U did us well service for a total of 30.1 hours flying, 201 US Gallons of fuel over 2500 nm. Engine is now well and truly run-in.



Chris Watson, who owns Anglo, worked out the bills and I was happy when my spreadsheet calculation and his match to the cent. Chris gave us a good rate on the aircraft – about 50% of our hourly flying cost for our AA5 in the UK without any fixed costs factored in.

I dropped Gordon off at the Anglo apartments near the field for him to finish his last two days of holidays and then headed off to pick up my car. I have to drive back up to Irvine where I'm working in the office Monday to Thursday before heading home.

One full week of flying. 18 hours logged for 12 and me for Gordon.



Everything worked exactly as planned except for the Bryce Canyon adventure and dropping out the Death Valley leg. The weather everywhere cooperated for us but mostly because we went where the weather is normally pretty good anyway. It was great (for us anyway) that most of the US had really bad weather for the week – including the freezing rain and snow in Texas - except for the bit where we were.

I must thoroughly recommend this as a way of spending a week flying. Absolutely stunning scenery in a country that really is GA friendly.



The only question now is where next?



Spot the altitude?

EFC NEWS

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