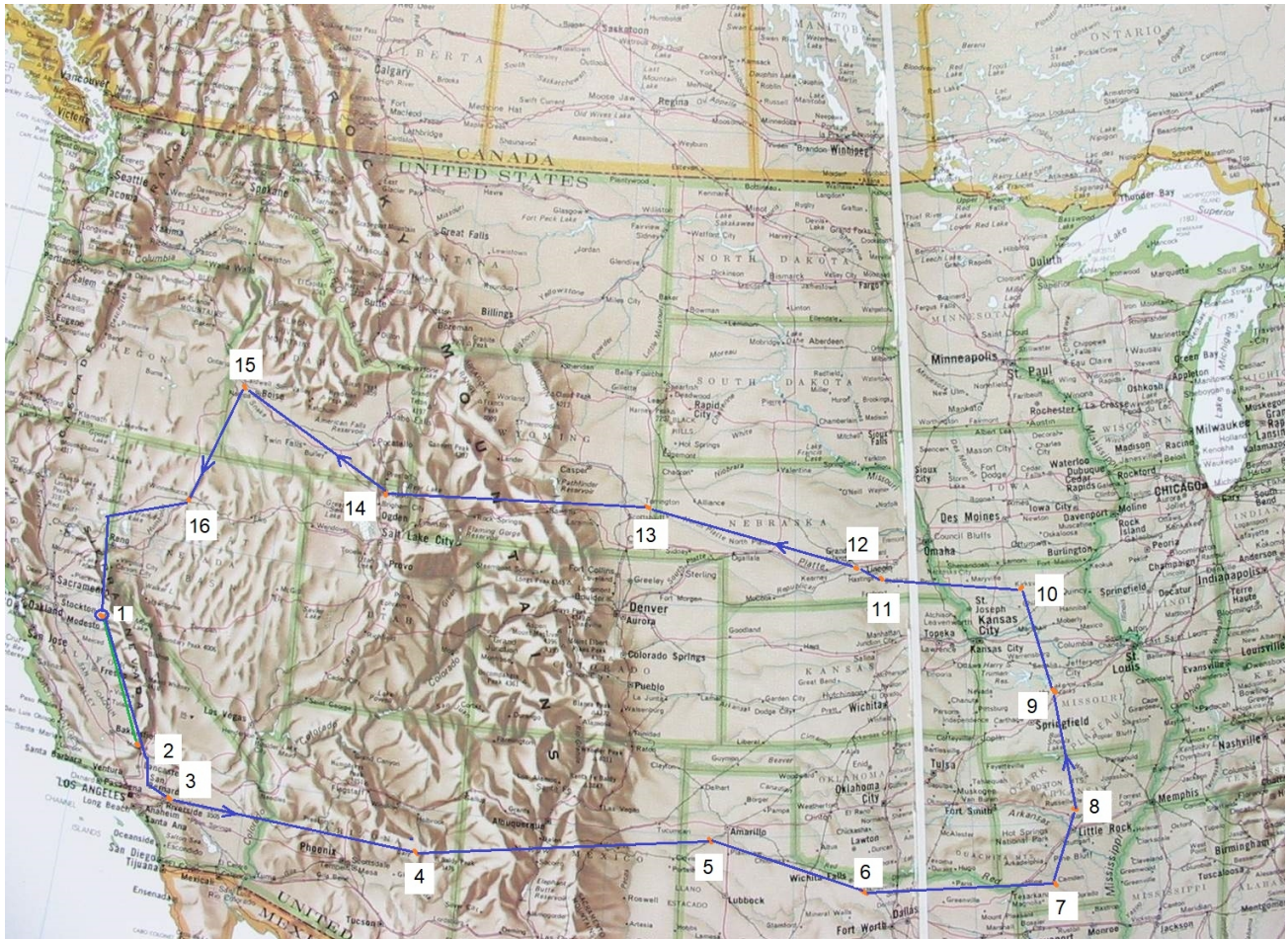


Midwest Roundtrip

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July 2025



1. Calaveras 2. Tehachapi 3. Apple Valley 4. Show Low 5. Hereford 6. Bowie 7. Camden 8. Clinton
9. Camdenton 10. Trenton 11. Crete 12. York 13. Torrington 14. Logan 15. Caldwell 16. Winnemucca

This year I wanted to do something different from the usual Oshkosh flight, which is always during the hottest part of the year and over a route where I already know all the airports and landscapes. I decided to take a two week flying tour with the only limitation of staying west of the Mississippi River. I wanted to use my Caro 1 motorglider and had set the start of the trip for mid June. I studied the weather pattern before departure to work out a route in the best weather. It looked best to fly south first, then turn east and use the strong tail wind.

Day 1

Caro 1 was loaded, fueled and ready to go on a clear day as planned from my home airport Calaveras. The first part of the route took me southeast, parallel to the west slopes of the Sierra Nevada. I had selected Tehachapi (municipal airport) as my first stop because it was a fairly short

leg, close to a small town, and I had not landed there before. The winds were light initially and 6500 ft was my cruising altitude.



Approaching the Tehachapi airport

After 2.5 hours I landed in Tehachapi, which is at 4000 ft elevation just west of a ridge cluttered with windmills that separates it from the Mojave desert.



Caro 1 on the ground in Tehachapi

The airport looked deserted but had an open (by code) airport building for pilots. After the short walk into town to eat lunch, I returned to where I had tied Caro down to retrieve something. I also

turned the propeller a few times and noticed the absence of the usual clicking of the magneto impulse coupling. This was bad news. Without the impulse coupling, starting the engine would be somewhere between difficult and impossible. It had worked fine before, but clearly something was wrong. It was very frustrating to have something fail this early into my trip. In order to find out what it could be, I needed tools. So I started walking from one end of the airport along rows of hangars to the other end in search of anyone who could help. I found no one and nothing on the east end, so on to the west side. Almost at the end I saw an open door and looked inside. There were people working on airplanes in a large hangar, but it was a manufacturing and not a maintenance shop and they could not help.

I continued my search along a second row of hangars and finally arrived at a promising place. It was a small hangar with Bonanza in pieces and a man working on it, surrounded by tools. After I explained about my problem, he was very willing to help and let me use whatever tools I needed. Mike turned out to be an angel in disguise. A mechanic at Edwards Air Force Base, he was well equipped and I was able to find the problem with my magneto. It required the help of another angel, this one was called Bruce Lockwood, who worked in a hangar nearby. His hangar was full of big Warbird engines that were stored there, and a well equipped machine shop. Bruce, who was a successful Unlimited air race pilot in Reno, had retired to work on repairing those big engines. He made a spacer I needed to fix my issue. After I had reassembled what I had taken apart and timed the magneto, the impulse coupling was working again and engine started up right away. The work had taken the rest of the day, so I stayed the night.

Day 2

In the evening I had time to think about what to do next. Did I really want to take Caro 1 on a long trip with a fix that I did not know how durable it would be? I really did not want to risk getting stranded on another, more distant airport. It was not an easy decision, but I flew Caro home the next day and swapped airplanes. The Pulsar was ready to go, so I moved my baggage over, filled the tanks and took off the following day with shorter wings to fly the same rout a third time.

Day 3

With a strong tailwind that developed as soon as I turned east, I flew the Pulsar across the California desert, past Mojave, Edwards Air Force Base, Lancaster and Palmdale as far as the Apple Valley airport.



Flying the Pulsar past Palmdale, looking south

By the time I arrived, the strong desert thermals had kicked in and in combination with the strong wind were bouncing me around. I made a decent landing on the long runway in Apple Valley, elevation 3000 ft. There were a few more airplanes on the ramp here, and the airport building was open to visiting pilots. There was a construction crew working on remodeling the attached restaurant, so I had to rely on the food I had brought along.



On the ramp at Apple Valley, California

I wandered around to see what could be found in the hangars here and came upon a man who was working on repainting a RV-4 cowling for a friend. He told me that all his life he had diabetes and even though he really wanted to fly, he was unable to get a medical certificate. His life

changed when LSA's came around and flying was now possible for him with a driver's license and simplified medical requirements. He lost no time, got his sport pilot's license in record time and bought an airplane. He was a very happy man when I met him.

Day 4

I was ready to continue flying eastbound very early, at 6:30 am, before the surface winds became too strong. To the southwest, fog was pushing up the valley to within a few miles of the airport, but this did not affect me. I turned east in the clear dry desert air, climbed to 9500 ft and found some wave lift here and there.



Climbing out over the Mojave desert

The wind was about 25 kts from the southwest, and brought some smoke when I reached the Colorado River, which is the boundary between California and Arizona, south of Las Vegas.



Light smoke over the Colorado River

The terrain was rising with peaks between 7000 ft and 8000 ft, which meant I was flying not far from the surface at times. I flew over Prescott, north of Phoenix, and towards the Mogollon Plateau.

This plateau is at 8000 ft elevation and wooded with Juniper and pine trees, which made it look like areas in Oregon and the Cascade mountains rather than the typical Arizona desert. There was a steep drop to the south, and the very steep and rugged mountains there caught the wind and ripped the air to shreds.



Over the Mogollon Plateau, looking south

This strong turbulence made my flight very uncomfortable. Flying over the southern plateau edge I found ridge lift and climbed to 11500 ft, which did not reduce the turbulence. I had selected Show Low, elevation 6400 ft, as my next stop, because it had two runways, and the shorter one was within 30° of the wind direction. Surface winds were between 20-30 kts, which would have been too much cross wind for the light Pulsar. After 3 hours of flight I tried to descend, but the lift had pushed me higher despite the reduced power.



Show Low airport in Arizona

I ended up having to circle for a while near the airport to get rid of the extra altitude. The strong turbulence made it a fight almost down to the ground. I was relieved when finally all three wheels stayed on the ground. I taxied very carefully to a free spot on the crowded ramp. Mostly there were larger, heavier airplanes, including a group of turbine ag planes used for fire fighting. The only other airplanes I saw fly that day were a regional jet and several turboprops (PC-12), which had less trouble with the wind.

I was lucky to find an older man called Bob working on a Sonex in a hangar, who agreed to drive me and a couple of his empty gas cans to a car gas station a mile away so that the Pulsar could get unleaded fuel. During the drive, he told me stories about his flying adventures, some of them made me wonder how he had managed to survive to his present age.

I had not dared to remove the Pulsar cowlings to check the oil, because it would have been difficult to hang onto it in the strong wind. Everything that was not held firmly was blown away. For the same reason I did not put the canopy cover on. When I left the plane, the canopy was almost closed. When I came back, it was partly open. I wondered if someone had moved it, but realized later that the wind blowing over it produced so much lift that it basically floated weightless on its rails and the slightest push with a finger would start it moving forward and up. Now I was glad that I did not have Caro here, with its side-hinged canopy things would have been even more difficult. Fortunately the Pulsar sat quite stable on the ground, with its tail into the wind and the controls locked.

Day 5

The wind early the next morning was down to only 10-15 kts on the ground and I hurried up to take off on the longer runway before it could get worse again.



Flying eastbound over Arizona

Still flying east, I was getting pushed along with 25 to 30 kts from behind at 9500 ft.



Happy to be flying



The first clouds on this trip

I soon crossed the border to New Mexico where I flew south of Albuquerque over less rugged but still high elevation desert. South of Santa Fe where the mountains gave way to wide flat stretches of desert, I saw these mostly dry lakes, called Laguna del Perro.



Laguna del Perro, New Mexico

It only took me three hours to cross New Mexico and my next stop was thus in northwest Texas. I had picked a place called Hereford as the destination for the day, and as the name indicated, this was a real cow town. According to a local pilot, the cattle outnumbered the human population by about 10 to 1. This area southwest of Amarillo was perfectly flat and still windy, but at the lower elevation of 3800 ft. The only runway was fortunately right into the wind.



Texas is flat here, the Hereford airport is in the distance

When I taxied across the empty ramp, I looked for a good place to tie the Pulsar down. But all the spots that had hooks in the ground were suitable only for much larger airplanes. I finally parked in a place where the Pulsar could sit with the tail into the wind, and just tied the tail down. My ropes were too short to reach the wing anchor spots. Then I surveyed the airport and found a pilot who had been out flying on this Sunday with his family and was just storing his plane in a hangar. I asked him about tiedowns and availability of unleaded fuel. He immediately offered to help and we drove around on the ramp but all tiedown spots were the same oversize. He found two empty gas cans and drove me to a gas station nearby.

He had pointed out that the hangar in which his plane was stored did not belong to him. His hangar, which I had noticed looked badly damaged, had been transformed to this condition a couple months earlier by a severe storm. So I was eager to secure the Pulsar properly: I ended up unbolting chains from one of the empty tiedown spots and used them to extend my ropes. Fortunately no storms came through while I was there. The FBO building turned out to be one of the most comfortable ones of this trip, it made up for the somewhat smelly air outside (think thousands of cows).

Day 6

Soon after takeoff, the scenery became nicer and greener. I had to fly over a local area of low, broken clouds, but I got some good views of the Prairie Dog Town fork of the Red River with its spectacular cliffs.



Red River cliffs

The area around this part of the Red river is beautiful and should be worth visiting on the ground at some point. My course was now more to the southeast, and I did not bother to climb quite as high as before (7500 ft) because there were no more mountains in the way. Now I had mostly pastures and the first farmed fields under my wings.



Flying east over Texas

The wind abated or turned and so did my ground speed, from 120 kts down to 100 kts. After flying south of the airspace of Wichita Falls and seeing a few more lakes, I landed at the airport near the town of Bowie, the name used by the famous knife. Seeing something green and more trees after all this dry desert was great.



Bowie airport in Texas, surrounded by green fields and trees

It was a relief to only have light wind from the south, but it was hot and quite humid under the clear sky. There was only Avgas available here, but this being Texas, it was much cheaper than elsewhere. The west side of the airport had grass with many wild flowers and was bordered by trees and a small lake, unfortunately fenced. It was very pretty, and for the first time on this trip I heard many bird calls. The airport building was small and unattended, but a number of other airplanes stopped by for fuel.

Day 7

I left fairly early the next day while it was still cool. Again I climbed only to 7500 ft and actually had some headwind.



Still flying over Texas

My course took me just north of Dallas-Fort Worth with its large and for me restricted airspace. I had to keep looking for traffic going into this major hub and spotted several airplanes heading south at my altitude. There were more trees now, although I had seen that many of them were oak and Juniper, which can handle still arid conditions. I met up again with the now much fuller and wider Red river, which lived up to its color. It formed the border between Texas and Oklahoma. Just west of Texarkana the borders of three states met in one spot: Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas. I tried to get all three states on one picture.



Three-state picture, along the Red River

Soon after I crossed into Arkansas, the fields disappeared and there were mostly trees underneath me. Trees as far as I could see.



Arkansas, lots of trees

After 2.5 hours I reached Camden / Harrell. The airport represented the largest clearing in this area.



Camden airport, Arkansas

Once I was on the ground, I recognized the place and realized that I had been here before, about 10 years earlier. I had been ferrying my old SF28 motorglider from Oregon to Alabama, to its new owner, when I sold it after having finished building Caro 1.

The airport has an easily recognized landmark, a Boeing 727 parked on the ramp. A maintenance technician school located on the field uses it for realistic practice. It was hot here!



Boeing 727 on the ramp in Camden, Arkansas

Besides me, a transient Bonanza pilot was buying fuel. I parked the Pulsar off to one side on the ramp and was reluctant to buy Avgas before looking for ways to get hold of mogas. I could see a car gas station on the other side of the airport fence, less than half a mile away. I walked along a row of new hangars, in one of them were some workers were still in the process of completing them. I asked the one who looked like the boss about empty gas cans. He was very willing to help, and started looking for one, when a young man who turned out to be the airport attendant, came by and heard about the issue. He immediately offered me the use of a new looking crew car and some gas cans they had in a storage area. So I drove away well equipped and bought food for myself and the Pulsar.

Even though the airport had a high fence all around, the friendly guys showed me how to get off and back into the airport, with hidden buttons and access codes. The airport building was large and airconditioned, set up like a small passenger terminal. It was completely uninhabited aside from myself.



Walk along the airport boundary in the evening

Thunderstorms developed in the humid evening air, so after a walk along the edge of the woods I had a dry place to retreat to. The drawback of the hot humid conditions were hungry and aggressive mosquitoes that successfully robbed me of some blood.

Day 8

After a long row of days flying east it was time to turn north. This meant the south wind was now a tailwind again. I wanted to do some sight seeing, so I only climbed to 3000 ft and was flying

shorter distances. I had several options of nice looking airports to choose from, so I just took a look from above to see if I liked it before committing to land. I stayed west of Little Rock and flew again over a lot of trees until I reached the Arkansas River.



Arkansas River

Just south of it was a small airport with the enticing name “Petit Jean”. It sat on top of a mountain, with a small lake at one end of the runway, and was listed as unattended.



Petit Jean airport, Arkansas

I flew over it, and all that was there were two small hangars and a very small ramp. I hesitated about landing there, it was maybe not quite so suitable for an overnight stop. I decided to continue to my second choice, Clinton, at the foot of the mountains a few miles further north. This one looked very nice from above, so I landed there. There were high trees on both ends and rising terrain on one end, but the 4000 ft runway was long enough for the Pulsar, and the elevation was only 500 ft. What caught my eye was a long row of something stacked along half the length of the runway, on the east side of the airport. I could not quite tell what it was, but it looked like a lot of wings.



Dawson's airplane scrap yard, Clinton airport (a small part of it)

After I landed it immediately was obvious that this was the largest airplane junkyard I had ever come across and it was in the process of expanding. After tying the Pulsar down on the wide, cracked, empty ramp I walked over to investigate. There were fuselages lying side by side, wings and twisted remains of unfortunate accidents. The most common types seemed to be Cessna 152's and crop duster planes. While I was there, two trucks arrived with presumably more damaged airframes.

There was an airport building, very modern, airconditioned and open for pilots, but it was not an FBO but rather a meeting place for the town council. No one else was there and I had it to myself.

On the south end, several large hangars belonging to the salvage company called Dawson contained airplanes that were being disassembled, but also some that were getting repaired. I asked about some parts that I might need for my planes and was shown their inventory. While I did not find a suitable part, I told them of my trip and was offered a car and the prospect of an empty gas can for another mogas expedition. The people there were really helpful, but no one could find any of their gas cans. Disappointed, I walked away, along the open hangars. At the last and smallest ones I decided to take a look for myself, and was successful in finding an empty gas can. Triumphantly I returned to the office building with it and was quickly handed the keys to the car. After a visit to the small town on the other side of the airport and the small creek, both my stomach and the gas can were full and ready for another flight.



Evening at the Clinton airport

Fog in the morning delayed me a bit, but gave me the time to go for a walk.

The whole area was very beautiful with much nature, and it would have been good to spend more time there exploring it. I had never seen and heard such a wide variety of birds in one place. They obviously liked it there, with some open pastures, many trees and plenty of water and insects as food. But for me the heat and the mosquitoes would make it advisable to come back next time earlier in the year.



Lake near Clinton airport



Clinton area, morning walk

Day 9

The next flight took me early across the low mountains to the north of Clinton in clear air and with a light tail wind. I flew over a place called Gaston which I had visited many years earlier but had good memories of it. It was a grass field alongside a river on the east side of a dammed lake. The river water flowed from the bottom of the lake and therefore was very cold, but the trout liked it.



Gaston grass runway, right side of the river, Arkansas

There was a resort and restaurant and the owner had been very friendly towards visiting pilots. Great hiking trails radiated out from the airport. Only a short distance north of Gaston was the border to Missouri.

I continued further north to what I thought might be another interesting airport, called Camdenton.



Camdenton airport, Missouri

Set in low, rolling hills and much forest, after landing it became obvious that this place was a fly-in destination for wealthy people visiting the nearby large lake and its attractions. Quite the opposite from tiny Clinton. The only thing that was small at the Camdenton airport was the FBO building, left over from a time when this actually was a sleepy remote place without the recent development. All the hangars looked new and huge and contained “heavy iron”, that is twins, large new singles, and possibly jets.

After parking, I found that I needed to tighten a clamp on the Pulsar, but did not have the right screw driver. I went looking at the hangars, but no one was around. The small FBO was attended by two young guys who were happy to lend me the tool, but they were busy servicing their client’s planes with fuel and tiedowns. It was actually quite busy here. Even though I felt a bit out of place, everyone was helpful and nice. Fortunately I did not need fuel, as Avgas was the only stuff available. In the evening there were thunderstorms building up to the west, but the airport did not get hit.

Day 10

After takeoff in the morning I turned slightly west for the first time, but was still heading mainly north. I stayed east of Kansas City and halfway to my next stop, Trenton, MO, I met up with an old acquaintance, the Missouri River, which I had crossed many times much further west. This far east it looked full, slow and well tamed with its shores bordered by trees. For a while there were some high clouds, then it cleared up.



Approaching Trenton

Only when I got close to Trenton, my next stop, low scattered clouds developed almost at pattern altitude and turned the air bumpy. After I landed they became broken and provided shade, but later burned off. This was a small, well maintained airport close to a small town, but except for two workers driving around mowing the abundant grass it was deserted. I quickly gave up hope of gaining access to mogas and resigned to pumping Avgas into the tanks. As usual after shutdown, I removed the cowling to let the engine cool down quicker.



Pulsar, reluctantly approaching the Avgas pump

The open FBO building had everything I needed, including noisy airconditioning that helped me cool down after a long walk. Only in the evening some life stirred at this airport. An older couple pulled a pretty white and red Cessna 152 from one of the few hangars and went for a half hour flight in the calm evening air. When I talked to them after their return, they mentioned that this airport was subject to frequent flooding. It sounded like this was almost a yearly event.

The temperature just before sunset was quite pleasant for sitting outside in the shade of the building. A truck pulling a boxy trailer pulled up besides it and I was wondering what might be inside. It was soon revealed when the young man who drove it jumped out and opened it.



Unwrapping the powered parachute

He was curious about my plane and my trip and told me that he liked to fly his powered parachute at night. While the sun was setting, he went about his careful preparations of setting everything up. He positioned it on the taxiway, spread the chute, and with a burst of power inflated the canopy. After only a short roll, it lifted off and climbed steeply into the clear, darkening sky. I still heard the engine for a while, fading into the distance. It must have been fully dark by the time he returned.

Day 11

I had agreed to meet the potential buyers of a SF28 motorglider in Nebraska and inspect the plane, because I had owned the same model for about 20 years and knew it inside out. Because this model is very rare, I was probably the most qualified person in the USA to do this. I decided to fly part of the distance to York in Nebraska on this day and the rest the next day when we would meet. I selected Crete near Lincoln, Nebraska as my next stop. It was not that far, today's flight would be around 150 nm, the sky was clear and the visibility was good. I stayed fairly low, around 3000 ft, westbound, with a light headwind. There were a lot of corn fields underneath now, and fewer trees.



The ground was very wet here

North of Kansas City, I crossed the Missouri River again, east to west this time, into Nebraska. Not far to the south of me was the border to Kansas. When I got within 6 nm of Crete, I heard a helicopter on the radio who announced that he was departing to the southeast, at a lower altitude than mine. I was approaching from the east, so I thought I should be clear of him. A couple of minutes later I saw him flashing by underneath me, not real close fortunately, but I had expected him to be further away. I was about to turn downwind at Crete when I heard him on the radio again, asking me where I was. I informed him of my position, and that he had passed me a minute earlier. It was apparent that he had not seen me. I am getting used to this.



Crete airport, Nebraska

I landed uneventfully, tied the plane down and tried to get into what I thought was the airport building. The door had a number lock, but no note about what the code was. I tried a second door, which was also locked. Frustrated, I went looking for help and found someone in a hangar a few rows away and asked him about the door code. It was supposed to be the airport frequency, but when I tried it, it did not work. I was about to walk away and fly to a more accessible airport, but hesitated. I looked around and noticed another hangar, almost hidden behind two huge fuel storage tanks. Might the airport building be in there? There were two more doors with code locks, and here it worked.

I was relieved and made myself at home in the nice pilot's lounge. As usual, I had the place to myself. There was a counter with a binder and car keys, inviting pilots to use one of the three crew cars, all of which were ex-police cars. I did not have gas cans available this time, so I drove into the town two miles away to just find a restaurant.



Crete Medical helicopter base

Later I found out that the other building was the headquarters of the helicopter medical service. No wonder it was locked when they were away on an assignment. Their helicopter returned after a few hours and I was able to talk to one of their crew members about their work.

Day 12

The next morning started cloudy with increasing wind followed by a strong thunderstorm and rain blowing sideways. From inside the airport building, I watched the Pulsar getting a good bath. And this was the day when I was supposed to meet the other guys in York. We were in contact by phone, and they were already on their way flying down from North Dakota in a Mooney. The weather was much better in York, but unless the stuff moved off soon from Crete, I would not be flying anywhere. I considered borrowing a car and driving the rest of the way, but fortunately the storm moved away to the east just in time.



Finally the rain stopped

As soon as it stopped raining, I got the Pulsar ready and took off into shifting winds and under an overcast sky. It rapidly improved to the west, and after a short flight I managed to land in York just a few minutes before the Mooney arrived.



York airport, Nebraska

I used the time while the potential buyers had a meeting with the seller to use yet another ex-police car to drive into town for food, and this time with gas cans. The first three gas stations I visited only had either Diesel or 87 octane, both unsuitable for my engine. Finally I found a fourth one, which had the desired 91 octane.



Pulsar and Mooney at York, Nebraska

The inspection of the motorglider went well, with a few small issues found, but overall it was in good shape, with low hours.

Day 13

This morning was almost a repeat of the previous day's weather, with low clouds and rain. It moved off quite soon and it was clear to the west, so I was soon under way with only some high clouds above me. Now I could fly almost straight west. The corn fields soon gave way to open range and very widely spaced ranches. I was definitely leaving the east behind. To me, Nebraska connects the humid east with the (mostly) dry west. It is a gradual transition, from lush green grass and forests to arid prairie and higher elevations.



Heading west over Nebraska

With the ground speed of 110 kts and only light headwind, I was able to cross the rest of Nebraska and reach Torrington, just across the border in Wyoming next to the North Platte River. I had landed there several times before so I knew what to expect. It was pleasantly cooler and drier than further east, and I was back at higher elevation, 4200 ft in this case. They had Avgas at the airport, but I knew the closest car gas station was less than a mile away. There was a curtesy car, and I went on my usual round of checking for open hangars for someone to borrow gas cans from.

I quickly found what I needed. One can from a pilot who had just landed in his Carbon Cub. He told me that this was the third one he had built, because he kept wanting to change something and was finally happy with this latest one. It was only 2 years old and looked brand new. He was an airline pilot living in Cheyenne and flying out of Denver, so he must have been driving a lot between the different airports.

The other gas can came from the hangar opposite of the Cub, from Larry and his wife Toni, who were busy changing a cylinder on their Cessna after the compression had been lost on the old one. I knew Larry from my previous visits, and we caught up on what was going on and I briefed them on my trip. The weather stayed clear with a light wind from the east, so I had high hopes to be able to cross the rest of Wyoming the next day.

Day 14

I was able to get a very early start, no rain this time. They had quite a lot of rain in Torrington earlier in the week, so everything still looked sort of green. The initial light tailwind turned into a light headwind during my climb to clear the first serious mountains. Now I had to get back to at least 9500 ft msl, and for the most part this meant flying at less than 2000 ft above the ground. Fortunately the Pulsar handles the high density altitudes rather well.

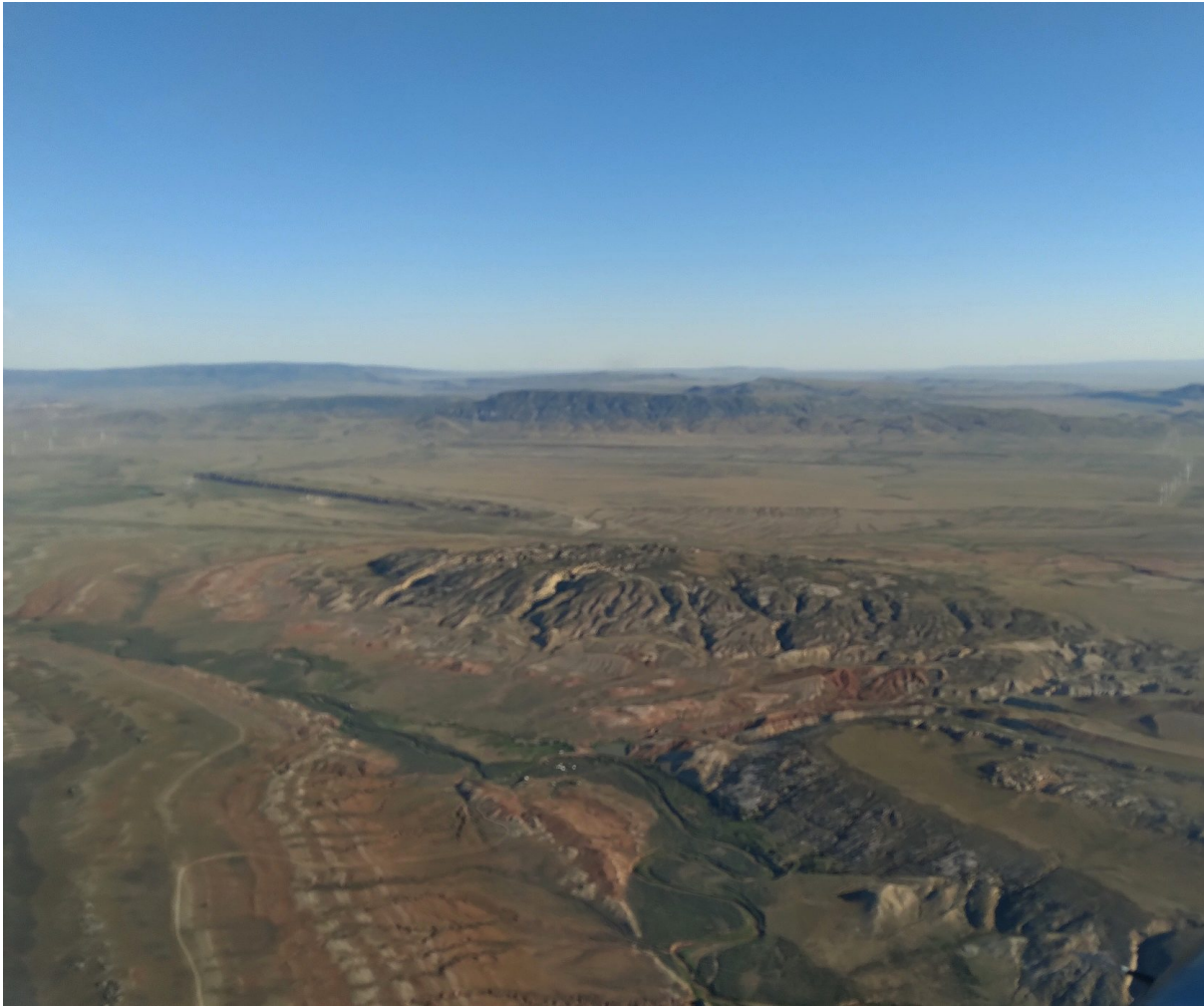


Eastern Wyoming, still flat



Eastern Wyoming, it is getting dryer

This part of the flight was over a route I knew well from other Oshkosh trips, and I recognized a number of land marks. There is a lot of wide open space, few airports, roads or settlements.



A lot of empty desert

It was smooth and clear, really a pleasure, especially with a ground speed of a little over 100 kts. Many times I have had a lot less than that flying westbound. I was confident that I could make it all the way to my next stop, Logan in Utah. I intended to visit friends there that I only get to see about once a year. And it was sort of on the way to a place in Idaho, where one of my customers had his shop, which I wanted to visit as well.



Wyoming windmills

The wind mills provided a great wind speed and direction indicator, visible from a distance. They showed light wind from the southwest when I passed them.



Almost looks like upside down shingles



I discovered a road!



Finally flying past the south shore of Bear Lake

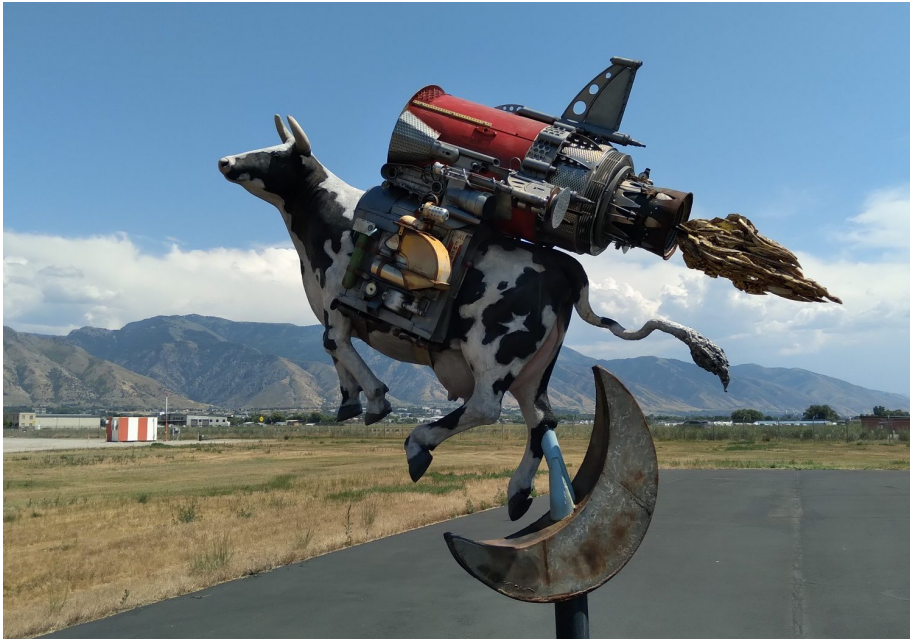
The highest obstacle came last, the mountains to the east of the Cache Valley, so I had to stay high until I was within a few miles of my destination.



Looking at the Logan airport from the north, Cache Valley, Utah

Crossing the last ridge it was like discovering a small, neatly farmed green oasis in the middle of the high brown desert. I overflew the airport and circled to the west to get rid of several thousand feet of altitude. I managed to fit myself into the busy pattern with the student traffic and touched down after 3 hours and 40 minutes, the longest leg of this trip.

I had to wait until Ryan got off work, but the reward was mogas, food, and the discovery of this statue.



“Rocket Cow”, or “Cows can fly as well”

Day 15

Early in the morning, I could hear the calls of Sandhill cranes from the direction of the long runway. I did not want a repeat of last year’s near miss with those large birds on the runway, so I scanned the length of it with the binoculars which I had brought for that purpose. There were none on the hard surface, so my takeoff was uneventful. My next stop, Caldwell in Idaho required a northwest heading. Getting out of the 4450 ft elevation valley meant I had to climb back to at least 9500 ft for a while.



After takeoff from Logan

The sky was overcast and it was a bit hazy, but dry. The wind was from the southwest at my altitude. I had to cross under two bands of thermally very active clouds, one with slight rain, that made my ride very bumpy. It only smoothed out once I reached the flat Snake River valley in Idaho.



The Snake River valley opens up in front of me

I descended to a lower altitude when there were no more mountains in my way. Then I had to skirt some restricted airspace and Boise's class C until I had Caldwell in sight. About 30 nm earlier I had left the last clouds behind, so it was getting hot in the cockpit. There was not too much going on at the airport at this still early time, it was only 9:00 am when I touched down. I met Justin at his hangar later and had the use of one of his cars. I spent some time inspection his work, he had made good progress with the engine installation in his Spitfire replica.

Day 16

This day was a rest day for the Pulsar, who had been in the air with me every day since the start of this trip. Instead, after some work with Justin, we took his T-6 up and flew around the area for an hour.



Justin is getting the T-6 ready to fly

Day 17

I was hoping to get an early start for the last flight home, but this was prevented again by rain in the morning. I had to wait until after nine before I could leave. I climbed southbound out from under the clouds above me, and soon had only mountains and dry desert on all sides.



Leaving Caldwell, Idaho, flying southwest

Because of the expected headwind, I needed a fuel stop on the way somewhere. I selected Winnemucca in Nevada, where I had not been before.



The clouds are gone, but the turbulence increases

An hour before I reached it, the air became turbulent. The closer I got, the worse it was. The wind and thermals had picked up, both together made the flight rather uncomfortable. I flew past a

black patch on the side of the mountain, later I heard that there had been a fire there the day before. Grass and weeds were the only victims.



Burned patch of desert just north of Winnemucca, Nevada

I listened on the airport frequency as I approached it, and heard a helicopter land ahead of me. I did not receive their AWOS, but it was not hard to tell that here as well there was a strong surface wind from the southwest. I landed on runway 20, which was almost into the wind.



Over the airport, looking south at another fire

Winnemucca lies in a wide valley, elevation 4300 ft, surrounded by gently rising brown mountains. Another fire was sending up smoke into the sky about 10 nm south of the field. There was nothing there, they could have just let it burn, but about four or five firefighting aircraft were busy taking care of it and several other fires in the area. I filled my tanks with Avgas, briefly toured the very nice FBO building which was attended by two friendly people and took off again.

Now my fight started. The first 1000 ft of climb went well, then I must have been in the lee of a mountain and remained stuck at 7500 ft for a while. The mountain in front of me was higher than me, so I started to fly around it until I exited the sink hole. The cold, unstable air in combination with the wind produced difficult conditions for a small, light airplane. In a series of ups and downs I stepped my way up to more altitude. When I was flying past the Black Rock desert, I was able to fly over the mountains instead of around them and by the time I reached 9500 ft I started to relax. Every time I found lift, I pulled up and tried to gain as much altitude as I could get from it.

I had decided not to try crossing the highest ridge of the Sierra Nevada at Lake Tahoe, because there could be strong downdrafts when coming from the lee side. Instead I stayed well north of Reno and flew up the gentler slopes over Nervino. It worked out as planned. The higher I climbed, the more the flow smoothed out until I found smooth wave lift.



Lenticular clouds, looking south, showing the location of the strongest wave lift

Just before reaching the highest wooded and rocky peaks, which were around 9000 ft elevation, I was briefly as high as 13500 ft, a very comfortable altitude over that hostile terrain. All the while the wind speed had increased until I had >25 kts on the nose.



Looking northwest while over the highest terrain

Once past the peaks I started a slow descent towards home, now on the west side of the Sierra and still in smooth air. Taking this route together with the fuel stop probably added >40 miles to my distance to fly, but it was worth it. I concluded the day and a great trip with a smooth landing in Calaveras after 4:20 h in the air.

It was a great experience, flying around half the country like a gypsy, not exactly knowing what the next day would bring or where I would land. I was glad to have had the extra speed of the Pulsar, or I would have had to spend a lot more than 30 hours in flight to cover the same distance. Total flight time was 36.5 h in three different airplanes, and 3772 nm (6986 km) flown. I want to thank all the people who helped me on this trip and made it more fun.

States landed: CA, AZ, TX, AR, MO, NE, WY, UT, ID, NV

States overflown: NM, OR