

October Flight to Arizona

10/10/25

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An opportunity presented itself to go on a multi-day flying trip in Caro 1 in early October. No urgent work required me to stay at home, the weather looked good for a flight southeast and Caro 1 was doing well. I planned to go for 4-5 days only this time. Other than a general area where I wanted to go, I did not make any firm plans but let circumstances dictate my stops. The reason: when flying a small airplane VFR plans don't work out as intended anyway.

I started out from my home airport Calaveras (southeast of Sacramento) by flying southeast along the west side of the Sierra Nevada. The initial 3 kt head wind soon turned into about 20 kts on the nose, which slowed me down more than I had hoped for. I only climbed to 7500 ft in the clear sky.



Initial climb

The water had worn away most of what must have been large plains. Only small remnants can be seen in this picture. I crossed from the central valley over the Tehachapi pass, a route I knew very well by now.

The Rosamond Skypark airport looked like a destination that I could reach within a reasonable flight time. It lies in the Antelope Valley, the flat part of the Mojave desert, just north of Lancaster and Palmdale at an elevation of about 2400 ft. Some of its residents work at nearby Edwards Air Force base.

Rosamond was established in 1877 as a townsite owned by the Southern Pacific Railroad. The first local industries were mining and cattle. During the 1890s, gold was discovered in the area, quickly drawing miners and prospectors. After the initial boom, gold mining gradually declined.



Looking at the Willow Springs race track with windmills in the background.

Willow Springs lies west of Rosamond and was a watering hole for stagecoach travelers for generations, though its springs have since dried up. Willow Springs Raceway is near Rosamond, which hosts a variety of motor racing events, attracting people from all over Southern California and beyond.

The Rosamond airport is a private residential airpark open to the public, which means that pilots can own a house and hangar right at the airport.



Rosamond airport

You can see the runway in the right lower part, the wider black strip above it is a taxiway that connects a lot of hangars and homes to the runway. At the left (east) end of the runway, another taxiway extends further east, with more homes on the side. I landed after 3 hours, just before noon. There was almost no wind and it was pleasantly warm.

The airport only had a small ramp in poor condition, apparently not many visitors are expected. What must have been an FBO building had been renovated and taken over by a machine shop business. Only the restrooms were available for transient pilots. This lack of indoor space was more than compensated tables and benches outside and by the restaurant directly at the airport, with its own ramp, where I had a much needed lunch. Apparently many of the residents also ate here.



The sign in the restaurant's yard reads: "Rattlesnakes have been observed – Please stay on sidewalks". Nice try to keep people off their landscaping (I did not see a rattlesnake on the whole trip).

After lunch I explored the hangars. Here is a typical example, many others did not have a fence between hangar and taxiway.



Rosamond Skypark house with large hangar and airplane parked between the trees.

The most interesting open hangar was inhabited by a retired guy with four airplanes: two projects (Velocity and Osprey) and two flyable ones (Comanche and Vagabond). He was just working on finishing a beautiful Osprey, which is a wood amphibian with two side by side seats in the front and the engine behind the cockpit mounted on a pylon above the wings. The other project was a Velocity with a Subaru engine and a four-bladed Airmaster pusher propeller. He had already flown this airplane and liked the prop, but after an engine failure and forced landing the plane needed extensive rebuilding. This was almost done, with a new engine installed, but again he had problems with it and was trying to figure out why it would not run smooth.

This provided us with quite some topics to chat about. It ended when I mentioned my own VW engine and its preference for unleaded fuel. He had some empty gas cans sitting in his hangar, and soon one of them, filled with 5 gallons from the local gas station, augmented the fuel level in Caro's tank. Other pilots stopped by, curious about the motorglider, and I soon got to know more people in this interesting flying community.

The next morning, the sky was as clear as it can be expected in the dry desert air, and I hoped that the wind had maybe changed direction. I was soon disappointed, it was still the same strong southeasterly flow. I still had a 20 kts headwind flying east, past dry lake beds and Edwards Air Force base.



Runway marked “02” in the sand of a dry lake. Note the wet trail from the bottom of the picture, threatening to erase the runway.



As I made slow progress over the high desert, I had plenty of time to admire the rocks and sand, which is all you can see in southeastern California. The dark areas are more recent volcanic rocks, the lighter areas are eroded granite.

I first climbed to 7500 ft and endured the headwind for a while, with a ground speed around 73 kts. After a while I decided it might be worth a try to climb another 2000 ft to see if that improved anything. Fortunately it did reduce the headwind component down to 13 kts.

I wanted to land at an airport near the Colorado river, which forms the boundary between California and Arizona. At first I considered Sun Valley near Bullhead City, but when I found out that the wind on the ground there was gusting to 33 kts, I changed my mind. A much

better alternative turned out to be 75 nm further south, the Avi Suquilla airport near the town of Parker, Arizona which reported almost no wind.



Approaching Parker from the west. The black mountain in the background is called P-mountain, because someone has marked it with a huge “P”, visible from the air.



Looking south past Parker, there are the only green fields in the area.

The town's name and origin began when a post office called Parker was established in 1871, at Parker's Landing and the site of the Parker Indian Agency, named for Ely Parker, on the Colorado River Indian Reservation, four miles downriver from the site of the railroad bridge of the modern town, to serve the Indian agency. Parkers Landing was established on the river as the place to land and pick up cargo and personnel for the Indian Agency and the U. S. Army detachment that was stationed there at Camp Colorado from 1864 to 1869. Camp Colorado was abandoned after sparks from a departing steamboat rapidly burned down the brush huts of the officers of the garrison.



The airport belongs to a Colorado River Indian tribe and is very large. I could not find anyone to explain its name “Avi Suquilla”. It is almost at sea level, and thus much lower and hotter than the surrounding desert. The only rain it receives usually falls in August during the “monsoon”, but it is less than anywhere else.



On the ground, sharing the ramp with helicopters and a number of other small airplanes

This airport is a base for a couple of medical transport helicopter services. This time, I found an airport building open to pilots and a bored looking airport manager. I asked him if there was a place where I could eat nearby and also about the availability of unleaded fuel. He immediately sprang into action. The airport only sold Avgas, so I took him up on his offer that he would drive me into town to a restaurant, pick me up when I was done,

round up a couple of gas cans and return to buy mogas. I was happy, Caro was happy and Everett was happy to have been helpful. What a service!

When I told him that I intended to fly in the direction of Phoenix next, he mentioned a ghost town in the vicinity, which I could look at from the air.

“Fly to P-mountain, follow the asphalt road north until it turns into a dirt road, when it splits up take the left one and keep following it until you get there,” he described the route.

But first I intended to go down to the river. A map in the airport office provided the direction, which was simple, but a bit of a walk in the by now 33°C heat.



First I found the Headgate dam, just north of Parker



Colorado River up close

Upriver from the dam, the water was deep, clear and cool and there were quite a few boats on it. After climbing down the steep bank, I was able to submerge my legs and cool off for a while in the shade of some small trees.



Looking north, Lake Havasu and the city next to it with the same name. There also is an airport, but not as close to the river as Avi Suquilla

The next morning, I was weary of the head wind and selected a destination only 75 nm away, Wickenburg, north of Phoenix. After takeoff I followed the directions to the ghost town, and found the first part of the road, but then I had to climb because of the rising terrain. I lost track of which dirt road was the correct one and did not find the abandoned town.



I only needed to climb to 5000 ft to clear the terrain and had less headwind than expected.



Wickenburg airport, looking east

Things looked fairly green there, it must have rained recently. The runway, at an elevation of almost 2400 ft and the direction 23-05, has quite a slope to it, with direction 23 being uphill. For my landing, I selected this direction because the wind was calm. The ramp and airport building were at the south end (right side in this picture). But before I got there, I noticed another large ramp with many tiedown spots, so I parked there. Then I walked along the row of hangars towards the airport building, I noticed an open one, and of course I had to take a look.



GlaStar project in one of the hangars

What I found was another airplane homebuilder working on his airplane. He also was a retired guy, and said he was about 90% done, and as is common knowledge among builders, this means there is still another 90% to go before it is finished. After 20 years of slow but persistent build time, the airframe looked fairly far along, but most of the systems installations were still missing.

The town itself had a varied history. In 1862, a gold strike on the Colorado River near present-day Yuma brought prospectors, who searched for minerals throughout central Arizona. A German named Henry Wickenburg was one of the first prospectors. His efforts were rewarded with the discovery of the Vulture Mine, from which more than \$30 million worth of gold has been dug.

Ranchers and farmers soon built homes along the fertile plain of the Hassayampa River. Together with the miners, they founded the town of Wickenburg in 1863. Wickenburg was supplied from the Colorado River, by steamboat, then over the La Paz–Wickenburg Road by wagons and pack mules. Wickenburg in turn became a supply point for the mines and army posts in the interior of Arizona Territory. As the town grew, conflicts developed with the Yavapai natives, who rejected a treaty signed by their chiefs, effectively breaking the treaty. When the American Civil War began, the Federal troops were all withdrawn and the settlements were left unprotected.

The small town of Wickenburg went through many trials and tribulations in its first decades, surviving the Indian Wars including repeating Indian raids, outlaws, mine closures, drought, and a disastrous flood in 1890 when the Walnut Creek Dam burst, killing nearly 70 residents. In spite of such challenging circumstances, the town continued to grow. Its prosperity was ensured with the coming of the railroad in 1895. The historic train depot today houses the Wickenburg Chamber of Commerce and Visitor Center. As of 2007, however, only freight trains pass through Wickenburg; passenger trains ended their runs in the 1960s.

After my landing, a steady stream of small training airplanes began to arrive to practice landings, interrupted only by a Citation jet that landed and dropped off some passengers.



I went for a walk in the desert and saw my first Saguaro cactus up close since a long time ago. It would not be a proper visit to Arizona without seeing some of those giants. Up on top of the hill in the extension on the runway I watched some of the training airplanes which were continuously flying around the pattern since my arrival. They were still using runway 23 and cleared the rising terrain by maybe 150 ft, which is not much. It would have been better to land and take off in the other direction.



Looking north at the runway of Wickenburg

After my return to the airport I noticed another inhabited hangar. Here I found Peter, owner of the shop and an A&P mechanic of 40 years, working on two Cessna 185 projects for his customers, and his dog who greeted me like a long lost friend. Peter's own project airplane, a Cessna 140, lay waiting for his attention to complete its restoration in the adjacent hangar. He really enjoyed working on airplanes, but regretted that he could not find helpers for his

business, because the young people these days seemed to have little interest in this kind of work. After hearing about my trip and that I was flying a motorglider which I had designed and built myself, he wanted to take a look at it. He gave me a ride in his truck back to my remote ramp, with a detour through town to get car gas for Caro. He got to see Caro and I got to see some of the town. Because of the mild climate in winter, its summer population of about 8000 people tripled in the cold season.

It was time for me to begin the return trip to stay within my limited window of good weather. Clouds sent north by a distant Pacific hurricane were promising thunderstorm activity later in the day. October is rather late in the year and the days were getting short, so I was lucky to be able to do this trip at all.

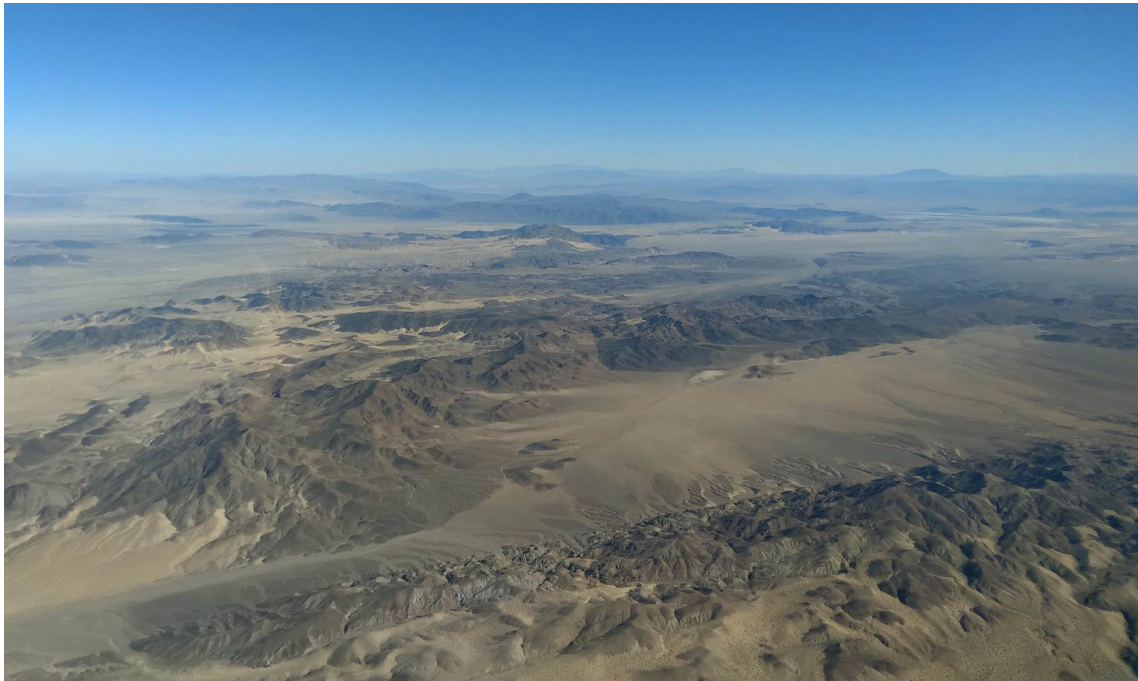
I hoped that, flying in the opposite direction this time, I would finally be able to find a tailwind, but it hardly ever works that way. I started out without setting a firm destination until I knew what winds would be. At first there was not much of anything. The wind direction at higher altitude turned out to be mostly from the south and was therefore a crosswind. I climbed to 8500 ft, but the best I could do was 93 kts ground speed, which was several kts short of my true airspeed.

I wondered if on my outbound flight, had I turned around immediately and gone back in the opposite direction, that I could have somehow tricked the wind gods and managed to have the exact wind speed I had minutes before on the nose now pushing me?? Probably not.



More desert

I crossed the Colorado River east to west this time and calculated times and distances for my next stop. Tehachapi was easy, but maybe I could go further.



Back over California

I was approaching the Barstow airport, which is the first suitable airport for landing and refueling west of the river, when I noticed the symbol of another airplane on my right on the moving map display. It was at the same altitude and slowly converging on my course, nearly flying at the same speed, distance about three miles. I scanned the sky to my right, but could not see it. Slowly its screen symbol came closer, but still I could not see it. The sky was clear, the visibility was great and at 2 miles distance I ought to have been able to spot it. It was slowly pulling ahead of me, still converging. No joy. Was this airplane painted in the same light blue color as the sky, so that it was camouflaged? Not even a small reflection of the sun gave its position away while its symbol on the screen showed it to be quite near me. I never saw the other airplane. I may not have found the ghost town, but maybe I found a ghost airplane.

A little later, while flying through what is almost a corridor between the Edwards restricted air space and the mountains to the south, another airplane symbol on the screen caught my attention. It was inside the restricted airspace (which probably was inactive due to the government shutdown, I did not ask), and 2000 ft above my altitude. It just had changed direction and was coming from the right towards my flight path. Nothing wrong with that. Then it started descending, until it was only 1000 ft above me. I kept an eye on it and also looked for it outside. After some more maneuvers on his part it soon was positioned about a mile behind me, 800 ft higher, flying in the same direction as me. This was getting uncomfortable. If he had not seen me and continued descending, he might fly right into me from behind. Typically an airplane that is low directly in front is hard to see because the nose of one's airplane hides it.

To find out if he saw me and was following me deliberately, I made a turn to the right to get away from him. A minute later he changed direction as well and was again pointed directly at me, still 800 ft above and slightly behind. Had he seen me and wanted to take a closer look at Caro? I changed back to my original heading and he seemed to do the same, still staying behind me. Next I tried a sudden steep turn to the left, and this time I caught a glimpse of the

belly of his airplane out of the corner of my eye. He was also in a steep left turn, and kept turning until he was flying in the opposite direction, heading east. I was sure now that he had seen me and was relieved when I saw on the screen that he was finally gone. That was weird.

Flying due west for another ten minutes, I finally reached the end of the restricted airspace and was able to turn northwest on my new course. This immediately improved my ground speed to over 100 kts, for the first time on this trip. I discarded the idea of landing in Tehachapi and selected Delano, 75 miles further as the next stop. I caught some turbulence and wave action from the south wind while crossing the pass, then I was clear of the mountains and ready to descend into the central valley.



Delano airport (left)

Here the air was hazier and I landed uneventfully at the Delano airport, which I had to myself for most of the day. The airport building had two young guys as attendants, even though they had nothing to do. One of them gave me directions to the closest food places, which were easy to walk to.

Afterwards I continued my walk and found a park and a museum provided by the Delano Historic Society. There were several old buildings, farm equipment, tools, appliances and vehicles on display outdoors. They could have added a couple of abandoned airplanes from the airport which looked like they had been sitting there for decades.

The airport was definitely underused, with many T-hangars sitting empty and only a couple of small airplanes passing through. A helicopter and a King Air picking up some passengers completed the day's activities.

Thursday was my trip's last day, all that was left was to fly home. The wind helped me a long for a change and sky was still clear until I was almost home, here I saw the first clouds in the sky and the temperature dropped.



Almost there

I had no airplane issues on this trip, the flying was slow but very pleasant and leisurely. I did not fly long distances, but rather focused on find new and interesting places to land and spend the day at. Staying in warmer weather was also a goal, before fall set in. I met nice and interesting people (and one very friendly dog). I can't wait to do this again, but I suppose it will have to wait until next year.