



A SEAPLANE PILOTS ASSOCIATION PUBLICATION • NO. 222 • \$3.95

WaterFlying

JUL/AUG 2017

Coastal Alaska *Daytripping*



Cross-Country Kitfox
AirVenture's SeaVenture



To Back, S

Taking time in an am



o AirVenture and Slowly

phib Kitfox to smell the... smoke

Story and photos by Joel Mapes

The windscreen in my Kitfox filled with smoke but, fortunately, it was outside the cockpit, primarily due to the forest fires burning in western Montana. I was headed east, to EAA's AirVenture Oshkosh, at 9500 feet near Mullen Pass, Montana, and could see the ground looking straight down. Yes, the visibility was VFR, although in this case VFR stood for Very Fire Restricted. Wanting a definite horizon, I pushed in the throttle on my Kitfox on Clamar amphibious floats and slowly climbed to 11,500 feet MSL.

This journey to the Vette Seaplane Base on Lake Winnebago in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, began many years ago. After getting my private certificate in 1982, I happily flew asphalt to asphalt until June of 2000, when I earned my seaplane rating at Hurst Landing on the Columbia River in Wenatchee, Washington. I was hooked.

Realizing that the only way I could afford a seaplane was to build it myself, I completed my Kitfox 5 in 2006 and flew it as a taildragger until 2013 when I installed Full Lotus 1650 straight floats. It was back and forth between wheels and floats for a couple years until I bought a condo hangar at Bremerton National Airport (KPWT), and then my wife suggested I buy amphibious floats. Deal!

So 2017 became the year to finally fly my homebuilt to AirVenture. Weeks of flight planning, making reservations, meeting new friends online, and prepping the plane culminated in launching from KPWT headed to Coeur D'Alene, Idaho (KCOE), for the first fuel stop. Cleared through Seattle's Class B airspace, I breezed over the morning rush hour, with a dozen airliners taxiing out for departure at Sea-Tac.

The Morning View

Morning flights over the Cascade Mountain Range are incredible, with views of Mt. Rainier, Mt. St. Helens, and Mt. Adams, not to mention the vast

array of mountains in between. Smooth, cool air became warm and bumpy by the time I was passing through Spokane's airspace and descending into KCOE. After stretching my legs and fueling the plane, I launched for Three Forks, Montana (9S5), headed to my first overnight at the Broken Spur Motel. Needless to say, it was a slow climb to 11,500 feet in a float-equipped Kitfox

Needless to say, it was a slow climb to 11,500 feet in a float-equipped Kitfox pulled by a 100-hp Rotax 912 ULS.

pulled by a 100-hp Rotax 912 ULS swinging a 70-inch Warp Drive three-blade prop.

Arriving early evening at 9S5, I grabbed my bag, buttoned up the plane for the night, and walked the mile to the Broken Spur Motel for some well-needed sleep. Tach time for the day was 6.9 hours. Up early for the long second day, one of the friendly local pilots took my photo as I prepped for launch.

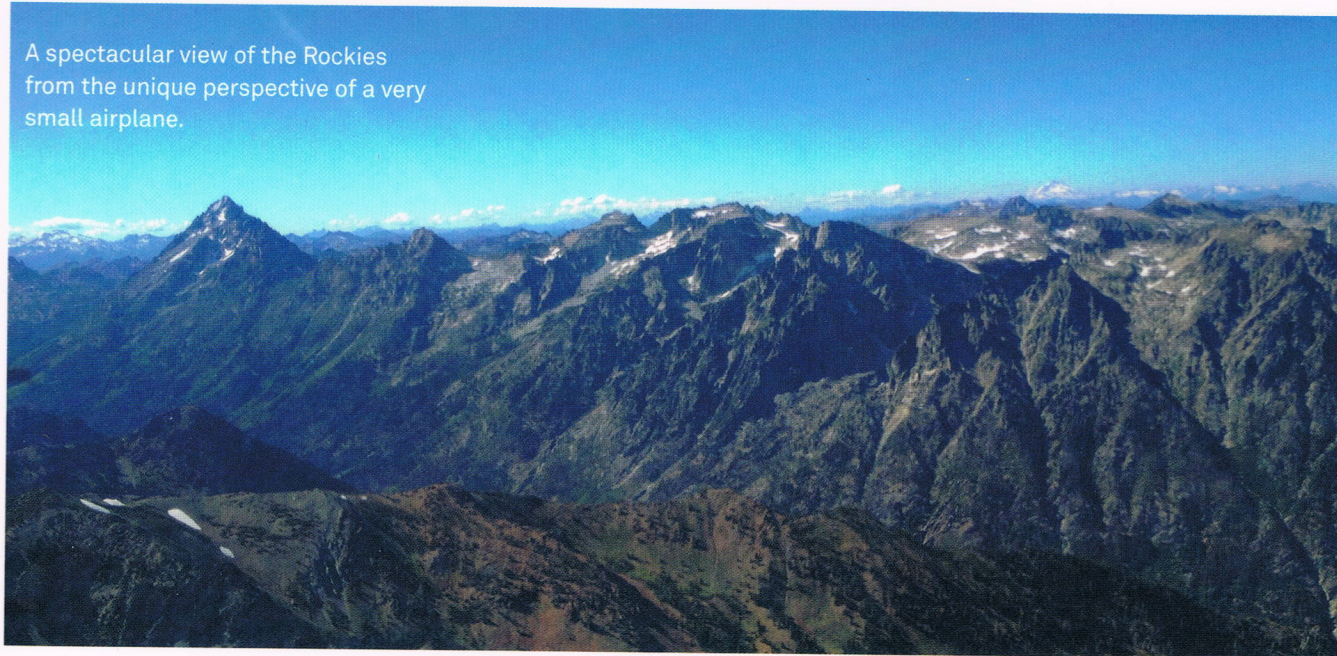
The original plan was to fly from 9S5 to Gillette, Wyoming (KGCC), then on to Chamberlain, South Dakota (9V9),

for fuel before stopping at Mitchell, South Dakota (KMHE), for the night. Ma Nature prompted a change in plans to Sheridan, Wyoming (KSHR), for the first fuel stop of the day. The excellent staff at Bighorn Airways treated my Kitfox with as much attention as the Citation jet that arrived immediately after. Pumping 15 gallons of fuel readied the plane for the next leg to Philip Municipal in South Dakota (KPHP), for another leg stretch and another 16 gallons of 100LL.

The morning flights were smooth, but by afternoon the South Dakota thermals were developing a real attitude. It was like stepping between elevators going up, then down at 500 to 1000 feet per minute. Lots of throttle movement and pitch management, but only a few "significant" bumps. After landing at Mitchell, I met a fellow amphibious Kitfox owner who graciously let me stay in his hangar. This is not your typical hangar as it houses three aircraft (four with mine tucked in), and has a full bath and kitchen and a sleeping loft—more than all the comforts of home.

An early launch from Mitchell took me to Jackson Municipal in Minnesota (KMJQ), a crop duster's paradise, over some beautiful farmland. The air was silky smooth at 5500 feet and a gentle tailwind pushed my ground speed to over 100 mph. Approaching Fond du Lac, Wisconsin (KFLD), I contacted the temporary tower to cross their airspace in preparation for landing at the

A spectacular view of the Rockies from the unique perspective of a very small airplane.



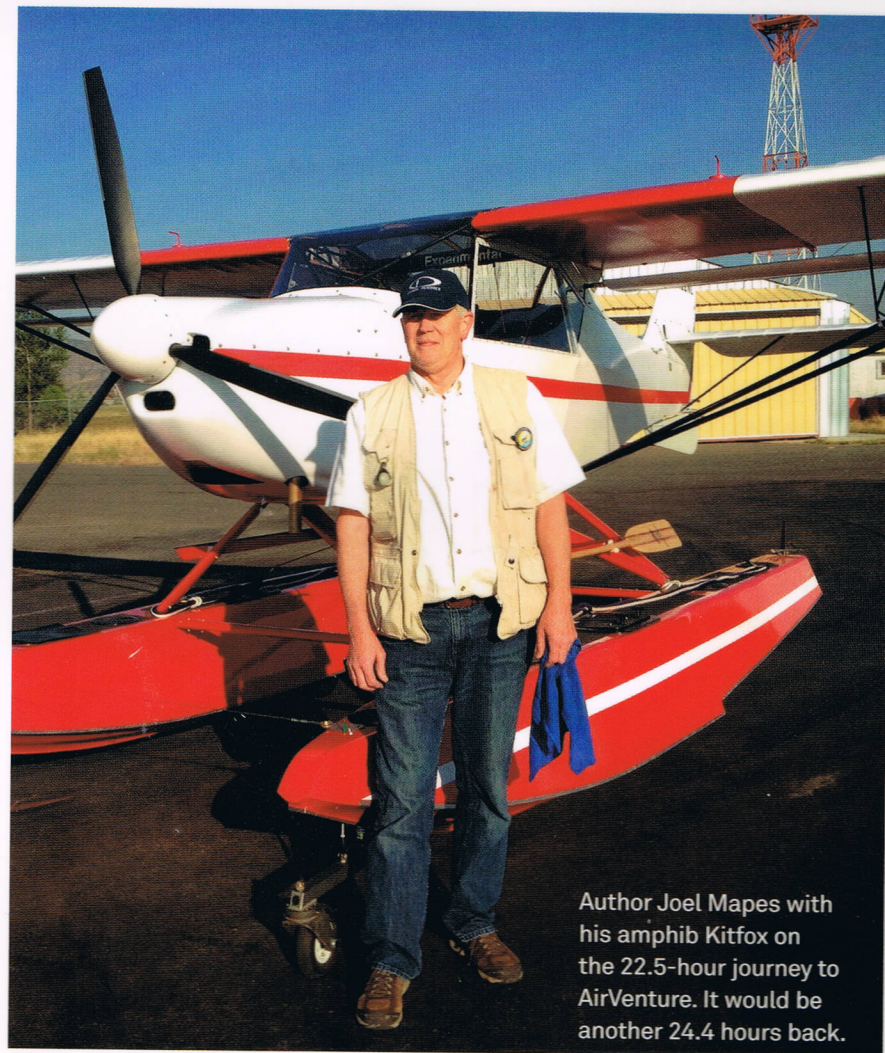
Oshkosh Seaplane Base. Landing south of the base in the lee of Warbird Island, I had a long taxi to the dock. After 22.5 flight hours, my 'Fox and I were finally at Oshkosh!

After five days soaking up the sights and sounds of AirVenture, it was time to go west and begin the journey home. Winds from the northeast drove 18-inch swells into the Vette Seaplane Base bay, so I waited for things to calm down a bit before launching westbound. With 18 gallons of avgas purchased, I was ready to go. Climbing out south over Lake Winnebago, then turning west heading for home, was bitter sweet.

My ADS-B receiver was active, picking up other traffic departing OSH. As I settled into cruise, I thought of all those pilots and their passengers and wondered about their AirVenture experiences. Albert Lea Municipal Airport in Minnesota (KAEL) was my next fuel stop, then it was on to Mitchell, South Dakota (KMHE), for the night. Mitchell is a beautiful town. Lake Mitchell is a busy recreational asset, with boating, swimming and fishing, but no visit to Mitchell is complete without seeing the Corn Palace. This year's motif features Rock 'n Roll legends including Elvis and Willie Nelson.

Crowd Differences

After departing KMHE I took on 19 gallons of fuel in Chamberlain, South Dakota (9V9), then continued my westward trek toward home. Forecast



Author Joel Mapes with his amphib Kitfox on the 22.5-hour journey to AirVenture. It would be another 24.4 hours back.

headwinds impacted my original flight plans, taking me to Sturgis (49B) for my next fuel stop. The friendly crew at CB & B Aviation came out to admire my little amphib and ask questions about it. The town of Sturgis was starting preparations for their annual motorcycle rally, with vendor pavilions and camping areas being readied. I thought about the differences between the crowds at AirVenture and Sturgis and concluded that we aviators are a fortunate bunch.

Climbing out from Sturgis heading to Sheridan, Wyoming (KSHR), ATIS reported lightning strikes east and west. Flying well south of the active cell, I dodged the rain and only experienced a little turbulence.

Circumnavigating the weather got me to the edge of the forest fire smoke. However, instead of the smoke climbing high into the atmosphere, it was cling-

ing to the ridges and valleys making for an almost magical scene.

After landing in Sheridan, I was once again greeted by their friendly crew and soon resting in the comfortable lounge reviewing the weather and watching other aircraft arrive. I added 12 gallons to the tanks and then launched for my overnight stay at Three Forks, Montana. Avoiding a bit more weather and then encountering the forecast headwinds added time to this final leg of the day. Winds at 9S5 were blowing out of the south-southwest, making for an interesting crosswind landing. It can be difficult to be sharp at the end of a long day of flying, and I'm afraid I scored less than a 10 on my arrival at 9S5. Fortunately, no one was there to grade my landing, so I quietly put the cover on the 'Fox and made my way to the motel.

Part of the adventure of a trip like this is the culinary diversity one can experience, and I had my first taste of green bean fries that evening. Definitely a culinary treat. This, the second day of

Electronic ADI shows 11,000 feet MSL and climbing to reach smooth air—a slow process in a 100-hp Kitfox on floats.

my return flight, was supposed to be the longest of the trip and by tach time (10.3 hours) it was. But the third and final leg had its own special surprises waiting.

After a good night's sleep at the Broken Spur motel I got a lift to 9S5, stowed the cover and filled the tanks with 17 gallons of avgas. Climbing out westbound in the early morning air was pleasant, but it didn't take long for the forecast headwinds to make themselves known. The plan for the day was to reverse my eastbound route and stop for fuel at KCOE. Ground speeds in the 60s made this plan less and less practical as the flight progressed.

I crossed Missoula only a few minutes behind schedule, but groundspeed continued to decline as I progressed westward, picking my way through the forest fire-induced TFRs. Smoke filled the canyons, well below my flight level of 8500 feet. The pucker factor was increasing as the projected arrival time moved further into the future. My 'B' plan was Mineral County, Montana (9S4), just east of Mullen Pass along Interstate 90. My GPS showed 9S4 not far ahead, just past the smoke-filled canyon below me. I pulled back power, announced my intentions on Unicom, and landed on runway 30 to use the self-fuel. Several helicopters were there in support of the firefighting efforts, along with their crews. These brave men and



Friendly, accommodating controllers made overflights of major airline airports non-events in the little Kitfox.

women accept great personal risk to protect lives and property from fires, regardless of the cause.

A Long and Bumpy Ride

The climb out of 9S4 along I-90 was a slow, bumpy process. Headwinds and density altitude kept me over the highway until reaching 8,500 feet. No longer needing to stop for fuel at KOE, I

turned west at Mullen Pass and followed a string of small airports leading to Pangborn Memorial Airport (KEAT) in Wenatchee, Washington. Thermal activity over Eastern Washington made for a bumpy ride, keeping my daydreams and drowsiness on "Line up and wait." After a long, hot leg, I descended into the beautiful Columbia River basin for a landing at KEAT.

I took time to get a soda and munchies

Between the Olympic Mountains, the Cascades, the Pacific coast and Puget Sound, there are many opportunities for float flying. While lakes within the national parks are closed to float operations, many lakes that are open and enticing.

Additional destinations include the many large lowland lakes, like Lake Washington with a seaplane base at both ends. Add the San Juan Islands, with many wonderful bays, coves, eateries and overnight options. And then there is Copalis Beach, the only public-use airport on the sand on the west coast.

Since switching to floats, I've been averaging about 60 hours per year and look forward to my next Fox on floats adventure. Flying on straight floats for two seasons gave me the opportunity to improve my float-flying skills, and explore water landing sites in the area. Moving to amphibious floats has expanded my float-flying options, providing the flexibility to find fuel on longer flights while still enjoying the magic of water operations. And, going slow is really a bonus because it allows me to soak in the scenery and fully enjoy the experience.

Kitfox on Floats around Puget Sound




from the pilot lounge vending machines and chatted with a group of Civil Air Patrol cadets waiting their turn for a flight. A Cessna Skyhawk pulled up to the self-fuel pump so I walked out to chat with the crew, only to discover that no 100LL was available due to a contamination problem. With only five gallons on board, I was at my personal minimum of one hour of fuel on board.

Fortunately, I was able to borrow the courtesy car and an empty five-gallon jug and headed in to town. Stopping at a hardware store, I purchased another five-gallon container (the most expensive gas container I have ever purchased) and proceeded to get 10 gallons of premium mogas. Rotax engines prefer unleaded 92 octane fuel, so this wasn't a problem, just a significant delay. After transferring the fuel to my wing tanks, I launched for direct Seattle (KSEA), direct Home Sweet Home (KPWT). Once again, the climb to 8500 feet was slow and bumpy, but I reached the necessary altitude to safely cross the Cascade mountains.

The busy, but always helpful, Seattle Approach controllers cleared me through Seattle's Class B airspace, directly over Sea-Tac and pointed me to my home field of KPWT. I merged with the traffic and made perhaps my best landing of the trip on runway 02, completing a fantastic adventure with 46.9 hours of flying over 11 days; three days out, five days at AirVenture and three days back home. Flying a plane I built to EAA AirVenture was definitely a bucket list item for me. Getting to do it on amphibious floats was truly icing on the cake.

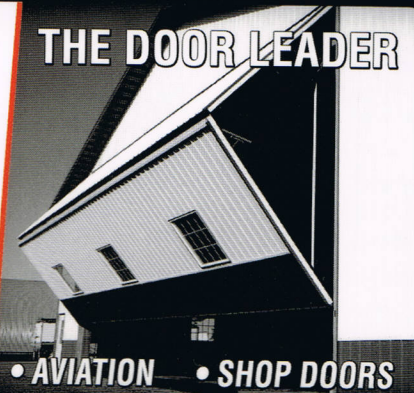
This journey is a testament to the freedom and flexibility that our current air traffic system provides. Let's work together to keep it working for all of us.

Joel Mapes earned his private certificate in 1982 at Bremerton Airport and soon bought a share of a straight-tail C172. Flying in the Seattle area prompted a desire for an instrument rating, so he sold his share of 15T and joined Kitsap Aviation Squadron, flying 172s, 177s and 182s. After earning a seaplane rating, he built a Kitfox 5 and has been enjoying flying adventures ever since. His wife, Lisa, supports his flying and his oldest son is an aeronautical engineer. His youngest son, an electrical engineer, designed his custom trim indicator. His daughter and other two sons have shared in his flying adventures.



SCHWEISS
DOORS
HYDRAULIC
ONE-PIECE DOORS
— OR —
BIFOLD
STRAP LIFT DOORS
SCHWEISSDOORS.COM

THE DOOR LEADER




• AVIATION • SHOP DOORS
507-426-8273

Call Now!
340-514-1680

flyingfishseaplanes.com





**MAKING WAVES
IN THE
MIDWEST!**

Float Training
Stockton Lake, MO

Buy or Rent


the World's..... **4-6 MAN**

- smallest package **4" x 12" x 14"**
- lightest weight **12 lbs.**
- least expensive **\$1510**

New!!! FAA TSO Approved Life Rafts

Emergency Liferaft

Call Survival Products, the manufacturer, for customer/distributor/service information




9-13 MAN

5" x 12" x 14"

18 lbs.

\$1960

TSO'd & NON TSO'd



5614 S.W. 25 Street, Hollywood, FL 33023
PH: 954-966-7329 FAX: 954-966-3584
Email: sales@survivalproductsinc.com
Website: www.survivalproductsinc.com



**SAVE 25-85%
off list price!**

New surplus aircraft parts!

- Edo, other float parts
- Cessna, Piper and others
- Instruments, Consumables
- Aircraft Hardware
- Lighting, Electrical
- Accessories and parts
- Continental and Lycoming engine parts
- Props, check stock at www.preferredairparts.com/props.htm

800-433-0814 U.S. & Canada

Tel. 330-698-0280
FAX. 330-698-3164

www.preferredairparts.com



Scan here to get our parts app!