

Son Jeremie and a cousin Allen hunt on a particular rancher's land down in the Badlands so, in return, they go help with the branding in the spring. Such was the case this past weekend and when Linda found out, she wanted to go as well, not only to spend some time with her oldest but to help with the branding. Knowing that I wasn't that keen on participating, she didn't ask me to go but did offer that maybe I could fly down for a couple of hours. YEAH!!! I got a map to find their approximate location, figured some GPS coordinates, and told them I might come down for a bit if the weather was reasonable (the forecast for the day wasn't that great).

They left out about 7:30 Sunday morning and I was to take off about 9 o'clock. Well, Mother Nature had other ideas for me as she started with some light rain about 9 and threw in some high winds to boot. I'd pretty much decided I wasn't going when things cleared up about 10 o'clock and the wind died down to around 18 mph. Huron FSS told me that thunderstorms were forecast for about 3 pm but Wall and Interior would just be windy. I decided I'd try it and got the plane out. The tower was calling it 350° at 18 mph gusting to 22 so off I went. I was at 100' AGL by mid-field, made an easy left turnout to head south out of the Class D airspace. A call to the tower that I was clear of their area and I dialed in the coordinates for the GPS.

I had a nice tailwind all the way to the Badlands which, of course, were a wonderful sight from the air. I did, however, keep a continuous eye out for emergency landing spots which were few. Mr. Rotax purred along and I felt at ease with him. I often wondered if I'd get used to flying with a 2-stroke but it's been a solidly reliable engine and has a nice sound to it now. My coordinates were off about a mile but they were close enough to find the group without much trouble. They had just finished with the first group of calves and the caravan of pickups and horse trailers was leaving when I arrived in the area. Linda and Jeremie saw me and hung back till I landed on the gravel road. I told them of my delay and she asked if I wanted to come over to the next location over by Interior. I agreed and "followed" them over to a ranch about a mile west of Interior and near the White River.

They had a real nice pasture for an uneventful landing and I was subsequently introduced to the owner and some of the folks who had come to help. One of the guys wanted to go for a ride so I pretty much said, "Let's go!" and we walked over to the plane. I removed my spare gas jug from the back seat and got things ready for him. He got strapped in and off we went. It was his first time in a small plane and he really enjoyed it. We flew along the river about a hundred feet up, looking for some turkeys since it was that time of year for hunting but didn't see any.

He finally decided we should head back about 20 minutes later so we did. We landed and

walked back to the barn, where we found everyone eating lunch. I hadn't planned on eating since I wasn't there to help but they wouldn't hear of it. Man! what a feed!!! They had roast beef (naturally!), BBQ pork, ham, mashed potatoes, cowboy beans, pasta dishes, sloppy joes, and about 4 or 5 different pies. Whooo Boy, did I ever enjoy it!

I'd decided to depart no later than 1 pm so as not to push things with the weather back at Rapid. I watched and visited a bit then told Linda I needed to head back. She agreed and walked me over to the plane. I refueled with my spare gas can, strapped it back I the seat, cranked the engine up and waited for the CHT's to hit 200°. I did my preflight list, waved bye to Linda, eased the throttle forward, and was gone. What strong headwinds all the way back! I had a 45 to 50 mph ground speed most of the time. The closer to home I got, the more I could see clearer skies and the AWOS wasn't calling any rain or stormy weather. Winds were, however, right up there... 25 gusting to 33 mph. Well, at least they were still at 350° which was right down my strip.

I came in south of Regional's Class D and about 6 miles out. I was at 3400' when I suddenly saw a Blackhawk helicopter coming straight in, apparently for runway 32. About the time I saw him, he called the tower for landing on 32. He was about 3/4 mile ahead of and maybe three hundred feet higher than I was when I saw him. I wasn't really looking forward to going under his downwash but thought maybe it would dissipate by the time I got to it... WRONG!!! I encountered it and it shoved me downward about 50' or so. I was glad I hadn't been closer.

I called the tower for permission to transition to my place which was approved. I turned northward toward home and my ground speed slowed to around 35 to 40 mph. Onward I trudged until I arrived near the trees around the house. Normally, I'll drop in just over the trees but didn't want to chance any turbulence that might have been generated around our place, so I waited a moment and chopped power just past my back yard trees and hangar. Down I went, touching down easily, and was stopped within about 100' or so. I turned around and taxied into our yard, glad to be back. I cautiously got the plane into the hangar, closed the door, and went in the house.

Linda called about a half-hour later to see if I'd made it back okay. She said they were getting ready to head back but first, Jeremie wanted to show her a prairie dog town where he'd gotten a couple of his deer last year. She got home about 3 hours later, tired and muddy from wrestling calves along with some bruises from them, but with a satisfied smile on her face. She was really hungry so we went to the Golden Corral for supper as she really loves the bread rolls and I really enjoy the large choice of veggies. It was a pretty nice day for both of us and we tried not thinking about having to go to work the next day!