

Flying 2020



August 7th, day two of our Northwest Wisconsin Airport Passport stamp flying adventure started out with our Dan Marlenga alarm going off before dawn. Lyle Banser and myself, Larry Gordon, were close behind in the process of breaking our FBO camp and packing our Rans S-6's. The Cumberland weather was starting out with low 60s temperatures, winds south-southeast at 5 to 7, and a few localized rain cells on radar. The eye-catcher was the afternoon forecast of south-southeast winds at 15 +, gusting to 25 miles per hour.

Dan would be flying with us for our first stops at Barron and Shell Lake Municipal airports, departing for little Chicago, having then completed his stamp collecting in Northwest Wisconsin. From Shell Lake, Lyle and I would be flying a counterclockwise route around Cumberland as a hub, towards Grantsburg near the St. Croix River, then southward to New Richmond, back towards Cumberland, then to Ladysmith before hopefully completing all 11 planned airport stops. Our Cumberland departure was slightly delayed due to my Rotax 912 not starting

right away. It finally came to life and off we were headed to Barron, 10 miles to the southeast and its grass runway. Before entering the pattern we were getting raindrops on our windshields and experiencing low light conditions, adding to our cautious approach to an unfamiliar airport.

The flight of three was on the ground, passports stamped, in departing for Shell Lake before the heavier rain cells caught up to us. Shaking off the rain felt like starting the day fresh again, but settling in behind the stick wouldn't be the norm today as Lyle had to initiate a goose induced "go around". With water on three sides of KSSQ and the WI Airport Directory warning of "birds on and in the vicinity of the airport", we were probably the intruders ON their turf.

This is where we said goodbye to Dan, as his Shell Lake stamp completed his stamp collecting west of Highway 13 and North of Highway 64. Thus, The Three Amigos became the Dos Rancheros. Dan kept in touch on the "pork chop channel", 122.675 for the next hour as Lyle and I stamped our passports at the Nest of Eagles Airport in Spooner, and Burnett County Airport in Siren. The 28 mile flight took us over the Spooner State Fish Hatchery which is the largest cool water hatchery in the state with 46 rearing ponds, and the world's largest Muskie hatchery. The land-

scape was mostly agricultural with interspersed lakes and streams.

Departing Burnett County Airport for Grantsburg Municipal, the forecasted increasing winds became evident with more and darker clouds. While I was lining up for a grass landing on turf RWY 05-23, Lyle again got into the geese on Rwy 12 - 30. I too found geese on both sides of the grass runway. More than likely, they were molting due to their being on the lethargic side and not taking to wing.

Shortly after landing, the weather became a concern. Lyle got up his Foreflight weather to find a line of thunderstorms heading our way. We tied down the planes and headed for the airport terminal building. Then, with more time to spare, we noticed that KGTG was in need of some tender loving care. Since then, the story of the airport is quite similar to more than just a few small airports - local politics and taxpayer financing of airport operations affecting maintenance issues. The geese sure seemed like they are the reigning aviators in Grantsburg these days, even though they were grounded temporarily. With the storms having dissipated, it was time to return to the air with six more airports to go, weather permitting. On course for Osceola, it became more evident that the gusting winds were taking the joy

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out of the ride! My flying posture was soon predicated on a snubbed up harness, a tight left-handed grip on the stick, the other hand gripped on the passenger side overhead structural tubing, and chest and stomach muscle contractions with each jolting ascent and descent of the plane. Not much time was spent viewing the meanderings Saint Croix National Scenic River.

The approach to L. O. Simenstad Municipal airport in Osceola, in retrospect, was one of my busiest landings to date, with a charter plane practicing touch and goes in the pattern, not being familiar with the airport, and gusting crosswinds 24 miles per hour. The Wisconsin Airport Passport program is partially responsible for our turf landings being somewhat routine due to a marked increase in our pilot proficiency. The turf conditions of Runway 4 - 22 also definitely aided in our 15 - gusting to 24 miles per hour southeasterly wind landing. We didn't spend much time on the ground, other than collecting our stamps and wiping the perspiration from our brows.

Readying for takeoff, I de-

ecided to wait for a passing gust, then pushed in the throttle. When the tires left the ground, I had the sensation of being in a box kite with the string being held somewhat perpendicular to the wind. There's nothing like flying with your forward line of sight being out of your side window! Airborne, we were again getting our abdominal workouts on our 13 mile flight to New Richmond. The New Richmond Regional Airport's primary runway is asphalt and for us it was aligned with the wind. We were able to park leeward of the terminal for fuel truck delivered MOGAS and passport stamp number 7 for the day. Soon we were both back in the air after my being able to watch Lyle's plane seemingly explode off the runway shortly after his tail wheel came off the pavement. Then 12 miles later, after riding a somewhat pleasant tailwind to Amery, I watched Lyle finesse his Rans into settling on the runway, in what appeared to be slow motion, after dissipating the lift generated by 2 to 3 good gusts. While stamping our passports we were greeted by a spectator to the flying circus, who was the Amery mayor, saying that he was betting that he was the only mayor of a WI public airport town to welcome visiting flyers. And right he was. Our next stops, Rice Lake Regional and Chetek Municipal are both within 10 mi of Barron, our first stop of the

morning. After completing these two stops and collecting our stamps, we were happy to have diminishing quartering tailwinds for our last stop before heading to our home airports. We were overflying both the Chipewa and Flambeau River valleys with their flowages and reservoirs. The lush green forests and intermittent fields were slowly being tinted by the waning sunlight. The last 34-mile leg to Ladysmith was pretty quiet on the "pork chop channel". It had been a long and busy day in our cockpits. Soon the water tower standing sentinel over Ladysmith was visible above the sea of green. A quick glance of the Wisconsin Airport Directory put RCX "4 Northeast of City". The local AWOS report made Runway 19 our choice for landing, and one we would be sharing with a dozen buzzards. Whatever was the meal of the day, they were more interested in it, or too full to enter the pattern.

The Rusk County Airport terminal appeared rather new and inviting for a short stay, but the local news on TV reminded us that the day wasn't over until the planes were hangared, and that left 126 miles more for me to go to Wild Rose. Lyle and I said goodbye until we were again in the air expressing our final thoughts on our two day adventure. Our final good-byes were made while Lyle

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was about to switch to Merrill's CTAF for his final landing after a rather full day.

I was flying at 5,500 ft. to take advantage of a tailwind current, along with the cooler air of the higher altitude. My flight path was taking me over Stratford and the Big Eau Pleine Reservoir, so I descended to 1,500' to enjoy the sites of the WI River Valley. South of Stevens Point, the center pivot

irrigation systems looked like glistening white waterfalls with rainbows in the light of the setting sun. With two fingers of sun remaining above the horizon, I announced my position and intentions to land in Wild Rose, and by doing so, telling others on frequency 122.8 what a lucky guy I was to be a part of that moment!

Stats for the day from Cumberland (UBE) to Wild Rose (W23):

- Hobbs hours logged - 6.4
- Miles flown - 336
- Landings - 12
- Passport stamps - 11

Respectfully submitted,
Larry Gordon

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