

Sun-N-Fun Adventure of Paul Buss, Bill Reed and Jim Shnowske



After years of dreaming, months of preparation and a week of sleepless nights, our trip to Sun-n-Fun, Lakeland, Florida began on Saturday, April first. We originally planned to depart for Florida on Sunday, but incoming weather dictated we leave a day early. Since my Norrie Brook airstrip was too soft, I staged my Avid weeks earlier in J.J. Smith's hangar at the Antigo Airport. I would fly to Stevens Point to rendezvous with Bill and Jim.

It was 4:00 AM when Sue took me to the Antigo airport where we finished packing and preflighting the plane. The north wind was cold as the sun started to rise. It was time to say goodbye, fire up the Avid and head south to Stevens Point. Meanwhile, Jim was checking the weather one more time, opening his JAK'S field hangar door and rolling his beautiful Kitfox into the morning sun. Airborne, I could hear Jim announce his intention to land at Stevens Point. Jim. and I landed within five minutes of each other while Bill was prepping his sharp looking Kitfox for the trip. We took pictures and at 6:50 am our "dawn

patrol" lifted into the cold and cloudy skies of Wisconsin headed for the warm and sunny skies of Florida.

Our first planned fuel stop was Poplar Grove, IL, just south of the Wisconsin state line and east of Rockford, IL. This beautiful residential airport has both hard and turf surface runways. Next it was off to Monticello IL's turf runway where the manager was outside to welcome us. Little did we know that someone from Poplar Grove had called ahead to inform them of our flight plans. He took some pictures and wished us well. At our next stop, Carmi, IL, we fueled the planes and checked the weather. We watched some parachute jumpers land on our taxi out. We left for Jasper, TN at midday with warm and sunny skies.

The Jasper airport is located in a beautiful river valley in the Smokey Mountains near Chattanooga. We originally planned to camp there overnight, but with good weather and the benefit of a 20-25 mph tailwind we arrived with enough day-

light to fly another leg. It was a beautiful evening flight over the mountains

By the time we reached Rome, GA it was time to call it a day.

The airport manager showed us the local EAA Chapter picnic area where we could camp for the night. The only mishap of the

trip took place as Jim was taxiing off the pavement onto the grass to tie down for the night. His right tire fell into a depression next to a septic tank cover and his wheel pant got scuffed. Luckily the damage was only cosmetic. Bill and Jim slept in their tents, but I roughed it and unrolled my sleeping bag on a couple of picnic tables sheltered under a roof.

Sunday morning fog kept us grounded until almost noon. We spent the time packing, studying charts, and Sun-n Fun Notams. Once the sun burnt through the fog we headed to Lagrange, GA, where we encountered our first Self Serve fuel at an airport. Swipe your credit card and filler up. A good price too! \$ 3.04 a gallon for 100LL. We paid more than that for mogas at some stops.

We continued on to Adel, GA where we knew there was truck stop near the airport so we could refuel our bodies as well.

The pork chops (no, not the liquid kind) and hamburgers were good.

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With the afternoon nearly spent we left Adel not exactly sure where we would tie-down for the night.

Syd Cohen and his group were at Crystal River, FL already. We didn't have enough time to catch up. With the sun low in the west we decided Cross City, FL would be far enough.

Cross City airport had a special fuel price for Sun-n-Fun and they let us camp under the airport rotating beacon. We were welcomed by Terry, the fueler, and a playful airport puppy named Piper. The pup received plenty of attention and had the run of the airport. After a nice warm shower in the new FBO building we were ready for a good night's sleep.

Monday morning Lakeland was fogged in so we had plenty of time to stow bags and tents. FSS forecasted the fog to lift by 10:30 so at

9:00 we launched. Lakeland was 13 3 miles away so by the time we would arrive the weather would be ok (and - it was). This segment of our trip was the most beautiful as we climbed up through a scattered cloud deck to 7500 feet. The cloud formations went up 8000- 8500 feet as we threaded our way through the valleys between the tops and maintaining VFR cloud separation distances. The clouds were bright white and we took turns getting pictures of each other. Calm air, beautiful scenery, and some good looking light planes, it just doesn't get much better than that.

Twenty miles from Lakeland we tuned in to ATIS and turned transponders off. At 15 miles out we descended to below the cloud bases and reviewed the arrival NOTAM one last time.

[CROSS OVER THE LAKE PARKER POWER PLANT AT 1200' HEADING WEST, STAY SINGLE FILE, WHEN YOU CROSS THE SHORELINE AND HIT HWY 4 TURN AND FOLLOW IT SW UNTIL YOU PASS THE GOLF COURSE, THEN TURN DUE SOUTH AND FLY TOWARDS THE BLUE ROOFED TERMINAL BUILDING AT THE AIRPORT KEEPING THE ORANGE WATER TOWER OFF TO YOUR RIGHT AND THE CAKE SHAPED WATER TOWER OFF TO YOUR LEFT. THE CONTROLLERS WILL CALL YOUR DOWNWIND AND BASE LEGS AND WHERE TO LAND ON THE RUNWAY.]

OK, NOTAM is reviewed and there is the power plant about 3 miles ahead. Whoops! There is a flight of 5 Swifts going past us about 1/4 mile off our left wing. We fell in behind them and in front of a couple Cessnas.

The controller called us by color. Jim in the lead, powered up to 6200 rpm to avoid bottleneaking the planes behind us. Just about the time we begin to think the controller didn't see us he calls for a turn to a right downwind for Runway 27R (which is a taxiway used as a runway during the show). Abeam the numbers they call for a turn to base, Jim flew 3/4 the length of the runway, touched down and exited. Bill landed next. Paul landed shorter and exited at midfield. An hour of excitement packed into 10

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minutes! A ten minute taxi to homebuilt camping and we are there!

We spent the rest of the day setting up tents and checking out the sights of Sun-n-Fun. Our plan was to stay a few days and leave Thursday morning. We looked at planes and all the accessories, spent some time visiting with Paul Seehafer, Patrick Eron, and Syd Cohen, and other acquaintances, including Al Beyer from Oshkosh (Paul's son Brandon worked and talked airplanes with him at Mercury Marine). We even watched the air show sitting beneath the wings of our planes. I had my picture taken with air show pilot Michael Goulian (for Sue).

On Wednesday we checked the weather and it looked good for our Thursday departure to Atlanta, so that night we prepared for the flight home.

Thursday morning we awoke to clear skies ... no fog. We packed, did a preflight, and fired up the planes, After a short taxi, we were on the end of runway 27-three abreast. NEAT! When signaled, we powered up and took off together. REALLY NEAT! We flew three miles west, turned right, and headed in the direction of home.

Our first stop was to see Piper again at Cross City, then on to Adel and La Grange, GA riding a tailwind the entire way. With plenty of gas and

daylight left, we continued on to Tullahoma, TN. On our arrival the sun was getting low, so with an offer of hangar space we spent the night.

Friday morning it was off to Carmi, IL. As we crossed the Wabash River we could see the tugs and barges. By the time we got to Carmi the winds started to pick up. We fueled the planes and headed toward Monticello. As we got near the Monticello airport we could see puddles everywhere, including on the grass runway. We opted to continue on to Pontiac where we tied down the planes and waited for the wind to die down some.

Continuing on to Poplar Grove, we had a strong head wind, so we had plenty of time for sight seeing. The Poplar Grove runway was not orientated to the wind so we continued flying north. We encountered some light precipitation but had plenty of visibility to continue. Knowing that we were not going to make it home that evening, Jim suggested we stay at Watertown. We got a good night's sleep at the Super 8 and were ready for the final leg of the flight Saturday morning.

With Saturday morning temperatures in the teens, we were off to a slow start. By midday we were back home.

It was an exciting, fun-filled seven days.

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