

ArkanSTOL Ozark Backwoods Challenge - 2nd annual

Dateline: Monday, October 4th KMRJ Iowa County Airport, Mineral Point, WI

The Pitch: Scud running has stopped for now in Mineral Point, giving me a moment or two to ponder the happenings from the last 8 Days of our destination flying to the “ArkanSTOL Ozark Backwoods Challenge” flying event. The idea for this aviation adventure was spawned by Christina Basken’s article in the January 2021 issue of Sport Aviation,

that covered the first organized competition of the Arkansas challenge at Byrd’s Adventure Center, located along 1800 ft of the Mulberry River in Northwest Arkansas.

The Bait: The co-conspirators in the adventure include UL 75 members Lyle Banser, Paul Buss, Steve Krueger, Dan Marlenga, and yours truly, Larry Gordon. The idea of flying to ArkanSTOL was slowly nurtured by Christina’s EAA article and several YouTube videos. The rabbit hole draw was too great when the ArkanSTOL organi-

zation was soliciting for volunteers to participate in the four-day event as ground crew members. The “Hey Guys” sales pitch factors included daily 4 hour work shifts of choice, food and beverages while working, pre competition catered meal,

Clinton MO at the Banser cabin, on the Truman Reservoir.

Before getting underway the next morning and returning the “courtesy car”, Lyle decided to unknowingly feed some of the local wildlife at the Banser cabin - chiggers! With “Itchy Brother” in tow, we were soon overflying the Truman Reservoir, then heading south for a side trip to a Recreational



Chapter 75 Members attended the Arkanstol event near Fayetteville, AR. Larry Gordon, Paul Buss, Dan Marlenga, Lyle Banser and Steve Krueger. The national event was held Tuesday, September 28th - Sunday, Oct 3rd.

and the biggy, the best seats in the house! The allure of the adventure itself was too great to not send in our volunteer applications. Bingo! The volunteer coordinator gave us the green light to come join the 2nd annual ArkanSTOL.

The Journey: The flight south would be a journey of 757 mile, with 5 guys in 4 planes, tents and sleeping bags included. Monday, September 27th found us rendezvousing in Sauk Prairie(91C) for a splash of Swift 94, then off for Marion, IA and Mexico, MO, with an overnigher in

Aviation Foundation (RAF) / Nature Conservancy airstrip, called Trigger Gap. The 3,000” ridgeline airstrip is complete with post and beam shelter and fireplace, wood, solar bathroom, tables, and chairs. Surrounded by Ozark mountains and sited atop the ridge, it is free to use by the flying public!

The Destination: Departing Trigger Gap, we headed to Huntsville(H34), the highest airport in AR, for a fuel stop and to review the ArkanSTOL air traffic procedures. Departing H34, we were over-

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flying the heart of the tree covered Ozarks, keeping watch for our topographical checkpoints leading us to Byrds' Adventure Center, its River Runway, and our home for the next 5 days. Back on the ground and tied down in the volunteer parking area, it was time to reconnoiter our surroundings, given the fact that we had the rest of the day off until our morning briefing.

Our morning briefing gave us a chance to meet our supervisors and fellow volunteers, as well as becoming orientated to the events of the day. The pilot contestants were practicing on the course, at which time the runways were closed to other air traffic, giving us a light workload until the spectator crowd showed up. We

took the opportunity to watch practice runs on the 4 utilized runways making up the course. The high pilot skill levels needed to compete were evident in the fact that during Wednesday's practice, the third pilot of the week stalled his plane during a slow high banked turn on the most difficult portion of the course. The severity of the accident was enough to change the race format, which increased pilot safety margins.

The Takeaways: The pilot skills needed to compete in the ArkanSTOL were greater than the modifications to their planes. It is an "on the edge" event. The hospitality extended to us by the event staff, as well as that of the venue staff, was outstanding. Saturday's post event party was a celebration of new

friendships made and renewed, with hopes of getting together again in the future. The adventure of flying to a place that embraces aviation in an arena of natural beauty is inspiring enough to be repeated.

Journey's End: The adventure couldn't end in Mineral Point with a lightening horizon on the course towards home. The quiet contemplation in the planes, once the limiting weather conditions were left behind us, was evident by the silent "pork chop" frequency. Our passing over the Baraboo Hills brought life back to the radio as the comparison of the Hills was made to those of the Ozarks. I am sure that we will carry reminders of this adventure with us forever.

Larry Gordon



Trigger Gap is located 3.2 nm south of Carroll County Airport (4M1) in Arkansas.

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