

Flying Down Under.

I am not the greatest writer but here is a rather rambling description of what I think was our greatest ever vacation. It is a bit long but the safari was 15 days over some pretty spectacular country.

We came from Seattle to Sydney in October to do a flying safari with Australian Air Safaris (AAS). We had been at an anesthesia meeting of the International Federation of Dental Anesthesiology Societies the previous week at the Gold Coast.

AAS is run by an Australian and his American wife who live in Atlanta GA, Mick and Tina Keough. To get your Australian flying permit, a 90-day license, is a daunting task. The bureaucracy of the Australian Government's Civil Aviation Safety Authority, makes our FAA look like a stroll in the park. I had to fill out and read 20 pages of forms and directions. In addition, I had to send notarized copies of my birth certificate, passport, drivers license, pilots license, medical, and the last 5 pages of my logbook. Tina got all the paper work to the right people and made sure the permit was ready when we arrived.

Upon arriving in Australia I had to take an English test. This amounted to listening to an exchange between an Indian accented air traffic controller and an Asian accented pilot. I had to copy what they were saying. It took less than 5 minutes to pass, however, it took 10 minutes to fill out the paper work. The charge for this, covered by AAS, was \$250.

We arrived, along with 3 other couples, in Sydney. We had dinner and the next morning the pilots all went to the Sydney Bankstown General Aviation Aerodrome Procedure, GAAP, YSBA. First there was a very necessary briefing about getting in and out of the Bankstown Sydney area. It all seemed very complex at first with two routes in and out one from the north and the other from the south each with multiple waypoints. As certificate pilots, we could only fly day VMC. After being briefed we went to our planes, a Piper Warrior and three Cessna 172s including one with a G-1000 system. Mick who would lead the group flew a Cessna 182. We all were introduced to our instructors and we flew the N entrance and exit routes. These are a series of 4 checkpoints extending to the West and then North from the airport to a point about 20 miles North where all incoming flights are funneled. The path South has 4 similar way points and is displaced a mile or two to the West. This does make for rather high-density traffic in a confined area. The tower does not have radar and depends on planes crossing and making position reports from the waypoints. You first check in with the tower about 5 miles out and then get your landing instructions and clearance to enter their airspace. We did 4 touch and go landings and we were ready to depart the next day.

The following morning we loaded and were off to the North to Moree. Our practice flight the day before, made the exit from this airspace north much easier. It would

have been a difficult task without the practice flight. This a heavily traveled corridor to and from Bankstown and you really needed to have your head on a swivel looking for other aircraft. Our first day was an easy 3-hour flight over rolling hills that were heavily forested with gum trees, the Blue Mountains. We did not get airborne until after 10:30 AM. Half way to Moree the forests yielded to rolling farmlands and open pit mines. Moree was an untowered airport. All but Alice Springs and Bankstown were without towers. We used a CTAF reporting system similar to what we have in the US. We reported 30 miles, 10 miles, entering the circuit, crosswind, downwind and final with my call sign, ADI, and 2 persons on board. Moree was a small town. We ate at a pub that had a DC3 mounted overhead. We asked and they unlocked the cargo doors and we were allowed to tour the old bird after lunch. Next, we were off to a natural hot spring pool to soak away the rigors of travel. The following morning we started Breakfast at 7 AM. We were not wheels up until 10AM. It took us about three stops to be able to get breakfast, get a briefing covering the day's flight plan, preflight the planes and be in the air by 9 AM. Navigation was usually direct to the next airport 1.5 to 5 hours away, There simply were not many visual checkpoints and the winds made dead reckoning very difficult if not impossible. A short weather briefing - Sever clear or a few puffy clouds at 4,000 ft., and winds on our nose at 15 to 25 kts. It is amazing how you can fly a circle of 500-mile radius and always have the wind on your nose. Preflight the aircraft, which we took seriously because there were few fields that were far apart and even fewer mechanics along the way. Some how from breakfast to wheels up it took 3 hours for the first few days. We learned quickly if we got into the air by 9 AM it would be a smooth flight if it was 10:30 it would be an amusement park ride of up and down drafts by the time we were on the ground at 1 PM.

On final to Moree at about 5 feet above the runway, my wife opened the window on the 172. I am not sure if it changed the way the plane flew or it was just the sudden loud unexpected noise but I bounced 5 times before I had the landing nailed. We had about a 10 kt crosswind. I was known as skippy for the next three days and was asked if I was going to log all 5 landings. We then had an agreement, do not open the window until I have taxied off the active runway.

I have a routine of once the wheels are rolling of looking at the engine instruments and reporting aloud "engine good" then the airspeed indicator "airspeed working." This flight the plane was off the ground at 25kts. Clearly the airspeed indicator was not working and it quickly went to 0 kts. I declared a problem stayed in the pattern, "circuit" in Australia, and flew down the runway at about 1 foot as speed bled off. The wheels touched as the stall warning sounded and we taxied off the active. Our leader had not left as all his ducks were not safely in the air and on the way to the next airport. We took the pitot tube off and fortunately there was a shop open that had a compressor. A blast of air through the back of the tube and the occluding item was blown free. I had sucked in a small stone or a very hard bug, it bounced off the floor and we were not able to determine exactly what it had been, as the takeoff roll had commenced. 20 minutes later I was on my way.

Each morning we had a thorough briefing about the course and destination airport and procedures for the day. Weather reports were not as complete as I am accustomed to, severe clear, moderate turbulence and a barometer setting in mm. QNH were about as complex a report as we received. I think I could be a meteorologist in the Outback. There is no flight following or radar coverage. Radar coverage existed only along the most populated areas, Sydney. It was good to fly as a group of 5 planes. Should one of the planes have a problem, someone would know where you were. Our leader, Mick, would take off last in a Cessna 182. We reported in with our distance to destination and altitude on a regular basis. More regularly if two or three of us were within a few miles of each other. We would pick an altitude a hundred feet higher or lower to assure separation. After an hour of flying, we were usually spread out 5 to 10 miles apart because of the different speeds. The leader would eventually pass us all and land a half an hour ahead of us relaying wind and runway information back to us.

Our next stop Charleville, is the home of the Royal Flying Doctors and an astronomical observatory/science center. The airport was the home of the American Army Air Force bombers in WWII. We spend an the afternoon visiting the artifacts of the American base including a bunker where the Norton bomb sites were stored after each bomb run and a museum dedicated to the flying doctor service. The evening was spent enjoying telescope views of the southern sky. Our flight from here to Longreach could best be described as a technically advance roller coaster. Up and down drafts of 700 to 1000 ft were the order of the day for the last two hours of this flight. It was safe enough but not very comfortable.

The first three days Mariana played Kermit. It is not easy to be green with your head in a bag. She never played the Buick song but came pretty close a couple of times the first 4 days. She was a really good sport.

Longreach is the home of Qantas Airlines and the Qantas museum. The original 747, a 707, which had been owned by a middle eastern royalty and by Michael Jackson at one point, and a DC3 were on display and we were able to visit all with a guide including a walk on the wing of the 747. Our next day was a flight to Birdsville

Birdsville is a town of 200 to 300 people and is know for the Birdsville Pub, the only Beer for 300 miles in any direction. The pub has about a dozen hotel rooms and a restaurant. We flew 3.1 hours across the Simpson Desert to get to the beer. It really helped wash down the dust of the area. The desert is a fine pink sand that has no other features; a continuous series of small sand dunes, 300 continuous miles of emergency runway. The cook was good and our evening meal was great. The first hour out of Longreach was again very lumpy then things calmed down and the flight was smooth. We did carry 4 quarts of water. Dry is an understatement. I drank almost 2 quarts of waters on the flight.

More desert the next day on the way to Alice Springs. There is an unbelievable amount of nothing in the center of Australia. Alice Springs is a delightful city with water trees and grass. The airport actually had reporting points and a control tower. Reporting points were mandatory and were usually an intersection. The problem was there were numerous intersections that all looked the same. However, we all figured it out and got to the runway. We probably doubled the workload of the controller for the hour that all 5 of us arrived. We went to the horse races the next afternoon and spend an extra day shopping and sightseeing before departing for Ayres Rock.

"The Rock" aerial tour is truly spectacular. You report in over the Ayres Rock Airport then off to fly back and forth North of "the rock." "Entering the rock," "departing the rock" were the calls. From the rock we next flew by the Olgas, a similar grouping of rocks, a bigger area but several smaller rocks. We have all see the classic photo of Ayres rock but nothing is as impressive as flying past the rock a half a mile away or standing next to it. It is a sacred place for the aborigines and has a very special feeling when you are up close. Up to this point all, our landings had been with a crosswind of 7 to 12 kts. Ayres Rock Airport outdid itself with a 20kt crosswind.

Cooper Pedy the home of most Australian Opals was next. We spend the night in an underground hotel. The rooms had been carved out by mining equipment the wall and ceilings were somewhat rough but sealed showing off the beautiful colors of the sandstone. When the lights go off at night it is really dark and very very quiet. I did not feel the second bounce when my head hit the pillow. 7 hours later the alarm woke us up as there was not window to let in the sun.

We were to fly to Leigh Creek to refuel the next day. However, when Mick checked, it was discovered that Leigh Creek had no fuel. We had a 4 hour flight to Broken Hill but had a 20 to 25 kt. headwind at all reasonable altitudes, 500 ft to 10,000 ft. Several of the planes could not make this in one hop, so we stopped at Maree a small strip with fuel. The fuel truck was a trailer pulled by a small auto with 4 - 50 gallon drums and a hand pump. Pump a plastic fuel tank full, 5 gallons about 20 L, lift the tank up to the wing and do not spill a drop because fuel as \$10 a gallon. Conversion of units was an every day thing. In the air it was knots for speed and feet for altitude. The barometer pressure was in mm. 1027 1021 etc. QNH. On the ground it was in kilometers and centimeters. Fuel was in liters but planes read fuel consumption on gallons per hour. Off we went to Brokenhill, a town of 20,000, known for mining and the largest town we had seen since leaving Sydney 2,000 miles ago. We visited a park and had a wonderful dinner with a spectacular sunset. We deserved this after 5.1 hours of flying.

Broken hill to Griffith was another 2.8 hour flight. A few bumps but for the 5 flights in a row we again had 20 to 25 kts of wind right on our nose. At one point, it took an hour to pass a road train, a semi truck with 4 trailers, on the road below us. He was doing 70 plus we were trueing out at about 80kts and you could see for 30

miles. Griffith was back into farming country lots of vineyards and orchards.

The flight from Griffith to Cessnock, almost on the East coast 80 miles north of Sydney, was a challenging day of flying. The cloud base started out broken at 4,000 ft and an hour later was solid at 4,000 ft over the Blue Mountains heavily forested by gum trees and creased by deep ravines and rock walls raising to 3800 ft. We were able to stay legal clear of clouds but sometimes only a couple of hundred feet above the trees. We had to deviate from our appointed course several times because of hills that were higher than the base of the clouds. There were not many spots to put down if there was a problem. This leg was fortunately in very smooth air. None-the-less, I was happy to see the airport at Cessnock. We had two days here as we had in Alice Springs. This gave the tour some flexibility had we got behind schedule due to weather or mechanical problems. Fortunately, neither happened, so we simply relaxed and enjoyed an extra day.

The leg from Cessnock to Sydney was like a fine delicate desert after a really great exotic many course dinner. We took off with puffy white clouds dotting the sky like balls of cotton bases at 2000' tops at about 3'000 feet. However why climb above and miss the view down below. After crossing a few ridges at about 1200' feet we could see the Pacific Ocean. Turn South, right, and follow the beach. As we got into the Sydney area we had the air traffic control area similar to our bravo air space. We would have enjoyed a flight into Sydney harbor with a circle West of the Sydney bridge but that required a clearance and only one of the 5 planes in our group was granted that privilege. In its place we flew down the coast over bluffs, beaches and beautiful homes at 900'. We got a good view of the Sydney harbor but at about 5 miles. A 180-degree turn and we were back to our starting checkpoint, the Brooklyn Bridge. A course of 205 took us to a strobe 5 miles later and a second strobe on some Dual tanks 7 miles later and finally to the Prospect Reservoir that is the check-in point for Bankstown airport. Bankstown has three parallel runways. At one time it was the busiest airport in the Southern hemisphere. This day we were landing to the East that is unusual. 11 R is used for the circuit. Student practicing takeoffs and landings use a Right hand pattern for 11R. Often there is a waiting quay for space in this pattern. 11L was the active runway for folks coming from the North and South. 11 C is usually reserved for jets. On this day my little 172 was assigned 11 C. I felt quite important. 11 L had a twin landing 1/8th of a mile ahead of me and 11 R had a piper Warrior at the same distance as I was. The three of us landed within about 10 seconds of each other almost in formation. What a perfect ending for a wonderful adventure. When you start pushing 70, it is important to find and do as many adventures as possible for as long as you can.