

Flight in C-FCES, Lumby, B.C. to North Bay, Ontario

July 4 – 10, 2018

I was free to leave the plane at Freedom Flight Park for as long as I liked. This place has been a haven for my former brother, now turned almost sister, the final major stage being her soon upcoming surgery in Montreal. The many foot-launched aviation followers and the owners have been so supportive of Terri and the flight park has become her home. This welcoming atmosphere has always been extended to me and my friend Gillian, who drove in from Vancouver the day after I landed. We returned to Vancouver by car rather than in the plane. I felt simply that I had done so well to come this far. Also, the airports available in the Vancouver area, Pitt Meadows, Boundary Bay and Squamish, are all at least an hour's drive from Gillian's, so how to get to them for the return flight without having to leave her car? We returned to Lumby or at least Vernon on the Greyhound, a mode of travel, we learned soon after, that is on numbered days.

An episode of low cloud and scattered showers moved in along with our return to Lumby. We could have left but the TAFs (terminal area forecasts) further east, particularly for Cranbrook, were often speaking of very low cloud. As Randy, the flight park owner and accomplished pilot, pointed out, better to be waiting here than someplace else in the mountains. And we were never waiting really, in the sense of just marking time. There were the Canada Day activities in Lumby, highlighted with Randy's band, the Mabel Lickers (Mabel is for Mabel Lake, a noteworthy water body just to the northeast, and a lick denotes a catchy musical phrase). Gillian and I carried out a hydrologic survey to help bolster Randy's case with the authorities against their claim that a drainage channel crossing the park is fish habitat. We helped with maintenance around the park and the short walk into town took us



Gillian, Terri and myself in front of the pilot's lounge reconstruction.

past Saskatoon bushes heavy with berries. Meanwhile Terri was masterminding the replacement of the roof of the pilot's lounge which had been blown away by a passing cold front about a week before. I had received a phone call from Terri, whose first words were to assure me that the plane was fine. Nevertheless, I flew a circuit just to see if the plane felt OK, although I was also very interested to find out how a takeoff would be from the 2000 foot grass strip. It was seemingly effortless and I persuaded Terri to come up for a circuit so I could see how her extra weight affected the roll. Again, no trouble at all. Terri had never viewed the runway from quite the perspective of a light plane approach – I think she found the steep angle quite interesting and we were able to turn off onto the taxiway without backtracking.

So, after three or four days, the weak trough that had been hanging around along the U.S.-Canada border had disappeared. The next morning started with low overcast but you could tell it was thin and would burn off. The aviation weather was still calling for cloud banking up in the Rocky Mountain Trench but the trend

seemed everywhere for rising ceilings. Even while considering these observations, the Lumby picture was turning into isolated cumulus. This takeoff was with another slight notch upward in weight, with all Gillian's and my gear aboard. The wind was mostly cross so not much help there. I held the brakes a bit and clearing ourselves with Randy on 126.7, started our roll. There was never any question about the takeoff. We swung around the corner of the ridge that comes down to Lumby and flew over to Vernon for fuel.

Taking off from Vernon, you are either immediately over the north end of Okanagan Lake or over part of Vernon. I liked the departure over Vernon best as gently sloping but open ground becomes handy very shortly after takeoff. As we initially gained height I could imagine bellying-in or even landing conventionally on the top of the capping open knoll. But setting course for the Monashees was really what needed attention. B.C. Highway 6 connects Vernon with the Arrow Lakes and crosses a pass of less than 4000 feet. Even though it's the Monashees, the terrain around the pass is really quite subdued compared to the snow-covered peaks in the distance further east. The highway makes a big loop going over the pass and momentarily we were distracted by a valley that opened up to the south. We needed to loop our course as well – once we did so we recognized the Arrow Lakes valley and soon caught sight of those welcoming fields near the lake. I can only wonder what would happen under a low ceiling without the height and visibility we had.

We continued towards the Arrow Lakes, gradually turning to bring us over this long, narrow, curving water body. Castlegar appeared to the south, where the Kootenay River joins the Columbia. Castlegar Airport was soon within gliding distance but looked so hemmed in by its enclosing valley. It is one of the airports in southern B.C. where night landings are either prohibited or recommended only for pilots familiar with the airport. One of the Columbia River Treaty dams is just upstream of Castlegar. This was part of W.A.C. Bennett's deal with the U.S. in the 1960s to help regulate Columbia River flow (the famous 'downstream benefits'). The Castlegar dam (High Arrow Dam) turned the original Upper and Lower Arrow lakes into one big reservoir, flooding the agricultural terraces along both. Now that I think back to the flight, that explains the almost complete lack of possible emergency landing sites near the lake shores.



Kootenay Lake, B.C.

Maintaining the gradual turn brought us to following the Kootenay River past Nelson with its runway right downtown, hard by the river shore. Then, reversing the gradual turn brought us over Kootenay Lake. The fields at the south end of the lake beckoned not far away and it wasn't long before the Creston Airport could be spotted. But we looped again back to the northeast, toward Cranbrook. All this looping back and forth is our necessary homage to the north-south grain of the mountains. This same grain plagued the CPR into building the now long abandoned Kettle Valley Railway to forestall the north-extended tentacles of James Jerome Hill's Great Northern.

At Cranbrook we find the same Darren of Eclipse Helicopters and his repeated welcome into his office for flight planning. I no sooner get off the telephone than he's handing me printouts of the latest TAFs for Medicine Hat and Swift Current. We are back to our cruising altitude of 7,500 ft. by the time we turn into the Rockies proper, more looping past Sparwood and the mountain-top open pit coal mines, much more visible now than on the trip west. We can now see through the Crowsnest to the Prairies beyond. Many fields have turned yellow with the bloom of Canola, the lowering sun angle accentuating the colour. At Lethbridge we are directed to parking with signals as if we were an airliner – I'm not up on the signals but seem to satisfy the attendant nonetheless. Inside, we find the big orange cat fast asleep in the same soft chair. Even though the day is drawing on, the weather is so fine that we make one more leg to Swift Current. The sun is just setting as we tie the plane down in the same spot I used westbound and the flying club car is parked in the same place.



Old Man River reservoir east of Crowsnest Pass

The return trip is turning into a mirror image of the outbound. Brandon is our next overnight stopping place but, of course, it will be more than just a stop. My cousins, Ken and Florence, are at the airport in no time. The weather is very warm so that afternoon we set up their above-ground pool. After emptying the farm's 2,500 gallon water trailer, Ken and I make two trips to the community well to complete the filling. At first the water is a bit brownish in the pool but daughter Diana's chemist's hand makes this colouring disappear. The next day I am able to take Diana and her husband Richard for a local flight over Rivers and the nearby subdivision where they are renovating their new home. They both seem to enjoy the flight and Diana gets some excellent photos. On the return I ask Brandon Radio for clearance to fly across the departure path from the active runway so that Diana can get a photo of her parent's farm.

We are with Ken and Florence for two more days, partly to be on hand for Diana's daughter's birthday and partly to wait out a concentration of thunderstorms in southeast Manitoba. We attend service at their church, along with its small but most devoted congregation. The topic is the age-old dilemma of the presence or absence of divine intervention. At some point, the reverend seems to be saying, one has to take responsibility for events. The idea is not so much to have every outcome explained as to realize that there are some that simply can't be. I suppose this is how religion considers risk.

Our next flying day gets us back to Atikokan, through most of the airspace requiring a clearance to enter (Portage Le Prairie and Winnipeg). We are just a few minutes late to have the airport manager come to pump fuel for free so we elect to stay here and camp. We are given a free ride into town with a taxi van, the driver claiming that someone called from the airport. We had indeed enquired of the White Otter Inn if they could put us up but they were full. I can only think that he had heard the plane as we circled over the downtown during our approach. At any rate, he wouldn't take any payment. Later, after we had walked back, we took a stroll down the runway and came across a professional photographer whose specialty was deer – made me think of the first morning here on the outbound trip when I came out of the tent to find two deer right beside the tent. That night, someone with nothing better to do than annoy visitors, parked their vehicle with the light shining straight towards us. I think if we had parked a bit further away, they wouldn't have bothered.

The final flying day returned us to North Bay. A jaunty Cessna 150 landed to refuel at Marathon, the pilot taking my advice to land the direction opposite to what I had used, on account of a changed wind direction. At Chapleau, two CL-415s were parked and Gillian netted an invitation for a tour while I was in trying to file the last flight plan over the baying of the attendant's basset hound. I got in on the tour as well. The guide is the officer who coordinates fire fighting efforts from a kind of flying command post. I couldn't help wondering how our new Ontario Premier might be regarding the aerial service with its \$45 million-apiece water bombing planes. Writing right now, just after the containment of the much covered Parry Sound 33 fire, I expect they are on a firm footing, for the time being at least. We could see smoke coming from the Temagami fire off to the north, the other really large fire for Ontario this season. For ourselves, we weaved our way around cumulus for part of the way to North Bay, a last salute to the world of the atmosphere before it would disappear once again with our return to zero airspeed.

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