

## August 15th, Angel Fire, Eagles Nest & Cimarron, NM

The drive between Taos and [Angel Fire, NM](#) is less than 40 miles. However it is along a very winding and narrow two lane road that takes you up to a 9,200 elevation to the narrow pass that lies between mountain tops. It was a good 2 hour drive, but because of the slow speeds and early morning temperatures in the upper 50's, the motor home engine never came close to overheating. When I got to the Angle Fire airport, where I had planned on spending the day, I was made aware of some changeable weather that was being forecast for the weekend. There were flash flood watches and the prediction was for very heavy rain through Sunday afternoon. I had to make a decision as to whether or not I would stay over or continue onto the other side of the mountains to try to reach the Colorado border by evening. I figured that as long as I was there, I might as well try to get some flying in while the weather was still halfway decent. Even though there were blue skies, white puffy clouds and plenty of sun, the temperatures were a cool 60 degrees and the southerly winds were already gusting to 23 knots (better than 25 m.p.h.). I parked the motor home on the airport ramp and off-loaded and set up the plane for a short 30 minute orientation flight after which I would make the decision as to what I was going to do.

It is interesting on how geology plays itself out. Angel Fire is located in a 5 or 6 mile wide, and 25 mile long lush, green valley located amongst some very high mountains. The airport itself is the 5th highest in elevation in the United States. With a 8,400 foot elevation, it exceeded the Taos field that I had just left, by over a thousand feet. Because of the very brisk winds which were right down runway 17, and the cool, dense morning air, I was airborne in only a few hundred feet, and began a brisk climb to 9,500 feet. At that altitude I had a good view of the entire valley below me and the Eagle Nest Lake to the north. The air aloft was fairly stable considering the strong winds at the surface, and flight was surprisingly smooth...that is until you got near to the mountains. Angel Fire is a prime ski area with some 70 runs on the adjacent mountains. I took a couple of photos of those ski runs and a few of the lake, but decided that I would not want to be spending the weekend there if it was going to rain heavily. Since my main means of ground transportation is the scooter, it would not be fun to be traveling around the town in a downpour.



This is a view of the 7,000 foot long runway at Angle Fire, NM and its distant mountains



The 8,500 foot high valley goes on for about 25 miles with a large lake at its northern edge



Here I am flying along Eagle Nest Lake, viewing toward a large dam located in the cut



On my return to the airport, I had a good view of the ski trails that dot the mountain beyond

I radioed in to report that I was on a 4 mile final to the 7,000 foot long runway 17, when another plane called reporting that he was about 1 mile behind me. In order not to hold him up, I aimed for the numbers so that I could turn off at the first taxi way which was about 500 feet from my touch down point. This meant that I had to taxi almost a full mile to reach the ramp. The pilot of that second plane was a lot smarter, and he flew his tail wheeled airplane at about 25 feet above the runway all the way down to the ramp area. We got there about the same time, and after both planes were shut down, he stopped by for a visit. His name was Joe Woods, and he was flying a 1979 Piper Super Cub, that he had owned for about 12 years. He had come in from Raton, NM which is just below the state line with Colorado and had to fly the [Cimarron Canyon](#) because of overcast sky conditions. Now this is the same Canyon that I later drove the motor home through, and there were portions of it that appeared to be hardly wide enough to accept the wing width of Joe's Cub. In the event of an emergency, it is unlikely that there would be enough room to make a 360 degree turn back and absolutely no place to land. As Joe is a resident of Angel Fire and an accomplished mountain flyer, this flight probably did not bother him as much as it would have me. Since my home field in Hilton Head, SC is at 20 feet elevation, and even my airport at Seymour, TN in the Smoky Mountains is but 1,000 feet high, the type of flying that I am now doing is an entirely new experience...but one that I am thoroughly enjoying.

When I mentioned to Joe that I had decided to pack the plane back into my trailer and head on toward Colorado, he agreed that it was probably a good choice. He did recommend, however, that when I drove through Cimarron, that I should make it a point to visit the [Philmont Ranch](#) which is located but 4 miles south of the town. This is a 140,000 acre property that Mr. Waite Phillips (a 1920's oil man...but not of the Phillips 66 brand) gave to the Boy Scouts of America. He was a wealthy philanthropist that believed in giving away half of what he owned to deserving charities. It is now the national boy scout training center and hosts up to 30,000 scouts for summer camping each year. The home, which is open for tours each day, is a beautiful Spanish Mediterranean style encompassing about 16,000 square feet and was completed in 1927. The tour took about an hour, and was well worth the stop-over.

I wound up spending the night in the motor home at the Colorado State Welcome Center and dealt with heavy rains and strong winds all night long.



The town of Angel Fire is fairly small, and only really comes alive during the winter ski season



This is a view of the shear granite cliffs that make up the Cimarron Canyon that I had to drive through once I left the Angel Fire valley



The exterior of Philmont Villa, the summer home of Waite Phillips is beautiful Mediterranean style



The home's living room is replete with European antiques and furnishing brought back by Phillips