

Aug. 28-31 - Montana - Big Sky Country, Part 2

Bozeman - August 29 & 30 -

I arrived at Bozeman in the late afternoon on Friday the 29th, and brought the trailer onto the ramp at Gallatin Field. [Arlin's Aircraft Service](#) was very accommodating and welcomed me as if I were in an arriving Citation Jet. Since the weather was so pleasant, I decided to see the area from aloft. After unpacking the trailer and swinging out the wings, I took the Highlander up for an hour's flight over the city and its adjacent mountain terrain. I found Bozeman, and its sister cities of Belgrade, Manhattan and Three Forks all lying within a 50 mile valley, surrounded by mountains that reach well over 10,000 feet. The airport is at 4,500 feet elevation, and next to the main runway 12-30, (over 9,000 feet in length), is a well groomed 3200 foot turf strip just adjacent. I used the grass runway whenever wind conditions permitted...which was just once during my two days of flying.

As I mentioned previously, the main reason for visiting at Bozeman was to see my brother's mini-ranch which is located in horse country, just outside of the city limits. I don't know the population of this spread out small Montana city, but I am sure that the branch of the State University that is located here adds greatly to the local populace.

After landing, I tied down the Highlander, and took my motor home over to my brother's place and parked it there in his back yard. Unfortunately he is currently at his full time residence in Vermont, and when he arrives here in two weeks, I will long be gone. Perhaps I will have better luck in catching up with him when I pass through Vermont in about 6 weeks. However, I did have a chance to see my niece, Casey, who was attending the University for several years, and decided to make Bozeman her permanent home. However, the day that I arrived, she had returned to her employment at an upscale Fly Fishing Resort called [Ruby Springs Lodge](#). When I say upscale, I do mean upscale. With a \$1,000 per day, per person all inclusive rate, it caters to the "rich and famous" Casey mentioned that guests that have been there this year included screen actors Michael Keaton and Tom Cruise, as well as many CEO's of the nation's top corporations. With only 7 cabins that can accommodate a maximum of 24 guests at any one time, the 32 staff members that service this establishment are well versed in providing excellence.

When Saturday dawned, sunny and clear, I assumed that I was going to have another delightful flying day. I made the mistake of checking only the Weather Channel's website and determined that it was going to stay that way for most of the day, although with a pick up in winds. Casey, and her boyfriend Adam, was scheduled to pick me up at the small field that is close to her work establishment at about 1 PM. Halfway to the Bozeman airport, I realized that I had failed to do the FAA preflight weather check that I usually perform via the computer. Oh, well, I thought, I can get the briefing over the phone once I get to the airport. However, when I finally made the 30 minute drive over on my motor scooter, and took on the 4 gallons of fuel that the flight would consume, plus another 4 gallons as reserve to compliment the 4 gallons that were already in my tanks, it was nearly noon, and I knew that I had to get into the air soon, or I would arrive there late.



View of downtown Bozeman, the University & the mountains in the background



The Madison River cuts thru a deep gorge on its way to Ennis Lake, just to the south of Bozeman



My brother's mini-ranch with my motor home parked in his back yard.



My niece, Casey "strikes a pose"

Well, weather was still looking good, and winds were out of the north-west at only 6 knots, so how bad could it be? Since the self serve fuel pumps were located just adjacent to the 2,650 foot long sailplane runway 3-21, I elected to use runway 3 for my departure and saw "wheels up" at precisely 12:15. The flight across the valley was smooth and I climbed up to my cruise altitude of 8,500 which would take me over the 7,000 foot mountains that were on my course heading. I decided to make take a slightly circumventus course in order to avoid the higher 10,000 foot peaks that I would have to cross if I went direct. I estimated that this 50 mile trip would take 40 minutes to complete at my "economy" 4 gal./hour fuel flow setting which produced a callibrated 90 m.p.h. cruise speed. However, I was shocked to see that my actual ground speed was only 50 knots, or about 57 m.p.h. After encountering some minor turbulence over the ridge line, that speed decreased to 45 knots, or just a bit over 50 m.p.h. I could swear that I could see some cows in fields below, leaving me in their dust. When I arrived at my destination field, I noticed the wind sock standing straight out, but thankfully it was directly down the runway. That 40 minute flight took almost a solid hour to complete. However, Casey and Adam were a couple of minutes late, so it worked out OK.

We drove over to [Virginia City](#), a quaint 1860's town that has changed very little since then. The old, original buildings still stand, with most having been turned into museums displaying artifacts of the times. We had a nice lunch and a chance to catch up. I guess that it has been almost 10 years since I last saw my niece and it was good finding out what has been happening in her life. She really loves the far west, and especially Montana, and I suspect that she will eventually settle down and make it her permanent home. After lunch and a stroll around the town, it was time to head back to the airport. Winds had picked up considerably, now with a steady flow of 30 m.p.h. and gusts to probably 40. Since, my plane will begin flying at about 30, that left precious little room for error in my taxi out to the active runway. A strong enough gust could easily flip the plane over on its back, so I had Adam hold onto one wing, and Casey the other until I was ready to taxi out. I decided not to go any further than the taxiway just adjacent to the ramp and after applying take-off power, I believe that I left the ground in well under 50 feet.

On the plus side, the tailwind on the way back allowed me to see a 125 m.p.h. ground speed and the return was completed in under a half hour. Since the winds had shifted 180 degrees in direction from when I departed just 3 hours previously, I found that runway 21 was a better bet than the longer airliner runway 12. This decision was clinched when the tower informed me that winds were from 190 degrees at a sustained 30-40 m.p.h. While the landing was OK, the taxi into the ramp area was a bit of an adventure. Once I arrived back at Arlin's and because the sky to the West was now darkening with lightening seen off in the distance, I decided that it would probably be wise to bring in the wings and put the plane back into the trailer. Sunday was forecast to have rain all day and gusty wind conditions. As circumstance would have it, once I returned to the motor home to prepare for my next day departure the winds calmed down to about 10 m.p.h., the skies brightened and the sun shown through. Today, Sunday, it is partly cloudy with no winds.

Weather...go figure!



A view of the Ennis Valley seen at ground level



Downtown Virginia City's "main street"



Horses compete with cars in this "olde town"



You can take a stagecoach ride, an old firetruck city tour, or travel on a steam locomotive train