

August 12, 2014 - Around the ~~World~~ Lake in 80 ~~Days~~ Minutes

Lake Okeechobee is not only the largest fresh water lake in the State of Florida, but it is the 7th largest in the US, and covers 730 square miles, which is half the size of the state of Rhode Island. Its Circumference is a bit over 100 miles and today I decided to see it all... low and slow, with my Highlander Light Sport plane.

I needed to replenish my fuel supply, both in my airplane's wing tanks, as well as in my reserve supply stored at my hanger. I threw 4 empty 5 gallon jerry cans into the aircraft's luggage compartment and took to the sky on a clockwise journey around "The Lake". It was going to be a pretty day for flying. I planned a refueling stop at Clewiston's Airglades airport, which still was selling 100 LL av/gas for under \$5/gallon. This was going to be a sightseeing flight to enjoy the scenery and to view the small communities which butt up to the 50 foot tall and 100 foot wide dike that surrounds this lake. The "Florida Trail" is a paved pathway that follows much of the lake's perimeter atop that dike, and which attracts hikers, campers, fisherman and bicyclists alike. Those sections which are not paved have well worn vehicle tracks that still make pedestrian and bike travel possible. There is a rim canal alongside that berm, which also surrounds the entire lake, and acts as an egress into its several lock entrances.

My first big landmark, after leaving the Indiantown airport, is the Florida Power & Light clean burning natural gas & solar generating plant located at the northeast corner of the lake. As I continued my southbound journey at 700 feet I came across the Palm Beach Glades Airport, located on the east side of the lake in the town of Pahokee. This can be a busy pilot training field as it offers several instrument approach procedures, but today all was quiet. I soon overflew the town of Belle Glade, which I featured in a recent blog article, and, before you knew it, I was at the lake's southern community of Clewiston where it was time for the fuel stopover. Airglades is a busy skydiving center, but like Pahokee, today everything was quiet. While pumping gas I was greeted by a gentleman who had pulled up behind my plane. He had just flown in from Gainesville, Ga. located about 60 miles north of Atlanta, while en-route to Fort Lauderdale. His plane, a four seat high wing Cessna Cardinal, is about half again as fast as my Highlander and is designed for cross country travel. It was a similar model, my Cessna Skyhawk, which I once owned and flew all the way down to Mexico's Pacific cities of Acapulco, Zihuatanejo and Ixtapa, as well as to its Capital, Mexico City.

I was soon back in the air, and continuing on my northern trek around the Lake's western perimeter. Here the resort town of More Haven is the largest village on this side of the lake, and a jumping off point for sport fisherman. Then I was over the Brighton Indian Reservation, which is home to yet another Seminole Indian casino. I had planned for a lunch stop at the Okeechobee County airport, located on the northwestern point of the Lake, where I often take my little Yorkie, Scarlet, for meal stops. After a nice lunch at the Landing Strip Cafe, it was time for my final 30 mile flight, directly over one of those major lock entrances to "The Big O" (the lake) and back to my home field at Indiantown, after an enjoyable "Around the Lake in 80 Minutes" of flying.



US's largest natural gas power generating plant



Lakes east side: Pahoee and sugarcane fields



Lake's northside rim canal & dike's Florida Trail



Close up of one of the lake's entrance locks