

Sept. 20, 2013 - Flying the Savannah

There is a lot more to South Carolina than its affluent coastal communities with their spacious homes, expensive automobiles and large yachts. Back when I operated my consulting and testing business I had occasion to travel the width and breadth of my home state, and I enjoyed visiting and working for the good folks who help make the wheels of industry and commerce turn. My clients ran the gamut from Paper Mills to Pharmaceutical Plants, and from Food Processing to Forrest Products. I did my inspections at Power Plants (both nuclear and fossil) and then followed the electrical flow from transmission to distribution and from sub-station into the end user's facilities, be they military bases, universities or Industrial giants such as Georgia-Pacific, Kroger Foods, and US Steel. I got to see how things were made, beginning with incoming raw materials to the final packaging and shipping, via rail car or truck trailer. I was able to perform my infrared thermal surveys throughout the US and had clients from Maine, to Florida and California to Washington State, and literally most states in between. I greatly enjoyed my 3+ decade professional career and looked at it as one long paid vacation. And while the remuneration was good, the thing that I most liked about my job was the opportunity to meet and work with what I considered to be "the salt of the earth"... regular people who rolled up their sleeves and got the job done. When I finally sold off the balance my business accounts, in 2009, the economy had just begun to take a nosedive and some of my clients had scaled way back or even closed their doors. So today's flight, halfway across the State of South Carolina, was going to bring back memories of the glory days of my business. I was going to visit some old friends... this time at 1,000 feet above their facilities.

The Savannah River eventually empties into the Atlantic Ocean, just below the City of Savannah, Georgia, with its origination in the mountains of western North Carolina. It makes up the border between SC and Georgia for most of its 300 mile run. Today I was going to follow that river at an altitude of 800 feet or so all the way up to Barnwell, SC where I was planning to stop for lunch, and then I was going to fly over a half dozen or so of my previous client's mills and plant facilities, some of which are now closed. These ranged from saw and paper mills to a cannery, a bakery and even a state prison. At no time on this trip did I exceed 1,000 feet, so I had a chance to see, in close proximity, those same facilities that I had previously trudged around at ground level, carrying my 40 pounds of test equipment. It was indeed a bittersweet trip, made especially enjoyable due to the dead calm air with absolutely no turbulence or disturbance of any type. Much of the time my side window was lifted open, giving a clear unhampered view and plenty of fresh air. The flight was "low and slow" and when I finally reached my destination at the Barnwell Regional Airport, I used their courtesy van to drive one mile over to The Lakeside Cafe for a very fresh shrimp salad. Barnwell is the airport of choice for those corporate aircraft that bring their people over to the Savannah River Site, the US Dept. of Energy's nuclear processing facility which is currently operated jointly by Fluor Daniel, Northrup Grumman, and Honeywell. When I used to do my inspections there, in the '70's, both Dupont and Westinghouse had a go at its operation, and back then it was affectionately known as "the bomb plant" since it processed heavy water for the "H" bomb.



The Savannah River, just north of Savannah, GA



This river meanders and flows for over 300 miles



An old client, the Elliott Saw Mill in Estil SC



Here I am in front of the Barnwell Apt. FBO terminal