

CenAm 2013

Done deal....

January 18, 2013, Jack McCormick

Well, we just got back Wednesday evening after a one day flight from Florida to Pegasus IFR at 4,000 feet (until we got to the New Mexico border). Kind of cheating as we departed from the Florida's panhandle but that still counts.

Oh for a 421 Golden Eagle.... Fast, pressurized, lots of leg room, and a nice ride but, when I opened my hanger door and saw the Commander sitting there, the one that has made at least 12 CenAm trips with me in the past, I had second thoughts however; I am getting way ahead of myself.



Flight of N678SW, (Baja 1-2) from Pegasus back to Pegasus, CenAm 2013

Day -2 (two days before the start of the trip.

January 4, 2013; to Laredo Texas

There were two twins scheduled to go on the trip, my Aero Commander 500S and a Golden Eagle 421. Both had only two persons so, we doubled up and the Commander stayed home....

Departed Pegasus sitting right seat and we did a sever clear direct flight to Laredo, Texas where we landed and taxied to Lacey's Aero Service. (direct takes you out of the US and into Mexico twice, no problem)

There they had a crew car waiting and had reservations for three rooms at the Historic Hotel La Posada in downtown Laredo for Claudia, Bob and Mary Ellen Carlon, and Myself.

Day -1 (one day before the start of the trip)

January 5, 2013: To Veracruz, Mexico and on to Flores, Guatemala

Well, knock me down, pick me up, and knock me down again. When arriving Veracruz, we told the line people that this would be a technical stop as we were continuing on to Guatemala. The line people indicated that this was not a problem and most fees would be waived and there would be a minimum of paperwork.

Sure, you never believe that kind of statement until you are on your takeoff roll departing so, we walked into the terminal past all the airport security that appeared to have little to do and filled out flight plans. (in and out of Mexico) Was told it was a done deal, did not need immigration, customs, agriculture, etc. however, we would have to purchase a multi-entry authorization for the aircraft. Nothing but smiles as we handed over a credit card to do the Multi-Entry purchase.

Whoops, none of our credit cards worked however, the lone DGAC person working that Saturday afternoon said that the DGAC cannot take cash but he could. So, I handed the man cash, he put his credit card in the machine, printed out all the official and required receipts, and we were on our way. I still don't know how it worked out for him however, I have a good idea....

Once in the air, we went from sever clear to solid IMC. We had filed IFR so we now had to put our complete trust in the system (as well as the big sky theory) as we plowed through the gray matter at 180 knots.

Called Flores (Tikal) about 50 out, got a return reply indicating to expect the ILS runway 28, report 25 out.

At 15 out, it was still solid IMC however, knowing the terrain; we started a slow descent, grabbed the ILS and at about 3,000', started to see patches of ground. Down another 500 feet and we had hazy ground. And then there were the two white, two red lights and a runway disappearing into the haze. The Great Guatemala ILS God was with us, all was good.



Day 1, the official start of CenAm 2013

January 6, still at Flores

Stayed out on the island and did a laid-back kind of day. Got up late, walked the circle, had lunch, visited with our Guatemala friends, and waited for all the other planes on the trip to come in. And they did.

Great reunion. All but one couple had been on trips with me in the past and that couple had been a member for a long time, had watched our CenAm trips in the past, and this was the year.

Then it was time to gather to relax, talk about what was planned for the morning, have dinner and a good night sleep. Whoops, forgot to say that Flores is firecracker (fire bomb?) crazy. Sounded like we were in the middle of a war almost the entire night.

Day 2, still in Flores

It must be early :30 in Flores as our bus was outside the door waiting to take everybody to Tikal to visit the Mayan Ruins. As I have been to the Ruins six or seven times, I did not go however, I spent most of the day at the airport getting all flight plans and paperwork put together for the next day's flight to Honduras. Another great dinner, another great night of sleep, more fireworks, and all was well.

Oh, I forgot about the Hooligan Parade. In the evening from January 1 through the 20th, there is a Hooligan Parade. Lead by one or more Hooligans and followed by a marching band and then at least 10% of all who live on the island, they march around town dancing, making music, and setting off fireworks. What a hoot, only in Guatemala.



Day 3, check in at La Ceiba and on to Trujillo, Honduras

In the air by 9:00, our next destination was La Ceiba for check in only and then on to Trujillo. The only rough spot on the trip, we had about a three hour lesson on how not to be efficient. However, I kept remembering that "waiting was an action". We had advised the DGAC that we were just checking in, picking fuel, and continuing to Trujillo. Everyone at the airport knew it but the ground crew who parked us way out by the fuel pumps and then it was bring in (most of) the luggage, go through security, immigration, etc. get flight plans, pay fees, and then go back through security, etc. Now, this is not the peoples fault who work there as they were very friendly and helpful but it is just the procedure that complicates things....

Then, it was liftoff for the short 54nm flight to Trujillo. All ran just under the clouds at about 1,500 feet in and out of the rain all landing one at a time on the uncontrolled unlighted paved strip that is also used as a road, driveway, drag strip, soccer field, parking lot, and more. We made a statement, we are here....

Day 4, at Trujillo

What a great place. Land, park, walk across the runway and you are at the hotel. This small village (town) has as much and as little as you need. Most spent most of the day on a short walk into town and then doing the tourist thing. Paid



US\$5 to go through the Santa Barbra Fortress, ate lunch from a street vender, did a little shopping, as well as looked at brand new motorcycles in a combination appliance/motorcycle store. That evening we were treated to a show by an amazing group of young dancers. The enthusiasm, fun, and spirit of their culture was what it was all about. The dancers performed to the music of two drummers and as the evening grew later, the dancers got more aggressive. Yes, and all of a sudden, we (including myself) were in the middle of the group pulsating to the magic music and dance that could only be provided by the culture of the Garifuna people of Trujillo.

And the following day, as it was when we landed, it was just walk out to the plane, start up, and takeoff. No paperwork, no fees, no immigration, oh my.

Day 5, to Roatan

Yes, our Island in the Sun. And this is one place that I always double check to insure that my gear is down when landing.



All departed Trujillo for another short flight across the pond to Roatan. All landed, parked, unloaded luggage, and walked direct through the terminal to our waiting vans. This was a National flight and no one needed to see us and no paperwork was required.

Took a 40 minute van ride (longer than our flight) to Foster's West End Resort. What a laid back place. Fun people along with the assorted vendors were on the

beach doing the tourist thing. Could have your hair braided, a beach massage, get an ice cream cone, invest in an original painting, as well as get a little of that stuff that makes you act really funny.

At first it was overwhelming as we had been staying at fairly isolated places but it did not take long to fit right in (minus the Speedos)

And the food was so right. First night was Lobster; second night could be lobster or....

And, for the first time, we had clear skies and many paid the price.... Put on number 100 sun block and still got burned. Something about clear sky, white

sand, blue water, and numbing drinks that makes you forget about the skin that is not normally exposed to anything.

Foster's resort, it is a hands down winner.



Day 6, Check in at Grand Cayman and then on to Brac

Cleared out of Roatan with the normal paperwork and fees and it was out over the Caribbean to the small island city of Georgetown where all landed and cleared into the Caymans.

But wait; there is more to the "landing" part of this report.

Seems that Grand Cayman's Tower is also Ground and Approach. Baja 1-2 was first in a flight of six, all telling Tower we were so far out inbound for landing. Then, the call came from Tower that all inbound VFR flights from the West move to the right of the approach path and figure on a right base for runway 8. Yep, lots of commercial traffic into Grand Cayman. When our 421 was about five out, we were cleared to land behind the 737, caution for wake turbulence. No problem but that was the start of the fun.

The United 737 in front of us was instructed to accelerate its landing and the United 737 behind us was told to do a spin. You could have almost heard the groan from the first officer as he started his 360. Then as we had the landing 37 in sight and it was still on final, we indicated we would do a 360 which the then tower told us to do a 360. Then, still on final, we could still see the 37 in front of us still in the air. We then did a series of S turns until we were on short final. The 37 was now on the ground and was told to expedite his back taxi. (there is no parallel taxiway) To confirm permission to land as we were close to touchdown and the 37 was still back taxing, we questioned our "cleared to land" permission. The Tower answered by telling the 37 to speed up the back taxi and yes, we were cleared to land. Yep, we were touching down and the 37 was still on the runway but, no problem, this is the Caribbean. Then, we were told to expedite our back taxi to the first available taxiway because of the incoming 37. (you know, the one that was doing spins out there)

And guess what, we made the very first paved turn and found ourselves taxing up to the fire station. So Tower told us that we were on a driveway, please (he was still very pleasant) turnaround, go back onto the runway, and continue to back-taxi to a taxiway that goes to the terminal.

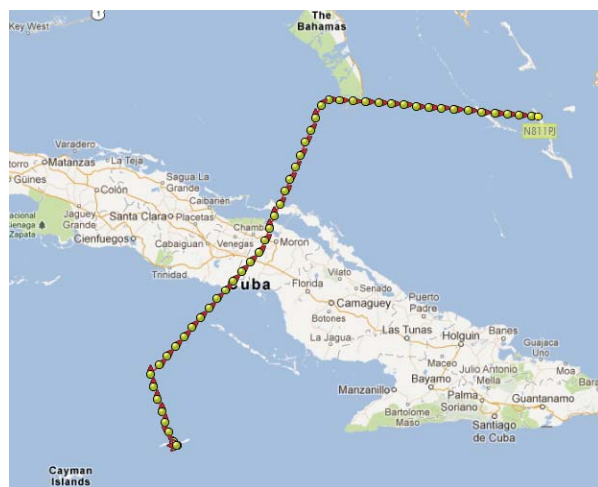
We just cleared the runway when the 37 that was behind us touched down.

True.... I could not make up a story this good.....

Cleared into the Caymans fairly fast and then it was back into the air for the short flight to Cayman Brac where we landed, grabbed our luggage, and walked through the arrival lounge to the outside without seeing anyone.

Day 7, across Cuba to The Bahamas

Cayman Brac was our only one night stay. Our flight today was IFR as that is what is required to cross Cuba. I had stayed up late getting all the flight plans done and filed. Crossing was easy. If I remember correctly, it was A511 to B767 to UCA to Diana direct to Stella Maris at 8'000 feet. All were released in ten minute intervals so no one ran over the other and necessitate a plop down on Cuban soil. No Problem.... But I did request direct from Imela and was told in no uncertain terms by Havana Center that we must stay on an IFR flight plan. THAT IS "I" "F" "R".



Did not argue any more on that one but once passed off to Miami Center and still in Cuban airspace, it was VFR direct Stella Maris.

Landed Stella Maris where we did the five minute check into The Bahamas, fueled up, and continued on to Cat Island and the Fernandez Bay Village.

Day 8, Cat Island

Captain Toney's Fernandez Bay Village is the tropical paradise that we all had been waiting for. The Village is laid out along a white soft sand beach with all rooms (and houses) overlooking the bay. The reception/restaurant area is all open window and the "make it yourself" bar is on the honor system. And there are all kind of adult toys i.e. bicycles, kayaks, paddle boards, and more. Yep, I even took a bike (along with several others) to the airport and back



while others, more aggressive than I, did the four mile ride into the village and back.



FBV is definitely a place to come back to time after time after time. And then there is Donna, the most gracious hostess ever. Always there with a great smile, can make anything happen, and always has an extra hug for you....

Day 9, to Fort Pierce

Well, this is the day.... Some departed back to the States and some hung for a couple more days. Ourselves, we did the several hour flight to Fort Pierce, did a great lunch at the Tiki Restaurant while the ground crew fueled us up, and it was on to Quincy (Florida) for an overnight before our long two stop flights to Pegasus

CenAm 2013 All that it lived up to be. We had weather, sun, rain, wind, and lots of fun.

It is amazing how much fun and laughter mature adults can have when all tossed into the same barrel. All departed good friends and there will be lots of follow-up.

Now I am back to reality thinking about Whales and then.... CenAm 2014







