

Close, But no Cigar

Beautiful Lake Tahoe. Last year, Kim and I had a great time there with the Vintage Mooney Group and so did everyone else. We had almost 80 Mooneys worth of great people show up and park their Mooneys side by side until the Mountain West ramp looked like Mooneyville USA.

Between the bright blue skies, the excellent service we received from Michael Golden and his staff at Mountain West Aviation, the hosted lunch courtesy of Top Gun Aviation, the great aviation seminars, Kim and I meeting new friends, the ramp chatter, and the first-rate technical advice I got from Jerry Manthey, it truly was a weekend to remember. I wanted to do it again.

The Vintage Mooney Group board felt the same way and decided to make it an annual event. Our goal this year was to break our record and strive for 100 Mooneys. Announcements were placed in aviation websites and magazines and it paid off. At last count 108 people registered for the fly-in and indicated that a total of 214 smiling people would attend.

Five weeks in advance, I sent an email to those who like flying with me or have expressed a desire to do so. Kent sent me the most compelling email and so he was going to go with me. As the weeks went by and the time drew near, he assisted me big time in creating the over 200 nametags the VMG were to hand out to everyone. Unfortunately, it wasn't going to happen, not this time...



About a week before the fly-in, the annual southern California June Gloom weather pattern set in. A low overcast was over us every morning. Every day it was the same. I hoped for the best.



The sky over my airport Friday morning was not good at all

Kent met me at my hangar and we were both excited about our fun trip and mini-vacation weekend. Jon and Lori Elinsky drove up and she was really concerned about the overcast sky. I told her that I was going to look for a break in the overcast and climb through it to get on top like I had done before.



Lori and Jon



Kent was just "Hanging out" waiting to get going



Lori took a picture of two very silly guys, Kent and me

Lori is instrument rated but evidently not 'current' and she had strong concerns about the weather. They left us, we got the in Mooney, and then Dave walked up to us. He admonished me to not do anything dumb up there. I promised I would fly smart. I had called an FAA weather briefer and she

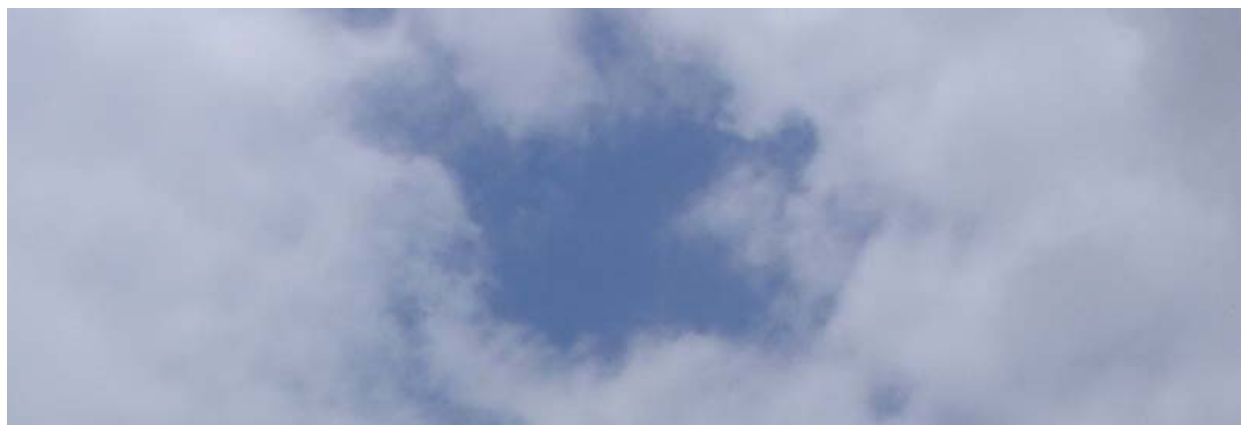
said that if I could get safely over of the clouds covering the LA Basin, the rest of the trip would be fine, weather wise.

I turned the key and the 'new' engine fired right up. I set the flight plan into the computer (my Garmin 430 GPS) and went through my standard run up procedures. All was good to go so far. My next concern was due to Kent's generous weight. Would we clear the trees at the end of the runway? I had purposely flown for an hour and a half earlier in the week to burn off some fuel to lighten the load as Kent is a Big Honey Bear.

I got a running start as I swung onto the runway and then advanced the power to 100%. 60, 65, 70 knots on the airspeed indicator and she lifted off by herself! I lowered the nose to build up some speed as I raised the landing gear 20 feet above the runway.

The Mooney laminar flow wing kicked in and gently lifted us higher. When we got close to where the trees were I pulled gently back on the yoke and we climbed as if gravity said "I give up". Up, up, up we climbed and I left the airport area searching for a bit of blue sky. Oh, this is so much fun. At 2000 feet above the ground I leveled off and reduced the power as the overcast was not too far above us.

Everything was gloomy and hazy all around us. I slowed down some more to maybe 150 MPH. We were both looking for a peek at blue sky. All of a sudden one appeared right in front of us. I shoved the pedal to the metal as I pointed the nose up and started an aggressive climb.



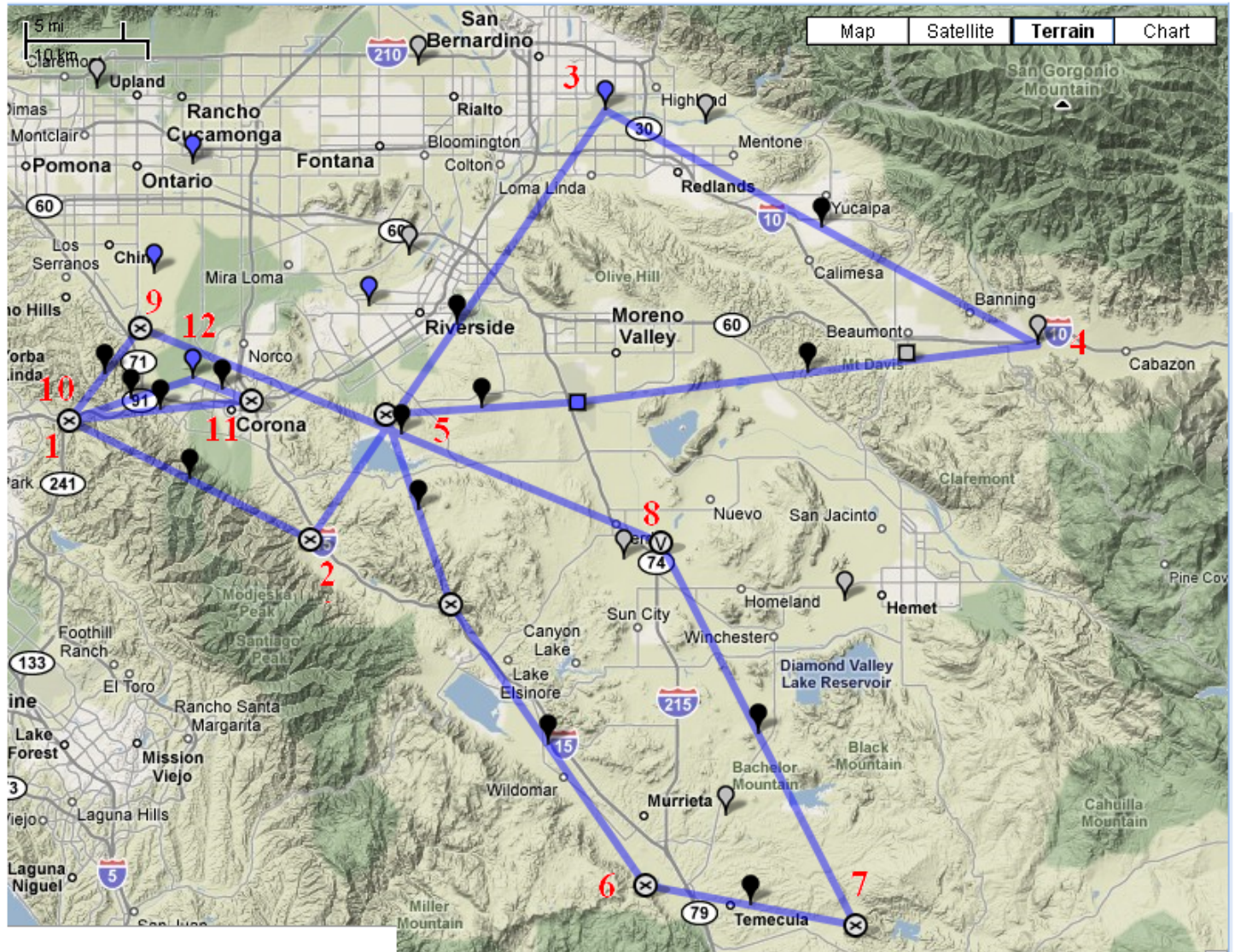
The hole in the overcast looked pretty much like this one

I was optimistic as we got up into it. Then the blue sky started to slide up relative to us and I knew we would brush the bottom of that hole in the clouds, or worse, go into a cloud. I am not rated to go into a cloud. It would be really dumb to go into a cloud. I powered back to idle and pointed the nose back down, we were soon back where we started from, underneath that huge overcast.



I was looking for one of these bigger holes but it never happened

We went all over the eastern end of the LA Basin in an almost zigzag fashion. At times Air Traffic Control wondered what I was up to based on my unusual track on their computer enhanced radar screens which nowadays are computer monitors displaying a Lockheed Martin traffic control system.



My almost zigzag route over southern California courtesy Landings.com

I found and missed that hole around point 2 on the map. ATC advised 2100' and scattered at San Bernardino (point 3) so we went over there. She forgot to advise about the overcast layer at 4000'. Then I decided to follow I-10 to Banning but no luck over there either. I knew Palm Springs was having just scattered clouds but I could not chance going any further east as the mountains come pretty close together past Cabazon and I could not see either of them.

Kent gave me the ultimate vote of confidence in my flying, as he fell asleep. After another 45 minutes of flying in the yuck as outlined above, I gave up and returned to Corona and made a nice landing. That was one thing that I had control over. We put miss Slippery away and indeed popped a couple of Blue Cans. An hour and a half of flying and over 200 miles traveled and no cigar!

Kent came home with me and he got to chat with Susie when she came home from work. We put him up here for the night. I made some coffee and then we went back to the airport again Saturday morning but it was solid clouds as far as we could see. I drove him home to Anaheim. We drove

through drizzle. It was solid clouds all of the way there and back. Then the sky opened up once I returned to Corona but it was too late.



Hey Mother Nature, thanks a lot!

I am sure a write-up will show up soon at <http://www.vintagemooneygroup.com/> so I can read all about what I missed. Maybe next year they will move the Lake Tahoe trip to July so those of us in the LA Basin and the San Diego area can attend. As it turned out 49 of the Mooneys that registered actually arrived. Much of that was due to weather conditions. I hope they all had fun. There is always next year.

I miss all of my VMG brothers and sisters.

Ed Shreffler
eshreffler@sbcglobal.net
June 13, 2009