

A Flight to Remember, April 2011

The objectives were to fly Sue to Lake Havasu and to find London Bridge. Missions accomplished.

There is difference between this flight story and all of those that I have presented to you over the past 5 years. It is very hard to explain the difference unless you are a pilot yourself. Over 15 years ago, Sue decided that she didn't want to go flying with me anymore. Her reason was my health, due to my lack of caring about my physical condition. She was concerned about what could happen up there if I became incapacitated. I continued to go fly and have fun with others.

I do go flying with many other great people who already were or who have become my friends, and I have really enjoyed all of those flights, (even the bumpy ones). I have become close friends with a few of those people who have showed up to go flying with me over the years. These are some of the special people in my life these days. I call them my fly-buddies. Most of you have read about them.

A couple of weeks ago, my wife Sue said something for the first time in ages. She said she wanted to go flying with me (if Marty comes along). It had been a long time since the last time I took her flying. She felt that she needed to have another pilot on board to land the airplane if I became incapacitated. Of the relatively few pilots she knows, she has the utmost confidence in Marty. Marty agreed to fly with us so he sat co-pilot next to me and Sue sat behind him in back. I still think she has worse statistical odds of safely driving on the freeway to work but she felt confident.

I had 44 gallons of fuel on board and I ran the numbers at home for fuel needed, weight and balance. I looked out the window when I awoke that morning. I saw blue skies, thank you. I checked online weather. I had my flight plan and kneeboard plate for the destination airport. All was A-OK.

We all arrived in our own cars. I arrived first at the hangar and opened the doors in a cool yet sunny morning with light winds and an FAA standard 59° temperature. I was on time but I was alone. Soon after I sipped on the coffee that I had brought along, Marty and Sue approached walking up the ramp together towards me. I hollered out something silly and the fun began. They helped with the preflight and getting the plane out on the ramp. Marty had also checked flight weather.



Marty took this one of us two who look somewhat like a couple of displaced Nebraska farmers

We got in and helped Sue with her headset and seatbelt in her back seat. Just before engine start, we witnessed something for the first time in my 21 years of flying. An airplane taxied down the ramp towards us and I knew his hangar was behind us. There is no room for two airplanes to get by each other. He made a U-turn and got out of our way. Quite unusual. We soon took off and turned east.



A huge area of bright yellow wildflowers greeted us out the left window later. Unexpected surprises.



We planned to fly to Lake Havasu City (KHII), just 167 nm from Corona. My first waypoint was the Banning (KBNG) airport. That routing always gets us through the Banning Pass and safely between two mountain ranges. We are right over I-10 there. Then I turned slightly left and took precaution to miss the SE corner of the military R-2501 Restricted Area, at red arrow #2. We motored on through some areas of jiggly air but no real rough turbulence. Sue said that she was doing fine on the intercom and she was enjoying the flight. Autopilot on. I kicked back and watched my instruments.



Sue's self portrait - just comfy jiggling along with the rest of us on an average day up there

This flight was pretty easy and soon we were talking with LA Center who also directs the airliners travelling above us. Another 30 minutes passed by. I usually start descending around 40 to 50 miles out and once we were below about 5,000 feet, Center (ZLA) said, "Radar service terminated, squawk VFR and switch to advisories." We did and also veered slightly to the right to clear the Chemehuevi Mountains by 5 miles to reduce the chances of more bumpy air. I switched to 122.7mhz on the radio.

Lake Havasu airport area pilots were constantly talking on the frequency. It sounded really busy. I called up and made my first announcement 10 miles out. Marty and I were busy watching for airplanes and Sue was quiet in back. As I turned onto the 45° entry for left downwind for runway 32, I heard one of the pilots mention something about his engine not running right, and he sounded concerned. I turned downwind and fit in with the rest of the pilots in the traffic pattern. Mr. 'rough engine' made another call to us and I made a decision right then. I announced my intentions on the radio to them, powered up, and made a climbing right turn to get out of the traffic pattern. Less congestion is what everyone else needed. I think pilots (should) always have a Plan B at the ready.

A big circle path brought us back a few minutes later when everything was back to normal. Better for them, better for us. A few left turns and that long black runway was right in front of us. Throttle back. A mile to go to touchdown. Slow to 75. On glide slope. (It is never over until it is over). Half a mile out, the surface winds got squirrely and I had my hands full making corrections to keep the wings level and the nose aligned with the runway. A good landing and we rolled off onto a taxiway.

This was my 5th time there so I was comfortable with what laid ahead. I called up the Desert Skies FBO on 123.3 and very soon a shiny red golf cart was in front of us with a **FOLLOW ME** sign hanging in back. We follow, he stops, gets out, and guides me right into my parking slot with gestures to steer left and right until I am on the spot. Then he gave me the stop and shut down signals. We got out into a beautiful 70° day with a nice breeze, and beautiful blue skies. You can see forever from there because of the clean air. I wish you were there with us. Sue was smiling.

Sue and Marty chained down the wings for wind gust protection. I closed up the airplane. The shiny red golf cart is just right sized to deliver us to the FBO's front door, and that's just what they do for us there. I said we would be going next door to Waldo's BBQ for lunch and would want some fuel when were ready to leave. We chatted and explained some things to Sue that pilots know. Then we went in the one way gate to Waldo's. The gate going the other way is locked. I turned around and -



There is my Mooney out there, showcased by the Desert Skies monster truck

So much good stuff on the menu. I admonished all of us to not pig out as turbulence and full tummies do not set well together. It is even more important in the hotter months. Everyone agrees.



There is the happy couple, for the first time on a lunch date via a Mooney airplane ride

We had a great BBQ lunch, and lots of great conversation. It was a good match, us having lunch with Marty. I love the coleslaw there. My BBQ pork ribs were awesome but just too much food for the return trip so the second half came home in a Styrofoam box - for a pleasant snack another time.



Marty, our friend and expert pilot, said "I've got airplanes on my mind."

I explained that all of the pictures hanging on the walls, and their picture frames, and the nails and wires holding them up, are really painted directly on the walls. Mason jars hold our large sized drinks.

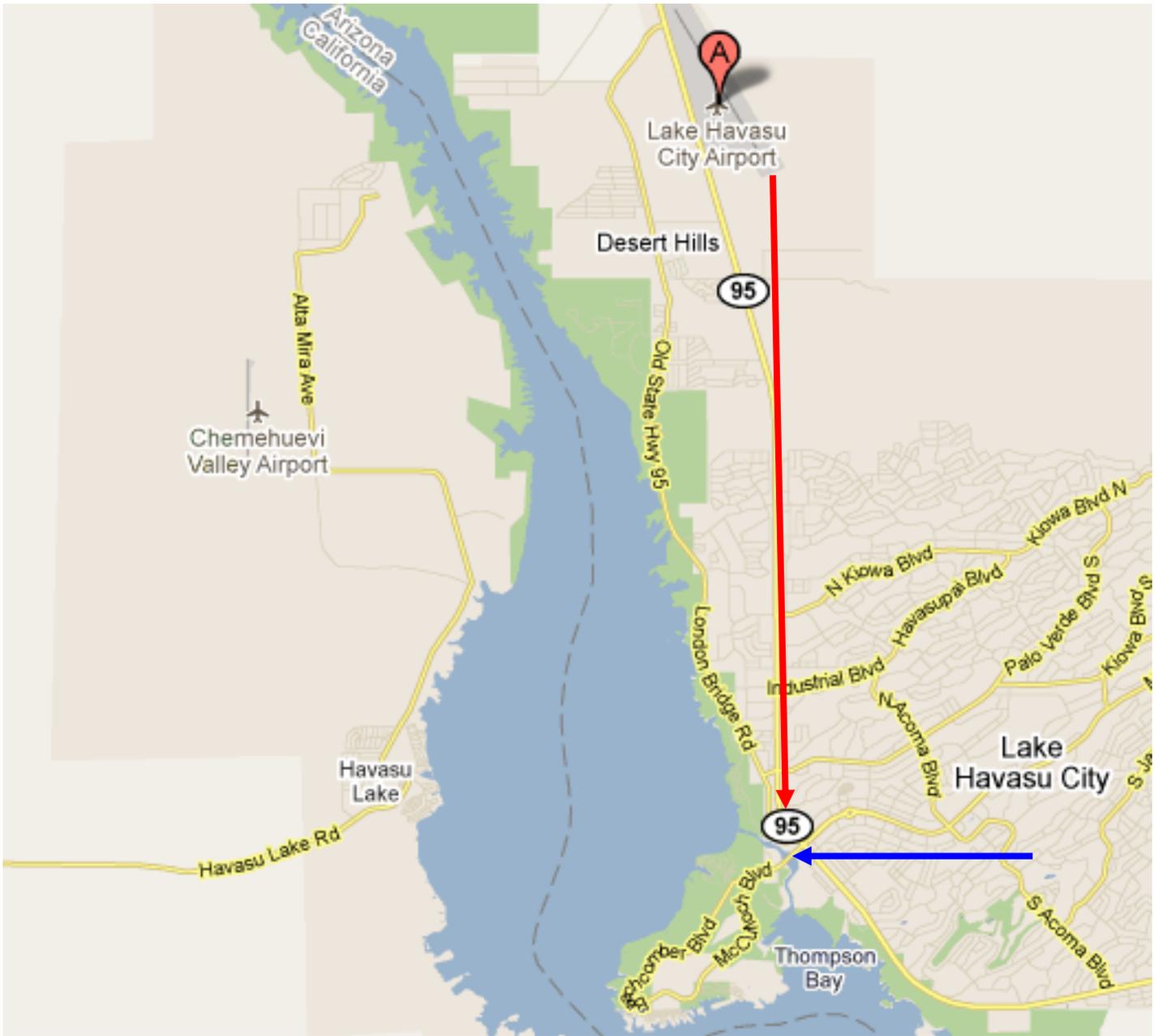
After lunch, we went back outside to perfect weather. A secret code pressed in the buttons on the security gate lets us back out. To me, it lets us back in to the airport. It depends on your point of view. We have more fun chatting and looking around as we walked back next door to the Desert Skies FBO. I went in to order some fuel. The Slushy machine was still down, waiting on parts. Yvonne, the gal with the smile that makes all pilots feel like flirting, took my order and radioed the lineman who drove his fuel truck up to my Mooney. Sue and Marty walked out to the plane and brought the fuel up to 25 gallons per side. Pilot Assist pricing is what they call it and it was only \$4.89 a gallon that weekend, and lower than advertised. After I paid Yvonne, she gave me two bottles of cold water and a warm smile. Another shiny red golf cart driver delivered me back to my Mooney.

By then, Sue and Marty had walked back to the FBO. I got the plane opened up and checked the fuel, oil, tires, and control surfaces. OK, here they come, chains undone, so we were ready to leave.



We took off and headed south for London Bridge. When we were at 1500' above the ground, I pulled the throttle back and leveled off so we could stay low and slow to find it easily. The river was off to our right. Sue had her camera ready. I knew just where to look from my extensive reconnaissance.

I announced my plans on the intercom. We will fly down to the general area, then veer to the right over the water, then a left 180 to bring us back up to the bridge on Sue's side of the airplane. All agreed so I did just that. I held the speed down to just over 100. We had some bumps along the way but nothing too bad. Seems we were there in less time than it took me to write this paragraph.



The London Bridge crosses a narrow channel, not the actual river, right where I show with my arrows.



The shot above shows where we had just come from over highway 95 with the bridge at the bottom

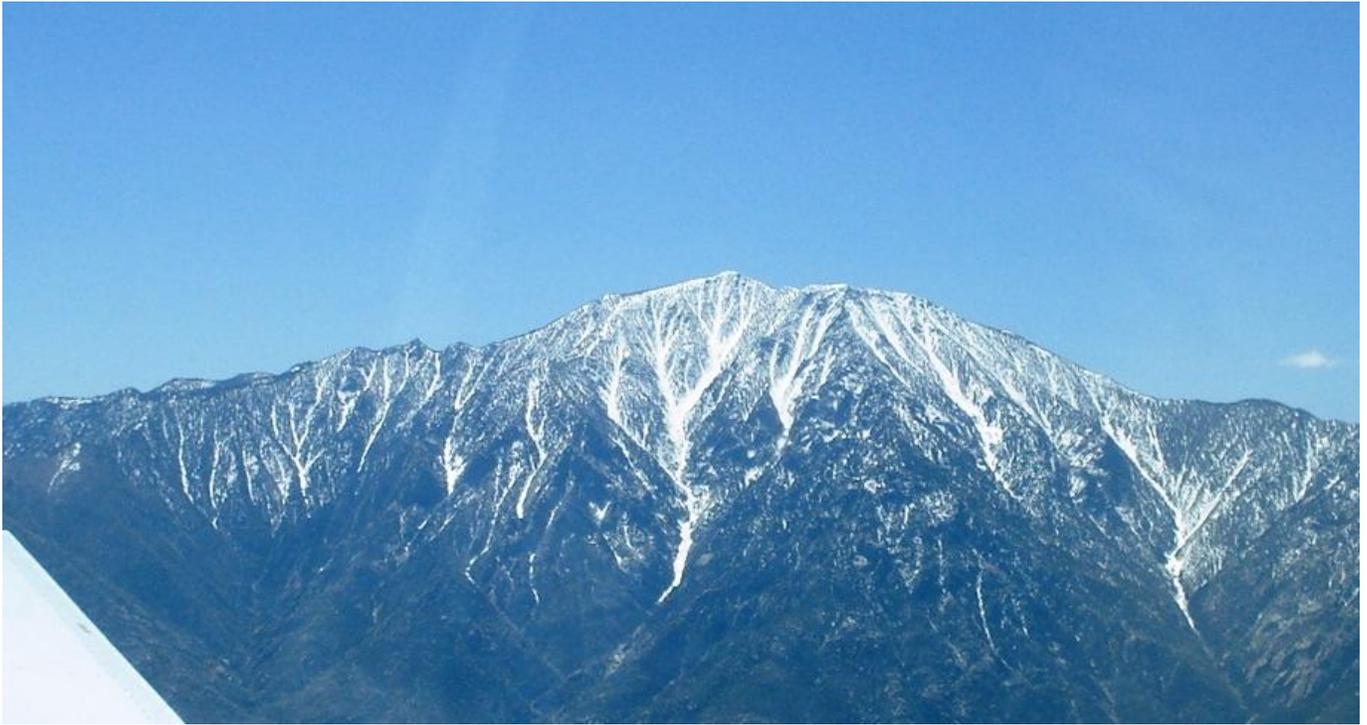


People pay ridiculous prices to stay the night in a hotel room with a balcony view of a bridge



Sue said she had taken enough, so I powered up and started a climbing right turn over the people having fun in their boats on the lake. Soon Marty was ready to take it so he flew for a spell, I forget how far. Another hour and a quarter to go. The Mooney performed as always with that engine never skipping a beat. Once we were back up at 8,500', we leveled off and set up for the cruise portion of the flight. Prop control, mixture control, and cowl flaps were set. All instruments cross checked. Marty was flying so he set the attitude and the trim to maintain the proper attitude. OK, I know I am done working for the next hour except for the radio work.

Talking and listening on the airplane's 2-way radio is not an easy task for many student pilots, and 21 years ago I was in that group. Experience helps a lot. Sounding professional, knowledgeable, and friendly helps me get the kind of cooperation and response I want from ATC.



I think Sue snapped this one on the way east but it is just as great located here, one of the best

About 10 - 20 miles out, I like to 'grab on' to again get the 'feel' of the controls before landing my airplane. Seems reasonable. Always the same objective, how to come down and slow down at the same time in a 'slippery' airplane. (Different airplanes are not all the same, believe me.) Always the same answer, Mooney pilots don't wait for the last minute. We set up for landing way out there.

I can't believe I did it - and got good marks from Marty on both landings. What he remarked on from a professional pilot's point of view, is that I planted the nose wheel right on the runway centerline both times today. Sure, I grinned.



We (Marty) put the plane away for another day and soon it was time to say goodbye.



Bye Marty, and hope to see you again soon

Ed Shreffler

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Pictures by Sue, Marty, and myself

Email me at: eshreffler@sbcglobal.net

More of my stories are at: <http://www.mooneyevents.com/shreffler.html>