

From Corona to Bisbee with Delia

The Vintage Mooney Group had a fly-in to Bisbee AZ scheduled for Saturday 3/6/2010. Delia was born and raised in Bisbee and wanted to go for a Fri, Sat, Sun weekend. She's only 72. I used Dave Parson's <http://www.runwayfinder.com/> to work out the flight plan. It looked like this with Corona CA way over to the left and Bisbee AZ on the right. It looked like about 500 mi. and 3 hours by Mooney.



On Friday, Delia met me at my hangar along with her husband, sister, and her son Sam.



Sam took our send off picture and I teased George that his wife was my newest girlfriend



Sam surprised me with his satirical collage of the two of us that is just too good to not share with you

The flight plan to Bisbee worked out to 431 nm and my conservative no-wind estimate of the time enroute was 2 hours and 52 min. As flown, it was a 440 nm trip or only 2% over my preflight plans. This happens when ATC directs me to fly 'that way' for a while for separation from other aircraft. Due to some headwinds, it took us exactly 3 hours to fly there, but that is only 4.6% over my estimate. Not true coming home, the 3 hour trip took almost 4 hours total on the way back. I toss out numbers sometimes, because every flight is loaded with them.

If you know any youngsters who want to be pilots someday, tell them to please get comfy with numbers and simple math. They will have to know, and be comfortable with, many of these basic things before and during each flight. Time, speed, distance, airplane weight, fuel on board, rate of fuel burn, elevation, altitude, direction, location, time of day, temperature, altimeter setting, rate of climb or descent, radio frequencies, radio communication phraseology, wind speeds and cloud heights, flight rules and airspace rules to start.

The list goes on and on, but this covers most of the major items. It seems like a lot at first, but just like everything else, it is a series of extremely simple concepts when learned at a proper pace.



After a clean engine run-up and Delia affirming that she was good to go, Sam got one last shot of us on the takeoff roll. We lifted off and turned east. There was a little motion from the local air currents but after 2 to 3 minutes, we left all of that behind us. Upon reaching 9,500 feet above sea level, I leveled off and the autopilot commanded the plane right over Banning and through the pass I use for all destinations to the east. Delia is a great conversationalist and she had to learn to hold it in when ATC started talking on the radio. By now, the ride was as smooth as sitting on a living room couch. We saw some white vapor trails (contrails) stretching across the blue sky above us from the airliners. I explained to Delia what they were and how they are caused. Then we looked down and saw the shadows of those very contrails on the desert floor below us. Pretty neat viewpoint.



Only those of us up here can see the shadows of the contrails on the desert floor below us



On the left is I-10 crossing the Colorado near Blythe, our next waypoint (E63) is Gila Bend, AZ



By now, Delia was seeing life through rose-colored glasses - - -



- - - while I wondered which way doeth the wind blow?

In-flight Incident: Somewhere along here, I saw Delia's finger pointing at something out of the corner of my eye just as I was scanning in that direction. It was a wisp of smoke coming from the instrument panel in front of us. Maybe an inch high and as wide as a yellow wooden pencil. Was the first time for me in 20 years of flying. I did not take the time right then to determine where it was coming from.

Hustle Ed, in less than a second, the index finger on my left hand had pushed the bottom of that white rocker switch marked Avionics Master, killing electrical power to all of my avionics. The plane was still flying along just as before, albeit without the autopilot, so I started driving for a change. It's not much work to drive straight anyway. Delia was just sitting there putting her trust in me, She kept her composure, and as we now had no intercom, I didn't hear her say anything. ☺ I determined that the smoke was emanating from Nav-Com 2, a King KX 165. About then, I realized that I do not have all 20 or 30 circuit breakers memorized, so I started reading the labels under each one while glancing out the window to ensure that we were still flying right side up. Finding the Com2 breaker, I pulled it out and then pushed the Avionics Master back on. Everything else came back on while Com2 stayed dark. I watched and I waited. There was no smoke. Good, I had determined the culprit correctly. I re-activated my flight plan in the Garmin 430 and put the autopilot through the startup sequence again. George was again flying. I was feeling comfortable with my current conditions.



Two radios in one box, Com2 on the left half, Nav2 is on the right - I am so used to using this radio

Then a thought dawned on me. I had been getting Flight Following from either Tucson Approach Control or Albuquerque Center Control and the only place that radio frequency resided was on the digital display of Com2 which was now black. I opted to try it. Looking right at Com2, I pushed in the Com2 breaker in and pulled it back out in ½ second. 125.1 blinked on for an instant and that was all I needed. I set 125.1 in the Com1 radio, switched the audio panel to Com1, and we were again back in the system. That is why we have two of almost everything on an airplane. All that's left is the \$\$\$ to get it repaired. Gill Ross came by a few days later and took the radio to his avionics repair shop.



We passed by an open pit mine with the excavated rock and dirt (tailings) deposited to the left

We were getting close to Bisbee, and after passing over some good sized hills just north of town, it was time to pull the power back, drop the nose, pop the speed brakes, and aim for the airport five miles away. I called up on 122.8 and a friendly voice said the wind was 6 to 8 from the south, and runway 17 was recommended. I later learned that I was listening to Jim Gutowski, the new airport manager there. I made a nice landing and taxied to the ramp where 3 other Mooneys were already tied down, side by side. I pulled in next to them. By the time I had shut down and logged my flight numbers, Delia was getting out and two new faces were right outside my plane. One was Jim, the newly appointed airport manager at the Bisbee airport who had already chained my plane down. The other was Mary Alice, Delia's niece who offered to put us up for the weekend. I got out and shook Jim's hand and thanked him for his help. I hugged Mary Alice. By now, we three were hungry.



We left the airport to go have dinner and Mary Alice selected the San Jose Lodge, named for the nearby San Jose Mountains. It is a family restaurant where most of the customers are regulars and most everybody knows everybody. Delia and Mary Alice not only know the owners and staff, they know most of the customers. They cook up their own refried beans, and make about everything else from scratch. Everything on my combination plate was great. We had a great dinner and a great time.

After dinner, Mary Alice drove us around the area re-activating Delia's memories of her childhood there. After the mines in that area shut down, thousands of people left the area and many businesses and government operations shut down. As Mary Alice drove and Delia asked about certain stores, schools, hospitals, gas stations, and office buildings, Mary Alice's consistent answer was "Not any more, not any more". That was sad to hear. I think I got to know more about Bisbee from the personal and local perspective than some of the other Vintage Mooney Group people did.

Yes the history of the heyday and boom years are well documented, but the ravages of the decline after the mines closed down is a hurt known mostly by the local people.

Then, Mary Alice drove us to her home, where we planned to spend the next two nights. We all sat around the kitchen table talking about Bisbee, the past and present, while Delia made Salt and Pepper shakers out of my empty Blue Cans. She used scissors to carefully cut the cans in half, and a hammer and a nail to punch the holes in the shape of a S or a P because Mary Alice didn't have an ice pick. She kept telling me to hurry up, she wanted that next empty Blue Can! We were all laughing so hard about her demands on my consumption rate.

Not many (if any) women have ever asked me to consume beer at a faster rate. I did as she asked.



These salt and pepper shakers work great and Delia delivered some to family members in Bisbee.



On Saturday morning we went into town and the gals had breakfast here while I took in the sights. This used to be an early 1900s drugstore, just as the storefront style suggests. Remember these?



I was told that the steel structure at the left delivered workers down to a mine tunnel and back up at the end of the work shift. Some of them also hauled copper ore up during each shift. The amount of physical labor required to do all of this is impossible to calculate or even imagine.

The results of so many men working for so many years is difficult to comprehend as a tourist.



I never did learn what went on in these round buildings but evidently they were built for a purpose



Colors and contrasts in texture and in years



On the ramp my 1985 M20J, Phil's 1999 M20S, Walter's 1999 M20M, and Ozzie's 1982 M20J,

We drove to the airport and saw the same 4 Mooneys as when we parked there Friday. It was 40s and windy. Inside the airport building, two VMG wives Jo K. from Tucson AZ and Linda C. from Paso

Robles CA were sitting comfortably on a stuffed couch, away from the weather (and maybe their husbands) outside. Delia and Mary Alice mixed in with conversation immediately and I smiled. In the next room, Jim Gutowski was at work in the airport office. I said hi to all and went outside. No one was by the airplanes. Way down the runway, three guys were walking back towards their airplanes.

I waited and soon they walked back to the ramp. It was Ozzie Kaufman, Phil Corman, and Walter Bell (who had flown in from Denver Colorado). Ozzie explained that we all got a fuel discount because they volunteered to kick the stones off of the runway. ☺

The weather forecast had prompted some VMGers to call and cancel. We all waited some more. Then a Mooney arrived and landed, then another. By noon, 9 Mooneys had arrived, an extremely small turnout for our VMG group. I had the good fortune to meet Linda & Tim Rundus from Queen Creek AZ and Henry Punt based in Long Beach for the first time on this particular fly-in.

The plans to have lunch catered at the airport were scuttled as we were only 20 or so. The people who were to cater have a restaurant, so we went there instead. It turned out to be the San Jose, the very place we 3 ate Friday night. They put on an awesome buffet lunch that everyone raved about.



The buffet serving line which had many entries to choose from - and a happy table of VMGers



Linda and Phil Corman in front - then Carol and Cliff Biggs, Henry and Walter - Delia and me



Jo Kaufman and Mary Alice - from top, Linda & Tim Rundus, Betty Pearce & Dale Mooneyham, Ozzie



Ozzie's trademark red flying socks



Mary Alice had fried ice cream for desert

After lunch we all went back to the airport. Some people left to go back to town to take the afternoon underground Mine Tour, others formed a group to drive a ways to go to Tombstone, and some chose to hop aboard their Mooneys to depart back to home or to other planned flying destinations.

Delia and Mary Alice stayed inside the airport office building where it was warm. I wanted to hang out on the ramp in my winter jacket to tell those assembled about my episode with the smoke in my cockpit from my radio, and to say goodbye to those who were planning to fly off then. It worked out well.



The sky was murky overhead and it was breezy and brisk – jacket weather for most people



This is pretty much all of us with Ozzie's red and cream 1982 Mooney M20J in front



Walter Bell flew his blue and white 1999 Mooney M20M in from Denver CO !!!



The Biggs' 1964 M20D waits patiently while Ozzie explains our next fly-in to Cliff & Carol



Dale Mooneyham's beautiful 1968 Mooney M20G Statesman with a fresh paint job



My 1982 M20J and Phil's sleek 1999 M20S Eagle



Oh yeah, those Magnificent Mooney Tails were standing up tall for all of us to appreciate

We all said good bye as people prepared to drive or fly off to their various destinations on a Saturday afternoon. There were so many diverse objectives for all of us. The gals I was with had another destination all picked out for a Saturday afternoon. It was Naco, a Mexican border town nearby. As they both had their passports and I did not, I offered to stay at the airport for an hour or two while they went off. I have hundreds of hours hanging out at airports behind me anyway, what's a couple more?



I looked around and took some pictures of a relatively sleepy airport (when we are not there).

When my ride returned, the 3 of us drove around the area for a while, looking at sights for me and exploring memories for Delia. Just as if you went 'home' once again.



Downtown Old Bisbee was a hoot for me and Delia's high school is now an attorneys' office building

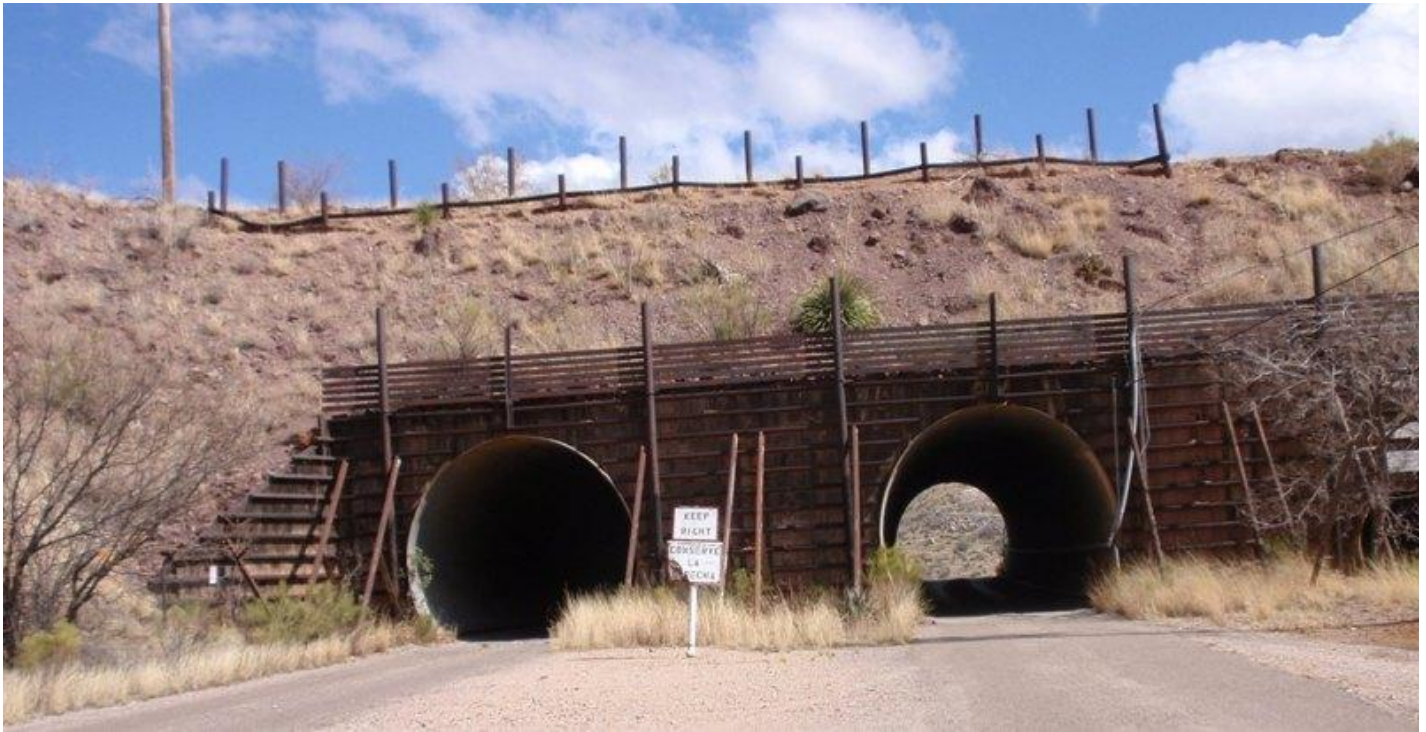
There are hills everywhere and driving is either uphill or downhill in many places. We saw many more sights and later wound up at the Copper Queen Hotel again looking for some VMGers. We thought they would be there in the lobby bar. Nope, not there.



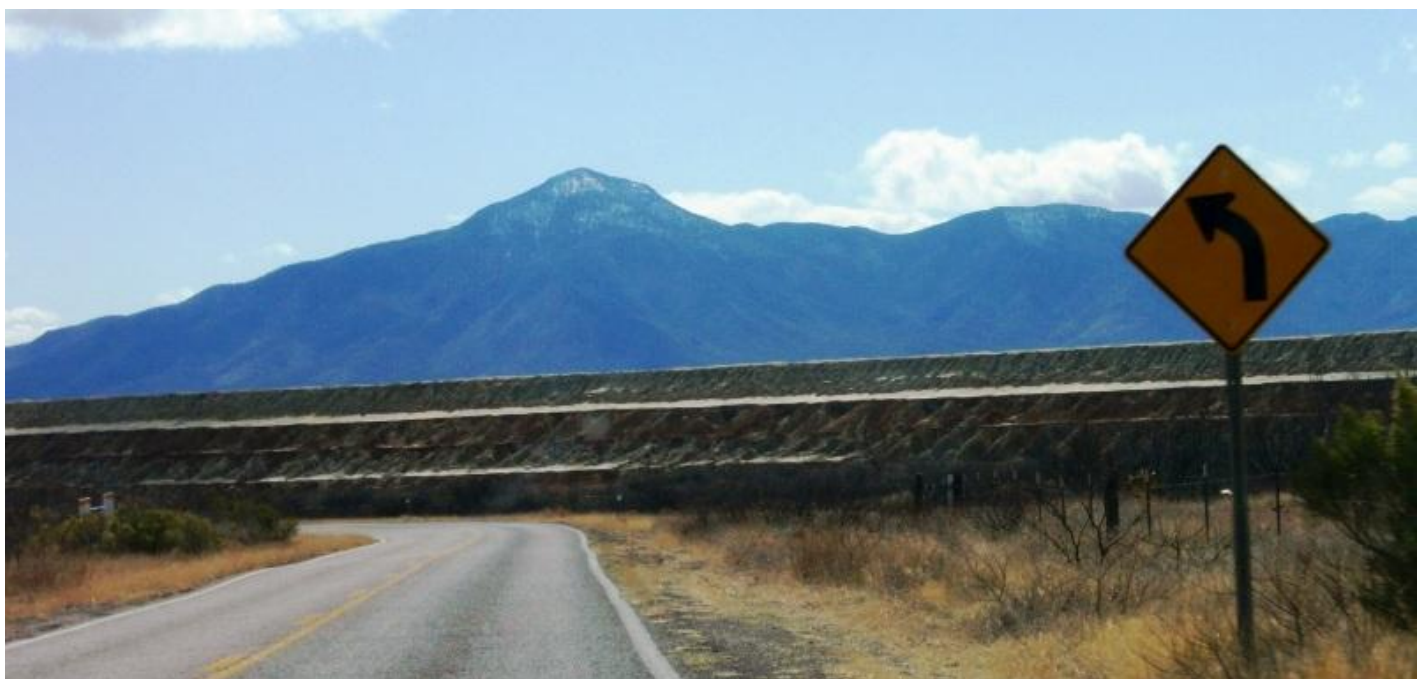
The hotel lobby's ceiling is made of a copper plate with an intricate design

We didn't connect with anyone so we left. As we were still too full to go out to dinner, we went back to Mary Alice's home to eventually make more salt and pepper shakers. I did my part.

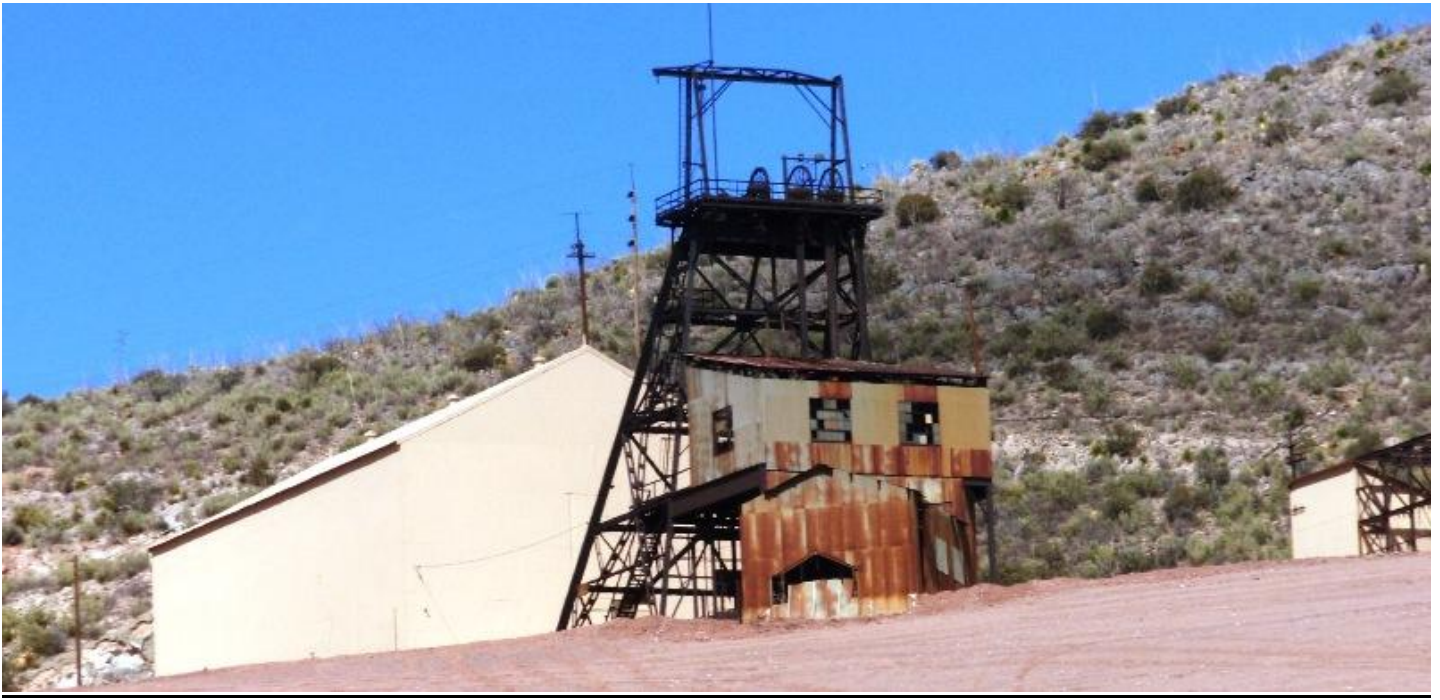
On Sunday morning we woke up to another less than stellar weather report. A big low pressure area was drifting from California to Arizona. Along with that came low clouds, rain, some scattered thunderstorms, and reports of pilots accumulating ice on their wings. I called Kim and left a message that I would be 'late' to work. It was a good morning for coffee in the kitchen. The three of us went to visit family and tour Bisbee some more. It was a family fun day and I was treated as family too.



All of the worthless dirt and rock removed of the mines has to go somewhere. It can be spread out for miles at nearby areas. Here, they just placed huge pipes down and deposited the tailings around and above. It created instant tunnels for this rural road.



This road curves around for a mile to get around this stretch of copper mine tailings.



I don't usually get to connect with the surrounding area at a fly-in, and this was history in front of me



We swung by the airport again and just two Mooneys were left. Phil and Linda Corman's and mine.

The weather looked just fine for flying, so why were we stuck in Bisbee on a Sunday afternoon? Well, it is the weather that I was aware of 100 or 200 miles away that just does not show up on a beautiful afternoon like this. Part of being a pilot is always knowing the weather along the route of flight. Did anyone notice that I left my flaps down in the landing position? Forgetfulness? Not this time. I do that sometimes to discourage a first time fly-buddy from stepping on them when boarding.



I had real Mexican burritos for dinner as Mexico was just a few miles away and these are homemade

On Monday morning I called Flight Service and the weather briefer gave me the same news. Another low pressure area, clouds, rain, icing. I told the gals it was not a safe flying day. I called Kim again and left another message that I would be 'late' to work. It was another good morning for coffee in the kitchen, but this was getting really old. But it always beats doing something dumb.



This was the view just outside of Mary Alice's front door looking across the street. It had snowed on the local hills and the clouds were so low that they were obscuring the tops. I figured Mother Nature had it in for me for flying with so many pretty gals. Was that esteemed lady a tad jealous? We went to town again but bypassed the airport for a day. I had the pleasure to get in more fun sightseeing.

On Tuesday morning we had some more great kitchen coffee and just before I went downtown to establish residency and look for a job, I once again called the FAA FSS for weather. I got the longest VFR Standard Weather Briefing, in my life that morning. That lady told me things for 20 minutes. It was a go, **but** it had imbedded caveats. As I really had no plans to change my domicile right then, I opted to give it a go. We got to the airport and no one was in the office. There was just no one anywhere. I had the combination to the locked airport office door, so we went inside. I made some calls and someone was going to be coming so I could get some avgas before departure. I walked out to the ramp, as I knew I needed to add some engine oil also. Boy it was brisk!

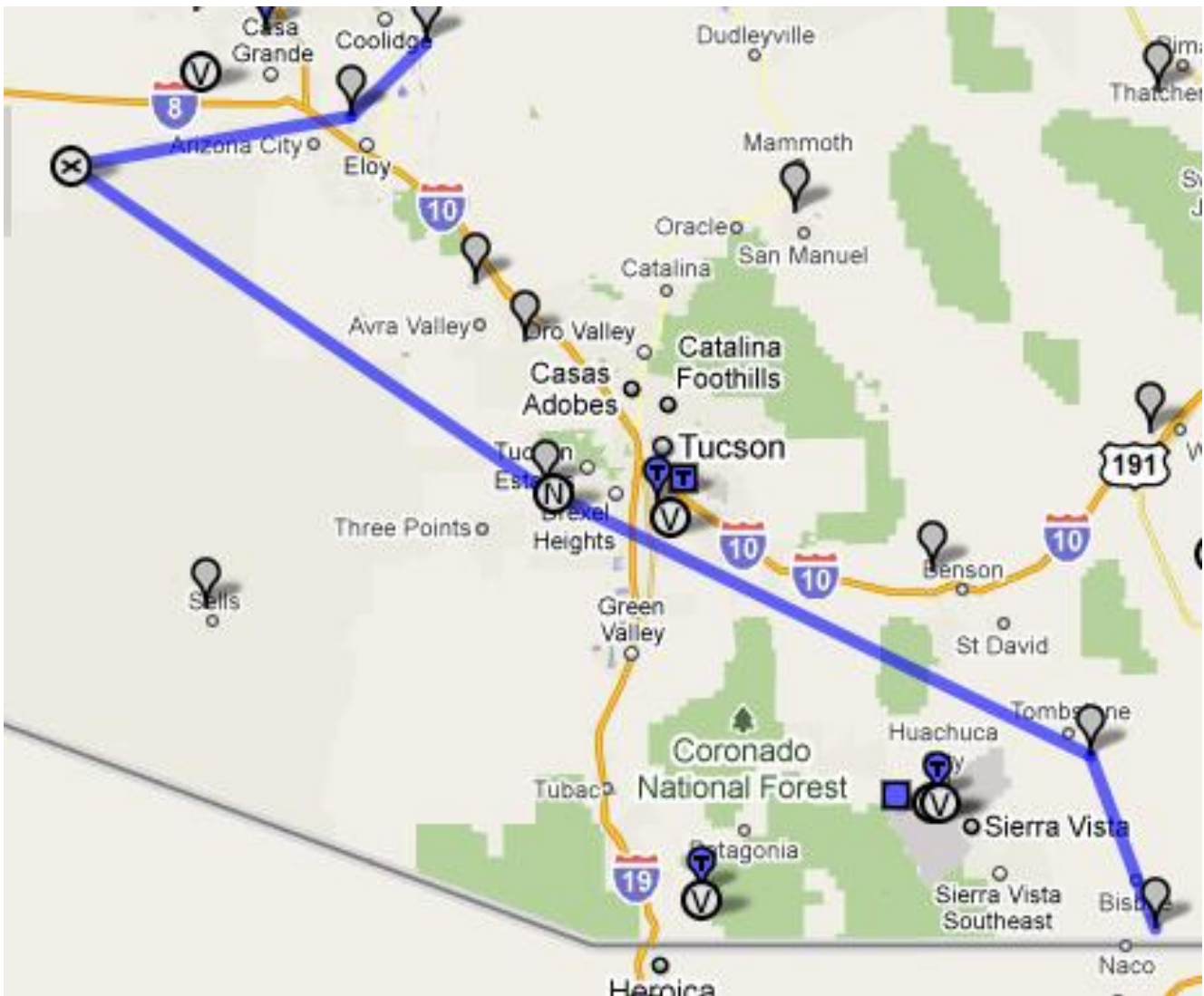


We didn't need to guess which Mooney was mine, the whole ramp was ours

We met the lineman and filled up. After hugs with Mary Alice, we said goodbye and climbed in for a nonstop flight to Corona. I couldn't even fly over town because of the mix of hills and clouds in my way so we circumvented to stay safe but missed some pictures. As advertised, the headwinds were beating us back to 140 Knots or less.

It was somewhat bumpy but Delia shrugged them off and continued to be amazed at the avionics and instruments right in front of us. First we had to fly over Tombstone before turning left, to avoid military restricted airspace. Then a 43° left turn. It was maybe 30 – 40 bouncing minutes altogether by the time we passed over Ryan Field just west of Tucson and then left another 3° towards Gila Bend AZ, another 90 nm away. We went on watching the weather and deviating occasionally due to clouds in our path.

Something new for me got my attention maybe half way along this segment. No more blue sky and white clouds, in front of us. It was a solid gray wall from the clouds above to the earth below, and as far as I could see left to right. It was solid, I could not see anything past it. When we got to maybe within 5 or 10 miles, I told Delia that there was no way we were going in there. As everything left of us was military restricted airspace, I turned right and checked my GPS for a suitable place to land.



It turns out I was pointed right at Eloy's airport, but I was still too high to land there, so we continued on to Coolidge AZ and made a good landing in spite of the now gusty surface winds. Oh yeah baby, a cold front was approaching the area big time. It was wet in some areas but I found a dry spot to park.

We both knew it was going to start raining there soon. Behind us was a huge WWII military hangar with a distinctive orange roof. Nearby the flag was being whipped vigorously by the winds. The sky was a dark overcast gray. It was actually a little difficult to walk in those conditions.



We started to look around for shelter when a young man drove by in a pickup truck and pointed out where we could go indoors to get warm. Two minutes later we went in the front door of International Air Response and were greeted by Carl Wobser and Debbie Skelton and told to make ourselves comfortable. They have a plush lobby with overstuffed black leather couches. So nice.

Then the noise began as the rain poured on the field. I walked outside in my winter jacket and stayed under the canopy that keeps an area dry. I looked straight across the airport maybe ½ mile away. Nothing, solid rain obscured all vision. Everybody knew it was a good time to be on the ground. We waited it out. I hit the couch for a while. It was an hour and a half later before things looked better.

After everything blew off to the east, we expressed our appreciation and said our goodbyes. The Mooney was again to be our home for the next 2 ½ hours with the prevailing headwinds out of the west. We motored on now using Comm 1 as Comm 2 was disabled. Once back in Corona, everything was again normal. A light breeze, mostly blue skies, and warm sunshine. Delia called her family to come over and pick her up. I had a Blue Can. She said she wants to go flying with me again, and I just think she does. We all went home to rest a bit after a 1,090 mile lunch date.