

N32847 to South America

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On a seeming impulse I purchased a plane I saw on EBay that I thought was a good deal.



I have always wanted to fly down to South America and see the vast subcontinent from a decent altitude.

Preparation

So started a busy month in preparation.

As I write Today I left the doctor's office in Clearwater Florida with the last piece of paper that I need to fly my plane without an instructor in the right seat.

At the end of this marathon ordeal I believe flying is mostly paperwork with a bit of skill involved. The last 2 days have seen me do some intensive flight review and today I took off my own master of the plane after 13 years and flew to several airports in the crowded Tampa bay area.

The next 2 days are going to put the plane through it's paces and get all the

small gremlins fixed and then I have a 3 weeks off preparing for the trip South. On September the 1st my daughter and I fly the plane off to the wild blue yonder and the start of a very gentle delivery to Uruguay and Argentina.

Roxanna will be a key player here as she will be organizing all my permits and overflight clearances so it will be a total family adventure even if only two of us are flying.

4th August 2013

I have had an intense 3 days flying.

The person who sold me the plane recommended that I have a right seat pilot who needed to build her instructor hours. Together with her husband we were able to load the plane to max gross weight and get some realistic performance data.

All in all we flew about 12 hours over 3 days. The longest trip was down to Marathon keys. Made longer by thunderstorms popping up all around us. As they were building we had to climb to avoid and eventually at 10,500 feet we decided that discretion was the best part of valor and dropped through a convenient break in the clouds and landed at Marco Island.

The one thing I find flying in the USA is that everyone you deal with in this business goes out of their way to be pleasant and helpful.

We were lent a van to drive into town and grab Lunch while the weather sorted itself out. After lunch North was looking increasingly bad but South was doable so we did it.

Landing in Marathon we met an old friend Marti who I have been working with on and off for many years on weather and radio projects.

A quick cup of tea and we were having to decide whether to head North and home or wait in the keys. We were all quite happy to remain but on a Saturday, the Florida Keys are not a good place to try to get accommodation at short notice.

However the weather radar was looking a lot better and with Internet on board we were able to monitor the radar real time - we decided to go for it.

Having a commercial pilot in the right seat is very helpful and we were able to look at alternate plans all along the route so the flight was never in any real risk though dodging a thunderstorm is very intimidating even if we got smooth air all along the route.

Landing 30 minutes before sunset all worked out very well in the end.

This whole experience has been excellent and although plenty of mistakes were made they were educational rather than dangerous and hopefully will help making the big flight next month that much safer and enjoyable.

25th August 2013

A quick heads up - trip is less than a week away. We get to Florida next Monday and Tuesday start our flight weather permitting.

First stop is Knoxville TN where a pile of charts and safety equipment is waiting.

Been a very intense month. With expert help from friends in the UK advising

parts to carry to lots of planning.

Roxanna has been busy calling the governments of the various countries we will be visiting and we are on the way to getting permission.

When we get going I plan to send my reports in 2 parts - first the daily log and the last part will be detailed technical data that you can skip if you like - may be of interest to those planning a similar trip.

So the next mail will be a live one.

So far officials every country we have dealt with have been well informed and very helpful. Lets hope it continues.

The Trip

2nd September 13

Clearwater Florida

All well so far. I had a tense nail biting session wondering if all our connections were going to work in Buenos Aires. Last week saw significant industrial action as the Argentine government youth movement who control most of the nationalized industry, attempted to kick Lan Airlines domestic out of the country so it was touch and go if Gabriela would be able to fly.

All the fears were groundless and her flight landed 2 minutes early and we had a brief reunion before Roxanna was on her way to Uruguay and we were on our way to the International Airport.

Our flight North was uneventful and comfortable thanks to the business class seats courtesy of my frequent flyer account and we were first off the plane. We were through immigration in 5 minutes and with no checked baggage we were in the rental car and rolling within 20 minutes of the plane landing.

The drive to Clearwater was largely uneventful and we stopped half way for a Wendy's. Gabriela wanted to use the drive through but as we both needed a pit stop we went the more conventional route.

We did pass through some heavy thunder activity but by the time we got to the airport it was mostly clear. The plane was ready so I preflighted and gave G a thorough briefing on her duties.

G proved to be a very valuable co-pilot absorbing all the detail and keeping me on track with the checklists. She was also able to monitor the gauges on takeoff and read the radio frequencies as we had trained on the simulator.

We did a bit of hands on flying and G was comfortable with gentle turns. We will work on the straight and level over the next few days.

We then went and did some touch and goes at the nearby St Pete's international airport so I could brush up on my landing skills before having to fly back to Clearwater. Clearwater is a fine airport but is not into the wind so can be challenging. St Petes was also challenging as the hot humid weather made for bumpy flying and it was a hard job putting the plan down on the hot tarmac.

We did 3 touch and goes and then ran back to Clearwater. Apart from incipient



carb icing that was immediately fixed with carb heat the flight was uneventful and we finished the day buying essentials for the next day.

The first real leg is a gentle flight to Tallahassee and then the unstable weather will decide what is next. The watchword for the entire voyage is time - plenty of it so we have no deadlines to meet and no risks that need taking.

Tue 3rd Sept 2013

Been dodging thunderstorms all day.

We planned an early start but by 9 AM the storms were well established. We had to divert far East to get around and adding 50% to our trip. G really enjoyed the climb in to the blue clarity above the clouds and was happy to steer the ship. She did an excellent job and has a good feel for the plane.

Towards the end we had to go under the clouds as they were thickening up and made an uneventful landing at Tallahassee.

We were met by some old friends who wanted to see us - especially Gabriela and we spent an hour chatting - however the weather was moving in and we had to decide to go or stay. Weather North of the field was good for our destination however after takeoff, we got back into the game of dodge the cumulus - a game I am getting tired of. After seeing things get more and more squalid we decided to abort and we landed at Butler Georgia. However the field when we got there was deserted - no fuel so we jumped back in the plane and shot off North to the next field 15 miles away and 5 miles into the trip the AWS recording changed and broadcasted rain. - Whoops and visibility was fading so we did a 180 and landed back at Butler and watched us being hemmed in from both sides.

Oh well - we secured the plane and wandered into town - it was very close and found a restaurant with cabins for rent. All very clean and modern so we checked in and were driven back to the plane to collect our things.

Gabriela was fading fast so we showered and got a bite to eat - our first substantial meal as our Breakfast was pretty basic.

So some lessons learned - never let the weather bully you into a fast departure - mistakes can get made and eat a hearty breakfast and have snacks on the plane.



Continued Wed 4th 2013

Planning today - Short hop to Thomaston OPN for fuel and then a 175 mile hop to McGhee Tyson where we will do some plane maintenance

5th Sept 2013

Yesterday was an absolutely perfect day for flying despite flight service saying "VFR not recommended" (a few airports en route were IFR low fog).

We took off at 8 and made a short flight to Tomaston airport 20 miles to the North to fill up with fuel. In retrospect I think we were lucky to miss this place yesterday. A huge airport with a fuel pump in the middle of the field was all we could see. There was not a town within 10 miles and so we would have had a hard time finding a place for the night.

So we did our flight planning in the cockpit and filed over the cell phone. On take off we were unable to raise flight service to activate so we contacted Atlanta approach and spoke to air traffic control for the entire flight.

The flight was magical - fluffy clouds and mountain scenery combined with smooth air made for a memorable flight.

We were vectored straight in to a right base and made a smooth landing at McGhee Tyson airport in Knoxville. All in all a very pleasant and stress free experience.

Today we will be testing the aircraft tracker.

go to www.anahera.org to see the results where we will also post video and any other relevant information / pictures as we go.

6th Sept 2013

Maryville TN

We are staying with our friends at Global Marine Networks and setting up the tracker for the next leg of the trip.

Our webpage <http://www.anahera.org> is now fully functional and there is a link to Gabriela's blog with photographs.

We will also publish our latest youtube uploads (unedited) periodically so you can share life in the cockpit and fast forward if it is a bit boring.

Yesterday I took our friends up for a test flight of the tracker and we did some local sightseeing as well holding position over the property.

Also we addressed some of the issues. As I suspected the brake problem was simply the brake lines not being properly bled after maintenance.

The oil warning light has started to work again so that is good news but we have an issue with the electric fuel boost pump that is not working very well. I have a replacement on order being shipped to Houston and we will sort that there. The Mech who bled the brakes declared the plane flyable however I want that sorted as soon as possible.

This is the whole purpose of dallying in the US to highlight all the potential problems before heading South.

7/9 Lake Charles Louisiana

All started well lovely weather and an easy landing at Meridian in Mississippi. All totally routine.

Well not totally. Paper charts were a bit thin on the ground when I went shopping and so decided to shake the dust off the Ipad. I do not like Ipads as I never really feel I own it. My Android device manages to work for about 6 hours plugged into to a 2 amp charging socket and then dies so I really had to get something better. Well I reckoned the Ipad and the Android with the proper software would properly back each other up.

Well the IPAD software - Fore Flight turned out to be brilliant. It took me about 3 minutes to learn how to use it. So we end up in the cockpit and all working. The Engine is getting hard to start and this is probably related to the failing boost pump. So after a decent cranking session and all started and clearances obtained - horror - the Ipad screen was dark and I could not turn it on - Typical! I got Gabriela to get the backup out and that worked fine. Eventually I realized the new polarized glasses Gabriela gave me were hiding the screen so I got out the old Foster Grants and we were in business. We ended up giving the IPAd software a real workout and it worked great.

The next segment was not so good. Immediately after takeoff the tach started

oscillating wildly. I requested a return to the field and a long runway. I always have landed with the tach - power settings on landing and carb heat tests all use the tach. Anyway the landing was fine and I had an A&P mechanic stop by. We decided together there was nothing wrong with the basic plane and the best course of action was to get to Houston and fix it there. I am pretty well familiar now with the engine and with the EGT and airspeed could set the power where it had to be.

The next leg was not to be quite so smooth and at the first hint of hazardous convective weather in our path and Gabriela getting spooked, I pulled the plug and we are now in Lake Charles Louisiana in a Holiday Inn one hour from Houston.

The IPAD kept it's charge the whole flight so it has been promoted to the primary nav device.

8/9 Clear Lake Shores

A fairly uneventful flight.

We got going at 8:30 - balance between waiting for the fog to lift and before the thunderstorms start.

100 easy miles over miles of oil refineries talking to flight following the whole way and with good visibility we found our destination and landed at a fairly deserted but functional airfield at La Port on the outskirts of Houston.

Here we had made arrangements for the plane to be torn down and serviced.

The tach turned out to be a cable lubrication issue but there was also some question the drive was possibly too short so I requested it replaced. Spark plugs were good and I am waiting on the filter report to see if there are any surprises. One brake line is old and being replaced but on the whole the plane is in excellent shape. We get the new electric fuel pump in the morning and I will run back to the airport to see where we stand then.

We spent the afternoon with friends we are staying with and made a brief visit to the Johnson space centre so Gabriela could see the Saturn V booster housed in a massive shed there.

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Concerning the navigation data on board for this trip:

We are totally dependent on electronic VFR charts as the ONC charts that cover South America are out of print and only available in digital format.

So we have one Ipad and two Android tablet devices on board with built in GPS. All with the VFR data overlayed with the current aeronautical frequencies and airspace data. For flight in the USA we are using Fore Flight and Naviator software both with current Sectional and TAC charts and for the rest of the world we are using Air Navigation Pro. All three tablets can run autonomously for 6 hours. The IPAD can run indefinitely on the aircraft 12 volt power and one of the Android tablets is limited to 8 hours on the aircraft power while the second has been tested to run indefinitely.

We did identify a cooling issue with the IPAD when run in a leather holder.

Running it out of the holder solved this issue.

As a backup we have a Jeppesson Paper IFR chart kit with en-route and terminal data for South America, Mexico VFR charts, IFR enroute charts for Central America and Carribean SkyTours airport manual for Mexico and Central America.

The aircraft itself has an IFR certified Apollo GX60 GPS with current data for the entire Americas and Vor/Glideslope and 2 Comms radios.

10 September 2013 Houston

Rather depressing news from the mechanic - Right landing gear was in a shocking state and needed a complete rebuild. The brake leak was a result of bad maintenance and there was significant play in the wheel. I was one bad landing from a gear failure.



Good to catch it in the land of plenty so we are looking at another day of labour. The mechanic could have patched it up but we all felt it was much better to do the job properly, rebuild the gear from scratch and apply an airworthiness directive that obviously had never been applied. He is going to bore scope the main strut to make sure it is not cracked. Apart from that we are in good shape. Electric boost pump has been replaced, brakes have been serviced. The proper alternator belt has been put on and the entire airframe inspected. All in all we are in very good shape. We leave two days later than planned and this too is a blessing as we have tropical storm activity in the Southern gulf that is crossing our path. So we rest up a couple more days.

Today we did the tour at the Johnson Space Centre and Gabriela got a bit of the History of the American space programme.

3/9/2013

We are getting ready to move South.

I spent the day at the workshop and helped move those difficult bolts and pull the landing gear.

I felt I had to be part of the action and help move the whole thing along and also learned a lot about the plane.

It was very comforting to peer inside the wing and see the internal zinc chromate layer in perfect condition. Basically the aircraft is in very good shape.

The landing gear problem turned out to be an old O ring that was past it's prime. Taking the landing gear off was a horrible task and my years as a cruising sailor put me in good stead with the ability to get to those hard to reach bolts and untorque them.

When we got the gear out the whole mechanism was in remarkably good shape and there was no deformation or pitting on any of the critical parts. They were as fresh as the day they were assembled.

I spent the afternoon placing the bolts with the help of some of the local pilots who like to hang out and chew the cud. It was a real pleasure to watch Dan the A&P mechanic torque down the bolts You can see a real professional with a passion for perfection and it gives me a very comfortable feeling that the plane is in good shape and I am walking into this adventure with my eyes open.

Tomorrow is a taxi test followed by a flight test and then weather permitting we fly to the Mexican border and wait out some tropical weather that is migrating over to the Pacific.

Tomorrow we get the bill and I will happily share the "sticker shock" with all.

14/9/2013 San Antonio

I feel I have gnawed off a limb to get out of a trap. With \$3500 lighter on the wallet we flew an aircraft that I feel was airworthy.

It was a very decent flight - great weather and no issues of any sort except we were not going in the direction we wanted to go.

Ingrid is now a full blown hurricane and headed North towards Houston. The track is forecast to change rapidly West and hit Tampico - where we planned to be today. One of the advantages of 100+ knots airspeed is that you can easily outrun a hurricane - something hard to do in a sailboat. Anyway tomorrow Ingrid is somebody else's problem. We will spend the day visiting sea world and having fun with the daughter. The day after I hope to be on the border and we can worry about border crossings then.

The main thing is to have time and no stress.

Arriving in San Antonio was wonderful. The FBO laid on a car and booked a

comfortable hotel at a reasonable rate - less than I could do on the Internet. The cost for this service is topping off with fuel. We are at the Sheraton downtown - free parking and walking distance from the Alamo and the river walk.

Gabriela and I had a lovely meal on the edge of the river. Our survival strategy is now ordering one meal between two and even then we are sending food back as our appetites cannot cope with the food quantity.

16 Sept 20

We have been watching amazing tropical weather to the South and it at last seems to be dissipating and moving on so hopefully we will be on our way soon.

We are staying in downtown San Antonio a short walk from the Alamo that we visited today. We have had an evening meal on the river walk on a busy Saturday evening and been playing at the Sea World water park. In the intervening times I have been down the plane and been cleaning her up and basically making things more organized.

Today I attempted to do some circuits but some fool was flying a kite at 500 feet right on the approach to the runway (photo enclosed). In the video I reviewed it is very noticeable. At first I thought it was a bird but then I got a close up of the pretty colours. I reported it and tried one more circuit in case I was mistaken. I had to make the approach high to avoid it and decided that we did not need this kind of practice and so called it a day.

Still the airport was quiet so Gabriela had her first taste of taxi and takeoff. She handled the takeoff well and we reviewed the video afterwards and I pointed out a few things that could be improved. She basically did the whole thing herself and has a good feel for the plane.

The mechanic in Houston called me and told me he had undercharged me on the hours. I reviewed the work done and we agreed on the shortfall and so the bill jumped to \$4000. Oh well.

So hopefully in the morning we will be at the Mexican border and can spend one last day in the US before heading South.

Departing the US now requires an electronic filing. In reality it is quite simple and rather convenient. Your departure clearance is issued on the spot. There are a few small caveats - like allowing an hour from the filing. I have put the paperwork through today for a Wednesday departure and have the required clearance. All that remains is to file a "defense VFR" Flight plan on the day and be talking to ATC when we cross the border.

18th Sept 2013

We are finally away. The bridge has been burned and our escape route by LAN Chile is passed. We are in deepest Mexico and fully committed to this adventure.

I was getting a bit depressed in McAllen Texas. It is not the brightest spot on the planet and the weather was not looking good for the next few days. Another tropical storm was brewing in the Gulf of Mexico and that threatened to block the path once again.

So we went down to the airport early and as dawn broke looked at all the towering cumulus around us and it did not bode well.

Anyway I spent another hour and looked over the satellite imagery and saw a way through.

So we went.

All the research I did on how to cross the border went for nothing. Even an "International flight plan" was still US format and totally incompatible with the ICAO system. I called customs as a courtesy to let them know I was leaving and nobody answered the phone. As I had my Electronic clearance printed I did not worry too much. Calling clearance delivery for instructions they did not give me any departure instructions or a transponder code. So I just called for a Southbound departure and within minutes was over the Rio Grande and talking to Raynosa tower in Mexico.

Suddenly everything became a lot more relaxed. The tower spoke excellent English and was very professionally handled. The weather also stabilized a great deal as we went South. The towering cumulus lost a lot of the looming threat and became a good deal more widely spaced.

One thing that is very apparent is the lack of airports compared to the US. Gabriela and I looked long and hard at the terrain and "what if" scenarios if we had to land in a hurry.

As we approached Tampico the cloud base came down and we were forced a little to low for comfort especially with the oil refineries and towers. Anyway we found the airport and taxied up to the ramp area.

We were met by customs and the customs dog who had a sniff around the plane and the luggage. After this we were processed by Customs, Immigration, Agriculture and Civil Aviation. We ended up paying \$10 in landing fees and \$70 for Air navigation tax for the year. All very simple and pleasant.

Fueling was a breeze and the fuel company took a credit card. Prices were comparable to the USA.

Looking at the weather, Flight planning could see decent weather for Veracruz flying along the coast so we went for it and had a brilliant flight.

Roxanna was on the other end of the phone and had a hotel organized for us.

We ended the day in the hotel bar having a quiet meal.

19/9 /2013

A full days flying today as we work South. We were at the airport before sunrise and organizing fuel and our flight plan and paying the \$5 in landing and parking fees.

All went smoothly and we were fueled up and ready by sunrise.

The flight planning office is very optimistic about weather. A quick glance at the sat pic and a great flying prognosis - lovely weather whereas I had been looking all night at the evolution of a very nasty tropical low that would have had us blocked for days. So we got off ahead of it and indeed had very good weather for most of the trip but run up against squall activity chasing us in from the Pacific. At one stage I had to go under the squall line while just

maintaining visual conditions at a thousand feet lined up with the 200 mile long beach as our guide and emergency landing strip if we had to make a forced landing. Well the plane got a good cleaning anyway and we were back in clear weather in no time but the system was building behind us all the time.

We got to the last airport in Mexico Tapachula. 345 miles of flying - the longest leg so far at 29 gallons of fuel consumed and 19 remaining.



With the clouds from the west building and closing in we cleared out of Mexico and ran on to the South East for our relatively short hop to San Salvador. The exit tax for the "Passenger" on board was \$35 so I had to run to an ATM to get some more pesos.

After that we were good to go. The forecast showed clear weather to our destination but we had to keep to the longer coast route with cumulonimbus building North and South.

On this leg Ushuaia Logistics (Aviation Division) got it's first real workout with the transit of Guatemala airspace. The permit worked like a charm and Roxanna had advised the civil aviation authorities by phone that I was on my way and so I had VFR flight following all the way through Guatemala airspace.

The approach to San Salvador was interesting as we were getting more Cu Num building. The ONC charts in Air Navigation pro were invaluable to making the approach with partially obscured mountains. We currently are running 2 systems all the time now and if one goes out on us we have the other immediately available with the third backup in the flight bag. The IFR low altitude charts are a great fallback to make sure the relevant air spaces are accurate and frequencies are correct.



The topography around Ilhopango airport is rugged and picturesque and the landing is a bit like coming down on an aircraft carrier. As usual my approach was far too high as I was not taking chances with the surrounding hills stacks and antennas. The runway was long and we landed quite safely.

Clearance was very easy and we were able to be on our way within 15 minutes to the hotel that Roxanna reserved.

You can see the place is not totally safe. Armed private guards are everywhere and the whole city of San Salvador looks a little run down.

We ate in a Pizza hut next to the fortress of a hotel and will be heading back to the airport and moving on weather permitting.

20th September 2013

From Costa Rica until we get to Chile we are passing through a very general aviation unfriendly zone. Costa Rica has insane parking fees - A piper pays the same as a Gulfstream 5 for parking. Then Panama - not so bad and afterwards Colombia Ecuador and Peru where we will be contributing to the country's revenue with taxes, large fees and unclear rules.

Colombia it is looking like we will have to hire a handler or risk seizure of the plane - Roxanna is busy working on various options and we will have to watch this space.

So far Roxanna has been doing an excellent job talking to the authorities and basically telling them how to do their job while letting them keep face - more later.

But after the very laid back and friendly attitude of Mexico and El Salvador it is looking like anyone planning to tread this path in the future - put in big ferry tanks and stay clear of the crocodile.

Anyway on to today:

El Salvador is probably the best place to make a technical stop but the worst place to overnight. It took 80 minutes to get from the hotel to the airport as the main road was mostly closed and the taxi driver had to divert through some "residential" areas. It was quite weird to see people living in squalor with brand new cars parked outside, a paradox I see all the time in Latin America.

So back to the present. Clearance was like greased lightning. I leave Gabriela to fill out the forms and all goes remarkably well. Compared to clearing a sailboat the Aviation bureaucrats are fast and efficient. Getting fuel I had to taxi round the back of the building and collect fuel and then taxi back so Immigration could see the plane depart with the manifest.

After a long wait - lots of private aviation taking off we got our clearance. Gabriela made a very good takeoff and climb out and we were on our way getting out of some gloomy weather and into clearer air.

Transit of Nicaragua's airspace was a breeze - very efficient ATC all round and thanks to Roxanna priming the authorities there were no issues. Our flight plan was to San Jose but our late departure meant we had Cu Nim building and we decided to go for the alternate Liberia. Making MVFR landing in mountainous terrain did not appeal to me.

The people in Liberia were wonderful - We had a security policeman take us under our wing and we were rushed through Customs and immigration. After this the narcotics team wanted to take a look at the plane. - This was brilliant - I was able to unload the plane and ditch all the garbage. We even got to look in the empennage and see the wonderful corrosion free interior and the greased properly tensioned control cables.

Fueling was a breeze although you have to pay for fuel in advance so I estimated a very pessimistic fuel amount after which my credit card voucher was cancelled and the real amount charged.

Particularly enjoyable was visiting the control tower and talking to the controllers who landed us and discussing the weather.

The day ended in the pool and a nice meal after an eventful day.

21st September 2013

Panama City

A very eventful day. Once again climbing up to 9,500 and playing dodge the thunderstorm. We got out of Liberia Costa Rica reasonably early. There was about an hour delay with paperwork. So far I have no complaints. The paperwork is considerably easier than dealing with a yacht and the people are well practiced with the procedures.

It is starting to get expensive though. Costa Rica cost about \$200 with landing and huge parking fees. One reason you do not see much general aviation here. Everyone was very pleasant though.

We took off into a broken low cloud Gabriela handling the takeoff roll very well and we maneuvered well clear and climbed up to an altitude where we could spot the clouds. The continental divide was invisible and what we call "Cumulo Granite" We kept well clear. The software we are running has a terrain database and you can see at a glance if you are running into danger but the mark one eyeball always works the best.

Anyway the big problem was a headwind that took 20 knots off our speed. I like to land with at least one hour in the tank and things looked a bit tight for a safe arrival especially as the weather was so unstable. So we got the conditions for our alternate - David on the Panama border. Marginal but doable. With 2 hours at least loitering reserve we opted for that and easily dodged the clouds and made a safe landing.

Roxanna working from base had the fuel lined up in a drum and that was brilliant. The fueling could not start till the fire truck was there and the firemen ready in flame suits ready to put out any conflagration.

Then the fun began. David Airport has a reputation for a thorough inspection and I rather like this as it gives us a chance to unload and tidy the storage. And if they want to go into the control surfaces and cable spaces so much the better so I can inspect as well. So the total co-operation and strip down of the plane rather disarms the inspectors. I do insist on aircraft documents being inspected inside as they are so valuable and handing a photocopied sheet of every document works a charm and if that does not work - digital copies on a USB Pen drive is the ultimate they can ask for.

However today was a black day for the wallet. David airport hit me up for \$170 in parking and air navigation fees. And we are going to have to get used to this for the next three countries until we break through into sanity and GA friendly skies.

The flight to Panama city went very well. After an overly optimistic weather forecast from flight planing that I knew to be wrong (the entire zone was under a convective sigmet) we took off and passed over a nasty system and made it under the next beast and landed with smooth air in Panama Gelabert. The approach was spectacular turning base over the Miraflores Locks of the Panama canal that I know so well from many transits by yacht.

24th Sept 2013

Cali Colombia

We attempted an early departure out of Panama. All forms filled in etc but no avail. Little problems like flight planning forgetting to call the tower etc etc had us delayed and we finally got away at 08:50.

With no real weather information except what I was studying on the Internet gave

me a rough idea of what to expect but we were gradually finding ourselves up at 11,500 to clear clouds and a mostly solid deck underneath.

The plane does run very economically at this altitude but we pay to get it up there of course. We were talking to ATC most of the route and Cali was reporting clear skies. I was getting a little worried but the times and all at our most pessimistic fuel burn had us with a projected 45 minutes of reserve at our destination.

Because of terrain and cloud I could not do an economical descent and once we were in the clear I had to push her down in the yellow arc to get down to traffic pattern altitude.

The landing was uneventful. I landed slow to set her down firmly on the hot runway and we taxied to the ramp where a reception committee 10 strong was waiting to meet us. Gabriela fielded them all well until she started to wilt in the fierce heat. This cut short everything and we were whisked inside and G consumed a half litre of Gatorade.

The technical stop needed a full set of paperwork though and by the time we were all through it was too late to fly on to Guayaquil - I was quite glad to pass on that one as dodging high cloud gets old.

As there was some issue with customs with arriving aircraft and the remote possibility of aircraft seizure, Roxanna decided to use local handling. She shopped around quite a bit and found a guy that would let us pay our own fees but do the customs advance notification. Roxanna also had the fuel organized and that worked really well with us being fueled before the clearance was even done. We will find out later how much the handling all costs - the initial quote was well under the Jet set teams, however it was great to have somebody drive us and our luggage to a hotel where we could unwind after a hard day.

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This trip gave us the first decent fuel burn figures.

On this flight we were forced up to 10,000 feet for most of the flight and at that altitude we had light headwinds a lot of the way. With 4.6 Hobbs hours and 4.5 tach hours we consumed 38 of our 48 gallons of fuel. We landed on the fullest tank with 5.5 gallons remaining. The power was set to 75% with the mixture leaned as per the manual. We are getting 8.5 gallons an hour per flying hour approx so with descent I reckon we had an easy hour plus of reserve and our endurance is a safe 5.5 hours.

24th Sept 2013 Guayaquil Ecuador.

An early start - our agent picked up up at 5:30 and while we had a quick coffee he prepared all the paperwork for us.

The whole cost for this service and filing advance customs notification was \$150. As he ran us to and from the hotel as well this worked out to be a really decent service. If all handlers were like this they would get a lot more business from us mortals. The first quote we got the handler put a 0 on the end of all government fees and had we used them we would have limped away \$1000 poorer. Roxanna was about to raise the issue of overcharging with Colombian customs but luckily she found a decent company.

And so on to the flight. We need a second narcotics inspection and a very bored dog came over to the plane and did a cursory inspection picking up interest in Gabriela's Subway sandwich. Eventually they signed us off and we were ready to go.

Departing Cali requires an IFR flight plan and so I had to go through the whole procedure. Fortunately the simulator hours I put paid off and with the Jeppesson trip kit I had all the documents I needed - The only thing lacking was an Instrument rating. The SID I was given would have stretched my fuel reserves so I cancelled IFR immediately after takeoff and routed myself visually.



This leg is hopefully the longest of the trip at 440 nm unless Peru deny me landing at Nazca. We had reasonable winds for most of the trip and I climbed to 10500 feet - I am starting to like that altitude where I can lean the mixture right down and start to get some decent fuel economy. We were up against the Andes all the way with granite towers at far above our altitude with heavy cumulus giving them an imposing look. Certainly not a good place to wander into clouds.

Asking ahead for our weather at the terminal we had visibility unrestricted scattered 2500 and 5000 broken. I was not sure as the deck ahead looked pretty solid at 6000 feet so I spiraled down into the last hole and ran the scud at 1000 feet AGL with an overcast at 1500 and visibility 3 miles.

We had to hold for landing traffic and followed a LAN Airbus in making the approach at 100 knots to try to be a good neighbor for all the planes on the ground waiting to take off.

We were directed to the general Aviation area and a very efficient team cleared us in. All was looking good for a fast turnaround for Peru but... Our permit was still not available. There were multiple problems - Not being able to answer the phone, Not being able to open Email were the prime reasons. Finally Roxanna got through and it looks like we will be able to move tomorrow.

Most of Peruvian airspace is restricted so we are limited to very narrow corridors. Anyway that is something for another day. The electronic charts match the Jeppesen trip kit so we are good.

Now we sit tight and wait for the Peruvian permit.

So far this flying has been pretty challenging but good fun. Weather has been a big issue the whole time however the thunderstorms now have given way to gloomy marine layer overcast that will be quite tiring to fly under.

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No technical issues with the plane. I have learned how to start the motor. By using the primer even once the engine tends to flood and takes forever to start. Starting with little or no throttle and pumping once the engine fires right up.

I have a good handle on the fuel endurance and Gabriela is a great help with fuel management. We know exactly what we have at any moment in time. Gabriela is also learning to write down all ATC instructions in a legible hand. Gabriela needs to work on the finer aspects of flying. On these long legs where fuel economy is critical we need to fly a steady course and steady airspeed. Gabriela tends to chase the altimeter rather than letting the craft drift to the altitude in time. We can work on perfecting these skills.

I am preparing a spreadsheet detailing the fees we encountered in each country. Basically Avgas has been fairly consistent at \$6 - \$7 per US Gallon. More or less USA price. Every country you get dinged in some way for about \$200 somewhere. Landing fees are quite cheap at around \$5-10 and parking ranges from free to completely insane as it is in Costa Rica. Hence there are very few light aircraft flying in that country whereas there is a thriving GA community everywhere else we have seen.

25th September 2013 Guayaquil Ecuador

Well the Aviation division of Ushuaia logistics is getting one baptism by fire.

Roxanna was on the phone all day and got the impossible - A Peru permit issued the same day. We have the number, our flight plan is approved and we are good to go.

As an aside the Chile permit was issued within 24 hours after filling in a simple form on the Chile Website. Two neighboring countries worlds apart.

So Roxanna can relax tomorrow and deal with the comparatively simple task of arranging Avgas at the destination.

In the meantime we will start bright and early and get airborne. Weather is forecast to be reasonable - not great but sunshine at our destination meaning we can hope to fly high and land safe.

Our day was competitively pedestrian. We saw a bit of Guayaquil. The waterfront development was pleasant if not a tad sterile but the visit to the city park, full of Iguanas was something else and Gabriela was fascinated by these primitive creatures.

I had a business meeting with a prospective client that I was not overly keen on pursuing. The job looked fraught with problems.

We are camping in and making a snack dinner with items purchased at the supermarket.

26th September 2013

Trujillio Peru

Well we made it out of Guayaquil and had a reasonably uneventful flight with the Andes as a splendid backdrop.

Although we tookoff with our destination IFR the forecast was correct and the place was clear on landing. Great approach over the beach shacks where we are currently staying.



The landing went well and the air marshal directed us to park at which point everything started turning to custard. The Air marshal handed me a bill even before we had shut down. He wanted \$180 for his services that really put a bad start to an otherwise trouble free entry. We proceeded to fuel up and pay all the other fees - Air navigation is about 20 cents plus tax a kilometer - that we just have to pay. Parking and landing was reasonable at \$25 a day - So we are disputing the air marshal fee that is levied by a private contractor and hoping that we can come to some sort of arrangement to get that one out of the

way in a diplomatic and face saving way for all concerned.

Ecuador also left us considerably lighter in the wallet. Mandatory handling at \$150 - well they did a reasonable job and all paperwork was prepared so we saved some time and run us to immigration twice so I felt we had reasonable value there. All the other fees for stopping in Guayaquil were \$165.

Anyway our plan is to get through Peru as quickly as possible and get to some relatively sane country.



We only have a few flying hours a day as the cold marine layer moves in at night and we have to wait till about 10 for VFR conditions. The big advantage is that we are in the country and do not have to cross borders. This is really where things get time consuming.

If I do this again it will be with ferry tanks and basically overfly Ecuador and Peru.

28th Sept 2013
Pisco Peru.

This town has got to be the most run down place I have ever seen. It is basically built of shacks with a very nice square in the middle. We are staying at a fairly decent place next to the square. How did we get here. Well it is a long story.

So we left our beach resort town next to the airport. I was rather perplexed by

the place as all the hotels were supposedly booked out but in fact there was nobody around and breakfast did not start till 10:30 so we went to the plane very early and started checking it out while waiting for the weather to lift. We never saw the \$190 Air Marshall so I assume he had been read the riot act. Finally at 10 we got the clearance to go. We were VFR on top of clouds nearly the whole way.

I was pretty certain Pisco airport would clear up. I have been studying the modis rapidfire imagery that provides very detailed pictures on a daily basis and I could see the micro climate that keeps this airport VFR during the day but fogged in at night.

So we landed more or less uneventfully and refueled and we were good to go an hour later CAVOK at our destination one hour away - we were home and dry - Wrong. 30 minutes into our flight we got a report of a dust storm at our destination and reduced visibility. We maintained an inbound course for 10 minutes and the next report was vis down to 2.5 km.

Decision time. I decided to head back to Pisco while the sun was reasonably high and keeping the marine layer at bay. We landed with CAVOK but the low clouds rapidly thickening around us. We were really just in time.



Well the upshot of all this was that our flight permit had expired and there is no flexibility in Peru. Every other Latin country understands about weather and there is a 72 hour buffer with those countries that still require advance permission. Not Peru. So Roxanna is back at ground zero and re-negotiating the permit. We shall see if things go through with a weekend looming. I am turning up at the airport in the morning as if all is OK and we are good to go but I am not sure and we will have to have a plan B ready to go.

Gabriela is fuming - she has not seen one positive aspect to the country except for the stunning desert scenery when the clouds part. She wants to head South as soon as possible.

I am of the opinion that somebody high up in the ICAO needs to talk to somebody influential in the Peruvian government and explain about things like right of innocent passage that seem to escape the way things are done here.

28th September 2013

Pisco

Well it looks like N32847 is going to take a long bask in the sun.

After a herculean effort from Roxanna and the girls in Flight Planning we managed to get the permit renewed just before the weather turned VFR. A 3 hour wait was bearing fruit and the architectural horrors of Pisco were going to be a thing of the past.

Not so lucky. We taxied out and I ran through the pre takeoff checklist. The first hint of trouble was no RPM drop on left mag. Things got worse on right mag when the engine cut out completely. Nobody takes off on one magneto so that was the flying done for the day. I called for a taxi back. The Peruvian inspector said that if we fixed the problem I could sign for it no problem - my responsibility.

We had a local Joe take a look and all he could really do with the primitive equipment was pull the plugs. I suspect a burned out distributor line or coil - there is no life on any cylinder with that puppy. The unit must have failed in flight on the aborted Nazca flight. Suddenly all our little problems seem to be working out for the best as we would have been really in the poo in Nazca.

Looking through the maintenance log I see the mags were overhauled not replaced at the major overhaul so I am going to have to go back through everything to work out when the things were new and probably bite the bullet and replace both of them.

So the solution - We are laying the plane up here. The good news is apart from everyone being very nice at the airport is that the parking is probably the least expensive in South America and the area is a desert so corrosion is not an issue. At times like this you have to count your blessings.

I can get a replacement Mag in the US (not cheap) and we will have to find a FAA licensed mechanic in Lima to do the work or at least sign the paperwork. We will cross that bridge when we get there.

We found out that the other side of the airport is a desert Eco reserve and the small town of Paracas is the antidote to the horrors of Pisco so when we are not mothballing the plane we will go pleasantly to pieces on the beach.

I have our reservations booked and will ticket tomorrow. In the meantime if anyone disagrees with my diagnosis or knows of a better path than replacing both mags or something else to look for please let me know.

29th September 2013

Firstly a big thank you for all those who sent in the tips on Magnetos. First prize goes to the suggestion to remove the grounding and make sure the magneto grounding was not faulty.

Well isolating the right mag worked wonders. We had even running on all settings. Not good enough as I needed to see a RPM drop on one mag at least.

So the removing the grounding on the left mag was not so good. The Left (right) mag was definitely in need of TLC. Anyway the day started to get a lot better when I found out there were two FAA licensed mechanics on the field and I started to work out a way forward out of this mess.

I have to go back to work. I cannot afford a week delay (or more) for parts. Doing a thorough read of the maintenance records. The mag that failed is the original and had 3600 hours. The Left (Right) magneto has about 1000 hours and is well within it's 5000 hours life. So we will order up a new mag and new harness and I go and recover the family fortunes and come back in December to continue this trip.

The authorities are happy with this plan and we have chosen the best airport En Route to break down - Under crowded and dry. So we are flying out on a twin otter day after tomorrow. Tomorrow we put the craft into mothballs and hopefully in December we can continue this narrative.

After we were definitely not flying, life got a lot less stressful. We checked back into our hotel and spent the afternoon doing tourist things. A cattemeran ride in the bay and a short walk in the desert. This is real desert where there is not a blade of grass or any living thing for hundreds of miles around. Quite daunting after the lush deserts of California and Arizona that I am used to.



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Looking at the plane and where we are at: She has had a pretty hard run down. The Mag failure was not on the cards but in the budget. So far we purchased the plane at about \$10,000 less than the book price. Gear maintenance has cost \$4000 and now the mag problem has bumped this up to \$5000. We are still less than book price on the plane and to boot we have the plane pretty much debugged I think. The worst is behind us with permits and fees. Once we get through Peru we are home and dry.

1/Dec/2013

Pisco Peru

As many would attest - traveling from Ushuaia North can be an adventure even if on the beaten track. I always plan my journeys with long rest overs and err towards the earlier flight. If if this time I was forced to fly on the state owned carrier as LAN did not have a morning flight.

As usual if you have plenty of time the luggage comes off the carousel first and

there are always taxis to be found so I was waiting at the International Airport for 2 hours waiting for the check in for Peru to open. It was then I learned that the Argentine air traffic "control" system was in partial meltdown and flights were getting delayed left right and centre. I had dodged the bullet.

At check in my upgrade request had come through so I was able to get some rest in the comfy seats on the way up North.

The last big hurdle - Peruvian customs was a breeze and that large metal lump in my tattered rucksack did not raise any eyebrows.

This time I did not brave the horrors of Lima but checked into the airport hotel right in the terminal and got 5 hours good rest.

Rest is the key to a long cross country flight I am not planning on economizing there.

It was in the security lane in Peru I had my most searching probe of my bags and they pretty much found everything except the ignition leads tightly coiled in a Tupperware box.

So onto Pisco and the very new twin otter with huge windows for sightseeing. Gloomy most of the way but on touchdown I was able to take my bags on the tarmac and walk over to my plane where the loyal Marco was waiting after having looked after the plane for 2 months.

The plane was immaculate. He had the plane washed down whenever a dust storm had come by and I felt a lot better already seeing the plane so well.

Marco decided to subcontract the work to a specialist and he supervised while the specialist very confidently lined up the engine and timed and synchronized the magnetos.

The shaft shear pin had sheared on the old mag and it could have been fixed quite easily however I am big believer of over-doing a job like this. The shoddy state of the wiring was the clincher here.

Anyway we put everything back together and my faithful engine fired on the first crank - the battery was in perfect shape after 2 months. The run up tests were fine. Engine was in perfect shape. Mag tests passed and they both grounded properly. The work is signed off by a FAA licensed A&P who has declared the plane fit for return to service.

3/12 Pisco

Well Monday was a blown out day. I spent it doing an in depth pre-flight and inspecting control cable spaces for dust contamination and going over the engine and airframe with a toothcomb.

I did find that the last mechanic to work on my plane failed to replace the Schreder valve cap on the landing gear. Nothing major just a bit sloppy in my opinion.

The wait is for the people in Lima to study the log book entry and make sure the mechanic has done everything correctly. I am sure these people have less knowledge and experience to the line boss of a functioning airline but so be it. The unemployable must be given jobs.

So another night in Paracas. Wearing a little thin now but I did have a splendid local fish served cooking on a hot slab of volcanic rock. I had to wear a bib to protect my clothing from the spitting juices emanating from the slab.

Today it was back at the airport and putting very gentle pressure to move things on. Freddy the government air inspector was calling at one end and Roxanna pushing from the other end and so towards Mid Day all started to come right.

So far Peru has been a very mixed experience. The appalling poverty to be seen everywhere is mixed with lovely warm hearted people. Everyone I have dealt with in the bureaucracy has been very pleasant.

The mechanic boss at Aero Diana - Marco Pejerrey was a real prince keeping my aircraft in good condition and not charging an arm and a leg. He even gave me a replacement for the missing valve cap. I left him all the old magneto parts. The unit can be easily reconditioned and put back into service as I would have done had I been in the USA and near a proper mag shop.

So on to Nazca - Permission finally came through at 10 but flight planning took an hour to write out the invoice (problems with the software then the printer kept chewing up paper). I closed my eyes and purged my mind of frustrations and just resigned myself to it being a long day.

Once the paperwork was complete I was suddenly in the real world again. Efficient air traffic control had me on my way and an hour later I was approaching Nazca - snatched from us twice before now the place was in sight. The plane performed perfectly. Engine running like a Swiss Watch. I made the approach with no problem. The less said about the landing the better. Lets say the oleo struts made it a relatively smooth experience and I got a chance to put them through their paces.

This is also the first time for about 25 years I have flown as the sole occupant. There have always been plenty of willing hands to fly right seat. Anyway I managed OK it would seem though it would have been handy to have my daughter fly the plane and help with the workload.

By the time I got in I was pretty bushed. I could have pushed it to Tacna but the long wait in hot weather and all I decided to rest up in a nice place and get an early start in the morning.

It also gave me chance to inspect the engine in depth for any loose bits or wires hanging off.

So now I am in a quiet chalet with good WiFi an Early night and an early start tomorrow. Hopefully I can be clear of Peru and make a good start into Chile in the morning.

4/12 Arica Chile

For all you have heard about Nazca- the mystique that surrounds the lines. Nazca is in fact a garbage dump that has been placed in some pristine desert scenery.

The taxi driver managed to find me a corner of serenity in this chaos and like I fool I took a walk along the Pan American highway approach into town - so I will say no more and not abuse your sensibilities.

It was the wake up call - rain that really put the really bad start to the day. The only positivespin I could put about Nazca was that I was able to fly out of

here. And now here I was in the driest place on the planet and it was raining. It did not bode well

Fortunately it cleared up by the time I had finished breakfast and my early start was further delayed by the forecast - I could not be airborne before 10 as the destination was not forecast to be VFR before after mid day. However that changed and quite quickly the weather seemed to re-arrange itself into something quite passable.

I was further delayed by Peruvian technology. It took 4 experts and several phone calls to compute the \$2.64 parking I had to pay and unfortunately another 30 minutes delay.

Eventually I had clean accounts and was airborne. I did a high altitude short field takeoff with the mixture properly leaned and I was airborne in 1200 feet and almost safe altitude after the runway threshold.

This leg was probably the most rewarding of the trip so far. The topography is stunning. Mountains covered with sand dunes and insane gorges that put the grand canyon to shame.

The approach to Tacna was over an expanse of desolation that was mind boggling and coming over the ridge of sand I was so focused on the airport that I did not notice the horrible urban sprawl defiling this clean desert until I had to fly over it.

After my last landing I decided to extend my downwind and establish a decent approach. This plane really does not like the ground and will do everything it can to stay airborne so a low gentle approach and a nice soft landing ensued.

Tacna Airport was a fairly non event. I had 3 bills to pay. Not quite sure what they were but they were trivial sums - like a lot off these fees they probably cost more to collect than they are worth. I was stamped out of the country. Great !

Back in the plane. Only a 19 mile hop so I skimmed on the planning. After engine runnup I realized I had a dead comms set. The tower was not hearing me on either radio. At the end of the runway there was no way I was staying in Peru. I plugged into the CoPilot side and was back in touch and could get away. However I was off balance.

19 miles later I was in a different universe. Firstly the clock was 2 hours later and I was finally in a time zone that matched the position of the sun. In Peru it gets light at 3:30 but nobody gets into work till 8:30 so you lose on flying segment in a day.

Secondly the clearance was so easy and thirdly the fees - One fee \$41 and that covers 30 days usage of Chilean airspace. Takeoff landing and parking. Avgas is \$7 a US gallon including VAT. I was ready to kiss the ground after what I have been through.

5th Dec La Serena Chile

What a wonderful day ! Free of stress and everyone I met was lovely and helpful.

I had a leisurely breakfast at the comfortable and well run resort I stayed in last night. Taxi was waiting for me and we were at the airport before 8. A simple flight plan (I did have to dig up

customs to stamp the form) but I was airborne at 9 with most of the delay being my very thorough pre-flight.

The comms issue turned out to be the headset so I had 2 spares and no worries I was in great shape and not having to use the co-pilot PTT switch every time I communicated with ATC.

Airborne at 9 AM as filed and I was once again flying over the totally lifeless Atacama desert. The sheer depth of this landscape has to be seen from a small plane to be believed. With my instruments I can measure the terrain relief and it is mind boggling. Flying next to cliffs 6000 feet high that descend almost sheer into the sea. If you look at this scenery at ground level with the super clear air you cannot comprehend the scale.

Cut into this are deep valleys with small settlements and of course a lot of mining with crazy approach roads with amazing switchbacks. I was it all today.

My mid day stop was Antofagasta and the 5 minutes paperwork involved filing a flight plan and that was all. So I took a break and actually ordered lunch in the airport cafe. The first time on this entire trip I could afford the luxury of free time.

The afternoon leg was a little longer and I ended up at 9500 feet - although my course was 185 Degrees ATC thought I should be at an odd cruising altitude - Who am I to argue. Apart from that the ATC was super professional.

The approach into la Serena was very interesting judging the numerous mountains. This area is not well charted except for the instrument approaches but I preferred to dodge the rocks in the perfect visibility. So not a boring moment though after landing I did feel the fatigue hit a bit. This is quite a bit more flying than I have been doing lately.

The plane flies so well I do not miss the autopilot but the workload is quite high all the same.

So now I have splashed out on an overly lavish Hotel but who cares I need the rest. Another long day tomorrow and then decision time - do I stay in Chile or cut over to Argentina.

6th December Concepcion

What a brilliant day !

Well it did not start brilliant. The swank hotel I booked into turned out to be Chile's version of Faulty Towers. Cleaners were deployed at 11 PM and made a dreadful racket all night. I asked to be moved and they put me in a room at the hotel somewhat insulated from the nocturnal industrial activity.

Tonight I found a modern Holiday inn where soundproofing and insulation are incorporated into the design but I digress.

I woke up to a particularly IFR grey dawn - so what to do - well a leisurely breakfast at any rate. The gloom was somewhat intensified by a growing problem. My engine oil was over 50 hours. Something nagging from Peru and these hours I am putting in rack it up that much more. Basically today I had

to change the oil. I had filters on board but only carried top up oil and everywhere I stopped there was no oil to be found.

So call the wife and we have to make it happen. And the only place in Chile it is going to happen is Santiago. I had hoped to avoid flying into class Bravo airspace but this was not to be and to boot the GA airfield in downtown Santiago is 2800 foot long and that is 400 feet shorter than anything I have landed on.

Roxanna had everything lined up thank goodness.

So no choice and the terrain was quite serious. Looking at the charts I was going to have to dodge 12,000 foot cliffs.

The weather over Chile was perfect everywhere except where I was. Well it was clearing fast and by 11:30 I was able to depart Special VFR and after leaving the traffic patters I was in clear blue skies.

The mountains yesterday were awesome. Today they were quite distracting to the point of being surreal and I was cruising on the shoulders of the giants of the Andes. Aconcagua was very clear off my left wing and at 9,500 feet I was a very minor player in this show having to dodge terrain all the time.

Arriving into Santiago airspace I was very professionally handled. I am not a newcomer to crowded airspace and really rather enjoy being vectored with high quality ATC. The one tip I can give to anyone is if you are not sure of what you are doing act humble and say "I am familiar with this airspace please provide directions" I was shifted over to the tiny GA Airport and made an "interesting" cross wind landing that would have won no prizes.

There ensued an hour long discussion about who would sign for the oil change till I pointed out that my licence entitled me to sign off the work and so the deal was done. I purchase the oil supply the filter sign off the work and buy everyone a beer.

Perfect.

A late afternoon flight and no over the fertile breadbasket of Chile. This may be a long thin country but it is a huge place of contrast.

My last landing of the day was delayed by the arrival of an airbus and I had to hold position while it landed. At last I was able to approach and made a perfect soft landing finally.

Fuel Hotel and Bed. Tomorrow I may be crossing the Andes. Lets see if my clearance comes through.

7th Dec

The satellite and upper air data was perfect - today was going to be the day. Only some obstacles.

Chile requires 72 hours notice and Argentina 48 hours notice of a flight between these airports. I explained to the flight planing office that this was not practical. You cannot accurately predict trans Andes weather that far in advance.

So he recommended I file a flight plan the day before and let the system take care of things.

The ICAO filing system may be a bit counter intuitive but it really is an effective way for 2 countries to communicate on a very businesslike way. All the way down the Americas the system has worked extremely well.

Today was no exception. Customs and immigration turned up on time and I was cleared out. Then began the long weather wait. My departure was 900 feet overcast. Irritatingly there was a blue hole to the south that I could easily climb through but the airport minimums were not there.

A special VFR clearance allows you to operate in controlled Class D airspace in conditions less than the VFR minimums and it is generally a means to get your rear-end on the ground. It is quite foolhardy to use a special VFR for departure unless you really knew what you are doing. Even so I had to wait for 1200 feet overcast before I got the clearance.

In my case I was in clear sky before reaching 500 feet so this was not an issue.

I started my long climb up to to fl115. I have not spent much time at this altitude so I was trying to self evaluate my problem solving skills making sure tanks were switched and my mental arithmetic in estimating distance and time were working.

I was also watching the temp gauge drop below zero and was shutting off some cabin air. I am not a big believer of using a heater in a plane as I m very nervous about carbon monoxide poisoning and would rather be a little cold than risk some invisible killer share the plane with me.

So I cleared the ridge comfortably. In fact I could have easily flown at 7500 and dodged peaks but I would have had very little room in event of an emergency landing.

The weather predictions were correct. Further south at my first intended crossing point I could see standing lenticular clouds. At my point the air was clear but not too clear - that also can indicate turbulence. So a smooth crossing and snow capped volcanoes as far as the eye could see with my flying right next to two of them.



Crossing the Argentine border the characteristics change dramatically and we are in pure Pampas - dry flat grasslands. Here there is a different splendor. Ochre rocks and eroded valleys running slowly towards the Atlantic.

Arriving in Neuquen it was a bit bumpy with all the heat coming off the land but the landing was smooth. Slight crosswind but very comfortable.

The clearance was very easy.

Roxanna had greased the wheels at the Argentine end and they were all waiting for me. I need a special stamp in my passport or the security police in the port in Ushuaia will not let me in to the port. Just a small ritual and this was all fine.

All the officials were friendly and professional and thorough. However the papers were all prepared in advance. I had 6 copies of my general declaration and all my aircraft papers photocopied so in fact I was cleared and fueled in 30 minutes. Quite amazing. It really pays to clear in a small place.

While I was waiting for my change from the fueling I connected my cellphone to the computer - booked a nice hotel room near the airport and 30 minutes later I am resting and getting the next leg planned.

8th December Comodoro Rivedavia

A fairly educational day.

On the good side my air taxes to date in Argentina have been a total of 2 pesos - about 20 cents on the black market rate. Fuel is reasonable even on the official rate and I am buying with the Amex card as it is so convenient rather than having to haul wads of cash around.

On the less than easy side I found out that the equivalent of a Mexican International Inward clearance needs to be done at every airport. A quarantine document needs to be completed and handed to the security police and flight planning office needs to have a copy of every document imaginable. I carry a stack of these copies anyway and am only too happy to lighten the payload by giving them out to whoever wants them.

The security police are something else. Most of them are very pleasant and quite well educated but they are packing some serious heat and dressed in full body armor. I really cannot see a shootout in these sleepy Patagonian airports but you cannot be too careful.

I am flying over Antoine De Saint Exuperey territory. The same runs he was pioneering with the Southern mail in an aircraft of similar performance. Flying over this barren country devoid of human habitation one is transported to the same era. Yet flying over here you can see the vast mineral wealth and agricultural potential going untapped. Here is water and fertile soil a plenty. Minerals beyond dreams and yet this country is always teetering on bankruptcy.

However these thoughts were far from my mind as I flew over mesmerizing pampas and a landscape whose scale is a little too vast to grasp. You glance out the window and you see endless grasslands but flying over time you build up a picture of vast wide canyons and dramatic relief impossible to photograph. You

can only try to describe it.

My first landing in Trelew was very interesting. A 20 knot crosswind. This is the strongest I have landed in so I took care to clean up the cockpit and remove Ipads and secure the clipboard before wading in. In fact it was very easy. The wind was steady and was able to maintain a steady crab all the way in kicking the nose over and moving the ailerons over to full travel on touchdown landing at 10 knots over stall with 2 notches of flap. You could scarcely feel it.

The air traffic control quality has taken a serious turn for the worse. My Spanish is not good good enough for aviation speak and so I am speaking in my licensed language. The poor controller at Comodoro could not cope. Here I was unfamiliar with the airport and she could not give any landing directions. I was told to approach the airport and report on final. Nowhere in my extensive Jeppeson trip kit was there a visual approach to this runway. Standard left pattern was out as there was a hill in the way. I broadcast my intention to overfly the field 1000 feet above pattern altitude and join right traffic on downwind for the runway. Those keywords "Right" and "traffic" were not in the vocabulary. Fortunately there was a commercial pilot pushing back on the same frequency who translated my intentions.

The last adventure of the day was a monumental failure of booking.com who normally are able to provide an accurate description of the hotel. In this case the description was fairly accurate as to the premises however it did not allude to the toxic waste outflow into the "beach" and the warning signs - " Do not bathe here Toxic Hazard" - I had the taxi Driver take me into town and we found something decent with the chance to buy some supper as well.

10th Dec Ushuaia

Made It !

A relatively uneventful flight from Comodoro Rivedavia. I had the dubious pleasure of having an ATC startup delay for 20 minutes - this has to be some of the most uncrowded air space in the World and yet ATC was experiencing congestion. Oh well.

When I eventually got my clearance I was on my way. Weather was going to be the challenge today. Down here you are on your own. With very few airports reporting I was relying on GFS Grib files for cloud cover precipitation and wind and pressure and Skyvector.com for satellite imagery and winds aloft.

This combination has proved quite accurate and I was expecting mild frontal activity on the way.

Rio Gallegos approach was easy though there was nobody on the approach frequency so I called Roxanna to advise ATC I was about to enter the class Bravo and advise them the frequencies I was given by Comodoro control. Contact was made soon after and the landing at the huge empty airport was uneventful.

Despite the paperwork shuffle I was refueled and on my way in 45 minutes. If you prepare in advance it goes quickly.

The Ushuaia leg was the most interesting. I took off into a rain shower that I had to negotiate around and stay clear of Chilean airspace and climb to FL70. I could just do it and remain legal.

One other little factor was rearing it's ugly head and that was the outside air temperature that I was watching like a hawk. Freezing levels were down to about 8000 feet and so I had to watch for structural icing. Fortunately that was not happening today.

The clouds were quite thick approaching Ushuaia but I found a small gap that opened up into the spectacular Valle Olivia approach. Mountains both sides and no room to maneuver but the Beagle channel dead ahead.

I was talking to the tower by this time and the controller could both speak and understand English. This was as well as there was other light aircraft traffic in the area.

I made an uneventful landing at the International airport and made my inward clearance. Roxanna was there to help and then I then zipped over to the Aeroclub right next to the International airport where Roxanna had arranged storage. This needed another flight plan for the 5 minute flight.

The plane is now safely hangered at the aeroclub while we decide what to do next.

So 10,000 miles and 90 hours of flying and I am finally here. Other than the Mag problem the aircraft has performed perfectly. I have a few minor issues. Landing and taxi lights have stopped working but other than that everything is fine.

December 2013 - June 2014 Soujourn in South America

After the excitement of the trip and finally making it here I started to find my feed and decide what to do. I was looking at a 1 month work schedule and then where ?

Well the first thing was to check the plane thoroughly. The optional 50 hour inspection can be done by the pilot owner and so I proceeded to pull the plane apart and check what I was allowed to check.

We did have a serious nose wheel bearing issue and a few minor items that took a good 2 days to sort out. Some local flying ensued and I then took a boat South to Antarctica to attend to the Antarctic Heritage trust's communications.

I had started to dig into the regulations and realized I had to get the plane out of the country inside 45 days or face aircraft seizure. So early January I was headed North - first stop Punta Arenas Chile and then all ports North via Argentina. I had the first officer from the National Geographic Explorer as my co-pilot so it made for good company. Appart from some icing and strong winds at Comodoro Rivedavia we had a good run to Uruguay.

It was starting to dawn on me that keeping an aircraft in South America is an expensive proposition. Hangerage and parking fees were running \$2000 a month as foreign aircraft have to pay a ramp fee calculated by the hour at public airports.

Argentina only allowed 45 days a year so that put a huge chunk of flying territory off limits. I did slip into Argentina as I had to get an Annual inspection that could not be done in Uruguay and at the end of this maintenance - sure enough the plane was stopped by the aviation authorities. We did manage to negotiate a safe exit with a day delay with the firm promise that I was not coming back.

So it was looking more and more like I could not remain here. There was a real

estate deal going down at one airport in Uruguay I could have bought into where I could build a hanger on a private airstrip but that was years in the future and so I bit the bullet and planned a route to the USA the only path left - Brazil.

I had not considered Brazil as the cost of Avgas and user fees are very high. However with 6 stops in Brazil I could safely transit the country and be on my way. When compared to Peru, Ecuador and Colombia it actually comes out about the same with the clearance fees I had to pay and there are definitely fewer borders to cross.

The Permit for Brazil turned out to be the easiest we have so far encountered. The Website is in English and the process straightforward. There was one hiccup with the insurance wording but this was quickly cleared up.

So with less than a week to go.....

14/6/2014 Uruguayana Brazil

Got away - The weather was not looking good but with a 3 hour delay I was able to get airborne.

A big thank you to Paco and the Punta Del Este flying club who have looked after my plane for the last 3 weeks while I sorted everything out.

I did the longest flight possible in Uruguay - Punta Del Este to Artigas. All went well and I took off with the destination IFR. I had a few alternates in the bag and hoped for things to improve. When I got to my point of no return the destination was reporting VFR conditions so I was able to plug on.

I arrived and the very efficient ground crew were able to turn me around in a few minutes and I was on my way again all cleared out of the country in less than 30 minutes. All stress free. The sad side of everything was the fact that I was the only arrival for a considerable amount of time. This whole area should be teeming with general aviation and it is not happening.

Arriving in Brazil the ATC took a turn for the worse and I had to drive the clearance as the tower seemed to lack interest. Here we had an international airport with a staff of 20 and I was the second and last arrival of the day. Again excess regulations have killed GA in it's tracks.

The clearance procedure was all very pleasant and everyone was lovely but there were a few warts. Customs could only give me 4 days to cross the country (I suspect clerical error here) but the system is totally inflexible. We will have to deal with it as it comes. Not worth getting worked up about. The customs officer assured me there is no problem extending it but my confidence factor is somewhat low.

Anyway with the way the weather is shaping up I could be stuck here for the next 4 days.

Had a hard time finding a restaurant so ended up in a Pizza joint and had a passable evening meal. Early to bed and lets see if we can get out of Brazil in 4 days.

25th Jun Foz De Iguazu



Looks like the tracker was not working today. I need to take a look and see why. Anyway a very eventful day.

With the 4 day sword hanging over my head and not finding Uruguuayana quite as pleasant as Shangri La I was at the airport by 7:30 and had clearance to leave at 9 AM. \$75 in user fees poorer - not too horrible. Avgas is not quite as expensive as I had been told - about U\$8 a US gallon - pretty much what they charge in the US at some larger airports.

Anyway the airport's definition of VFR was not what I would call VFR and was running the scud through controlled airspace until I could find a gap to climb on top.

As far as I can tell VFR on the top is probably a lot more dangerous than over water as you are totally committed and screwed if you are forced to land. I was working off satellite imagery that turned out to be amazingly spot on though it did require pushing the boundaries of VFR and at one point I got whacked by a squall and was completely blind. Of course this is the time we have the finger of God pointing and the vaccum pump decided to quit. The light went on and the Gyro Vacuum read 0 and the gyros gently coasted to stop. Fortunately the electrics continued to function and I had done partial panel training so very

soon we were back in the clear and unrestricted visibility. I was lucky but luck tempered with some preparation.

The Gyros are not really needed for the type of flying I do (or should be doing) so I will wait till I get to Puerto Rico to fix them.

The approach to Iguazu was fascinating and I tried to sneak a bit closer to the falls but the tower had other ideas and chased me away so I made an uneventful landing.

Then the bureaucracy started again. Actually it was not too bad - everyone is very pleasant but they seem to be doing work beyond their pay grade so it takes a lot of time. The Chief of the Customs was another matter. 3 minutes and a few keystrokes and I had 14 days to get through Brazil. Phew - that one was worrying me. So from now on stress free is the order of the day. (I hope).

26 June 14 Baro Do Garcias

Well today was a shadow of yesterday's excitement. As I was going to get reamed at the Iguazu airport I decide to go the whole way and book a private tour - At least got to see one of the true wonders of the world in 2 hours and not have to pay an extra day of plane parking on an otherwise empty GA parking lot. I could write a lot more about the falls - suffice to say it was well worth the effort.

Anyway I managed the unheard of and did all my paperwork yesterday so all I had to do was to turn up and fly today. I did see a nasty CU bank on the satellite image so I decided to move my departure forward an hour and take off at crack of dawn. That needed me to get to the airport 45 minutes before sunrise to revise my flight plan. Every flight plan has a 45 minute cooling down period before you can take off and then you have to take off within 45 minutes or your flight plan is cancelled.

The whole system seems to have been put together by lawyers and accountants. They do not seem to have let a pilot anywhere near the decision making process. The odd thing is when you get the hang of it - it actually is workable and at least it is consistent.

So working inside the rules I was airborne one minute after sunrise with a nasty cloud bank bearing down on the airport and ready to close it and I was moving rapidly northward into the high dry middle of Brazil. An amazing change from rain forest to grasslands.

So very uneventful. I did 2 segments and during the "cooling off" period had lunch and was on my way into wilder and wilder country. You can see that South America is a huge largely empty place where the population huddle in these overcrowded cities - it does not make sense - here is vast empty grasslands and good living for all. No need to live in a slum.

I landed towards the end of the day at Baro Do Garcia - the only plane on the tarmac with a staff of 20 working. At my mid day stop I did see 3 Single engine reciprocating - one making a dreadful landing as I was waiting to make an equally dreadful takeoff. Uphill with a downwind crosswind component. It was probably the worse takeoff I have ever done. In retrospect - 2000 feet high on a hot day I should have leaned the engine and put in some flaps. No matter I got away.

I will take it easy tomorrow and only fly one leg before getting back into high gear. From there I want to try to get through Malaria country in a day and a half. The only Malaria tabs available in Argentina are totally banned by the FAA. So speed and basic precautions are going to be the way forward.

27/6 Maraba Amazonas

What started as a simple one day hop turned complex.

Ok after a reasonable meal on the river last night I headed back to the hotel and planned a one hop excursion to Porto Nacional on the Tocantes river. I am not big into the Brazilian towns as they are a bit chaotic and I do not feel 100% safe so I am avoiding the bigger places. Anyway the winds aloft forecast was not brilliant so I was not sure I would make my destination so chose an airport with Avgas 70 miles closer as my abort point of the fuel situation started to get worrisome.

I took my time and was ready for takeoff at 9 AM. Baro De Garcias airport was my favorite so far. There were no landing fees, fuel was comparatively cheap and everyone was super helpful.

A slight drawback was that nobody spoke English on the radio but they understood

my Spanish and I was able to understand numbers and letters when they spoke slowly so we were able to cope.

So I sampled the winds aloft. At 3500 the winds were on the beam and I could at least move at the speed of the plane. Drifting up I hit a brick wall so dropped back down and clipped daisies all the way across the plain. A lot more fun flying low.

Now those of you following the tracker are probably seeing how straight the tracks are. This is primarily as I am now using my Samsung smart phone as the primary heading reference rather than the directional gyro as the DG is now INOP. So for the first time I am steering with a device that does not drift. I will repair the vacuum system but it will be ornamental rather than essential. Even I am prepared to leave 1930s technology now.

Anyway I digress - I flew over the field I had planned as my alternate and advised them over the radio (in Sportuguese) that I was transiting the airspace. They came back and told me there was no Avgas at my planned destination and I had better fill up here. - Great sales ploy. Landing runway was dead into the wind. On the ground and gassed up in moments. They also took all major credit cards. Normally in Brazil it is all cards except Amex Mastercard Visa, Diners and any other grubby bits of plastic not from Brazil.

Again since the only staff here was the pump attendant - no landing fees. Wow !!! how long could this last? And - **** Internet **** I could actually get a proper weather briefing .

I told the attendant that I needed to close my flight plan so he called and the guy at the other end did not understand - I could only file a flight plan not close one. OK - just past mid day - I am fresh and full tank of gas - lets do it. - I filed on the fly cooking up a route on the IPAD and Surprise - it was accepted. I was told I was not allowed to take off for 45 minutes.

As the field was not controlled - fat chance. I preflighted and got out of there and was at Maraba 1 hour before sunset after an uneventful and easy flight.

I made contact with Palmas approach 45 minutes later and advised them that strong tailwinds had pushed me way ahead of my flight plan and was back in the system - so you see having lawyers and accountants running the show who know nothing about small planes has it advantages.

OK enough chatter I am off to get supper - Goodnight.

28th June Macapa Brazil

Made it to the banks of the Amazon. The flight started fine but then the towering cumulus started to build and the broken clouds thicken so I ducked down underneath and flew at 1000 feet above the ground the rest of the way getting a very close up Amazon experience. Some very dense forest there. Some habitations but if I had to ditch the plane there are very few options.

As you can see I am psyching myself up for the over water bits that are not that much but still it is a psychological hurdle.

Anyway we are committed now. A rather nice problem now is that I am moving too fast and cannot leave South America before the 1st of July or my Caribbean insurance is not valid. The Caribbean insurance is a lot better than the current package as it allows over water and is fully comprehensive. The South American package (at 5 times the cost) covers ground risks only and there are so many

outs that I doubt a claim would be that easy. My Caribbean and North America package is organized through the pilot's lobby AOPA and is thoroughly respectable. With my meagre 400 hours I am considered a high time recreational pilot and qualify for a hefty discount. - Well it did take me 30 years to get there.

The flight was otherwise uneventful and I got in at mid day. I was a bit perplexed why everyone was a bit distracted and had a hard time motivating the fuel guy to come over. We had the complex haggle over how to pay - This was a no US dollars accepted shop - we tried several credit cards and eventually the Amex clocked in. Always an adventure. I have been able to use plastic in quite a few places so can hoard the cash for the islands.

By the time I got to flight planning I could see that Brazil was about to play Chile and the entire country was in the process of grinding to a complete standstill. So those thoughts of a fine French meal and a glass of wine in French Guyana went on hold. The CU was still building in any event and I was quite happy to throw in the towel for the day.

The airport admin let me use the Internet and I booked the best hotel in town. Took some sadistic pleasure in dragging a taxi driver away from the football to take me to the hotel.

29th June Georgetown Guyana

I skipped breakfast this morning to get to the airport as soon as possible to get airborne before the ITC got active.

This morning as I was clearing out it took 2 hours to eventually get released with the Immigration guy checking me against any database he could find.

So I was airborne at 8:15 with another \$200 in fees poorer. Weaved around some clouds and got up to 7500 feet in clear cool air as opposed to the sweaty clammy Amazon fug.

I also picked up a tailwind so was rushing along at 130 knots on average. I was so fast I was on the ground in Cayenne an hour early. Also I saw the tropical weather was settling down and the next leg looked doable. So I requested a technical stop and was ready to go within 30 minutes. No toilet for technical stops so I sneaked round the back of the tower and left a comment on the wall.

It was a bit weird as all the various departments did not talk to each other. Meteorology did not know where flight planing was but when I finally located the guy and said - "great you are good to go". He had not considered the landing fees - a different department. I actually was about to line up and go when the tower cancelled my takeoff and directed me back to the ramp. I paid the \$7 in cash - took 15 minutes to generate the receipt and finally I was on my way - off balance but flying. I had to tread a fine line between the spaceport and towering cumulus but eventually I was at my cruising altitude of 10500 feet and on top of the bad air. It was then a milk run - 40 knot tailwinds - brilliant and all the tropical weather had blown away and I landed at the Ogle airport at 3 PM.

I was back in the Caribbean and the officials with a slight chip on their shoulder. None of the Brazilian camaraderie. Oh well nothing is perfect.

I am now in a beach hotel and will rest up for 2 days before the next leg.

30/6/2014

Georgetown Guayana

So what can I write about when I spend a day in a hotel room and doing nothing ? Well not quite. As a first step I decided to check the beach out.

I was a bit perplexed by the towering reeds where the beach access should be and eventually mounted a wall and realized that most of Georgetown is below sea level. The dismal tidal mud flats and mephitic stench of estuary mud extending seaward that brought back horrific memories of sailing the South coast of England. Ok the beach was out. Also pools of stagnant water in a malaria zone are not the greatest place to be. So back to the hotel where a full day of office work and flight planning were waiting for me.

I did get 12 hours sleep continuous. That indicated I was getting dangerous in the cockpit so I am going to slow down tomorrow and fly one segment only.

In the afternoon I went back to the plane to get all my fees paid and the plane fueled up. It took about 2 hours. We are still in crocodile country and I was dinged \$135 once all the fees were paid but the price of Avgas is coming down.

I have been looking at the whole trip and Peru and Brazil are the big stings with all tropical countries North still being expensive. When it is worked out both sides of the coast balance out and there was no real cost advantage in either route. The total experience is another matter and there is no price to pay for experiencing South America the way I did. Those memories are permanently etched.

If I were doing this trip again I would fit ferry tanks and just leapfrog crocodile country with a co-pilot. It is cheaper than paying these outrageous fees.

Anyway fees are now paid and all I have to do is stamp out and go I hope in the morning.

Tomorrow I fly keeping 10 miles North of Venezuelan airspace and basically fly over water the whole way. Personal Locator beacon in pocket and life-vest on before takeoff. Lets hope the Venezuela (that claims over 50% of Guyana) respects the agreed airspace boundaries.

1st July 2014 Grenada

I don't know why you are still reading this - there is nothing less newsworthy than a properly executed voyage and after my brush with the forces of nature everything has been going very well.

My day of rest put me back in a good frame of mind and getting a slightly more professional attitude to the whole thing.

Well the day did not start that well. A mega downpour while I was having breakfast. By the time I made it to the field there were some breaks in the cloud.

My Guyanan minder was waiting for me at the airport and helped me get away. There was a lot of VFR is very liberally interpreted here. As long as there is decent vis laterally then you are good to go.

And go I did. This time wearing a life vest with a GPIRB attached.

After 180 hours with this plane I have a feel for her and coaxing the most out of the lawnmower engine she has. I made a steady 500 feet per minute ascent weaving around clouds with the controller asking for ETAs etc. I asked him to wait while I maneuvered to stay in VMC and 30 minutes later I was at my cruising altitude and moving albeit not at the rate I was doing last flight but ahead of the game.

As I suspected the over water was a lot less daunting than VFR over the top and at 10,500 ft I could see ship wakes and drilling platforms so had a few options. Anyway none of this was needed. The plane performed perfectly and it was a relatively short and smooth trip all the way. You are a little more sensitive to those rough spots on the throttle movement but no worries.

What a lovely stop ! The taxi driver managed to get me 45% off waht booking.com would have gotten for the Radisson resort - they have a special deal for pilots. Great "I will take it!"

Good Internet and for the rest of the afternoon I did boring business stuff except for a stroll on the beach and a simple meal at sunset. Away from the infernal heat of the equator. Cool breezes and a slower pace of life.

3/7/14 British Virgin Islands

As breakfast was not served till 7 and I really wanted to get away at 7:30 I just went to the airport. There were a bunch of passengers lined up at passport control but I was whisked right past, stamped out and on the tarmac in no time. Wow !

My electronic flight plan was in the system and I was good to go. A really easy departure and flying North past the hotel I was in last night. The weather at the outset was brilliant but up ahead a very nasty cloud mass was looming so I decided to alter the routing direct St Martin. As soon as I did this I saw we had a strong crosswind with a headwind component. My arrival was comfortable with 60 minutes at least remaining on the end but I felt we could do better. I requested 10,500 feet and picked up 15 knots. Also at this altitude I can really lean the engine and get the fuel consumption down. Repairing the exhaust gas sensor was a definite plus. That instrument along with the tachometer are the instruments I use most in cruise flight.

Weather approaching St Martin was a little bumpy and I got my first look at the Grande Casse airport snuggled between 2 hills. The downwind leg had a choice of going over a hill with about 200 feet clearance or swinging wide and losing sight of the runway. I chose to keep the airport in sight as there was movement on the ground. The advisory frequency was active with the person on the ground moderating rather than controlling.

The approach was lively but the plane settled nicely in ground effect and with a bit of power put her on the ground in one piece.

The clearance in and out was quick - hand in 2 GENDECS , pay the fees while the plane was being filled. I then had an excellent curried fish at the restaurant and relaxed for 30 minutes.

The 45 minute flight to Tortola was uneventful. I did get a touch of nostalgia as I approached these familiar shores and finally a shock when I realized the airport had been completely rebuilt and was now a major terminal rather than the sleepy field of 20 years ago.

The only hitch in an otherwise smooth clearance was the immigration form. This has to be purchased

for \$1 and it took forever to get change for a \$10 bill.

I was met by some old friends from another life it seems and had a memorable reunion at one of the local watering holes.

Definitely not a good day to fly after that so I am laying over one day. My parts are in the post and the mechanic is waiting for me tomorrow. Even Homeland Security have authorized my flight.

The adventure continues.....

5th July San Juan Puerto Rico

All going well. The maintenance people installed all the bits sent down from the US and we are good to go.

The flight from the VI was uneventful and fast. It was a nostalgic trip down memory lane and excellent to catch up with old friends.

My back is acting up a bit but nothing major and certainly not affecting the flying. The oil change allowed me to free up some space in the baggage compartment and so loading the luggage will be easier.

Tomorrow the Dominican republic and that is an easy 300 mile hop. Monday we contemplate the last leg to Miami.

Caribbean maintenance have been wonderful They made sure they got the parts on a Saturday and got everything working in short order. I also ordered new sun visors as the originals were cracked and not usable. So the plane is gradually getting better and better. New side windows and a new paint job and the plane is as good as new. They were very happy with the state of the plane and remarked how well looked after it was.

The only real challenge today was getting a SIM card for the phone. It took 3 hours with tech support to properly provision the card so I could use data. Everyone was polite and helpful so I could not complain.

Off for a Japanese meal and an early night.

6/7/2014 Puerto Plata

There is no doubt that this is a splendid island. Natural resources and outstanding beauty.

The flight was easy. My old habits of asking permission to start the engine were not needed. Fire up - call for taxi and go - we are in the good old USA. An uneventful flight followed with the CU as expected North and South but clear in my path. Airtraffic control was laid back and I navigated VFR to the class Delta

The airport had a runway big enough to land the space shuttle and the inward clearance was fast and easy.

Fuel was delivered on request and I still have both arms and legs.

The Dominican Republic is preferred over the Turks and Caicos as the latter have instigated punitive fees for General Aviation and have successfully driven that scourge from their shores.

There are a few warts here - this is the one of the last bastions of Nicotine tourism where where

you can travel and take pleasure destroying your health and the health of those around you by smoking wherever you please. I had to reject my first hotel room as the smell was terrible. With most of the world becoming smoke free it is a shock to encounter the "bad old days".

Even more disconcerting was getting propositioned in broad daylight by some extremely scantily clad but none the less ruggedly build ladies. A lot of the bars had signs reading "Unaccompanied females not allowed on the premises". I was safe a haven to have a beer and reflect. I watched a superb sunset and prepared for the next leg.

This one is interesting. 180 Miles open water - the most I have done and if the engine quits - well I will just have to deal with it. I am going to shoot for Miami with a technical stop in Stella Maris Bahamas on Long Island with an alternate of Great Exuma and if I have to overnight on the cays? Well no doubt I will survive.

7/7 2014 Stella Maris Long Island Bahamas



Easy start - good weather. No nonsense clearing. I rather like the Dominican Republic. The obviously like visitors too.

Climbing quickly up to 10,500 feet - Altitude is your friend especially at sea and the plane performed perfectly.

I was talking to Miami centre and heard the drama unfolding. Massive CU buildup - Hazardous flight conditions etc etc. Time to look at options. At 10,000 feet you can see a fair way so I could see the chess pieces on the board and it was

touch and go whether I could make it to my destination. I did have one good alternate and my fuel reserves were excellent - at least 2.5 hours at my primary so I continued.

The airport was VFR but the approach was a black wall of nastiness so I cut the approach short slipped her in and made a very decisive landing. Looking over the tapes it was not a heavy landing merely a firm landing and my lower spine that is now very sensitive to hard landings did not complain.

As soon as I was down all hell broke loose. It sounded like world war 3 with loud booms going off all over the place. I hunkered down with the FBO who did not want to fuel the plane with all the lighting going off.

So I went ahead and started my clearance. Bahamas are starting to taste the joys of levying heavy fees. So far it is \$50 for the plane and \$25 per person double from last year when they introduced the scheme. It will ramp up I am sure until they drive the scourge of general aviation away. Fees for light aircraft do not boost the coffers of the government whereas the business they drive away really hurts the locals. Oh well - that is their problem they need to sort it.

At the FBO the radar map showed the grim picture - massive convective buildup everywhere.

Time to flash the credit card and get a bungalow at the Stella Maris resort. Minimal Internet but otherwise comfortable. If you like laying on a sun bed and getting blasted with rays it is fine. I appreciated the peace and quiet and enjoyed my last day before the faster pace of life on the other side of the Gulf Stream. No way I was going to try to punch through that mess.

8/7/2014 Miami.

An uneventful morning's flying. Lifted off from Stella Maris at 8:30. Paperwork was fast - just another \$25 making it \$75 plus \$10 parking for the Bahamas plus a brutally expensive overnight - though cheaper than writing off the plane due to bad weather. I did get a very pleasant rest and my back is all but recovered.

The flight over the coral reefs was absolutely splendid. Sailing the Bahamas twice you do not appreciate the colours like you do from the air.

This trip required a bit of preparation. First the electronic manifest had to be completed - I did that the night before. Then I filed the flight plan electronically and got a response from the US control area accepting it. That was a complete waste of time as when I went to activate it in the air Nassau radio could not find it so I had to re-file over the radio.

After that I connected to the Miami center and joined the big boys. Far easier to let Air traffic control talk you through the air defense identification zone. If you are not identified you will find an armed escort on your wing.

The USA has to have some of the finest air traffic control on the planet. The approach controller was overworked and talking non stop. He managed to hand me over to Kendal tower and there it was bedlam. 3 planes behind me and stepping on the controller so I could not hear my landing clearance at first. I was cleared in ahead of traffic landing on a straight in. Anyway no worries it meant I had to do another steep approach - full side slip and get her on the deck fast.

Customs was it's usual unnecessary intrusive inspection. At one stage they had me as an over stayer in 2012 - unlikely as I am never in one place for more than a month. - They eventually got the record straight and saw it was another guy not me and stamped me in.

Anyway a nice hotel and rental car ensued - I now have to get back to work so the bulk of the adventure is over. I will be flying over the western US to check out hangers and put the plane to bed and possibly fly in to Oshkosh for the fly in if I can work up the courage but for the time being I am signing off and this will be the last journal entry until I cook up some other adventure.

Preparation and logistic notes.

I was expecting a very daunting bureaucratic experience when getting ready to go. I was very pleasantly surprised to find this was not the case, even in the most restrictive countries. This was very much aided by having my wife make phone contact with every country I visited.

Rule 1 never be in a hurry.

Latin countries tend to be overstaffed in the civil service and so need a lot of forms and procedures to keep everyone in work.

Rule 2 Be polite and respectful – Smile and never get confrontational or angry.

Saying that when you are dealing with aviation officials things tend to run relatively smoothly compared to say dealing with a yacht and as a yacht captain I was pleasantly surprised to see everything run smoothly after a fashion in every country I visited.

Rule 3 Carry copies of everything. Printing and photocopying is difficult and so having prepared copies of all documents speeds everything up.

Documents Carried:

Notes on documents we have had to digitize and have available for inspection for soliciting advance permission to Latin American Countries:

Pilot Licence with "English Proficient" written on it
FAA Radio station Licence
FAA Radio operator licence
Current medical certificate
FAA Aircraft registration - (Registration via trust for non US Citizen)
Notarized letter from trust giving me permission to fly aircraft in South America
Insurance for USA and Mexico \$1,000,000 Liability via AOPA (\$300,000 only needed for Mexico)
Insurance for South America and Central America \$500,000 public liability
Aircraft Weight and Balance
Aircraft Airworthiness certificate
Evidence of Aircraft Annual being in Date (last page of airframe inspection)

Other documents.

Letter from Mother giving me permission to travel with 17 year old daughter notarized
Letter from Mother and Father giving 17 year old daughter permission to travel unaccompanied from Argentina notarized and countersigned by the relevant apostle and college of notaries in Argentina.
Travel insurance.

Parts and supplies Carried

Halon Fire extinguisher - 500g
First Aid Kit
ACR 406 GPIRB emergency beacon
GMN Redport Iridium tracker
Inner Tube for front wheel
Inner tube for rear wheel
4 oil filters
1 spark plug
1 spark plug socket
Stainless Steel wire
Wire twisting tool
Grass Tie Down pegs (3) - these were never used
Rope
Lightweight Wheel Chocks (2) Used all the time
Jeppesen IFR Airways Chart Kit South America Not really used
VFR Charts Mexico Not used
Pilot Guide Mexico - Central America
IFR Airways chart Central America Not used
Perspex cleaner and Microfiber cloth

Parts purchased en route

Set of SAE spanners (wrenches)

High Visibility jackets:

Always wear a high visibility jacket airside. It is the law nearly everywhere (except in US General Aviation airports it would seem). Apart from being a requirement it is common sense to be as visible as possible where you have vehicles running all over the place.

It also has an added advantage that whenever you want to go airside you are already recognized as being something other than a passenger and have a lot easier time getting through.

In Peru they may ask you to wear a less visible colour and in Argentina only baggage handlers wear jackets. The police are dressed in black so keep a sharp lookout when taxiing. I still wore a jacket in Argentina and nobody commented though I got the impression it is distinctly “Lower class” to do so.

Security

Every Latin airport we stopped at you have to go through X Ray and Metal detector security. Get used to it.

Flight plans.

Every aircraft manoeuvre requires the filing of an ICAO flight plan(they are not difficult to fill out) You need to specify specific information about the aircraft learn in advance how to fill out this form. With practice you can get it filled out in under 2 minutes. Carbon forms are dotted all over the flight plan office. 2 copies are needed, One is left with the office and the second is retained by you. This is opened by the tower on takeoff and closed when you land. A visit to the flight planning office though is a mandatory courtesy to ensure the flight plan is closed.

Some countries you can save time filing electronically. I paid 10 Euros a month to <https://www.eurofpl.eu/> - Here you can build a plan, get a self briefing and file. This worked sometimes.

Prior to engine start call the tower and make sure they have your flight plan and request start up clearance. Even if not needed they like this little touch.

For International flights the flight plan verifies your permit and when you are cleared for engine start your flight has been transmitted to the destination country and they are prepared to accept you. All the formalities will have been lined up ready for you.

Air traffic control.

Pilots used to the free and easy flying in the US need to get used to the more formal flying in the Latin world.

You should be talking to ATC all the time. Although flying visually it is more like an instrument

flight plan. If ATC cannot work you they will relay via a commercial flight.

Be aware of the transition altitude – Typically greater than 5000 feet AGL the Altimeter is set to standard and you report flight level.

You will be asked for position reports frequently. Have the DME from the VOR closest to the radio station and the radial. They will often ask time to next waypoint – typically a VOR. They may ask time to an IFR way point – if you do not have that give them time to your next VOR or your destination.

Treat the controller as your friend speak slowly and spell any nav aids phonetically. Always accept a handover with a cheery goodbye and thanks if time permits.

Listen to the Spanish chatter. If you can understand even a little bit of what they are saying it improves the situational awareness considerably. Do not expect traffic advisories VFR – Keep a lookout.

In Argentina the ATC is fine in the Buenos Aires area but as you go South this changes. Some controllers do not speak English. In these cases I would speak in simple slow English and they would reply in simple slow Spanish. Some controllers can speak English but do not understand it. In a few cases when there was a commercial airliner on the frequency they would translate.

Handlers:

Most handlers are geared to the jet set. If you get a quote from one of these agencies expect to pay 10 times the government fees plus a retainer. You can easily pay \$1000 where if you had done the work yourself you could end up paying less than \$100. Detailed charges per country are listed later.

Colombia I recommend you hire a handler to fill the Electronic advance notification. Failure to do this may result in the plane being seized. The law is black and white on this we checked this thoroughly.

We found a handler who we paid \$150 that included taking us around all the offices where we paid our own fees, filing the advance permission and also driving to and from our hotel. I felt this was well worth the money.

<http://www.colombiafbo.com>

OSCAR A. BRAVO G.
Director Operaciones
COLOMBIA AVIATION ROUTING
57 3124824250
PIN 283BF0BE
www.colombiafbo.com

Management & Accounting (57) 315 881 88

In Guayaquil we had no choice – the handler met us at the stand and did everything for us again a \$150 fee that I was happy to pay.

In both cases we had more time to enjoy the stop and less worries with paperwork.

Advance Permission and Fees

We thought we had current information however things change all the time. There are many web “Clubs” that charge a fee and allow you into their “member's only” pages. I found the information of limited and also dated value.

So I recommend that anyone going this route hire a Spanish speaker to contact the Air Ministries of the countries involved and inquire as to the current procedures. Start the work a month ahead of the proposed flight and move into high gear one week before. Keep each country abreast of any delays so there are no issues. Open communication is a great lubricant.

Have all your documents scanned in PDF format with a low quality JPG copy for those with poor Internet.

All countries now prefer EMail to fax and we managed to avoid having to use that horrid contraption.

Panama and Chile have a Web Based application process that is fast and easy.

Mexico, Costa Rica and El Salvador and Argentina did not require advanced notification.

Guatemala and Nicaragua required overflight permission and we had to pay \$100 to Nicaragua for this privilege.

All countries provided a high quality ATC service.

Peru

If you can find a decent agent to get your Peru permission it could cost less than the phone bill. The Peruvian authorities have lots of meetings and long lunch breaks and are difficult to get hold of. You need to contact each person in the chain and confirm they have received the relevant document and confirm this 48 working hours before the flight. You will almost certainly find the original documents you sent have been lost and you have to start all over again from scratch. Every document has to be sent as an individual attachment. Keep your scans to 150 dpi and save them in JPG format or PDF. The document will need to be lightweight and easy to make it through a challenged Internet service.

Chile

Permission over the Internet

<http://www.dgac.gob.cl/portalweb/dgac/aeropuertos/autorizacionSobrevuelo>

A followup phone call may be needed. Airspace use costs \$41 and covers use of airspace and airports. There are no other charges though a Passenger tax may be charged if you have non flight crew with you.

Argentina

I was charged the equivalent of 20 cents at Trelew but other than that there are no charges so far.

Hangerage in Ushuaia at the Aeroclub is \$30 a day – Quite frankly this is an excellent deal when you can borrow the jacks and check your plane out indoors. Also a club member is always happy to take a ride with you and help with the radio. Really nice club and excellent people.

Flying between airports is the equivalent of an International flight and you need to clear quarantine inwards and outwards with the security police. The form has to be filled out twice at every airport by hand. Documents prepared and printed in advance are rejected. The flight planning office will need to sight all the plane documents at every airport. Carrying a full set of them as photocopies speeds this up a lot.

Warning

Argentine law allows a foreign flagged aircraft a maximum of 45 days in one year (from the date of first entry in the country). Most people believe this only applies to one entry and leaving the country resets the clock. This is not the case and at some stage if you overstay your aircraft will be seized. Getting an extension is time consuming and requires travel to Buenos Aires or having all your flight documents legalized. As with most things in Argentina the laws are interpreted many different ways and even when you do everything properly you can still fall foul of the authorities.

Brazil

There is a lot of hype about flying in Brazil but a lot of this is blown out of proportion.

User fees are very high – basically user fees appear to have killed general aviation and many Brazilian airports are sterile and have a lot of people working there even though no planes land.

Bigger airports have bigger fees – Example Foz de Iguazu - \$200 – Uruguayana \$75. Both include landing and overnight parking.

The bureaucracy is more than some however it does work albeit slowly.

The permit is relatively easy – go to the web page and fill in the form. Upload your documents and if all is OK you will get a permit. You validate this with customs at the airport of entry and you are good to go.

<http://www2.anac.gov.br/portal/cgi/cgilua.exe/sys/start.htm?sid=390>

Note that all charts and plates can be downloaded free of charge.

Flight plan filing is a little tricky but follow the example below and you will be fine.

You can do all the paperwork the night before and jump in the plane and go.

Be patient and be friendly and the officials will reciprocate in kind. Note that after a flight plan is filed there is a cooling down period of 45 minutes before you can fly. I tended to preflight – then wax down the plane – Very soothing and gets you in the right frame of mind. Then without fuss prepare the cockpit and start engines about 10 minutes before takeoff time.

A footnote – Customs have to inform the aviation authority when you leave and if they do not then it is your responsibility to sort the mess out. In my case they did not inform and although I Emailed the authorities they just told me to sort it out – this required hiring a Portuguese speaker to research and contact the correct people.

Approximate fees paid per country

	Quarentine	Landing	Parking	Air navigation	Immigration	Overflight	Handling	Total
Mexico		\$5.00	\$10.00	\$70.00	\$15.00			\$100.00
El Salvador		\$2.40	\$15.00		\$10.00			\$27.40
Nicaragua						\$100.00		\$100.00
Costa Rica		\$8.00	\$160.00		\$29.00			\$197.00
Panama	\$10.00	\$10.00	\$60.00	\$100.00				\$170.00
Colombia		\$9.00	\$6.00	\$36.00			\$160.00	\$211.00
Ecuador				\$165.00	\$43.00		\$150.00	\$358.00
Peru		\$30.00	\$60.00	\$500.00	\$20.00			\$610.00
Chile				\$41.00				\$41.00
Argentina				0.2				\$0.20
Uruguay		\$30 - \$50	\$15-\$100 Day					\$200.00
Brazil								\$700.00
French Guyana		\$7.00						\$7.00
Guyana		\$25.00	\$5.00	\$80.00				\$110.00
								\$0.00
								\$0.00

Brazil Fees

Overnight Landing etc \$220 Iguazu - \$75 Uruguyana No fees at Gurupi and Baro Do Garcos

To fly through Brazil – Total fees Approx U\$700 7 landings 2 airports no fees.

Avgas

[HTTP://www.acuquick.com](http://www.acuquick.com)

Is an up to date reference and the Avgas availability was accurate every time except once. I was lucky as I got an update in the air and was able to divert. In retrospect when travelling areas where fuel is far apart I would call in advance every time.

Costs vary though if you budget at \$7 a gallon for the whole trip you should come in somewhere right. 100LL was uniform quality everywhere I went. Aeroclubs tend to be a bit more expensive but convenient.

Brazil was more expensive Avgas – U\$8.3 to U\$11.2 per gallon.

Expect to pay cash USA dollars in El Salvador, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia and Peru. Chile pay cash in Chilean pesos with ATM machines at every airport. Argentina I could pay with Amex and MasterCard. US Dollars not accepted. In Argentina if you can find a black market you can save considerably on the exchange rate.

Brazil some stations took Amex some MasterCard some dollars others refused dollars. If they refuse dollars they normally take some kind of card

Sample Fuel Management log carried on Clipboard

Trip Report		Date	<input type="text"/>	Oil at start	<input type="text"/>	
Hobbs Out	<input type="text"/>	Tach Out	<input type="text"/>	ATC NOTES		
Fuel Tank Left	Obs	<input type="text"/>	Gauge			<input type="text"/>
Fuel Tank Right	Obs	<input type="text"/>	Gauge			<input type="text"/>
Take Off Time	<input type="text"/>	Tank At Start	<div>LEFT</div> <div>RIGHT</div>			
Flight Plan Open Time		FP Freq	<input type="text"/>			
Swap Tank Times		<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>			
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>				
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>				
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>				
Other Notes						
<div></div>						
Shutdown Report: Master Switch Off				<input type="text"/>		
Hobbs In	<input type="text"/>	Tach In	<input type="text"/>			
Flight Plan Closed at	With	Refueling Report				
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	Left	Right	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	
				Pilot Name		

Flight plan for Brazil

FLIGHT PLAN									
PRIORITY FF		ADDRESSEE(S)							
FILING TIME		ORIGINATOR							
SPECIFIC IDENTIFICATION OF ADDRESSEE(S) AND/OR ORIGINATOR									
3 MESSAGE TYPE FPL		7 AIRCRAFT IDENTIFICATION N 3 2 8 4 7			8 FLIGHT RULES V		TYPE OF FLIGHT G		
9 NUMBER		TYPE OF AIRCRAFT P 2 8 A		WAKE TURBULENCE CAT L		10 EQUIPMENT SG/C			
13 DEPARTURE AERODROME		TIME							
15 CRUISING SPEED N 0 1 0 5		LEVEL		ROUTE					
16 DESTINATION AERODROME		TOTAL EET HR. MIN		ALTN AERODROME		2ND ALTN AERODROME			
18 OTHER INFORMATION AVANAC0779N14 OPERATOR: JONATHAN SELBY INTERNATIONAL AIR SERVICES INC PREV AIRPORT RECEIPT NO ALREADY FLOWN VMC									
SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION (NOT TO BE TRANSMITTED IN FPL MESSAGES)									
19 ENDURANCE E / 0 5 0 0		PERSONS ON BOARD P / 0 0 1		EMERGENCY RADIO UHF VHF ELT U V E					
SURVIVAL EQUIPMENT S		POLAR PX		DESERT D		MARITIME M		JUNGLE J	
JACKETS J		LIGHT L		FLUORES F		UHF U		VHF V	
DINGHIES NUMBER D / 0 0		CAPACITY 0 0 0		COVER C		COLOUR			
AIRCRAFT COLOUR AND MARKINGS A / WHITE WITH BLUE STRIPES									
REMARK N /		FIRST AID KIT CARRIED ABOARD							
PILOT IN COMMAND C /		JONATHAN SELBY							
FILED BY JONATHAN S SELBY		SPACE RESERVED FOR ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS Please provide a telephone number so our operators can contact you if needed +54 92901 600264 USHUAIA LOGISTICS							

