

## Mountain Obscuration

My first journal entry is made on January 3, 2011. "After much thought I will be donating Stinson 10A NC36794 to the Champaign Aviation Museum located in Urbana, Ohio at Grimes Airport".

Having spent a considerable amount of time researching taildragger's, by the end of February 2011 I have decided that the Interstate S1A will fit my needs the best. That is how my adventure started.

I have always been enamored with the pilots of the 1930's and 1940's, wishing I could relive some of the pioneering cross country travels.

My own adventure was first, the necessity of bringing my Interstate S1A home from Springfield, Oregon after it had been restored by Tim Talen of Ragwood Refactory; and secondly the losing my inner Walter Mitty. I wish to make clear that in no way do I compare my trip to those pioneering efforts of the past. Our improved maps and access to advanced meteorological information makes any flight a walk in the park in comparison to the same flight in the 1930's. The steed I chose for this adventure was a 1941 Interstate S1A equipped with a liquid compass, tach, airspeed, non-sensitive altimeter, oil pressure, air temperature, Model A Ford fuel gauge; and a large stack of sectional maps, an E6B; and did I mention no electrical system.

My initial plan was to fly north from Cottage Grove, Oregon to the Columbia River Gorge twenty miles east of Portland International (PDX) and follow the Columbia River to Hermiston (HRI). My call for a weather briefing Tuesday morning, October 2, 2012 changed my plan. There were low clouds, broken with mist and mountain obscuration; winds increasing to the north at 38-42 mph gusting to 60 mph at the Columbia River. Plan B went into motion to fly direct from Cottage Grove (61S) to Hermiston.

Tim Talen's assistant and ace mechanic Jakonah Matson Ball was at my hotel early; and as promised Tuesday dawned with broken clouds; mountain obscuration; visibility 5-6 miles and mist. Upon arrival at Cottage Grove we pulled out the ship, Interstate S1A NC37219, also known as Dreamweaver. Her federal yellow wings contrasting with the true blue fuselage sparkled in the sun that peaked through the broken clouds. Having vastly overestimated the baggage capacity of the aircraft, most of my heavier and bulky clothing was sent home reserving space for survival equipment. Hand shakes and wishes of good luck were exchanged and Jakonah spun the prop. She started. Ready to go. As I taxied to the active, Jankonah jogged at my right wing tip for the first 100 feet. It meant so much to me. Stopping at the run up area for runway 33 everything was checked for the tenth, no the twentieth time. Upon taking the active and releasing the brakes, I was surprised at the acceleration. Forward pressure, just a little; tail up, relax and she flies off. The surprise was there because this was the first time I had soloed the Interstate. As we climbed away from the runway, sunlight shown like gossamer veils streaming through the clouds. A large break in the clouds gave me the opportunity to climb on top about 7000 feet. Looking down, the mountain tops could be seen poking their wooded heads above the clouds; views of deep canyons gave truth to the term inhospitable terrain. Time passed quickly as navigation, wind drift, speed and fuel consumption demanded my attention. The aircraft flew as if we had been together for years, requiring very little in the way of correcting for heading or altitude. Tim had fitted a 6 gallon tank in the wing to increase the total fuel capacity to

21 gallons. With an estimated fuel consumption of 6 gallons per hour and a total fuel capacity of 21 gallons, watching time was a preoccupation. One hour and 20 minutes into the flight, the clouds began to thin and then disappeared revealing a dramatically different terrain. The sparsely wooded mountains and deep crevices were replaced with brown barren earth eroded into an irregular surface. In the distance an impressive snow capped mountain could be seen. It could only be Mount Jefferson at 10,487 feet. That is what you call a geographic feature! With just a little bend in my flight path I landed at Madras (S33) to refuel and check the oil. It was here that I had my first solo landing. I came in a little fast and floated over the first one third of the runway, then clunk, and we were down. I got out of the ship and just stood looking at Mount Jefferson. I didn't hear the attendant walk up behind me until he asked while smiling "first trip across the cascades?". We laughed and he offered to buy me a cup of coffee and I gratefully accepted. He liked the looks of the Interstate; just a little flying talk, and the suggestion to keep my head up as I approach Hermiston because of the restrictive areas just to the west. I had an uneventful flight to Hermiston. I observed evidence of water which is something that I had been missing since passing the Cascades. Flying today, pilots take advanced navigation equipment and radios for granted. Flying the Interstate without an electrical system focused my attention on my surroundings and sectional. The instrument sweep is very simple. The stop at Hermiston was short and pleasant. Jakonah's mother had sent me off with a bag of chocolate chip cookies. A lunch was made with airport coffee and cookies. After departing Hermiston, things seem to slow down and the 163 mile flight to Coeur D'Alene (COE) seemed to be taking forever. The answer was the increase in head wind. The time it took to reach Rosalia (72S), my last checkpoint before Coeur D'Alene lake suggested that I had more wind than either one of us could handle. I was told that the cross wind component for the Interstate was 12 mph. The wind at COE was a quartering head wind and landing was easier than the taxiing after I landed. Taxiing was a combination of differential braking and power. After pulling into a tie down spot and opening the door, one foot in the plane and one on the asphalt, it became apparent the aircraft was repositioning itself. In 1941 parking brakes were not thought to be necessary. It took me ten minutes to move the aircraft against the wind back into the tie down space to get it secured. Once inside the administration building, I found that the wind was 18 mph gusting to 22mph.

The morning forecast was winds 16-20 mph, snow in the mountains and icing at all levels. "I would rather be down here wishing I were up there, than up there wishing I were down here". I enjoyed spending a day in Coeur D'Alene and preparing to fly the mountains. When I asked an accomplished mountain flyer how high I should fly in the mountains, he told me high enough to stay out of the rocks and trees. My mountain guide was Sparkie Anderson's Mountain Flying and the many pilots who so generously shared their expertise.

Thursday I arrived at the airport only to find all horizontal surfaces covered in frost. A combination of the sun raising the temperature and muscle remedied the situation. Wheels off at 10 a.m. Flying past the Reagan Ranch down Coeur D'Alene lake the mountains loom ahead gradually climbing higher and higher on either side of my aircraft passing Shoshone County (583). I am aware how very small my little aircraft is and at the same time it gives me the power to move among the peaks with speed and agility. The valley is wide enough to afford a little sight seeing. Just past Wallace, the

valley begins to narrow, 6800 feet mountain peaks with snow on their shoulders. I am starting to feel very lonely. To paraphrase, Lord your mountains are so great and I am so small. My eye catches movement at my ten o'clock position and 50 feet above, a prayer answered, a golden eagle flies formation with me for about 15 seconds. That fifteen seconds will last the rest of my life. In an instant he does a wingover and is gone, but it was long enough. I had forgotten you are never really alone.

Look Out Pass is 5 miles ahead. The pass gave me a pause for reflection. All of my flying hours have been spent east of the Mississippi. As I approach, flying at 500 AGL, I noticed smoke in the distance. I checked my preflight notes and there is no mention of smoke. Must be a local fire. Wrong. At first just a few flakes then thicker snow. I begin to fishtail the Interstate for a look back and the valley no longer existed. A 180 degree turn is not possible. The mountain that had just a few minutes ago had been towering over me had disappeared with only a grey white shadow in the snow, reminding me of the folly of attempting a turn. Straight ahead it is. Reduce power from 2300 to 1900 rpm and as visibility deteriorated, out of habit, I went to my instruments. As my eyes lowered, I smiled because all that my instruments would tell me was at what altitude and airspeed I would hit the ground. As a sage once said, I was running out of altitude, airspeed and ideas all at the same time. The vertical visibility was still good as I peered down through the wing struts on the port side. The rapid approach of Lookout Pass was becoming evident as the valley narrowed. In the snow, the mountains are not seen so much as felt. It was growing darker due to the snow fall and even the vertical visibility was deteriorating. The question at the moment was how low will you go? The sight of the snow hitting the windshield had a disorienting effect. The prospect of an off field landing was in the back of my mind and moving forward rapidly. Going through the checklist: locate a landing area, stow loose gear, harness tight, fuel off, mags off, door open, ELT switch on. Then in the best dime novel tradition the sky began to brighten, the snow veil began to lift and I began to have forward visibility. Looking down at the mustard colored sectional just reinforced "toto I don't think we are in Kansas anymore". I longed for the shade of my green Detroit sectional.

Mineral County (954) was 35 miles ahead. Just a heart beat at the blistering pace of 108 mph, unless of course I get a tail or head wind. The snow settled down to the appearance of a fine lace veil moving in a Spring breeze. Forward visibility was now adequate. Mineral County appeared in the snow quiet and inviting. A quick look at the wind sock, reverse and land on an asphalt runway 3450 x 75 feet. Very good conditions, but pulling up to the fuel tanks the absence of other aircraft or people became evident. Oh well, stretch my legs and fill the tank. You can never have enough fuel. Dark low clouds to the north suggests the snow is still falling. Climbing back into my magical steed, taking note of the low cloud deck and it is off to Missoula (MSO). My route took me north of the Missoula traffic area. As the arc took me to the northeast, rising terrain and low clouds made me feel like the filling in an Oreo cookie. I stopped at Deer Lodge City County (385) with nobody home. The mountains are impressive. The sectional indicates 10,500 to 11,000 foot monuments to creation. My respect for the pilots who fly the mountains regularly grows with every mile.

While departing Deer Lodge, some breaks in the cloud deck allows the sun to shine with spotlight intensity revealing spectacular terrain and vistas; shades of blue and purple; distant snow; and diamond like sparkle of small bodies of water. All of this

for me. I remember thinking nobody else will ever see this in this way. How selfish I am. What a privilege. Passing Bert Mooney (BTM) it struck me that the field elevation of 5500 feet was higher by 2000 feet than the altitude that I usually fly at home.

With the altitude came the cold. Sitting on the ramp at Cottage Grove the temperature was 82 degrees in the sunshine. I sent my cold weather gear home UPS. I had a medium short jacket my mother had purchased for me, silk long johns, silk glove liners under my leather flying gloves, and a white silk flying scarf. My log book says "cold, cold, cold; I have never been so cold". Trying to stay warm in an unheated aircraft takes some ingenuity. Sitting on one hand at a time results in a cold bottom; twisting from side to side 20 times helps for two minutes before your teeth chatter so hard you think you will need replacements. Thinking good thoughts does not help at all. The altitude was so drying that my tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth. With a little twisting I was able to get my water bottle out of the rear seat. Taking a sip from the straw did not produce the expected result. The water bottle that was filled with cool water two hours earlier was now solid ice. Hard as a rock, no - hard as ice.

Passing Whitetail right through a gap in the mountains was Cardwell. For the first time that day there was open, relatively flat terrain, bordered by high inhospitable mountains. A strange haze with a shifting opaque quality was present with visibility deteriorating as the altitude increased. Passing over Three Forks (935) and looking for Gallatin (BZN) visibility dropped to 3-4 miles and at times it appeared that something was passing my windshield. Not so much seeing but a feeling. Like putting a light veil before your eyes, diminishing the clarity of vision yet you can't see what is causing it. A break in the clouds and a shaft of light solved the mystery - ice crystals that danced and sparkled presenting me with the gift of a rainbow without rain.

Thirty miles ahead Bozeman Pass. As Tim Talen had said "It's all down hill from there". In the distance a wall of clouds hides the pass. It appeared they didn't have much depth, so a little higher and maybe a little higher, the turbulence increases as I approached the pass; maybe just a little higher; approach at a 45 degree angle - thank you Sparkie - a little higher and the cloud wall was above me. Rising air took hold of the Interstate and gave us (Dreamweaver and me) an elevator ride almost to the twelfth floor. Altimeter reading 11,960 feet. Time to get off. Lower the nose and expecting the altimeter to unwind, it didn't. I was stuck in rising air. But, what goes up must come down so a gentle bank to the right produced a modest loss of altitude. It was my intent to return to Three Forks, but one more look in the direction of the pass revealed a parting of the cloud wall and descending terrain with clean air extending an invitation to proceed through the pass. With the afternoon sun painting the cloud canyon walls in gold, pink and blue, the trip through the cloud wall was almost too short. It was like flying through multicolored cotton candy.

Once through the cloudy canyon, the winds calmed and the terrain opened up. I had ample fuel. God was in his heaven and all was right with the world. As the landscape opened up I was able to do a little sightseeing. The next tick on my map was Mission (LVM) and it showed up early. My guess was a ground speed of 125 mph but of course it could be timing or measurement. I arrived at Big Timber (650) traveling 24 miles in eleven minutes. The E6B calculating 131 mph. With this kind of speed, the fuel stop at Waterman (653) was unnecessary and a landing at Laurel (658) just west of Billings Montana would be in order. As in Coeur D'Alene, the wind gave tail dragger

pilots a brake. The wind was a steady 18 mph out of 230 and Laurel's runway heading is 22.....thank you! Again the old saying, a tail wheel aircraft is just like a tricycle gear aircraft once you have it tied down. As I was trying to get to the apron, I took an unintended excursion across some frozen grass. After tying down the Interstate I took my gear into the administration building, enjoyed the warmth, and accepted the use of the airport courtesy car.

Morning dawned clear and cold, no frost, and 28 degrees. It will go up to a high of 31 degrees for the day. I was presented with a dilemma. My engine had only twenty-one hours since overhaul and running mineral oil, so there was no chance of heating the engine prior to take off. So I tried to start her up. The sequence: Mags off, Fuel off and tied down, 10 blades through; then fuel on, prime twice, 2 blades through, mags on and the C-90 started with the first pull. The oil pressure came up before I could look at the gauge. I sat on the ramp until the oil temp started to move and was in the green for takeoff. With only 21 gallons of fuel it was necessary to follow a line of airports which could afford me fuel and the safety of a one hour personal reserve. My first checkpoint was Wiley (MLS) to the northeast and then to follow the airport sisters - Baker, Bowman, Hittinger and Lemmon. The sky was clear and the flight was relaxing. The view spectacular and so flat. To quote Robert Rieger from Lemmon, "If your dog runs away, you can watch him for three days". At an altitude of 1000 feet AGL the ride was a little bumpy but the sightseeing was great. With Bowman (BPP) thirty miles ahead I switched on my wing tank and gave my main a six gallon drink. It took about four minutes. I landed at Bowman to top my tanks. I went inside for heat and conversation. Thirty minutes later while I was walking toward my plane, I was greeted by a straight out wind sock and a ninety degree crosswind and within minutes there were gusts to twenty mph. With some difficulty I pushed the plane to a parking spot and tied the Interstate's wings and tail down; and placed the seat belt around the stick and bungee on the rudder. My day of flying was cut short so I took the airport car to town and found a place to stay. My timing could not have been better for I was starving and a new Subway had just opened along the highway. Never order food when you are hungry. Fortunately the lady at the hotel desk had not eaten and accepted the other half of my sandwich and a bag of chips. I kept the free cookies for myself. Sleeping was a problem with trucks pulling into and out of the parking lot all night.

Up and off to the airport by 0700 and greeted with heavy frost on all horizontal surfaces. The sun was coming up in one of the bluest skies you can imagine. With my bare hands; because I didn't want to wet my flying gloves, and with two hand towels I started to wipe down the Interstate. The sun threw in a helping hand, but the Interstate seemed a lot bigger than it had previously. After cleaning the tail, wings and windshield I went into the administration building to warm my numb hands under warm water. During this fifteen minute process I stamped my feet to warm them. This is something I would only want to do once in a lifetime. Wheels off and into the central time zone toward Aberdeen South Dakota (ABR). My impression once again of the Interstate is one of eagerness to accomplish whatever task you assign. Take off short, climbing 700 feet per minute at 4000 feet MSL, speed 112 and all of this with 190 pounds of pilot, 21 gallons of fuel, and sixty pounds of baggage. The C-90-8F took me to cruise at 2300 rpm with a McCauley 1A90CF7343 propeller. Landing is predictable, positive control all

the way to stall, and location of controls logical. Getting into the front seat can be a challenge. You need to be limber, but the plane can be soloed from the back seat.

My small stick-on thermometer tells me the temperature is 21 degrees. I have been flying for two hours at six gallons per hour so I still have nine gallons and one and one half hours of flying time. The landscape in shades of brown is so flat it seems to go on forever. Fingers and toes are tingling, teeth chattering and cold to the bone. The cold makes the decision. In all candor, at temps below 30 degrees find a fire and a good book, or maybe your wife would like to hear you relive one of your many flying adventures. Aberdeen (ABR) has everything a pilot could ask for. Not much in the way of a crosswind, smooth runway, welcoming airport staff, warm office, fuel and did I mention it was warm in the office?. Because the frost delayed my takeoff to 10:30, two hours of flying, one hour stop to warm up and fuel up, I have one more hop before it gets dark. The flat lands are bumpy today and in early October they are dressed in shades of brown and grey. Surprisingly, the landscape east of Aberdeen is so full of small lakes. I don't think I could successfully land without a cold dip. The sun at my back casts dark shadows, the lakes reflecting light gives the appearance of movement to the earth. As the shadows grow longer, I recalculate my time to the next fuel stop. As I headed east out of Aberdeen, the Twin Cities sectional shows a rise in the land and in this flat terrain any land mark is more than welcome for a stranger. I flew along a railroad track and identified the summit but could not see any discernible rise in the land. The cold is soaking slowly into my hands and feet; even the sun shining through a thin cloud layer gives no warmth, only a cold disk staring down on my misery.

My mind wanders from time to time, trying to conjure an image of piloting an aircraft through this place in the 1940's, no matter. This is my adventure, this aircraft my magical steed, my pegasus, my Dreamweaver. Dreamweaver, Interstate S1A 37219, allows me to share with its first pilots the magic of flight; at times the aircraft becomes almost a living thing responding to the pilot's thoughts with movement and grace, a magic carpet. Sometime after arriving home I received a letter from Robert L Taylor of the AAA. He included copies of his log book that showed an entry of 12/17/1946 flight in NC37219 at Whiteman Airpark in Pacoima California. For those who fly time is not.

I digress. It is onto Mankato (MKT). My airspeed on final was a little fast eating up 50% of the runway; "just hold her off till she lands"- advice from an experienced S1A pilot and sure enough 'clunk' another landing. I sat in the administration building, looking over the maps again and checking weather; thinking about the old time pilots checking weather by going outside and looking up. I guess some of the new technology is good. I watch a young pilot who just landed a six place aircraft check weather, file a flight plan; receive his clearance and rush his passengers into the restrooms and back out to the aircraft. I wonder when this young man flies does he look down and think about all the people he overflies; does his aircraft have a name or is it just an N number; does he know that flying is not just going from point A to B. In fact going from place to place may be the least important part of flying. Flying is an activity which a pilot can say I guided this magical craft into the air and returned safely to earth. In the air nobody can change the outcome except for the pilot. The wind is picking up and light mist with freezing level at 3000 feet. It is time to find a nice warm room and rest.

Upon rising in Mankato, frost is present that melts off by 09:30. A weather front is developing to the northeast so my flight path will be taking me to the southeast. Takeoff is uneventful but I have to stay low at 1000 feet. The winds forecasted to be against me at a higher altitude. The land is changing giving evidence of Fall. The few trees I see are showing colors of red, gold and brown. I stop at Clinton (CWI) to fuel and warm up. I break out a bag of nuts and raisins, and drink water. The weather is misting with darker clouds to the north. The forecast is IFR by evening. VFR now with visibility 6-10 miles, so I am off. As I climb out, the Mississippi comes into view. What a great check point and after 6.4 miles..... right on the money. Two lines of barges going in opposite directions each pushed by a single tug boat and sand bars everywhere. I have a new respect for Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain).

A new milestone in my trip - I am east of the Mississippi. The cloud deck is pushing me down below 500 feet. An occasional wisp of cloud goes by the wing and in the distance is that mist or rain? Out of the mist to the northeast is Chicago. My flight path will take me south of the city. A little more power and the additional of 1000 feet gives me a little more visibility and decision making room. Looking north, 'is that lake Michigan's southern shore that beckons?' As enjoyable as that side trip may be, the sun's long journey is almost over for today and to quote Robert Frost "and miles to go before I sleep".

Warsaw (ASW) is 80 miles east and a little south. I am seeing more trees. The midwest Fall is in full display. The colors are starting to peak.....too much sightseeing. Twelve miles west of Warsaw I started to pick up rain that hits my windshield and freezes. At first it is just bothersome, but soon I am having trouble with forward visibility. I overfly Warsaw and check the windsock through the open side window. As pattern altitude is reached the ice starts to melt and little fingers of water follow along the curve of the windshield and explode as they reach the edge of the window frame. An application of tincture of time outside the pattern and the forward visibility is restored. Warsaw is a large well maintained facility. After touching down on the numbers in a manner which in my memory, I should have received a standing ovation and a mention at some future award's banquet, I taxied for such a long time, that had the aircraft been equipped with a radio I might have requested a fuel truck meet me at the taxiway. Warsaw is the home of several of the world's largest orthopedic companies. If you are not aware of this fact, everyone you meet in Warsaw will let you know - from the man in the administration building at the airport to the lady at the hotel desk and even the guys at Dave's pizza. I was lucky enough to get a room at the Garden Hilton. It was the only one left because of a large orthopedic prosthetic convention in town. The wait for dinner at the hotel was 2 hours so I asked the hotel desk about dinner options. The desk clerk slid his hand across to me palm side down in the best Bond, James Bond manner and said "they deliver". Under his hand was a folded menu for Dave's pizza. I didn't waste any time, calling before I went to my room and within forty minutes a knock at my door was the pizza delivery man. He announced loud enough to be heard in the lobby "here's your carnivore pizza; are you going to eat this by yourself?". Never order when you are hungry. I ate half and put a dent in the liter of 7up. I slept like a baby or should I say like a bear denning up for the winter.

At 06:00 I called for a weather brief for my flight route from Warsaw to Wadsworth (3G3). The briefer said "on a day like today I wish I could go with you". Temperature 20

degrees; wind light and variable; CAVU all the way. At 08:00 on the flight line, there was frost but the temperature was 34 degrees and not a cloud in the sky. The frost was gone by 09:30. The temperature 38 degrees; fueled up; packed; engine started and Dreamweaver and I were on our last leg home.

The 825 pound Interstate is influenced by rising air, a bumpy ride, but worth every bump. I cross into my home state for the first time flying Dreamweaver. Ohio is a beautiful state. For those who have only seen the cities, you are missing 85 percent of the state full of farms and fields; forests and streams; and our magnificent Lake Erie. It will take your breath away when seen from the air. Ohio in the Fall is full of the colors from the hardwoods- green, golds and the red sugar maples pop out from the landscape. At 1000 feet Ohio is spectacular. The land is starting to look familiar. As I approach 3G3 from the west, my first sighting is the salt shaker, a water tower which resembles its name sake. Downwind for 02. 3525 feet of solid familiar runway. Base, final, flare, clunk. I taxied up to the gas pump having completed the first of my adventures with Dreamweaver. When I got out of the aircraft I was greeted with "Where in the hell have you been? I could have boxed it up, put it in a wheelbarrow, pushed it all the way to the hanger and still beat you home by two days".

As Dorothy said "There is no place like home".

Hours flying: 32

Miles: 2640

Take off and landings: 11

Fuel: 179.2 gallons / 5.6 gallons per hour

Oil: 2 quarts aeroshell mineral oil

Range of cabin temperature 18 - 38 degrees Fahrenheit

Average miles per leg: 240

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