There are certain obligations involved when you take on the task of a caretaker for a Piper Cub. Unforeseen duties include the maintenance of time-honored traditions. You don’t just go out and buy a Cub with no thought being given to the necessity, the self-evident debt of honor, that comes with the purchase. At least that’s how I convinced myself that no Cub pilot worthy of the name could own a Cub and not fly it to “Sentimental Journey” at least once.

Back in the Olden Days, I soloed in a Piper J-3. It was on a very late and cold November afternoon with a scarlet sunset stretching more than 180 degrees across the sky West of Dodge City. As I flew the downwind leg to 14, a Central Airlines DC-3 arced over me, headed east, and the image of that silhouette, nav lights and rotating beacons bright, the red exhaust pipes with blue flames, and the twinkling of cockpit and cabin lights remains with me forever.

One added feature of that little 65 hp Cub was the cracked rings. As long as winds were calm, I could fly out to a point and then retrace my course back along the blue smoke contrail it had left behind. Although I never went far, the thought occurred to me that I could have just continued on forever if I wanted to.

A plan evolved. We have a family place up in New Hampshire on an island on Lake Winnipesaukee. My understanding wife, Lynne, loves to spend time there and our two Westies agree that the ducks are fun to chase. I have always felt confined to be there without an airplane. The logic was simple.

Phase One: We drove the car to New Hampshire. I left them all there to airline my way home. I then launched out in “The Mad Dog”, so named in the memory of an earlier lost faithful friend, and because it has 18 gal. wing tanks as well as the standard 12 gal. tank up front. It is the Cub equivalent of a Boeing 747 SP.

I know that’s cheating but I don’t care. I also have in my non-electric Cub, a 12 volt wet cell battery about the size of a brick, a hand-held COM radio, a Garmin 496 with XM weather downloads and can zoom out hundreds of miles to check the storm systems a day or so ahead. I get winds aloft and know when to hug the nape of the Earth or to climb into favoring tail-winds. I also have a small transponder detector for traffic alerts...although at my normal cruising altitude birds don’t have transponders.
The “King of Cub Cross Country Expeditions” title goes to Bern Heimos, of California, who yearly makes Cub journeys to every corner of the country. His photos are posted on the internet and are my inspiration. Our paths have crossed more than once. I wonder if he has a “Lava Buns” cushion like mine.

Contrary to popular wisdom, the knees are the weakest link, and I would kick off my shoes to stick my legs straight out over the rudder pedals to ease the pain. The somewhat supine position would then be comfortable.

My Brother John, also a Cub flyer, once told me that cross-country Cub flights were “like reading a book...one page after another” and he is absolutely right. Never boring, always something new coming up.

After a fuel/food stop in Goodland, tailwinds blew me over to the First Annual Biplane Convention at 3JC, Junction City. My tent stayed dry for three days there, the fourth was in a motel where I could “reload” with clean, freshly washed clothes.

Creve Coeur was two legs East and a great place for a museum visit. It is a Monocoupe Haven and an overnight there was obligatory.

Next came a night in Washington County, Pa., (Just South of Pittsburg,) where all battery chargers were put into play. I would turn off the COM to save power until needed. The Garmin would run for about four days, but there was no “quantity” indicator on the wet cell. I hate surprises of a detrimental nature.

Lock Haven was reached a week before the Sentimental Journey fly-in. I pressed on to New Hampshire, across New York, the Hudson River, right over Old Rhinebeck’s grass field...and landed in Laconia as the sun was setting. Twenty one hours, 10 landings, and ready for more!

WAIT! Wait! There’s More!

Remember that Lock Haven “Sentimental Journey”? A week later The Cub and I again crossed over Old Rheinbeck and the Hudson going back for some rain-soaked camping and a great time. (The Saga continues.)
The weather in Pennsylvania can be a trap. My 322 nm flight was with a tailwind, and it was only after my tent was pitched that the rains came. That wasn’t so bad, though as we had a nice rainbow over the field. We knew there was a pot of gold.

The driving force of Sentimental Journey is Calvin Arter, Sr. On the Wednesday night just before the event is set to begin, he hosts a welcoming dinner on the grounds of his estate. After flying all day on agent orange peanut butter crackers and beenie weenies (not bad, really) the feast he presented was very well received. He knows how to spread hospitality!

Every night during the event, there was live music to enjoy. The scariest group was a polka band. I had never seen those shapes on humans before.

The best of all were the “Sisters” who sang “The Boogie-Woogie Bugle Boy From Company B”. There was a C-54 on display at the Piper Museum, and I believe they were part of that attraction. I encountered them coming back from the C-54 and asked them if they could do another round of “BWBB of Co B” and they jumped right into character! It was as if the Andrews Sisters were right there!

But..Hey! Like Bre’r Rabbit and the Tar Baby, I’m getting stuck here. I digress. The sea is the other way. A front came through and I had another tailwind all the way back to New Hampshire. The flight to Owl’s Head, Maine was next on my “bucket list”. A “lobstah roll” was my goal.
Back again I went, over the Hudson, over Old Rheinbeck, retracing my path. All the way to Moultonborough (5M3) where good friends have a hangar. After a couple days of giving Cub rides to neighbors, I set a course for Owl’s Head, Maine. It was due East so I could not possibly get lost, and there was an Ocean named Atlantic out there waiting. When I arrived at the museum, folks came out to look at the Cub as I went inside to see the old airplanes and cars. It was a perfect day. I had flown my Cub “From the Mountains to the Sea!”

For the first time in this journey, I found a headwind. The 100 nm flight back to 5M3 took over two hours. Lynne and I made a few local flights and we parked “The Mad Dog” in our friend’s hangar, and drove the car home. Oshkosh, Blakesburg, and the West Yellowstone 195 convention were coming up out West. The rest was yet to come.
Final Phase: After a wet Oshkosh in the 195, a nice warm Blakesburg (Thanks to Lynne and the Westies driving “Max” the motor home 1,600 miles) and a windy, cool West Yellowstone 195 Convention, it was time again to bring the Cub home from N.H.

Eat your heart out, Bern Heimos! I have a “Commander of Ground Operations, and her two assistants, looking out for me! We drove back to New Hampshire two days after the West Yellowstone 195 Convention.

Fall in New Hampshire is not to be missed...especially if you have a Piper J-3 for “Leaf Peeping” as they call it. And there is a secret fly-in to attend...details unavailable. We waited as long as we could before the first snow hit the mountain tops.

On a Wednesday morning, 0700, Lynne and the pups set out in the car. I lifted off at Moultonborough westbound.

For all of the kind tailwinds I had enjoyed headed Eastbound, there was now a price to pay. Fifty kts was expected, anything better was a bonus. Lynne was confined to the Interstate. Our first R.O.N. Was Sterling, Pa.’s Spring Hill Airport. My 50 kts in a straight line would, hopefully, coincide with her deviations following the roads. With two unexpected stops, thanks to coffee, I landed after 3 hours...and she drove up 15 minutes later. The FBO was un- prepared for arriving aircraft, but we had a very nice first night on the road.

Flying anywhere East of La Trobe, Pa. pilots must deal with areas of trees. There are few landing spots. A survivable crash site is often all you can hope for. Lynne had given me a SPOT personal locator that sent a signal into space every ten minutes...and Brother John was able to see our progress on a web site. At least my body would be found....blood drained out due to my thinners.

Our method of operation was to fly/drive two three hour segments and call it quits for the day. That worked well.
Leaving Sterling, Pa. required flying low and around the TRSA at Wilkes-Barre. Lynne and her crew set out for Clearfield, our next stop. As the weather cleared I crossed a pumpkin patch, unusual sight for me, and thought of Charlie Brown’s “Great Pumpkin” The winds were strong and against me. We arrived almost at the same time and had lunch. I was tired already.

Pushing on across the last ridge in PA, we again reunited at LPR, Loraine CO, Elyria, Ohio. My ground crew was ready for dinner and so was I.

The next morning’s flight brought me to the shore of Lake Erie. As our paths crossed, Lynne would sight a fuzzy black spot way off to the left, and it would slowly turn into a Cub as it passed overhead...only to become another fuzzy black spot way off to the right. I was obliviously plodding along without knowing where she was.

There was always something interesting to see. Homes with man-made ponds. Old quarries, ammo dumps, nice grass runways, congested industrial zones, and places where I am glad I don’t live.

As we approached Wauseon, Ohio, A problem developed on the ground. Lynne’s GPS did not have the airport in its data base. She stopped and called Brother John, who could see my SPOT tracks at his desk in Wichita, and who could find the airport on Airnav. Before he could relay the information an Ohio State trooper pulled up and asked what the problem was. He then gave Lynne and the pups a “police escort” right to the airfield, and just as I entered the pattern. The trooper was intrigued with our operation.

We flew on past Morris, Ill. To Davenport. In the morning there was a thunderstorm right overhead but moving East. VFR finally appeared and we had a very nice overnight at Council Bluffs.

The next morning, day five, I flew the Eye of the Needle between OMA and Offut Air base westbound. It’s about a mile of clearance and I’m sure I appeared as a flock of geese on radar.

After a rare “Wheelie” landing at York in a 32 kt crosswind, and a dash for the men’s room, my ground crew arrived with lunch.
Being over cows and wheat fields again brought a sense of relief. Plenty of landing sites out here. We spent the last night in McCook. The FBO, Red Willow Aviation, was one of the best. They knew how to properly tie down a Cub! They treated us as if we were buying hundreds of gallons of fuel, and then later sent us a “thank you” letter.

Up before daybreak, we launched out as soon as there was enough light. The Denver area forecast called for winds above 35 kts later in the day. If I stayed down low I could avoid the headwind, hoping to average a mile a minute.

My ground crew was well on their way but saddled with the road grid, and planned to go South to Highway 36. The morning was clear and smooth so far.

As I was well into Colorado again, I spotted what seemed to be a stampeding heard of horses way ahead on the horizon. There were no horses...only dust. The weather forecast was a bit tardy. My XM weather showed the Front Range winds to be 350 at 32 gusting to 42. Dang! The last leg of such a journey and this had to happen!

With plenty of fuel on board, I eyed Akron 18 miles to the North...but pressed on. It was all moving to the South and East and I have seen many times when this condition would blow through. It started raining and my wind correction angle was such that I was looking out the left side window at my desired track. Hundreds of migratory tumbleweeds were racing by 200 feet below. My ground speed was 31 kts.

Meanwhile, Lynne and company had also encountered said migratory tumbleweeds to the extent that she, (and a group of truckers) , had stopped to clear them from the front of the car. She contacted Brother John to locate me. He reported my almost stationary position and apparent intent to fly on.

My situation was improving, radio contact was made with the tower, and by the time I landed it was calm. The car and crew arrived fifteen minutes later.

Do it again? You Bet! It was FUN! And that’s what Cubs are for!

Richard Hawley