

Alaska to CONUS June/July 2025

Went up to Birchwood PABV to help a friend bring a C170B back to CONUS for a relocate. Specifically we are going to Meadow Lake KFLY near Colorado Springs. We spent a good chunk of the day after my arrival from Denver via UAL doing flight planning, <https://fly2ak.com> customs procedures review, organizing, weight and balance to include weighing, lightening and stowing the load, doing tire pressure, oil, etc.

Day 1

North to Talkeetna:



Got a late start owing to weather and initially planned to do Gulkana PGKN then direct Whitehorse CYXY for customs. Sheep Mountain PASP and Tahneeta Pass were zero-zero, unfortunately. We changed routing and went due N via Talkeetna PATK then initially NE following the Big Su (Susitna River):



After that, E along the Alphabet Hills, Duffy's Tavern, Mentasta then N to TOK. Weather was anticipated to worsen and already marginal in spots, so we got a hotel room and spent the night at the 3 Bears Motel. A 2 mile walk owing to no public transportation, and hitchhiking wasn't working. Nice night's sleep after provisioning at the 3 Bears grocery store.

Day 2

Was able to catch a ride from the owner of the nearby Thai restaurant along the way back. More weather waiting, and had a Denalli pizza (personal choice - hold the onions) at Fast Eddie's and in the early afternoon, the cloud base finally broke. Called Canadian customs, set an ETA with a healthy margin for indirect flying, and filed a flight plan to Whitehorse CYXY. Called the airfield management office to get a 2-day Parking PPR owing to construction at the airport and the many fire-fighting aircraft being involved. My Foreflight couldn't get it done. I'm not sure if the problem was my home time zone, or my default C180 vs. the C170 actually being used, but we had to use the owner's Mini-iPad. Having some redundancy is helpful. I left all the left over pizza, chips and fruit with the Tok FBO and launched E, picked up the Yukon River and followed it S into Whitehorse CYXY:



Ran into a kerfluffle during landing. Cleared to land 14L, exit off at Rwy 20. Landed long, and had to back taxi in order to get back to the runway. The aircraft (too) closely following had to go around, and the reputedly polite by occupation Canadian controller vented for about 3 minutes. In retrospect, I should have declined that clearance and offered to go around so the other aircraft could land before us. If you follow the VASI, you're gonna land about 400 ft from that crossing runway. We apologized, and meekly requested progressive Taxi to customs. We were informed "that is not my responsibility". I found that to be very helpful in terms of defining his professional limitations. It turns out that on the "Aerodrome" plate, customs is annotated as CANPASS. My understanding is that CANPASS is a voluntary Canadian Customs registration process with registration fee valid for 5 years that allows one to go to special "CANPASS"-only ports of entry for an abbreviated inprocess.

Customs was polite, and even friendly. Much concern about whether we had a firearm. The next thing asked was whether there was a trigger lock. As far as I know, there's no requirement for that, but presumably the official was enquiring as to how careful he needed to be removing the weapon from the case. As you know, a firearm is always considered loaded until you personally clear it. The owner had spoken with a Canadian official who recommended filling out the Firearm Declaration form in triplicate, but not signing it until we were in the presence of a customs official. The weapon, a slug shotgun (no choke), had 5 shotgun rounds in a buttstock sleeve. The owner was admonished that the ammo should be stored separately. The Customs officer did qualify that statement by adding that having ammo with the weapon

while airborne makes sense from a survival standpoint. The whole affair only took about 5 minutes. Remarkably pleasant.

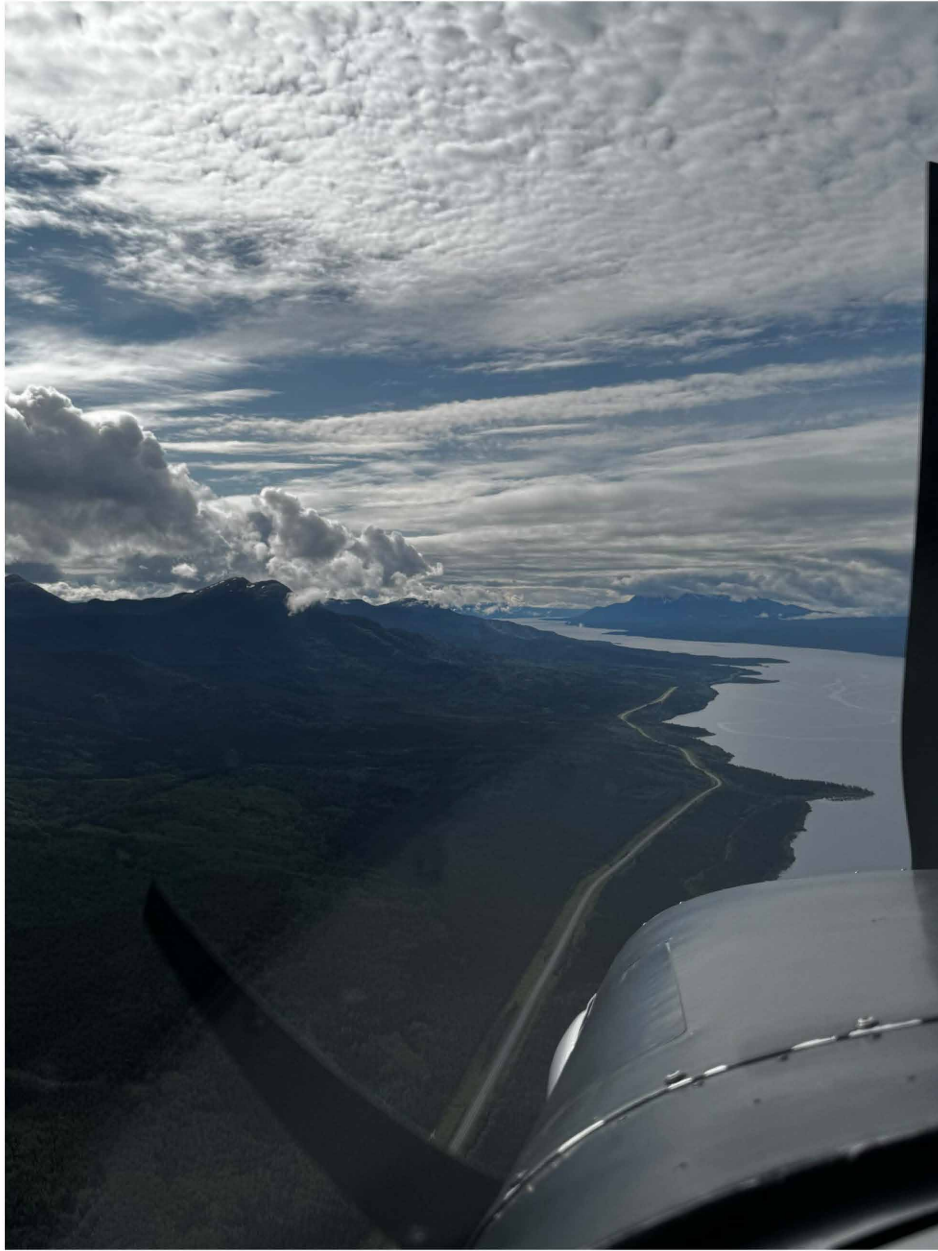
Topped off at the fuel farm and parked in transient. Be sure to bring your own ropes; if ropes even exist along the way, they are likely not serviceable. Walked about 3/4 mile to the Skky hotel.

Day 3

Nice enough room, no breakfast. There is a small restaurant next door. Had a BELT, which is like a BLT with egg and hash browns. Pretty good. You can just walk out of the airport fence at a person-capable gate, but you need the vehicle gate code to get back in. We obtained that from Patrick, the airfield parking manager with a quick phone call. We saw Whitehorse's C-47 windsock in the distance.

At this point, we felt like we were on the clock, as the bad weather seemed to be following us, and if we lingered, we'd get stuck. We used a weather website called "Windy.com". Basically, it allows extrapolation of available weather data in order to predict atmospheric phenomena like fog, winds, cloud tops, etc. In my normal CONUS flying, I haven't needed that level of detail. In AK and CA, the reporting stations can be great distances apart, instrument flying can





be an impossible dream owing to high terrain and MEA's and low freezing levels, and the area seems to be riddled with micro-climate systems.

Anyway, we were going to Watson Lake to pick up the AK Highway route. Windy.com predicted fog midway at Tezlin to burn off at 9 AM local. We didn't want to be taking off any later than necessary because the weather was still on our tail, and closing fast. We had a 2700 ft ceiling (sort of) and launched, following first Hwy 1, then Hwy 7, which followed the terrain. There initially was an episode where the ceiling lowered, the terrain turned, and the course forward became invisible to us. Fortunately, as we made the turn, we could see the ceiling actually lifted, and the way forward was actually improved. It could easily have been the reverse with a wall of clouds, and no ceiling or visibility ahead. Staying on one side or the other in confined terrain (preferably on the side with the best emergency landing options) so as to allow a 180 deg turn, is highly recommended. After that the weather continually improved and didn't trouble us greatly thereafter.

Gas at Watson Lake, on to Fort Nelson for more gas, then Grande Prairie CYQU for RON. Great FBO, the "Happy Gas". Wendy seems to be the boss, and was very helpful. We put the aircraft in the hangar for \$84. We were now officially in Boomer country, and a large thunderstorm hit the airport that night. No aircraft are parked outside there.



Stayed at the Hampton Inn. They have a shuttle, which is basically a taxi that they call. The hotel gives the driver a coupon when they drop you off, and another coupon when you leave the hotel.

Day 4

Awesome Continental Breakfast. Most hotel breakfasts are carbohydrate-loaded, with no protein. That's cheaper for the hotel and has the added benefit that in that it usually makes me hungry again in a few hours. There are few options for food enroute until you stop for the night, and because of that we were eating twice daily. In Grande Prairie we had a folded egg omelette with bacon inside and loaded with cheese, sausages, hard-boiled eggs, fried potatoes, muffins, fruit medley and coffee.

Next stop was Drumheller CEG4. We met the husband-wife owners, Canadians who learned to fly in Florida and moved back. We had the famous free ice-cream as well as great conversation. We flight planned going to Customs at H28, Whetstone International on the US side, and Del Bonita on the CA side. Prior to this, we had filed flight plans in Canada for every leg owing to the remoteness and lack of communications. A flight plan is not required from the US customs nor the Canadian aeronautical viewpoint for this leg, so we skipped that. Most of the airport controllers will close your flight plan for you. A couple asked us to try on the Edmonton Radio remote frequency, but would close it for us if we were unable - that happened once.

We contacted the Whetstone International Airport of Entry Customs office, and spoke with the Customs official giving our ETA with the required 2 hour notification and called Art at the FlashPass App, and got help filling out our eAPIS and received a confirmation email. Well worth the purchase, the FlashPass offers a first month for free.

The last time I flew this route was in 2014, and back then cellular data or even phone calls were quite unreliable. On the 2014 trip, I rented a Sat phone for comms on the ground. On this flight we kept an Garmin InReach on during flight, sending breadcrumbs to aviation friends. Every attended FBO had WiFi, and sometimes we didn't even look for it, and just used an iPad hot-spotted to my iPhone if we were just passing through. A week prior to the trip I spent \$50 for 15 GB for 1 month from T-mobile for Canada (International) data, and didn't exceed that amount.

A brief statement on using the AK Highway route. IMO, although longer overall, that route's advantages are consistent fuel supply and shorter legs. In terms of going E of the Rockies, it avoids having to go through Montana's I-90 passes:

Lookout Pass

4738', between Spokane and Missoula on I-90, by VOR MLP

Lookout Pass Webcams:

<https://skilookout.com/webcams>

Bozeman Pass

5702', between Bozeman and Livingston on I-90, about midway

Bozeman Pass Webcam:

<https://montana-webcams.com/bozeman-pass-webcam-i-90/>

From previous experience going to and from Oklahoma to Seattle, I found that in inclement weather, these two passes can be quite formidable with mountain obscuration. Tall clouds, high MEA's and low freezing levels make non-deice, normally aspirated general aviation IFR flight improbable.

If you do the Trench, for which my version is Anderson Lake, Palmer, Tok, Beaver Creek (CAN), Whitehorse, Watson Lake, McKenzie, Kamloops, Dorothy Scott/Oroville 0S7 (USA), you will be W of the Rockies. You can cross over to the E Rockies above Calgary with relatively benign terrain and do Customs at H28, as an alternative. From our standpoint, there is not that much fuel available enroute, so the legs are long and weather reporting spotty. Generally, auxiliary fuel and/or favorable winds are needed, IMO.

In 2014, my return trip was the coast: PABV, PAYA, PAKT and KBLI. Short and sweet. Last leg 4+ hours, IIRC. But with plenty of fuel, including a 35 gallon aux tank in the cabin, it had the advantage of totally avoiding customs. That route requires a favorable weather picture, and there are few airports along the way. Depending on the tides, there may be beach available for emergency landings. A manually inflatable life vest is recommended. In the two weeks prior to this trip, I familiarized myself with the current weather patterns, and there was only a couple days in which all the weather lined up for the coastal route. The rest of the time, only parts of the route could be flown safely, and some indefinite lgaaring would be required. For example, on my coastal trip I was stuck in Yakatak PAYA for a day, after a look see heading to Ketchikan had the ceiling dwindle to nothing and I had to return to Yakatak.

Back to flying. Landed at H28. Hard to see from the air. Following the E-W road to Del Bonita coming from the E, and an offset of a few miles to the S had us roughly lined up with it. The airport includes a truck border crossing building where US Customs lives in some infrastructure on the US side, a Jet Fuel bowser just S of the W end of the runway, and a small interrupted line of trees running N - S. From Google Earth. The runway goes off to the right and the Jet Fuel bowser is to the far right of the picture:



When contacted, the somewhat grumpy Customs official asked us to taxi up to the bowser, so he didn't have to walk so far. OK. We were 9 minutes early, so we dutifully waited in the aircraft until he arrived precisely at our ETA.

The Custom official walks the short distance to the plane, Kevlar vest and all, and wants to know where the sticker is. I pointed to it - passenger window frame. We are then allowed to deplane. He asks if we have bags. Yes. Do we have a firearm? Yes. The owner volunteers it is a shotgun with 5 rounds stored separately. The official opens a bag, and he paws through it. He then tells us to walk to the Customs building roughly a quarter mile away. He gets back in his car carrying our documentation and drives himself back. We trudge over to Customs. A few more questions. One was directed to me: Do you have medications? Yes. You didn't take them out of the bottles, did you? No. A few more minutes go by. I suspect but cannot confirm there is some typing going on. "You are released". Not welcomed exactly but on the other hand, not detained, incarcerated or renditioned to a black site. Probably 15 minutes spent at the facility.

We walk back to the aircraft, and are soon airborne heading S to Great Falls KGTF. There is not much nearby around Wheatstone International H28. We landed at the civil airport, distinguishable from the USAF base by being S and on the mesa a few hundred feet above it. After exiting the runway, we are told to taxi monitoring ground and spot the nearest FBO, Holman, nearby and we taxi toward it. We dial in their Unicom frequency stating our intentions and after a brief delay are told to "standby". In aviation terms, that means stop. We stop. We ask if there is a problem. "Standby". A few minutes go by, and we are told to taxi to Customs. WTF? We told the FBO lady we have already cleared Customs at H28-Del Bonita. She says no, we cleared Customs at Grande Prairie and didn't file a flight plan. She is adamant. Nobody likes going through Customs even once, and we definitely didn't want to do it twice, but off we go to Customs.

The officer there was polite, but wanted our documents and we precede him into the building and sit. After about 5 minutes of him typing and examining our documents, he says "sorry about that". I ask if the FBO is paid to rat people out who are evading customs. He says no, they are just afraid of being blamed for aiding smugglers. He offered, "perhaps she mistook your aircraft for another one". Documents handed back. Grrr.

Fortunately, there is another FBO at KGTF, Jet Center. On the flip side, it was a 2 mile taxi to the other end of the runway. Their lineman was very helpful and friendly, and we were able to get hangared overnight again, this time for \$100. The owner called the Holman FBO and asked to speak to the manager. The manager offers the owner that "you are lucky that Customs didn't find you at fault. If they did, they would have charged you for the Custom officials overtime". The owner asked the manager what we should charge the FBO for our time. Silence. The Jet Center linesman personally gave us a ride to the local Hampton Inn (the shuttle wasn't available this late in the day). A great FBO, in my opinion.

Day 5

Another excellent Hampton Inn Continental Breakfast later, we were shuttled by the hotel to the Jet Center a little before 7:00 AM LCL. I pumped AvGas for 2 years to help pay for my Private Pilot's license, and never got a tip during all that time, way back in the 70's. For the very first time, I tipped a lineman on this day. Departed at 7:20 in CAVU.

Next stop was Lusk KLSK, on our way to Meadow Lake KFLY. Fifty-degree crosswind at 18 knots. Breezy in Oklahoma parlance. Unattended with free bottled water and a couple quarts of Phillips 20-50W available for use if needed and an air-conditioned pilots lounge with a refrigerated drinking fountain. We got our workout with a effort-required spring-loaded fuel hose reel that literally required the two of us to pull the hose to the aircraft, winding up the spring as we went. The hose went back very easily when we returned the hose to the reel, though.

Final leg. Up until now we had unbelievably favorable winds. Rarely neutral, never headwinds, and mostly 10-15 knot tailwinds. That all stopped, and we fought winds all the way to KFLY at 9,500 feet. It was bumpy, but not dreadful. My airplane came out of the hangar, the owner's airplane went in, and I headed home.

Took 5 days and 25.1 flight hours, reasonable given our 100 KTAS cruise.