

Scott & Deb's **EX**cellent RV Adventures
Thanksgiving '07 at Rosamond Skypark
by Debra and Scott Mills

The second installment of the *Scott & Deb's EXcellent RV Adventure* series means a title change is in order: Adventure—singular—has become Adventures—plural! Although this trip was on a smaller scale than Turks & Caicos at 2,829 miles round trip (day-tripping included), it certainly qualifies as an RV adventure. We had a great time reconnecting with RVing pals and (as Paul Rosales likes to say) “expanding our circle of friends.”

If the idea of Thanksgiving air travel triggers flashbacks of the holiday from Hell, I'm with ya! Who can forget the long lines, crowded airports, missed connections, screaming babies, “yada, yada, yada” when flying on the busiest of holiday weekends? Well I'm here to tell you that holiday travel in your own airplane is a rewarding, enjoyable, and *pleasantly unforgettable* experience.

Of course, traveling in a private aircraft comes with its own challenges. Knowing that weather was potentially our main obstacle, Scott and Gary monitored it closely prior to travel day. The plan (keeping in mind what they say about the best-laid plans) was to begin our 1000-mile trek to Paul and Victoria Rosales's house at 6:30 a.m. on Thanksgiving morning. While everything *looked* good for an early morning departure, we just wouldn't know for sure until AIS (a** in seat) time.

DAY 1: (November 22nd)

Scott and I were up at 4:00 a.m. and on our way to *Front Range Municipal Airport* by 5:15. Hmmmm . . . couldn't see the stars—not a good sign. The changing weather patterns (76° on Monday, snowing on Wednesday) had apparently created the perfect conditions for generating a fog around the Denver-Metro area as thick as that proverbial pea soup. In aviation lingo, we were “socked in.”

Certain that we wouldn't be going anywhere for a while, we decided on breakfast at *Biscuits Café* truck stop a short distance from the airport. After enjoying a hardy meal, we headed back to the airport to wait it out. And wait . . . and wait . . . and wait. What we hoped would be a short delay turned into four hours. With each rotation of the clock, our chances of making it all the way to our destination in southern California were getting slimmer. But, we reasoned, if it looked as though we weren't going to make it to *Rosamond Skypark Airport* before nightfall, we could always land in Arizona and get rooms.

When those clear blue patches started peeking through, we excitedly made our way from the FBO to the hangar to begin pre-flight preparations. Within minutes of take-off, the Ziliks began experiencing engine problems that necessitated landing back at FTG. While mechanical issues present another potential obstacle to general aviation enthusiasts, this one turned out to be a quick fix. Our able-bodied flyboys made short work of it, and we were once again airborne.

It was pretty nippy, with temps on the ground in the teens, so we had dressed in layers. I'm one who is usually cold when everyone else is comfortable, so I was a little concerned about this. But, between the clothing layers, the heat in the cockpit, and the warm sunshine streaming through the canopy, I stayed nice and toasty the entire trip—*inside* the plane, that is!

As we flew above the beautiful and ever-changing westward landscapes at altitudes ranging from 6,500-14,000 feet, Scott and I talked about how fortunate we are to experience air travel in this way. When flying the not-so-friendly-skies of commercial airlines, the fun doesn't begin until you reach your destination. Not so when flying your own plane—getting there is half the fun!

Three hours after leaving Denver, we reached our scheduled self-serve fuel stop at *Lindbergh Regional Airport* in Winslow, Arizona. After gassing up and a quick potty break (*Yikes*, that port-o-let seat was cold!), we began the second leg of our trip. While I was disappointed that we weren't going to make it in time for the skypark holiday meal, I was thankful that an overnight stay in Arizona wouldn't be necessary; and my mouth was already watering for the turkey sandwiches that we'd no doubt have later on.



Background: Mills / Foreground: Zilik

We left Winslow at 1:16 p.m. PT and arrived in Rosamond, California just before 4:00. Within mere *minutes* we were tied down outside of “hotel Rosales”—one of the perks of skypark living. While an RV motor home in the driveway is commonplace, parking an RV airplane right outside your front door is not. The drive from our home in Littleton to FTG takes about 45 minutes (twice that for the Ziliks who live in the mountains), so hangaring / tying down right where you live seems like a pretty sweet deal to us!

What a pleasant surprise to find that Victoria had prepared a separate Thanksgiving dinner just for us! As we sat down and said grace, I was thankful for a good flight, good friends, and good food. After a delicious dinner, complete with home-baked pies, we visited with other RVing friends. Annmarie Strachan (and her significant other, John “Chief” Manduca) and Mercedes Eulitt also live at Rosamond. Annmarie and John hosted their second annual skypark Thanksgiving dinner (Sorry we missed it!) in their hangar with 90 people in attendance!



L-R Scott, Deb, Victoria, Paul, Gary, Carolyn

The next couple of days were spent doing what else? Flying!

DAY 2: (November 23rd)

Wheels up at 9:00 a.m. We headed north over the *Tehachapi Pass Windmill Farm* to *Tehachapi Municipal Airport* for gas before making the one-hour flight to *Harris Ranch Inn & Restaurant* for breakfast, where they are known for their excellent beef. There we were joined by Bryan Wood (we missed you, Sherri!) and his dad Bob who flew from their home base in San Jose, CA; and Laird Owens and his

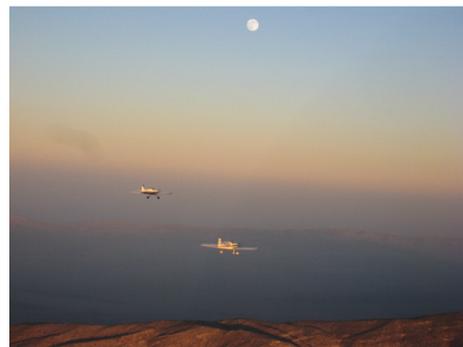


significant other Christine Johnston who flew from their home base near Burbank, CA. Having departed LØØ a little after we did, Mercedes (with passenger Mike McCavic) and Annmarie joined up with us there. At the restaurant it was our pleasure to meet Paul Eastham, Bill and Randy (sorry, don't know the last names)—all from the Bay area, and Bill Souza from Rosamond.



Following some enjoyable conversation and a tasty meal of steak and eggs, the Millses, the Rosaleses, the Ziliks, Laird/Christine, and Annmarie continued on to *Oceano County Airport*. Walking on the beach of the Pacific was a first for both Scott and I. It's the only beach I'd seen to date where ocean and mountains are part of the same landscape. After the beach, we made our way to the *Rock n' Roll Diner* for ice cream and sodas. In case you haven't noticed, flying your own airplane involves *lots* of eating.

On the flight back to LØØ, we had the sun at our backs, the mountains below us, and the full moon ahead of us—it was absolutely beautiful (the picture at right just doesn't do it justice)!



Front: Laird Owens & Christine Johnston

#2: Gary & Carolyn Zilik



After tucking our planes in for the night, it was Mexican food at the *Golden Cantina* inside the skypark. The 23rd of November just happens to be Scott's birthday, so we made sure to embarrass him accordingly. All kidding aside, I think a day of flying / hanging out with some of his RVing buddies made for a better-than-average birthday. We were joined at the restaurant by Rosamond residents Greg and Beth Scates and Chief's mom, Eunice, from Buzzard's Bay, MA.

DAY 3: (November 24th)

We fueled up at LØØ and took off as a four-ship (Mills, Zilik, Rosales, and Souza) for *Furnace Creek Airport* in *Death Valley National Park*. Mercedes and some other RVing friends from Arizona—Larry and Gerri Schneider—met up with us there.



Call me paranoid, but the concept of landing *below* sea level conjures up mental images I could do without! But this little airport actually *is* 211 feet below sea level—no water involved. ;-)

A short 10-minute walk from the airport is the *Corkscrew Saloon* where Linda served us up a little grub. It was kind of funny that the gal who seated us was from Denver (where we live now) and our waitress was from New Hampshire (where we come from). Small world—and getting smaller all the time!



L-R: Bill Souza, Mike McCavin, Mercedes Eulitt, Gerri Schneider, Carolyn Zilik, Scott Mills, Victoria Rosales, Gary Zilik, Larry Schneider, Deb Mills



Flying the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range

Following breakfast and a quick tour of the nearby museum, we caught a van ride back to our planes. After a pre-flight briefing, it was the tourist route back to Rosamond. Flying over the popular attraction *Scotty's Castle*, we enjoyed a birds-eye view that the average paying tourist on the ground just doesn't get!

Seventy-six miles west of *Death Valley*—the lowest point in all of North America—we flew over *Mount Whitney*—the highest point in the contiguous United States.

Back at Rosamond, Paul and Victoria made preparations for “Movie Night.” They began hosting a semi-monthly Movie Night in their hangar during the summer months. The movie, which must involve flying, is always a surprise to everyone except Rosie. Since we had been unable to make it there over the summer, they decided to have a special showing just for their friends from Denver! Temps being a bit chilly, the show was moved inside with heaters rather than on the ramp under the stars.

While Movie Night set-up is quite an undertaking, these two have it down to a science. The planes were moved out, chairs and tables were moved in, and a movie screen and surround-sound speakers were set up lickety-split. A good time was had by all as we enjoyed the well-stocked fridge, movie-style popcorn, pizza, assorted snacks, and, of course, the flick—*The High And The Mighty* starring the Duke and Robert Stack. The scene where co-pilot John Wayne face slaps handsome young pilot Robert Stack demanding that he get hold of himself is classic!



DAY 4: (November 25th)



Rosamond

It was now time for us to head back to Mile High City. We said goodbye to Rosamond and started home at 7:30 a.m.

We planned our breakfast stop for the picturesque setting at *Payson Airport* in Payson, Arizona. A short 45 minutes after leaving Payson, we made our planned fuel stop at *St. Johns Industrial Air Park* in St. Johns, Arizona. This was Scott's and my second visit to *St. Johns*, and each time we have found the folks on site to be pleasant and helpful. The clean and nicely decorated restrooms are a nice touch, too!

The remainder of our flight back to Denver was very enjoyable—smooth and scenic. The high country was particularly pretty with a fresh dusting of snow.

We touched down on FTG's runway 08 at 3:36 p.m. MT, marking the end of our Thanksgiving RV adventure.

Our thanks to Paul and Victoria for their hospitality! They made us feel like family in their lovely home, and we look forward to returning the favor. Thanks especially for Movie Night—it was awesome!! Thanks also to Gary and Carolyn Zilik for helping to make this Thanksgiving such a *pleasantly* memorable one—we really enjoy traveling with them!



This sure has been an active year for 339A! She's been to the British West Indies (<http://media.putfile.com/Scott--Debs-EXcellent-RV-Adventure-07>), Oshkosh AirVenture fly-in, Land of Enchantment fly-in, Arizona (twice), Goodland, Kansas for a fun-filled weekend of target shooting and great food with Jim and Vicki Baker (also gracious hosts!), Sid and Shelly Baldwin, and the Ziliks. With this little jaunt under her belt, 339 can now claim the distinction of having landed on both U. S. coasts.

We're looking forward to next year's travels: a trip back East for Scott's 30th class reunion; yet another trip East with the Ziliks, the Bakers, and possibly (*hopefully*) the Woods for an autumn leaf-peeping tour; and a return trip to Rosamond to help a certain someone celebrate her 50th. And who knows what other flying adventures are in store for us and the great little plane that we built in our garage?!

Go RVing!! ☺

Deb's Pearls of Wisdom:

- 🕒 Blinding your pilot while trying to take a flash photo at dusk is not a good idea.
- 🕒 Like it or not, the variables of flying a small aircraft render plans/schedules tentative.
- 🕒 Frequent restaurant stops catch up with you in "*the end.*"
- 🕒 Unsolicited "helpful reminders" sound a lot like nagging. So much so, in fact, that Bryan Wood has come up with a clever name for women who do this: *nagivators*.
- 🕒 Under just the right circumstances, a "go-around" *can* be considered a "fly-by," depending on who's telling the story. ;-)

The Pilot's Perspective

Yet another EXcellent Adventure in our RV9A! This one may have been even more fun than the trip to Turks & Caicos—oh no, can't believe I said that. With the experience I gained on that trip and as my "time-in-type" has increased, I have become more proficient at flying and navigating. With the upgrade from the 296 to the 496—complete with Aviator Light weather package—confidence has increased substantially.

This trip was truly pure enjoyment all the way around—no stress. From the very delayed takeoff due to bad weather at FTG to the absolutely CAVU return flight to Colorado, every aspect of this trip was a BLAST!

The original plan was that we and the Ziliks would depart FTG at 6:30 a.m., but due to a serious fog that came in overnight, we didn't depart until 10:30 a.m. Behind on our schedule to make Thanksgiving dinner at Rosamond with Paul and Victoria Rosales, Gary radioed shortly after takeoff that he was having mag issues. He had a suspect so after landing back at FTG, we quickly removed the top cowl and plugs to take a look. At this point I'm thinking to myself, well ... looks like I'll be working on the living room floor this weekend. The inspection finds the culprit—a fouled plug, shorted out by a piece of bead blast. A quick fix and we're back in the air.

No more problems as we get above the breaking clouds and head direct to Alamosa. It's incredibly smooth over the Rockie pile today, the winds aren't too bad either as we continue to our first fuel stop in Winslow, AZ. A straight-in approach soon has us on the ground and searching for the self-serve pump, cleverly hidden behind the FBO. After locating it, we do a QTA and are off again direct to Hector VOR, trying to beat the low and fast-setting late fall sun.

It is during this leg that I notice the vastly changing terrain of the west. I have flown this way before but had never been in So-Cal. Once we make Hector, it's direct to General Fox airport. We pick up a headwind at this point, thanks to the Santa Anas. It became clear that we would make Rosamond with daylight to spare. We pass Edwards on our right and turn for Rosamond. Once we locate the field, I make a left base entry for 25 and we're on the ground at 3:59 p.m. PST—we made it! It had been a great day of flying! Rosie and Victoria held dinner for us, so we sat down to an awesome turkey dinner with all the fixins!

Next Day:

*Now **this** is what it's all about! Rosie scheduled us for wheels up at 9:00 a.m. Over the "Tehachapi bump" and a bunch of wind generators and we land for "cheap" fuel before heading to our first destination—Harris Ranch for lunch. Here we meet up with several other RVers, Bryan "soapy" (inside joke) Wood from our T & C trip among them. A low pass down the runway with smoke on by Annmarie of smokingairplanes.com—**nice!***

*Inside for lunch and I can tell right away that this is the kind of place my lovely wife adores—complete with gift shop. After lunch, it's back in the planes we go and off to Oceano airport to spend the rest of the day on the beach. Another nice ride in the RV over the San Joaquin Valley and we are there. Rosie sets us up for an overhead break. I'm #2 of 5 and the only fixed pitch in the bunch. The 9 can be a challenge to slow down, and I know I'm coming in with too much speed. I call, "2's extended down wind." I'm trying to slow down, but it's not happening fast enough. Well ... half way down the runway I still haven't landed. I call, "2's going around." There's a guy on the ground with a big Nikon and telephoto lens snapping pictures, so now my "go-around" becomes a "fly-by" photo op! Again I say, **nice!** It's out over the Pacific Ocean for*

another look and the next one's a charm. A good time walking on the beach and eating ice cream was had by all.

The sun is starting to set fast and I ask Rosie how long to get back to Rosamond—about an hour. It's 4:15 p.m. by the time we reach our planes and get fired up. The sun will set at 4:45 and this guy's not night current. I, along with Gary and Laird, take off as a three ship. A low pass over the beach by Gary and Laird as we head back to LØØ. With the winds working against us, the GPS shows over an hour to go with an arrival time of 5:15 p.m. Another beautiful ride with the sun setting behind us and the full moon rising in front of us. It is just gorgeous! I'm peddling as fast as I can, but the 9 can't quite keep up with Gary and Laird (I think they were firewalled...). They get about two in front of us. By the time we make it to Rosamond, Rosie and Annmarie have caught up with us. At 5:17 p.m.—30 minutes after sunset—we make the most perfect landing ever done . . . ever! Nice! What a perfect day of flying. No way it gets any better than this.

Day 3:

Wheels up at 8:00 a.m. Destination Furnace Creek airport in Death Valley—lowest point in North America at -211 ft. MSL. I got to thinking about the diving Deb and I have done, and although we've never been below 85', we can now say we've been 211 feet below the sea. Somewhere, someone on channel 3 was heard singing "Unda Da Sea" from The Little Mermaid. After lunch at the Corkscrew, we take off as two three ships to fly low over the barren wasteland of Death Valley before beginning a climb for the highest peak in the contiguous U.S. We went from -211 ft. MSL to 16,000 ft. The view from the Sierra Mountains is outstanding. We can see the little hikers' hut at the top of Whitney, and Deb's snapping pics like crazy. It's time to head back to LØØ as Rosie and Victoria have to setup for "Movie Night" in the hangar. A nice tailwind and we are back in a little over an hour. Gary and I divert to Tehachapi for fuel as we will be wheels up at 8:00 a.m. headed back to Colorado.

Last Day:

7:30 a.m. Contrary to popular belief, it gets cold in the So-Cal desert, so the engine heaters were plugged in to keep the oil nice and toasty—85 ° on startup. We loaded all our gear and said goodbye to our hosts.

*We began our flight back to Colorado in smooth air. First heading, direct to Hector VOR and then direct to Payson, AZ. A smooth ride and a clear day lie ahead of us. I was lead for this leg, and never having been to Payson before, was drifting around a bit trying to locate the field. Sunday morning at Payson was busy. I get on "somewhat" of a 45° entry for a left downwind on 24. Someone had just departed and was below us. I'm looking for traffic. Just as I spot it, I hear a call on the CTAF, "That's **not** a 45." Looks like I got reprimanded by a local—sorry.*

The landing was nice but a bit of a floater as the runway drops off.

We had a nice breakfast before jumping back into the planes for the short hop to St. Johns for cheap fuel. This is the second time I've stopped here for fuel—these guys are great! Another QTA and we're off for home. It's direct to Alamosa now. The visibility is absolutely fantastic—must be 500 miles. As we climb out, I decide to try out the new O₂ tank I had picked up from Rosie. I've not had oxygen for the two years I've been flying in Colorado, but it's been on my wish list. This one even came with 1200 lbs of O₂ in it! Anyway, I'm really liking it—I feel GREAT—keenly aware of what's going on. At 120 nautical out, I can see the ridgeline that lies just in front of Alamosa because it is as clear as crystal!

We cross Alamosa and head for Hayden Pass over the rest of the Rockies and on to Front Range. Another nice landing on runway 08 and we are home!

This was a perfect trip! We had so much fun flying and socializing with fellow RVers who have become close friends. We spent about \$500 on fuel for the weekend, but it was well worth every penny! Had we flown commercially, we would have spent more than that on tickets alone. Plus the RV fun factor . . . well, it just can't be compared!!

Lessons Learned:

The Garmin 496 with XM weather is worth the investment.

Go-Arounds are just fly-bys . . . really.

O₂ really makes you feel good!

Need to get night current so we can have even more fun.

CAVU is a special treat when mountain flying.

Need to improve my pattern entry skills at strange airports.

Living at an airpark is the best way to go.