

Aug. 28-31 - Montana - Big Sky Country, Part 1

Missoula - August 28 & 29th -

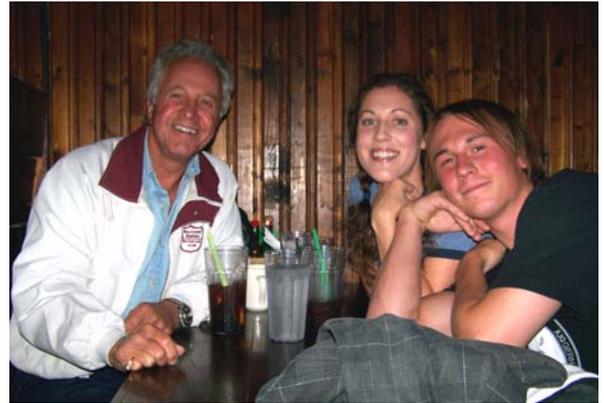
I added Missoula to my route, almost as a last minute decision, in order to visit with a nephew Josh Hayes, who is attending school in this delightfully small city. I arrived to blustery, rainy conditions, but got a long enough break between showers to off load and set up the Highlander and tied it down at [Minuteman Aviation](#), the FBO on the field. As has been the case with all of my stops along the way, everyone has displayed a gracious and friendly reception to my request to base the plane and trailer on their ramp area for a couple of days. I got together that evening for a light dinner with Josh and his classmate girlfriend Anna, who is leaving for London in a week to begin her graduate studies.

Josh, who is now 23 took his first flight with me almost 20 years ago. I let him sit on my lap and “steer” my twin-Comanche on a short flight to his grandparents Florida home. I actually made the flight adjustments with the autopilot’s turn command controller, but Josh thought that he was “driving” the plane, and later reported to his parents that he did “loops and rolls”, much to their dismay.

Our flight on Thursday the 28th was to clearing skies and diminishing winds. We flew north, out of Missoula’s air carrier field and over the low (8,000 foot) mountains ringing the city and down into a long, wide valley that is bounded by the Bitterroots on the West and the much higher (10,000 feet) Swan Mountain Range to its East. Our destination was Flathead Lake, which is about 50 miles north of Missoula, where Josh wanted to take some photos. On our way we passed over the much lower (5,000 foot) Bison Range, which is a federally protected patch for the American Buffalo. We saw none that we could discern, but from 2,000 feet over the hills it would be difficult to distinguish bison from the many cows below us.

Upon landing, I was approached by a gentlemen on a bicycle who saw the plane taxi in, and wanted to know more about it. I gave him my “standard” speech about Just Aircraft and the Highlander, and even handed out a company flyer. I am never quite sure what the interest or experience level is of the people who approach me about the plane, but it turned out that this gentlemen was a pilot, and owned a Stearman bi-plane. That peaked my interest, and I mentioned Stephen Coonts’ [“The Cannibal Queen”](#)...the book that got me hooked on making this trip about the US. He replied that he had a chance to fly with Steve, in his Stearman, when he came through Missoula doing research for his book. I wish that I had gotten his name, as I had been communicating with Mr. Coonts via e-mail, and would have liked to have made him aware of this chance meeting.

Because, upon landing weather conditions were turning “south” again, I had Josh help me fold up the wings and put the plane back in the trailer. In the morning I will be leaving for a couple of days in Bozeman, MT. visiting with my niece who was attending classes at the university there, and who now lives at my brother’s “mini-ranch” get away home, and works in the immediate area at a Fly Fishing School and Resort. Another fun day of flying in store, I hope.



This photo of me, Josh and his girlfriend Anna is more for family members than you readers



Missoula’s mountains soon gave way to a wide valley with a meandering river thru it



This is the southern shore of Flathead Lake which is halfway to Glacier National Park



After the flight Josh helped me put up the plane