

## Aug. 8-10th, 2008 - Amarillo, the High Plains and the Palo Duro Canyon

Well, today, August 7th, I arrived at the high plains of the Texas panhandle. When I left Tulsa, elevations were generally around 750 feet. The 350 mile drive to Amarillo took one entire day, and produced an increase of almost 3,000 feet in altitude. With the propane fumigation kit that I had installed on the motor home's Cummins diesel engine and an earlier upgrade to the Banks system turbocharger, the bus had plenty of power for that long uphill climb. I arrived at the Tradewinds airport (which is within the Class C airspace belonging to Amarillo International) very late Thursday afternoon.

But first, a word about logistics. There are a number of factors that I have to consider before arrival at my destination city. Foremost is parking for the trailer. Generally I would like for it to remain on airport property, which makes it easier to retrieve any items that I might need for my flights. For example, today I decided to change my fuel filter, and my tools, spare parts and clean up stuff is kept in the trailer, as is what remains of the 30 gallons of automotive gas that I mix with the aviation fuel. Having the trailer near the airplane just makes things easier. This generally requires advance permission from the airport management. Reaching that person is not always easy, but so far I have been able find the right contact. In that regard, prior to my arrival at Tradewinds, a privately owned airport located in the second concentric ring of controlled airspace around Amarillo International, I contacted their manager, Mr. Les Byram, and received permission to park the trailer on their property. Next I need to locate a campground to base the motor home that is relatively near the airport. While I don't mind riding the scooter back and forth, I want to avoid more than 30 minutes of travel time each way. Also, I try to stay off of the interstates whenever possible. Since all of my driving is now done with a GPS moving map software program on my 17" screen laptop, I don't have the need for paper maps. However, I can't carry that large computer with me on the scooter, so I now need to print out maps that will take me to my local destinations. Once I arrive at the airport, I have to set up the trailer on fairly level ground, to avoid any tracking problems when I off load and re-load the airplane. All of these things take considerable research on the computer as well as with hard copy directories of both airport and campground facilities. Advance planning goes a long way in assuring a pleasant stay with a minimum of difficulties.

Before flying on Friday, 8/8, I needed to do a little preventive maintenance on the plane, including the removal of the front cowl, to examine the engine components. I routinely monitor an internet forum, for *Just Aircraft* builders, even though my airplane is completed. A recent concern with possible leaching of resins from the fiberglass fuel tanks dictated that I examine the interior of those tanks for sponginess, and replace the fuel filter. Everything checked out OK. The tanks were firm and the filter was clean of any noticeable particulates. Next, a "soft" left brake pedal required the addition of some fluid. The type of brake cylinder I have installed, which has no reservoir, means pumping in fluid from below the brake rotar...kinda like bleeding the system. Since I did not have any tools or accessories for this project, I was directed to the airport's maintenance shop, **Amarillo Aero**. Even though its foreman, Dave Wright (Cell # 806-236-7504) was up to his elbows in work, he stopped what he was doing and immediately walked out to the plane with the necessary equipment to take care of this chore...and he wouldn't even allow me to pay him for this help.



This is the view of downtown Amarillo as I fly into the Tradewinds Airport, just south of the city



As I near Palo Duro Canyon, this small lake comes into view along with beginning changes in terrain



The canyon walls here are only a couple of miles apart. Note the flat terrain just beyond the rims



Once inside Palo Duro, the canyon seems to go on forever and the dramatic views are endless

Another class airport person that I have met along my travels. Now that my maintenance chores were completed, it was time to go flying.

My interest for the day was the [Palo Duro Canyon](#). This is a 800 foot deep and 2 to 20 mile wide ravine that had been carved out over millions of years by the Red River and wind and rain erosion. It is second in size only to the Grand Canyon and has much of the same geological features and multi-colored rock appearance. It begins only about 25 miles from downtown Amarillo and then meanders 100 miles further towards the south. It is the one **must see** thing when in this area of the panhandle. While flying below the rim is permissible, this was not anything that I wanted to do, and the closest that I got was 500 feet above that rim. One of the places that I wanted to find was the location of the state park, which allows access down into the bottom of the canyon, as well as camping for RV's. I had planned to relocate the motor home there later in the day, so as to be right "on site" for the evening presentation of the outdoor play "[Texas](#)". This is a "loose" history of the white man's settlement of this part of Texas. With a cast of almost 5 dozen players, this musical play is set with the canyon walls as its backdrop. In fact, once darkness settled in, those canyon walls were lit with an array of multicolored lights, which further enhanced their beauty and detail. It was almost as good as the show itself, but impossible to capture with the little Kodak digital camera that I am using on this trip. With elaborate moving sets, it takes one back to the mid 1800's when settlement by both farmers and cattle ranches competed for the land recently taken away from the native Indians. Although performed with an upbeat musical tempo of singing and dancing, along with some good family comedy and a lot of hope and energy, it did suggest a subliminal message that we should all get along and consider our neighbor in our daily lives. The play finished up with the two leading actors, a young farmer and a ranch cowboy foreman (much like the theme of the play Oklahoma that I had just seen), finding true love with the niece of the ranch owner, and an Annie Okley tomboy type. The show finished up with a dramatic fireworks display over the tops of the canyon's rim, and a stunning high speed ride-by of horseman displaying all of the flags which Texas has flown under, set to stirring music. It is now completing its 45 season as the states official Play.

The flight itself took about an hour as I traveled well down along the canyon's wider areas. It is truly dramatic seeing it from the air, since the land on both sides are as flat as a table. The rock formations and colors are spectacular and I came away with the feeling that there is natural beauty in almost everything around us. Once I got back on the ground, and tied down the plane (winds were expected to gust to over 25 m.p.h. by afternoon and continue into Saturday), I cranked up the motor home, and duplicated my aerial journey with a road trip to the State Park. When I got there, an hour later, I found that the campground was fully reserved, and was directed to the [West Rim RV Park](#) that was just outside of the State Parks entrance. Here I had a view down into the canyon, from its rim, much like I did from the air. After setting up my motor home, and removing the Vespa from its carrier, I planned to explore the area. However one of the numerous thunderstorms that seem to hit every afternoon began to build almost directly over the Park. I watched both in real time, and on my computer's "Weather Channel" web page as it grew from almost nothing to a massive red colored blob on my screen. With thunder billowing, and lightening glowing within the torrential rain bands that I could see off in the distance, I watched nature's majesty at work. The thing that I have noticed about thunderstorms in this part of the country, as com-



This balancing rock is called Lighthouse Hoodoo and is one of its most photographed features



Below me is the amphitheatre where the Texas show is held each night. Note the walls beyond



This lower view better shows the theater, its stage and stadium seating for 2,000 people



This was the view from my campground. The misting off in the distance was a thunderstorm.

pared to what I am used to back home, is that these storms barley move. They form, then grow and finally diminish in almost the exact same spot. I am used to having these storms move rapidly along a line. In fact, when I look at my local news doppler weather they are able to pretty much predict when a storm will get to a particular town or neighborhood, based on that movement. In this case, that big boomer was out of the area by about 6 pm, and it was then that I drove my scooter down to the bottom of the State park in order to attend the evening performance at their outdoor amphitheater and to better view the canyon walls from below. It was an evening well spent.

To the right is a view of the canyon walls from the State Park



I need a full page for this photo of the cast of the musical show *Texas*. The outside stage setting is spectacular.

Because of the very strong winds on Saturday, the 9th, I decided that fun flying was not in order, and instead did what pilots like next best to do-eat! Here I am in front of an Amarillo landmark, the [Big Texan Steak Ranch](#), just down the road from my campground, but far enough to require transportation. Instead of the complimentary limo, I took the Vespa. This western motif restaurant is the home of the “free” 72 oz. steak...if you are man enough to finish up the whole thing in 1 hour. Many have tried...few have succeeded. I ordered a much smaller 16 oz. version, which was quite adequate, and 1/4 the price.

Hopefully Sunday will see the winds die down enough to allow me one more flight before I head out for my next destination, Sante Fe, NM.

