

August 1, 2008 - Bull Shoals Lake, Arkansas

I was tempted to entitle this section “**Branson - Extended**”, since I am still in this very scenic town at the very southern portion of central Missouri...just a dozen or so miles from the Arkansas line. By now I should have been on my way to Tulsa, the next stop along my route, but things have a way of going astray. When I got to Branson, I decided that I had enough of putting buckets under my front air conditioner unit each day, to capture the half gallon of condensate water that drips from the ceiling grill...a dilemma that has been going on for almost a year now. Previous attempts to correct this anomaly has not solved the problem. So I put a call into the air conditioner’s manufacturer, [Dometic Corp.](#) a very large supplier of appliances for motor homes and RV’s. They agreed that a more positive approach was now needed and promised to send a replacement unit to a RV service center which happened to be located right next door to my campground. Unfortunately the unit took a week to arrive, and was finally installed just today. I decided to wait around the extra day to make sure that the fix “takes” and will head out over the weekend.

Since I now have some extra flying days (every one since I have arrived have been good, except for the mid 90 degree temperatures that hit by afternoon), I decided to make a short hop over the state line to [Gaston’s White River Resort](#), which has its own grass runway directly alongside the River. This trip was my version of the “\$200 hamburger” (it used to be called the \$50 hamburger when I started flying back in the 60’s). While the cost of the hamburger has probably only increased by a few dollars, it is the price of the airplane fuel that gets you today. On the way over to the resort, I had a chance to fly over the construction site for the new airport that is being built just a few miles south of Branson. This airport is supposed to be completed by this time next year, and will cost over \$155 million dollars. It will have a 7,200 foot long, by 150 foot wide concrete runway, capable of handling any corporate or commercial jet out there today. It will also feature a 58,000 sq. ft. terminal building and the latest state of the art in aircraft control equipment. The interesting fact here is that it is being built entirely without federal, state, county or city monies. It is being financed by a group of investors, and will be a completely private venture. I am not sure that the old adage “If you will build it, they will come” will apply in this instance. I do not know just how many airlines will flock to this brand new facility given the state of the economy today. However, the investors and Chamber of Commerce both seem to be very positive that this venture will fly (no pun intended).

When I got to Gaston’s I circled the field to get a lay of the land. I had been cautioned that high power lines off of the Bull Shoals Lake hydro-electric dam just adjacent dictates that all landings are to the east and all take-offs to the west, in order not to tangle with those lines. With 3,200 feet of well manicured runway to play with, this would not have been a problem for the Highlander, no matter what the wind. Today it was dead calm. The resort is “luxurious rustic” with plenty of antiques and artifacts both inside and outside of the buildings. I spent about a half hour walking around and taking in the complex before heading over to the restaurant, which overlooks the beautiful White River.



In this view of my sectional chart you can see that my route takes me over many lakes & rivers



The new commercial airport just south of Branson will have a 7,200 foot runway



Gaston's White River resort with its grass runway (like a golf course fairway), cottages, restaurant, pool, tennis courts and fantastic fly-fishing for trout. A First Class resort, for sure.

I was seated right next to a window which overlooked the river and a series of hummingbird feeders. Since it was lunch time, both eateries were busy, but I was in absolutely no hurry. I decided that since this was a famous trout fishing resort, that I would order grilled trout. I casually inquired if it had been swimming around in that river last night. The waitress replied that unfortunately they are prohibited, by health code, from serving fish from the river...unless it is brought in by one of the guests. Then they are allowed to cook it, but take no responsibility as to its potability. In any case, my trout was delicious, no matter where it came from.

While there was only one other plane at the strip, a light twin, I was told by the front desk that on the weekends the airport really gets jumping. Many people fly in for the Sunday Brunch, which is supposed to be awesome. I also learned that later that afternoon a DC-3 would be arriving with passengers for an overnight stay at one of the resort's cottages. While I would have loved to have watched that landing, I just couldn't wait around a few more hours. And so, after lunch and another walk around the grounds, I departed for the 30 minute flight back to Branson's airport. The distance between these two points is only about 40 nautical miles and takes one over some beautiful lake country. The round trip was just shy of 1:15, as I was in no hurry and kept my fuel flow to under 4 gals. per hour.

When I landed at Clark-Taney County airport, I stopped into the FBO building to get a drink of water. I saw a gentlemen sitting on one of the chairs inside of the terminal, and we exchanged "hi's" I went over to "set a spell" and we got talking. His name is Jim Watt, and he told me that he is 76 years old. He has been flying all of his life, and does work for a Baptist church mission down in Harrison Arkansas (just over the state line). He had flown in with the church's Cessna 150 trainer, to give a lesson to a young church student who would be arriving by car momentarily. The mission has a Beech Debonair, a Cherokee 6, a Piper Arrow and the 150 in their stable of aircraft, but most of the training is done in the Cessna. He does other flying for the mission, and occasionally will take the larger planes down into Guatemala and Honduras, where some of the missionaries work (including his daughter and her husband). Jim is another one of the interesting people that I have met at airports, and talked about in an earlier posting, which is making this such an enjoyable trip for me. About that time along came his student, who turned out to be a tall, stunningly attractive young lady. Hilary told me that she has 18 hours dual so far, and will be ready to solo shortly. I wished them both well, and took their photo in front of the Cessna trainer.

Hopefully tomorrow I will be able to get going on the next leg in my journey west...if my land "ship" don't leak.



My table, overlooking the river. Note the "ceiling art" consisting of old outboard engines, old bicycles, old sleds, motor scooters, & gas signs



Gaston's flight line. Only two airplanes here today



Instructor Jim Watt and his church student Hilary in front of their Cessna 150. Isn't she pretty...the airplane that is. Well, OK, both.