

July 23 - 27th, 2008 - Branson, MO

Its been quite a while since I was last in [Branson](#)...probably 8 or 10 years ago. I was surprised to see the changes that had taken place over that period. I used to stop there with my motor home when I was doing some of my Georgia-Pacific plants in nearby Arkansas. In fact, in those days I would occasionally use my twin-Comanche for those trips and would then fly into the [Taney County](#) airport and stay over in motels for a few days. It's a lot more comfortable with the motor home though, since you spend each night in the same bed. Now I have the best of both worlds.

Anyway, I arrived in town in late afternoon on Wednesday and deposited the trailer at the general aviation maintenance building, after receiving the approval of their airport manager, Mark Parent. Because of the lateness of the hour, and the possibility of some afternoon thunderstorms, I decided not to unload the plane until the next morning. I drove the additional 7 or 8 miles to the Stagecoach RV park, which is right off of Table Rock Lake and next to the State Park located there. I really didn't feel like eating in on my first night and found that the Branson Belle showboat, which was located less than a mile from the RV park, had an 8 PM dinner show cruise. A quick telephone call secured a ticket for that evening, and after plugging in the motor home and grabbing a quick shower, it was off on the scooter and to the boat. The cruise around Table Rock lake was smooth, relaxing and quite enjoyable. The entertainment was really better than I had expected. There was the usual singing and dancing, a bit of "comedy" and a couple of "Russian" aerial ballet performers that reminded me of a Circ du'soleil act. By far the most unique portion of the evening was when a ventriloquist by the name of Todd Oliver came on stage with his 3 dogs. He somehow had trained these dogs to move their mouths open and closed when he touched them on their neck, thus giving the appearance that they were actually talking. It was quite a funny act, and one that he has apparently performed for various national TV shows. Even the food was tasty, so all in all it was an enjoyable "night out". This was my first time driving the Vespa in the dark, and I was somewhat apprehensive. Everything worked out OK, however, and I was back in my bus by 11 pm.

The next morning, July 24th, I was out the door a little after 7 AM, and at the airport 15 minutes later. It took about an hour to get the plane off loaded and set up. I have resolved not to be rushed into getting it into its flyable stage, in order not to make a mistake. I was concerned that the slightly uneven ground where the trailer was parked would create a slope problem for the ramp, so I was especially slow in wenching out the pulley that allowed the plane to roll down that ramp. However, by 8:30 all was secure and I did my first 30 minute flight around the lake. Since I wanted to try to get tickets for some of shows for that and subsequent evenings, I parked and tied down the plane and drove off on explore the old historic downtown area.

When flying off of Runway 11 I had noticed that the downtown waterfront on the smaller Lake Taneycomo (more like a long, narrow river than a lake) was nothing like what I remember the last time that I was there. Gone were the old shacks and cottages that previously dotted that lake. They



This is an aerial view of my campground. I have circled my motor home in red highlighter



The Branson Belle stern wheeler dinner showboat as seen from aloft



This is the Taney County-Branson Airport with its 3500 foot paved east-west runway



The original downtown area of Branson has been totally transformed to a large tourist pedestrian mall with upscale stores & shops.

had been replaced by a gigantic pedestrian mall, much like what we have seen in Europe. Shops, restaurants, hotels and boutiques were on either side of the pedestrian street, which ran for about a mile. There was a Bass Pro Shop on one side of the complex, a Belk department store on the other and a very large Hilton Hotel and condominiums directly across. A Harley Davidson motorcycle store was actually floating out on the lake, much like the casinos that I had seen in Memphis. This was certainly a unique development, and one that brought many more people to the downtown Branson Landing than I had ever seen during my past visits. The Taneycomo lake is a deep, cold waterway that begins at the hydro-electric dam on the upper Table Rock Lake and runs through the downtown area of Branson. It is known for its trout fishing, and on hot summer days provides a bit of relief if you are fortunate enough to have a boat with you. Since all that I had was a motor scooter and an airplane, the only relief that I was able to enjoy was a stroll along the boardwalk that was built as part of the redevelopment. That and a ice-cold lemonade purchased from one of the kiosks that lined the pedestrian mall.

This area, with its large series of interconnecting lakes, the infamous but beautiful White River (of the Clinton scandal days), rolling mountains, valleys, wooded forests and never ending scenery makes it a joy to see from both the ground and the air. I would start off each day with a 30 to 60 minute flight over spectacular never ending beauty. I would figure for a 20 minute flight, and would spend 45 minutes instead. It was hard to force myself to return to the airport, and it definitely set up my whole day as a positive uplifting experience. This is what private flying is all about. The ability to experience the world from a whole new perspective. Flying along at from 500 to 1000 feet over the ever changing scenery below and seeing how the geography of the area interconnects to form the hills and roads that you will later drive on is a great experience. While many people come to Branson for the shows and other tourist attractions, I believe that they are missing it finest attraction...its never ending natural beauty. While I will go into further detail about the Branson shows in my next posting, I want to spend a little more time and space in sharing with you some more photos of what I have been privileged to have seen during my week long stay here in the Ozark Mountain area of Branson.



Here the headwaters of the Taneycomo begin at the large hydro-electric dam of Table Rock



Perhaps the world's only floating Harley-Davidson motorcycle store on Taneycome Lake.



The downtown plaza with fountains & flowers



Having a picnic lunch at the State Park Marina



Downtown pedestrian mall and the free trolley

But first, a little about my “ground” travel. You have already seen pictures of my little Vespa 150cc scooter. It has served me quite admirably in my explorations of the area. It is said that it will provide 70 m.p.g. and will travel in excess of 70 m.p.h. I have done 65 on the Interstate, for just one exit between the campground and downtown, but I feel much more comfortable at 45 m.p.h. and it probably gives me about that much in mileage... although since I only put in \$5 at a time, I have not had the opportunity to check that out yet.

Once I get to the airport, my preflight inspection and a fuel top off of about 5 gallons of my avgas and automotive fuel mix takes me about a half hour to perform, since the plane is already “assembled”. I generally like to make at least a 30 minute flight each time I go up, which will burn about 2 1/2- 3 gallons of fuel. However the other day thunderstorms were being forecast, so I only planned for a short 10 minute flight. Once aloft, I saw nothing in any direction that would indicate stormy weather and my flight lasted a bit over an hour. I just kept wanting to see what was “just over the next hill.” And found it hard to psyche myself to begin going back.

One of the places that I wanted to try to find the “Big Cedar Lodge”, a really upscale resort that is owned by the Bass Pro Shop group, whose national headquarters are based just up the road in Springfield, MO. While we have never stayed overnight at that ultra-pricey place, we have made it over for dinners and their especially spectacular Sunday morning brunch. On one cold winter evening a dozen or so years ago we drove over to spend an hour or so just sitting in front of the very large outside fire ring, warming in its crackling glow. We just sat, talked and watched the flames lick their way skyward, sending out showers of sparks as it cracked and sputtered. It was probably the most romantic thing that I have done outside.

On my way back I happened to glance down at my GPS screen to check my heading to the Branson airport, and noted that the screen said “No Destination” selected. This about sums up what this flying is all about. There is really no destination...it is the journey that is enjoyable. Each day is different, and I head in whatever direction the spirit or my interest dictate. I fly until I am feeling good, and then I head back and begin my ground activities for the remainder of the day. Sometimes that involves riding around, looking at “tourist things”. Other days are more mundane, like doing laundry, or cleaning up the motor home. I will occasionally pursue my photos, weeding out those that are not very good. When I am in the mood, I put down some thoughts or notes on the computer for later retrieval for my blog.

One thing that I have been remiss about is my goal to have completed my year end business paperwork while out on this trek. I had planned to spend a little time each day in finishing up my financial work, so that my accountant can begin this year’s tax return. I have not even “cracked the book” in this matter. Oh well, perhaps there will be some rainy days along the way.



View of the Big Cedar Lodge resort complex



My instrument panel. The GPS map says “no destination”...although I am making good time.



A view of the big Table Top Lake and its islands



The big lake, its dam & Taneycomo Lake below