

Feb. 18, 2014 - Chalet Suzanne, Lake Wales, FL.

First, to answer a question recently asked of me, "Yes, I am still flying, but maintenance issues with my recent annual inspection took the Highlander out of use for all of January. However it is now back in service, and I am back in the air... almost every day! The main reason that there have been no new blog entries posted is that I generally don't like to write about a place that I have previously visited unless something interesting has occurred since my last flight. Chalet Suzanne is such a unique place to fly to that I tend to take a lot of friends there to enjoy both the eclectic lodging facilities that make up this interesting resort near Lake Wales, Florida, along with their world class gourmet restaurant. Such was the case today when I flew up there with a fellow that I had met a year ago over at my home base airport. Frank O'Conner is an ex-patriot Irishman, now relocated to Newfoundland, Canada. Each winter he makes a trip down to South Florida where he keeps a 42' sailboat. After several weeks of maintenance and tidying up, he then takes charters to the Bahamian Islands. Generally by May the 10 feet + of snow which had fallen back home has pretty much melted, and he returns back to his northern base until the following year.

Frank happened by my hanger this weekend and I invited him to return to accompany me up to the Chalet Suzanne airstrip for a lunch. It is about an hour and a quarter flight, including the slight detour to avoid the Avon Park Bombing Range. On final to

runway 18 I noticed two large birds grazing in the middle of the strip. Since they were right in my landing path I added a bit of power to continue over their heads and touched down at the halfway point on this 2,400 foot turf runway. If I had been flying anything other than a light sport aircraft I would have to had worked hard to get the plane stopped in time. In my case there was still plenty of runway left and on the way back to the parking area these 4 foot tall Sand Hill Cranes did not seem inclined to move off the strip.



One of the two airport Cranes

I gave my guest a tour around the Chalet Suzanne grounds and even got a chance to view into a couple of the cottages which are available for rental. One of the interesting places on the grounds is a sunken garden where the surrounding walls are covered with personalized glazed tiles commemorating some special event on the part of the Chalet's clients. This might be a wedding, an anniversary or even a special fly-in which is personally painted by the participants and then adhered to the wall for posterity. We found entries going back to the late '70's.

Following a delicious lunch of a broiled grapefruit appetizer and a 1/2 pound Angus steakburger, we returned to Indiantown where I had the opportunity to visit the marina where Frank was working on his vessel. I took a quick tour aboard the boat and then bid Frank a fond farewell until next winter's sojourn.



Aerial view of the Chalet Suzanne complex



Frank O'Conner and me on the Chalet's strip



Lunch in the resort's unique dining room



Frank O'Conner getting ready to board his 42' sailboat the "Morning Watch" out of Canada