

July 25, 2014 - Vero Beach, CJ Cannons Restaurant and the Chimpanzee Reserve

During Florida's summer months it is best that I try to schedule most of my flights during the early part of the day, so as to avoid the inevitable afternoon thunderstorms. However, way too often, necessary chores at home prevent me from getting out much before 10 or 11 AM. Such was the case today, so I decided to make it a short and sweet aerial adventure. I opted for Vero Beach, a mere 45 direct miles from my base airport. Besides I wanted to again check out an interesting complex that I had commented on in a previous blog entry. An unusual grouping of small "islands" well inland of Fort Pierce, Florida, and just to the south of Vero Beach, captured my attention on an earlier flight. At that time I thought that it might have been some sort of a boy-scout or juvenile boot camp or perhaps even a Ropes Course. Well, as it turns out, it is the world's largest chimpanzee sanctuary, run by the non profit "Save the Chimps" foundation. Home to almost 300 primates rescued from medical research, abandoned as pets, or obtained from various entertainment venues, they depend almost entirely on private donations to carry out their mission of salvation. After learning of this worthwhile charity, I gave a small contribution that helped feed a chimp for a month. Now I wanted to fly over the complex, once again, to see just how my adopted charge was doing. (LOL) While the adjacent aerial overview photo is mine, the poor quality picture just below it, showing staff members bringing "lunch" to the waiting chimps, comes from the foundation's web site. These animals now live, in family/community units, on each of the many separate "islands" that make up this complex. Once a year this facility opens its doors to its supporters, for tours, and I am hopeful of being able to attend one of these events in the future.

I have been to the Vero Beach airport literally dozens of times in the past, and why I have not written a blog article about it before. I really don't know. It has a friendly air control tower, along with an active flight training school catering to students from several European and Asian countries. In fact, earlier this week, I met a young man from Vietnam who was just completing his government's sponsored, and paid for, year long course at this school. He was obtaining aerobatics training, at my own home airport, something apparently not given at Vero, before heading back to Vietnam next week. Vero is also the current home to Piper Aircraft Company's last manufacturing facility here in the United States. Years ago my testing company did a lot of work at the Piper plant in Lakeland, Florida, prior to it closing down, and one of these days I would like to schedule a tour of their current facilities. However, for today my trip's purpose was to have lunch at CJ Cannons, an interesting aviation themed restaurant located in the airport's old historic terminal building.

My left downwind approach to runway 29L, in fact, took me right over that Piper manufacturing plant. A short roll out brought me to taxiway turn-off D-3 and into the ramp area in front of the restaurant. After a short wait in their comfortable lounge area, replete with WWII memorabilia, I was ushered into their aviation decorated restaurant and given a window booth, which allowed me a view of both my parked airplane as well as the runway that I had just landed on. After a nice lunch I headed back out to the ramp, and my airplane, for the 30 minute return flight home.



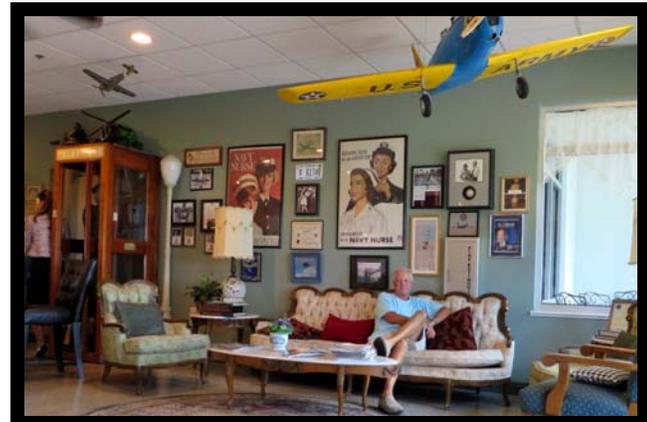
My overflight of the Chimpanzee Reserve complex



Foundation's web photo: The chimp's waiting lunch



Downwind leg, over the Piper plant to Runway 29L



Me, waiting for a lunch seat, in CJ Cannon's lounge