

July 9, 2013 - LaBelle, FL & Beef O'Bradys

Several people have inquired if I am still flying my Highlander since not much has been posted recently to my blog. In fact, I am flying more than ever... every nice day that south Florida, in the summer, offers. During the first half of 2013 I have actually logged over 100 hours on my little homebuilt airplane. Even during my active business flying days 200-250 yearly hours were all that I could ever muster. The reason that I have not posted much new is that I am now generally flying to the same dozen or so locations that I have previously reported on. Until I get to go somewhere new or interesting, I probably won't bore you with replays of trips past. In that regard, today I did fly to someplace new... but perhaps not all that interesting.

LaBelle Florida is a small city of 5,000, located on the Caloosahatchee River just to the west of the large Lake Okeechobee. Settled in the 1880's it is the county seat of Hendry County. Loosely translated from the French language, its meaning is "beautiful". So what made me want to make my first ever 75 mile flight to this small southern Florida city? Well, there were a couple of things. First, it was a beautiful summer day with only a 10% chance of rain showers, a rarity for Florida in July. Secondly, I wanted someplace new to fly to and I heard that it was a only a short walk from the Hendry County Airport into town. And, most importantly, it had some very cheap fuel, priced a dollar or more per gallon lower than other Florida airports. So, the die was cast. LaBelle would be today's destination.

My trip took me South, along side the eastern boundary of Lake Okeechobee and then over Clewiston, onto LaBelle. An easy hour or less trip in each direction. My flight was conducted at a low altitude of 1,500 feet to better enjoy the changing scenery below. Much of the trip was over the vast sugarland fields so prevalent in this part of South Florida. This is the year when, by law, the sugar growers can no longer burn off the fields prior to the harvesting of the cane. They are using a new approach that turns the fields brown, thus exposing the bare cane stalks. It was interesting seeing these brown fields next to the ready to harvest green fields and the black, already harvested, sections.

After overflying the city, so as to pick out the shopping center where Beef O'Bradys was located and determining it to be very walkable (see photo just adjacent), I set up for a base leg entry to Runway 14. On the 30 minute mile and a quarter jaunt to downtown (a courtesy car is available but I am on a Dr. ordered exercise regimen) I experienced what I would call a typical American small town, many to which I have traveled to on my work assignments around the US. It had the obligatory assortment of fast food joints, automotive parts stores, Dollar General merchandise marts and even a couple of automobile dealerships and farm stores. It was mid-west America at its finest and it made me proud to help out the local economy with my \$100 purchase of aviation fuel and a \$12 meal at one of its many eateries. While Beef O'Bradys is not exactly gourmet fare, the shaved beef on a sourdough roll topped with mashed potato, melted cheese and brown gravy was a substantial meal. However, on a hot summer day, thankfully some thick clouds made the walk back to the airfield more tolerable than the walk into town. Would I return to LaBelle in the future. For the cheap fuel? Most definitely. For the local cuisine? Well, one has to eat somewhere.



The Florida Sugarlands and Lake Okeechobee



The big US Sugar Refinery in Clewiston, Florida



Downtown LaBelle with Airport in the background



High final to Runway 14 at the Hendry Co. Airport. I made the first turn-off past the displaced threshold