

Sept. 22-26 - Wild and Wonderful West Virginia

One of my favorite places to work each year is West Virginia. I don't know if it is because of the time of the year that I am usually here ...during the Fall Foliage Season, or if it is the natural beauty of the mountains that make up such a large portion of this state that enchants me most. It might be because of the old, quaint, small cities with their historic charm, or perhaps it is because most of the jobs that I do here are for small saw mills which take only a few hours to complete. In any case, I enjoy coming to and working in West Virginia.

I arrived at Elkins in the late afternoon of Sunday, the 21st, and decided this year to base out of the new [Pegasus Farm](#) campground, which is just 1/4 mile off of the two paved runways at the Randolph County airport. The park's owner, Mark Branciaroli and his wife Bonnie are charming and gracious hosts. Mark is also a CFII (Instrument flight instructor) who used to own a center line thrust twin engine Cessna Skymaster (the 336 model, with fixed gear). So delighted about my arrival with my airplane was Mike, that he suggested that I fly out of an 800 foot long open field just adjacent to the campground. I momentarily considered it, until my aircraft insurance agent reminded me that an "off airport" incident would not sit well with my carrier...especially with a "real airport" just next door. So, on Monday, I brought my trailer over to the airport and made an hour long flight over to the nearby mountains. The higher elevations (above 3,000 feet) already had the beginning stages of color and I suspect that it will become more dramatic during this next week while I continue to work in the area. During this period, I hope to take advantage of the beautiful autumn weather with cool, crisp evenings followed by sunny mid 70 temperatures of the afternoons. Since I am generally back from my daily projects my mid day, this will be a perfect time for flights around Elkins and its adjacent mountain communities.

On Tuesday I flew over to [Seneca Rock](#), which is an interesting formation of sheer, bare white/gray Tuscarora quartzite rock jutting out from the adjacent rolling foliage covered hills. This is a 900 foot high geological formation which formed millions of years ago, and has become a mecca for rock climbing aficionados. Just a dozen or so miles beyond is the highest point in WV, Spruce Knob, which comes close to the 5,000 foot elevation mark. Interspersed are a myriad of meandering rivers, waterfalls, beautiful lakes, a multitude of ski runs, and state parks which will make flying over West Virginia a "wild and wonderful" adventure.

This is a view of the nearby town of Buckhannon. Its most notable citizen, Steve Coonts, attorney, author, movie screenwriter and ex-Navy Avenger pilot, wrote "The Cannibal Queen" That book was, in large part, my inspiration for my flying trip around the USA.



Elkins is a typical old, small & compact WV city



There is a lot of charm in these old WV towns



Elkins Airport w/ my campground circled in red



A close-up of the Pegasus Farm campground with its adjacent "runway" shown in red.



Flying over Mark's Sunflower Maze @ the campground



The Blackwater River water falls at the State Park



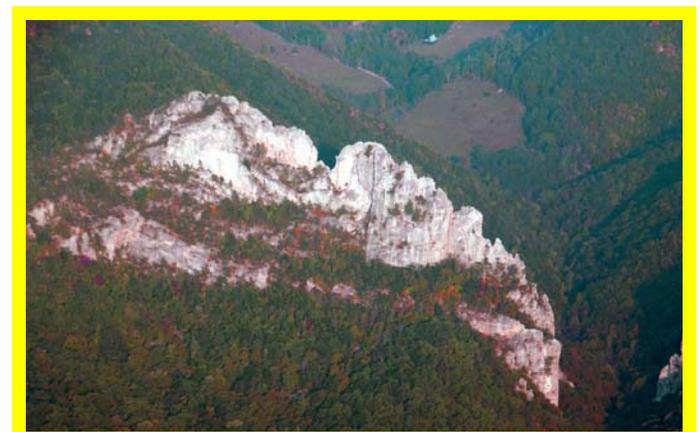
Color has already come to the higher elevations...



...and the leaves are equally beautiful from close-up



Seneca Rock & the mountains from 2,000 feet above...



...are even more dramatic up close at 500 feet

Having a rental car available during my WV stay allowed me to make many side trips, including the 40 mile drive over to the small city of Weston. While there I took a tour through the old State Psychiatric Hospital, affectionately known as the [The Trans-Allegheny Lunatic Asylum](#). This large Gothic Revival style facility was operated for well over 100 years, finally closing down in 1994. It was a grim, unsanitary and overcrowded place and reminded me of the type of institution featured in ["One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest"](#). It is said that the building is haunted and several "ghosts" of patients who died at that facility have made their presence known in the past. All that was missing from my hour long tour was Jack Nicholson and Nurse Ratchet.

