



GREG BROWN savors autumn leaf-peeping from the air, from New England hardwoods to aspens of the Mountain West.
www.GregBrownFlyingCarpet.com

Fortunately, I'd learned from last year's misadventure. This time I previewed online weather-radar coverage maps, and ADS-B ground-station coverage from which we'd receive weather and traffic data. (Sure enough, there's an ADS-B gap, too.) I loaded lots of fuel for the route, allowing hundreds of miles' diversion in case of unforecast weather. Given minimal radar coverage, I monitored satellite imagery for telltale cloud buildups. And along with gathering weather for the few airports within 100 miles of our route, I scanned nonaviation station reports for the tiny Native American communities passing under our wings.

Even then, every distant shadow raised the specter of last year's lurking weather. Despite such uncertainty, we thankfully encountered only widely scattered thunderstorms during the two-and-a-half-hour flight. Then, as if to reward our two-year ordeal getting here, we found ourselves sailing a sea of gold—"flaming" autumn aspen trees carpeted the 10,000-foot Uncompahgre Plateau almost to our destination. Following dazzling rainbows and shimmering gold, our long-awaited Montrose arrival felt anticlimactic. I begged out of brunch with Jean's waiting family, and quickly launched homeward over those gilded aspens, hopefully before new thunderstorms could obstruct my route.

I dodged a few isolated cells on the way home, but the eye-opener was a line of thundershowers blocking Flagstaff precisely where we'd bypassed the first one outbound hours earlier. I skimmed Mount Elden in light rain, ogled distant sun-silhouetted thunderheads, and landed in the clear.

Made it! I thought, taxiing to the hangar. But before I could get out, a downpour struck from nowhere. After four and a half unscathed hours aloft, I got soaked opening the hangar. But the drenching seemed a small price for the day's exploits.

When I collected my passengers several days later, for once there were no thunderstorms and the golden aspens shone brighter than ever. Lessons learned? When flying new-to-you routes, especially across remote areas, check in advance for weather-radar and ADS-B coverage gaps, so you can better judge whether an empty screen truly means clear skies ahead. And although piloting may sometimes be stressful, overcoming the challenges often rewards us with great adventure and amazing sights that other people never get to see. **FT**

SEA OF GOLD

We'd cleared a nasty line of thunderstorms departing Flagstaff, surmounted a vivid rainbow, and now cruised cumulus-flecked skies toward Montrose, Colorado.



"Flaming" autumn aspens carpet Colorado's Uncompahgre Plateau.

Although datalink weather suggested clear sailing the rest of the way, I'd previously learned the hard way that an empty weather screen doesn't necessarily equal "no thunderstorms." After an unknown-to-anyone squall line turned us around half-way to Montrose last year, I'd discovered the large weather-radar gap spanning the Four Corners area due to lack of antennae.

We'd been so traumatized by last year's U-turn, and Jean's subsequent 16-hour round-trip drive, that she'd investigated flying airlines this year instead. But between such remote locations, general aviation can indeed save money. Yes, *Flying Carpet* fuel would cost \$400 to \$500 to drop and retrieve Jean and her mother, but far less convenient Phoenix-to-Grand Junction airline tickets priced out at \$750 apiece.