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**DOWNTOWN FORT WORTH'S** Sundance Square, glimpsed through a hole in the clouds.

# TOURING TEXAS

## BEST MILKSHAKES EAST OF THE PECOS

**T**his year's AOPA Summit had long been marked on my calendar. I'd never been to Fort Worth, Texas, unless you count in pilot parlance, "I've flown over it." And just two states from Arizona, it initially appeared within reasonable *Flying Carpet* range. I was soon reminded, however, of how big those states really are—we faced an 11-hour round trip. Then Jean was invited to a San Antonio meeting the week after Summit. I phoned Texas pilot friend Sergio Schaar to ask where to relax over the intervening weekend.

"Consider Fredericksburg, in the Texas Hill Country," he said. "It's known for wine and German cuisine, and you could stay at the Hangar Hotel right there on the airport." Sergio suggested that we could take advantage of the \$1-per-gallon avgas promotion at San Marcos Airport, "though I've heard there's a two-hour wait." Landing at San Marcos also would allow me to tour Redbird Skyport's touted "aviation laboratory." Each additional destination made the long journey more attractive.

We fled Flagstaff ahead of a huge storm system rolling in from the west. Although

turbulent, powerful tailwinds urged us along ahead of the approaching cold front.

*Poof!* Jogged by a bump, Jean's elbow popped open the passenger window some 60 miles out. After recovering from that ear-bending shock, we motored uneventfully over eastern Arizona, New Mexico,

and Texas. It's always astounding crossing just a handful of towns in five and a half hours over the endless Southwest. Arriving the day before Summit proved painless. Upon crossing the convention arrival procedure's inbound reporting fix, we were cleared direct to Fort Worth Meacham International Airport.

"Welcome to Texas!" Sergio texted after we landed. Clearly he had been following our progress. At Summit, Jean and I caught up on new technology and old friends. We joined fellow conventioners at the town's famed Stockyards for barbecue, classic country music, and a rodeo.

We'd known that the cold front we'd escaped in Arizona would eventually catch us, and that happened as we departed for Fredericksburg. Thunderstorms weren't a problem, but we'd be cloud-flying. I'm rarely assigned instrument departure procedures when flying the desert Southwest. So, when issued a particularly complex one departing Meacham, I asked clearance delivery to go over it with me.

"Wait, I'll pull out my chart," the controller cheerfully replied, and together we reviewed it. "Radio back with any more questions," he drawled. "Y'all have a good flight!" Departing Meacham, I glanced downward through a hole in the clouds to discover Fort Worth's Sundance Square, where we'd enjoyed the past five days. After 90 pleasant minutes between cloud layers, we emerged into hazy visual conditions near Fredericksburg, so I cancelled the instrument flight plan and abandoned my programmed GPS approach.

### TRAVEL LOG: GILLESPIE COUNTY (T82)

**Runways:** 14/32, 5,001 X 75 feet

**Location:** Three miles southwest of Fredericksburg

**Extra:** The Hangar Hotel ([www.hangarhotel.com](http://www.hangarhotel.com)) is a re-creation of a World War II military hangar.

**Elevation:** 1,695 feet

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“Where’s the airport?” Jean asked. But I couldn’t see it—nor, for the moment, remember how to cancel the loaded approach. So I aimed in the general direction and, assisted by Jean and her tablet GPS, found Gillespie County Airport hiding behind some low hills.

Fredericksburg’s legendary Hangar Hotel was booked, but Jean and I strolled from our tiedown to check it out. The desk clerk showed us around and boasted of the adjacent Airport Diner.

“Best milkshakes east of the Pecos River,” she said, so we moseyed next door into an old-style stainless-steel diner for a huge vanilla malt.

“Who makes the best milkshakes *west* of the Pecos?” I asked, back at the hotel. The woman blushed and shrugged. Jean has volunteered to conduct further research.

I resist hard appointments when piloting, but sometimes they’re unavoidable. Departure morning found us still under the shadow of the lingering front. I wanted to land at San Marcos to experience \$1 fuel and Redbird Skyport, but the forecast suggested we might get stuck there.

It’s work flying instruments in unfamiliar territory, especially not knowing local fixes on a short 35-minute flight. So early on our San Antonio hop I requested and dialed in an approach to Stinson Municipal Airport, but we departed the clouds before getting there and landed in the clear.

“You made a good decision flying direct today,” said Sergio that night over dinner. “Thunderstorms bracketed San Marcos after you took off.”


“Is Sergio seriously tracking our entire trip on his computer?” asked Jean.

“Yes,” laughed his wife, Deanna. “When it comes to airplanes, no amount of detail is too much for Sergio.” Then our talk turned to weather. That same gargantuan cold front was now stalled in a great stormy arc from West Texas to Michigan.

“I’m afraid you’re not flying home anytime soon, Greg,” said Sergio, and it appeared he was right. 🐉

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