



COMMENTARY

/ 04.10 /

FLYING CARPET / By Greg Brown

BREAKFAST AT BAR 10 RANCH

A MEAL WITH A VIEW



"Hey, Greg, I just wondered if you and Miss Jean are joining the 'airport slugs' on Sunday for breakfast at the Bar 10 Ranch." It was my cowboy buddy, Baldy, calling from Seligman.

"Is it safe to land there?" I asked..

"Last time we flew over, that strip looked way too rugged for our airplane. And didn't someone clip a wing there last year?"



"Yeah, but I understand they've chip-sealed much of the runway since then, and cleared the brush farther from the pavement. Besides, that was a low-wing airplane; high-wing Cessnas like ours should have no problem. I'm taking my visiting high-school friend Janice over there in Critter. If I can get in and out flying an old Cessna 172, you'll certainly have no problem in the Carpet."

A cattle ranch on the Grand Canyon's remote North Rim, the Bar 10 has built a booming business accommodating Colorado River runners. Rafters leaving the river at Whitmore Wash (river mile 187) are hoisted to the Bar 10 by helicopter, and then ferried to Las

Vegas on rugged Dornier 228 turboprops. Although Jean and I had overflown the barren strip, we'd never spotted any ranch buildings. The runway was untreated dirt back then, and given its remote side-canyon location, it was someplace you'd hardly dare to land in case you couldn't get out again. Unlike the cushy grass strips found elsewhere, Arizona's backcountry airports are rocky, dusty dirt—unsuitable for low wings, wheel fairings, or the faint of heart.

So before joining the fly-in, I sought out pilots who'd recently flown there, and perused Internet videos others had taken during landing. I finally signed on when Dave Sanders, the trip's organizer, assured me that the ranch owners have adequately improved the runway so competent light-airplane pilots can land and take off entirely on the sealed portion. Going with the group offered additional support.

The Bar 10 is only 45 minutes from Flagstaff, but oh, what a flight! Westward we flew, ogling golden aspens on Bill Williams Mountain, then the western Grand Canyon's South Rim, and finally the jumbled geometry of the great chasm itself. En route there was considerable air-to-air radio discussion.

"Last year a Mooney scraped some brush on landing," said someone, "and an RV-6 was damaged badly enough that it had to be disassembled and towed out."

"Two airplanes hit bushes?" replied Jean. "I thought there was only one!" Others on frequency reassured us that the brush had since been trimmed, and the field improved. "Anyway, a high-wing Cessna is landing first to check field conditions."

Soon the Bar 10's "Whitmore International Airport" (1Z1) appeared, perched perpendicular to the Grand Canyon in a deep side canyon surrounded on three sides by high plateau and open on the fourth to the abyss. Add a northward upslope, and it's pretty much a one-way airstrip—aircraft approach from and depart toward the canyon side. You cannot descend or climb over the Grand Canyon itself, however, as the airport's open side is largely blocked by the Grand Canyon Special Flight Rules Area.

After the lead Cessna confirmed good runway conditions, a dozen airplanes from Flagstaff, Aguila, and Seligman converged into that confined airspace, but aided by Dave's radio choreography, everyone did a great job of announcing and spacing their pattern positions.



In sequence, we crossed the restricted airspace above 9,000 feet; skimmed breathtakingly low over the surrounding 7,000-foot plateau on upwind, crosswind, and downwind; and upon clearing it, plunged earthward toward the rudimentary airstrip floating 3,500 feet beneath us in otherworldly color and light.

We turned a long final, allowing the preceding airplane seemingly lots of space, but as we approached Jean said, "I hope that airplane gets off the runway." Given the upslope and rapidly rising terrain, this is no place to go around. The prior aircraft exited just before we touched down. All too soon we understood his delay, as we too jumped onto the solid-but-coarse runway surface and frantically shoved our airplane into the weeds to accommodate those behind us.

Once everyone had landed uneventfully (including two low-wing airplanes), Bar 10 wrangler Lane Gardner shuttled us a half-mile to the ranch house in its tiny oasis of trees, where home-cooked eggs, bacon, and pancakes awaited us. After brunching on the patio, we investigated the covered wagons where overnight guests sleep and viewed caged rattlesnakes captured nearby. Most of the pilots then took off, but a few of us lingered for scenic horseback rides. We soon learned that our wrangler was interested in becoming a pilot.

"It would be far easier flying in here than driving," said Lane. "It's 80 miles to the nearest paved road." Afterward, we walked back to the strip. Always the gentleman, Dave insisted upon being last to leave. Like a bronc-riding cowboy, Baldy gunned Critter down the runway with Janice, followed by Jean and me in the Flying Carpet, and then Dave in his Cessna 182. Each of us climbed southward until high enough to clear the surrounding plateau; then ascended northbound to 9,500 feet before heading south again over the Canyon.

"Incredible!" said Jean as she photographed the Colorado River snaking far below us. "Here we are crossing one of the great wonders of the world—for a horseback ride and Sunday brunch!"

GREG BROWN'S books include *Flying Carpet*, *The Savvy Flight Instructor*, and *You Can Fly!*.

TRAVEL LOG: GRAND CANYON BAR 10 AIRSTRIP (1Z1)

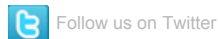
RUNWAY 16/34

LENGTH: 4,500 feet (slopes uphill; south to north)

WIDTH: 33 feet

CHIP AND SEAL SURFACE: 4,000 feet; **DIRT:** 500 feet

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