



As often as **GREG BROWN** flies the Grand Canyon, neither the thrill nor the apprehension entirely fade away.
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ACROSS THE WORLD

Thursday, I flew to meet a pilot friend for lunch. Sounds routine, doesn't it? But Uwe Goehl, a Canadian Airbus captain who flies the world for a Middle Eastern airline, lives in far-away Abu Dhabi.

We last met six years ago, so when Uwe enrolled in hot air balloon training just across the state line at Hurricane, Utah, I jumped at the chance to reconnect. As always when bound for unfamiliar airports, I phoned ahead.

"As long as you're not staying over the weekend," said Art Granger, manager of Hurricane's General Dick Stout Field (1L8). "We're closing the runway for reconstruction Monday morning—you wouldn't want to get stuck here for three months."

That got my attention. Sure, I planned only a day trip, but what if delayed by weather or an unexpected mechanical problem? I remembered my friend Julie, whose airplane was stranded at another airport when runway reconstruction started two days early and she couldn't leave. So I arranged to meet Uwe at nearby St. George Regional Airport (SGU), instead.

St. George is only 150 miles from Flagstaff, Arizona, but over a stunningly remote route. Halfway lies none other than the Grand Canyon, followed by the uninhabited "Arizona Strip." En route, only Grand Canyon National Park Airport reports weather, beyond which there are no airstrips, towns, or even ranches for 100 miles. So while excited, I obsessively double-checked my survival kit, outerwear, water, and energy bars.

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Weather was a concern, too. Snow was expected over the weekend, with mid-level clouds developing Thursday evening. Given minimum altitudes of the Grand Canyon Special Flight Rules Area, any cloud deck must be 3,000 to 4,000 feet above ground to safely and legally cross.

Such concerns were forgotten when I soared that sparkling morning around Arizona's snowcapped San Francisco Peaks, then over a sea of volcanic cinder cones. Entering the Grand Canyon's Tuckup Corridor, I ogled the Colorado River meandering through the jumbled chasm far below. Beyond the desolate Arizona Strip, St. George welcomed me with the gargantuan Hurricane Cliffs and snow-covered Pine Valley Mountains. Is there a more dazzling 75-minute flight anywhere?

Over burritos in St. George, my friend and I caught up on life, flying, and world events. On days off, Uwe flies general aviation, holding glider, gyroplane, powered paraglider, weight-shift-control sport pilot, and shortly, hot air balloon ratings. And it was fascinating hearing political perspectives from elsewhere in the world.

"Great seeing you!" said Uwe afterward, sending me home with a gift box of delicious Dubai dates. "Your visit wonderfully demonstrates the convenience of private aviation." A one-time Arizonan, he knew my brief *Flying Carpet* ride compared to six hours' drive each way around the Grand Canyon.

Ceilings indeed lowered as I approached the Tuckup Corridor, but happily the only impacts were scenic—the canyon played peekaboo through virga veils, and the San Francisco Peaks welcomed me home with a halo of snowshowers.

I landed at Flagstaff brimming with excitement. Between scenic marvels and multinational dining companion, my brief lunch flight seemed a great journey across the world. **FT**