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Re: Western Canada SAREX; Yellowknife

Wednesday August 12, 2009

Day begins at 7:30 AM, with a call from the zone commander that the other guys, Chuck, Al, and Bob were just leaving Wpg and should arrive at Grace Lake Airport around 11-11:30 AM.

Verified that Roy would be available to fuel the plane when they arrive.

Weather clear unlimited visibility.

11:45 AM plane lands, my first thoughts were man that's a small plane for four people to be in for this trip.

Fueled up, introductions made, and we are off. First question after take off was, "Ray which house is yours?" I said see that big building at 9 o'clock. Well that's not it, but look across the street and that little house is mine."

Transit to Yellowknife was to fly to Edmonton Municipal airport and overnight before continuing on to Yellowknife.

First stop, Prince Albert, Sk. to take on fuel. Chuck piloted the plane into the airport nicely. Topped the tanks off and we were off again.

Lined up and started to roll on the runway and after about 7-800 feet bam we seemed to be airborne. Chucks description was, "pop", now that's never happened before. It was weird as it seemed we were just starting our roll when we lifted about 50 feet and just started flying again....fasted take-off ever for me.

Transiting across Sk was very scenic, lots to see and because I've driven this route many times as a truck driver it was very intriguing to see the sites from the air.

As we approached our next stop Lethbridge Alt. we began to see all the oil wells and oil drilling rigs. They are everywhere and seemed to be no end to them.

As a spotter while we were in transit there really wasn't a lot to do except to try and figure out how my spot worked and to be able to have the time to play with it was as well very rewarding because now I know how to set up the shared page, how to get the spot to sent, "just checking in msg's, and how to get the tracking to work."

Not to mention the comedy we all shared. Imagine giving the pilot direction with my lips when he would say where is this or that, and me responding by pointing with my lips, over there. Of course this was just done in jest and the proper directions were found to provide him the information he asked about.

I haven't been in Edmonton for over 30 years and flying in I could not recognize any landmarks I used to go by when I drove in from the Yellowhead Route.

The landing was not much of a challenge for Chuck it seemed as we had another plane in front of us that provide us all with a visual to the runway.

On landing we were provided a flyover by a Herc which was preparing to land at the airport behind us.

Our stay at the Ramada was interesting, halfway through the night I heard something that woke me up. Seems my roommate was giving what sounded like radio calls in his sleep, but I guess he got the right answers to his calls because he never woke up and the night went on.

Thursday August 13, 2009

Breakfast was at 07:30.

My day started at 05:30, so it seems regardless where I am if the sun comes up I'm awake. I swear it's a curse.

However it wasn't all a total waste, because I geocache (finding locations using GPS technology) in my recreational time, and a short walk away was a location I had wanted to find anyways.

When I returned to the hotel I noticed Chuck and Al already in the dining room waiting for breakfast.

Quick rush upstairs, change into my flight suit, back down for a hardy breakfast.

After the loading of our stuff, and doing the preflight checks it was time to begin our day, off the apron to do our run up and we hear over the headset, "oh, oh that's not right, we have a dead mag." Now if something was going to go wrong this was the right place to find out we had a problem, on the ground. Back to the apron to find a mechanic.

However Chuck with his advanced knowledge and his advanced aeronautical skills figured out what was wrong, not to mention the long distant phone call to John (owner of the plane).

It seems the ignition switch works better in the on position vs. the off position...oppp's pilot error.

Off we go, north bound, next stop High Prairie, practicing spotting by calling out towers, and other unusual landmarks.

On to Peace River, where our stay there while taking on fuel was not only worth the view but it seems the cat living at the terminal took a liking to me and decided I was a better comfort pillow and settled in for a nap while I was sitting on the couch. Made a friend in Peace River.

As flew along side the foot hills the clouds started building making it necessary to fly around the low clouds a bit. Again worth the ride, as the view was spectacular.

Next stop was in High Level and from my perspective this was a real nice airport and the views were again spectacular.

This was where someone decided cleaning the windshields was the spotter's responsibility.

Someone decided spotters must clean the spots. And of course the guy who made up this rule was a lot shorter than me so guess who got the hard to reach spots.

Next stop Hay River, by this time Bob and I were getting pretty good at finding the flight supplement and bookmarking the airports for Chuck's reference. For our landing where afforded a spectacular view of Great Slave Lake (or should I say, in-land ocean).

On arrival we saw several DC3's and 4's parked behind the terminal belonging to Buffalo airlines. These planes were still in service.

After fueling the plane was taxied over in front of the terminal while there we witnessed one DC3 take off what a treat to see.

Shortly before loading again another DC3 landed and like any normal person would think they would want access to load and unload in front of the terminal. Well we started pushing our plane out of the way and this guy comes running up to us expressing us excitedly saying where we were pushing our plane to was where that plane was going to park and we didn't want to take that spot because the pilot was Buffalo Joe. Go figure, well back in front of the terminal we pushed.

This was to be our last stop before Yellowknife but transiting over the water was out of the question it was decided to transit the western land shore and cross over the lake where there were just short water crossings.

As we approached Yellowknife the best landmark was the headframe of the mine in the middle of the city. Pretty easy navigating there.

It appeared several planes were already in before us but a parking spot was found and we tied down for the night.

Terry Lumb was in before us and along with the many local CASARA members greeted us as we disembarked.

Off to the hotel for a much needed rest, which turned out to be shorter than expected, we where scheduled a flight for Friday as it seemed the organizers wanted an opportunity to do a shack down of their operations and tasking before the big day Saturday.

Friday August 14, 2009

Back at the airport for 09:00 hours.

As we approached the plane we where met by CBC who was filming our take off.

Tasking was done for a shore line search, our task was to try and locate a boat which was over due. Descriptions where given, turns out we where to find an orange tarp on the ground. Almost immediately on task we called several turn arounds which where marked while we continued the search pattern.

At approximately N 62.14.487 W 114.05.544 a call around was made where an orange tarp was spotted outside a cabin on an island. This tarp was surrounded by three buildings one having a silver roof and a long dock near the bay in front of the cabin. Location marked and we continued our task.

On task another call around was made due to a sunken boat being observed. Located at approximately N 62.12.469 W 113. 54.640. Bob had spotted this and the turn around was good and along with several photo's we then continued on our task.

No other items where found except several sets of rapids.

Back to Yellowknife, where we debriefed and where told we had successfully found our targets.

At approximately 17:30 we all went to the meet and greet to receive our safety briefings, and operations reports from the organizers.

Originally there where 19 planes registered, however due to weather in the south only 15 planes where able to make the SAREX.

Planes of all types where there, float planes, Cessna's, pipers etc.

Saturday August 15, 2009

Weather partially cloudy winds light.

First tasking was to do a sector search north of Yellowknife, at N 63.06 W 113.41 last known positions. Search object type was a C-185 over due.

On arrival to the plane we again where approached by the organizers asking us if we would mind taking a small video camera up with us to tape some footage for the CBC. Well naturally Terry said we would and I was given the task to be the camera operator. We took about an hour of film while we where on task.

After the briefing we left Yellowknife and on transit we picked up an ELT transmitting. We called Op's and received permission to break off our original task to begin doing an ELT search. This searched proved difficult to us as spotters due to the terrain having so much copper or iron oxide showing which resulted in many call arounds to view the observed rock formations.

I don't know how many people have seen Ice Road truckers on TV, but on that show there is a mine they go to called Discovery Diamond Mine.

As we flew over the North end of the runway an orange target was spotted on the edge of the float dock. N 63.11.263 W 113.53.459.

We where convinced this was our target and as we made a pass over the north end of the runway another call around was made to verify another possible target on the northwest side of the runway. A pink tarp and what appeared to be a transmitter sitting in the middle of it N 63. 11. 263 W 113.53.716.

Several flyovers verified that this was our target vs the previous target.

We left to transit back to Yellowknife.

On arrival again with the seemly blessing of our own Terry Lumb I was interviewed by CBC as it seemed after talking to the reporter, nobody was too egger to provide them with any interviews. Oh well, another opportunity for fame and glory for Manitoba.

The Organizing Committee had a windup Saturday night at the curling club where everyone enjoyed a meal consisting of corn on the cob, Cajun spare ribs, chicken, smashed potatoes, rice and many other tasty food items.

Sunday August 17, 2009

Weather partially cloudy,

Different route planned for our transit back to Manitoba. This route would take us over the East side of Great Slave Lake alongside the Slave River taking us to Fort Smith, Alt.

The view while transiting over the North of Saskatchewan was again spectacular, ravines, barren land, beautiful lakes which shone with almost teal colored water and lakes with the sandiest beaches outside of Mediterranean beaches.

From Fort Smith we travelled to Stoney Rapids to take on more fuel. Again the view was terrific, I counted seven sets of rapids in the river beginning right outside the community.

From Stoney Rapids we continued east to Long Point and while there we were able to watch a helicopter enter the airport with a cargo line attached beneath it and land, take on fuel and then take off again.

From there we made beeline to Flin Flon Manitoba, where we arrived right at sundown. Weather was beginning to be a factor as there was a weather front almost starting right over The Pas continuing through the interlake.

This was a factor and decisions had to be made whether to take off or hang out until it cleared. Fortunately because of night fall that decision would be made in the morning.

Wake up August 17 resulted in cloud cover and some rain in The Pas. After fueling the plane we left to The Pas where we sneaked into Grace Lake under the clouds.

This was where I left the crew, they left Grace Lake much as they had arrived, in a small Cessna 172 only heading south this time.

I went home and tracked the flight by accessing Chuck's spot he had on board.

Link to show our Routes to Yellowknife and return to Grace Lake.

http://www.everytrail.com/view_trip.php?trip_id=318226

I want to thank the persons who made the selections and I would like to think what I've taken from this exercise is the knowledge that the standardization of our training makes it possible for anyone to go on any flight regardless of where they may be and fit into the same procedures and make a difference on our assigned duties.

Together we can make a difference and save a life.

Sincerely,

Ray Young