

Oshkosh bound in a PA28-140

I started planning for this trip about a month and a half ahead of departure date, so I would be sure to get "all available information regarding the flight" well in hand. The first thing I did was to buy a set of WAC and Sectional charts for the route. For those route segments that covered both sides of the WAC I bought two so I could visualize the route at one time. I laid out all the charts on my living room floor and drew a line with a big green highlighter.

Planning for fuel stops was next, and since I wanted to fly, not be hanging around airports I planned for legs based on 0 winds aloft, but knowing that eastbound I would have help from the wind. My thought was that the actual winds aloft would give me the VFR reserve that I needed. So with no wind help I planned Great Falls, Pierre SD, and Eau Claire WI for fuel. That would also give me plenty of gas in the tanks for holding over Ripon and/or Fisk..

I thought about loading the airplane too. We were going to be camping in the North Forty at OSH so I had to get all that stuff plus food plus clothes plus, plus, plus..... I removed the back seats, remember that someone on the thread said there is no real luggage compartment in a 140, and they are correct, but with the rear seats out, you have about 12 cubic feet of space. Guess what? A tent, two sleeping bags, one air mattress, one air mattress pump (you don't think I'm going to blow that thing up with lung power do ya?) two coolers, two suitcases, one camera bag, one flight bag, fills up 12 cubic feet of space.

Now for the flight it's self. We wanted to get an early start, so as to arrive at OSH before they closed, so it was plenty dark. Wx briefing showed VFR over the whole route except at PAE, our home field. PAE is Paine Field, Everett WA, the home of the Boeing wide body factory. So I filed IFR to GTF and off we went. Now MEAs (Minimum Enroute Altitude) across the Cascades is only 8000, so I filed for 9K eastbound and I knew that old 54T would do that easy. That part that was worrisome was between Mullin Pass VOR and GTF the MEA is 13000.

Earlier I had anticipated this so Hella and I (Hella is my SO) decided to find the service ceiling of 54T. We loaded her up with full fuel and threw a bunch of stuff in the back to make her heavy and off we went. This was about a week prior to the actual departure. Up we go 9K, 10K, 11K, no problem, 12K starting to get a little puny in the climb department, 13K, wow, still climbing at 50 ft/m. Well here we are, airspeed at Vy TAS and climb rate 0 and we are at a pressure altitude of 13,300. So there you have it gang. The service ceiling of a 140. Well, on that day anyway. YMMV.

Well, with a max of 13.3, an MEA of 13, and a TAS of slow at that altitude, IFR was out of the question for the entire route, so I thought I would go IFR across the Cascades, because it was (as it usually is) VFR on the East side. I would then go "on top" the rest of the way to GTF. Great Plan. We got our clearance of PAE D SEA V2 MLP V120 GTF as filed, maintain 9000. Cool – just like I wanted. As usual, around Seattle you always get vectors east of SEA to keep out of the way of SeaTac so I was given a SE heading and told to intercept V2 and proceed on course. It's what I anticipated so no surprise. What was a surprise was about a half hour into the climb, I was given a 270 heading. "Why?" I queried, I'm going to Great Falls. The controller said, well at your present climb rate you will run into the mountains prior to crossing them. Ok says I, 270 - you got it. A few minutes later the controller comes back with another turn to 110 to re-intercept V2 and all was well.

Now level at 9er000 and cruising merrily along we neared ELN and broke out into the clear. It's still dark, but the night sky was really nice to see. Keep going... We proceed "on top" and started our climb to a nice on top altitude of 11500 to cross MLP and as soon as we are past the last of the tall hills we started our descent into GTF. The sun is just starting to peek up on the eastern horizon. What a sight! We land in GTF and fuel up and find that we indeed had plenty of IFR fuel remaining. Interesting, it's still dark on the ground. Twenty minutes later we are airborne again heading for SD our next stop.

In 54T I have dual nav/coms, and Loran, so I do a lot of Loran direct stuff when it's VFR, and this flight is no different. Plug in PIR, fly the heading that holds the CDI steady and watch the world go by. Well about half way we lost the Loran signal, but no big deal, as there are no transmitters around there, so I had expected it. What I had not expected was that VORs are far apart too, so I lost them too. Since I didn't want to climb high again just to get a signal I just flew the heading that I knew was holding course, and about an hour later I started picking up the VOR again. Wow! I'm right on course. That dead reckoning/pilotage stuff that I have been teaching for 20 years really does work..

At GTF there was a Mooney that took off just after us and he too said he was enroute to Pierre. Apparently Mooneys gather at several places around the country and then fly a loose formation on to OSH. Pierre is one of those places. When we got there, there were about 30 of them already on the ground. Quite a sight. They let us in too, but made us park away from them. "We don't want any Piper germs on our birds" ---- just kidding ---- they were a great bunch of people. The one that left GTF behind up beat us to PIR by an hour. Not fair.

It's now mid-day and off again to Eau Claire. Routine flight, with the exception that there were a lot of those big white puffy clouds along the way. The ride below them was a little bumpy so I thought I would go over them. Remember that I'm from the left coast and build ups around here top out at 8 or 9 thousand. Well at 11,500 still climbing and flying around those guys it became painfully clear that over the top was not happening today. So we basically just stayed there and dodged around them for the next hour or so, kind of just keeping the CDI on the VOR from going full scale. What the heck, it worked. After the fuel stop at Eau Claire, it's on to Oshkosh, and our new home for the next few days.

If you have not flown into Oshkosh, I guess it's called Air Adventure now, it is a trip. I got a copy online of the NOTAM regarding arriving and departing OSH. It's 32 pages long, so if you plan on going be sure to really understand this. Remember that there are 10,000 doing the same thing you are. We tuned into the Ripon ATIS about 40 miles west and found that they were holding airplanes prior to Ripon, but to proceed toward. The instructions were to fly south of Ripon and find someone and follow them. We did and joined about 10 airplanes a few miles south. We just orbited at 90 kts at 1800 msl and finally were advised by approach control to

proceed inbound. At Ripon we flew over the railroad tracks and listened to approach control. Per the NOTAM, do talk unless spoken to. ATC does all the talking and identifies you by color and type. For example White and blue Cherokee over Fisk rock your wings and rock 'em hard. We do about a 45degree bank waggle and they acknowledge White and blue Cherokee follow the Tailercraft ahead, and listen to OSH tower on 126.6. We keep the T-craft insight and switch to tower. Tower is as busy as approach control, with nonstop chatter. They are landing us on Rwy 18, and have the runway split into 4 runways. They have right side at the numbers, left side at the numbers, and midfield left and right. They then rotate through these four positions, so it goes something like, "Blue bonanza, put it on the right side numbers and rock your wings if you can do that - great, you are cleared to land - yellow J3 you are cleared to land midfield on the left side, keep your speed up, I have an Aztec following you - Tan Aztec, give me your slowest speed on final, you are following a J-3 and I'll buy the beer if you have to go around - white and blue Cherokee, land midfield on the right side - rock your wings to acknowledge - great - you are cleared to land....."

After landing, you can imagine that ground control is just as busy, so after landing and clearing the runway as soon as possible, and that means exit anywhere to the side you landed on. So we turned right in between two runway lights and were clear. Then you put a sign in the windshield stating where you wish to park. We were going to the north forty, so ours was GAC which means General Aviation Camping. Others are HB for homebuilts WB for warbirds etc. People with orange paddles direct you to the area you want to park. It is totally amazing how well it works out.

We taxi for about half an hour with the aid of the flaggers, and finally get parked. Here is our home for the next week.

Looking in the front door – That's Hella happy to be home. Looking out the front door – nice neighborhood.

