

■ ■ One of the occupational hazards of the jet set is "jet fatigue" induced by fast movement through time zones. But lightplane pilots, who take all night to fly across the North Atlantic, have their own brand of fatigue.

It was 9 a.m. when I landed at Shannon, Ireland, 12 hours 5 minutes after takeoff from Gander in "Willie," my 1947 Bonanza which I have owned for 20 years. I was already well into a 9,000-mile round trip from my home in Plainfield, Ind., to Europe and back.

The hotel room was quiet, spacious, and the bed very comfortable. I was tired but I had difficulty getting to sleep. The tension of a 2,000-mile flight in a small plane can't be turned off as a

switch, rather it must wind down as the wheel in a gyroscope.

Refreshed after seven hours of sleep, I walked across the street to the terminal for a check on the weather to London. A cold front over the Atlantic was predicted to move into the London area the next morning. I wasn't wild about the prospect of an instrument approach to Gatwick airport, 25 miles south of London, because the area was strange to me. So I thanked the young meteorologist and told him I would be back tomorrow; in the meantime I'd visit the Irish countryside.

I explained to a pink-cheeked colleen in one of the many tour booths in the terminal that I had a day to spend.



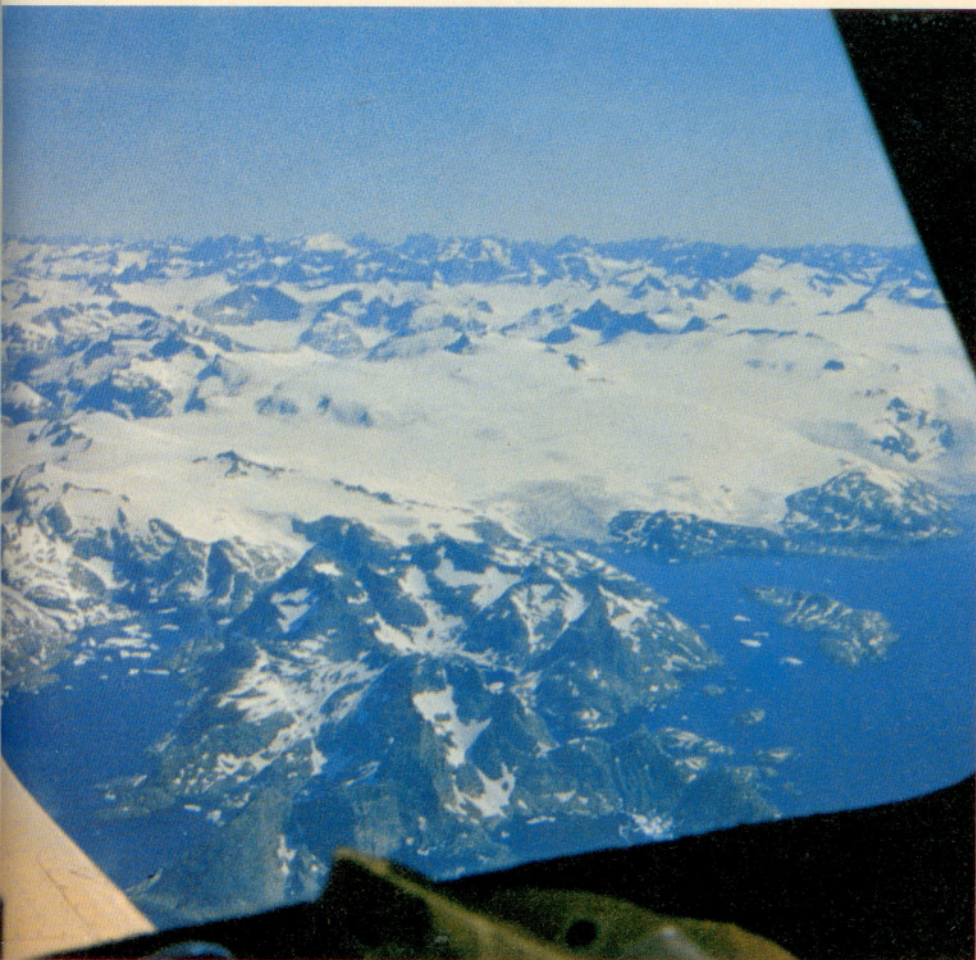
Atlantic Odyssey

Transocean visiting with a long-legged Bonanza

by RUSSELL W. RINK / AOPA 83005



The site of Iceland's first parliament, established in 1100 and subsequently destroyed by an earthquake.



Forbidding terrain greets the author as he approaches the east coast of Greenland after a six-hour flight from Iceland. Photos by author.

She suggested the Bunratty Castle tour topped by a medieval banquet. It turned out to be an educational, fun-filled bargain at \$35 that included two meals and a night's lodging (not at the castle).

Friday morning the cold front left the British Isles with broken to overcast clouds around 6,000 feet and visibilities better than 15 miles. Out on the parking apron there was only one other private plane, a Cherokee with an English registration number, sitting next to Willie. This was to be a common sight at my next two stops. When I paid my bill at the Aer Rianta office, I understood why there is so little private flying. Although I bought no fuel because I had 75 gallons remaining of the 185 aboard when I took off from Gander, the bill for landing and two night's tiedown was \$33.

I filed IFR to Gatwick along airway G-1 and estimated 2 hours 45 minutes for the 343 nautical miles at an airspeed of 120 knots. This speed doesn't break any records, but it's great for gas mileage; at \$1.60 a gallon, money as well as range is important. Gatwick is recommended for private planes because they are not welcome at busy Heathrow. The only overwater flying on this leg would be the 60 miles between the east coast of Ireland and the west coast of Wales,

but I buckled on my life jacket.

After liftoff, Shannon departure control cleared me to flight level 080 above a broken cloud layer. A little tense flying instruments in a strange country, I was soon made to feel at home by the friendly, unhurried communications of the controllers. Not infrequently the conversation would open with, "Good morning 3705 November," and the handoff to the next controller would terminate with, "Cheerio."

Time slipped by quickly and London center handed me off to Gatwick approach control. Descending through the cloud deck, we broke out at 2,000, five miles from the end of the 9,075-foot runway. Gatwick was busy with more airline traffic than I had expected. The taxiways and parking area were torn up with construction activity which made instructions from ground control a wee hard to follow.

Since the Irish Free State is an independent country, it is necessary to clear customs upon entry to England. The customs officer apologized for asking so many questions concerning my departure from Ireland but explained that the unrest in that country required extra precautions. Next stop was the airport management desk where I was briefed

on the accelerating tiedown rate designed to discourage lengthy stays. My bill for 20 hours on the field was \$30. One advantage to Gatwick is it's only an hour's train ride to London's Victoria Station, and the trains are in the lower level of the air terminal.

The next day's weather for the 336-nm flight to Prestwick, Scotland, was VFR with broken to overcast at around 6,000 feet but with a possibility of rain showers. I filed IFR and at 5,000 feet Willie poked his nose into the base of cumulus clouds, and water droplets streamed across the black cowl and up the windshield. At 6,500 feet we broke out into the sunshine and were cleared to FL 080, our requested altitude. Below was the teeming city of London obscured by clouds. Occasionally a Boeing 747 off to the west popped up out of the cotton batting and headed for the Atlantic on its way to the U.S. Passing Daventry VOR we were cleared on course and turned northwest to Prestwick. After Dean Cross, London center requested I contact Scottish control. There was no doubt I was in Scotland—the burr in the controller's speech confirmed it.

Through breaks in the clouds I got glimpses of small farms bordered with stone fences. Prestwick approach vectored us to final for Runway 31. Descending through a light rain shower we broke out looking down the 9,800-foot runway. The green landscape had a pastoral peacefulness about it.

Had I not been talking to the tower, I would have sworn the field was closed—there wasn't a single plane on this expansive airport which had 12 airline gates. Willie was tied down a quarter mile from the terminal and taken in by truck. There were no cabs so I walked the third of a mile to the Towans Hotel where I got a small, but comfortable, room for \$12 a day. Prestwick, a town of around 15,000, has a scrubbed look with immaculate streets, carefully kept flower gardens and many homes advertising "Bed & Breakfast."

Sunday I took a bus tour north to Glasgow, past the bustling shipyards along the Firth of Clyde, to Loch Lomond, and on to Loch Katrine, the lake that provides Glasgow's water supply. The 12-hour round trip cost \$2.60. An hour's steamship cruise on Loch Katrine was 60¢ extra.

Monday morning I checked out of the hotel early with the intention of departing for Reykjavik, Iceland, by 10 a.m. but after fueling, weather briefing, bill paying, etc., it was after 11 when I called Prestwick for my clearance. Estimated time enroute for this 781-nm leg was six and a half hours, assuming an

average 110-knot ground speed with a 10-knot head wind. With the ferry tank partially filled we can stay airborne for 16 hours at 9.5 gph. Akureyri, 125 miles distant from Reykjavik, on the north coast of Iceland, was my alternate.

A brisk wind out of the north was whipping up white caps on the blue-gray north channel that separates Prestwick from Skipness 35 miles away. Twenty-six minutes after departure we crossed Skipness VOR and turned north on airway A-1. Easily 50% of the 150 miles to Stornaway on the Isle of Lewis can be considered overwater flying because the area consists of sharp, narrow mountain ridges separated by sounds that reach in from the Scottish Sea, and by lakes or lochs. And such romantic names—Kilbrannan Sound, Loch Fyne, Sound of Jura, Firth of Lorne, Island of Skye.

We were in and out of broken clouds at 8,000 feet. I recorded passing the Rona Intersection on the flight log on my lap. A few miles south of Stornaway it started to sleet and the windshield got covered with slush. While figuring out what our next move should be, the clouds thinned, and 11,000 feet below was the Stornaway airport clutching the edge of a finger of land. This was the last land we'd see for 600 miles.

An hour later the Scottish Airways controller offered a list of frequencies to use on the HF radio when I ran out of VHF range. I replied the HF was not working and would relay through other aircraft. He responded with the welcome news that Golf Hotel Yankee, a plane with about the same airspeed, was following an hour behind me and would relay my position reports. Soon the VOR was no longer giving a usable signal. Until we could pick up the radio beacon on Vestmannaeyjar, a small island eight miles south of the south shore of Iceland, the navigating would be by dead reckoning.

With close to 22 hours of daylight in Iceland in July, there is no concern



Scottish hostelry in Aberfoyle provided a break on a tour from Prestwick to Loch Katrine.

about landing at an unfamiliar airport after dark. The air was smooth, and Willie's 205-hp Continental with 4,600 hours and four major overhauls was running like a 21-jewel watch. Through breaks in the overcast I could see the dark ocean below with whitecaps that indicated a northwest wind at about 25 knots.

About 150 miles out from Iceland the snow-capped peak of Oraefa Jokull poked up on the horizon. Making a land-fall has given a warm feeling to pilots of the oceans of air and water for many years. Like a jigsaw puzzle, it's fun to put the last piece in place.

After landing at Reykjavik we found that the airport hotel was sold out, as were the other hotels in this city of 100,000. The establishment of the first parliament in the year 1100 was being celebrated. Private homes were being opened to visitors and I secured a small room for \$13.

On an all-day tour of the back country, the volcanic origin of Iceland was evident. Subterranean hot water heats the majority of homes, businesses, and greenhouses used for growing fruits and vegetables.

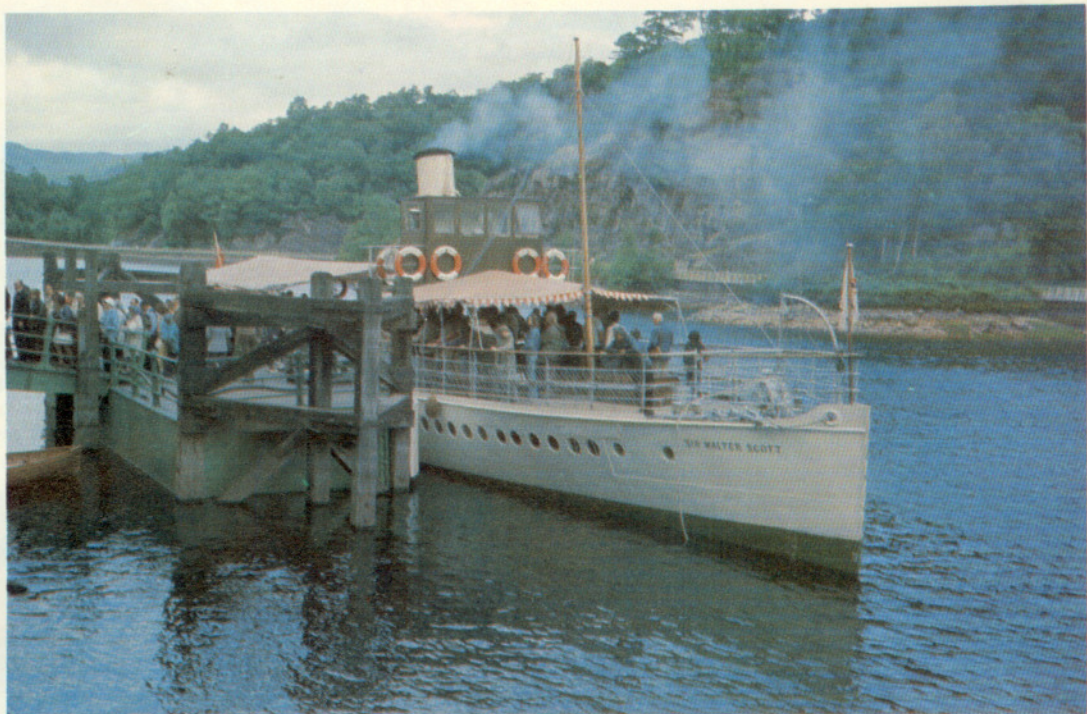
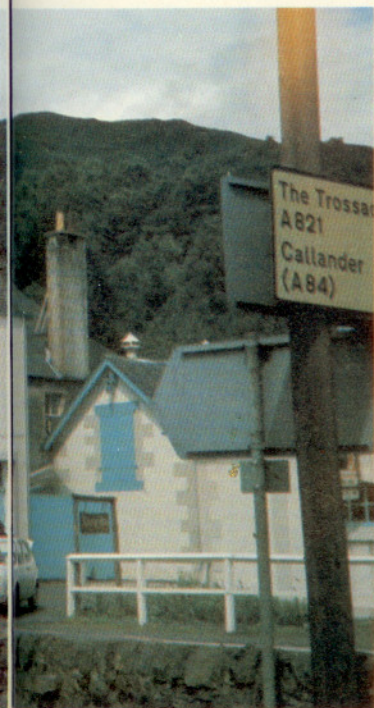
Next day in the Met office I met the three Englishmen who were ferrying Golf Hotel Yankee, a fixed-gear twin, to the Yukon. All of us were grouped around the weather map as the meteorologist explained the forecast for the 826-mile flight to Narssarssuaq (NA), Greenland.

The airport at NA has no instrument approach, hence a visual approach must be flown through either of two fjords that extend 45 miles from the west coast to the single airstrip. Bordering the fjords are mountains that rise sharply to elevations ranging from 1,800 to 4,700 feet. If a visual approach can't be made, the alternative is to go on to Sondrestrom, 400 miles to the north.

VFR weather for NA could not be guaranteed and the fixed-gear twin didn't have the range for a pass at NA and then to divert to Sondrestrom. Its pilots filed to Sondrestrom via Kulusuk. As we bid goodbye, they said they wished they had the range of my Bonanza. Instead of going out of my way for an alternate to the north, I listed Goose Bay, 695 nautical miles southwest of NA.

Estimated time was seven hours with a slight help from a north wind. FL 080 put us on top of the clouds. It seems that the oceans seldom have vast expanses of clear sky. Two hours after takeoff, Prince Christiansund NDB, 470 miles away on the tip of Greenland, was coming in with a good signal on the ADF. I wished the beacon at Gander were as strong.

About 20 miles east of Greenland the clouds were scattered, and close to the shore it was clear. The ocean was deep blue, dotted with huge icebergs that had broken off from the glaciers in the multitude of fjords. This is the iceberg factory of the North Atlantic.



Sightseeing steamer returns to dock after an hour's tour of Loch Katrine, north of Glasgow, Scotland

We were getting close to Simiutaq beacon which the map shows on a speck of an island at the end of a fjord. From this point we made a 90° turn to the right and headed for NA, 50 miles up the fjord. The coast was obscured by the cloud blanket. Suddenly, almost mirage-like, a hole in the clouds appeared ahead, and I could see the two fjords that lead to Narssarsuaq. Then I could see the airstrip running from the edge of the fjord to the glacier that plugs the upper end of the very narrow valley.

After landing and checking into a room, I walked out to the end of the runway to take pictures of the icebergs less than 100 feet offshore. As I leaned down to gather a few rocks and flowers, I was startled by what sounded like a rifle shot. Whirling around I saw an iceberg breaking in two. Each piece rolled and spewed water into the air like a couple of large whales. The phenomenon is not uncommon in the summer. Wave action and warm temperatures erode the icebergs causing them to split or turn turtle.

The next morning I walked to the Met office for a weather briefing for the 820-nm flight to Gander. The fog was so thick I couldn't see across the runway. I was told it would burn off in an hour or two. Gander was forecasting rain showers but was expected to clear in the afternoon. I could expect rain and clouds enroute and a headwind component of 18 to 20 knots.

Assuming a groundspeed of 102, I

estimated our time would be 8 hours 13 minutes with Stephenville, on the south shore of Newfoundland, as the alternate. With 20 hours of fuel on board, I was confident that even if the forecast for Gander went sour, there would be some airport open within range.

By 11 a.m. there were only patches of fog in the fjord as I taxied to the end of Runway 26 and took off.

Once out of range of Sondrestrom's VHF, I was out of communication with the world. Numerous blind calls on 121.5 for the next three hours brought no answers. Finally, three hours after takeoff, a KLM airliner answered my call and relayed my position report to Gander. Four plus forty after departure, the overcast and the cloud deck below squeezed together in a smog-appearing mixture, and we ran into heavy rain for an hour.

About 500 miles out from Gander I fished around with the radio compass trying to pull in the Gander NDB which was wishful thinking. When I had left Gander 12 days ago I had had trouble getting the signal even 30 miles out. Fortunately, I remembered the frequencies of two commercial stations given to me by a ferry pilot and got a good indication from one of them to help with the dead reckoning until I eventually got the Gander NDB and landed.

Although still 1,800 miles from home, I knew that on departure next day from Gander, we were on the last lap and felt that any problems would now be

minor. An hour after takeoff I noticed oil streaks on the windshield. I passed them off as a slight leak in the hydraulic propeller diaphragm that could be tightened when we got home. But by the time we neared our destination at Bangor, Me., the forward visibility became so bad I considered requesting assistance from the tower for landing. However, with the vast expanse of runway I was able to make a fairly smooth touchdown.

When I got out on the ramp for customs inspection, I was shocked by Willie's appearance. His fuselage and tail feathers were dripping with oil. How much oil had been lost? Suppose that had happened over the Atlantic?

A check of the oil reservoir revealed only one quart down in six hours from Gander. Paul Hubbard, a mechanic at the municipal repair facility, pulled the prop and discovered two pin holes in the rubber diaphragm. After a new one had been shipped in by airline to Bangor, he installed it, and by 11 a.m. on Sunday we were off on the last 1,200-mile lap for home.

Except for only a few such minor problems, Willie and I had covered 9,000 miles in two weeks on schedule. Of these miles, 6,000 were over water. As the bills trickled in I realized that, while pure economy might dictate the use of charter or airline flights, the memories would never be the same, and the tales I would spin for my grandchildren might lack a certain original touch. □