

Waco travel tips

Cross-country by biplane is, well, just different

BY ALTON K. MARSH

My glove was levitating at chest level—just floating there in the front cockpit thinking of its options. Thus the AOPA Centennial of Flight Sweepstakes Waco UPF-7

began teaching me about flying in an open-cockpit biplane. It was on only its second cross-country flight since being refurbished, the one that would bring it home to AOPA headquarters in Frederick, Maryland, for the first time. The first was from Rare Aircraft in Owatonna, Minnesota, where it was restored to better-than-1940 condition, to the Sun 'n Fun EAA Fly-In in Lakeland, Florida.

The solution to the floating glove was to transfer it to the crook of my knee until needed, and to look at anything unattached with suspicion. Batten down everything you take with you lest ye sow the countryside with your belongings. I became expert at removing unexposed film rolls from their canisters while they were still inside a coat pocket and using only the pocket with the Velcro flap. I was sitting on a down jacket in case temperatures proved cooler than expected; I had thought of that on my own. On the first leg, we were going only across the state to Fort Pierce, Florida, where an air-to-air photo shoot would take place prior to continuing the journey. Another lesson wasn't far behind.

Tired of wrestling with my suitcase in the confines of the front cockpit and aware that the American Champion Adventure flying in formation with us could haul only so much, I began mak-

ing plans to ship as much stuff home as possible. That's standard operating procedure when flying cross-country in a biplane, according to Ben Redman. Ben was piloting AOPA's sweepstakes aircraft from the pilot-in-command position in the rear cockpit while his father, Rare Aircraft owner Roy Redman, flew the Adventure. Extra clothes, dirty laundry, notebooks, my laptop computer—all were shipped ahead to lighten the weight and volume of my baggage. After all, no one checked e-mail in 1940; we shouldn't, either. Ship nonessentials ahead. The down jacket stayed with me, no matter how bulky it might be. Predictions were for cool temperatures as we pushed farther north on a journey of 770 nm, and besides, it made a good seat cushion.

Prior to the trip I had been advised by an experienced Waco traveler to record the sounds, smells, and sights of biplane cross-country flying. (More about those later.) You could add temperature to that: The front cockpit stays warm, thanks to the 275-horsepower Jacobs radial engine. In summer, some front seaters are known to scoop cooler air into the cockpit with their hands—no mean trick considering that the relative wind is whipping by at 135 mph. To stay in formation with the Adventure, Ben slowed the Waco to 115 to 120 mph, still fast enough to prevent holding a camera



PHOTOGRAPH BY MIKE FIZER



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over the side. Keep your belongings, like cameras, out of the wind lest ye lose thy grip and smite the rear-cockpit pilot.

keep my head from interfering with his field of view. Ben thought less of the landing than I, but he's a perfectionist. If the winds are too challenging along the route, as I was soon to learn, wise biplane pilots delay the journey. Biplanes

Tired from a week at Sun 'n Fun, the newly arrived got no rest as *AOPA Pilot* photographer Mike Fizer marshaled our remaining energy for cleaning and polishing the aircraft in hopes of an immediate photo shoot. It turned out, though,

Batten down everything you take with you lest ye sow the countryside with your belongings.

Winds upon arrival at Fort Pierce proved interesting, gusting as they were to 20 knots. Ben chooses airports with multiple runways so that one will be reasonably into the wind at the time of arrival. If winds refuse to cooperate and there's no favorable runway even at nearby airports, you'll have to land anyway—but not without a fight. Ben proved equal to the task and the landing seemed fine to me, slumped as I was into the lower portion of the cockpit to

were made to land on huge circular grass fields where every landing was perfectly into the wind.

After landing it seemed as though my ears were taking an unusual amount of time to clear: The flight over had been only at 2,000 feet and shouldn't have caused a problem. It was then that I discovered that the throaty Harley-Davidson-like roar of the engine temporarily dulled my hearing. Another lesson: Wear earplugs under the headset.

that our crew was too pooped to primp (the airplane), and after a halfhearted effort the photo session was delayed until the following day.

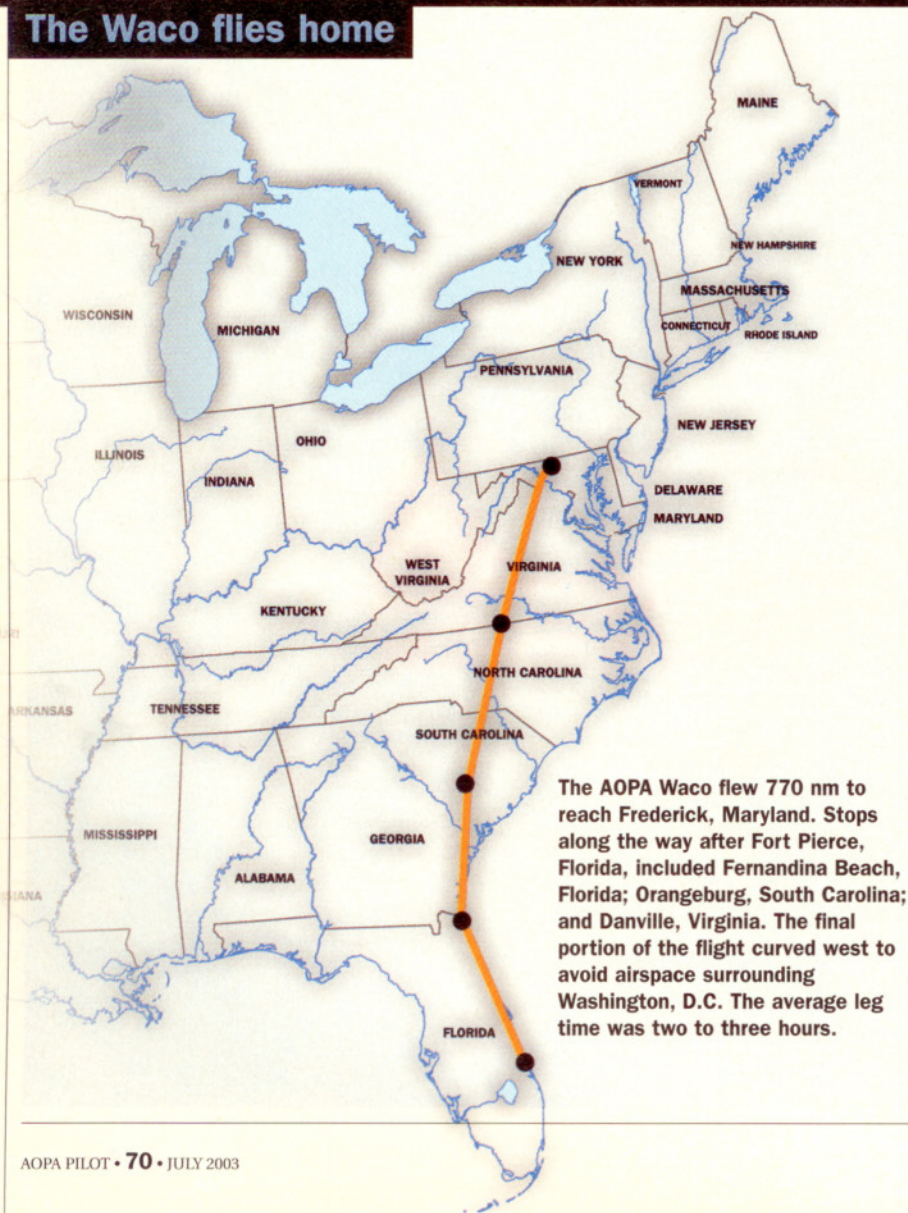
The next afternoon a rain shower kindly wet down the ramp outside the Mirabella Yachts hangar, where space was generously donated to protect the Waco and Adventure from growing storms. We completed scrubbing and cleaning every square inch of the Waco as the last shower stopped and the evening light lowered to glamour quality. After ground shots were completed on the glistening ramp, and Fizer had thanked the clouds for providing just the right amount of drama, we launched an air-to-air photo shoot. Fizer photographed from the Adventure while Ben flew in formation.

Then began the wait—as important a part of our journey as flying. Predictions for the following day's weather indicated that at best, bad weather would roll away like the parting of the Red Sea, yielding stormless skies but leaving gusty conditions behind. Roy Redman, anxious to push ahead (that's why his sons call him "Old Iron Pants") but experienced in the ways of biplane flying, called off the flight the night before. The day after that the weather was better, but winds along the route were generally 13 kt gusting to 18. So once again there was no reason to leave Fort Pierce.

How do you handle a two-day delay when on a biplane cross-country flight? Research. Get to know your surroundings. In Fort Pierce there is much to discover—like Theo Thudpucker's Raw Bar and Seafood Restaurant.

To look at Thudpucker's from the outside one might assume one is entering a biker bar, a common saloon, or maybe even a dive. But once inside, the atmosphere is more like a family restaurant—a really unusual one. The walls (not to mention ceilings, windows, and even the ceiling fan) are plastered in dollar bills signed by past customers, and a

The Waco flies home





The Waco cleaning crew includes (left to right) Roy Redman, flight instructor Karen Kehoe (Ben's fiancée), Ben Redman, all of Rare Aircraft, and the author.



The Waco flew alongside an Adventure on the trip north. Notice the white cover on the exhaust stack to catch oil at startup.

MIKE FIZER (TOP); ALTON K. MARSH (BOTTOM)



12-foot alligator hangs on display over the bar. It was

a very bad alligator in its day. The food is five-star: In the most recent Taste of St. Lucie (County) competition among 48

Roy Redman helps these Averett University aviation students in Danville get their pictures taken with the sweeps Waco.

restaurants, which do you think won first prize? Thud-

pucker's, with its seafood bisque, New England clam chowder, and oyster stews.

Join-up over Bowling Green

Our sweeps Waco goes to Florida

Ben Redman, son of Rare Aircraft owner Roy Redman, flew AOPA's Waco UPF-7 from the Rare Aircraft factory in Owatonna, Minnesota, to the Sun 'n Fun EAA Fly-In in Lakeland, Florida. Here is his account.

A voice on the Evansville, Indiana, approach frequency said, "Citabria Seven-Seven-Golf-Alpha at 3,500 feet." I know that guy! Then he said, "Evansville, are you talking to Waco Two-Nine-Three-Five-Two?" That was the first indication of an evening join-up of our two aircraft over Kentucky, one of them the AOPA sweepstakes Waco UPF-7. The two flights had started hours earlier in two distant towns.

The sweeps Waco had spent the winter waiting for this flight. It had been ready since the test and shakedown flights last fall, and had spent the winter in a prominent spot in our display hangar in Owatonna. Numerous AOPA members from the region, and some from far away who were passing through, had stopped in for a look. "Take good care of my airplane!" was the familiar comment.

The time of departure was near at hand...that's all one knows prior to a Waco cross-country. The Florida arrival deadline had been set and the airplane made ready. All that remained was the final ingredient...weather. Vigilant monitoring of the weather for the 1,300-nm sprint indicated that Wednesday was a good bet. Leave on Tuesday and get trapped in Indiana. Leave on Thursday and be stuck at home another three days. Wednesday was the day.

Roy had already left Owatonna to pick up a new American Champion Adventure at the factory in Rochester, Wisconsin. We planned to depart both Owatonna and Rochester about the same time and fly paths converging on Bowling Green, Kentucky. The best of all worlds would be to meet along the way, but it wasn't likely. We had discussed the trip, since Roy had flown this route several times before. This was a new part of the country for me to conquer in a Waco, however, and



Back to the gator (don't mean to bore you, but we've got two days to kill, right?). It ate a woman's dog before it was trapped alive. Thudpucker's owner, Bert Anderson, then paid to have it taken to a less-than-enthusiastic taxi-

The Waco and Adventure (both were headed to AOPA headquarters for extended stays) flew through 770 nm of perfect weather.

dermist who sensed his days coming to an end as the gator splashed into a holding pond. A 14-inch steel hook attached

to a steel cable kept the beast from checking out early. "He was nasty to begin with," Anderson said of the gator, "but after that [referring to the steel hook]...." Well, you'd be cranky too. When the taxidermist was ready the

I was excited. Roy and I have covered lots of territory together...always an education and experience for me. And great preparation for trips like this one and several others...such as my coast-to-coast trip in a Waco last year. We are ready to go!

The predictions came true...Wednesday was a perfect, clear, cool morning. I had spent five days staring at weather maps and now it was time to do what I was taught: "Look where you're going and if it looks good...get going!" I looked south, literally. The skies were perfect. The freshly detailed Waco was rolled out in the morning sun. I layered on my cool-weather clothes including an electric vest...which would be welcome on this 35-degree morning. It was time for takeoff. With a snarl of the big Ham Standard [Hamilton Standard propeller] and the reassuring rumble of the Jacobs [275-hp engine] I was on my way.

With the Waco trimmed out at 2,500 feet the GPS read a groundspeed of 123 knots...a light tailwind. I decided to climb and found 136 kt at 3,500 feet...life is good! Slicing through the smooth morning air and watching the world go by, I smiled and pulled out a sandwich. I had thought Galesburg, Illinois, might be a stretch, but not with this tailwind. In less than two hours I was in the pattern at Galesburg Municipal Airport. Surface winds were a bit strong but down the pipe. A brief stop for fuel and a bathroom break, and I was off again.

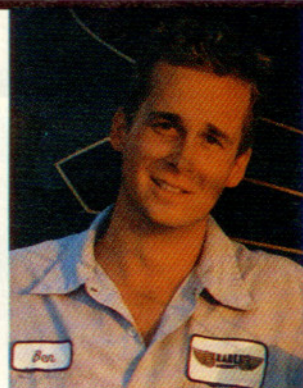
The weather was becoming fantastic and warm! It was like watching spring happen over the course of a day, going from

brown to budding trees and green grass in hours. In the Waco you pick two or three stop options to ensure a runway with minimal crosswind, then decide as you get close. Olney-Noble Airport [Illinois] it was. Full fuel again and I was ready to go. The skies were perfect, so I opted for the "look where you're going" method and pressed on.

In the air and headed for Bowling Green—a beautiful evening flight was unfolding. It was smooth, warm, and pleasant. Staring at the green countryside I found myself smiling again. On Evansville Approach frequency for a Class C clearance, I heard the tail end of a transmission and a voice I instantly recognized. I received clearance and then said hello to the familiar voice...it was Roy in the Adventure! We switched frequencies to talk, found that we were within a few miles of each other, and met up in the pattern at Bowling Green. After some laughter and back-slapping we hangedared both airplanes and were off to debrief at the local steakhouse.

What a great day! Cross-country in a great Waco, new places and new sights, and I met up with my partner. The world is definitely a more beautiful place from an open-cockpit Waco!

—Ben Redman



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870-pound gator was killed, Anderson paid thousands of dollars in state fees and trapper fees, and Thudpacker's had itself a stuffed gator with a Florida registration tag on its tail—like an N number, only different.

Other research included a visit to the Tiki Restaurant and a block away, the Mana Tiki, not to be confused with the Airport Tiki that boasts it has the best hamburger *AOPA Pilot* ever tested. I don't know who at *Pilot* said that or in what year, but suffice it to say that I have retested the hamburger and the statement stands.

But enough research. The winds calmed, the skies cleared, and thus began a daylong flight that saw perfect weather.

"Wasn't it slow?" you ask. Let us not forget that the journey was the point, and the longer it lasted the greater the experience. The wheels of our 2,600-pound Waco lifted off at 8:33 a.m., and by 7:15 p.m. we were above Maryland's Frederick Municipal Airport. Total time in the air for our World War II trainer was slightly more than eight hours. An official of AAA Mid-Atlantic tells me a similar journey by car in 1940 from Fort Pierce to Frederick would have required 30 hours of driving spread over four to five days. Drivers of the day averaging only 30 mph over poor-quality roads must have thought of our Waco UPF-7 as a miracle. In other words, not slow.

Downtime had been used for more than touring the various Tikis of Fort Pierce. It's not like we weren't working—not at all. At one point sectionals were laid across a large conference table in the Mirabella Yachts hangar, home to four 19-passenger Albatross flying boats, and the route was marked as in the old days, with a pencil and a ruler. (And then we adjourned to the Tiki.)

But what about those biplane sights, sounds, and smells? A puff of white oil smoke belched from the exhaust stacks as the engine started. The smell of oil smoke lasted only seconds and, since the airplane had sat for days prior to start-up, a thin oily film immediately formed on the front window. Roy later used a white sock over the exhaust pipe to catch the oil at start-up—the sock blows off as power is increased for taxi.

Let's cut to the takeoff. A drumming clatter lets you know there are 275 horses up front: The Waco was not on the

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runway long. Some people call the engine "Shaky Jake" but vibration was seen, not felt. The black throttle knob vibrated side to side so rapidly it was a blur. The constant-speed prop allowed a steep climb from the airport.

Ben easily caught up with the Adventure that had departed seconds earlier, and slowed to stay in loose formation, handing the stick to me with a wing wag. The stick pulsed without excessive vibration. At first I flew tight formation, varying the throttle from 15 inches to 23 inches of manifold pressure, but Ben cautioned that the normal fuel burn of 16 gallons per hour jumped to 22 at the higher manifold pressure, affecting calculations for the aircraft's range. It's a trainer (intended for short flights) with 50 gallons of avgas, so we planned to fly for only two hours, leaving an hour of reserve.

Altitudes varied from 2,000 feet to 600 feet, where we saw pink dogwood trees blooming in the forests. Down low I smelled the pine trees of the Carolinas and a wood-chip pile at a lumber mill. Keys to the enjoyment of biplane flying are the sights and the openness. I was out there in the same air as the clouds, not the cabin air of a closed cockpit. If we had been close enough, I could have brushed a cloud with my hand.

Ben has his own way of enjoying biplane flying. Bored by lumbering in step with the Adventure where Roy labored with maps, a GPS, and radio calls, we departed occasionally to investigate a small town, farm, river, or lake. "That town is all trailer parks," Ben noted. One house had six cars in the driveway—probably a family reunion or a used-car dealer who keeps his rolling stock at home. I was vigilant for someone to wave to. I know if I were land bound and heard the rumble of a Waco above, I would run out to see.

We landed at Fernandina Beach, Florida; Orangeburg, South Carolina; and Danville, Virginia, before the final hop to Frederick. Roy was the watchful straw boss, urging us on to our goal before nightfall as Ben, his fiancée, Karen Kehoe, and I snuck quick candy bar meals from the vending machines at each stop. Flight students from Danville's Averett University gathered around the Waco, asking knowledgeable questions until finally we had to leave. Ben spotted their waves after takeoff and dipped a wing in acknowledgement.

The view was even better on the last leg as the sun lowered and reddish-yellow light mixed with the spring-green hills of Virginia. The lower sun angle caused rivers and ponds to glow on and off with a white florescence.

Roy descended the Adventure as Frederick came into view, while Ben climbed the Waco to enter the pattern. He asked that I fasten down anything loose up front, and I assumed that meant winds favored Frederick's bumpy grass runway. Then Ben entered a proper pattern and dove at 160 mph to Runway 30, passing along it

i Links to additional information about the AOPA Waco UPF-7 may be found on AOPA Online (www.aopa.org/pilot/links.shtml). Keyword search: AOPA Waco.

at 100 feet and 150 mph, proving the aircraft's role in World War II as an aerobatic trainer. Six upturned faces of ground-bound spectators watched and arms began to wave. And finally I could wave back. **ACFA**

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