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Rosie Zahasky

Canadian Fishing Fly-Out – Green Turf, Blue Skies Ahead!

by Dave Weiman

The next best thing to actually going on the “Midwest Flyer Canadian Fishing Fly-Out” each year is to relive and share the experience with you, and making plans for next year’s trip.

When we started the “fly-out” in 2004, there were only two planes – mine and one other – and when my plane experienced a mechanical the day of departure, we were left with

On left base to Rwy 27 at Miminiska Lodge in Ontario.

one plane. So I flew with the other pilot – Phil Peterson of Oregon, Wisconsin – who is now “second in command” by seniority.

The idea for the fly-out came from Ray Rubin of Eagle River, Wisconsin, in 1989. Ray was in the Canadian resort business at the time, and had some flying experience. The resort he was involved with had a private airstrip, so he felt that a “fly-out” of private aircraft would be a natural and we began promoting it. It was not until years later, however, that the fly-out took hold. I was happy when Ray decided to join our group in 2009, so he could see how the fly-out had grown.

This year, there were seven planes on wheels and 17 people that



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Wayne Blackman

We have arrived.



Wayne Blackman

A Wasaya Airlines Pilatus PC-12.

enjoyed the trip held August 19-23, 2009, which included pilots and their passengers from Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa and Maryland. Among the planes were a Cessna 172 and Piper Archer, two Cessna 182s, and three Piper Cherokees. Our final destination was Miminiska Lodge (CPS5), located along the Albany River watershed, 196 nm north of Thunder Bay, Ontario. This was our third trip to Miminiska, and it will not be our last. Of the five lodges with airstrips I have flown to over the years, Miminiska is simply the best facility for this fly-out. It has a grass airstrip on the property, which is preferred over a gravel airstrip, off property; the accommodations and service are exceptional; the boats and motors, and facilities are well maintained; and the trip is affordable for the average GA pilot. Miminiska is also located far enough into Canada to make the trip an adventure, but not so far as to keep the novice private pilot from participating. As Goldilocks said in the bedtime nursery tale, "Goldilocks & The Three Bears," *"this bed is just right!"*

Flight planning and execution is much simplified, thanks to a personal "Flight Plan Guide" we put together in advance of the trip, and our step-by-step "Quick Reference Guide & Checklist," which summarizes the information, and highlights radio frequencies and procedures. Both the guide and the checklist are updated each year, thanks to input we receive from participants.

This year we included a chapter on new U.S. Customs & Border Protection (CBP) procedures, including Homeland Security's new electronic "Advance Passenger Information System (eAPIS). Yes, eAPIS is one more layer of red tape between the fish and the fisherman, but once we were all registered with CBP, the process went quite smoothly. We also found that the U.S. Customs officer on duty on our return flight through Ely, Minnesota (who was known only as "Dan" for security reasons), was extremely courteous and helpful. He apparently grew up in the area, understands the local environment, and wanted eAPIS to work, as we all did.

For additional information on eAPIS and our proposal to improve the current system of notifying Customs and Flight Service, see the "Dialogue" column entitled "Streamlining Customs & Flight Service Would Enhance Security...Cut Costs!" published in the August/September 2009 issue of *Midwest Flyer Magazine* (www.midwestflyer.com).

The Aircraft Owners & Pilots Association (AOPA), Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA), and U.S. Customs & Border Protection (CBP) provided information on eAPIS, and assisted us throughout the registration process (<https://eapis.cbp.dhs.gov/>). When we got home, AOPA followed up to evaluate any problems we may have encountered with the new procedure.

Not only were we able to complete our "Traveler

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Wayne Blackman

Alan Cheeseman of Miminiska Lodge, looks over the aircraft that flew in for the “Midwest Flyer Canadian Fishing Fly-Out.”

Manifests” for U.S. Customs & Border Protection for both our outbound and inbound legs prior to leaving the comfort and convenience of our homes, but we were also able to file all of our U.S. and Canadian flight plans prior to departure, which really simplified things during the trip. Additionally, we contacted Canadian Customs with our ETAs into Thunder Bay the night before, using 1-888-CAN-PASS (226-7277), and had our planes fueled and loaded. On the day of our departure, all we had to do was check on weather, NOTAMS, TFRs, and go.

Concerned with some weather moving in from the west, four pilots, including myself, decided to leave a day early, and arrived in Ely, Minnesota (KELO), the night before our planned departure.

I, along with my fishing partner, Dick Doerfer of Verona, Wisconsin, departed the Madison, Wisconsin area at sunset, and enjoyed a pristine flight, 250 nm direct to Duluth, Minnesota (KDLH), and then direct to Ely, 69 nm further north, for a total of 2.7 hours. Concerned about the

possibility of fog settling into the Duluth harbor, I contacted Green Bay Radio to get an update on the forecast. Clear skies were expected until daybreak. I was relieved. Once passed the city lights of Duluth, and with Lake Superior to our right, flying that moonless night into the north woods was like flying into a black hole! Only the “Big Dipper” and an occasional light on the ground, differentiated sky from earth.

When we landed at Ely, every light in the universe shined brightly...galaxy upon galaxy, star upon star. The cool, crisp air was a reminder that fall would soon be here.

We stayed at “Motel Ely,” a nice 1950-era motel, owned and operated by Roger and Debbie Murawski (www.moteley.com). Upon our arrival, Roger picked us up at the airport and drove us the short distance to town.

Reveille was at 7:00 am the next morning, and there were enough of us that Debbie had to make two trips to the airport. When we arrived, we were greeted by airport manager, Jim Preblich, who made the airport terminal

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facilities available to us, and topped off our tanks one last time before we left U.S. airspace. We also updated our ETAs into Thunder Bay with Canadian Customs.

Ely has a VOR on the field and a Remote Communications Outlet (RCO) to contact Princeton Radio to open our flight plans, to obtain a discrete transponder code (FSS gets the code from ATC), and to stay in radio contact with them as we crossed the border. Pilots are required to maintain radio contact with either Flight Service or Air Traffic Control while crossing the border, as required by U.S. Customs & Border Protection, the Federal Aviation Administration, and the North American Air Defense Command (NORAD).

Those of us who climbed to 5,000 feet MSL or higher had the option of contacting Minneapolis Center to obtain our squawk code directly from them, but there was better communications with Flight Service. Once across the border, we changed our squawk code to 1200 VFR until 35 miles southwest of Thunder Bay, when we contacted Approach Control and obtained a different squawk from the Canadians. At least one pilot in our group was told to continue squawking the code assigned by Minneapolis Center.

Out of Ely, Minnesota, we flew direct to Thunder Bay, Ontario (CYQT), 106 nm on the 072-degree radial. Upon our arrival, members of our group greeted one another at the Esso fuel operation, and one by one, we taxied to Rwy 07 for departure.

I called the lodge to inform them to expect four aircraft from Thunder Bay, and three aircraft later in the day. As it turned out, two aircraft were about an hour behind us, and one aircraft took a different route, due to weather, from Oconomowoc, Wisconsin, through the Upper Michigan Peninsula, clearing Canadian Customs at Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario (CYAM).

The tower at Thunder Bay activated our flight plans upon departure, and Thunder Bay



The 1957 de Havilland Otter at Miminiska Lodge.

Dave Weimer

controllers were exceptional in their duties, as usual. They kept the mixed traffic flowing nicely, including an Air Force C-17 that made a low pass as we readied for takeoff.

One by one, we switched from tower to departure, and all aircraft in our group stayed in radio contact with one another on 122.75.

Departing Thunder Bay towards the northeast, we saw majestic Mount McKay (a mafic sill formed 11 million years ago by the mid-continent rift system) towering the city at 1585 feet MSL.

Within minutes, we were flying across the beautiful Canadian wilderness!

The weather was superb throughout the trip – visibility was

unrestricted, and the wind, was not much of a factor, even heading north.

GPS technology, and prominent landmarks like Lake Nipigon east of our course, extending north and south for 40 miles, and visible from a distance, made navigation easier. Our entire route from Thunder Bay to Miminiska Lodge was on the Thunder Bay VFR Navigation Chart, which simplified things even more.

An alternate airport directly on our route of flight was “Armstrong” (CYYW), located 80 nm south of Miminiska Lodge, and there were several airports east and west of our course, which we noted on our charts in the event we had to divert.

We kept a copy of the “Canadian Flight Supplement” in our flight bags.



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Dick Doerfer



Shore lunch.

Besides being a nationwide airport directory, the supplement contains a lot of information about Canadian flying, emergency procedures, and search and rescue.

According to Canada Air Regulations (CAR) 602.61, when operating in the sparsely settled area north of 52 degrees, pilots need equipment sufficient to provide the means for starting a fire, making a shelter, purifying water, and visually signaling distress.

Floatation devices, such as life vests or cushions, are also encouraged in the event of a water landing. In fact when you file a flight plan with Winnipeg FSS, the specialist will ask what you have on board for survival equipment, and you better be prepared!

The AOPA Air Safety Foundation (www.aopa.org/asf) and the Federal Aviation Administration (www.faa.gov) are good sources of information for specific emergency landing procedures.

Canada's search and rescue procedures and personnel are among the best, and thanks to the standard 121.5/243 MHz emergency locator transmitter (ELT), the new 406 MHz GPS ELT, personal locator GPS beacons, Canada's flight plan and notification requirements, and pilots monitoring common frequencies,



Daily catch.

the occupants of a downed aircraft will likely be picked up and back in civilization within 24 hours.

As we approached Miminiska, we monitored the common air traffic advisory frequency 122.8, and as each plane landed, the pilot informed the others when the aircraft was clear of the active runway.

Miminiska Lodge is one of few Canadian lodges that have their own airstrips (CPS5). The grass runway (9/27) is 50 feet wide and 2400 feet long. Besides the single-engine aircraft in our group this year, twins and turboprops land at Miminiska as well.

Lodge manager, Tristan Yuswak of Australia, and his staff, met us at the airport with a four-wheeler and trailer to help transport our gear to our cabins. Yuswak was an immigration enforcement officer in Australia prior to accepting his position at Miminiska, and understands the hospitality business very well. His wife, Jasmine, worked in the kitchen, and helped with housekeeping chores. Nice couple!



Tranquility.

At the end of the season, the Yuswaks were heading back to their yacht, the "Eloise," a 31 ft. centre cockpit sloop, which is parked in Thailand at the moment. The Yuswaks are in the process of completing an around-the-world trip, and have already sailed 6,000 miles.

As soon as I landed and unloaded the Skylane, I took off for Armstrong to pick up two more passengers.

Since I had to make more than one stop, I gave Winnipeg my "flight itinerary" when I filed in advance out of Thunder Bay, and was in radio contact with either the lodge, or their seaplane base located 15 miles south of Armstrong, during my flight.

Included in the Canadian flight plan form is a section to note time en route or "Estimated Elapse Time," and a section to note how much time to allow before Transport Canada initiates "search and rescue," referred to on the flight plan as "SAR Time." It is always good to allow ample time to cancel your flight plan, but not so much time that you delay search and rescue in the event you really need it. The key to remember is to close your flight plan, making access to good communications at your destination, essential. Otherwise, it is probably best to notify your destination airport of your ETA, rather than file a flight plan, which is a procedure

Dave Weiman

Dave Weiman



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Larry Foat

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Larry Foat



Dave Weirman

Good fishing.

permitted in Canada, so responsible people at your destination can contact authorities to initiate search and rescue, if you are overdue.

By the time I returned to Miminiska, the other three aircraft had arrived, and we caught up with everyone in the lodge to cancel our flight plans with Winnipeg.

In the past, Miminiska Lodge had a satellite telephone. This year they switched to the computer satellite telecommunications system, "Skype," which worked reasonably well in contacting Customs and Flight Service, and our families back home (www.skype.com).

After we got settled into our cabins, and had dinner, some of us got together on the deck outside the main lodge, overlooking the lake...some went to their cabins...and others went fishing.

You know you have reached tranquility when you are away from the hustle and bustle of civilization, watching the sun set over crystal clear lakes and green forests, and listening to the call of a Loon! I only saw one airliner pass by, and that was at high altitude.

A pool table and satellite television were among the amenities available to



John Benstrup

A lot of luck.



Larry Foat

A watchful eye.

guests, but the best entertainment was to watch either a turbine de Havilland Otter fly in on floats, or a Pilatus PC-12 land at the airport. The turbine engines on both aircraft would resonate across the water, and was music to our ears.

Among Wilderness North's aircraft are three turbine de Havilland Otters on straight floats, a Beaver – also on straight floats – and several cargo aircraft and corporate jets used to shuttle people and supplies. The Pilatus is owned by Wasaya Airlines, with flight operations in Thunder Bay, and administration in Fort Williams First Nation.

Wasaya, which means "rising sun" in Oji-cree, is owned exclusively by 10 First Nation communities, and serves a total of 21 communities throughout Ontario and Manitoba with populations ranging in size between 500 and 4,000. With no roads in the region, Wasaya plays a critical role in transporting all supplies and medical personnel to these communities. The airline provides two scheduled daily flights from Thunder Bay to Sioux Lookout, Winnipeg to Sandy, and Winnipeg to Pikangikum.

Wasaya Airlines has a fleet of 27 aircraft, including Pilatus PC-12s, Beech 1900Ds, Cessna Caravan 208Bs, and Hawker Siddeley 748s.

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Wayne Blackman

Join Us In 2010!

Alan and Krista Cheeseman own Wilderness North, which includes Miminiska and four other lodges and 10 outposts in northern Ontario. Only Miminiska Lodge has an airstrip, which to us pilots, is our passport to adventure! All of the other lodges depend on floatplanes to transport guests.

Miminiska Lodge has an assortment of rustic, yet modern log and cedar-sided cabins of varying sizes, as well as rooms immediately adjoining the main lodge.

Everyone in our group was more than pleased with the great abundance of fish, both in Walleyes and Northerns, and we caught and released any fish that did not qualify for either shore lunch or take-home. The conservation license we bought enabled us to take two Northerns under 27 inches in length, one Walleye under 18 inches, and one



Rosie Zahasky

Walleye over 18 inches.

Probably the most popular lures for Walleyes were yellow, white and tan double tailed twisters or swirl tails on the end of a yellow jig with a black Berkley "Gulp" minnow. Live minnows work well, too. Northerns seem to bite on most anything, but my weedless Daredevils. All fish cleaning was done by the staff at the lodge.

The lake map the lodge provided identified the best fishing spots, so there was no need to hire guides, except for those in our group that went trout fishing on a swollen river, which was a safety precaution. The water level was so high that Miminiska's new dock was submerged, and we had to launch our boats from shore. The high water also kept the rocks submerged, which was a good thing for our outboard motors, and did not affect fishing.

Speaking of shore lunch, no matter where we were on this massive chain of lakes, we would break at noon and meet at "Shore Lunch Island," where the staff prepared our morning catches. One of the hot fishing spots was near the island, which was convenient. From lake, to frying pan!

Tristan joined us each day for shore lunch, where he personally cleaned all fish and made us his special brew of Aussie "billy of bush" tea. Next year he promises to bring the real McCoy from "down under," among other delicacies. By the comments he made, we think Tristan enjoyed our company as much as we enjoyed his. He notes on the Wilderness North website that the lodge "roared of laughter and ran with the sound of bloody good people, having a bloody good time...we really cannot wait for everyone to come back next year!" He also referred to our group as the "Midwest Flyer Squadron!"

Amongst us in our group were an office administrator, computer software developer, computer programmer, nurse, engineer, airport restaurant owner, recreational property developer, retired department store owner/resort owner/engineer, retired appliance repairman, two attorneys, five farmers, and one magazine publisher. Our common denominator was our love of aviation and adventure,

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followed by fishing!

The night before departing on Sunday, August 23, 2009, we filed and activated our flight plans with Winnipeg, and confirmed our ETAs with U.S. Customs & Border Protection at Ely, Minnesota, both by Skype computer telecommunications, on the ground. After a hardy breakfast the following morning, we took off and flew to Armstrong to refuel, courtesy of Mark Prokopheuk, manager of Wilderness North's seaplane base at Armstrong. (There's no fixed base operator at Armstrong). As soon as I dropped off my two passengers and fueled up, I flew back to Miminiska to pick up Dick, then we rejoined the group on the return flight to Ely, lagging behind over 100 miles and on a slightly different course. Again, we kept in contact with one another on 122.75, and I could still reach some of the pilots by radio even at that distance. I eventually climbed to 8,500 feet, above a broken layer between 4,000 and 6,000 feet.

Before we left Canadian airspace and prior to crossing the border, we either contacted Minneapolis Center, Princeton Flight Service, Thunder Bay Approach, or Winnipeg Radio to get a discrete transponder code. Contacting Princeton FSS on 122.1 and listening over the Ely VOR on 109.6, seemed to work the best. The FSS specialist shared our enthusiasm for our flight of seven, and contacted U.S. Customs & Border Protection at Ely to update our ETAs as needed. Once topped off at Ely, we were homebound in different directions and altitudes.

Make Your Reservations Now!

We are already making plans to return to Miminiska Lodge, **August 18-22, 2010**, and we want you to join us.

For rates, additional information, and a FREE DVD, drop me an email at info@midwestflyer.com, or call 608-835-7063. Also, be sure to check out the Wilderness North website at <http://www.wildernessnorth.com> where you will find lots of podcasts and fishing reports, including a report



Composite Photo by Dick Doerfer & Wayne Blackman

Homeward bound!

on this year's fly-out. A podcast on the fly-out with Minneapolis radio personality, Al Malmberg of the "World of Aviation," can be found on the *Midwest Flyer Magazine* website, www.midwestflyer.com.

Actual reservations are handled directly through Wilderness North in Thunder Bay. Make your reservations by January 1, 2010, and you will get a substantial discount. **Call 1-888-465-3474.**

Ride share information is also available by contacting *Midwest Flyer Magazine* at info@midwestflyer.com. In other words, if you have an airplane and no one to go with you and share expenses, we will help you find a passenger, and vice versa.

As one member of our group said, "This is a trip of a lifetime I plan to make each year!" With a 100% return rate expected in 2010 by this year's participants, others in our group feel

likewise.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The "Midwest Flyer Canadian Fishing Fly-Out to Miminiska Lodge" is a service of Miminiska Lodge, Wilderness North and its owners. Dave Weiman is acting only as a fellow participant on the trip, and neither he nor *Midwest Flyer Magazine*, Flyer Publications, Inc., or their staff and owners, assume any liability for the participation of others on the trip or for the trip itself, and do not assume any responsibility for the reliance upon the information contained herein or which is provided or stated elsewhere. Federal Aviation Administration, Transport Canada, and U.S. and Canadian Customs regulations and procedures are subject to change. Pilots are urged to use every resource available to them in planning their trip, including government agencies, fixed base operators, airport management, and pilot organizations. Any information provided by *Midwest Flyer Magazine* is subject to error and change, and requires personal verification. □

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