



— FUN DESTINATIONS —
NRI Flying Club Inc.

Skylane 21348 Goes to the Pacific Northwest – by Oren Cheyette 8/26-8/28/2022

With my wife back East for the week, I decided to embark on a longish trip to the Northwest corner of the lower 48 – an area I’ve long wanted to visit, but with weather that I wouldn’t have ventured before getting my IR last fall. Joined by an old pal, JT, I set off for Port Townsend and Olympia, Washington, to visit mutual friends, Bay Area transplants we’ve kept up with over the years. Since the start of the pandemic, we’ve reconnected over a weekly online poker game / zoom session. Some people have family chats, we have zoom poker.

We left around 9:30 on Friday morning in N21348, enjoying the recently installed G5 and the luxury of not having to reset the DG every 15 minutes. We headed slightly NW from CCR on a route taking us past Mt Shasta, and on to Klamath Falls/Crater Lake for refueling, bathroom break and lunch. It’s a class D, where they call themselves “Kingsley Tower” even though it doesn’t say that anywhere on the sectional. But they answered to “Klamath” so my fear that I was landing at the wrong field passed quickly. The FBO had Newsmax on the teevee – it’s in the great state of Jefferson after all - but they fueled us and fed us (in a restaurant at the terminal where we were the only visitors) despite our arriving from California. Leaving KLMT we turned back to the NW, passing Crater Lake and skirting the edge of a fire-fighting TFR. We were initially at 10.5K, but popped up to just under 12.5 for a little while to get above a layer of cumulus and mountain turbulence. I had my pulse oximeter going & could see quite a drop going from 10.5 to 12.5, so we didn’t stay there very long. After passing south of the TFR, we turned more northerly, passing Eugene, Corvallis and Portland on the left and getting great views of the Cascade volcanoes to the right.

I had been watching the weather intently during the previous week, hoping to get a clear day for a low altitude flyby over Seattle on the way north to Port Townsend. Trying to figure out how to make sightseeing around the SEA class B work, I benefitted from Cunningham’s law: “the best way to get the right answer on the internet is not to ask a question; it’s to post the wrong answer”. I posted a proposed route on reddit and asked for feedback, which came quickly: my idea was stupid, it would never work, and here’s what I should do instead. I also discovered that the Boeing Field controllers have a “contact a controller” link on their facebook page & asked for & quickly got details about transitioning through the BFI airspace.



Shasta & Castle Crags



Crater Lake

In the event, on Friday morning the weather in the Seattle area was forecast to be not great, with several cloud layers and low stratus starting around Portland. I filed an IFR plan before we left, starting from a waypoint abeam Mt. St. Helens up to OS9 (Jefferson County International), planning to activate it only if we had to. When we got close to Portland it was evident that it would be necessary – the area had solid undercast and we could see lots of puffy clouds ahead, so I picked up the clearance from Seattle Center. They routed us up the west side of Puget Sound where I got some rare time in actual IMC. It was mostly quick hits, in & out of cumulus and only a little bumpy. Not too many sights to see on the last leg, at least for me, though JT was enjoying looking at the islands passing down below when we could see them.



Mt St Helens & Rainier (I think – might be Adams)

Seattle kept us at 8K before handing us off to Whidbey Approach just a few miles short of the field, denying my request for lower. JeffCo has only one approach, the [RNAV-A](#), which is aligned with runway 9 and has a normal descent angle (though it's labeled "N/A" for some reason), so I assume it's circling-only because it doesn't have the right runway markings. (I'm asking for another round of Cunningham's law here I think.) The controller gave me "direct JAWBN, direct YAYUB, cross JAWBN yadda yadda cleared approach" when we were just a few miles out, leaving me scrambling because JAWBN is not a

waypoint on the procedure. (I believe it's called a feeder fix, meant to connect an airway to an approach, but we were being vectored and not on an airway so I was confused. Turns out the magic GPS box includes transitions, but I didn't realize / had forgotten that. Just hanging out my Ls for all to see here...) We got aligned with a little wiggling and down to the approach initial altitude in plenty of time. (Our friend, out at the airport to meet us & watching our flight path on flightradar24 was a bit mystified and thought we were mistakenly heading for Port Angeles, an hour's drive down the road.) We broke out around 2000 feet, well above the FAF, so despite all the IMC I don't get to log the approach for currency.



Just-in-time delivery of malted beverage

After our Port Townsend friend was finished critiquing my landing (“If you’d landed in the touchdown zone you could have made the first taxiway!”) he took us to a very pleasant pub in the old “lower” town by the harbor, where I made quick work of the pint I felt I’d earned. According to Port Townsend guy, the town was the original harbor for the Seattle area, but quickly lost out to Seattle/Tacoma when the railway ended there instead of coming all the way out the Olympic peninsula. It has a waterfront area about which you read the same kinds of stories as from SF’s Barbary Coast days (e.g., drunks waking up on a boat to Shanghai) and a “respectable” churchy uptown on the bluffs with some nice old mansions of the local gentry, which now include PTG and his wife.

The Salish Sea (the name of the whole watery region) has maybe more microclimates than the Bay Area. Saturday dawned with low overcast in Port Townsend, and a very variable forecast for the rest of the day, but mostly clear up towards the San Juan Islands. The three of us (me, JT, PTG) decided to try our luck flying up to Orcas Island for lunch. We found the airport lot nearly full – there’s a little restaurant on the field (the Spruce Goose) that’s supposed to have the best pie in the area.



Somewhere in the San Juans

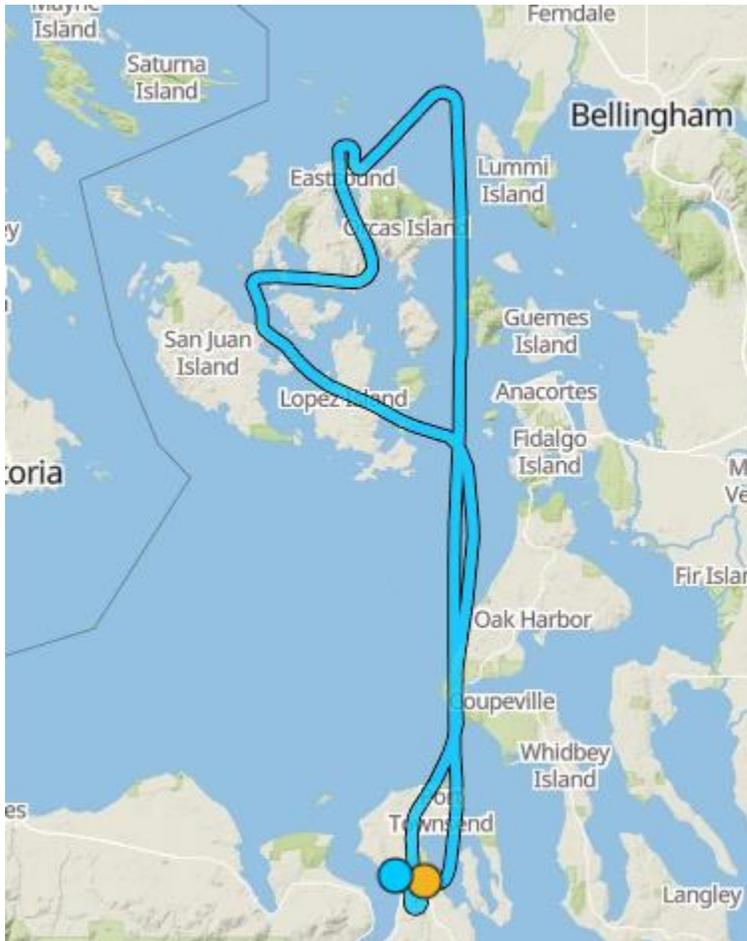
I got a clearance from Whidbey Approach to get us going up through the low stratus (a few hundred feet thick with a base around 1K), found more puffy cumulus above, and quickly got into clear air as we headed north. Even though Orcas is in the US, the airspace is controlled by Victoria Terminal (which should be the name of a character in a William Gibson novel). After the handoff from Whidbey, we quickly cancelled and dropped in to the strip at the north end of the island. So I can now say I've talked to a Canadian controller (who politely didn't correct my calling her "Victoria Approach" which might be a name from a different type of novel).



PTG pointing something out over the San Juans

A short 20 minute walk got us to Eastsound, a harbor town on the south side of the north end of the island (shaped like a ψ with the bottom to the north). After lunch, checking out the farmers' market and snacking on all the ripe blackberries growing along the path, we got airborne again & had a 30 minute tour of the San Juans before heading back to JeffCo. The direct route across San Juan or Lopez Island to the Olympic Peninsula crosses about 20 miles of open water, so I took a land-hugging route along Whidbey Island through the Naval Air Station's class C. On Friday I'd heard other GA pilots being told to stay out of the Charlie, but I guess there's less happening on the weekend, and I got no peep

when I headed for the shoreline. The islands are amazingly beautiful. PTG does a lot of sailing in the area and was really enjoying the 182's-eye view from above. He showed his appreciation by offering praise for my landing back at OS9: "Nice. But aren't you supposed to land straight?"



San Juans route

Sunday dawned mostly clear in Port Townsend, but the east side of Puget Sound down to Olympia had a broken layer, nixing the idea of a Seattle flyby on the way south. PTG dropped us back at the field and I filed another IFR plan, this time picking it up in the air. By the time we got close to Olympia, where our other friends live, it was CAVU. The jagged Olympic range was a spectacular contrast with the network of islands, inlets and waterways on our route.

After second breakfast with our Olympia friends, we launched for the last long legs home. We made one stop in Roseburg for bathroom break & refueling then quickly got going again. Best gas prices on the trip, in case anyone's headed up that way. South of RBG we passed a TFR and a towering column of smoke from a fire in southern Oregon near the California border. The next 50-odd miles were pretty murky. Our route took us over terrain up to almost 8K and it started getting bumpy at 9.5k. Climbing another 2000 feet smoothed things out for the rest of the ride and got us above a lot of the smoke.

Somewhere in there over rugged terrain we picked up an ELT signal on 121.5, which I relayed to the controller. Looking back at the flight path, it was close to the top of the hour, so it might have been a test.

We soon passed the Trinity Alps off to the west and could see Shasta again off to the right. Another 90 minutes had us back in Concord. Total distance ~1400 nm. 13+ on the Hobbs. Not a cheap outing, and a lot of time in the seat, but lots of fun.

Thanks to JT for the photos.