



---FUN DESTINATIONS---

NRI Flying Club Inc.

Grand Canyon/Sedona AZ Adventure
by Ben Ginsberg and Aaron Doyle
Memorial Day 2019

Over Memorial Day weekend, we had a pretty epic trip to the Grand Canyon and Sedona, AZ, in N111GG. We would definitely recommend the trip and have some tips and advice to share!

The trip was planned as an MDPA fly-out to the Grand Canyon for the long weekend and the MDPA organizer handled logistics. If you don't know what the Mt. Diablo Pilot's Association (MDPA) is, check out www.MDPA.org. We found out about the trip by seeing it mentioned in the NRI newsletter. Trip planning was fairly easy as there was an electronic sign-up process on the MDPA website and they took care of booking the hotel block. Shortly before the trip they asked for confirmation and for hotel room payment.

Two days before the trip there was a planning meeting held in the KCCR clubhouse where details about departure time, weather forecast, route planning, weekend itineraries, etc., were all discussed. All pilots/planes exchanged contact information, tail numbers, flight routes, and estimated departure and flight times.

Prior to this trip, Ben had flown to the LA/SD area 3 times solo so this would be his farthest trip and it was reassuring to know there was another pilot in the plane and there were several other pilots/planes traveling who had made the trip before. It was also the longest trip for Aaron. In total, the trip ended up including 6 planes carrying 12 people. For those VFR only pilots, this is definitely doable as 4 of the planes did not have IFR-rated pilots.

All planes wanted to leave early on Saturday to avoid any afternoon thunderstorms and take advantage of the calmer air over the mountains/hills. We were no exception and took off in 1GG around 8:30AM. We flew directly to the Tehachapi Pass at 9,500 MSL and there was already too much low cloud buildup to comfortably fly through the Pass under the clouds so we flew over the clouds and 1GG handled the climb to 11,500 MSL just fine. We descended into KWJF (General William J Fox Airfield) as most of the other planes had decided that would be their stop given the cheap fuel. The flight there took us a touch over 2 hours. After a quick stretch, we departed and flew directly to KGCN (Grand Canyon Airport). We stayed at 9,500 MSL the entire way which provided enough clearance over the couple of mountain

ranges on the route. Highlights included seeing Edwards Air Force Base and the river town of Bullhead City – which is situated right on the Colorado River with a Class D Airport (KIFP). There are casinos, jet skis to rent, and basically looked like it could be a fun flight destination for a weekend trip itself. Approaching KGCN after another 2+ hour flight, we could see quite a bit of the Grand Canyon but we decided we had had enough flying for the moment and wanted to land and unwind a bit before possibly heading out later in the afternoon to tour the Canyon.

The biggest disappointment of the trip was how unfriendly the KGCN FBO was upon our arrival. There is only one FBO on the field and normally I only do FBO research when there is more than one and need to make a choice. In the future, I won't make that mistake again. We had tried calling them via cell during our stop at KWJF, tried calling them over the Unicom upon our arrival, and tried calling them via cell again once we arrived at KGCN – all to no avail. We even contacted the KGCN ground controller who tried to reach them and couldn't. The general aviation parking area at KGCN is a LONG walk to the RWY 21 approach end where the FBO is located and we were hoping to get a ride and order fuel quickly – but we ended up lugging all of our bags down to the FBO by walking. The two ramp attendants basically said they were just too busy with all the fixed-wing sightseeing planes and skydiving planes to have time to take care of us. We won't bore you with the details, but one of the FBO attendants was incredibly rude and dismissive. When I requested to be re-fueled in the next 2 hours so we could tour the Canyon, he said that wouldn't be possible and that he "hoped" to have us fueled at some point the next morning. We would definitely recommend planning to get fuel elsewhere in the future. We were shocked by how busy the airport was with fixed-wing and helicopter operators – and didn't know Sun Country Airlines flies a 737 in there. We decided to tour the Canyon the next morning.

Anyway, the hotel picked us up for the 2-3 minute shuttle ride back there and we were in our room quickly and easily. Attractive dinner options in town were limited based upon Yelp reviews – and we ate a decent Mexican restaurant named Plaza Bonita – which seemed like the best option.

On Sunday morning we were up in the air around 8:30AM again with our Grand Canyon Special Flight Rules Sectional. There are specific waypoint corridors you must be on to overfly the Canyon as well as specific frequencies to monitor and altitudes you must fly. There are also special no-fly zones. Shockingly, we were the only general aviation plane around though there were a ton of commercial fixed-wing and helicopter operators flying their own specially-approved routes and altitudes.

After about an hour of flying which allowed us to fly two passes through the corridors over the Canyon, we decided on the spot to fly to Sedona, AZ, which was only about ~70 NM away to the SE. Ben had always seen pictures of the Sedona (KSEZ) airport and it's infamous tabletop runway, but was not prepared for how beautiful the surrounding valley/canyon around it would be. Flying in through the

vibrant red rock structures with green vegetation all around the valley floor was awesome. We landed at KSEZ, parked the airplane, and went inside the single FBO/terminal building where the FBO employees were great and super friendly. We rented a car for a few hours – which cost \$20 bucks – and went to town for some sightseeing and lunch. The town had a chill, artsy vibe that was impressive and the views from everywhere were fantastic. We both left thinking we had to visit again and both agreed that if anyone else in the Club wanted to fly to the Grand Canyon, we'd tell them they should stay in Sedona for the trip and make a quick daytrip flight out to the Grand Canyon from there. The lodging/food options were much better in Sedona – not to mention the beauty and good energy of the place.

That evening, after arriving back at KGCN, we met the rest of the MDPA fly-out group for dinner on the south rim of the Park. It was fun swapping stories with other pilots and was an enjoyable evening. We also spoke about the forecasted inclement weather for the next morning and our plans to wait it out, as well as the routes we wanted to fly home.

The next morning we awoke to a snowstorm! It snowed heavily for a few hours but luckily it didn't stick to the paved surfaces. After the snow stopped, the hail came! This overall experience of watching multiple storm cells come through on ForeFlight, making smart aeronautical decisions, bouncing ideas off of other pilots, and overall just being safe and flexible was invaluable. After originally agreeing to depart early in the morning when we were planning the trip a few weeks earlier, we weren't able to depart until around 2pm. By that point, the precipitation was over with but there were low clouds for a hundred miles or so in our flight direction. Most planes took off from KGCN in short succession and we flew 8,500 MSL back towards KWJF. The clouds bases were around 9,000 MSL but rather than pick up an IFR clearance to get on top of them, we wanted to stay below because of the concern of icing given the temperature was right around 0 degrees Celsius. The sky cleared up around the HEC VOR and after looking at current weather reports on ForeFlight, we could tell the Central Valley had overcast skies but with high ceilings. We decided it was a great opportunity to practice an instrument approach so we filed an IFR flight plan with FSS into KBFL (Bakersfield Meadows) and then picked up our clearance with ARTCC. To our surprise, we were given a STAR to fly. We were both happy there was a second pilot onboard to handle the increased workload!

After a quick refueling stop at KBFL, we were back on our way to KCCR and flew back directly given how exhausted we were. We had tremendous headwinds of 20-30 kts the entire time after leaving the KGCN as winds were blowing towards the low-pressure storm system that had just passed. We ended up putting 5.6 hours on the Hobbs on the return trip – jeez! We arrived home just around 8pm on Memorial Day.

In all, it was an epic trip. Not only was it the longest trip either of us had been on, but we learned a ton about mountain flying, cross-country planning, flying IFR, flying in groups, etc. We'd recommend taking advantage of larger group fly-outs like

this one and going with another pilot on board if possible. The 5+ hours of flying on the way home enlightened us both on the dangers of flying tired. Also, traveling during the cooler weather really helped with density altitude concerns as the density altitude at the ~6,600ft KGCN airport never exceeded the low 7,000s.

Please feel free to reach out to either of us with any questions about the trip.

Ben Ginsberg & Aaron Doyle



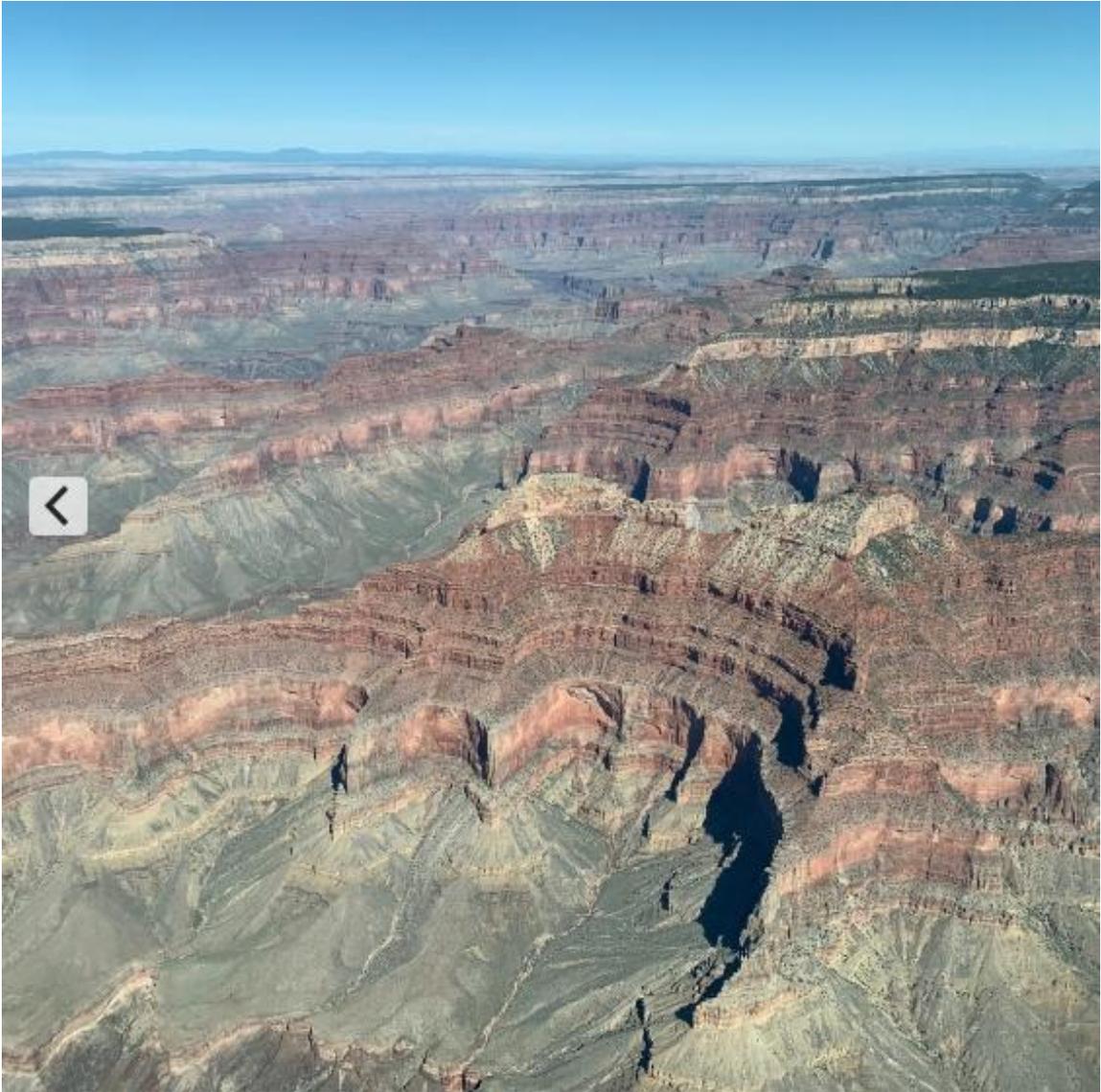
Flying over the Colorado River on the boarder of Arizona and Nevada.
Laughlin/Bullhead Airport is in the distance on the left side of the river.



This box is on the fence near the GA parking ramp area at KGCN. It contains key cards that GA pilots can sign in and out and that work to open a gate from the road to GA parking ramp area. We did not notice it until the second day of our trip and thought we had to work to/from the FBO each time.



Canyon overflight.



Canyon overflight.



Snowstorm!!



The cloud cover after the snow and hail stopped and melted.



Just your standard coffee shop view in Sedona.



Descending into the valley surrounding Sedona.





Short final at Sedona... don't come up short!