



## ---FUN DESTINATIONS---

NRI Flying Club Inc.

**SOCAL Adventures ---** by Chris Mather

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My wife and I recently took N7561X on a cross country tour of California, clocking in with a total flight time of 11.4 hours. Our route took us from Concord -> Fresno -> Bakersfield -> Mojave -> Palm Springs, Torrance LA, Santa Barbara -> Monterey -> Concord. It was a great learning experience and we had a lot of fun!

The planning started about a month prior when we realized we both could finally take some time off and do an adventurous vacation. The problem is that my wife and I look at adventures differently. I like the adventure of flying the plane and thinking of all manners of worst case scenarios and solving for those. Her idea of adventure is stopping at an unknown airport, going for a hike, and seeing where chance takes us before going to the next airport. On this trip we'd end up doing a bit of both.

We planned to fly to Seattle. I had the destinations and route charted. But a weather system covering most of the west coast thought differently about my plan. We realized the morning of the trip that getting over the mountains to get to Seattle was a non-starter. There were visibility issues, reports of icing, thunderstorms and moderate turbulence. We decided instead to go south, staying in California. We'd pick at random one town per day to visit, each town being within 1 - 2 hours of flying. No IFR and no arriving at night. Safety - check. Adventure - check.

Our first stop was Fresno for a bathroom break. When we got back to the plane it wouldn't start! The next morning we arrived at the repair hangar where a mechanic had already removed the engine cowling. We would come to find out in a few minutes that we were in one of the largest Cessna Conquest maintenance facilities in the US. And they had quite a few King Airs and jets in the hangar. I sheepishly asked if I could sit in all the airplanes. They graciously complied. Of course, after the mechanic tried to start the plane it started on the first try. After discussing the possible issues with Larry from NRI we were convinced we were safe and continued onwards. And don't worry, the root of the issue was resolved in 61X after we got back.

Next stop Bakersfield. Except there were thunderstorms to the west from the cold front that still hadn't quite cleared the area. I had been monitoring the delayed radar graphics from my iPad all morning and the thunderstorms seemed mostly stationary and far enough from the airport that we could make it to the next town. We departed, keeping a close eye on the clouds off of our right wing. We ended up with a little bit of rain and continuous light chop with moments of moderate. As we neared Bakersfield I felt the wing buffet, that I recall from east coast flying, comes from thunderstorms. I remember an instructor warning me: when you feel the buffet on the wings it's time to land. I felt happy to be at Bakersfield for the night.

The next morning we departed for Mojave. The locals at Bakersfield gave us some safety tips, warning us not to fly into the windmills, and to watch the wind going into Mojave. A quick Google search revealed that this is where the US Air Force tests cross wind landings for military aircraft. Great! I can tell you the wind was indeed ferocious. And there was something about the feeling of being continuously pushed sideways that was new to me -- perhaps unique to the desert? The flight from Mojave to Palm Springs was filled with continuous light turbulence but we were rewarded with spectacular views of the mountains.



There was a fair bit of mountain flying on this trip. No matter how much I've studied the effects of flying near mountains, flying through a canyon or near these gigantic things is humbling and scary. My palms were definitely sweaty as we flew through the infamous Banning pass from Palm Springs to LA. We got through at 6,500ft with only light turbulence. I was thankful.

The rest of the trip proceeded in spirit like this and the flight back up the coast from Santa Barbara to Monterey to Concord was turbulence free and beautiful. We made it back safely, learned a lot about a few towns in California, got to know 61X a little better, and leveled up a little in cross country flying!



Chris