




Skywriter



Monthly Newsletter of the Calgary Ultralight Flying Club

November 2002

From the Cockpit

by Bob Kooyman

I've had an interesting month in October. Not much flying, but a lot of hanger work. The first order of business was to attend to the formation of a new COPA flight. Bob Kirkby was good enough to attend to the paper work of sending over the application form. I rounded up the Club executive plus additional volunteers and filled in the form with the requisite number of signatures and returned it to Bob. Bob arranged for delivery of the form to COPA and in due course I received an e-mail advising me that the Calgary Ultralight Flying Club has been accepted as COPA Flight 114. COPA publishes a regular monthly newsletter by e-mail which I'll try to forward to the membership who have registered their e-mail addresses.

I drove out to Vancouver for a few days with my wife in the unusual position of accompanying my wife to a teachers' convention. The spouses' program wasn't, which left me with time on my hands; so I went to look at airplanes. I had three destinations in mind. My first stop was the Canadian headquarters of ICOM Canada (www.icomcanada.com) in Delta. The building in a strip mall is the Canadian distribution center and a repair center. I had an excellent visit with their sales manager. I was surprised at the wide variety of products Icom produces. They are #1 in Canada in the marine radio line,

and also quite busy with wireless computer products. He indicated that they plan to have several new aviation products out "soon". I have invited Icom to attend one of our meetings to display their products.

I then headed down to the Delta Air Park, one of several small airports along the edge of the Fraser River. The Delta Air Park is a former British airbase left over from the WWII. It is now held in trust as a "park" by the City of Delta for non-commercial airplane use. I visited the main hanger and restaurant and did a bit of hanger flying with the residents. The Delta Airpark is home to RAA chapter 85. They have a nice clubhouse (a larger round "band stand" closed in with windows, plumbing, and heating) and a hanger for members aircraft. Present at tie downs on the field were a Glastar and a couple of Cessna's. Inside the hanger were a couple of Emeraludes (both single and two seaters), a lovely Tiger Moth and a beautiful scaled Spitfire. The Spitfire was powered by a V-8 auto conversion and reported to be both fast and sound authentic. Both were slated to fly at a Memorial Day fly by. In the end of the hanger was a second Spitfire which was being rebuilt after an engine failure and forced landing and a Volmer flying boat. The Delta Air Park is a friendly place to visit if a bit remote and challenging to find by road.

My next stop was the King George Air Park, home of Airflow Ultralight Aviation. I was shown around the airpark by George Sakgaev and Darrell Wells, two of the ultralight instructors. There are between

30 and 40 aircraft based at the field. Most are in open sided roofed T-Hanger sheds. The day I visited, flying had not begun. Unlike Calgary, where most flying is undertaken in the morning to avoid the afternoon winds, in the winter in Delta, flying has to wait for noon until the morning fog burns off and the ground becomes visible!

There are a real variety of ultralights on the field ranging from an old Lazair, several Beavers and other ultralights up through new RANS -6 and -7 aircraft and two Seareys. I noted the effect of the high humidity and rain on all the wooden buildings. I received a real lesson in humidity when we looked at one of the RANS S-6 aircraft. The elevator had been covered in clear tedlar and was fogged with condensation with water in large droplets pooling in the bottom. The aluminum tail structure was clear and bright, but you could see how corrosion would quickly take its toll. Of note, the S-6 and S-7 aircraft are used for instruction. All are powered by 912's. The field has two grass runways about 1000' long. The approach from east to west is reported to be challenging, particularly in the summer. You come in over a set of power lines and the King George Highway. In the summer, heat convection from the highway tends to pop you up significantly, just as you begin to flare. Challenging place to land if you drop in here in summer! →

For Sale

Ragwing Special - plans, fin, stab & rudder built, all ribs built, sitka spruce for longerons and spars, glue and metal parts. \$580. Dave Dedul 403-823-2214 (11/02)

VP2 - C65, 198 TTEA, homebuilt, built 1982, \$13500. Dave Dedul 403-823-2214 (11/02)

MiniMax 1600R - 85 TTSN, Rotax 503DC, dual CHT/EGT, wing tanks, strobes, cabin heat/air, all speed fairings, steel Eros landing gear, always hangared, beautiful plane, \$15,000. Guy Bishoff 403-320-1768 or gtbishof@telusplanet.net. (11/02)

Parts - Lyc. and Cont. alternators, starters, generators, regulators. All new or overhauled, some certified, 85-100HP, 115-150HP. Cessna tail dragger skis, Fluidyne A2000A with rigging for Cessna 150. RV6 tail feathers, completed. Larry Motyer 273-7023. (09/02)

Fisher 404 - bi-plane, 65hp Rotax 532, VHF radio, excellent condition, easy to fly, \$13,500 OBO, Ron (403) 207-1147 (07/02)

Piper Vagabond PA17 - 10hr since total rebuilt, Continental A65 10 hrs STO, \$25,000 OBO, Glen Clark, (403) 279-1036 (07/02)

COSMOS Phase II Trike - 1997, loaded with extras, 582 Rotax, 6-blade prop, 14.9 wing, electric start, trailer, high-speed/two-step floats (new), BRS900. Hangared, immaculately cared for and maintained only 200 hours. \$25,000 OBO. Call Ted Matthews (403) 722-3810 or trmatt@telusplanet.net (07/02)

Kolb Firestar - Single seat ultralight, excellent condition, good panel, Rotax 447, 160 hrs TTAE. 10 minute wing fold for easy storage. Complete with enclosed trailer which can be used as a hangar. Asking \$15,000.00 For details and pictures contact Andy Cumming (403) 380-6291 or flyingac@hotmail.com (05/02)

Continental 65 - with prop, 300hrs, high compression pistons make it an 80hp, \$5500. Call Don LeOnzio (250) 427-2046. (05/02)

Propeller For Sale: 2-Blade wood, 68x32 tractor for Rotax 503DC. Leading edge protection, 60 hours TT, great condition. \$350 CDN, obo. Includes bolts and mounting plate. Call Stu at (403) 255-6998 or e-mail ssimpson@telus.net for pictures. (02/02)

Super Koala - Rotax 503, DCDI, Culver wood prop. Airspeed, Altimeter, Tach, CHT, EGT, Hour meter, Fuel gauge. Heated cockpit. Less than 200 TT on new engine and airframe. This is an attractive, predictable and easy to fly taildragger. Open to any serious offers. Dale (403)293-3826. (01/02)

Notice: Classified ad are free to CUFC members. Call Bob Kirkby to place or renew your ad 569-9541 or email to kirkby@skywalker.ca

Ads reprinted from the St. Albert Flying Club Newsletter

Team HiMax - licensed as a homebuilt, 40hp Zenoah twin 2 stroke, full electrics, brakes, radio, skis, 70mph cruise, 11 gals, ELT, \$11,500. Dan Pandur 780-418-4159.

GSC 3-blade prop - for 912 hub, tractor, 66" with tapered tips, leading edge protection, 30hrs, cost \$650 new, \$450. Dan Pandur 780-418-4159.

Rotax 503 - mag ignition, single carb, electric starter, 60hrs SOH, \$3,000. Dan Pandur 780-418-4159.

Biplane - wings and fuse, no undercarriage, Continental A65 not mounted, no prop, needs paint, located Cooking Lake, \$6650. Tom Schroeder 780-922-1212.

Zenair 601 UL - Jabiru engine, 100hrs, 500 TTAF, good radio & intercom, fresh annual, 100mph on 3gph, 5hr range, Dave 780-459-8535 or 458-8324.

Skywriter

Skywriter is the official newsletter of the Calgary Ultralight Flying Club and is published 12 times per year. Forward your articles and letters to:

Editor: Bob Kirkby 569-9541
e-mail: kirkby@skywalker.ca

Assistant-editor: Bernie Kespe (see below)

Calgary Ultralight Flying Club

Meetings of the Calgary Ultralight Flying Club are held on the second Thursday of every month, except July and August, at 7:00 pm, at the Northeast Armoury, 1227 - 38 Avenue NE.

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Visit the CUFC web site:
www.cadvision.com/cufc/



*Brian Wilson's colourful Sky Raider.
Photo by Adrian Anderson.*

November Meeting

Our program for the November meeting will be presented by member Brad Lawrence. Brad will bring in his computer with all it's flight-sim accessories and demonstrate armchair flying at its best.

A Thousand Miles of Air Adventure

Part 2

by *Stu Simpson*

Continued from the October Skywriter

Day 3

Destination: Slave Lake

I was really looking forward to seeing Dawson Creek's famous Mile Zero marker at the start of the Alaska Highway. But the next morning dawned cloudy with a cold front quickly gaining from the west. I only managed to snatch a quick peek at the marker in the town centre as we bolted out to the airport.



Air and ground crew prepare for an early morning departure at Dawson Creek. Photo by Stu Simpson from atop Glen's motorhome.

Mornings on these trips are very busy affairs. Pilots work on knots, releasing their planes from the shackles of tie-downs. They stow gear in compartments and drain carefully measured, bright red cans into fuel tanks.

Ground crewers hustle, too, loading equipment, pumping gas and making sure everyone's accounted for, has what they need. They're accomplished performers in a seemingly chaotic ballet choreographed with a determined, singular purpose: to get the Dragonflies launched safely toward their next destination. The CUFC's ground crew are masters at it.

We beat the cold front by only a few minutes, but it was enough. And we finally got lucky with the wind. The front provided us with tail winds nearing 20 knots, pushing us hard as we hopped

from Dawson Creek to Spirit River. It was a nice treat to have the extra speed for a change.

The land once again went flat and if I hadn't been so diligent in my navigation, I might be convinced we were flying over Saskatchewan. Frankly, the view was dull compared to what we'd seen earlier on the trip, and to what we're used to back home. I hoped the other guys weren't too disappointed, and I worried we'd see nothing but this for the remainder of the trip.

There were close to a dozen people who came out to Spirit River's airport to see the flying circus that blew into town. Truth is, we were actually starting to get used to all the attention. One fellow was really interested in the Giant and actually offered to buy it. I courteously declined,

explaining that a fair price for the Giant wouldn't come close to paying for my divorce (which is what I'd face if I sold my plane and had to build another).

The ramp at Spirit River was really cramped with 15 airplanes trying to find parking space. As such, Carl parked his 'Max in one of the corners just off my right wing. When it came time to go, my helmet mike failed and I couldn't transmit. I hand-signalized Carl and he took over as Dragonfly 1, relegating me to number 2. All this was as per our established procedure.

Then Carl started to move forward. But there's no way his wing was going to get by my prop without some level of toothpick production happening. I signaled for him to stop.

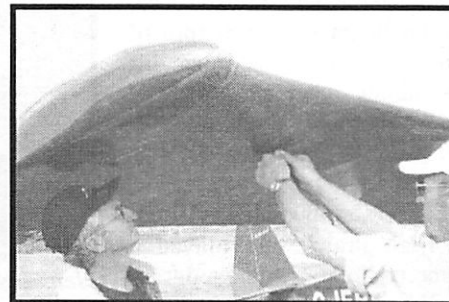
What I should have done then, in such crowded quarters, was get out and check the clearance to make sure I could get my wing past his prop now that he'd changed positions. Instead, I taxied ahead.

The next thing I knew Carl's prop was shredding the underside of the Giant's wing! In less than an instant I foresaw nothing but grief and complete disappointment as I envisioned a nightmare getting the Giant home on a trailer, performing God-knows-what for repairs, and being out of the air for weeks, not to mention the disastrous end of the vacation I'd planned for months.

Then a miracle happened, or so it seemed at the time. The damage was limited only to fabric and a bit of fiberglass on the bottom of the wing; nothing structural was damaged! Carl's prop missed the

spar and fiberglass wingtip completely, though not by much. After a very thorough inspection and cleaning, Kirkby and Bishell started laying on the duct tape. God bless Red Green. Robin Orsulak pulled a set of draw files from his tool kit and rubbed out a small nick on Forman's prop.

(Continued on page 4)



Kirkby & Bishell's wing taping service.

Adventure - continued from page 3

Half an hour after the incident we were all airborne again and headed for the town of Donnelly. The scenery didn't change much, just staying flat, but the flying sure was fun. We took the time to get some more video and pictures since Bruce had climbed in with Bishell. It was getting hot outside, too.

The lovely Harrison women worked their magic again and made lunch for us at Donnelly. We were all looking forward to the upcoming leg and to seeing Slave Lake from the air. I was pretty sure the trip was about to get a bit more interesting, visually speaking.

Ken Taylor and I watched from the Giant as the first flight departed in the sweltering heat. Then we taxied out and took our position on the runway. I radioed to Carl.

"Is there enough room there, Carl?" I queried. I was asking, of course, if there was enough room for my wingmen to line up behind the Giant for takeoff.

"Roger that," he chuckled as he taxied past my left wing. "I don't think we'll hit this time." It was a good joke and we all enjoyed the laugh.

The Giant climbed strongly and surely in the blazing afternoon. Even with a slightly duct taped wing and carrying me and Ken, the Giant gave us 500 fpm of climb. I tried to maximize lift by taking advantage of any thermal activity I could find.

We followed the highway south to High Prairie and played a game of 'I Spy' with Piegrass on the radio trying to spot his fuel truck on the road below.



Bishell's Bushmaster against Slave Lake. Photo by Stu Simpson.

As we turned eastward at the southwest corner of Slave Lake, Bruce radioed he was stopping for gas. We never did see him.



After fixing lunch at Donnelly, Doris collects her reward - a hop to Slave Lake in Kirkby's Starduster Too. Photo by Mac Harrison.

The beautiful body of water off our left wings captured our full attention now. I figured Slave Lake, about the third largest body of water in the province, would look bigger. But we never lost sight of the north shore, and could almost always see the east end of the lake. I guess seeing things from the air really does make them shrink.

Nonetheless, the lake was stunning. A myriad of greens, blues and browns paraded across the water in the brilliant sunshine. The guys in

our flight made sure we got plenty of pictures of each other with the lake in the background.



Hans Leblanc's Challenger flies along Slave Lake's southern shore. Smoke from a small forest fire can be seen in upper right. Photo by Joe Harrington.

The heat and humidity at the Slave Lake airport was absolutely oppressive. But we enjoyed seeing the vast amount of aviation activity there. I noted a Turbo-Beaver, a business jet, and was especially pleased to see a number of CL-215 water bombers land behind us. The bomber pilots all peered intently at our planes and waved to us as they taxied to their ramp.

Day 4

Destination: St. Albert

We apparently made quite a splash the next morning when we left Slave Lake. Bob and Gerry, as usual, left last. They reported later that it was very impressive to see thirteen ultralights takeoff in sequence the way we did.

As we climbed into the morning air I just couldn't wipe the smile from my face. The sun was shining, the air was calm and cool, and my wingmen and I were living out a great flying adventure. This was livin'!

This leg was going to be the longest, and one of the most challenging of the entire journey. It's a 95 mile jaunt from Slave Lake to Westlock. Not much of a problem except there are absolutely no airfields listed on any map between the two spots. On top of that, well over half the terrain beneath us was bush country. I guess if Punch Dickens could do it back then, we could do it today.

The only problem that cropped up for us was the wind. It was a bit over ten knots again and still on the nose. True, it was so steady as to be nearly unnoticeable, but it was getting a bit stronger as we went south.

As we made our way toward Westlock the trees slowly gave way again to agriculture and people. It was too bad we had to put the bush country's beauty behind us once and for all. I felt tremendously lucky to have seen that part of Alberta for the first time, and especially to have done it from the cockpit of my own airplane.

The landing at Westlock got
(continued on page 5)

Adventure - continued from page 4

complicated, or rather, the circuit did. Because we flew at a lower altitude than Conquergood's flight, and thus had less of a headwind, our flight of five caught up with his flight of three just before landing. We had to make some awkward turns for spacing to fit safely into the pattern. And Harrington's group was now pretty close behind us, too. Once again, everyone's professionalism shone through and we all landed safely.

We soon learned that things weren't going as smoothly for the ground crew. The Bishells' motor home got stuck in some mud at the Slave Lake airport. They had to enlist the kindness of a snow plow to free it. Then, Adrian Anderson who was piloting Robin's truck and trailer rig while Orsulak flew with Reid Huzzey in his Challenger, called to report that Robin's truck had broken down just north of Westlock. There was some sort of electrical problem. It took a couple of hours, but they eventually got the truck running again and joined us at the field.

After another Harrison lunch, and ensuring that Orsulak's truck would make it, we departed for St. Albert.

I expected the ride in the afternoon wind would be excruciatingly bumpy but I was

happy to be wrong. For reasons unknown the wind eased off with each mile further south we flew. The roughness we expected from the daytime heating never materialized, either. We set down on St. Albert's smooth gravel runway about half an hour later and went looking for a party.

The boys from St. Albert threw us a great one. They cooked up a great mess of hot dogs and burgers and opened up their hangars to let us peer at their planes. We saw all manner of ultralights and homebuilts and pretty much had the time of our lives. They made us feel completely welcome and we simply can't thank them enough.

The Harrison girls then treated us to a mid-summer's night performance of guitar playing and singing. We also learned Adrian Anderson plays pretty well, and that Bruce Piepgrass has another career option as a singer. There were jokes and laughter and a camaraderie we won't ever forget. No one went to bed that night



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without a smile on their face.

Day 5 Destination: Calgary

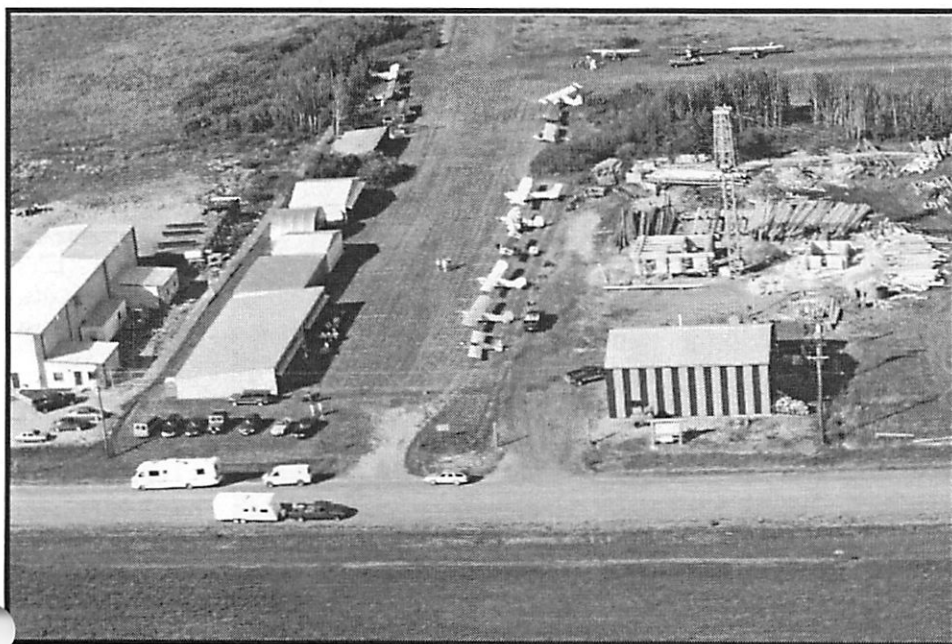
Arriving at the St. Albert field the next morning gave me quite a shock. Bishell's Bushmaster was sitting all askew from where he'd left it the night before. Apparently, it broke loose from its tie-downs during a vicious wind in the night and nearly smacked into Huzzey's Challenger right beside it.

The cold front that chased us out of Dawson Creek a few days earlier caught up to us again in St. Albert. Only this time it was stronger and the leading edge was right on top of us. Kirkby informed us that the front stretched northeast to southwest. In fact, we could see the front of the front just a few miles to the east, with clear blue sky beyond.

Because of the uncertain conditions Bill Davies was reconsidering his plan to fly back to Fox Creek that morning. He wisely decided to wait things out for a while.

Our problem lay in the fact that we had to fly south-westerly, along the front line, to get around the Edmonton International control zone. Conquergood and his flight took off as we taxied out. His Pietenpol rocked in the turbulence as he climbed away from the ground, as did Wright's Chief and the Clarke's Cub. As our flight lined up to firewall the throttles, Conquergood reported a cloud ceiling of only 800 feet.

There was some good news. The
(continued on page 6)



*15 aircraft on the ramp at St. Albert with a BBQ warming up in front of the hangars.
Photo by Marty Slater and Dan Pandur.*

Adventure - continued from page 5

temperature had chilled substantially, which would improve aircraft performance, and the wind was going our way at a pretty good clip. Things definitely could've been worse.

Piegrass was in the Giant's other seat on this trip and he took some great video of the weather as the Dragonflies left St. Albert to work our way past Edmonton's west end.

The trip to Lacombe resurrected a flurry of intense memories for me. I flew the Giant along the same route to Kirkby's a year earlier, having bought it only moments before. The fuel, engine and weather problems that day made it an unforgettable adventure. That day I enjoyed a strong sense of accomplishment knowing how my plane had improved, what it had done, and what it could do compared to just a year before.

I know this sounds ridiculous, but en route I was really happy to finally lay eyes on the Edmonton VOR. You see, in all the times I've flown that way I never actually saw the thing, until then. It was a small victory for me, albeit perhaps a silly one.

Our landing at Lacombe was weird as the planes just floated and floated. It seemed the wind sped up the closer we got to the

ground and it wouldn't quite let us drop through ground effect until it absolutely had to. Bob Kirkby was there waiting for us. Gerry flew his 182 straight from St. Albert to Springbank, having to get a VFR-on-top clearance to do so.

This was going to be the last leg of the adventure and briefing for it was bittersweet. On one hand, it would be good to get home. On the other, this had turned out to be a premium adventure, and it'd be nice for it to run a bit longer.

We still had our tailwind for the final leg to Kirkby's which, for a distance of 90 miles, really helped out. Robin Orsulak shared the final flight with me. Kirkby pedaled by on the left side of our formation once we got past Red Deer's east end. He radioed that he wanted to just keep going, that he didn't want it to end. He echoed many of our feelings. We soon said so long to Bishell as he peeled the Bushmaster off west toward his strip near Carstairs.

Back on the ground at Kirkby's, back where it all started those few days ago, we debriefed the trip from start to finish. We

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each took the opportunity to learn from our mistakes, hang onto the things we did right and brainstorm some things to make next year's trip that much better.

Then Joe, Brian and Hans decided to get going to Lethbridge while the gettin' was still good. It sure was fun having them along as fellow Dragonflies for a week. Their final salute to us was a line-astern, high-speed pass down Kirkby's runway 16 that left us all with smiles.

Such was the end of the Alberta Air Adventure Tour 2002. We covered more than a thousand miles and had only one minor, field-repairable incident. Our troupe of 15 planes included everything from ultralights to homebuilts, and both basic and advanced general aviation craft. Some planes were sixty years old, some were sixteen, and others had only a couple of years on their airframes. It

couldn't be any more certain that the line between ultralights and general aviation is now fuzzier than ever. Let's hope it stays that way - at least until next year.

That reminds me. Where's my Saskatchewan map? →



The happy adventurers at Chestermere-Kirkby Field. Photo by Graham Millington.

Red Antifreeze

by Ed D'Antoni

Brian Vasseur's recent articles about his Rotax 582 corrosion problems due to use of improper anti freeze has always perplexed me. Especially since I was one of the builders of his Rans. In 1994 there were two types of antifreeze available, regular and low silicate. The low silicate was labeled "safe for aluminum." At that time VW boxer water cooled engines were known to have problems with cylinder head gasket corrosion. Audi antifreeze was supposed to cure the problem. I spent the extra 5 bucks and used this product in the Rans. A recent article in the EAA experimenter suggests the use of Silicone free Texaco Dex-cool antifreeze. The only technical statement in the article was "after varying time and temperature the silicone begins to be abrasive to seals and shafts." In Don Cherry's words, it doesn't take a "rocket surgeon" to figure the sentence to be void of any factual information, so I did some antifreeze research.

The following is my interpretation of the new extended life anti-freeze's on the market. Antifreeze is used to provide coolants protection from freezing and boiling. It is basically Ethylene or Propylene Glycol with lubricants and corrosion inhibitors. Inhibitors protect aluminum, copper, steel, cast iron and rubber cooling system components. In addition there are inhibitors that prevent foaming and the formation of tiny bubbles that can cause cavitations. Inhibitors in conventional (green) antifreeze are generally nitrate based. Silicate and nitrate additives reduce metal corrosion. Unfortunately corrosion inhibitors are rapidly neutralized by the cooling systems metals. The solids formed in the neutralization process attach themselves to cooling system surfaces. They also act as an insulation that decreases cooling system efficiency. Aluminum silicates formed in the neutralization process are abrasive to water pump seals and shafts.

The low silicate antifreezes formulated with the advent of Aluminum engine



2nd prize: model Harvard wind vane

blocks were not much of an improvement over the original conventional antifreezes. An extended life antifreeze with phosphate-based inhibitors was developed in the late 80's. Corrosion inhibitors in this antifreeze are not subject to rapid neutralization. In 1995 Texaco developed a phosphate-free extended life antifreeze. It is a patented formula using carboxylate additives and is free of silicates, nitrates, and phosphates. There are now several suppliers of extended life antifreeze. These new antifreeze products need to be nitrate and amine free to meet U.S. requirements. I will stick with Texaco, as it is also phosphate free. Extended life antifreeze is coloured red or orange depending on manufacturer.

So Brian, if the product in your refurbished 582 is still green, the only way to eliminate any possibility of corrosion or abrasion is to change your coolant every 6 months. Should one change to extended life antifreeze it is necessary to drain and flush to avoid a mix of old and new. Mixing the two completely negates all extended life characteristics. There may be problems with extended life antifreeze in old engines. There is evidence that residue silicates and phosphates coating the inside of the cooling system will react with the extended life antifreeze to form an insulation which will decrease the heat transfer efficiency of the cooling system. With a used engine the best approach is to use traditional antifreeze.

Remember all antifreeze is harmful or fatal if swallowed or inhaled. Also animals seem to like it and have been known to drink it if left out. Antifreeze poisoning is responsible for several human fatalities each year. The only safe and legal way to dispose of used antifreeze is to take it to a recycling centre. →

Annual Raffle

The annual CUFC membership raffle is on. This year we have to prizes:

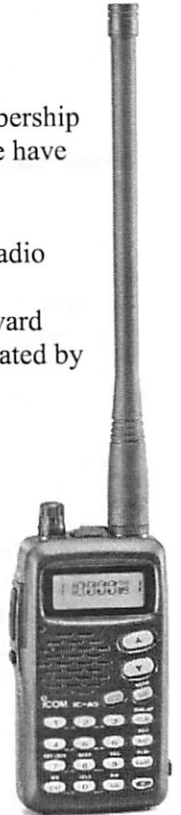
1st prize is an Icom A5 radio

2nd prize is a model Harvard wind vane built and donated by Elmer Dyck

Tickets are \$10.00 each available at the club meetings or from Bernie Kespe.

Draw takes place at the January meeting.

Renew your membership and enter the draw at the same time!



1st prize: Icom A5

High Country - continued from page 8

the Devils Gap just off my right wing. Looking through the "gap" we could see the water of Lake Minnewanka sparkle in the sunlight. I can't believe I didn't have my camera! My altimeter showed 6,800 ft as I turned south, just west of Waiporous creek. The terrain up here in the hills is hostile and I continuously kept an eye out for a place to set down if need be. Even with the 4-stroke engine one has to be prepared. The air that day was behaving well. We could feel the odd push from below but very minor.

Calgary was barely visible at a distance to the southwest and we turned east just north of Ghost Lake. I checked my GPS for my ETE to my home-strip and it showed 28 minutes. We had a fabulous flight and we'll go back soon to explore more strips and landing spots. Once you have seen this magnificent splendor you can't wait to go back again to the "High Country". →

The High Country

by Andy Gustafsson

My long time fascination for old time "bush flying" and the type of aircraft that these pilots flew and still fly is to blame for the airplane that I am currently flying. I have just finished building my Merlin, and I am learning to take full advantage of this new-to-me concept of a tail dragger. I believe that I finally have the airplane that I feel comfortable with for that "bush plane" experience but still being in the Ultralight category. With it's large wheels it handles the rough fields with ease and has the short take-off and landing capabilities that makes this kind of flying possible. The appreciation for tail dragger airplanes really comes to light when exploring unimproved or less used airstrips. My own home strip falls under the unimproved category. It is short and bumpy, with a hill in the middle of the runway, and demands your total attention. F.E. Potts writes in his book that it takes a life time to really get the hang of how to do it right in back country operations. I am the first one to admit that it takes time to learn to fly a tail dragger the right way. I am starting to get those landings to look better than when I first started. They were not pretty I have to admit. But it is still a challenge and I think it will make me a better pilot in the process.

My first back country trip took place after I studied an old "forestry" map and found the outline of, for the most part, abandoned airstrips along the Foothills of the Canadian Rockies. I also heard from Kim Skulsky, one of our club members, that he had spotted a "new" strip between Ghost Lake and the Waiporous Creek area. This got my adrenaline going and after a few e-mails to Stu Simpson with pictures of the

map, we decided on a Saturday departure. Stu flies a Bushmaster and like the Merlin, is designed and manufactured in Canada and equally at home in the back country. The weather and wind was perfect and visibility endless. With the wing tanks topped up, I flew down for briefing at Kirkby field just after 1:00 p.m. Chestermere-Kirkby field is getting to be the starting point for many of the adventures that the CUFC enjoys. We took off and passed by the limp windsock on runway 34 and climbed to 4200 ft. We went around the Calgary control zone with Airdrie to the north and laid in a course for the Wildcat Hills. This meant we had to penetrate the Springbank training areas just north of Cochrane. YYC was notified, as was Springbank airport. They were grateful to know "who we are, where we are, and what we want" and cleared us without delay to our intended destination.

The ground rises rapidly as you go west and at 6000ft we flew in over the Foothills. We had the Forestry Trunk road and hwy 1A as our first waypoint and we turned north along this winding access road to our high country adventure. I have driven this trunk road many times, but have never seen it from the air. I got a new appreciation for the breathtaking beauty of this part of Alberta. The hills rise sharply as you get closer to the mountains. The valleys get deeper and more rugged with fewer places to land if you had to. I took over the lead from Stu and started to look for the "new" strip that Kim had described. It was not long before I spotted the white



Stu and Andy head for the High Country.

windsock at mid field. The north-south strip looked long enough, but with a treed hill on the south end and a power line on the north end. It is nestled in a valley with a high hill to the northeast, so an approach from the northwest was in order. It looked like a challenge but in the calm air it did not look too bad. I flew over mid field and started my right spiral turn to final. The final approach took me over the trunk road and over the power lines for a touchdown. I rolled out and stopped well before the fence on the south end (nice to have brakes) and got out of the way for Stu. The Bushmaster touched down and we shut down and got out.

The first thing I noticed was the total silence and calm of this place. The air was crisp and clean and with the newly snow powdered mountain peaks to the west we had landed in heaven. A string of horses outside the fence got my attention as they peacefully kept on grazing on the meager blades of dry grass. They barely noticed our arrival. Stu snapped pictures of our planes and we discussed the notion of trying to reach the old and abandoned Waiporous airstrip further north, and to find out if we could get in and out safely. The afternoon was warm and calm and we only used less than half of the available runway to get out of the Ghost strip. After about a quarter a mile north of the Ghost strip we got into an area of sinking air and for a minute or two we did not gain a single foot of altitude. Then, just like that, we were out of it and picked up good lift that had us flying at least 500 feet above the valley floor. We continued north in a continuous climb as the terrain was rising sharply. There are plenty of meadows and narrow pastures along the road that can be used as an emergency landing spot and on we went.

I spotted the Waiporous strip from 3 miles away just as it looked on my old map. The south half is hostile with bushes and tall plants but the north half looks really good. We decided that this strip is our next "High Country" destination and with a wide turn to the west we started back down the valley. The mountains looked oh so close to the west with the Devils Head mountain and
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