

Have Trikes...



Will Travel

A family trike adventure

Last summer, my wife, Beth, and I lived our dream. We packed our two sons, Jeremy and Nathan, into a motor home and our two AirBorne trikes into our airplane trailer and headed for the Northwest. For those of you who are bored with your local flying area, join us for our trip of a lifetime—our trike adventure.

TERRI SIPANTZI

With our home on wheels, our trikes, and gear in tow, our first stop was EAA AirVenture Oshkosh 2004. Ultralights and light-planes were center stage with the FAA's announcement of the sport pilot/light-sport aircraft (SP/LSA) rule. While enjoying the convention, we finalized our trike odyssey plans, taking the opportunity to pick the brains of other seasoned ultralight pilots present.

After Oshkosh, our first stop was Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin. There we made some shakedown flights to test the equipment we purchased at EAA AirVenture. The air was relatively smooth, providing a good atmosphere for acquainting ourselves with new equipment. We wanted everything checked out before we reached the mountains where the air would be more turbulent. When all was in order, we headed for the Black Hills in South Dakota.

Our arrival coincided with the annual Sturgis Motorcycle Rally. Harley-Davidson motorcycles surrounded us. Beth and I both owned motorcycles previously, and we see our trikes as motorcycles with wings. What better place to fly our aerial motorcycles than above all those Harleys touring the Black Hills. We camped near the Custer County Airport and toured Crazy Horse, Mt. Rushmore, Custer State Park, and nearby Devils Tower.

Some of the benefits of taking our trikes to different places are the new airports and surroundings we see, and the friends we make. We consider ourselves ultralight ambassadors. As such, we look for opportunities to introduce the joys of trike flying to general aviation (GA) pilots. We are continually amazed at how little exposure GA pilots have to the world of trikes.

Good Visitors

When visiting new airports, we take certain actions to ensure our welcome. First, we take the time to meet the fixed-base operator (FBO), introduce ourselves, and share our intentions. We find out where he or she would like us to set up, ask for any special instructions for using the airport, and offer to pay any tie-down fees. Most importantly, we inform them that we will be using radios and flying the standard pattern. Radio communication is the single most important issue to the

at 1,000 feet AGL (10,300 feet MSL) only to have the ground drop dramatically away into a 2,000-foot deep river gorge! In the space of a single 90-minute flight, we saw more unforgettable scenery than most of the folks who have lived in Cody their entire lives. What other all-terrain vehicle could conquer such varied terrain and delight its occupants so much?

After Cody and Yellowstone we swung north to Glacier National Park. The grandeur of the park was hidden by storm clouds when we arrived, but you could still make out the immense ruggedness of the mountain peaks, which brought back memories of the European Alps. We made arrangements to fly out of a private airstrip near our campground, but weather grounded us. While hiking we could not believe the vertical grandeur of this park. We concluded this area is light aircraft hostile.



GA community. When arriving at a new airport, we often allow extra time to answer the many questions our GA brethren have.

Westward

After Sturgis, our next stop was Cody, Wyoming, the eastern gateway to Yellowstone National Park. While the town itself is interesting, the rugged and wildly variable terrain that surrounds it is even more interesting—much of it only really appreciated from the air. From low-lying desert mountains to soaring, lushly wooded mountain ranges, Cody was a western feast.

At one point we climbed over a ridge

God knew we should not attempt to fly there.

Finally, as we approached Idaho, the stormy weather broke, allowing us to fly over some of the most unique terrain we had seen to date. Departing from Grangeville, a plateau near the Snake and Salmon rivers, we watched as the ground dropped away—mountains in reverse relief. It was amazing. Grangeville's Idaho County Airport is one of the staging areas for Idaho's smoke jumpers. Because it was a slow season, we took several of them for their first ultralight ride, which put smiles on their faces.

As grand as flying in Idaho was, the best was waiting for us in Washington. We've long desired to fly around Mount St. Helens and see the impact of the 1980 volcanic eruption.

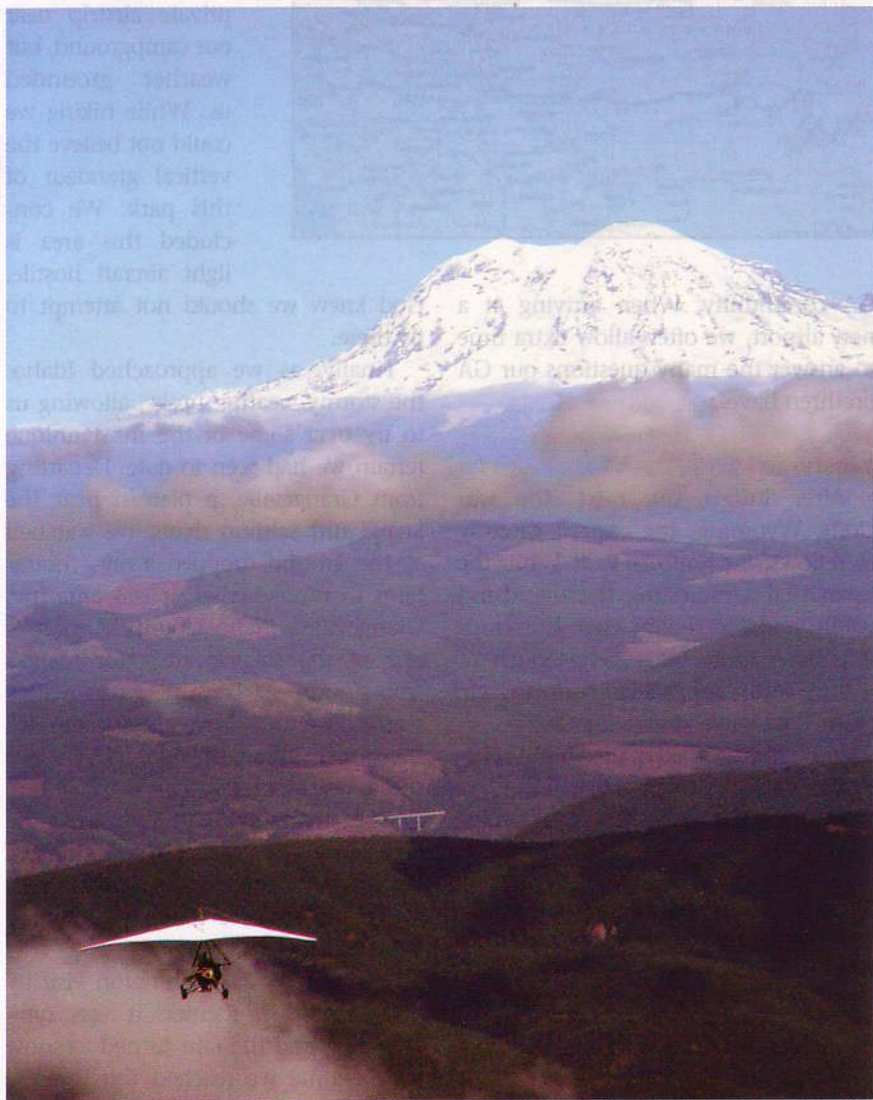
We started our Washington visit by driving to Mt. Rainier. It was typically wet, and the rain turned to snow by the time we reached the Paradise

Opposite page - Terri and Beth Sipantzi and their sons, Jeremy and Nathan, pose in front of their AirBorne trikes at Bryce Canyon, Utah. Their family adventure took them 10,000 miles over a three-month period, as they toured the country by land and air.



The Crazy Horse Monument, near the Black Hills, South Dakota—it is difficult to really appreciate just how huge this monument is unless you get much closer. Unfortunately, since 9/11, this is as close as we could get.

Flying towards Mount Saint Helens.



Visitors Center—snow on the 15th of September! The next day was no better, so we drove to Mount St. Helens hoping to catch a glimpse of the crater between the clouds, but no such luck. The forecast was for clearing the next day with an approaching high-pressure system. We extended our campground reservations for one more day hoping for a flying break. And we got it!

Taking off from the Kelso, Washington, airport, 17 feet above sea level, and climbing quickly, we followed a ridge line east to Mount St. Helens. It was too cold to fly over the crater, but the view from the north where the crater opened up was stunning.

Thirty miles to the north we could see the summit of Mt. Rainier. From our lofty trike perch, the boys could see Rainier's summit better than we had ever seen it when Beth and I had been stationed at Ft. Lewis, Washington, 20 years before. We also saw peaks in the Northern Cascades—Mt. Adams, Mt. Hood, and Mt. Jefferson—more than 80 miles away. It was spectacular! Fortunately, our flight to Mount St. Helens was the week before the area was closed because of new volcanic activity. Indeed, the growing lava dome was visible.

From Washington, we headed south stopping at Crater Lake, Oregon, and then moved on to California's northern coast near Crescent City. The weather was gorgeous, and we drooled over the prospect of exploring the rocky coastline by air the next day. After our usual airport reconnaissance, I decided to fly for the last few minutes before sunset. The evening coastal flight was beautiful. Unfortunately, the fog rolled in overnight and remained an obstacle for the rest of that week. If you plan on doing any coastal flying, remember fog can be challenging to work around; even just a mile away, the weather can be great.

From Crescent City, we moved inland to Redding, California. Our goal was to tour the Whiskeytown-Shasta-Trinity National Recreation Area. These lakes are real beauties and a mecca for water-related activities, including above-water flying. We spent hours exploring the meandering shoreline

and popping over high ridges.

From Redding, we headed for Yosemite National Park and the Mojave Desert and then made our way to Utah and the Colorado Plateau, also known as the Grand Circle. This area is home to more national parks than anywhere else in the country, including the Grand Canyon, Zion, Bryce Canyon, Lake Powell/Glen Canyon, and Monument Valley national parks. Based on our research, our anticipation for some spectacular flying was high.

We started our visit at Zion National Park and then moved to Bryce Canyon where the airport is at 7,600 feet MSL. Because conditions there are usually windy, our flying was restricted to the first few hours after sunrise. This was the highest airport we had ever flown from, with a density altitude of 9,100 feet. Thanks to the added power of our 80-hp Rotax 912 engines, we needed only a tiny fraction of the airport's 7,400-foot-long runway, and we were able to climb to 12,000 feet to explore higher vistas. Few GA aircraft can equal a trike's density altitude performance. (Our weight-to-thrust ratio is 4-to-3; not many fixed-wing airplanes have those impressive numbers.)

Following Bryce Canyon, we moved on to the Lake Powell/Glen Canyon National Recreation Area. This area is a trike flier's delight. The captivating landscape is unlike anything most easterners have ever seen. There is no green here—only the deep blues of the sky and water integrated with the reds and oranges of the steep and highly carved sandstone canyon walls. There are only two ways to appreciate Lake Powell—by boat or by air. This time we took the high road; next time we'll bring our jet skis. We saw things no boater or jet skier ever sees.

By now it was late October, and early winter storms were developing. We waited them out and were rewarded by some of the best flights of our adventure. Lake Powell is one of the largest man-made lakes in North America. It is 185 miles long, more than 500 feet deep (when full), and has more shoreline than the West Coast. Needless to say we were only able to explore a tiny

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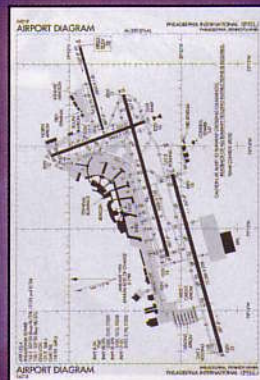
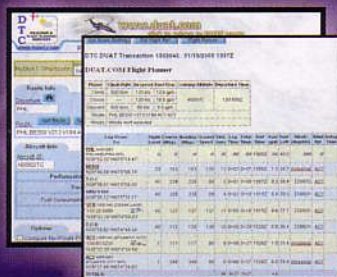
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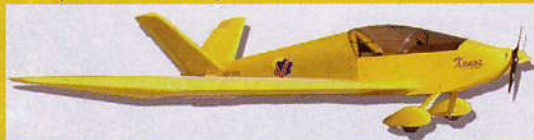
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A view of the crater and the ever-growing lava dome at the center of Mount Saint Helens. A week after we took this picture the National Park Service closed the area in anticipation of volcanic activity. Timing is everything.

and popping over high ridges. From Redding, we headed for



This is what is left of Spirit Lake just below the crater's north rim. You can still see the top left fork of the lake filled with timber swept off the sides of the mountain in 1980. Visible in the distance are Mount Rainier, Mount Hood, and Mount Adams...more than 80 miles away!



Breathtaking flying at Lake Powell, Arizona. This area is a trike flier's paradise; Beth and Nathan are en route to Rainbow Bridge.



Our home away from our "other home," as we began calling our home in West Virginia. Here we've set up camp in Joshua Tree National Park in California.

fraction of it during our brief stay.

One of the key landmarks of the area is Tower Butte, which rises 1,000 feet above the surrounding plateau and looks much like Devils Tower in Wyoming. Just a few miles west of Page, Arizona, is the Glen Canyon Dam and Horseshoe Bend. Glen Canyon drops vertically more than 500 feet from rim to floor to form a narrow canyon. You must be directly overhead to see the floor. On our last flight we decided to take a tour of the dam and Horseshoe Bend. Coincidentally, so did every tour operator and GA pilot within flying distance. Everyone had been waiting for the weather to break. We were so busy avoiding aircraft that we missed some of the spectacular views. Once we got away from Horseshoe Bend and Glen Canyon, the air became less crowded while the scenery remained inspiring.

This experience taught us a valuable lesson—avoid flying when air tours are at their peak, such as on weekends or high season. Once again we were reminded how important radio communications are for safe flying. Before taking off, we would coordinate our plans with the air tour operators so we understood their routes and they knew where we were going to be. To this we added frequent radio position reports to make ourselves more visible. All of this contributed greatly to a safe, though busy, flight.

Winter was approaching. The Rocky Mountain passes over 8,000 feet were covered with snow, so we had to quickly move south and east. We left the Grand Circle with much still unseen—and promised ourselves a return trip.

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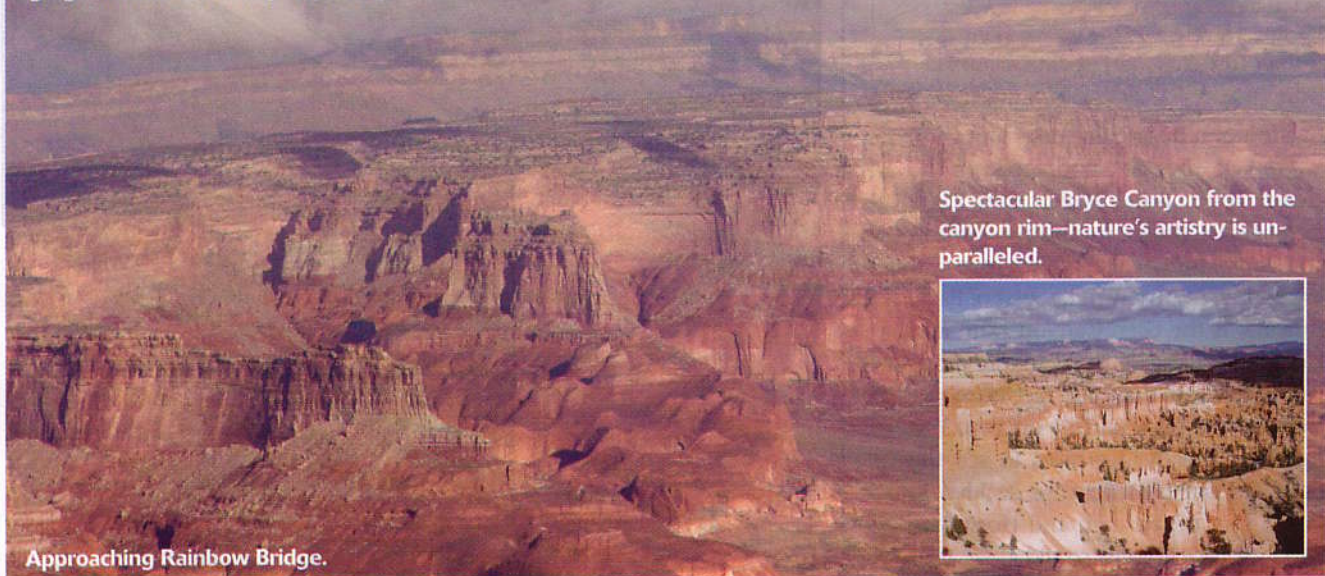
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Approaching Rainbow Bridge.

As our caravan headed home from our remarkable adventure, we reminisced about the sites we'd seen more than 3,000 miles from our home. Very few aircraft lend themselves to this type of touring. GA aircraft may be faster, but most pilots rarely fly more

than a few hundred miles from home. Unfortunately, most flex-wing pilots don't either, unless they fold their wings and hit the road.

Pack up your trike, powered parachute, ultralight, or light-sport aircraft and visit new airports, exciting places,

and meet new friends. You will wonder why you waited so long.

When you do, look for us; we'll be looking for you.

Terri and Beth Sipantzi own Precision Windsports in Lynchburg, Virginia. They are AirBorne Australia trike dealers and specialize in trike sales and training. All photos in this article were taken by their two sons, Jeremy (11) and Nathan (9), from the rear seats of the two-place AirBorne trikes. To view more photos from their trike adventure, visit www.PrecisionWindsports.com. For information about their company, e-mail info@PrecisionWindsports.com.



Beth had only limited time in light aircraft, flying as a passenger with Terri, a private pilot. Flying in an enclosed Piper aircraft had made her nauseated, but when they discovered trikes, the thrill of flying in the open air appealed to her greatly. After becoming proficient pilots and instructors, they decided to embark on this trip of a lifetime.

Preparing for our Dream Trip



Terri and the boys in front of our little caravan in Badlands National Park, South Dakota. Our truck with the travel trailer is behind the van with airplane trailer.

How do you prepare for a trip that will last four months, cover 10,000 miles, with two adults, two home-schooled kids, four reptile pets, and two ultralight trikes? It took a bit of planning. Here's what we did:

- Selected a motor home capable of housing said adults, kids, and pets.
- Purchased an aircraft trailer (and a second tow vehicle) large enough to haul two trikes and our gear safely.
- Developed an itinerary (where to stay, what to see, where to fly).
- Prepared for mountain flying.
- Identified, acquired, and learned how to use the right navigation tools (GPS, maps, travel guides) and portable computers.

For our sanity, we needed a motor home that included a separate kids' bedroom, with space to accommodate their pets, toys, and schoolwork, and a large enough living space so we wouldn't be on top of each other. A 33-foot Keystone travel trailer met all of our needs without breaking the bank. To increase the remote camping capabilities, we outfitted the trailer with extra batteries and a powerful (but quiet) portable Honda generator. The trailer was surprisingly comfortable, and we soon began referring to it as "home" and our residence in Lynchburg as "the other home." Prior to this trip, we always camped in tents, so the trailer felt like the lap of luxury.

Next, we had to transform an enclosed car hauler into an ultralight trailer. Car trailers are wide, have a built-in loading ramp, and can double as a portable aircraft hangar. This proved extremely convenient. The aircraft, with associated flying necessities, were stored in one place, securely locked and protected from the elements. We made some modifications to store the wing on the walls, and we added more tiedowns in the floor to secure the planes.

We planned our itinerary to put us in campgrounds next to airports. We used FlightStar aviation mapping/routing software, Microsoft Streets & Trips, and other resources like the Trailer Life RV Campground Finder to make this process easier. On the road, we used FlightStar mapping to print aviation maps and airport diagrams as needed, eliminating a bag full of sectional charts and airport directories.



Our car trailer converted to an airplane trailer has an inside length of 20 feet to accommodate the 19-foot long trike wings. It can hold three trikes in a pinch. It was our hangar-on-wheels, accommodating our aircraft and their associated gear.

Parking was frequently available for the airplane trailer at the local airport. Most campgrounds also had overflow parking—though there were some curious responses when we asked, "Where do you want us to park our airplane trailer?" In one case, the FBO let us camp with our travel trailer right at the airport in a grassy area near the tiedowns. He even provided a large hangar to secure the assembled trikes when a storm threatened. It was great to be able to set up and camp with the planes.

A Garmin GPSMAP 196 made navigation on the ground and in the air a snap. The 196 automatically plots a street route and gives turn-by-turn directions for any destination. With optional software, you can find campgrounds, rest stops, restaurants, malls, or attractions. For flying, you have all the critical aviation information right at your fingertips—frequencies, runways, field elevations, services, and distance/direction all in a little black box. For trike pilots, it is like having a flight bag without the bag or the paper, neither of which work well in open cockpits.

Another technical consideration was portable computing. Mapping/aviation software needs a computer to run, and a laptop was the obvi-

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ous answer. A Sierra wireless data card on AT&T's digital network provided e-mail service and gave us wireless access at dial-up speeds to e-mail and the Internet in most locations. Our laptops also supported wireless LAN connectivity, which is becoming more widely available. As a last resort dial-up access is usually found at a campground or library.

Surprisingly none of the airports we visited had Internet access for laptop users. Our local FBO, Virginia Aviation at Lynchburg Regional Airport, is the only one we've run into that addresses this shortfall, and it does it in style with a wireless system. Our mobile system was completed with a great little Canon printer that runs on batteries (the i70).

To prepare for the challenges of mountain flying, we spent many hours flying the low-lying Virginia Blue Ridge Mountains (hills by western standards), flying in and out of as many different airfields as possible. We read everything we could about mountain flying and watched every video on the subject. Last, but not least, we picked the brains of friends who had mountain-flying experience. However, the rugged terrain of the west certainly creates more complex wind, weather, and turbulence patterns than back east. Once we arrived out west, we gleaned information from local mountain fliers. Still, we were novice mountain fliers in light aircraft and flew accordingly, always erring on the side of caution.

We already had aircraft that were well designed for rugged flying. Our AirBorne XT-912s use the reliable 912 Rotax engine with enough power to handle all of the anticipated flying challenges. The Streak III wing handles thermals well and has good speed. We added VHS radios and BRS parachutes for safety purposes. The faired pods provided great wind protection—important when flying at colder, higher altitudes. This combination gave us great range (as much as 400 miles) and exceptional reliability in a strong and well-built package.

A lot of planning went into this fantastic trip, but do not let the preparations daunt you from experiencing your adventure. For us, the preparation heightened the anticipation of a dream about to come true.

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