

Sherry to Sedona - April 2012

I first met Sherry around 1999 when she became my new manager at my previous job. We didn't get to know each other that well as it was a work environment and I left there for another job in early 2000. The last time I saw her was at a group lunch Kim and I put together to bring the old gang back together again. That was at a restaurant in Orange County in 2004.

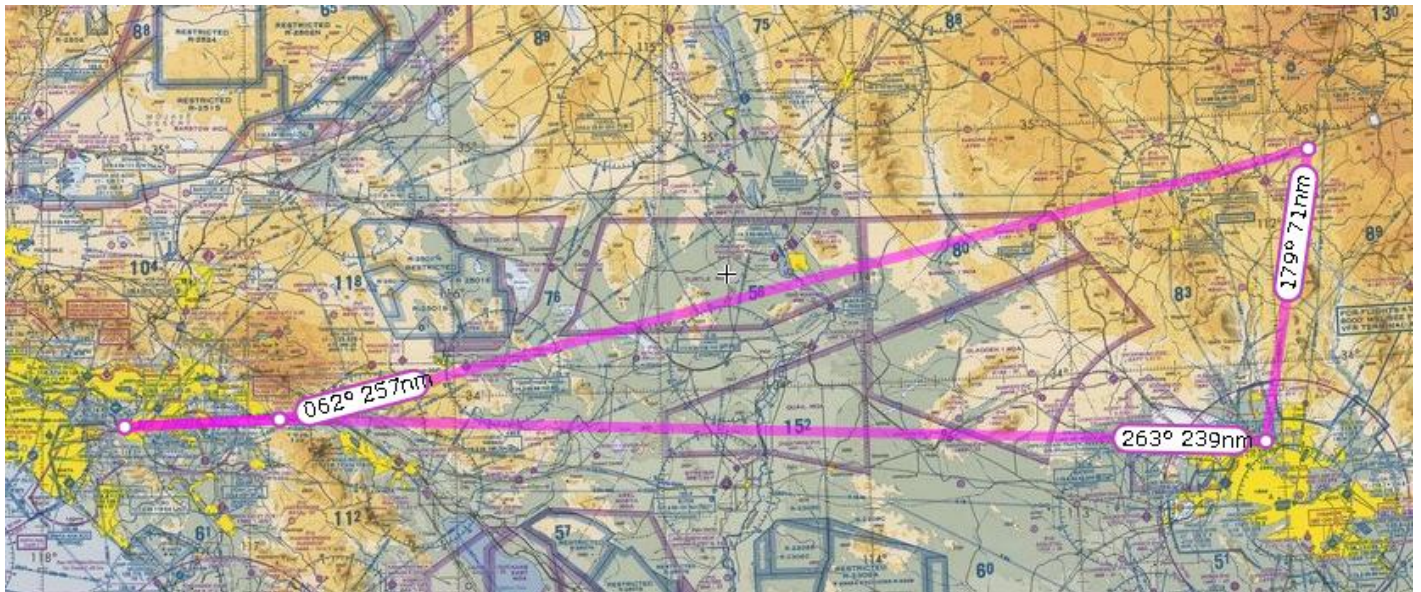


Sherry [in pink] at that get together lunch

We talked on the phone occasionally as the years went on and then she suffered a horrible automobile accident. Suffering from multiple concussions and horrible migraine headaches there was no way she could drive a car for a long time. During that time, she did start reading my flying stories. When she was able, she went back to school to finish two small tasks needed for her doctorate in management with an emphasis in Information Technology.

The years went by and finally she was ready and able to drive to Corona. I had sent out a group email about some flying adventures coming up and she chose my Sedona flight. We set it up to fly to Phoenix on Friday afternoon and stay over at my daughter's place. That day turned out upside down and everything went wrong for all three of us. I got washed, dressed, packed, and out the door 2 hours early for a change, I needed extra time to get some fuel. Neither of the 2 FBOs that have a fuel truck, had a fuel truck available for me that day. Of course the freeway was a parking lot and when Sherry got off, she had to wait forever at a train crossing. She arrived way late. We finally met, got the plane out and loaded, taxied over and got self-serve fuel, and finally we were off of the ground.

The pink lines on the chart below show the whole route. The yellow area at the left is where city lights show at night in the LA Basin. The yellow area at the lower right is the Phoenix metro area. The white dot at the top right is where Sedona is.



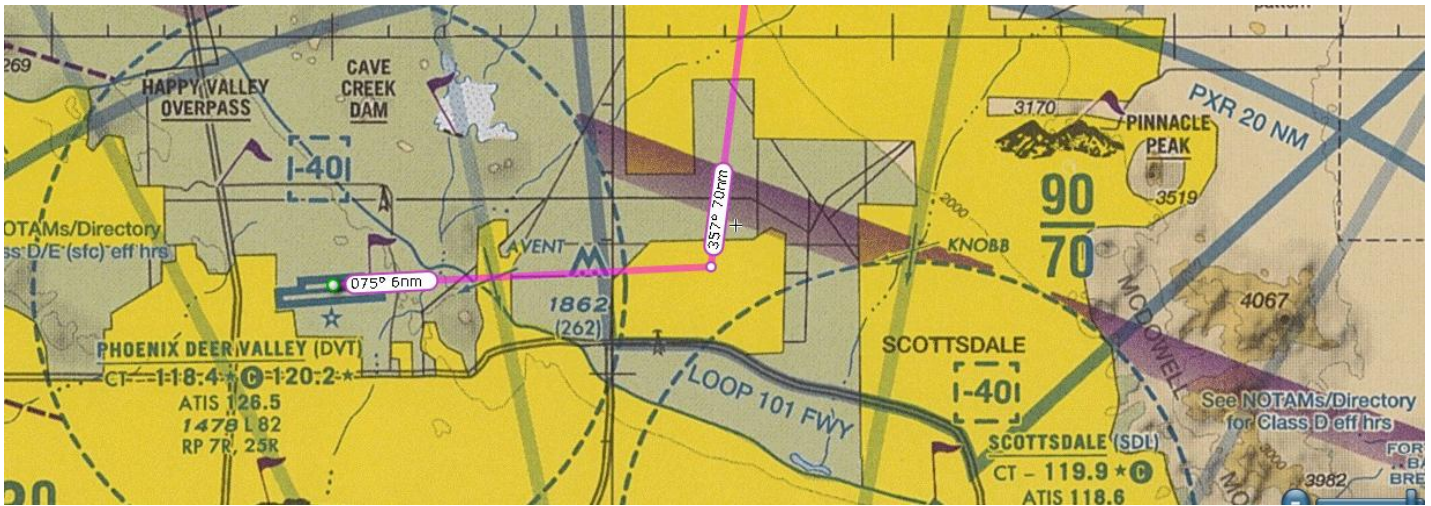
It was around 6 PM. I had planned to leave well before 5. The air was a filthy gray, no picture taking was worth it. The ride was smooth, even going through the Banning Pass just before getting to the Palm Springs area, it was smooth. Usually the air is clean east of there but this was the first Phoenix flight where I couldn't even see the Salton Sea from 9,500'.

We continued on, crossing the Colorado River into Arizona. A half hour later it started getting dark. VFR pilots know it can be un-nerving crossing over craggy hills and remote areas in the dark, even though I was on auto pilot on a time tested route in a Mooney that was performing perfectly with plenty of fuel on board. Logically, it was a piece of cake. Emotionally, I did not like the situation. I angled over to the right in the dusk until I was over I-10. It was all better seeing those lights below.

The grid work of those East-West and North-South Phoenix streetlights ahead gave lots of peace of mind. We descended. Alerts from my GPS gave me additional situational awareness as we passed next to the White Tank Mountains that were not at all visible out the left window. Then the flat Phoenix area was ahead of us. Albuquerque Center had already handed us off to Luke Approach and he guided us across the city. He handed us off to Deer Valley Tower once I had the airport in sight. We were cleared to land on 25 Left. I had to make 2 left turns 5 miles ahead to land westbound. I also knew there was a pesky hill straight ahead just beyond those turns. The street lights around the base and the red light on top helped a lot. The Mooney had landed and we pulled off on taxiway C7. Ground Control cleared me to taxi to transient parking via the ramp.

I pulled into my usual parking place right in front of the city's terminal building. It was around 8 PM. Something was different this time. Darrin is always there guiding me in with hand signals. This time, my daughter Teresa was there waiting for us. Darrin was home asleep! Back at my daughter's house, I had a Blue Can or two and the gals each enjoyed a glass of wine. We had a nice chat and by 10, the gals were off to bed. Saturday morning, Sherry and Darrin were out in the garage chatting and getting to know each other by the time I got up. Teresa was already at work.

We left the house by 9 and were soon at the airport and ready to depart eastbound into an easterly wind thanks to Darrin's helping hand. After takeoff, the guy in the tower was so busy, I couldn't get his clearance to turn northbound, so I waited until I was outside of their airspace and then I just turned left before I flew into Scottsdale's airspace. Class D airspaces are depicted by those blue dotted line circles below. It is rare to see 2 of them so close to each other.



The pink line shows our route of flight for the first 10 minutes after we departed. That 90 over 70 on the right side of the graphic above indicates that we were also under Phoenix Sky Harbor's Class B airspace which starts at 7,000'. The short ride brought us to the Sedona area soon. I switched to 123.8 and the frequency was so busy with Mooneys and other brand X airplane pilots wanting to land.

I flew in circles for a while letting planes ahead of me land and getting the lay of the land below. When there was safe spacing, I made my approach and I was too high. I did a go-around and then had to fly around some more in this beautiful locale to avoid other planes landing. This airport is on top of a mesa with drop offs at both ends, like an aircraft carrier. My second approach was fine and I landed with plenty of room to stop. We got guidance to a parking spot on the crowded ramp area.



This picture from an AOPA website looks so much like Sedona's airport

We got out and my buddy Dave from Mesa AZ walked up and said "Is that the real Ed Shreffler?" I originally met him at the Moriarty NM airport in 2006. Always great to see good friends again. Then Ron and Shawn greeted us. They live in Show Low AZ and are planning on hosting a VMG fly-in there for us in September. It had been a while since I had seen them. We got caught up on what's new. Dave and Sherry walked over to the VMG registration area to get our nametags. I kicked back on my rollator and had a cigarette while observing the awesome scenery and watching other airplanes come in to land. I can do that for hours as I do like hanging out at airports. They returned soon and Sherry handed me my nametag. I stuck it on my shirt. She had a big smile on her face.



Sherry covered her nametag with her hand and asked me to guess what it said. I thought, giggled, and guessed 'I'm with Ed'. I wasn't too far off, it said 'Sherry with Ed'. It was beautiful outside as we met and chatted with Mooney pilots on the ramp. Then we trekked over to the nearby restaurant.



On the way over, I paused again to take in this magnificent landscape

We walked past a large Gulfstream jet on the way over. It had an unusual logo on the tail. More about that later. It is not that it was so far to the restaurant, maybe 500 feet. It was the terrain. The

trek to the restaurant from the ramp had not been a piece of cake for me as part of it was on a very loose stone walkway and downhill to a gully, then back uphill. We walked in to air conditioning and were immediately greeted by Marc Battistini, the proprietor of the Mesa Grill restaurant right there on the airport. He looked so professional and yet so friendly looking.



This was not just another airport café at all.

He had made provisions for us to have exclusive use of their glass enclosed outdoor patio seating area just to the left. We all got settled in and comfortable. Everyone looked happy and the waitresses were really great.

I ordered their \$100 Hamburger. There is a story behind that phrase 'The \$100 Hamburger'. In the old days when things cost less, a pilot and a friend could go to an airport, rent an airplane, fly 30 or more miles to some other airport and stop at the airport café there for lunch, often a hamburger was chosen. After they flew back and paid for the airplane rental, the total cost for the day was around \$100. So when someone asked them where they went or what they did, the usual answer was "We just got a \$100 hamburger. Things cost more these days, but we still do it. My hamburger was one of the best I have had in years and it was huge. It must have been nearly 1/2" thick and on an oversize bun. Sherry really enjoyed her lunch too. Everybody did.



Ozzie was standing in his signature red shirt at table # 1



Gary in the lime green T-shirt shirt at table # 2 is from Tucson and often flies in with Ozzie.



More of my VMG friends were at table # 3

Per Ozzie's post lunch announcements, we had been promised use of the corporate jets ramp right in front of the restaurant for our Mooney group but it was not meant to be when we arrived. There was that large white Gulfstream jet parked there and I was told no other planes were to be allowed near it. Someone's conversations with the line crew revealed that it was a Counter Intelligence Agency jet that came in on Friday carrying Leon Panetta, the US Secretary of Defense. It seems he was in Sedona visiting Senator John McCain who has a luxury home just a couple of miles from the airport.



The jet that was carrying Leon Panetta was right there with our Mooneys further away on the left

I had a chance to talk with friends I had previously met at VMG fly-ins past that I had not seen in ages. Sherry met some interesting people and was enjoying herself listening all about flying. She had once taken flying lessons and was about to solo when some life changes came along and she had to move. She never picked it up again at her new location. This flight filled weekend must have certainly brought back many interesting memories for her.



Wearing 'Sherry with ED', she seemed absorbed listening to flying stories from the pilot next to her Ozzie, our host from Tucson came over and said hi to me before he stood up and addressed the group. He had made all of the arrangements for this fly-in and it all worked out. He announced our future VMG fly-ins and told a neat story about his last flight in his Mooney to Central America. This guy thinks nothing of flying to other countries. He and his wife Jo flew nearly 10,000 miles on that one and landed in quite a few countries, including Curacao, off the coast of Venezuela, and Panama. Ozzie has a hearty voice and certainly does not need a microphone or a teleprompter.

After the announcements were over, we again had a chance to talk with our table neighbors. The group started thinning out as the gang walked back to their Mooneys on the ramp. I thought about how I would deal with that loose stone walkway and my rollator on the way back.





Photograph courtesy of the Mesa Grill website

It was time to leave and head back to our Mooneys. My rollator is not built for those rock pathway conditions. Thankfully, the trek back to the ramp did not happen. The owner of the restaurant offered to bring his big Ford Flex Limited station wagon around and drive a few of us back to our airplanes.

We went outside the front door, to the car parking lot and there in the distance, was another red rock butte. From my point of view, the clean air was an Arizona plus. There is a major drop off between here and the butte, just past that row of trees in the distance. In-between, down there, is the city of Sedona and their whole surrounding area.



We had time to take it all in while waiting for the Marc's station wagon to arrive.

Besides me, Henry walks with a limp and Ozzie's wife Jo uses a cane. Marc was extra nice to go out of his way to offer to put my rollator in the back after I got in the front. A few blocks later, we were at the gate in the chain link fence that separates airplanes from most people. I think it is the unfortunate result of the government's protective attitude post 9-11. We all live with it.

There at the gate we looked for a speaker or a press to talk switch to contact someone to remotely open the gate for us. Ozzie got out and found it had just a keypad which works fine if you know the code to enter. Someone offered to walk to the terminal building just to our left to find someone who could operate the gate. No need, someone spotted the nearby attended fuel truck and got the driver's attention. He promptly drove by the triggering mechanism on the other side of the fence and the gate opened. We were all delivered right to our Mooneys with our gratitude. Thank you Marc.

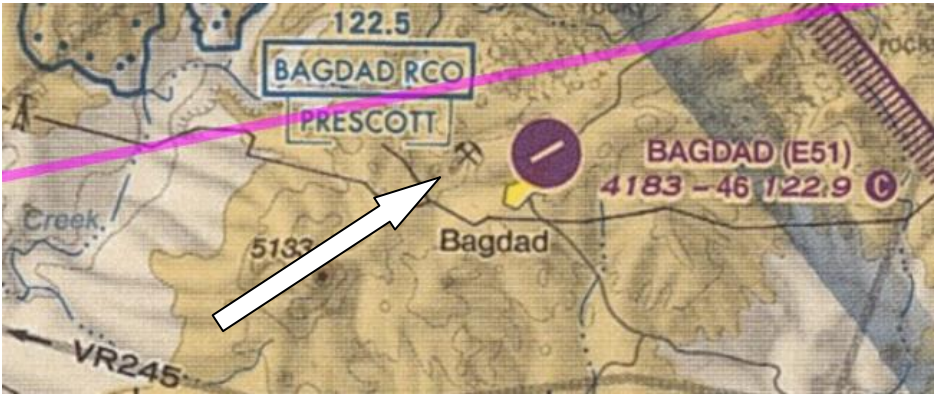
I felt just like I was on vacation and so I was in no hurry to do anything or go anywhere. I had it planned that I would not be arriving just 10 minutes before sunset so why rush? Sherry is super sensitive to sunburn so she wanted some shade. I suggested the right wing and she used it.



She was so relaxed I couldn't help thinking she was a teenager again, just 'hanging out'

I was going to call for fuel, but soon that same fuel truck pulled up just a few Mooneys away so Sherry offered to walk over and ask them to stop by my airplane when they had time. Soon we had plenty of fuel to go home, and regrettably, it was time. We departed and headed directly to Banning California some 300 miles away. The computer, HSI, and autopilot do all the work and we were headed in the exact direction, always compensating for crosswinds. It would be around 2 hours. Unfortunately, it was a bumpy ride part of the way, especially when I wanted to write something down.

Roughly 75 miles into the flight, after we had passed Prescott, Sherry asked me if that was a lake ahead. It was an almost white area and it looked wet in the afternoon sunlight. I checked my moving map and it was Bagdad AZ. It is still a copper mining town with a large open pit mine just west of town. Beyond the mine is a low area where water filled with minerals is pumped. That is what Sherry was seeing. Most of it looked dry up close but that fools you when it is in the distance.



The mine depicted on the chart



My first picture attempt had depressing colors



I tried something, not liking the colors in the pictures I take while flying. Too much greenish gray to my liking. So I opened my window and took another picture of the open pit Bagdad copper mine just beyond the town. The second picture is much closer to the real colors. It is all due to my gray shaded airplane windows. You don't notice it when flying and the colors seem natural.

The air settled down and the ride smoothed out later. Once we got to Banning I made a 20° right turn and headed right to Corona while starting a descent from 8,500' to 1,500', our pattern altitude. The sun was still too high to be in my eyes as I made my last turn to land. All was soon quiet.

The two of us managed to put the airplane away and the day's chores were done. We kicked back together and recounted the fun we had in the last two days and 750 miles. Sherry's SPF 70 sun block seemed to have worked well as she was not sunburned. A bit later we said our goodbyes and she gave me a nice thank you hug. She seemed very happy and later emailed this to me.

"Thank you again for taking me. It was wonderful to get away and I really needed it!! Sherry :-))"

Sure, it costs money to learn to fly, to buy and maintain a Mooney, and to go flying but I wouldn't trade this experience for anything. And with my current disabilities, my fly-buddies are eager to pitch in and make it all possible. May there be many more wonderful flights and experiences for us.

Ed Shreffler

4/28/2012

Photo credits: Paul Kortopates, Marc Battistini, and me

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More of my stories are on my Webpage at: <http://www.mooneyevents.com/shreffler.html>