

# CIRRUS PILOT

September/  
October  
2014



Volume 9  
Number 5

The Official Magazine of the Cirrus Owners & Pilots Association



**Inside:** Flying to Costa Rica  
Training and Insurance  
Safety: Avoiding the Rush to Judgment



## CIRRUS OWNERS AND PILOTS ASSOCIATION

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Las Vegas, NV 89130 (702) 920-2108

### "Volatus et Salus" – Flight and Safety

**Mission Statement:** The Cirrus Owners and Pilots Association (COPA) is a not-for-profit membership organization established to educate, promote the safety of, and support the owners and pilots of certified aircraft manufactured by Cirrus Design Corporation, encourage ownership of these aircraft and provide social activities for its members. Additionally, COPA will promote goodwill towards the general aviation community.

**ABOUT COPA:** Founded in 2001, currently with over 4,000 members worldwide, COPA is a volunteer-run organization completely independent of Cirrus Aircraft Corporation.

**MEMBERSHIP:** Open to all interested individuals. Dues are \$65 per year, which includes a subscription to *Cirrus Pilot* magazine, access to the COPA members website and forums, and eligibility to attend other COPA events and activities (additional fees apply to some activities). Join now by registering at [membership@cirruspilots.org](mailto:membership@cirruspilots.org).

### MEMBER-ONLY BENEFITS & SERVICES

**COPA ONLINE FORUMS:** One of the most active online forums in general aviation, the COPA forums have hundreds of messages posted each day. It is the ideal place to absorb information or get any question answered.

**COPApedia:** This online encyclopedia of all things related to owning or operating a Cirrus aircraft is written and edited freely by COPA members. It has hundreds of useful articles to help members avoid re-inventing the wheel or learning about their aircraft the hard way.

**MAGAZINE ARCHIVES:** Past issues of *Cirrus Pilot* magazine can be downloaded from our website – a treasure-trove of information.

**TECHNICAL LIAISON ACTIVITIES:** Working behind-the-scenes with aircraft, engine, and avionics suppliers, COPA's Technical Liaisons regularly forward member issues to vendors and provide members with feedback on critical issues affecting Cirrus aircraft, both on the COPA online forums and in *Cirrus Pilot* magazine.

**REGIONAL FLY-INS:** Volunteer regional coordinators regularly announce one-day events where COPA members will gather to socialize and meet face-to-face. Often held at attractive locations with special talks, tours, and activities.

**ANNUAL MIGRATION:** Each year hundreds of Cirrus aircraft gather to celebrate their heritage. A weekend of excellent seminars, a vendor trade show, and family friendly socializing awaits. This is a hugely successful and popular event.

**CIRRUS PILOT PROFICIENCY PROGRAM (CPPP):** The most in-depth, two-day weekend training program available for Cirrus pilots. Scheduled throughout the year in both the United States, Europe and Australia. CPPP offers both ground-only or ground and flight sessions with seasoned certified Cirrus Standardized Instructor Pilots. Many members attend annually as part of their recurrent training.

**CRITICAL DECISION MAKING (CDM) SEMINARS:** The majority of accidents are the result of a failure in the pilot's decision making process. These free half-day seminars held throughout the United States and Europe explore real-world situations and help pilots develop effective techniques to become safer decision makers.

## Calendar of Events

### Migration 12 – Viva Las Vegas

October 9-12, 2014 Las Vegas, Nev.

### Critical Decision Making (CDM) Seminars

Sept. 6, 2014 St. Augustine, Fla. (KSGJ)  
Sept. 27, 2014 Flying Cloud, Minn. (KFCM)

### Cirrus Pilot Proficiency Programs (CPPP):

Sept. 12-14, 2014 Baden-Baden, Germany (EDSB)  
Sept. 12-14, 2014 Oshkosh, Wis. (KOSH)  
Oct. 31-Nov. 2, 2014 Houston, Texas (KCXO)  
Nov. 14-16, 2014 Van Nuys, Calif. (KVNy)

## Upcoming Regional Events

### Sept. 25-27, 2014 Oak Ridge Nat'l Laboratory Tour

Knoxville, Tenn. (KTYX) SE

Come join your fellow COPA friends for some great food, fun, social networking and a tour of the Oak Ridge National Laboratory. This event has something for everyone: aviators, science geeks, history buffs, and those who just want to have a great time!

### Sept. 26-27, 2014 Southeast Aviation Expo

Greenville, S.C. (KGMU) SE

An annual premier aviation event that provides two days of pertinent educational (WINGS credit) and informational seminars, and attracts major aircraft manufacturers and suppliers as exhibitors. This year's event includes a Friday night reception for COPA members featuring Cirrus regional representatives and the Cirrus Training Center at Special Services Corporation. Come for a day, or both days. Lodging is available within walking distance from the airport.

### Sept. 27-28, 2014 Overnight Camping

Kern Valley, Calif. (L05) SW

Valley Airport is located in the beautiful and scenic southern Sierra Nevada Mountains. Camping facilities are located on the field and include a large grassy area with trees, fire pits, portable restrooms and shower, and is within hiking distance of Lake Isabella and the river. The Airport Café, located on the field, is open for breakfast and lunch, and there will be a cookout for dinner.

### Oct. 4, 2014 AOPA Homecoming Fly-In

Frederick, Md. (KFDK) NE

AOPA will be "coming home" after hosting one-day regional fly-ins around the country. Starting with a pancake breakfast, there will be exhibits, seminars and a town hall meeting with AOPA President Mark Baker.

### Oct. 18-19, 2014 Fall in Ft. Lauderdale

Ft. Lauderdale, Fla. (KFEX) SE

Join other COPA members for a fall fly-in. The highlight of this event will be an exclusive tour of the "Miami Center" led by senior air traffic controllers, which will include a lecture and Q & A session and a trip to the tower at MIA and Miami TRACON. On Sunday, there will be a narrated cruise on the New River and Intracoastal.

*Please check the COPA website for more details about the above events.*



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Taken by Mark Waddell in Nicaragua.

John Gressett is flying the Cirrus.

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# Operation Costa Rica

by John Gressett

Part 2

*Editor's Note: Last issue featured how John Gressett, one of five Cirrus COPA pilots who embarked on an adventure vacation to Costa Rica, prepared for his first international flight. Part two shares the actual experience.*

## Key West to Costa Rica

**I**t was a few days away from launch on our once-in-a-lifetime trip to Costa Rica; last-minute preparations were still in play. Our club's maintenance team had decided to investigate the oil consumption of the Cirrus – compressions were good, but it used one quart every three hours. After some soul searching and advice from Savvy, we decided to go forward with "open heart surgery," taking off all three odd cylinders. This decision was not taken lightly, since we all understand the risk of maintenance-induced failures. We did a complete annual and replaced the pads for both mains, and then religiously followed the break-in procedure. We noticed that the EGT #5 probe was in-op. Two days before leaving for Florida, we changed out EGT #5 and installed the new 650 firmware updates. Now EGT #5 was great, but EGT #1 was in-op.

EGT #1 was completely changed out. While flying home, I wondered what would be next.

## Leaving Minnesota

The BIG day to leave for Florida! It was Sunday and we didn't need to be in Key West until Thursday, but we didn't want to be held up by something and miss the trip! The club's maintenance team wanted to change the oil right before we left. The low temperature the night before was -15° F. The FBO offered us a heated hangar for the oil change. We took pictures of ourselves in the +6° F day and thought that Costa Rica sounded like a good idea. I was glad we had the winterization kit installed; at those temps, you get NO heat without it. The cabin was nice and warm on the way to St. Louis, where we spent the night with relatives.

The following day, the weather looked pretty good. After a gas stop in Georgia, we proceeded to Hernando County Airport (KBKV). The taxi marshal told us that the right main was smoking – NOT GOOD NEWS. I checked the indicator and it was NOT black. I was relieved, but





*The group getting ready to set out on their adventure to Costa Rica with the first leg leaving from Key West.*

puzzled by the smoke. It was night and we planned to stop in Fort Myers, and then stay the night in Sarasota. Within 30 minutes, KBKV went from VFR to IFR. We departed IFR en route to Page. Along the way, we saw the weather close in around Sarasota (MVFR-IFR-LIFR). I had never seen conditions change so quickly! As we flew by, we could see Venice, which I considered my primary after Fort Myers. We continued into Page and landed VFR. As we dropped our passenger off at Page, Venice went LIFR, just minutes after it was VFR! We assessed the risk factors: (1) LIFR; (2) night; (3) little rest; (4) unfamiliar approaches. We decided to rent a car, which was a good decision! By the time we arrived in Sarasota, it was so foggy we could barely drive.

### Unplanned Maintenance

In the bright sunlight, the right main indicator was not white, but gray. The brakes seemed to work fine, but we decided to fly to Tampa Executive (KVDF) where there was a fantastic Cirrus Service Center. After departure, while I was getting my clearance into KVDF, the #1 GNS 650 refused to accept touch screen commands. This was a MAJOR problem

because I couldn't input an approach. Thank goodness 650 #2 seemed unaffected, so I input my approach there. Safely back on track, I began the RNAV approach into KVDF. The autopilot performed flawlessly and I broke out at 500 feet AGL lined up to land. I was reassured by the dozen Cirrus aircraft on the ramp and in their maintenance hangar. The brakes were not in good shape. There was indication of heat and brake fluid everywhere. We replaced the rotors, all the brake pads and a pin used to "float" the brake pads because no one could explain why one side of the brake pads were almost completely worn down while the other side looked new. ALL new pads had been installed less than 10 hours ago. I asked about the 650 touch screen problem. I needed to reset the 650 by pulling the two circuit breakers simultaneously (not just one or you may need to send it back to Garmin for service). We concluded that the touch screen became in-op under humid conditions.

### Sarasota to Key West

The weather was looking good – MVFR at Sarasota, including our destination airports at Naples and Key West. What a beautiful trip! The water was many shades of blue and green. We made a visual approach into Key West, doing the full approach just for practice. I love WAAS RNAV LPV approaches and am now very comfortable with them. The FBO gave us the 39-pound, ocean-going raft that we had rented for \$50 per day. I looked at it, read the directions, and hoped I never had to use it. It took a special place in the backseat, free of all obstructions. I updated all the airplane NAV databases, repacked the baggage area, verified gas levels and couldn't think of anything else to check.

Later that evening, the five couples going to Costa Rica met for the first time. It was a great group of people. Helen from The Flight Academy kindly gave us a weather briefing



for the next day; it was looking okay, which was a good thing since XM weather was going to be useless once we were halfway to our first fuel stop in Belize.

## Key West to Belize

The BIG day was here! After weeks of planning, I hoped all was ready. The night before, I had submitted my eAPIS for Customs and Border Protection to leave the country and also requested an eAPIS for my return trip. I carefully submitted my ICAO-approved flight plans using *fltplan.com*. The group decided to file our IFR documents five minutes apart; I volunteered to go first. Foreflight showed METARs and TAFs for my complete route of flight; every airport showed VFR with a possibility of MVFR later in the day. I started my preflight just like any other day.

It was severe clear as we gathered for a group photo in front of our airplanes. Beth and I donned our life vests and buttoned up. After engine start-up came the moment of truth – Did I submit my IFR flight plan correctly? Will I get released or will there be a delay? I called Ground and casually asked for my IFR clearance to Belize. I received my clearance just like I would have from Rochester to Saint Louis. That was easy! I was all set to venture out over the ocean. I contacted Tower and was cleared for takeoff – we were OFF! I was handed over to Key West Departure and immediately cleared on course to 10,000 feet. I kept my IAS high to keep the engine cool, so my climb was slow. I monitored 123.45 – the frequency our group decided to use to talk with each other.



*The view flying over Cozumel; it was nice to see shoreline again.*

I was well over the water in the climb and I heard some new noises coming from the engine. I was warned that everyone hears unusual noises from their engine as they climb over water! I focused on the engine instruments that revealed all was normal and looked at all the cruise ships in the area, thinking that I bet they would pick us up if needed. We continued our climb and were quickly approaching Cuban airspace. About two miles out, Miami Center handed us off to Havana Radio. I made my call just as I would in the United States, and right away Havana called back. I began to think that this was just a little too easy. I heard Havana speaking to JetBlue and Delta in very fast Spanish. The other airplanes

in Operation Costa Rica were now off the ground from Key West. It was very reassuring to have four other aircraft ready to give assistance if needed. The coastline of Cuba was now well in sight. It was beautiful, and comforting to see, should the engine stop.

I practiced several drills to satisfy myself that if the engine did quit, I could glide over to the coast and make a feet-dry CAPS landing. Soon we found ourselves flying away from the Cuban coastline for Cozumel, Mexico. This was a short hop over open water, and the engine was running just fine. As agreed, I sent a short "A-OK" message via the DeLorme inReach device through a satellite up-link. This device allowed me to send real-time preprogrammed e-mail messages with our current position, direction and speed. It helped our handlers and everyone back home know how we were doing. We approached Cozumel; it was nice to see the shoreline again. We were handed off to Belize Approach; their English was excellent. I asked for lower, and they were reporting MVFR in rain showers. They asked

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*One of the volcanoes sticking out of the water over Nicaragua.*

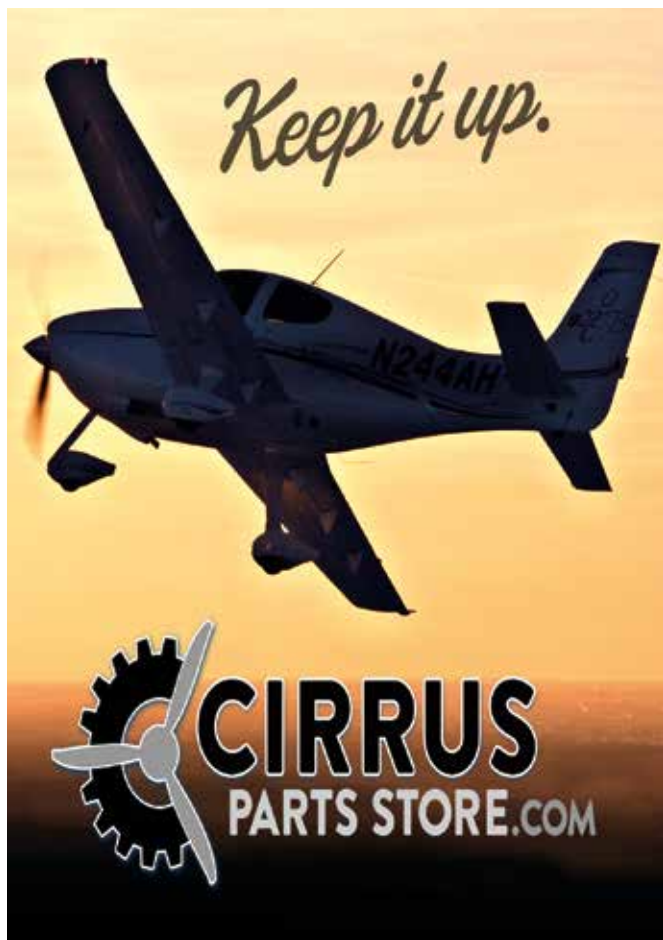
*Heading in to Belize, the colors were much more vivid than in Florida.*

me to report the field in sight for a visual approach. I almost passed the airport before spotting it. There was little time to set up my 650 for an approach, but I plugged in the ILS DME RWY 07 IFR approach and sure enough, it worked just like in the States.

The Belize airport was a busy place with lots of commercial jets on the ramp. We were instructed to go to

stall 10, just like the big jets. Thankfully, there was a ramp marshal guiding me in. Before I knew it, there were people and a fuel truck coming toward my plane. A young lady identified herself as our handler and asked for our passports. I grabbed them, followed her and asked that the plane be topped off. Beth stayed behind to pay the fuel truck in cash, as planned. I walked in through the door marked *Customs* with the handler. My flight plan had already been filed for me from Belize to Costa Rica, and I received a pile of paper – everything from current weather to a general declaration, and my flight plan all littered with government stamps. I could only imagine how long it would have taken me to get all this done; I like these handlers. I went back to the plane and it was already topped off and paid for – less than I pay for full service in Rochester! The handler came out and said I was all set. I looked at the flight plan and all was good. Wow, this was going well!

*Flying over Honduras, the weather was fantastic and we could see roads, cars and lots of volcanoes.*







The other four planes were arriving, so I was anxious to get out of their way. I started up and asked for my clearance. I had been warned that Belize never answers on Ground. CTAF covers clearance, ground and tower. Once again, I received my clearance just like I would in the United States. I taxied out right before a big jet. Soon we were cleared for takeoff and on our way. We spent less than 30 minutes on the ground – amazing! I would highly recommend the handlers in Belize, they cost a lot of money, but I can't imagine doing a better job. I was handed over to Belize departure and cleared on course up to 11,000 feet.

### Belize to Costa Rica

On the route from Belize to Costa Rica, we crossed the Continental Divide. All the charts want you at 11,000 feet. It is hot out – over 90° F, and I worried about keeping the engine cool, so I climbed with the IAS set for 135 knots. It was a very slow climb but the CHTs stayed well below 360° F. Gaining altitude, I progressively lowered the IAS to increase my climb rate. Soon I was at altitude and picking up speed. Belize is strikingly beautiful. The blues and greens seem more intense and vivid than Florida.

We were handed over to La Mesa, Honduras Approach. The weather was fantastic and we could see roads, cars and lots of volcanoes. It wasn't long before we were cleared direct to a waypoint just outside Nicaragua that saved us some time – we were WAY ahead of schedule. I sent another DeLorme inReach message real-time to tell everyone in the traveling group that we would arrive about 90 minutes

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early. The turn-around in Belize was amazingly fast, and the winds had been favorable. We were turned over to Managua Approach. They were very kind, as they should be; it cost \$150 to fly over Nicaragua. The scenery in Nicaragua was gorgeous – volcanoes were everywhere. There were two memorable volcanoes in the middle of a huge lake that made flying through the country worth it.

Next, we were turned over to Liberia Approach in Costa Rica –

our destination airport. I had asked Nicaragua Approach for lower and they simply said, "Unable." That was confusing since the terrain did not warrant 8,000 feet, and when I received the clearance from Liberia Approach to go from 8,000 to 2,100 feet, it was a fast, ear-popping descent. I requested the VOR/DME ARC RWY 07 approach, mostly for fun. How often do you get to do an approach into Costa Rica? Once again the autopilot did all the heavy lifting



flawlessly. As expected, I was the first to arrive in Liberia and cleared to land while allowing the plane to follow the ILS. It was very bumpy as we hit 800 feet AGL, so I manually took 5BD calmly down to a 9,000-foot runway. Liberia tower heartily welcomed us to Costa Rica. I suspected they do not get much single engine traffic from America. Myron Garfinkle, our Sherpa, was on the ramp to greet us along with our Liberian handler. It was nice to meet face-to-face. We disembarked the planes and it was a bit surreal to think we had just come from the United States to Costa Rica. It seemed far too easy! After a short celebration, we gathered our stuff and cleared Customs.

## Costa Rica!

Our hotel was amazing! There were two beaches, three pools and every amenity imaginable, and each group of three rooms had an infinity pool. Each couple in our group had different interests – some had busy schedules zip-lining, surfing, snorkeling, tours, golfing and more. Others stayed on one of the two gorgeous beaches and marveled that it was 100 degrees warmer than at home. This was a dream vacation!



*Some of the pilots flew gyrocopters down the coast. With an open cockpit, the visibility was great.*

Three of the pilots tried gyrocopters. It was a very different way to fly! The cockpit was open to the air and visibility was terrific. Each of us was able to fly down the coastline. Landing was a very interesting experience – as you came in for a landing, you hover and go backwards to reduce airspeed. Once you had the correct airspeed for the approach, the craft landed in about 20 feet or less. Very cool!

The last evening, the group gathered to review weather for our flight home. Amazingly, the weather was very good again. I began to wonder if this part of the world ever had bad weather! Every day in Costa Rica had shown us cloudless skies.

## Heading Back – Liberia to Belize

I couldn't believe it was already time to return home. As usual, we were up early checking weather. Foreflight showed TAFs to be VFR AGAIN. Everyone was a little concerned about some convective activity north and west of Key West. Only four of the five planes were leaving that morning;



*A sailboat out on the water in Costa Rica captures the serene surroundings.*

one couple decided to stay longer. We were all jealous. I was getting pretty used to international departures. It honestly wasn't much different than any other IFR departure. Thanks to our handlers for finishing all the paperwork. We departed RWY 07 and were cleared on course to 11,000 feet. That day, we noted improved clarity and we were able to take more pictures. The two volcanoes in the middle of Lake Nicaragua were even more beautiful. The four airplanes communicated over 123.45.

I set up my vertical profile for Belize and I was soon asking for lower and cleared to land. The same handler was there to get my passport and I asked the fuel truck to top-off. Another pilot in my group ran up and informed me that we had a problem. He had a satellite phone and had just called Key West Customs to let them know we were on our way. The problem was that only three of our four planes were in their system. I agreed to go into Belize Customs and let the other pilot know about his missing eAPIS request. He was confused because he submitted the eAPIS before he left and even had an eAPIS confirmation number to prove it. We decided to call Key West Customs with the eAPIS confirmation in hand. Thankfully, the Belize handler let us use his phone to make the international call. The pilot patiently listened as Key West Customs told him they did not have his request. Apparently even having the eAPIS confirmation number was no help. Good grief! The second pilot in our group asked what he could do. I told him to go ahead and leave since he was trying to beat weather. Beth and I said we'd stay until things were sorted out. Negotiations continued over the phone with U.S. Customs. It was decided that the only way to fix the problem was to resubmit the eAPIS. The handler had an internet computer in his office which we used. The pilot insisted that we take off. I was grateful for the release since I needed to beat the weather as well. I asked that he let me know his status on 123.45. I ran out to my plane, received my release, was cleared for takeoff and handed to Belize Departure on course to 8,000 feet.

## Belize to Key West

Climbing out, I was concerned about the couple we left behind and about weather. The color hardcopy picture for




the west coast of Florida looked pretty nasty. XM weather was not coming through. I was still a little perplexed why XM didn't come in since I was easily in line of site with the transmitter. I would need to call XM about that question later. I called 123.45 and it sounded like the Turbo far ahead of me was getting good winds at 15,000 feet. At 8,000, I was getting a slight tailwind. At 10,000 feet, another in our group had a slight headwind. I decided to stay put even though we were getting a little bit of turbulence and precipitation in the clouds. As we approached Mexico, I heard Approach talking to the delayed Cirrus. He must have gotten his eAPIS problem fixed; I was relieved. By that time, the Turbo ahead was still getting a good tailwind at 15,000 feet. It was time to don the oxygen masks and join him. I requested higher and was immediately approved. This was my first time using oxygen at high altitude and I was nervous. I carefully checked all the dials and checked my own pulse and oxygen saturation. At 9,000 feet and climbing, my pulse was normal, but I was already down to 92 for oxygen. I took a couple of deep breaths through my nose and was amazed that my O<sub>2</sub> level rose so rapidly. We were clawing our way up to 15,000, but it was worth it when we arrived. We enjoyed a 20-to-25-knot tailwind. Hurray!

Soon we were switched over to Havana Center. I expanded the MFD to see a really nasty patch of red and yellow closing in on western Florida. It appeared to be tracking north and east, and definitely wouldn't be a factor for Key West, but getting into Naples that night might be a problem. It was nice to have XM weather again. I started to hear traffic asking Havana for weather deviations into Belize. I felt lucky we had gotten out of Belize in time, but was concerned about the pilot behind me who had been delayed. He indicated he was fine. We relayed our NEXRAD information to him so he would know what to expect in Key West. The lead Turbo was descending into Key West, and kindly agreed to give Customs a heads-up that we were behind him. I noted that to do a steady descent from 15,000 feet, I would have to start pretty far out. We had a 30-knot tailwind, so I elected to stay high and plan for a faster than normal descent. Havana handed me off to Miami Center; I wished her "¡Hasta luego!" and turned to Miami Center. I requested a RNAV RWY 09 approach and we were back in Key West, just like that. The controller remembered us leaving the previous Friday and we chatted about our trip as he guided me to Customs.

The process through Customs was fast and efficient – we were in and out in less than 45 minutes. Just as we were leaving, I saw our fourth plane taxiing in. We gave them a big wave and pulled out to make way for them. I returned the raft to the FBO, and quickly filed for Naples. We received our clearance on the ramp in less than 10 minutes and were off to Naples. I executed an RNAV approach into Naples watching on NEXRAD a nasty patch of red about 50 miles offshore. Once on the ground and tied-down, all you could see was gray to the north and west. About 20 minutes after we left the airport, the weather arrived – it poured. I was very thankful to have the plane tied-down and blocked while we were eating a nice meal with friends. We spent the next few days enjoying the nice sunny Florida weather with friends.

## Homecoming

The trip home from Florida was uneventful and we overnighted in St. Louis. When we checked in with Rochester Approach, they inquired about our trip to Costa Rica. It was nice to be home, but as I taxied along, reality began to set in. The temperature was just above zero and the taxiways were filled with snow. I wondered how many hours I would need to shovel to get into our hangar. To my surprise, the hangar door was already open and the snow was cleared away. The maintenance team was there to greet us! How cool is that? After some quick pictures, we pushed the plane through the ice and closed the hangar.


After about 38 hours of Hobbs time, we had done it! We had flown round trip from Rochester, Minn. to Costa Rica. The only thing I could think was ... let's do it again! 

*Editor's Note: John will be a featured speaker at M12, discussing international flight prep and the trip to Costa Rica.*

About the Author: John Gressett lives in Rochester, Minn., and has always wanted to fly. He joined a local flying club and has been flying 172s, 182s and Archers for over 25 years. In 2012, the club purchased a 2005 SR22 G2 GTS which everyone immediately loved. John is instrument rated and would like to work on a commercial rating. He is married to Beth and they have two children, Monica (20) and David (15). Both John and Beth enjoy adventure vacations.

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