

# Air Mail

Volume 5 Number 1

Utah Back Country Pilots Inc.

Spring 2006

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|                                     |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|
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| Website                             | <a href="http://www.UtahBackCountryPilots.org">www.UtahBackCountryPilots.org</a> |

## Upcoming Events

**July 14-16, 2006**

**UBCP / KBTF Skypark Smiley Creek Fly-In**



Camp with your plane or stay at the lodge. Fish, hike, river raft, or kayak; but come on out mostly for the UBCP camaraderie! Call Kent Bond (801-913-5223) for more information. Also visit the UBCP website ([www.utahbackcountrypilots.org](http://www.utahbackcountrypilots.org)), click on "Newsletters" and select the Spring/Summer 2004 edition for a gouge on flying to Smiley Creek for the first time.

**July 8, 2006**

**Heber Valley Air Show, Heber, UT (36U)**

**August 11-13, 2006**

**NW Mountain Family Fly-In, McCall, ID (KMYL)**

**August 18-19**

**Northern Utah Regional Air Festival, Logan (KLGU)**

**October 6-8, 2006**

## UBCP Fall Fly-In, Mineral Canyon, UT (no ID)

### UBCP CFI/ASC Listing

The following contacts are UBCP Flight Instructors and/or Aviation Safety Counselors:

|                 |                   |                    |
|-----------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| David Beaver    | CFI/CFII, ASC     | DWH (281) 851-8960 |
| Steve Durtschi  | CFI               | SLC (801) 292-9372 |
| Holly Haag      | CFI/CFII/MEI      | SLC (801) 486-6116 |
| Matt Haag       | CFI/CFII/MEI, ASC | SLC (801) 486-6116 |
| Jess Hall       | CFI               | CNY (435) 637-4502 |
| Rob Hunter      | ASC               | SLC (801) 583-5705 |
| Hal Hilburn     | CFI, ASC          | SGU (435) 574-2808 |
| Larry Newby     | CFI               | CNY (435) 637-1108 |
| Deanna Strand   | CFI/CFII/MEI, DPE | GJT (970) 243-4359 |
| Chris Tuckfield | CFI/CFII          | SLC (801) 573-5767 |
| LaVar Wells     | CFI               | CNY (435) 542-3248 |

If you are a flight instructor and would like to be added or need to update your information on this list please contact Matt Haag (newsletter@utahbackcountrypilots.org) for changes to be included in the next newsletter.

## UBCP President's Message

*Steve Durtschi*

Well, I've stared at the keyboard like I usually do with that doe-in-the-headlights look for longer than normal - just don't know where to start as there is so much going on. Reminds me of having the canoeing class with the first group in the morning at scout camp. After a while you just resolve yourself to your fate and jump in. Keep moving and it gets warmer. Yeah, right. So here goes . . .

On a national level, a back country landing strip bill has been proposed by Idaho Senator Crapo aimed at protecting remote recreational landing strips, and Idaho Governor Dirk Kempthorne has been nominated by President Bush to replace Gale Norton as Secretary of the Interior. (See Rob Hunter's article on the back country bill in this issue). All of these developments are good news to pilots. The back country seems to have more champions than ever before.

The Park Service at Death Valley has agreed to allow the landing strip in Saline Valley called "Chicken Strip" to remain open to all pilots. The local pilots group will oversee maintenance. UBCP was invited to participate in this process and I had the privilege of attending the meeting at Park Headquarters at Furnace Creek a few weeks ago. (See more on Chicken Strip in this issue).

In Arizona it looks like Tuweep, on the north rim of the Grand Canyon, may open again soon. The state of Arizona required a large liability policy before issuing a lease on the landing strip that the local pilots feared was unobtainable. A provider has been identified and the Arizona pilots are in talks with the state lands administrator to lease the landing strip and open it. And finally, moving to Montana, the BLM has released the draft management plan for the Upper River Missouri Breaks National Monument that includes a handful of landing strips.

Closer to home, those who were unable to attend the slide presentation of lesser-known Utah landing strips by Ryan Jaussi and Nate Miller missed a fine evening. We'll try to schedule an encore and those who live outside of Salt Lake may contact them through the web site. Chances are they can bring the presentation to your pilots group. You will not be disappointed.

Hey, I'm flailing around and it is getting a little warmer.

And speaking of presentations, UBCP Board Member Rob Hunter gave an excellent presentation on survival skills. Rob has spent several years researching this subject and has become an expert in this field. Rob has also lectured at the Idaho Aviation Festival and the McCall Family Fly-in, and has formed a company to develop and supply aviation survival kits. You do fly with some survival supplies, don't you? You can contact Rob through his web site at [www.preparedpilot.com](http://www.preparedpilot.com) to learn more about his kits or booking him as an instructor at your event.

A dedicated UBCP crew worked on the windsock at Mexican Mountain. One of the (very) heavy segments was removed. The pole is a little shorter now, but it is much easier to lower to the ground to replace the sock. The strip is in great shape.

We are hearing that Galen Hanselman's Utah landing strip guidebook is progressing and is nearing the final stages. Galen says that the title is tentatively . . . Surprise - *Fly Utah!* (Don't tell anybody). He hopes to release the book possibly around the first of the year.

Speaking of Utah, did you see the classic Cessna 182 at Happy Canyon in *Pilot Getaways*? That is UBCP Board Member Dale Gardner's airplane. Dale lives in Logan. Our friends John and George Kounis, owners of the magazine are always on the look out for interesting back country stories. Call them if you would like to give it a try. They will guide you through the process.

Finally, if you wrote a letter to the BLM concerning landing strips in the "Arizona Strip", know that they took notice. I was misinformed when I reported that Imlay and Pakoon Wells were scheduled for closure. The BLM wrote back to many that their intention was not to close any back country landing strips. The former comment was a result of not circulating UBCP e-mails through our board prior to release like we normally do, still the BLM's response is a little mysterious. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) says, "Unauthorized airstrips or dump sites in special status species habitat would be given the highest priority for removal and cleanup actions." This in conjunction with the

fact that the DEIS does not address recreational or back country aviation at all despite presentations by UBCP and many visits to the BLM offices by local pilots. This is what prompted the call to write.

Grand Gulch, the premier back country strip in the new Monument, was not listed with the "authorized" landing strips, and neither were any of the other lesser known remote landing strips. (The "authorized" landing strips include municipal airports or government operated runways that are not considered "remote" or "recreational".) *We can only conclude that the back country strips would not have been allowed to exist under the preferred alternative of the DEIS.*

After returning from hiding, I had a nice conversation with the Planning Coordinator at the BLM in St. George. They were overwhelmed at the pilot response and the quality of the letters. They indicated that they were contacting the Price BLM to ask about back country flying and how they (Price) were approving the four remote recreational landing strips they had proposed in their land management plan.

The Planning Coordinator writes, "Closing the back country airstrips was never our intent. We know that we will need to re-examine this issue for the Final EIS and we will do so. There will probably be a decision in the Final EIS that says they will not be closed."

Without your letters, back country flying might have been swept under the rug. I received a few valentines from ruffled UBCP members chastising me for not having all of my initial facts straight. If we are camping at the Grand Gulch in two years, it will have been worth it.

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## **Backcountry Landing Strip Access Act**

*Rob Hunter*

Backcountry airstrips all over the Western US including Utah, Idaho, Arizona, Montana and California are in danger of being closed and in some cases destroyed by the federal agencies that oversee them. At one time there were over two hundred backcountry airstrips in Utah alone. Relatively few of them remain today and many of those are at risk. Currently we are fighting these battles on a case-by-case basis. We win some of the battles and unfortunately lose others. Luckily, a few elected officials are trying to do something about the problem. Idaho Senator Mike Crapo (ID), with the support of Senator Larry Craig (ID) introduced the Backcountry Landing Strip Access Act, S. 2108, on December 15, 2005. Idaho Representative Butch Otter introduced the same bill in the House as H.R. 4970 on March 15, 2006 with the support of Jeff Flake (AZ), Doc Hastings (WA) and Michael Simpson (ID). These politicians realize that backcountry landing strips have not only outstanding recreational value but occasionally save a life by providing an emergency landing spot in other wise hostile terrain. Backcountry airstrips also allow people with disabilities to enjoy areas they otherwise would not be able to visit and are important in search and rescue and firefighting operations.

This bill would offer great protection to the backcountry airstrips we love by creating a national policy

governing airstrips on public lands and requiring regional land managers to follow that policy. The bill stipulates that airstrips on federal public land can not be closed without the permission of the head of the state aviation department where the landing strip is located and without taking into account comments from the public. The bill mandates that airstrips be maintained in accordance with the surrounding land management values. Through cooperative agreements, interested parties such as UBCP could perform this maintenance. The bill would also help protect our right to fly over Federal land to access backcountry airstrips.

### **Call to Action**

We and all other backcountry airstrip user groups would love to see this bill pass, but it will not be easy. Similar bills have been introduced in the last several legislative sessions, dating back to Feb 15, 2000, but none have been passed into law. This bill will suffer a similar fate unless we get involved. This is a good time for us to push for this bill.

Governor Kempthorne of Idaho is expected to be confirmed as the Secretary of the Interior and should be very sympathetic towards backcountry airstrips. All of the Senators and Representatives from Idaho were either sponsors or initial co-sponsors of the Backcountry Landing Strip Access Act. If you live in Idaho it is a good idea to let your Senators and Representative know that you appreciate their efforts in getting the Backcountry Landing Strip Access Act passed and hope they will continue working towards that goal. Senator Crapo in particular, deserves our special thanks for his leadership on this issue. Without support from their constituents our members of Congress would likely move on to other issues that have broader support. If you live in another state it is even more important to write your Senator and Congressman. If this bill is to become law we will need to step up our efforts and show our support. We need them to be aware of the bill and its importance to the public. As of this writing the bill only has two co-sponsors in the Senate and three in the House of Representatives. Please ask your elected officials to sign on as co-sponsors! (It is not generally valuable to write letters to a senator or representative that does not represent your state or district, but they always listen to their constituents.)

### **The Bill in Committee**

In the Senate, the bill was referred to the Energy and Natural Resources Committee. Most bills never make it out of committee and this one will not either without letters from us to our Senators. The Chair of the Energy and Natural resources committee is Senator Domenici of NM and the Ranking Member is Senator Bingaman, also of NM. The Chair and Ranking Member of the committee have a large say in what bills will come before the committee. If you don't want this bill to die an early death have your friends in New Mexico write their Senators! The other members of the committee can be found [www.utahbackcountrypilots.org](http://www.utahbackcountrypilots.org) in the open mic/forum section.

In the House the Backcountry Landing Strip Access Act has been referred to three committees: House Committee on Resources chaired by Richard Pombo (CA), House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure chaired by Don Young (AK) and the House Committee on Agriculture

chaired by Bob Goodlatte (VA). It was further referred from the Agriculture committee to the Subcommittee on Department Operations, Oversight, Nutrition and Forestry chaired by Gil Gutknecht (MN). All of these committees have a say, so it would be helpful for all of these members to hear from their constituents in support of the bill. Letters to the members of the committees are the best way to get a bill out of a committee. The complete list of committee members is on our website so you can determine if any of your representatives serve on these committees

### **Who to Write**

There are obviously numerous elected officials that need to be persuaded. However, any given person has three people to write directly: The two Senators of the state and the one Congressman in whose district they reside. Of course, the three letters can be essentially the same letter addressed to three different people.

Thank you for taking the time to let your elected officials know how important backcountry landing strips are to you. AOPA, UBCP and other state pilot organizations can not do this without your help. Your representatives do not necessarily care what a pilot group has to say about the issue. They do care what you have to say because you elected them and can potentially reelect them. With your help our Congressmen and Senators will be able to pass this law and protect our right to use backcountry landing strips and the airspace over them.

Here are some letter writing tips:

- Read the bill for yourself. It is only 2 and a half pages and available on our website. Your letter will be better if it is clear you know what you are talking about.
- An actual paper letter is best and more effective than a phone call although email can be OK too. In many congressional offices the person that answers the call will thank you for calling and for your input but that may be the end of it.
- Personalized letters are more effective than form letters. Your Senator and Congressman need to know that the bill exists, that it is important to his constituents and why. Specifics are better than generalizations.
- Make sure you mail the letter to your Senator's or Representative's Washington, DC office. The local office is generally for taking care of local issues not national legislation. The addresses are:

Your Senator's Name  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Your Representative's Name  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

- Ask your Senators to cosponsors S.2108 and your Representative to cosponsor H.R. 4970. So far only seven of the 535 of Senators and Congressmen have signed on. The bill needs many more cosponsors.

- If you live in New Mexico, it is even more important that you write your Senators.
- Less than 5% of bills ever become law. If this one is going to it will take work on our part but future generations of aviators will be grateful for our efforts.

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## How to Write a Persuasive Letter

### *Karl Spielman / Matt Haag*

UBCP recently forwarded email messages from Chuck Jarecki (Montana Pilot's Association) and Mark Hawkins (Arizona Pilot's Association), and also solicited our members directly requesting help to insure the continued existence of backcountry airstrips in the Upper Missouri Breaks (Montana), the Parashant National Monument along the Arizona Strip, and in the Death Valley National Park (Chicken Strip). The responses were plentiful and very effective. However, there can never be enough letters, emails, and/or phone calls to Senators, Congressmen, offices of the BLM and Forest Service, as well as State and County officials. The responsible preservation, upkeep, and even rehabilitation of our precious backcountry airstrips are in constant and increasing peril as narrow-minded fringe "environmentalist" groups push their exclusive and elitist agendas in front of those same public officials. With those thoughts in mind, and the emergence of the Back Country Landing Strip Access Act bill in Congress, UBCP would like to offer some "ammunition" for inclusion in your letters and emails. Consider the following points:

- Airstrips fit well into the overall management goals of government land. Airstrips provide non-environmentally-impactive, multiple use access for diverse recreation opportunities.
- Airstrips are internal trailheads, resulting in less use of cross-country, motorized travel to access remote areas.
- Airstrips provide a method for disabled persons to reach remote areas when they cannot suffer the long overland journey. This follows the spirit of the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- Airstrips are useful for other activities aside from recreation such as search and rescue, firefighting efforts, law enforcement, and land management activities.
- Airstrips in remote areas can be used for emergency landing sites in case of poor flying weather or mechanical problems.
- The use of an aircraft for travel is by personal preference just like other forms of motorized transportation, yet it has much less impact on the ground. Aircraft wheels are not under power, and will not disrupt the soil surface like vehicles with powered wheels do.
- Most back country airstrips have been in existence for decades, yet there is no evidence of soil erosion. This is in marked contrast to scars left on the landscape by other forms of motorized transportation. Once an airplane has

- landed, it doesn't move until it is ready to fly again. A plane has no powered wheels and does not tear up the ground.
- The airstrips are not just for pilots but their family and friends as well.
- Some airstrips may appear on a map to be in close proximity to each other. However, rugged, deeply incised landscape may mean that the airstrips are hours or even days of foot travel apart from each other.
- Back country airstrips provide for a dispersed use of the landscape.
- The aviation community (UBCP) would voluntarily perform maintenance necessary for the airstrips, thus not obligating County, State or Federal agencies' personnel, time, or funding.
- Legal research finds that there is no legal liability to be incurred by the BLM. Most states have a recreational use statute.
- Airstrips could be charted and entered into the FAA database. The aviation public can then be notified of any seasonal closures needed to mitigate reasonable wildlife concerns.

For additional information, surf the internet for [www.recreationalaviationfoundation.org](http://www.recreationalaviationfoundation.org). Information and several sample letters supporting this position have also been posted on the Airstrip Advocate Forum on the Utah Back Country Pilots website: [www.utahbackcountrypilots.org](http://www.utahbackcountrypilots.org). (Click on "Communications" then "Open Mic".)

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## Tuweep Update

### *Mark Hawkins – Arizona Pilots Association*



*Tuweep. Photo courtesy of Jim Wark (www.airphotona.com)*

The Arizona Pilots Association has good news. Things are proceeding at a rapid pace on the lease of Tuweep airstrip on the north rim of the Grand Canyon, formerly L50. We have been able to acquire the required \$5 mil of general liability insurance and are now proceeding with the Native American Cultural survey. It is our hope to have the strip leased in the next month. Stay tuned for clean-up and

maintenance information. The recreational airport committee of the APA is going to be managing the strip and quarterly clean-ups are planned. The strip is being operated as a private airstrip on public land and use will require registration and permission from the Arizona Pilots association. We hope that in addition to a link for donations we can provide an online registration form at the APA web site: [www.azpilots.org](http://www.azpilots.org) Donations will be received thru the Recreational Aviation Foundation as well. Since the Arizona Pilots Association is sponsoring this venture, membership in the APA is encouraged. Please feel free to email me directly with questions, comments or donations: [Azstol@aol.com](mailto:Azstol@aol.com)

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## The Future of the Chicken Strip

### Steve Durtschi

I had the fortune to attend a meeting at Furnace Creek with the Death Valley National Park Superintendent and listen to the discussion of the future of Chicken Strip. With Chairman Jim Clark's permission, I have prepared this report from my perspective.



*Steve touches down at the World Famous Chicken Strip*

Jim Clark and Hart Drobish representing the Saline Valley Pilots Association chaired the meeting. Karl Spielman represented RAF, and I represented UBCP. AOPA representative Keith Holt tied in via a teleconference call from Washington D.C. National Park Superintendent J.T. Reynolds, park pilot, Ed Forner, and the Chief Park Ranger represented the park.

The meeting was scheduled to last one hour, but went much longer. Much was discussed including securing FAA funding to maintain the paved strips at Furnace Creek and Stovepipe Wells. Mr. Holt had done some background work on this issue and I think Mr. Reynolds was very appreciative. Once the discussion turned to Chicken Strip, we learned some of the problems the park faces in managing this area. First, it is very remote: The drive time from Furnace Creek is at least four hours and the roads are often blocked with snow. The park is also very concerned with the "activities" that go on out

there - mainly the nude bathing. He indicated his desire to try to please everyone, but also said that he would be unable to make all the involved parties happy regarding this issue ("activities" at the springs, not access).



*Attendees of the Furnace Creek meeting*

Concerning the landing strip, Mr. Reynolds set the record straight by saying he NEVER intended to close it. He related the hoop-la of last year when word got out that the park was trying to close the landing strip. The story is a long one and I won't rehearse it here, but I found it very interesting how these rumors get started and are taken as fact. I copied down some of Mr. Reynolds's comments concerning the strip that I believe sum up his attitude: "The use of the strip is not an issue," and "we can make it work."

The park had an MOU (Memo of Understanding) prepared, but will modify it after some of the ideas that came up in the meeting. A summary of the MOU is as follows:

1. Maintenance of the strip will be turned over to a pilots group. RAF and Saline Valley Pilots Assoc. were suggested, and the group tentatively settled on the Saline Valley assoc.
2. The pilots group will complete an Archaeological Assessment. The park archaeologist will be put at their disposal to do this, but they can hire an outside archaeologist to do this if it is more convenient.
3. Casual maintenance using hand tools will be allowed by any one at any time. "Casual maintenance" will be more strictly defined in the MOU. No work to be done outside of the original disturbance.
4. Heavy maintenance will be pre-approved through the park and will have a park "monitor" on-site when the work is performed.

The MOU will go a long way toward "legitimizing" the landing strip and make its long-term survivability much stronger. The park is currently about 7 years into its 15 to 20 year management plan. The continued use of the strip could be an issue when a new management plan is formulated.

We talked about a sign in board and Mr. Drobish said he would put an "ammo can" at the strip. Karl Spielman mentioned our Kiosk at Mexican Mountain, and Mr.

Reynolds's reply was, "hey guys, let's class it up a little bit out there". I later asked Mr. Clark if UBCP could volunteer to design, construct, and install a real cool kiosk to which he replied, "That would be great."



*Camping at the Chicken Strip*

As a side note, after the meeting, Cathy and I spent a night out at Chicken Strip. The "Race Track" and all the beautiful sights at Death Valley are truly stunning. Mr. Clark stopped by, but had to push on home. Karl Spielman joined us early the next morning. Day temps were mid 70s and a beautiful absolutely still night in the 40s. We were also treated to 100 foot AGL early morning fly-bys of two pair of FA-18s.



*The infamous oasis at the Chicken Strip*

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## Happy Canyon Photo Shoot

*Dale Gardner*

I received an interesting phone call the other day. The person on the other end of the line was asking if I would be interested in doing some modeling for a magazine. Knowing the dashing physical specimen that I am, I prompted

for more information. However, it quickly became crystal clear as to what they were really looking for. "So, you actually just want my airplane for some pictures to go with an article in a flying magazine?" OK, no problem. It was early December and I was looking for a good excuse to do some flying, plus it was an opportunity to head south and escape some of the cold in northern Utah.

The chosen weekend turned out to be great. The destination was Happy Canyon airstrip in southern Utah. I got an early start and actually had a relaxing hour all to myself to enjoy this isolated southern Utah backcountry airstrip while I waited for Steve Durtschi (UBCP), and the Kounis brothers (John and George) from Pilot Getaways Magazine to arrive. They had earlier explained that we would meet at the airstrip, gather information on the area, do a little flying, take photos of the planes and that would be it. After spending a couple hours on the ground touring the airstrip and some of the local area attractions, it was time for flying. I always wondered how all those pictures in flying magazines came to be. I mean how hard can it be? I take pictures out the window of my plane all the time. Well obviously, it is not as simple as I had thought. As soon as we returned from our morning hike, I watched John and George start to prepare the photo ship, a Cessna 185, by removing seats, removing the left side door, preparing cameras, and George climbing into insulated coveralls and putting on safety harnesses. John and George operate in a very professional manner and safety is a high priority as they prepare for the flying and photography sessions.



*Formation flight requires excellent airmanship and intense concentration, as well as thorough communication and an understanding of what the other guy is going to do.*

After preparing the photo ship, we had a detailed briefing of exactly what was to happen while in the air. We discussed formation flying, the role of each aircraft, communication procedures, procedures for changing lead, emergency procedures and what it takes to produce good quality photos from the airplanes. We discussed the patterns we would be flying and the position of the airplanes relative to each other and to the airfield. John Kounis (pilot and editor) would be flying from the right seat and George (photographer and publisher) would be harnessed in the airplane, taking

pictures out the left side door opening. We agreed I would let Steve do the formation flying from the right side of my plane while I acted as a safety observer and “flight engineer” (I had to think of something important to do).

The photo shoot lasted approximately one hour. For the first half hour, we flew in the lead making approaches to the airstrip, the photo ship was positioned at our five o'clock just above or below our right wing. We later switched positions flying in formation with the photo ship allowing them to capture the plane against a number of different backgrounds from the area. That might have been one of the most intense hours in the air I have experienced and I was not even flying. The formation flying is done at a lot closer range than I had expected, requiring your complete attention outside the aircraft. When following the photo ship it seemed as though we were in a constant turn and bank situation, making minor adjustments of up, back, in, and down to keep the aircraft in a “photo window” and away from wing struts and horizontal stabilizers that might obscure the photo. Because of the required concentration and intensity of the flying, an hour was plenty and it was somewhat of a relief to get it done. I believe Steve’s exact words were “I’m always glad when this part is over.” I give John and George high marks for performing this type of flying on a constant schedule.

The Kounis brothers really do a great job preparing for the shoots, briefing themselves and all others involved, and the photography turns out great. If you get a chance, find a copy of the January/February 2006 issue of *Pilot Getaways* magazine and check out Happy Canyon (p. 52). Secondly, if you ever get a chance to “model” for *Pilot Getaways* I encourage you to take the opportunity as it is educational, fun, and they will make your airplane look good.



*Dale on final at Happy Canyon  
Photo courtesy of Pilot Getaways Magazine*

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## **Gone West** *Editor*

UBCP mourns the loss of an experienced back country aviator, flight instructor, writer, and contributor to the UBCP newsletter. Mr. Fletcher Anderson died in an accident while doing what he loved. His CAP Cessna 182 struck a steel cable spanning the Snake River near Jackson Hole, WY on November 18, 2005. Our condolences go out to Mr. Anderson’s friends and family. He will be missed.

*NTSB Identification: DEN06GA017*

*14 CFR Public Use*

*Accident occurred Friday, November 18, 2005 in Alpine, WY  
Aircraft: Cessna 182R, registration: N9928H*

*Injuries: 1 Fatal.*

*This is preliminary information, subject to change, and may contain errors. Any errors in this report will be corrected when the final report has been completed.*

*On November 18, 2003, at 0900 mountain standard time, a Cessna 182R, N9928H, registered to and operated by the Civil Air Patrol as CAP 4928 and piloted by a commercial pilot, was destroyed when it struck a steel cable and impacted the Snake River approximately 6 miles north of Alpine, Wyoming. Visual meteorological conditions prevailed at the time of the accident. The public use business flight was being conducted under the provisions of Title 14 Code of Federal Regulations Part 91 without a flight plan. The pilot was fatally injured. The flight originated at Jackson (JAC), Wyoming, at 0843.*

*Preliminary information indicates the pilot was en route to Afton (AFO), Wyoming, where he was to administer a checkride to another CAP member.*

*A Wyoming state trooper had made a traffic stop on U.S. 26, at Mile Post 125. While he wrote the ticket, the violator saw the airplane fly past her position in the Grand Canyon of the Snake River. She told the trooper what she had seen and said that the airplane was below the highway and below the treetops. Shortly thereafter, the trooper located the inverted airplane submerged in the river.*

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## **Humble Pie** *Editor*

Thanks to the many UBCP members who submitted short stories along the lines of AOPA’s “Never Again” or *Flying Magazine*’s “I Learned About Flying From That”. It was a difficult choice, but I decided to include two stories that are the most pertinent to the subject matter of this newsletter. Please keep these types of articles coming for future newsletters! If you already submitted an article but it didn’t appear here, don’t be too discouraged. It may show up in a future printing.

The following is an excerpt from Captain Harry B. Hardin’s book, “West by 180”. It is his description of a departure from Mexican Mountain, UT followed by an inadvertent low-level penetration of the Lower Black Box Canyon.

“...I start up and taxi out from my campsite to the end of the strip around the cow patties. It’s like trying to avoid land mines, except when you hit one it’s just a bump and not an explosion. Make a full run-up, a complete check of the engine. This runway is only 1300 feet long, the elevation of the field is 4600 feet and the aircraft is fully loaded. Most small airplanes could not takeoff from this strip fully loaded and some not at all. So what could you do in this case? Fly half the gear out to somewhere else, like Green River airport 15 minutes away. Then come back for the rest. There’s nothing like that peace of mind, knowing that you won’t have a weight problem on departure. I’ve “been there and done that,” as the saying goes.



**Mexican Mountain airstrip looking southeast**

Anyway my old Cessna 180 is an outstanding back country aircraft. I line up, point it down the runway with low bushes under the wings. The bushes wiggle and wave as I apply full power for departure. The sand is a little soft here at the end, so when I apply power, it’s rather slow to start rolling. But rock and roll it does and two-thirds of the way down the runway I am in the air. There are some low trees to clear at the end and then I am already in a turn to fly around Mexican Mountain, intercept the San Rafael River and proceed downstream. Always fly downstream; at least that’s what it says in the book, Mountain Flying Bible. That’s so you won’t get caught in a canyon that narrows and prevents you from turning around or climbing out.

Well that applies 99% of the time. Little did I know I was about to experience that elusive 1%. No one told me about the Lower Black Box on the San Rafael. Why should they? No one I know has flown through it. I have talked to some whitewater rafters since then. They told me of the rapids and the narrow canyon with the sheer vertical walls extending upwards over two thousand feet. But I did not know this at the time, so on I flew.

And here I was, what’s the saying, “Fat, Dumb, and Happy.” Well I certainly am not fat, and I’m not dumb, but I was happy. In fact I felt great. Here I was doing what I love and in this magical place. This was the case until I made that first turn into the “Black Box.” I knew things were bad when the first words to come out of my mouth were, “Oh (four letter explicative)”.

Fear gripped me. I mean real fear, not just scary movie fear. The type of fear that you have time to experience. The fear that you may be going to crash into these 2000 foot

high sheer vertical walls. The feeling that you may be going to die.

Okay, the fear would have to come later, if I get out of the canyon alive, that is. Then will come the shakes, maybe the stutters, or the weak legs. But for now I’m too busy to think of being afraid. I’m too busy flying, attempting to survive, to feel the effects of fear; it comes afterwards. I have a technique, a flying mode if you will. And I tell my students this. When things get too busy, getting to the point of overload, tune everything out. Ignore the radios, ignore the passengers (you can explain later) put all else from your mind and just “fly the airplane.” I’m good at this. Of course I had no passengers and no one talking on the radio, but I went into my full flying mode, concentration of 110%.



**Cousin to the Lower Black Box, The Upper Black Box Canyon is pictured above; looking southwest toward the Mexican Mountain area.**

Well all of a sudden here I was, literally “between a rock and a hard place.” It was as if the sunny day had immediately become cloudy as I flew into this narrow alleyway between these 2000-foot high precipices of sheer rock where the sun seldom shone. If I looked straight up, a little sunlight spilled over the ridge. I had the feeling I was flying down a dark tunnel with the walls beginning to close in on me, and indeed maybe they were. I had entered the canyon at a speed of 120 MPH, but as fast as possible I slowed down and extended flaps. The 180 has a large manual flap lever on the floor between the seats. This allowed me to slow down quickly. Good thing, too, as I was already at the next turn. It was a 180 degree turn back the other way. I pulled the wing up 90 degrees, applied some power, and pulled back on the elevator control. I don’t know how many Gs were applied, but I could feel the force as I was pushed down into the seat.

Each time I completed a turn and could roll wings level, I applied full power and climbed as much as possible. I could see the reflection of the sun on the rim, like looking out of a deep cavern and not being able to reach the top. After a few more turns, I don’t remember how many, I was able to crest the rim into another day, another time. It was a different world of sunlight, blue sky and visibility that reached for miles.

*It was then that I realized that the airplane and I had been one for the last five minutes. We do indeed fly well together. Now the feelings of fear, joy, and elation, all set in – we have lived to fly another day. Winston Churchill once said that one of life’s sublime experiences was to be shot at and missed. I now felt that I had just had one of those sublime experiences.”*

*Capt. Harry B. Hardin*

Captain Hardin’s book is available from Trafford Publishing, or you can email him directly at [CaptainHBH@aol.com](mailto:CaptainHBH@aol.com).

Dan Lilja contributed the following story. It is a gentle reminder that trouble usually strikes in the most unexpected and untimely fashion...

*“In the summer of 2001 my son Adam and I took off from our home base of Plains, Montana in my Cessna T41B headed for a rifle match at the NRA Whittington Center in Raton, New Mexico. The Utah desert is very hot that time of year and on the suggestion of aerial photographer and UBCP member, Jim Wark, I decided to camp our first night at Dolores Point on the Colorado/Utah state line, southwest of Grand Junction, Colorado. At 7200’ in elevation we hoped it wouldn’t be too hot for camping. With an afternoon high of near 80°, it was delightful.*



*Dan Lilja and his son, camped at Delores Point*

*The next morning we planned on landing at a few of the other backcountry strips in Utah at lower elevations before continuing on to New Mexico. However, I realized we had a problem the next morning after breaking camp and reloading the plane. The starter wouldn’t turn over. The battery was dead. Here we were, at about as remote of an airstrip as there is in the west with a dead battery and a fuel injected IO-360 Continental engine. I decided to give hand propping a try. I’d already hand-primed the engine and it always started easily when it was cold. I turned the magnetos on and instructed Adam on how to shut things down if necessary. The compression stroke on the IO-360 and the prop are not synchronized with hand propping in mind. But, standing in front of the plane (not my preferred position for hand propping) I gave the high blade a few pulls. On about the fourth pull it popped and settled down into a nice idle. We’d done it. I taxied on up to the southeast end of the 2000’ strip and we took off for Moab, Utah where the nearest FBO was*

*located. As it turned out the folks at Canyon Lands were very friendly and helpful.*

*I knew I had either a battery that had gone south or an alternator problem. This engine has a direct drive alternator and we soon discovered that the cooling fan blades could be rotated with a finger. This is not as it should be. We pulled the alternator and found that the input shaft to the alternator had broken into two parts. It seemed odd that a ½” diameter shaft could have broken like that.*

*The next morning we had a new alternator in hand but the coupler that was supposed to be included was missing. Hoping for a Saturday delivery of a coupler through the U.S. Mail we hung around Moab and baked in the 116° heat. But the coupler didn’t show. Deciding not to wait until Monday or Tuesday for the coupler to arrive, we bolted on the new alternator (minus the drive gear), charged the battery up and left for Montana. Since it was too late to continue on to New Mexico and we had no means to charge the battery, home seemed like the place to go. We turned off the master switch for long periods of time to save the battery for the radio and flaps upon arrival. Using pilotage and dead reckoning again was a fun experience in the mountains of Utah and Idaho. We arrived home 5.3 hours later without incident.*

*A couple of hundred hours later I had to have the engine overhauled prematurely. It was a factory-remanufactured engine, but Continental had done a poor job on this one. Three of the connecting rods were of a different design than the others and the engine was out of balance and breaking internal parts as the hours accumulated. The alternator was one of these victims. Continental replaced the rods but that was as far as they felt their obligation extended.*

*We enjoyed our time in the Utah backcountry and have made several successful trips with the new engine since then.”*

*Dan Lilja*



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## Request for Articles

UBCP Air Mail will be starting a new feature, that all of us will benefit from. It will be similar to AOPA's "Never Again" but will focus on lessons learned through close calls in back country flying. We learn from mistakes but no one would survive long enough to make all of them. For this to work we will need articles from you. Of course we are also always looking for articles in on backcountry flying particularly about flying in Utah. Articles can be submitted by email to [Newsletter@UtahBackCountryPilots.org](mailto:Newsletter@UtahBackCountryPilots.org).

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