

## Int Air Rally

### International Air Rally 2003

By Garth Wallace

Imagine flying on an eight-day, 2,500-mile trip from southern Ontario north to James Bay, then over to Labrador and back along the St. Lawrence River to Drummondville, Quebec. Each stop would be chosen to add to the variety of attractions along the way. The food and accommodations would be the best available at the overnight destinations.

Sound interesting? Read on.

When you land at each stopover, the local director of tourism greets you at the airport. He or she has transportation waiting. You and your passengers are driven to the nicest hotel in town to freshen up followed by a guided tour of the area. Special activities have been set up or kept open just so your group can sample the area's culture and tourism. Later, the mayor joins you for dinner at the best restaurant in town. In the morning, breakfast is ready when you walk into the hotel restaurant. A carry-on, catered lunch is provided for everyone in your aircraft for the next leg of the trip.

Throughout this dream flight, your wallet stays in your pocket. The arrangements are free or pre-paid.

"Never in Canada," you say.

"Yes, in Canada."

There is more.

This flying adventure is planned for you by experienced, single-engine VFR pilots who have already flown the route. Flight itineraries are filed for your aircraft on each leg every day. The organizers also provide a list of entertaining questions based on VFR charts. The questions are challenging yet easy enough to involve your passengers.

Twenty-two other general aviation aircraft accompany you on this trip departing at staggered times each day. The other pilots monitor and report on an air-to-air frequency to enhance everyone's safety. Weather observations are radioed back by the crew of faster aircraft.

A TV film crew is documenting the entire trip.

A spot landing contest at each overnight airport adds to the fun and the challenge. One hundred or so spectators line the fence at some stops to cheer your arrival. The refueling on this trip has been pre-arranged. Waiting linecrew wave you to parking. The sixty pilots and passengers from the other aircraft join you for the tours, activities and meals. At the end of the week, they are your friends.

"Impossible," you say.

It gets better.

Your most northern destination is Radisson, Quebec where you are a guest of Hydro-Quebec. The mayor of Radisson gives you a personal tour of nearby LG2, part of the James Bay hydro development and the largest underground hydro-electric generating plant in the world.

Later in the week Bombardier provides a Dash 8 and crew to keep your trip going as planned.

Your furthest eastern destination is Pakua Shipu, Quebec on the mouth of the St. Augustine River near the border with Labrador. You are the first tourists to be invited to an annual gathering of Innu elders who have set up camp on a large sandspit to demonstrate their traditional ways of living.

The pre-organized part of your trip ends at Drummondville. A banquet is held in your honour. An Armed Forces cadet band provides the entertainment. If you have done well answering the route questions, landing on the spot and partaking of the activities during the week, your name is called and you are presented with a share of \$25,000 in prize money.

#### **THE IDEAL FLIGHT?**

I'm describing the running of the International Air Rally 2003, July 19 to 26. It was all of the above and more.

IAR 2003 was planned, organized and executed by the team of Catherine Tobenas, president of the IAR, Camil Dumont, president of the IAR organizing committee, and their host of helpers.

The IAR has its roots in a smaller version that was started two years ago by the Quebec Bush Pilots Association. Tobenas and Dumont expanded it this year.

The objectives of the rally were to establish an international general aviation event in Canada while celebrating 100 years of powered flight, promoting tourism in Quebec and Ontario, and raising the profile of the Nature Conservatory of Canada.

The rally was set up for VFR flying with an IFR component for those who could fly on instruments in bad weather. A maximum of 100 points a day could be earned by each team with up to five rally events daily:

1/ departing within 15 minutes of receiving your rally envelop;

2/ finding waypoints by answering questions along the way;

3/ matching photos to landmarks between waypoints;

4/ touching down in a 100-foot space between two lines at the beginning of the active runway, and;

5/ special ground competitions at the overnight stops.

Thirty teams pre-registered. Twenty aircraft entered, including five twin-engined airplanes, three helicopters and one seaplane. The smallest machine was a Piper Cherokee 140 flown by 14-year old Luc Charron and his dad Marc from North Bay, Ontario. The Cessna Conquest of Team Jean Delangis was the largest. The oldest pilot was Alex Dreyfoos from Miami, Florida in his AStar turbine helicopter on floats. Seven pilots and their aircraft were rated for instrument flying. The rest flew VFR. A minimum of two people in each aircraft made a "team." Nearly 60 participants were involved.

I joined the rally as an observing journalist for COPA. It had to be my all-time most interesting general aviation trip. We flew over and landed in parts of Quebec that I had never seen. Neither had the majority of the others. Everyone learned more about Canada, about flying and about themselves. We also had more fun than anyone deserves.

I was assigned to ride in different aircraft. During the first half of the rally, I flew in the AirJourney Beechcraft Baron from Palm Beach, Florida. It was piloted by Thierry Pouille and crewed by his wife Sophie, daughter Anais and son Alex.

The rally began in Ottawa with registration at the Rockcliffe Flying Club on Saturday morning, July 19. Each participant was welcomed and presented with three IAR T-shirts and a cap.

Dispatcher Robert Dewar assigned empty seats in participating aircraft for the four print journalists and their equipment as well as John Lovelace's six-person film crew from Wings Over Canada. This created a problem. Everyone had too much stuff. The empty seats were there but the useable weight for extra passengers was not.

Thierry Pouille came to the rescue for the first leg offering to fly his Baron back to Ottawa from our first overnight destination for a load of baggage.

We were bused to the Canada's Aviation Museum on the other side of the Rockcliffe Airport for the opening ceremonies. Inside, the group was entertained by La Musique des Cadets, the eastern Canada Armed Forces cadet band. Camil Dumont introduced the rally sponsors and outlined the objectives of the event. Then there was a quick Nav Canada briefing for the international pilots and forgetful Canadians covering the air traffic differences when flying in Canada.

### **DAY 1: OTTAWA TO TORONTO, ONTARIO**

Back at the Rockcliffe Flying Club, a mass weather briefing was organized by Rally Air Marshall Dave Bonnallie. He called flight service and hooked his cell phone to a radio amplifier so all the pilots could hear it. The weather for the day was forecast to be clear. A bag lunch was distributed and we headed for our aircraft.

The first day was to be easy, a one-leg flight to the Toronto Buttonville Airport where we would be hosted by the City of Markham in northeastern Toronto.

The plan was for the fastest aircraft to depart first followed by the rest at five-minute intervals. Some teams were not ready when their turn came up and departed later. This created some congestion over the waypoints, especially when pilots circled a spot for second and third looks.

Team Pouille discovered early that the rally was no push-over. We couldn't solve the riddle for the set-heading waypoint. We had been given a list of location names around Ottawa and a series of numbers. The clue was, "What was invented in 1876?" I failed history and the rest of the crew were Americans. The answer was "the telephone." From this we were to figure out what letters matched the numbers on a telephone dial.

Thierry hustled to be airborne for our twelve o'clock departure slot but we couldn't tell him which way to head first. We finally guessed by working backward from the next waypoint questions and photos on the route. We were wrong but close enough to get on track.

The next waypoint was, "A landmark named after a famous English cloth." The answer was "Tweed." Along the way, we identified the first photo as the chaulk mine near Almonte, west of Ottawa. The Pouille kids, Anais and Alex, sat in the middle seats. They got hooked on the problem solving and were accomplished map-readers by the end of the week. Mother Sophie passed out snacks, drinks and clues from the fifth seat in the baggage compartment. We discovered that two or three copies of the VFR charts would have been handy instead of passing around the one we had. Thierry's two GPSs helped since many clues were identified by latitude and longitude.

The pilots had been asked to report over the waypoints on the air-to-air frequency. It didn't take long to figure out that this gave away the locations to the following aircraft so we radioed, "By waypoint Number 2 at 3,500 feet."

And so it went.

At Buttonville, the arrangements for a spot landing contest and rigged walkaround competition fell through. This reality of air rally organizing happened rarely during the week. The ground competition was to occupy the teams waiting for the slower aircraft to arrive.

The City of Markham erased any disappointment by setting a high standard as our hosts. Donald Cousens, the mayor of Markham, was flown in from his cottage in a small plane to welcome the group. Stephen Chait, Markham's director of Tourism and Economic Development, presented each team with a soft-sided overnight bag containing information and gifts from the city. Under his direction, we were bused to the newly-opened Markham Hilton Hotel. There we picked up room access cards and freshened up before being shuttled to Markham's Angus Glen Golf Club for dinner where Stephen Chait thanked us for "Our spirit of participation."

On the way back to the hotel, we were given a tour of historic and lively downtown Unionville.

## **DAY 2: TO AMOS, QUEBEC**

Breakfast was served at 07:00. It was announced that Team Nancy Robertson from Ottawa, flying a Rockcliffe Flying Club Cessna 172 sponsored by Young Eagles/Droica, had the highest points on first leg. The pilot briefing at 07:45 indicated that the weather was marginal VFR with low cloud and showers on our first leg to North Bay. Air Marshall Bonnalli emphasized that the go/no go decision rested with each pilot. It was decided that we would bus to the airport and check the weather again.

A Robertson R44 helicopter flown by Norman Dube joined the rally to carry the extra baggage. When the Wings Over Canada crew spotted the empty helicopter, they arranged for some low-level filming en route. The extra luggage went in other aircraft.

The weather was still low but the group decided to go. Departures began at 09:30. Team Pouille departed first. We encountered some low clouds and light showers but made it through to sunny North Bay. Thierry reported the weather changes along the way. We landed at North Bay, an optional fuel stop, to let the slower aircraft catch up. Then it was on to Amos, Quebec for an overnight stop.

Amos is a supply city central to the Harricana region of Quebec. It is at the beginning of the road north to James Bay. Amos is famous for its pure water, which is naturally filtered through eskers in the area. Thierry Pouille circled the airport to prepare for a spot landing. The radio operator said that the runway numbers were the target. We missed.

This was the first destination with spectators. People lined the fence partway around the airport to watch the rally airplanes and have a chance to see French-Canadian TV personality Gaston Lepage who was participating in one of the Robinson R44 helicopters.

The ground competition involved driving four-wheel Bombardier ATVs from the airport through a nearby trail. The teams supplied a driver and navigator. Half of the points were awarded for the return of both riders on an undamaged ATV. The remaining points went for identifying landmarks on the trail.

The bus took us to the Hotel des Eskers and then to Refuge Pageau, a wildlife rescue centre that nurses injured and orphaned animals before returning them to their habitat.

Supper was a very sociable do-it-yourself barbecue at the Amos seaplane base. We cooked our own steaks any way we wanted. Salads, one-pound baked potatoes and desserts were waiting inside the clubhouse. Mayor Ulric Cherubin joined us and said that he hoped the Amos attractions and hospitality would encourage us to return on our own.

Among the seaplanes docked at the base was a Cessna 185 on straight floats. It was a rally entry sponsored by Monuments, Amos and flown by Marcel Labonte and Pierrette Delisle who call Amos home. They completed the VFR part of the rally on floats including landing in the Toronto Harbour on the first stop.

### **DAY 3: TO LG2**

Breakfast brought the results of the previous day. First place was shared by Team Andre Turgeon in a Cessna 185 on amphibious floats based in Toronto and Team Pierre Gariepy flying the Propane Express Cessna 172 from St-Mathieu de la Prairie, Quebec. There was a three-way tie for the two-day total points among teams Turgeon, Robertson and Jean Charles-Rey from Ottawa in the Sennheiser Canada Cessna 172.

The weather briefing indicated low cloud that would lift during the morning. The departure was delayed giving the group a chance to tour downtown Amos, including the impressive domed Cathedrale Ste. Therese d'Avila.

The bus departed for the airport at 11:30. Paul Clark, Toronto based and IFR rated, volunteered to fly a weather check. He reported that the low clouds were breaking up to the north. Rally departures began at 12:30.

The route was north via Matagami, Quebec to the village of Radisson located on La Grande Riviere at the LG2 hydro dam and power development. The weather soon cleared completely.

Team Pouille worked hard on identifying the waypoints and photographs. We did well until the landing at LG2. We were in the first aircraft to arrive. We asked about a spot landing competition and were told on the radio that the lines were near the beginning of the runway. The kids cheered their dad as we sailed over the end of the runway but we didn't see any lines. We learned later that they were made with duct tape. Radisson is a Hydro Quebec village. About 400 workers live comfortably in permanent buildings. They operate two powerplants in shifts, two weeks on and two weeks back home in southern Quebec. During the construction of LG2, 6,000 workers lived in tents during the early 1970s.

Our transportation, supper, tours and accommodation at LG2 were hosted by Hydro Quebec, the Village of Radisson and the local hotel, Auberge Radisson. The early arrivals were bussed to the rooms provided by Hydro Quebec and then offered a tour of the larger of the two local power plants.

Taking care of visitors is a daily summer occurrence at Radisson. The staff members were friendly and helpful to every unfamiliar face.

Supper on Day 3 was catered at the only room large enough, the school cafeteria. It started with a taste of the local fare: caribou, harbour seal, walleye, smoked arctic char and speckled trout. The main course offered roast caribou or grilled trout with blueberry banik washed down with Labrador tea.

### **DAY 4: TO CHIBOUGAMAU QUEBEC**

The breakfast results showed that Day 3 of the rally had been won by Team Paul Clark in the MVS Bonanza, Team Jean Charles-Rey and Miami, Florida-based Team Alex Dreyfoos flying the AStar 350. The three-day lead was shared by Team Robertson and Team Charles-Rey.

It was also announced that three teams had found and landed between the grey lines: Team Paul Clark and Team Warren Staples from Guelph, Ontario in a Mooney. The third aircraft to nail the landing was an inbound Air Inuit HS 748 whose female pilot had asked what was going on.

An early morning tour of the power plant for the later arrivals from the day before was conducted by Radisson Mayor Pierre Lavigne.

Rally departures began at 13:00 into a blue sky and 100-kilometre visibility.

The participants were becoming familiar with the organizers' pattern of questions and answers. Rather than searching for the photos by staying on course and hoping for the best, Team Pouille plotted the closest answers on the GPS and headed for the nearest. It worked most of the time.

At Chibougamau, Thierry dragged the Baron over the runway with the stall horn blaring. We missed the lines again. There was a small mutiny among the crew. In Thierry's defence, the heavy-hauling Baron is made to fly and hates to drop.

Chibougamau is Cree for "meeting place." It sits on a watershed with area rivers flowing north to the arctic and south to the St. Lawrence Valley.

The City of Chibougamau was established just 50 years ago when ore containing gold, silver and copper was discovered. Now there are only three mines operating from a maximum of 14 but hopes run high with the discovery of vanadium, a component of battery electrolyte.

The city hosted our stopover starting with a prospector's competition which included sandbag tossing, log sawing, sand shoveling and rock drilling. An abandoned gold mine tour included displays that paid tribute to miners for providing minerals to advance civilization.

Mayor Donald Bubar joined us for dinner in the Romeo and Juliet Restaurant. He outlined the importance of Chibougamau as a tourist destination and supply centre for travel north.

The prospecting experience continued with camping in a city park. The tenderfoot rally crews opted for the local hotels. They missed the marshmallow roasting contest.

#### **DAY 5: TO BAIE COMEAU, QUEBEC**

Up to now, the group had stayed together except for two teams that had suffered minor mechanical problems. They caught up with us at Chibougamau. This miracle of planning, skill, perseverance and luck was about to fall apart.

Next month: International Air Rally 2003 Part 2; the problems, the solutions, the results and the cost; plus a special section on what it takes to have fun and win an air rally at this level.

*Garth Wallace is a freelance writer who lives near Ottawa. He has written seven aviation books published by Happy Landings ([www.happylandings.com](http://www.happylandings.com)). These include a series of five volumes of aviation humour based on his experiences as a 12,000-hour flying instructor. Wallace is available to speak to aviation groups. He can be contacted via e-mail: [garth@happylandings.com](mailto:garth@happylandings.com).*

(photos)

All photos by Garth Wallace

#### 90 – Team Pouille

Team Pouille: (l. – r.) Anais, Alex, Sophie and Thierry. This family of rally participants leads group flights of general aviation pilots south from their home in Palm Beach, Florida. This was their first time flying in Canada.

#### 10 – Markham dinner

A special buffet tent was set up for us at the Markham's Angus Glen Golf Club. Brian Hillford, member of parliament for the area, addressed the group outlining that the area has become the "High Tech Capital of Canada."

#### 20 – Amos BBQ

"Step up and cook your own." The local Amos set up a line of grills and supplied steaks, seasonings and flippers for a do-it-yourself barbecue at the Amos Seaplane Base.

#### 20 – Amos Cathedrale

The Cathedrale Ste. Therese d'Avila is a prominent landmark in Amos, Quebec. It served as a rally waypoint on arrival and a tourist spot the next morning during a weather delay.

#### 30 – LG2A dam and spillway

This is a Baron pilot's view of the smaller of two dams and spillways at the LG2 Hydro-Quebec installation on La Grande Riviere. It was the first rally waypoint departing Radisson, Quebec.

#### 30 – LG2 mayor and group

Radisson Mayor Pierre Lavigne photographs the second rally group to visit the spillway (left) and dam (right) at LG2. Lavigne offered to take pictures for anyone and ended up with 12 cameras around his neck.

#### 40 – Chi mine tour

The inside of this abandoned gold mine in Chibougamau, Quebec was cold, dark, wet and interesting. Bonanza pilot Paul Clark (left) had to duck his head for most of the tour. AStar pilot Alex Dreyfoos is on the right.

#### 40 – Chi planning

Team Nancy Robertson checks over the rally route at the Chibougamau waterfront park campsite. (L. – r.) Robertson, co-pilot Jean De Cotret, seaplane pilot Marcel Labonté, and Robertson's navigator Nicolas Marmet. At this point, Team Robertson was leading the rally.

40 – Chi rock drilling

Thierry Pouille drills granite for his team. The contest was for the deepest hole drilled in 30 seconds with a bucking, 130-lb jackhammer. Gold miners did this for eight to ten hours a day.

00 – Catherine Tobenas

The president and chief worrier for the International Air Rally 2003 is Catherine Tobenas, seen here at right being interviewed on camera by Diane Roy. The “Wings Over Canada” production crew filmed the rally during the entire eight days. Television coverage will air on PBS this winter. The cameraman is Brian Chow.

00 – Camil

“Where did all this gear come from?” Camil Dumont ponders how to fit more baggage into his Cessna 185. Dumont has been the president of the organizing committee for the 2001, 2002 and 2003 editions of the International Air Rally.