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Happy Landings

By Garth Wallace

All photos by Garth Wallace

International Air Rally 2004 – Part 1

A unique Canadian aviation experience

International Air Rally 2004 proved that mixing general aviation with sleazy weather creates great friendships.

Sixty-three pilots, navigators, passengers, journalists and organizers were registered in 25 aircraft on the 1,900-nautical-mile rally. The plan was to fly to nine host cities across three Canadian provinces in eight days.

Mother Nature had other ideas. She paraded a week-long tangle of low pressure systems through eastern Canada starting two days before the rally. Six of the rally days began with below VFR weather. Group waiting in a host city was more fun than being marooned on your own.

The weather caused discouraging delays and a nightmare of rearrangements for the rally organizers. We flew in grey skies, browned a few pants but in the end we made it to seven out of eight stops. We also experienced wonderful eastern Canadian hospitality and developed lasting friendships.

FREDERICTON, NB

Friday, July 16 was rally arrival day hosted by the City of Fredericton, New Brunswick.

There were nine aircraft registered in the rally's IFR category including three twins and one amphibian. The 12 VFR entrants included one amphibian and two aircraft on straight floats. All entrants were to compete VFR except on certain legs that had separate IFR components.

Sixteen rally aircraft made it to Fredericton for the start by coming two days early or by flying IFR. The rest waited in low cloud and rain in Ontario and Quebec.

Fredericton is a clean, prosperous-looking government/university town. The rally was booked into the stately Lord Beaverbrook Hotel in the centre of the city's business, cultural and tourism area. See: www.fredericton.ca.

Friday coincided with the first day of COPA's Convention and Annual General Meeting. A hangar barbeque hosted by the City of Fredericton, the Fredericton Airport Authority and New Brunswick COPA members brought the two groups together for the evening.

(photo 001) map of IAR route

The 2004 International Air Rally zigzagged through parts of New Brunswick, Quebec and Ontario from July 16 to 24.

FREDERICTON TO MONCTON NB

Breakfast was served at a red-eyed 6:45 a.m. Buses departed for the airport shortly after eight o'clock.

The rally was on, sort of.

The first leg was supposed to dogleg south to the Bay of Fundy before heading to Moncton, New Brunswick. The weather briefing indicated below VFR clouds at Fredericton and Moncton, and a fogged-in seacoast. We waited. The fidgeting started. So did the friendships.

(photo 002) Fred - Camil addresses entrants

Camil Dumont, president of the Rally Organizing Committee, outlines the rally procedures at Fredericton. Each leg started with a briefing. Group VFR Flight Itineraries were filed by the organizers but pilots made their own "go/no-go" decisions.

By mid-morning, the route to the foggy Bay of Fundy was scrubbed in favour of flying direct to Moncton, as soon as the weather allowed. While waiting, the entrants were given rally questions. These were based

on the VFR chart for the abandoned first leg. The teams scattered around the terminal building looking for private space to spread their charts and knock their heads together.

This was the fourth annual rally for the organizers. They had pre-flown the route taking pictures and making up waypoint questions. They were experienced at being tricky. There was a sucker answer for each question and we learned quickly to not to discard “none of the above.”

I was covering the rally as a journalist, assigned to ride with different entrants as a passenger. For this leg, I drew Team Clark. Pilot Paul Clark, from the Toronto area, was a veteran of last year’s IAR. His navigator this time was P. K. Odendaal, an ex-military pilot from South Africa. They came prepared: pencils, protractors, rulers, calculators, highlighters and a Canada Flight Supplement flew as they scoured the map for answers to the questions.

Outside, the clouds lifted, grudgingly.

(photo 003) Fred – Team Turgeon

There were no restrictions on equipment in the International Air Rally. Here Team Turgeon from Markam, Ontario (L. – R. Morris Kansun, Andre Turgeon, John Lortimer) consult their laptop display for clues to the rally questions. Behind, a competitor sneaks a peak.

The scoring on the first leg was reduced to answering the rally questions, staying within the flight time submitted by each team and landing at Moncton between two lines spaced 100 feet apart.

It sounded easy enough.

By noon, the IFR entrants were given the “go”. The faster aircraft were assigned early departures. The Team Clark Beechcraft Bonanza taxied out third. We waited.

The Fredericton Flight Service Specialist did her best but she was handcuffed by the system. The only way to the beginning of the runway was by backtracking. Ten IFR airplanes cannot be launched easily without air traffic control or terminal radar. There were long delays while Moncton Centre identified each departing aircraft before giving Fredericton clearance to launch another one.

By the time we took off, our estimated flight time was blown and the weather had turned VFR, adding other traffic to the mix. Once we were flying above the cloud and separated from the other traffic we enjoyed a smooth ride.

The weather continued to improve. All of the rally airplanes made it to Moncton. So did four weather-delayed entrants who had skipped Fredericton to catch up.

CITY OF DIEPPE NB

Our host at Moncton was the City of Dieppe. This activity-rich suburb is home to Moncton’s airport. See: www.dieppe.ca.

Dieppe officials went all out to publicize our arrival. We were hours late but over 100 people were waiting for us, including radio and newspaper reporters.

A finger lunch was provided at the airport before we were bused 10 miles northeast to Shediac, New Brunswick for the first of four ground activities.

(photo 004) Monc – Team Cirrus

Team Cirrus from Toronto, shows off their new SR22. When the rally aircraft had shutdown at Moncton, a gate was opened and the curious crowd flooded the ramp. The rally crews became instant ambassadors of general aviation. Team Cirrus member Rob Apens is leaning on the airplane, Gary Goldfarb has his back to the camera and Chris Priess is hidden from view.

(photo 005) Monc – Boat tour

Shediac, New Brunswick was built beside a large, shallow bay that opens to the Northumberland Strait. A boat ride on the bay was one of the community events staged for us.

(photo 006) Monc – Lobster demo

Tour boat Captain Eric LeBlanc demonstrates his David Suzuki level of lobster knowledge. He’s holding a live specimen pulled from a trap. The cameraman on the right was one of two filming the International Air Rally 2004 for a documentary.

(photo 007) Monc – horseshoes

The gang horseshoes competition could have been dangerous but the shoes thrown were plastic.

(photo 008) Monc – group at lobster

The rallyists pose with the Worlds Largest Lobster in Shediac on the way to eating the real thing.

LOBSTER NOIR

Dinner was served at the Dieppe Rotary Club Centre, in the dark. The electric power tripped off 30 minutes before we arrived. This didn't bother anyone. The rallyists were in high spirits having completed the first day. The flow of Moosehead beer and lively Acadian music by fiddler and guitarist boosted them higher. Our hosts cooked mussels, lobster and steaks on large gas barbeques and served them New Brunswick style: piled high.

The lobster lovers dove in without hesitation. The rest of us decided steak in the dark was safer.

(photo 009) Monc – Tom & Sylvia Horne

AOPA editor Tom Horne and his wife Sylvia joined part of the rally as journalists. Here they check out a Cirrus SR22, one of several unique aircraft in the event.

(photo 010) Monc – Team Codahy

Two teams landed in the box at Moncton. One was the Piper Arrow flown by Patrick Cudahy, left, and Ron Conard. This team was declared overall winner of the first leg. Dieppe Mayor Yvon Lapierre presented them with a cheque for \$1,500 during breakfast.

The other airplane hitting the spot was a Piper Seneca flown by father and son Jean-Guy and Christian Michaud. The two floatplane teams missed the 100-foot box, four floating plastic bleach bottles.

MONCTON TO BONAVENTURE QC

The next leg was a 200-nm zigzag up the east coast of New Brunswick to Bonaventure, Quebec. I was assigned to ride with Marcel Labonte and Pierrette Delisle from Amos, Quebec in their Cessna 185 on floats. Marcel made me promise to write only good things about him or he would leave me on the dock. The morning low cloud was rising giving us the promise of a half-decent flying day.

A Dieppe Recreation Department van hauled us, our bags and gas cans from the Moncton Airport to the shore of the Petitcodiac River south of the city. We were joined by Team Gilles. Gilles Lapierre and Gilles Pinard from Montreal were competing in a float-shod Cessna 172SP.

It was noon before both airplanes were fueled and loaded, just in time for the clouds to dissipate, the wind to drop and the temperature to rise. Marcel looked at the limp flags and said, "I might have to leave you here anyway."

(photo 011) Team Labonte

Floatplane flying is gas-can aviation. Marcel Labonte refuels his Cessna 185 at Moncton, five gallons at a time.

(photo 012) Pierrette Delisle

I flew from Moncton with Marcel Labonte and Pierrette Delisle in their Cessna floatplane. Pierrette jammed herself in with the luggage so I could ride up front.

Through superior pilot skill (How's that Marcel?) and help from an upgraded engine, Marcel had his Cessna airborne and climbing in less than a minute.

The float teams were to fly the same rally route as the wheel pilots, answering the same questions. This was Marcel and Pierrette's second IAR. They ignored the rally envelope and enjoyed the coastal scenery instead. Their interests in the rally were the sights, the camaraderie, the hospitality and the arrangements for transportation, meals, accommodations, activities, floatplane docking sites and fuel.

The weather along the coast was clear with a hazy visibility of 15 miles. Below I could see the sandy bottom in the shallow water that makes this part of New Brunswick famous for lobster.

BONAVENTURE QC

Bonaventure Quebec was founded 250 years ago by Acadians deported from the rebellious United States. The city of 2,800 is tucked under the south shore of the Gaspe Peninsula where the Baie des Chaleurs

opens to the Atlantic Ocean. The area promotes itself as a “graceful union of nature and culture”. The rallyists were to experience both.

Marcel flew across the Baie des Chaleurs toward Bonaventure and then diverted 70 miles north to Lake Sept Isles near Chandler, Quebec. This was the nearest location that offered fresh water, docking, avgas and an airport from which we could be transferred to Bonaventure.

We were greeted by members of ZEC des Anses, a local group who protects and promotes the enjoyment of nature in that area. They drove us and our gear to the Pabok Airport near Chandler. There we were picked up by Paul Clark in his Bonanza and Benoit Booke, one of the IAR helpers flying a Cessna 172. The rugged Gaspé Peninsula (Gaspésie in French) is ringed with full-service airports, paved roads, clear streams, spectacular shorelines, friendly people and all levels of accommodation. Eco-tourism was invented there before the name was coined. Now local groups, backed by the Quebec government, are developing “aerotourism”. Six places are official stopovers in the circuit “ECOfly”. See: www.ecofly.org. Click on the American flag for the English version. Bonaventure is one of the ECOfly stops. We were among the first to experience it.

Our hosts were Gilles and Mimi Brideau and staff at Cime Aventure, a camp near the airport. The name translates into “The Summit of Adventure”. See www.cimeaventure.com.

The rallyists dumped their gear in assigned tents, were outfitted with paddles and lifejackets, and loaded into canoes for a seven-mile journey down the Bonaventure River.

The evening was spent around a campfire retelling the experiences of the completed back-to-back rally legs. Spirits remained high. This was about to change.

(photo 013) Bona– Gilles Brideau

Acadian Gilles Brideau built a rustic camping hide-away from trees cut to clear campsites and second-hand hardware scrounged from everywhere.

(photo 014) Bona – group riverside

Cold beers and hot meals greeted the returning paddlers at the camp cookhouse and terrace beside the Bonaventure River.

Next month: IAR 2004 Part 2 – Survival, controversy and triumph

Garth Wallace is a freelance writer who lives near Ottawa. He has written eight aviation books published by Happy Landings (www.happylandings.com). These include six volumes of Garth Wallace funny flying stories based on his experiences as a 12,000-hour bush pilot, flying instructor and corporate pilot. His latest book of aviation laughs is, “If Clouds Could Talk.” Wallace is available to speak to aviation groups. He can be contacted via e-mail: garth@happylandings.com.

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IAR 2004 – the concept

The International Air Rally aspires to establish an international general aviation event in Canada by:

- 1/ Sharing the freedom and beauty of flying in Canada with international aviators,
- 2/ Encouraging Canadian communities to be aviation-friendly by promoting their activities, attractions and hospitality,
- 3/ Challenging pilots to expand their horizons while honing their aviation skills in mild competition,
- 4/ Showcasing general aviation,
- 5/ Providing a venue for aviators to develop friendships, experience interesting parts of Canada while having fun.

The IAR has its roots in a smaller version that was started three years ago by the Quebec Bush Pilots Association.

This year the rally offered a cash prize of \$1,500 to the daily winners and a VFR and IFR trophy without cash prizes for the highest scores at the end.

A \$1,500 entry fee per aircraft was covered by rally sponsorship grants. Each entrant paid \$990 per person double occupancy to cover all food, lodging and ground transportation.

All visited cities were partners of the IAR 2004. Each prepared a welcome and assistance for the participants as well as organizing ground competitions and guided tours.
Airport landing and parking fees were waived or covered by the organizers.

(photo: 000 - Catherine & Camil)

IAR 2004 was planned, organized and executed by the team of Catherine Tobenas, right, president of the IAR, Camil Dumont, president of the IAR organizing committee and a host of helpers. Tobenas and Dumont were photographed at CIME Aventure during a rare pause in the rally.