

AROUND THE WORLD IN SIX YEARS

Although flying around the world is perhaps the ultimate trip for any aviator, taking six years to accomplish it is likely to get you clever quips like, "There must have been some kind of headwinds," or "You sure you didn't walk?" But after hearing how Don and Mali Lise Flynn did it in stages, from 1987 to 1993, to earn the probable distinction of the most leisurely circumnavigation with the most stops and the most countries visited, one can only conclude that theirs was the hard—if not more interesting—way.

Their easterly course in their IFR-equipped 1981 Beech Duchess twin took 279 hours of flying, during 16 months of actual travel and 106 stops in 31 countries—including some that rarely see private aircraft.

In the six years, they camped with Italians in Iceland; got engaged in Ireland and married in Greece; celebrated the Money Goddess and negotiated



*A feat not to be
attempted by those
with a weak bladder
and shallow wallet*

BY PETER KINGSLEY

red tape in India; played polo in the stratospheric altitude of Kashmir;

deliberately sent flatware crashing to the floor in a restaurant in China; pioneered two waypoints (Lucky and Smart) and a new route between Korea and Russia; and were two of the few general aviation pilots to land in Yemen, Vietnam, and Laos. Don and Mali became expert negotiators and diplomats (seasoned with exasperation) in handling tiedown fees, fuel prices, landing fees, visas, and landing and departure permission and skilled at deciphering hand-drawn approach plates, finding airports that weren't on the charts, and divining unpublished frequencies.

Don and Mali found their marriage was tested and became stronger as a result of the trip.

"It was a catalyst for our relationship. If you can survive going around the world together in a cockpit, then your marriage can survive just about anything," Mali says. When Don pro-

The Beech Duchess with ferry tanks, on the ramp in Magadan, Russia, proved to be the ideal aircraft for the six-year circumnavigation.



posed in Ireland on July 14, 1987, Mali accepted with happiness and tears and promptly rushed out to buy a huge bottle of Excedrin for the splitting headache that ensued. She was serenaded at 2 a.m. from the street

"Once I was single" until a neighbor lady shouted to Don, "Go home, Romeo!"

Their Duchess proved to be the ideal aircraft: reliable, relatively easy and forgiving to fly, and an 18- to 20-gallons-per-hour fuel burn, which yielded an endurance of up to 10 hours from the 100-gallon wing tanks and the 80-gallon ferry tank.

"We usually were 10 percent over gross and were delighted with the way the Duchess would jump off the ground and climb," says Don. Its short-field capability was especially valuable in Africa. The only shortcoming, according to Don, was the lack of a sophisticated electrical system to properly distribute the electrical load and the absence of deicing capability.

Although Don was pilot in command throughout the trip, they used a two-pilot system that required concurrence in every significant decision.

Together, they chose the routes based on terrain and weather after discussion with civil aviation authorities and local pilots. Mali would mark the route

on the VFR charts and file the flight plan, while Don marked the IFR charts and studied the approach plates. Mali did the preflight, which Don double-checked. Enroute, Mali checked progress on the VFR charts and Don

checked on the IFR charts, and both alternated on the radios. In the Far East and over Russia, they relied heavily on "his and hers" hand-held Garmin GPSs.

There was plenty of IMC flying, according to Don, and IFR capability was "critical to our safety," what with unfamiliar routes, approaches, and airports. Smog

in Athens and haze in India and Pakistan even made VFR problematical, and on two occasions, at Ivalo, Finland, and Vladivostok, Russia, they were unable to contact approach control or the tower and followed their IFR plan to landing without communications contact.

Around the world in stages is probably one of the more expensive ways. Between segments, the Flynns had to return home on the airlines to their day jobs in California and Oregon—they operate plant nurseries and deal in real estate. The Duchess was left in the care of relative strangers for months at a time, racking up tiedown fees and upkeep bills. The price tag for

all of this and more was \$110,000, including \$22,500 for avgas and oil; \$18,000 for aircraft maintenance, annual inspections, and repairs; \$5,000 for clearances and fees; \$14,500 for commercial airline tickets; and \$50,000 for hotels, meals, and other travel expenses.

By occasionally camping and packing a brown-bag lunch, they adhered to a budgeted \$100 per day, save airplane-related expenses and the occasional 5-foot-tall souvenir wood carving of a Zulu warrior.

A spectrum of emotions

Exhilaration, boredom, anger, love, hunger, puzzlement, determination, courage, and laughter, combinations of all of them, and, of course, desperate bladder control were among the feelings Don and Mali had on their "technical and human adventure" around the globe.

Calm fatalism set in when the right alternator went kaput 250 nautical miles west of the Irish coastline. "The ocean was so big and cold that our survival gear seemed a little silly. We wouldn't last long, probably not even in wet suits and a raft," Don recalls.

There was consternation at Italian pronunciation when, even after several repeats, they couldn't understand the long Italian name of the Bergamo airport and couldn't find it in the

Jeppesen information. "By this time, after six hours of flying new territory, several reroutings, an unsuccessful attempt at getting through to the Alps, the alternate airport being unavailable, and not knowing where we were

supposed to go, I was getting a bit flustered," relates Don. Fortunately, another controller came on the air to direct them to a safe approach and landing through the fog.

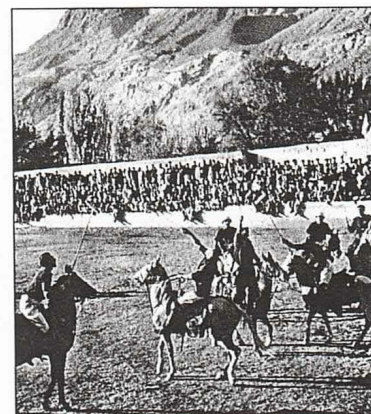
Interpersonal tension built up when, upon landing, Mali was ready to have some rest, and Don's first priority was always the

Duchess—making sure it was secure, repaired, fueled, and ready for the next phase of the trip. "I needed time to decompress, whereas Mali wanted dinner and a shower. It got better once she got her pilot certificate [about three years into the excursion] and the various preparation tasks were shared," says Don.

Don and Mali encountered the joys of Indian bureaucracy and politics. As soon as the Indian clerk saw they were westerners who needed to travel soon, an automatic two-week procedural delay occurred, involving expensive faxes to Delhi and special fees paid in the back room to get the visas in a few days. During the flight from Lahore to

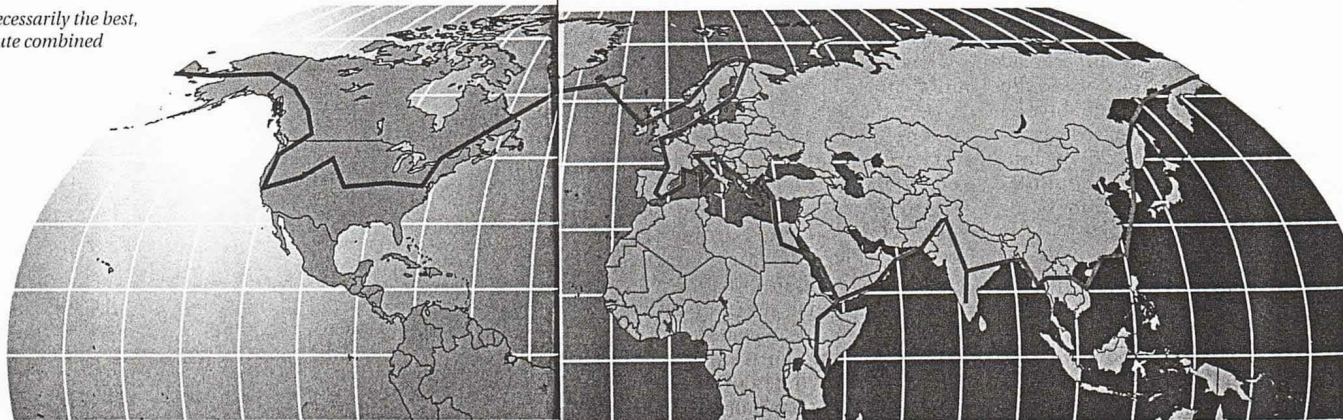


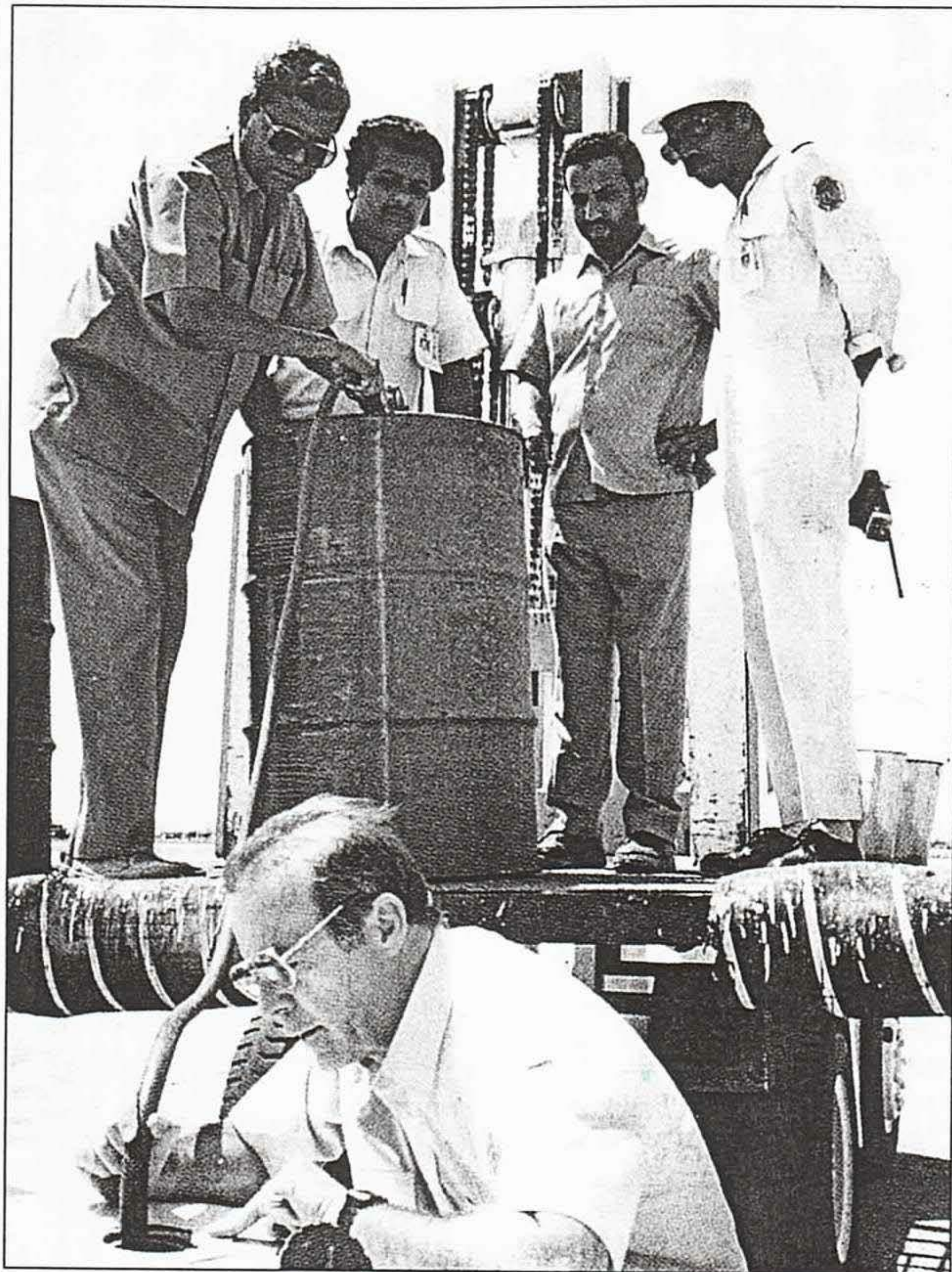
Even in post-marital bliss, Don and Mali take time to plan the next leg.



There's nothing like a chukkar or two of polo in the high altitudes of Gilgit, Pakistan.

The shortest distance is not necessarily the best, as Don and Mali's easterly route combined the exotic with the practical.





Sometimes it takes a committee to refuel in Salalah, Oman.

New Delhi, Indian controllers didn't respond until after the border with Pakistan was crossed, for which Don was castigated and had to apologize only to discover that the snub happens to all foreigners. The Indian experience prompted enlisting the help of Jeppesen DataPlan for the rest of the trip. "Jeppesen was a very helpful partner in the onerous business of getting Asian clearances, and honestly, when we did it ourselves, it probably took longer than using the commercial companies," Don says.

There was the thrill of a hairy approach into Calcutta. "We were instructed to go where there was a thunderstorm, east of the airport, had to do a tight three-sixty, crossed the threshold too high for probably the worst flying experience so far—a combination of pilot error for flying into the storm, ignoring my copilot's advice, and controller error for sending us there," Don confesses.

Don and Mali's resourcefulness came through on the leg between South Korea and Vladivostok, Russia. They improvised a new air route by flying IFR southeast out of South Korean airspace, then VFR up the Sea of Japan over international waters, naming two

waypoints Lucky (37 degrees 18 minutes north, 133 degrees 30 minutes east) and Smart (40 degrees 30 minutes north, 136 degrees 30 minutes east), saving \$5,000 in handling fees, and shortening the flight by several hours. "We had to be lucky to get to Lucky and even luckier to get to Smart, and if we got through unmolested into Russian airspace, we were both," explains Don. "We kept looking left for North Korean missiles, which, happily, didn't arrive."

But beyond all, Don and Mali were moved by the friends they made and the help received. "We had so many good experiences that many of the people became our friends," recalls Mali.

"People would invite us into their homes and reveal themselves in the most interesting and charming way. It was heartwarming and strengthened our faith in humankind."

In Corfu, the northernmost island of Greece, off the coast of Albania, they were treated so well that they bought a house.

At Ajaccio, Corsica, the island province of France, they drank champagne at sunset by the flower garden growing near the ramp of the FBO operated by Jean-Claude, Jean Pierre, Raymond, and Monique, after an unforgettable air tour around the peaks of the islands.

The East African Aero Club at Wilson airport, Kenya, became their home in the center of safari country. "The people were terrific. Almost every evening after work, we would gather at the bar as they and their predecessors have done since the 1920s, when Beryl Markham and her pals were there often," says Don.

In Gilgit, Kashmir, Pakistan, Don ended up competing after introducing himself as an American polo player (an immense exaggeration, Don admits). "With drums and flutes wailing away into a frenzy, my team had the attack,

and they made way for me to hit, which I did, but rather than veering for the next shot, my horse took off full gallop down the field's end, where I was able to stop by turning his head to the wall, much to the glee of the crowd, by this time convulsed with laughter. After doing this two more times—at one point galloping full-steam the full length of the field and my almost falling off—I managed to dismount.”

In Danang, Vietnam, customs police didn't know what to do with them, so they sealed the airplane's doors with paper and assigned an immigration officer to befriend them just in case they were with the CIA. Avgas had to be trucked in from Hanoi and cost \$5 per gallon. “We had a good time visiting the capital city of Hanoi. The city still has a French overtone but with an edge and vitality, something like a third-world New York City,” Don says.

In Magadan, Siberia, aviation navigator Iouri Kharitov and his friend Olga showed that succulent giant crabs, hot baths, and a sauna can make hospitable and enjoyable even the former administrative center of the Gulag slave labor camps.

Not all joy and rapture

The hardest to understand were the controllers over northern England and Scotland, on the way to Norway. “Only when we passed into Norwegian airspace could we again understand the English being spoken by the Norwegian controllers,” recalls Don.

The worst weather briefing came in Helsinki, Finland, “from a nasty, sarcastic woman who apparently has ruled the meteorological office since the airport opened. She wouldn't take time to discuss the overall weather picture or answer any of my questions,” fumes Don.

A near-international incident occurred in a Guilin, China, restaurant when Don discovered they were

victims of a scheme that overcharged them 400 percent. “Having explored and exhausted all remedies, I methodically tipped over the four fully set tables, tableware and all, very loud and dramatic with cups and saucers and dishes crashing to the floor,” recalls Don. “Mama-san was very distraught, and the owner wanted us to pay for the damage, but we declined, saying we were sorry but that they shouldn't cheat tourists.” Mali and Don left, went into seclusion in their hotel overnight, and took the 5 a.m. bus for their return to Hong Kong, where the Duchess was ramped. “Tipper” was Mali's nickname for Don the rest of the trip.

Got time to spare? Go their way

Having considered the alternatives to the route they ended up taking, Don and Mali are convinced theirs is the better. “Staying north and flying straight across Russia is by far the quickest route for pilots having limited time, but it's not nearly as interesting. Returning via the South Pacific would have required an additional 140 gallons of gas and a 15-hour leg, all a bit much for machine and crew,” says

The streets in Calcutta, India, were too jammed for Don and Mali to get around even with their trusty motor scooter.



Don. Another option would have been to go westerly because they in fact encountered more headwinds going east than anticipated. "The westerly routing would have had the advantage of getting out of the way early the difficult Asian clearance and probably the most difficult flying in terms of terrain and weather. The easiest flying by far was the middle part of the trip," Don advises.

What sort of person does this?
Citizens of the world possessing American and Irish passports, with

principal residence in Greece and businesses in Oregon and California, Don and Mali are the sort of people who pitch a tent on a volcanic landscape and read Icelandic sagas to each other beside a campfire as the "little people" (related to Irish leprechauns) lurk in the shadows of the flames.

They will test personal limits with determination. Don had thought about a trip around the world for years, starting with a visit to the National Air and Space Museum's exhibit on an attempt in 1924 by eight

U.S. Army pilots in four airplanes.

Once committed to going around the world, he bought the Duchess and went from being a 500-hour VFR single-engine pilot to one with nearly 1,000 hours, a commercial certificate and instrument and multiengine ratings, and a tuneup oceanic run to Hawaii. Equally determined, Mali went from being a passenger and sightseer to getting her pilot certificate and performing as a critical member of the flight crew.

The 360 Club

After completion of their adventure, Don and Mali were keen to share their experiences with others who had piloted themselves around the world. Surprised that no membership organization or network for such an accomplishment existed, they filled the void by chartering The 360 Club, which so far has members internationally, including Dick Rutan and Jeana Yeager of *Voyager* fame. "The idea is camaraderie among those who have already done it and sharing information with anyone who is contemplating or planning such a flight," Don explains. Promising no membership dues, fees, newsletters, or even meetings unless there is overwhelming demand for such, Don invites prospective members to contact him: The 360 Club, 39391 S.E. Lusted Road, Sandy, Oregon 97055; telephone 503/663-3133; fax 503/663-1129. □



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Ladakins Restaurant, Long Island.
We landed at Brookhaven Airport (HWV) in Shirley and were greeted by Vinny, owner of Ladakins (on the Mill Pond) Restaurant, telephone 516/878-1919. We had called ahead to make reservations; we find calling ahead a good idea. The restaurant was very clean and comfortable, the service was great, the food was excellent and moderately priced, and the dress was casual. If you like duck, Long Island duck is a specialty, and you cannot get it any fresher. After dinner, Vinny was "Johnny on the spot," ready to take us back to the airport. This was

the best restaurant service we have ever received. Brookhaven Airport, telephone 516/281-5100, is served by an ILS to Runway 6 and has a \$2 landing fee.

Dr. James L. Delahanty AOPA 908175
Trenton, New Jersey

Montauk Airport, Long Island. Montauk Airport (MTP), telephone 516/668-3738, is located at the very tip of Long Island. It has an asphalt runway and a VOR approach. There is a \$12 landing fee; add \$7 for overnight. The airport is just off the shore; and has its own private beach for pilots and guests and a camping area. There is a motel across the street and a fine restaurant a block away, open for lunch and dinner. One super place to stay is the Crow's Nest, telephone 516/668-2077. Call unicom 10 minutes before your ETA on 122.7 and ask for the Crow's Nest courtesy car, and they will be waiting for you when you land. They will also take you back to the airport. All rooms are waterfront, with an in-room jacuzzi and steam room, private balconies, and a private beach. Their restaurant has a water view from every table, also fireside dining (open year-round). They have 1,000-gallon lobster tanks for you to pick your own lobster. Montauk is a fishing village; it holds 30 of the world's records for sport fishing. There are plenty of charter boats and a half-day whale-watching cruise. The Montauk Lighthouse is a must-see. It was commissioned by President George Washington in 1790 and is the fourth oldest in the United States. The FBO was very friendly and helpful, as were the locals. For more information about Montauk, call or write the Montauk Chamber of Commerce, Montauk, Long Island, New York 11954; telephone 516/668-2428.

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