



Last month, senior editor Bill Cox chronicled the ups and downs encountered on his delivery flight from Bismarck, N.D. to Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. We pick up the tale of his 10,000 mile odyssey in Santa Maria, Azores.

Tuesday, January 23: The temperature at Santa Maria, Azores was a balmy 20 degrees C as I departed for Europe in the pre-dawn darkness. It's the beginning of a warm, uncomplicated flight across the remaining 750 nm of ocean to our European landfall at Lisbon, Portugal. From there, I'll fly northeast over Madrid, Spain, southeast again to Valencia and on into Palma de Majorca, Spain, 150 miles out in the Mediterranean. Today's leg will be only 1355 nm.

I make my last oceanic position report on HF as the quiet radiance of a new sun warms the horizon. I reel in the airplane's trailing wire antenna—all position reports from here on will be with standard VHF. The weather forecaster in Santa Maria predicted all of Portugal and Spain would be sunny and warm today.

As I cross the Portuguese coast and track north toward Madrid at 19,000 feet in skies as clear as Chablis, I can see forever. The wide Spanish peninsula is most legitimately the Olde Country, though it's hard to tell from the high road. Altitude broadbrushes everything, and I wonder at all that passes below, the wrinkles and hard lines of age and the blemishes of human existence. It seems improper that I overfly so much history and tradition in a few hours.

Somewhere down there (in fact, everywhere down there), thousands of sheep graze the lush, placid hillsides, unaware of my presence as I pass invisible and silent above them in the soft yellow light of morning. Far to the north, I watch the snow-capped Pyrenees materialize like armored knights, guarding Spain's border with France. To the

Jump The Big Pond II

Across the Mediterranean and thousands of years of history...with no time to sightsee

By Bill Cox



Beech Dukin' it out for 10,000 miles with headwinds, excessive cold, excessive heat, and an errant Arab fighter or two.

south, I see hundreds of miles of Spanish plain (where the rain falls).

Madrid and Valencia come and go as the Spanish day wears on. Today, I can actually see the land of Quixote. Night flying generally is the rule for ferry operations, and many of my previous trips across Spain have been under the veil of darkness.

I touched down in Palma seven hours, 44 minutes after takeoff from Santa Maria, my longest leg so far on this trip. I'd just as soon the rest were shorter, but tomorrow will be the longest day of the trip.

Wednesday, January 24: The island of Majorca is justifiably famous as a haven for the rich and famous of Europe. Palma nestles in a crescent-shaped bay, Acapulco-style, with a string of luxury hotels ringing the beach. Even in winter, the Med provides Palma with a warm, sensual climate. The city is replete with Rolls Royce convertibles and Ferraris, speedboats in the harbor and near-nude sunbathers on the beach.

In view of all that, it's a tragedy that I have no time to sightsee. I depart Palma Airport at 0600 local, now on the front side of Greenwich time. I head east in the dark toward Greece, leveling at 17,000 feet to stay out of the headwinds up high. The dawn begins as a tiny glimmer above broken stratus, then widens as the sun slowly rises to shout its radiance across the sky.

Today, I fly the length of the Mediter-

anean, 1200 nm across Sardinia and the boot of Italy, to the island of Crete.

In this part of the world, use of radio facilities, airports and air traffic services is most definitely not free. Unlike the U.S. of A. where there are typically no airway, ATC, landing or parking fees, you pay for practically everything in Europe, Africa and the Middle East. As I traverse the Med, I talk to a succession of controllers, two or three in each control zone. The aircraft owner will pay a service fee each time I cross a control zone (called an FIR for Flight Information Region), and each controller is careful to establish positive contact and remind me that I am under his control. Immediately after takeoff, I talk to Palma Control, then Marseilles, then Rome and finally Athens. The controllers converse with pilots in Spanish, French, Italian and Greek and only reluctantly in English. English may be the international language of aviation, but about half the time, international controllers prefer to say it their way.

Iraklion is a sleepy little town on Greece's largest island of Crete. It is blessed with a mild climate, thousands of tourists annually and the best Greek pizza in the Mediterranean. Normally, I'd stop for a night and enjoy the comfort of the Excelsior Hotel in the center of town. Today, I land, top off all tanks with 1010 liters (266 gallons) of avgas, pay my landing and handling fees and

CROSS COUNTRY LOG

leap back off the ground an hour later for Luxor, Egypt, a mere 795 miles down the road.

The weather is nearly always good over the Egyptian coast, but when it's bad, the problem most often is blowing sand. This afternoon, it is bad. As I race southeast toward Africa, the white clouds of the Med gradually take on a dirty tan color. Even at 15,000 feet, I can see the tint in the atmosphere.

This afternoon, Cairo hides beneath the sand to my left in the fading light. The brown mist paints spectacular colors in the western sky as the sun sizzles into Libya's Gulf of Sidra. There is no moon this evening, and though the weather has turned crystalline clear south of Cairo, starshine hardly illuminates the blackness of a desert almost totally devoid of light.

Americans, with only the Mojave as a model, have little real concept of the term "desert." The Egyptian Sahara is one of the least habitable places on Earth, and for that reason, Egypt lives for the Nile River, a thin slice of humanity in a wasteland of rock and sand. All of Egypt's major cities are hard by the Nile's banks. The only food grown in the country is within five miles of the river, and my destination, Luxor, is there as well.

I touch down at Luxor tired but grateful that my trip is almost over. Twelve hours of flying in one day is enough.

Thursday, January 25: Except for the airline flight home, today is the last day of my delivery flight. Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, lies some 1255 nm east of Luxor across Saudi Arabia's forbidding Nafud Desert.

People have been known to shoot at one another in these parts, so I need special clearances and a defense identification number to transit the country. I also need the ARNAV R15 Loran C for very precise navigation. The Saudis insist that airplanes crossing through their airspace hit exact checkpoints, often designated by little more than latitude/longitude coordinates.

To that end, the Saudis have installed three five-station Loran chains, this in a country about the size of Texas. (In contrast, the entire U.S. has only five chains.) The Northeast, Northwest and South Saudi chains allow an appropriately equipped aircraft to pinpoint its position with great accuracy, a necessity when flying off course might mean an unexpected encounter with a Saudi F-15.

Looking down from 21,000 feet today, again with the benefit of strong tailwinds, I marvel at the kind of people it must take to survive in a land so bleak and lifeless, a place without color, tan on brown, virtually colorless, odorless and tasteless.

Luxor Control, then Cairo, then Riyadh track me religiously on radar, requesting estimates for every position ahead. After Cairo, the controllers' voices are British or American, often retired FAA controllers from Oakland or Chicago or Jacksonville Centers.

Bahrain takes over control as I approach the Persian Gulf, and a controller with a decidedly Texas drawl vectors me halfway across the Gulf before turning me southeast. I fly down the center of the Gulf, nervously checking the coast of Iran, barely visible to my left.

After what seems like hours, the controller turns me away from Iran and directly toward Abu Dhabi. I recross the coast and land at a huge airport seemingly in the middle of nowhere. I park on the ramp at Emirates Air Service, where once again, American and British mechanics and administrators operate UAE's only FBO. The service manager accepts the keys to the Duke, and I take the 45-minute cab ride to town.

Friday, January 26: Abu Dhabi, along with Dubai, Ajman and four other associated states form the United Arab Emirates, a political consortium dedicated to a common purpose: selling oil. Collectively, UAE residents enjoy one of the highest per capita incomes in the world (\$22,000, far ahead of the U.S.'s \$16,000), all as a result of oil exporting.

Though the streets are neither paved with gold nor flowing with oil, refineries, wells and processing facilities are everywhere. Six-lane freeways drive off into nowhere, accommodating everything from the inevitable thousands of white Mercedes sedans to a plentiful supply of donkeys.

The city is a study in contrasts: temples straight out of Arabian Nights but not more than five years old; extravagant, modern hotels that would do honor to Las Vegas or Los Angeles; tiny streetside vendors selling everything from gold jewelry to Middle East hot dogs.

I have only a few hours to see the city. The British captain of the L1011, Alan Mansell, invites me to ride jumpseat in the cockpit as far as London, and I am privileged, once again, to see how the other half flies.

The L1011 is a marvel of automation, with plenty of redundancy. Equipped with triple inertial nav systems, triple VHF/DME, octuple restrooms and at least dual everything else, the L1011 speeds west at Mach .84, seven miles above Eastern Europe. It will require only 23 hours and two fuel stops to circumnavigate the same 10,000 nm I took seven days to span.

Somehow, it doesn't seem quite fair.