



## ---FUN DESTINATIONS---

submitted for NRI Flying Club by Sean Calhoun

### **Mojave Desert Trips**

**June 2016**

#### Plane Graveyards and the Mojave Desert

*By Kristine Zeigler*

**Fly into:** Victorville, **KVCV**. **Activities nearby:** [Joshua Tree National Park](#) (about 1.5 hours away), Historic Route 66 in downtown Victorville, Big Bear Lake, the boneyards of planes at [Mojave Airport](#) and [Southern California Logistics Airport](#), and Heritage Field - home of the [High Desert Mavericks](#) - a Class A Advanced Affiliate of the Texas Rangers.

**What we did:** Rented a car from Hertz, drove to my parents' house for the Fourth of July weekend, took walks in the desert and observed dozens of bird and mammal species from the comfort of a shaded patio (California quail, black-tailed jackrabbit, desert cottontail, Scott's oriole, Broad-tailed hummingbird, antelope ground squirrel, among many others). We took our nephew to his first baseball game, which ended in an extraordinary display of fireworks set to music. People in the desert love to set off fireworks, as we learned on the drive home from the ballpark, and every neighborhood hosts their own spectacle – we must have passed no fewer than 20 productions!



**Notes:** The staff was friendly at Million Air, but the prices were not. We paid \$200 in tie-down fees for three nights. It would have been cheaper for us to overnight at nearby [Apple Valley Airport](#) (KAPV). But the convenience of the rental car, the lovely lobby, the shuttle from the parking to the air-conditioned building, and the up-close views of the planes in storage, made it all worthwhile. Not to mention that my parents got a kick out of pretending we were all millionaires. Still, you could do some takeoffs and landings here and see the planes without spending that kind of money.

Southern California Logistics Airport serves as a “transitional facility for commercial aircraft,” otherwise known as a plane graveyard. It was a thrill to taxi next to 747s, 757s, Airbuses and other hulking aircraft in deep slumber. I wondered if they would ever come out of their mothball state, unfurl their wings and take to the skies just one more time. It’s eerie being in the midst of these ghost aircraft. There is no public access to see them, but as a pilot you’ll have superior viewing.



Before we departed for our return flight to the Bay Area, two European men loitering in the lobby at Million Air approached and asked me if I was a pilot. They were bummed out there was no museum they could visit. If I had not been with my entire family, I would have given them a free ride in the Piper to the plane graveyard adjacent to the taxiway. The gentlemen were Norwegian Airline Boeing 787 Dreamliner

pilots based out of Oakland. I joked with them that they have to make decisions much quicker than I do, given the cruising speed of their aircraft. They said my job as a pilot was harder, as they just punch codes into their computer and it flies their plane. I'm sure it's not as easy as they made it sound, but it's nice to be admired by professionals.

Joshua Approach gave us permission to fly over R-2515, Edwards Air Force Base, on the way in and out, as long as we maintained 7,500' and above. Which was no easy feat. The air over the desert shoved the Piper down, even though the nose pointed straight up, making a climb to 7,500' a lengthier task than it demands in the Bay Area.





At last we reached the required altitude and crossed the [Tehachapi Mountains](#), one of the most important mountain ranges on the continent. The Tehachapis connect the Sierra Nevada Mountains, the Coastal Range, and the Transverse Ranges with the Mojave Desert and the Great Central Valley of California – this region hosts a dizzying array of plants and animals found nowhere else on Earth!



If you get hungry or need fuel while flying between the Bay Area and Victorville, I highly recommend the [Aviator Casino](#) at tiny little Delano Airport. Shiny chrome surfaces, airplane seating as part of the décor, a terrific menu and excellent service await you!



**Contact Information:** Million Air Victorville, (760) 246-7794

**Website:** <http://www.millionair.com/VCV.aspx>

*Kristine is a writer and conservation nonprofit executive. Read her [blog](#) and visit her [website](#).*

**KLAS—Las Vegas, McCarran Airport**

*by David Niven*

My girlfriend and I took the Archer (9556K) down to Las Vegas for her bowling tournament. On the morning of the flight, weather was not ideal for a Sierra crossing, and the coast was fogged in. This made the San Joaquin Valley the easy choice. We woke up around 4:45am, with an estimated flight time of around 4 hours plus a fuel stop. I wanted to beat the 105 degree heat and predicted afternoon gusty winds in Las Vegas.

At the field, Concord (CCR) was under a 1500ft ceiling which stretched from the coast out to Travis AFB and beyond, but it was clear to the east. I had to wait for the FBO to open as the plane was not fueled. A handy tip would be to call the FBO the day before if you are planning to leave CCR early in the morning.



We departed under the cloud layer to the East, then it was two hours of easy flying into Bakersfield (KBFL) for fuel.



We stopped at KBFL for fuel. It's just before the start of mountainous terrain and desert. It's easy to get into, and the location offers several route options to get to Las Vegas. We used Epic Jet Center for fuel. They were pleasant and fast, with nice facilities. There is no restaurant on field. I wanted to turn and burn so this was not a factor.



The terrain at the end of the San Joaquin Valley rises to a respectable mountain ridge. We climbed high to stay clear of the ridge line.





We encountered a TFR enroute for a rocket launch at Victorville.



Over the desert, the heat and turbulence picked up steadily. We flew around the large restricted areas, and followed i15 into Las Vegas.



I chose McCarran (KLAS) for convenience to my destination, and because the forecasted gusty winds favored the GA runway 19 there. This was my first landing at a Bravo airport. It's a unique experience, and this is a great place for a first timer. At LAS, on 19R you are treated to a final approach parallel to the Las Vegas strip.

In the Las Vegas area we encountered turbulence, with a lot of strong up and down drafts, but the wind on final was just about perfect 7kts from 200. You need to be prepared to hustle off of the runway, as jet traffic is coming in quickly behind you.



Tower and ground were pleasant to work with, and we received good service at Signature. The FBO has a truck to follow to your tie down, and then a van to bring you and your luggage to the facility. They have a free shuttle to your destination. We were pressed for time and didn't want to wait, so they called us a taxi from the ramp. Overnight ramp fees were a bit pricey, but they did wave a few items. The Archer was the only small aircraft in sight.



We spent two nights in Las Vegas for the bowling tournament. Weather forced me to skip a planned fly over the Hoover Dam and Grand Canyon during day two. They are a short flight away, if you can work that in.

On departure, we were able to do our run-up check at the ramp, and easily picked up our clearance.



Good bye Las Vegas.



Crossing the mountains again, heading back into the valley. We saw a flight of fighter jets take off from Lemoore directly below us at one point, when traversing the MOA.



Unloading back at CCR, a bag full of bowling balls... With high temps, altitudes, and baggage; I had to carefully consider weight and balance on this trip.



We returned to Concord during a vintage aircraft display, saw a P-51 Mustang take off from 32R, and got up close with a number of WW2 aircraft.



Some final thoughts.

If you are comfortable flying around the Bay Area, working with NORCAL and SFO/OAK, you should have no problem operating in the Las Vegas Bravo. It just takes a little study, and talking with your CFI.

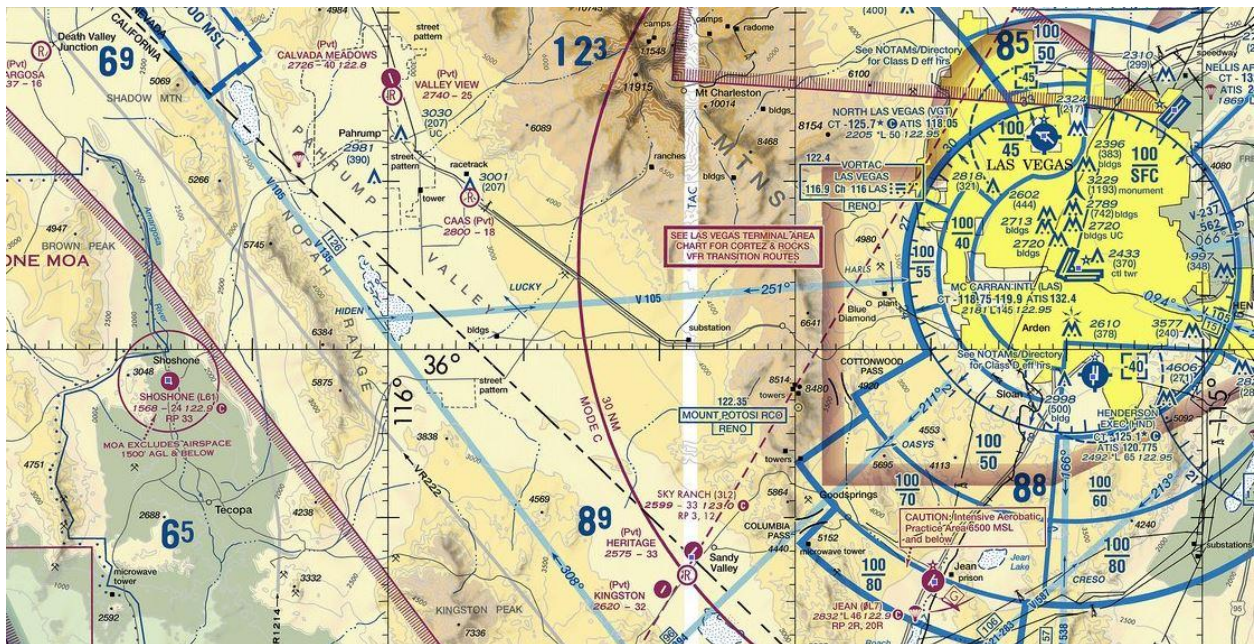
The heat, weather, and mountainous terrain can make this flight challenging during the summer months. Our desired route was over Lake Tahoe to Carson City, or down the Pacific coast, but neither was available for us on this trip. I also recommend taking your time, hand flying for over four hours is a lot of work if you aren't used to it. Overall, it's a fun destination for a first-time long trip away from the Bay Area. Cheers, Penny and David!



## L61---Shoshone, CA

Sean Calhoun

Some years ago I found a hot springs off in the desert near Las Vegas while driving in the area and later flew there just to see what the flight was like. The airport (L61) is located just East of Death Valley/Furnace Creek and is within a stone's throw of the very small town of Shoshone, CA.



Local lore is deep and varies quite a bit depending on who you talk to but many agree that before the interstate between L.A. and Vegas this area saw a lot of tourists and it was a very 'happening' place. Another almost deserted town named Tecopah is nearby and there are several other rather undeveloped hot springs in the area. My favorite is this one:

[DelightsHotSpringsResort](#)

Depending on the time of year a reservation is definitely recommended and if they know you are flying in will gladly pick you up at the little airstrip. Shoshone has a café, store, museum, post office and coffee shop to check out if they can't come 'right away'.

Routing can vary depending on your comfort level weaving around MOAs and restricted airspace but there are days of the week when it's pretty quiet (contact either Joshua Tree approach or Nellis approach depending on which way you fly into the area for radar advisories as well as possible VFR clearance right through the restricted areas!). My favorite routing is via the Tehachapis as the required crossing altitude is much lower, there are numerous options once on the Eastern side for fuel and food and I've always been able to contact Joshua Tree approach in transit. They have always cleared me through the restricted area weekdays and weekends but of course this is no guarantee it will be that way if you go.

While your touring options once there are pretty limited without a car there is amazing hiking just a short distance from Delight's in the Amargosa Wilderness area which is a small river with water year round. You can read more about this rather unusual area here:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amargosa\\_Valley](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amargosa_Valley)

Death Valley is of course about one hour's drive and about 15 minutes to fly to their small airstrip and then there's Las Vegas with all its charms and attractions. There is also an amazing date farm called China Ranch not that far away which has very interesting attractions including hiking trails and a gift shop. Their dates are out of this world!

[ChinaRanchDateFarm](#)

While I cannot promise this I have had luck in the past 'borrowing' an old truck or jeep from the folks who run Delights' to run around the area in but at other times they pretend to not know what I am talking about. All in all this is a very fun and interesting area to visit!

One word of caution: This airport is unsecured. By that I mean there is no fence around the airport property and it sits at the intersection of two highways which come into Shoshone. When I have been there I make sure the cover is on the aircraft and it is as secure as I can make it. I also prefer to take a Skylane as there is less access to the fuel tanks. Locals assure me the airport is safe and point out that the local CHP office is just across the street/highway from the airport tie down area. There is no fuel at Shoshone so plan your flight accordingly. I purchased in Bishop on the way there once and also while spending a few days flew over to Boulder City (KBVU) which has a self serve island 24/7 East of Las Vegas. It lies under the Class B there. In addition to the airports at Las Vegas I think KBVU is the closest and the easiest to get in and out of.