



— FUN DESTINATIONS —
NRI Flying Club Inc.

Trip to Joshua Tree National Park – by Oren Cheyette 4/29 - 5/2 2021

With my wife Catherine, who is tolerant of my new hobby and now inured enough to fall asleep in the right seat, I took my first overnight trip with an NRI plane. Newly checked out in N21348, I planned a trip to spend a couple of days in Joshua Tree NP, flying into Bermuda Dunes (KUDD) and staying in what the locals call "the Valley". (There is some dispute as to the pronunciation of Coachella - the prevailing preference seems to be Co-chell-uh, but as a young person I learned from a '50s educational video that it's Co-uh-chell-uh.

See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K8z5x9GYgdw.>)

I originally planned to go more or less direct via the inland route & return via LA and up the coast along 101, but at the last minute after seeing forecasts of very strong (30-40kt) headwinds up the coast on our return day, decided to reverse the route. On the way down we stopped in at Camarillo (KCMA) for a biology and brunch break. There's a very busy restaurant on the field there that was quite full on a Thursday at 11. There must be a big training operation there because there were lots of planes in the pattern and a harried and irritated controller when we got in line to take off. The procedure there was evidently an unspoken "monitor tower" – when I called ready from the runway I got chastised ("I know you're ready!") and then meekly got in a growing line of departures. After a 10 minute delay they got us going after spacing the pattern traffic, calling our tail numbers in quick succession without prompting.

From Camarillo the route was more or less due east at 7,500', calling up for FF with SoCal (after Mugu approach gave us the cold shoulder). We headed towards the Banning Pass along the north edge of the LA class B, giving us great views of the Wilshire corridor & Dodger stadium. SoCal sent us north of Ontario where a 737 climbing out nevertheless got an RA from us and was mad about it on frequency. Going through the pass, approach kept us high and south of KPSP for departures, which took us close to Mt. San Jacinto where my wife snapped the first photo.

I gather that the pass is notorious for turbulence, but we didn't get knocked around any more than I've experienced near Concord. The descent and landing at KUDD was uneventful. As everyone else already seems to know, the FBO there is great. They quickly gave me winds on Unicom when I called up a few miles out. I was worried about the forecast air temps over 100 and full sun over 3 days on the tarmac, so I arranged with them to get a spot in a hangar for what seemed a very reasonable \$45/night.



We spent 2 days hiking and driving around JTNP which is definitely worth spending some time in. In spite of the high temps in the valley, it was only mid-80s up in the higher elevation of the park and very tolerable for hiking. The two photos below are at the 49 Palms oasis which just pops up out of the desert scrub.





One of the cool things about the park is all the different biomes - totally different vegetation in different areas and elevations - a cholla “garden” in one place, brilliant red flowering ocotillo just down the road. One thing I hadn't known before this trip was that there was once ranching going on inside what's now the park. According to a sign near a former watering hole, the area averaged 2-3x as much rainfall 130 years ago as it does now and could support grasslands for cattle.

The last photo is at what's left of a prospector's shack near a gold mine from the late 1800s. Just outside the picture is a 100+ year old rusting bed frame. Things last a long time out there.

It was good luck to have reversed the trip route. Aside from the headwinds and a thick coastal stratus layer – which made it all the way to the Banning pass – returning via the more direct route on a Sunday meant we didn't need to skirt the Edwards restricted area and MOAs. Joshua Control cleared us through R-2515 and we got a good view of Edwards AFB and Rogers dry lake where Chuck Yeager landed his supersonic X1 flights. I had just read his "autobiography" ("as told to...") after his recent death, so that was kind of fun. It looks like ... some big runways and a big empty beige patch. (Wxbrief wasn't much help finding out whether the transition would work - they sent me to ZLA "watch", who sent me to Joshua's after hours # where a guy who sounded like I woke him up said it would be fine. It was easy to make it official with ZLA once we got going.)



The high desert looks terribly forbidding, but somehow supports isolated ranches and a few towns. After a stop in Porterville for lunch we intended to fly just west of Yosemite for the view, but between the haze and increasing buildup along the edge of the Sierras it didn't seem worth the diversion, so shortly after Fresno I turned towards home. Total flying time, a bit under 8 hours. My biggest flying adventure since getting my certificate almost 2 years ago. Trip summary: California is very big.