

# HOMeward BOUND



When Mark Albery's employment contract in California ended, rather than sell his RV-8 he took three weeks to fly the trip of a lifetime across the US and the Atlantic back to the UK

I guess many of us hanker after the opportunity to work overseas for a while, just for the experience, so when I was offered an interesting contract with Tesla, the electric car people, in California, I grabbed it with both hands. The only downside was that as I was likely to be away for four years, I reluctantly decided to sell my Van's RV-8 project and leave my RV-4 with a syndicate at Enstone. But never mind, I was sure there would be some interesting opportunities to fly in the US.

The idea of actually buying 'something' in the US and ferrying it back home at the end of the job started to form pretty soon after I got there, so I started researching routes and considering what I might buy quite early on. Having had an RV, the decision wasn't a difficult one and I eventually bought an RV-8, N713MB from Mike and Judy Ballard in Alabama.





I had a lot of fun flying in the US during my stay, met some great people and enjoyed being part of the Californian flying scene, but by early 2013 it was time to do some serious planning as I intended leaving in early April.

The 'Crimson Route' up through Canada and on to the UK via Greenland and Iceland, was established in early WWII by building or enlarging a number of airfields, including Sondre Stromfjord in Greenland, in order to enable aircraft to get to the European theatre in around 500-mile stages. Later in the war, an agreement with Portugal enabled British bases to be built in the Azores and that became the preferred route but the airfields continue to provide a route for shorter-range aircraft to cross the Atlantic without a requirement for HF radio.

The critical leg for fuel planning purposes is the crossing of Greenland from west to east over the ice cap. This was 380nm on my planned route, but there is only one usable airfield on the east of Greenland and a diversion would add another 350nm to the trip; add contingencies for winds and IFR reserves and I settled for a planned endurance of 7 hours at 150KTAS, to give me a comfort factor.

In principle, the 42-gallon standard fuel would be OK, but to reach my 'comfort factor' I added a 10-gallon fuel cell in the front locker. I discussed this with highly experienced round-the-world pilot Jon Johannson, and he agreed with my plan to plumb this directly into the spare inlet of the Van's fuel valve and vent it at the bottom of the firewall.



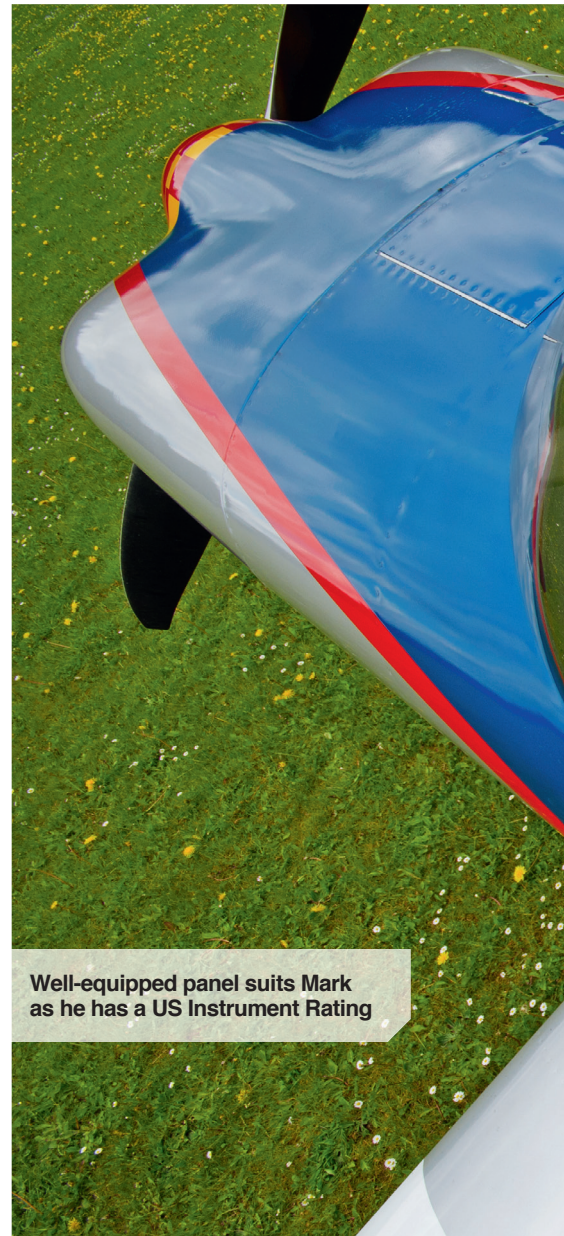
## LA TO ENSTONE



Mark Albery and his Van's RV-8, home in the UK after flying it from Los Angeles, California.



Descending into Egilsstadir, Iceland.



Well-equipped panel suits Mark as he has a US Instrument Rating

### PREPARATION

Overflight and landing permissions: with an Experimental aircraft you don't have an automatic right to fly anywhere outside the USA. Canada, Mexico and the Bahamas have free and simple procedures but beyond that, flight planning requires specific application and the payment of fees. Denmark will authorise flight through Greenland and the Faroe Islands. And Iceland and the UK provide time-limited authorisations.

All of these countries require liability cover of 1.5m SDR (about \$2.5m) and that insurance is very difficult to obtain in the USA. I eventually got it from a UK broker – Trafford's. That also included the search-and-rescue cover required by Greenland and Iceland. You need to present evidence of that insurance when applying for landing permissions.

Charts: the US is nicely covered by ForeFlight iPad charts and I had backup paper charts for the Hudson River route. In Canada, I used their VFR and IFR charts plus electronic plates from [fitplan.com](http://fitplan.com)

Greenland has no official VFR charts, so I got hold of some ONC/TNC charts. Iceland has a very expensive VFR chart from their CAA, and in the UK I used the new one-million VFR chart

that covers the whole of UK. EuroFPL provides pdf sets of European plates and some charts for a small subscription. I also bought the Jeppesen's Europe nav data for the GRT EFIS and a world database for my Garmin 695. Equipment: the equipment required was partly dictated by the various national regulations, supplemented by my personal choices. In addition to my personal luggage I had:

- single place Beaufort life-raft
- life-jacket
- immersion suit
- insulated swimming suit
- 406MHz ELT
- PLB
- handheld radio
- Delorme InReach satellite tracker and messenger
- first aid kit
- axe, folding saw and knife
- aerial flares, laser flare, day/night hand flare
- fluorescein
- stove, billycans, water, waterproof matches, candles, string, compass, foil blanket, water purifying tablets, insect repellent, bear spray, emergency water pouches
- oxygen bottles (9 & 6cu.ft) and cannula oximeter

- tent, sleeping bag and Therm-a-Rest
- 3,000 calories worth of snacks
- Travel Johns
- two five-gallon fuel jugs

Planning advice: the most valuable planning help came from talking to and reading reports from several people who had been that way before. The overwhelming emphasis was: don't take chances with the weather, carry sufficient fuel for all contingencies, and make sure everything is working properly before heading for the Arctic!

Bad weather and a lack of fuel planning claim many more victims than mechanical failures. Avoiding known icing conditions is a big part of the weather planning.

### THE JOURNEY

The journey started for real on Monday 8 April. My apartment was empty and the keys handed back to the landlord, aircraft loaded and car delivered. Fellow RV pilot, Scott, picked me up and delivered me to Hawthorne Airport.

Strong, gusty conditions were present over most of California and Arizona, so I abandoned my plan for lunch at Sedona and refilled further south to Carlsbad, New Mexico. This was a distance of 720nm, so it would be a good





check of all systems including the auxiliary ten-gallon locker tank. Climbing to 15,000ft I was getting an amazing tailwind, 85kt from the west, which was giving me groundspeeds up to 240kt. I took some pictures for proof of membership in the 200-knot club!

There was some light chop, but generally I had a good ride. Crossing Arizona, I encountered some quite strong wave and got an altitude block assigned of 13-15,000, so didn't have to fight the 1,000+ fpm up-and-down excursions quite so much.

Carlsbad was chosen for its choice of runways in these windy conditions. The tailwinds meant that I arrived in about 3.7 hours and only used 26 gallons!

I had a quick lunch stop, refuelled and it was on to Texas. I hadn't used the 'RV hotel' before, but this time I'd contacted Russ Madden at Denton, and he'd offered me a room for the night. I arrived at Denton, near Dallas, just after dark. Russ met me, got the RV hanged and took me to his apartment over his nearby factory unit. I reflected on the day – over 1,000nm, great support from the RV community and a good start to the journey.

Next stop was Lanett, Alabama, where I had bought N713MB two years earlier. Mike and

Judy had been persuaded to sell me their beautiful RV-8 and I'd got on very well with them at the time and had occasionally kept in touch. Mike had been recovering from major surgery, but met me at Lanett and took me in for the night and spent much time talking about the trip and planning. I knew they would be tracking my progress all the way home.

I was still getting used to the satellite tracker. We sorted out a Bluetooth issue and I proved to Mike that the tracking, email and text messages all worked in flight – very useful. The tracking message site allowed me to communicate in flight from my iPad.

Next morning was a relatively short run to Florida for Sun 'n Fun in good weather. A quiet Lake Parker arrival and taxi round to HBC to be greeted with a big hug from Mary-Jane – regulars at homebuilt camping will know what I mean. It's like coming home when you arrive – a great bunch!

SNF was a nice break and a good opportunity to catch up with old friends. News of my trip seemed to have gone ahead of me and was a regular topic of conversation. My aircraft had been featured on this year's SNF poster and when the organisers caught up with me, I got sent out with their photographer to be

put on their Facebook feed. I also got asked to sign several copies of the poster. This is what it's like to be famous!

A few frontal systems had been moving across the East Coast and had hampered many people's efforts to get to or from the event. A good opening presented itself on the Sunday, nicely coinciding with my planned departure. I had a good run up to St Simon's Island, but the weather was catching up, so a quick refuel and up to First Flight Airport at Kill Devil Hills and the obligatory photo with the Wright's monument behind. A quick tour of the site and museum, a late lunch and a short hop to Williamsburg for the night stop.

#### **CARRY ON REGARDLESS**

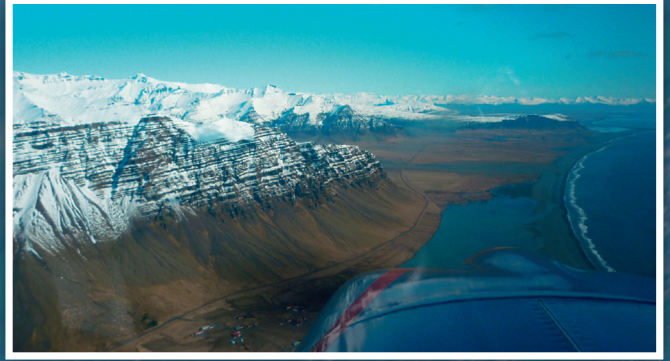
Up early, I devoted the morning to a visit to Colonial Williamsburg – a very interesting and well-presented living history area. I could have spent all day there. The next leg was to take me to Bangor Maine. I'd got the New York chart at Lakeland and studied the Hudson River corridor. Dropping down to 1,200ft, I routed in by the Verzani Bridge, aimed for the east bank and headed along the corridor, taking photos, making reports, swivelling for traffic while getting assorted alerts for traffic/obstacle/ >



## LA TO ENSTONE



Visiting the Wright Brothers Memorial at Kill Devil Hills, the location of the first powered flight.



The Icelandic coast.



terrain piping through the intercom. Shouting "I know, I know!" at the intercom didn't help much, but carry on regardless!

I passed Boston just after the dreadful bombing but was not aware of it till later. Then, with Bangor less than 100 miles away, there was an attention-raising change in exhaust note, shortly followed by a CO alarm in the cockpit. Closing the heater and opening the cabin vent, I alerted ATC to the situation and picked Sanford as a close and promising diversion. The exhaust backfiring as power was reduced seemed to confirm a likely exhaust leak.

Too late to get hold of a mechanic, I left any uncowling and diagnosis for the morning and checked in at the nearest hotel. Next morning, it became apparent that the number two exhaust stack had failed just below the pipe to flange

weld. Discussing this with the mechanic, and in view of where I was heading, we decided to overnight the stack to Clint at Vetterman's for repair and reinforcement with extra gussets. The FBO at Sanford couldn't have been more helpful, letting me use the crew car for three days and the Maine coast wasn't the worst place in the world to be stranded – the lobster was delicious. Keenebunk and Ogunquit were rather quiet this early in the season, but it was a pleasant area to pass some time. The repaired stack arrived back on the Friday and was quickly replaced, finally getting me on my way to Bangor.

I stopped overnight at Bangor to get the paperwork sorted with the brokers for exporting the RV. My next planned stop was to be Sept Iles, Quebec, but the delay meant that CANPASS (a fast track Canadian border

crossing system) wouldn't be available at weekends, so I replanned for Moncton. An earlier front had just cleared through so I delayed to avoid catching it up. I didn't quite time it right, arriving at Moncton with 1,000ft ceilings and rain, for the first instrument approach of the trip so far. After all that, nobody from Customs came out to me and I got my clearance by phone. The weather was just starting to clear so I departed to the north for Sept Iles, on the north bank of the Hudson River, for fuel and a night stop.

As I headed north, the temperature was steadily dropping and the terrain becoming wild and unpopulated. I set off next morning for Schefferville in Northern Quebec and there was practically no sign of civilisation until passing Labrador city and Wabush airport. Another hour in the wilderness and





**Air-to-air pictures were taken in the UK a few days before the aircraft was due to be transferred to the UK register**

some mine workings pointed to arriving at Schefferville. Here I got a shock as after asking both local fuel suppliers, it seemed that avgas was unavailable, contrary to their entry in the flight guides. Plan B was enacted and, thanks to the help of a local pilot who ferried me to the petrol station, I got 10 gallons of unleaded mogas to give me a safe reserve for the next leg. As I was about to leave, I was informed that avgas was available, but only in 50-gallon drums.

Time now to don immersion suit and lifejacket for the first time as the leg to Baffin Island would mean a 100-mile crossing of the Hudson Strait. The strait was still 99% frozen, making a potential ditching an interesting proposition. The weather was generally good with Iqaluit giving 2,500ft broken in light snow. Temperatures en route at 9,500ft

were around -18°C, which was beyond the capacity of the 8's heating system, making it good to get back on the ground. It was an easy visual descent across a solidly frozen Frobisher Bay and landing at Iqaluit Airport. This was the Arctic proper, the beginning of the real adventure!

Next morning, the weather at Iqaluit was cold and clear but when I checked the onward weather to see forecasts of IFR conditions at my next planned stop and alternates on the west of Greenland, I decided it was a good excuse for a rest day to prepare for the next leg.

Like Schefferville, avgas at Iqaluit is sold by the 50-gallon drum. You have to buy the whole drum, at \$310 Canadian, but any you haven't used after a few weeks is 'disposed of'. I filled all tanks and two five-gallon jugs

used for emergency fuelling, leaving about 10 gallons to support the local economy.

#### **WALKING ON WATER**

The RV was attracting a fair bit of attention as I ventured north, and a chap came over to see me as I was going over the aircraft. Wes turned out to be the chief pilot of Air Nunavut. He was enthusiastic about my trip and had lots of good advice based on his 30,000 hours flying in the Arctic, even affirming this to be a good time for clear weather before the sea warms with the threat of rapid fog formation. He also offered the use of their hangar to de-ice, if needed, before departure, something usually prohibitively expensive to do commercially.

Fortunately, I only had a dusting of dry snow to deal with and the hangar wasn't





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needed. Wes also asked one of his King Air pilots to give me a guided tour of Iqaluit. Calvin is a keen young pilot, really interested in the RV, and is spending a few years in the Arctic progressing his career and really loving the kind of flying they get to do.

Next day brought much better forecasts so I filed for Ilulissat in Greenland. Formerly known by its Danish name of Jakobshavn, this was one place that I was very keen to visit. Set in the beautiful Disko Bay next to the Icefjord, it is a world heritage site where the glacier above the fjord moves 100ft a day and calves an incredible number of vast icebergs. There is a great clip on YouTube of this happening over a time lapse from the film 'Chasing Ice'.

I arrived in Disko Bay in crystal clear conditions after a three-hour flight over a solidly frozen Davis Strait. The bay itself was not icebound and was open to the local fishing fleet. The approach plates warn of the possibility of icebergs on the approach at up to 750ft amsl! I've put a video of the landing at Ilulissat on the Photobucket site.

My taxi driver from the airport sorted me with a private apartment at about a quarter the cost of a hotel; very welcome with the high arctic prices for everything. I had fully intended to have a whole day here to explore and enjoy the fabulous scenery. A walk around the town didn't take long, seeing fields full of sled dogs basking in the sun despite the -12°C air temperature. I walked across the frozen inner harbour and hiked out on the trail to the nearby Icefjord. There were warning signs against going down to the beach due to tsunami waves from giant calving icebergs. It was a spectacular sight and a real highlight of the trip.

Next day was Thursday and a good day to leave as the Friday was a national holiday and the airport would be closed. I filed VFR over the icecap at 11,500ft to Kulusuk, the only airport

on the east of Greenland. Also, it was a great opportunity to fly up the Icefjord then climb above the largest ice field in the Northern Hemisphere!

The icecap was largely featureless and the veil of haze that often covers the area gave no distinct horizon; you could see sky and ground, but an autopilot was a great help. There are old Cold War early warning stations on the ice cap, but I decided against detouring to see DYE2, which I'd marked on my chart.

Eventually the mountains of Eastern Greenland came into view. Kulusuk was giving few at 1,500 and scattered 3,000ft, but there was a clear view of the sea and islands that allowed a VFR arrival. There was light blowing snow at the airfield, but the arrival on their gravel strip was uneventful.

I topped off with \$18-a-gallon avgas, warmed up from the -18°C en route temperatures, checked the weather towards Iceland and filed for Reykjavik. This leg was all over sea for 380nm, below cloud at 2,000-5,000ft and the cockpit once again felt toasty warm with temperatures now just below freezing point. Radio coverage was remarkably good, picking up Iceland about 100 miles out and being vectored in to the bay north of Keflavik to a very pleasant approach to Reykjavik's north/south runway. I had arrived in Europe, geographically at least, and after the Arctic it all seemed remarkably civilised and normal again.

A big conference was going on in Reykjavik and that meant the adjacent Loftleidir hotel was full, so I found a place at the Radisson not far away. The taxi driver was also a Cessna 140 owner making for a good chat over the short ride to the hotel. There was a fine clear sunset over the Atlantic from my hotel room and the next day dawned equally clear and fine. Scotland however was not so good, with CBs and occasional heavy rain and severe ice warnings at lower levels.

I decided to have a scenic tour around Southern Iceland and reposition to Egilsstadir in the east. That would be closer to Scotland and away from the worsening conditions approaching Reykjavik from the west.

This proved to be a good choice as the situation to the north of Scotland was steadily improving and Egilsstadir remained in good clear weather. I filed IFR at FL110 to Wick, where I had arranged to do the import paperwork for bringing the RV to the UK.

The flight was above a scattered layer of cumulus in excellent flying conditions. The route took me past the Faroe Islands where there is a single airport, Vagar, notorious for turbulence on the approach. Approaching Scotland, the remnants of the weather system could be seen, with the tops of embedded CB up to around my level, but easily avoided. Scottish Information picked me up and handed me over to Wick approach at about 50 miles out. Time now to descend amongst the clouds and weather. Descent was first cleared to FL55, which put me in and out of cloud and picking up very light icing. At 25 miles I could descend to 2,500ft, which immediately melted the remaining ice. About 10 miles out, I emerged into the clear and could see the town of Wick and the airport beyond. Not wishing for an unnecessary VOR approach, I cancelled IFR and landed at Wick with a 20kt crosswind and rain, but glad to be on the ground with no more ocean to cross.

I got marshalled in by the Far North Aviation crew, who took me straight to the hotel still wearing immersion suit and life-jacket. The paperwork could wait till tomorrow!

Next day, paperwork sorted, the weather improved and it was a pleasant 2.5 hours flying over now familiar landscapes, stopping at Rolls-Royce Hucknall near Nottingham to see some old friends and then finally to Enstone in Oxfordshire. I'd arrived! ■



Refuelling at Kulusuk, Greenland.