

Gagging on Canada's Georgian Bay

I had the great pleasure of helping plan and host the First Georgian Bay SeaRey Gaggle based in Midland Ontario from August 4th to 9th 2003. (Many of the photos from attendees of the event are already being enjoyed on SOS Lite.)

Georgian Bay captured for the most part in very old Pre-Cambrian rock, joins Lakes Superior, Michigan, Huron, Erie and Ontario in providing the world's largest area of fresh water. In August the near shore waters yielded a refreshing swim and even a cool drink!



Eight SeaReys from Florida, Manitoba, Michigan, and Ontario headed to Midland Huronia Airport, a 4000 foot paved strip near the southern end of Georgian Bay. On the good counsel of Rob Loneragen it was decided to establish one central base of operations for daily sorties lasting up to two hours (not including stopovers for swimming, picnics etc.) Flexibility became paramount as low ceilings, poor visibility and thunderstorms delayed the arrival of four aircraft until Tuesday August 5th. I think the terrible weather following Oshkosh was the last

straw for several of our wives who decided not to join their pilots on the harrowing trek, but the remainder of the week provided sunny skies and light winds. And we had some great "fill-ins" including Ozzies Brian Dehlsen and Suzanne who flew all the sorties and provided "crew transport" to and from the Best Western hotel.

Every evening the weary Gagglers picked a local pub or restaurant to terrorize with their high spirits (pun intended.) With some attending by car, there were as many as 15 at the table (not including the mosquitoes that arrived to dine at 9pm.)



Mornings included breakfast at 7am, a rush to fill jerry cans with mogas, sandwiches at Subway, then weather, safety and route briefings by our team of sleepy experts, and finally departures on the pre-planned “canned” routes. As a safety precaution, the sorties were flown in sections of two or three aircraft, five minutes apart.

The three days included a little bit of everything. We flew the Muskoka Lakes region of million-dollar cottages, the Severn River lock system including a rather rare marine railway, and popped



into a tepid swimming hole surrounded by rocks and evergreens. Oh the smell of those Balsams! There were cottages perched on rocky outcroppings braving the fury of Georgian Bay’s storms. One provided a great “water runway” between strips of Pre-Cambrian granite. There were the Indian beaches of Christian Island where a squaw pocketed our “offered” toll. And the historic British military and naval site at Discovery Harbour Penetanguishene with its little “tall ships” (where the writer took his Ozzie passenger on a engine failure forced splash!) Then there was the run up the Thirty



Thousand Islands to Parry Sound, eventually splashing into Snug Harbour for a lunch of fresh Georgian Bay White Fish at Gilly's (after digging the writer's Rey out of a children's artful ditch!) We cruised at wave top height 15 miles offshore to the bleak Western Islands where our circling "weed whackers" broke the reverie of lonely boaters. And then I must not forget the "bikini tour" down Wasaga Beach nor the side trip Dan, Doug and I took to Muskoka Airport to see Thurston Teals being rebuilt. And of course, the "VFR on top" flight Dave Edward and I took to pick up his bird in Picton on Lake Ontario and the two



thunderbolts Thor hurled at us on our return to Midland!

It seems that poor weather and equipment failures can be expected on most SeaRey gatherings (a major reason for choosing one base of operations.) But anytime you have multiple sorties of multiple aircraft it is the human element that must be guarded against. Despite careful planning and safety briefings it seems that the distraction of being in unfamiliar situations causes even experienced pilots to make mistakes. The engine failure mentioned earlier was initiated by leaving a fuel sampling valve in the open position. And a Midland wheels-up landing followed a formation fly-past. Human factors must be

a major part of all future Gaggle planning.

Meanwhile, Georgian Bay has only just begun to show off her great beauty to our SeaReys. 2004 holds the possibility of another Georgian Gaggle for our growing fleet, perhaps to Oshkosh and back. Hopefully then we'll again see some Ozzies along to flavour our waters ops and evening bashes!



John Dunlop (Mother Goose)