

Flying your own aircraft to Alaska

By Vic Syracuse

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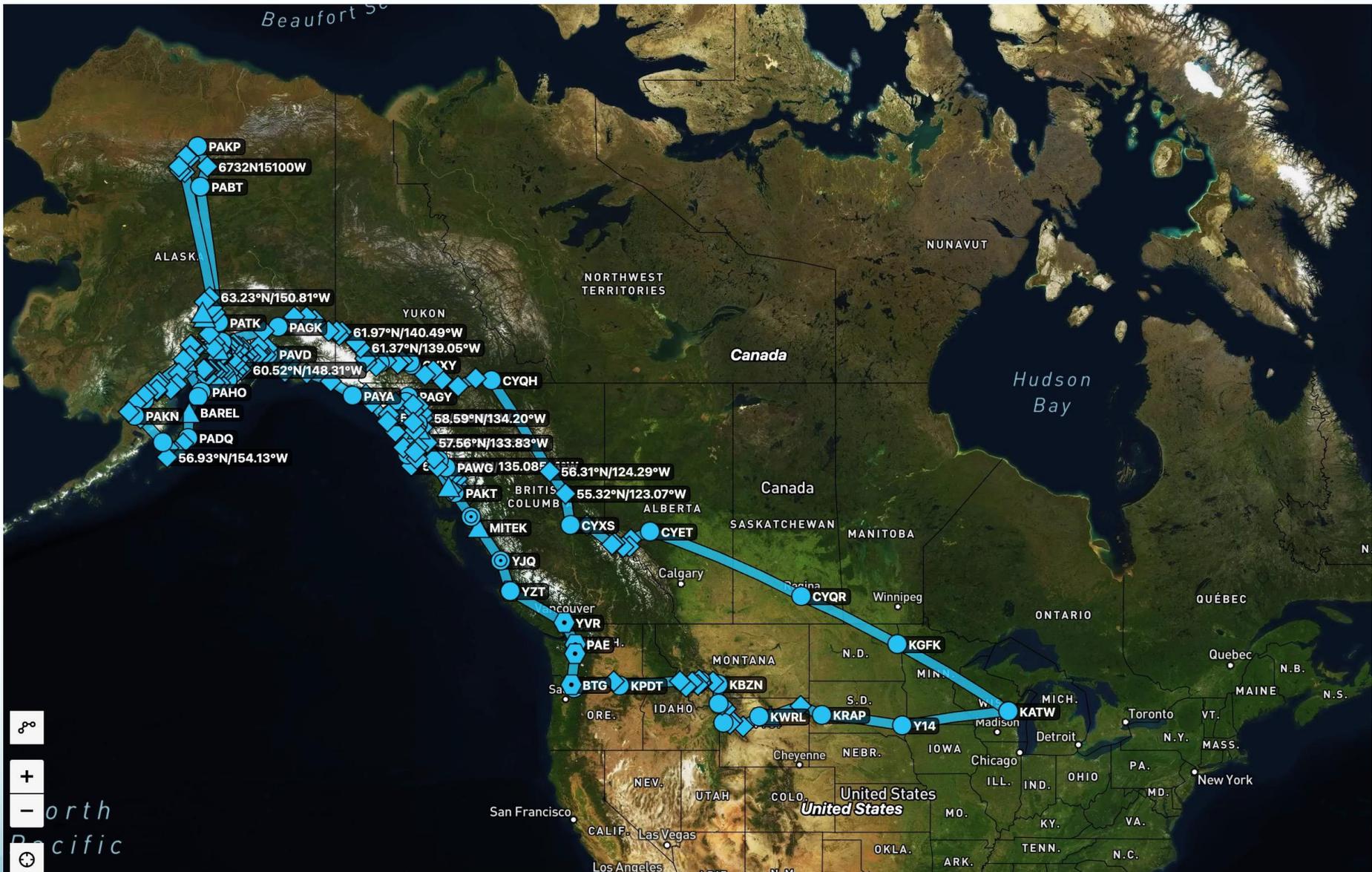
30 days

10,131 Nautical Miles

Thanks in large part to you two, Margaret and I had the trip of a lifetime. Thanks for all your mentoring. See you in Oshkosh.

Margaret and Larry B

This afternoon Ralph B and I landed PAMR in Anchorage. We followed the flight path included in your book including Ketchikan and Yakutat and PAMR utilizing the coastal route. Our trip from Madison Wi was successful in many ways due to your excellent advice and route planning. We had dinner tonight at the Lakefront. Life is good. Thank you and happy 4th of July! Peter A



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**It's risky, no doubt,
especially in a single-
engine aircraft.**

**But it most likely will be
the most worthwhile
aviation adventure you ever
do!**

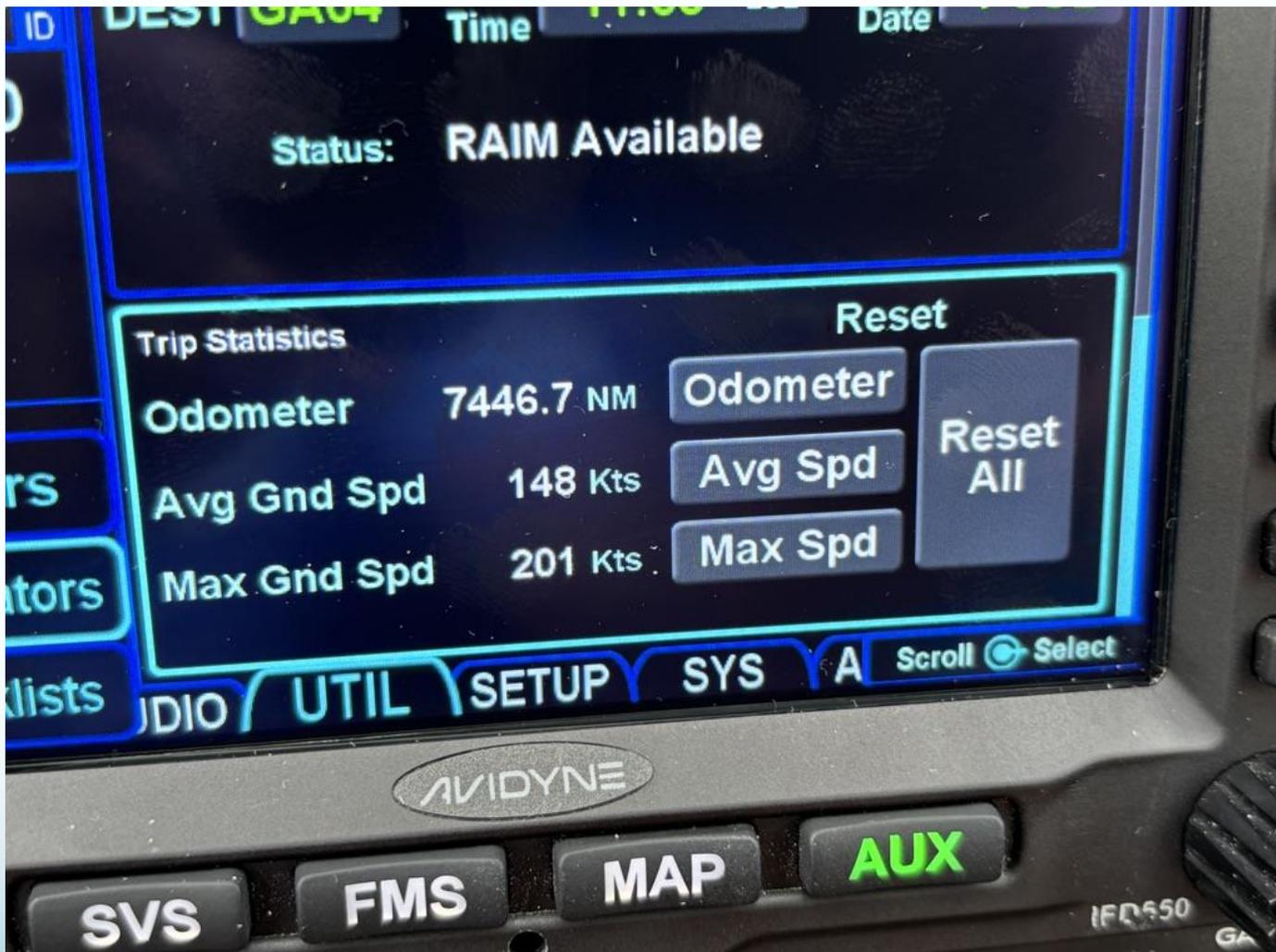


- We've made 5 trips in 10 years in our RV-10
- On every return trip we are asking how soon can we go back!

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- It's a long, costly trip— so enjoy it.



- The scenery gets better every day!
- No camera will do it justice
- You won't want to leave

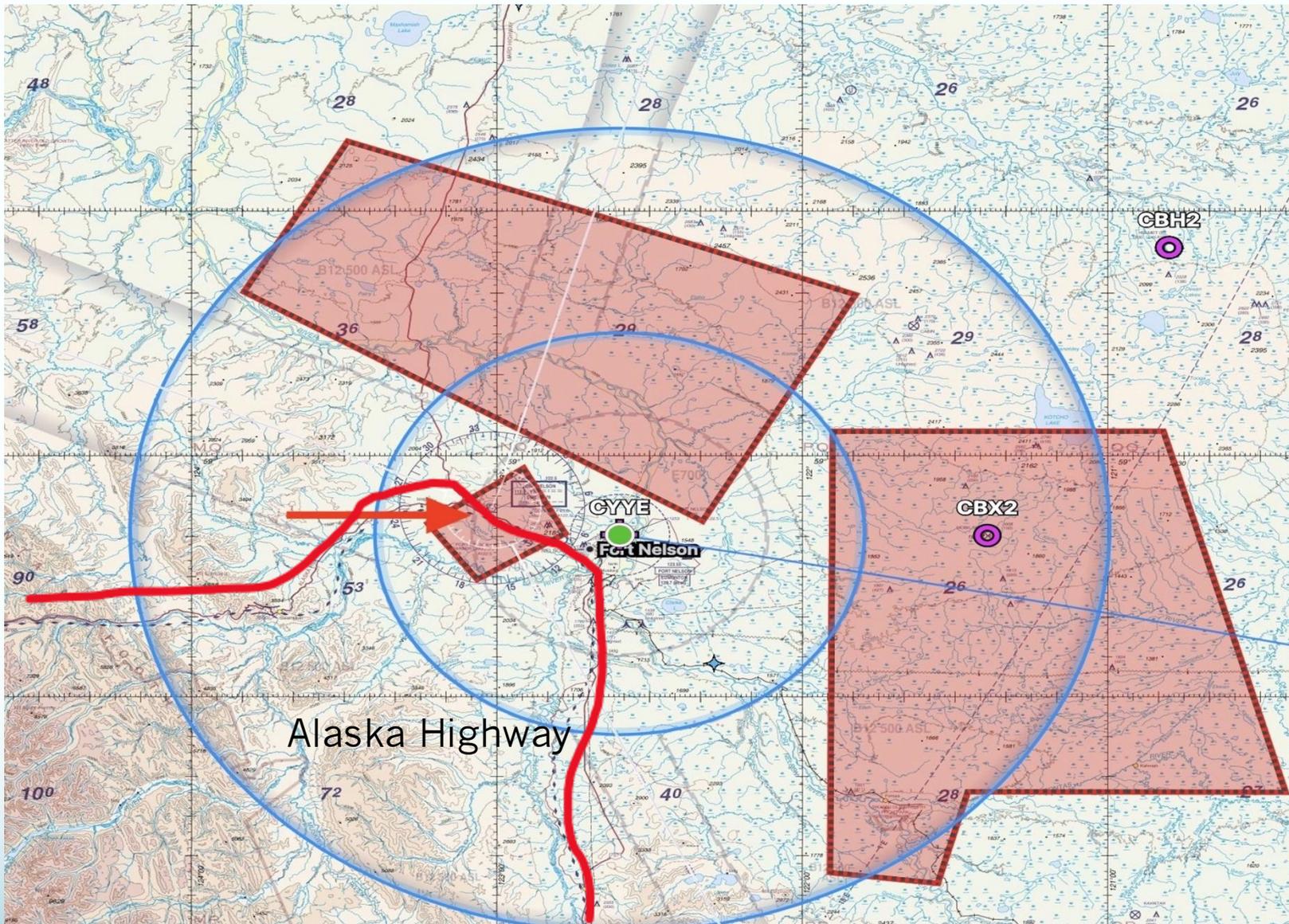
There's a winter coming!

- Start planning a year in advance
- Hotels fill up fast (get one with a laundromat)
- Plan for delays and diversions
- **DO NOT THINK YOU ARE GOING TO KEEP A SCHEDULE!**
- Have a current passport

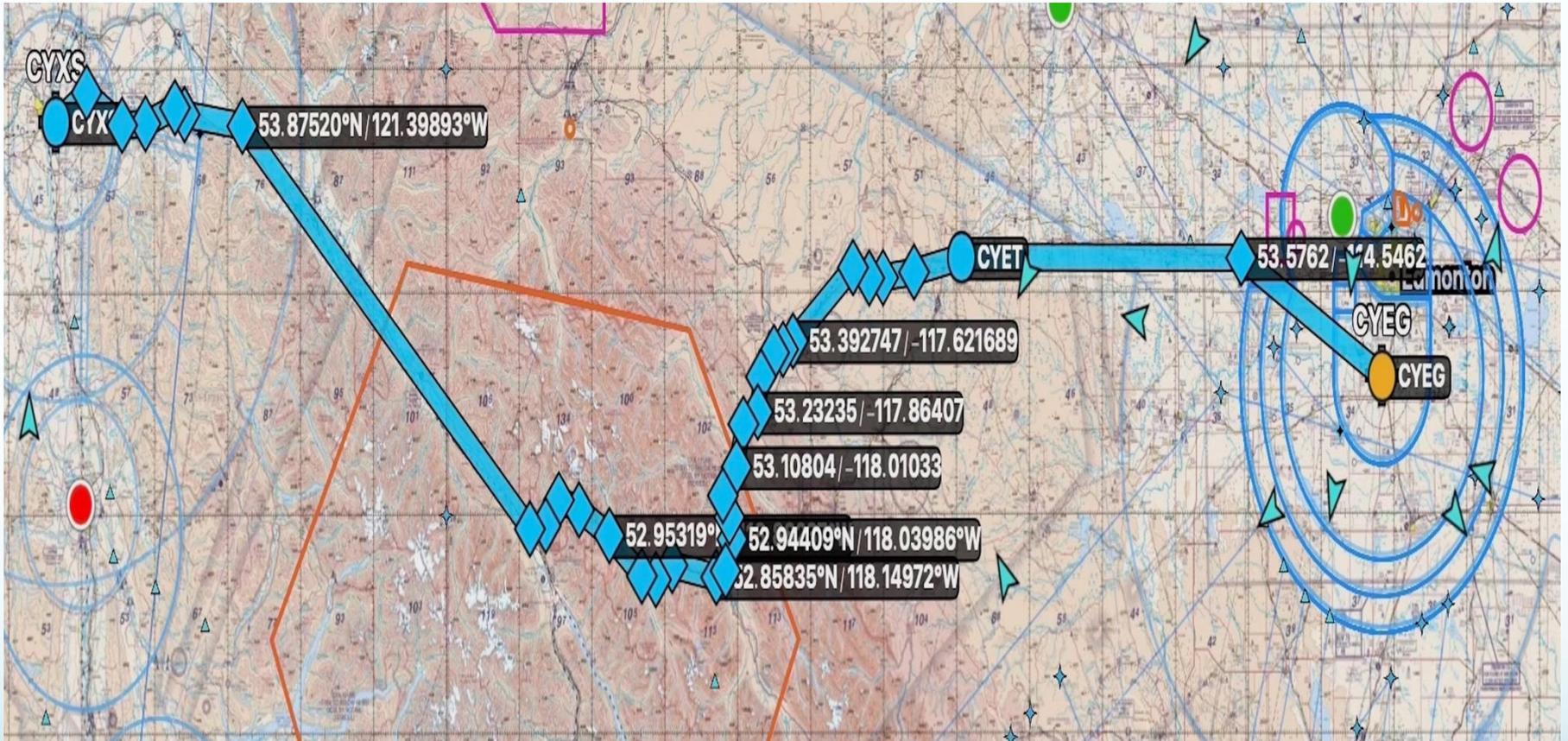


Original 2024 Planned Route





2024 Diversion



- Ensure airplane is in top mechanical shape
 - Perform CI at least 1 month prior
 - Leave with a fresh oil change
- Pilot should be instrument current and proficient
- Don't go overboard on spare parts
- Pilot needs to clearly understand fuel limitations of the aircraft
- Pilot needs to be comfortable in low level flying
- If flying in groups, spread out so you can sightsee

- Apply for CANPASS
- Take **quality** survival gear
- No pistols in Canada; firearms can cause customs delays



Multiple routes:

- Coastal route
- “Trench”
- Alaskan Highway

Coastal Route:

- Gorgeous scenery
- Rocky coastline
- Over water
- Longer legs
- With enough fuel, can overfly Canada thus avoiding customs
 - Bellingham direct to Ketchikan
- Weather can change rapidly in Ketchikan area and northwards
- From Ketchikan the route is to Yakutat and then Anchorage

”The Trench”

- Follows the Fraser River in Canada alongside the Trans Canada Highway (pick up just north of Bellingham after crossing into Canada)
- VFR route
- Keeps you over land with airport options, but will usually add an extra day with stops in Prince George and Whitehorse (headwaters of the Yukon), then into Fairbanks (customs stop at Northway, AK)
- Smoke from fires can be a serious problem
- Must be on VFR flightplans in Canada
- Should understand Canadian flying regulations
- Mandatory Frequencies and reporting

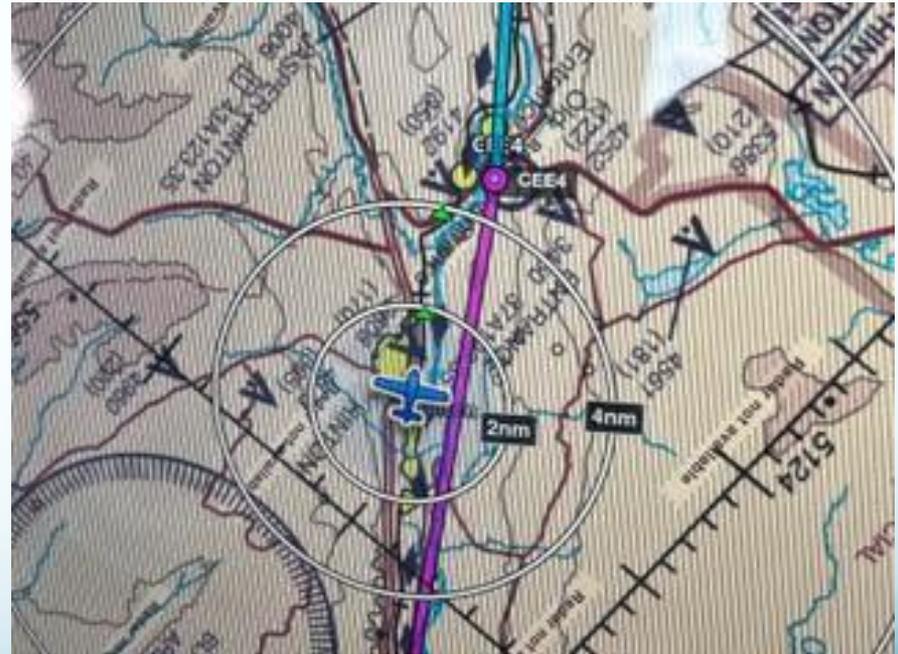
Alaskan Highway

- Pick it up west of Edmonton
- VFR route with diamonds marked through passes
- Keeps you over world's longest runway!
- Mandatory Frequencies and reporting
- Ends at Fairbanks, AK

Flying the Trench

- Know your avionics and how to turn off terrain advisories
- Plot your route before you go; it's too easy to turn up a blind canyon
- Radio coverage is sparse, especially when low
- Weather reporting is few and far between
- Recommend a good panel mount GPS and a handheld backup
- Expect peaks to be obscured

View of EFIS & Chart



View out the front



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- In the Trench expect peaks to be obscured
- Special requirements for VFR OT in Canada



- Trench flying is mostly in valleys
- Beautiful lakes!

Watson Lake

Trench Scenes



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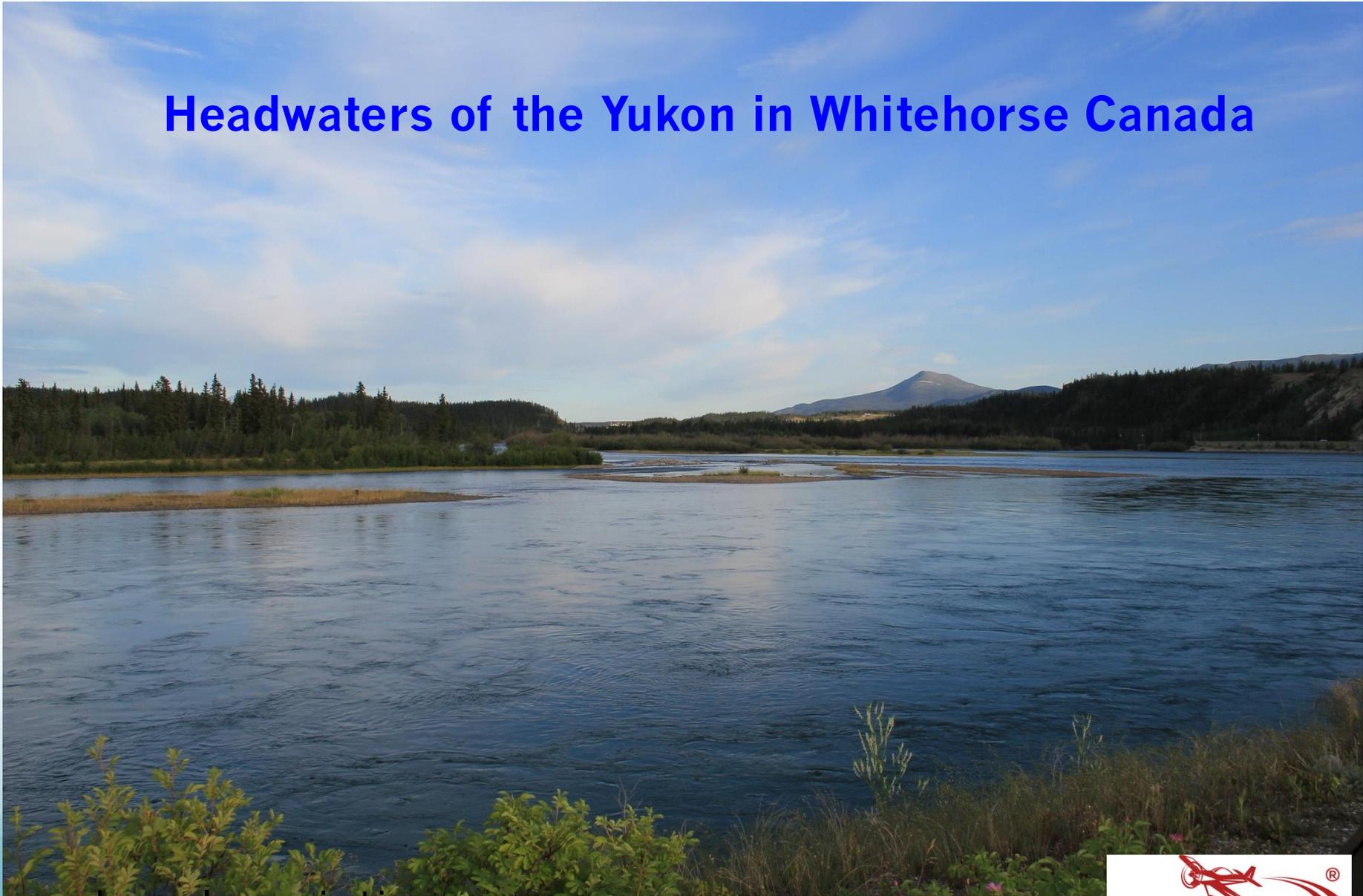
Trench Scenes



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Headwaters of the Yukon in Whitehorse Canada



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You will want AC in Whitehorse!

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Train to Skagway from Whitehorse

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- Expect Delays out of Whitehorse
- Don't push the weather
- FSS on the field. Make use of it.

- Expect to turn around
- Fuel is your friend!

Fires are very prolific in Canada and Alaska in the summer.

TFRs are constantly popping up for firefighting and can completely block the inland routes.

You may be the first to report a fire.

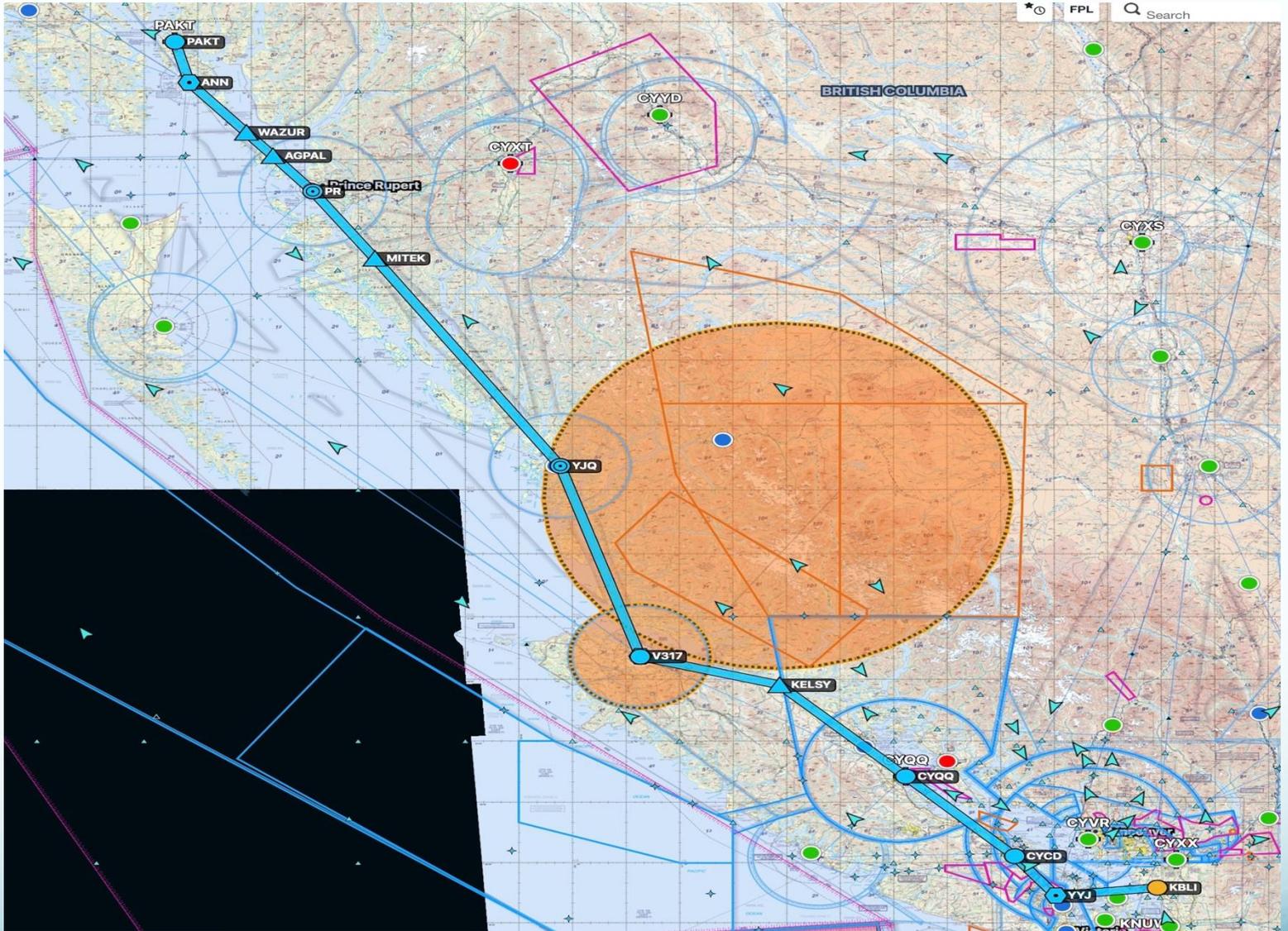
- Landings are permitted on the Alaskan Highway
- Cars have right-of-way
- Best places to land on highway are west of Whitehorse

**File EAPIS manifest and flight plan prior to leaving
Whitehorse for Alaska**

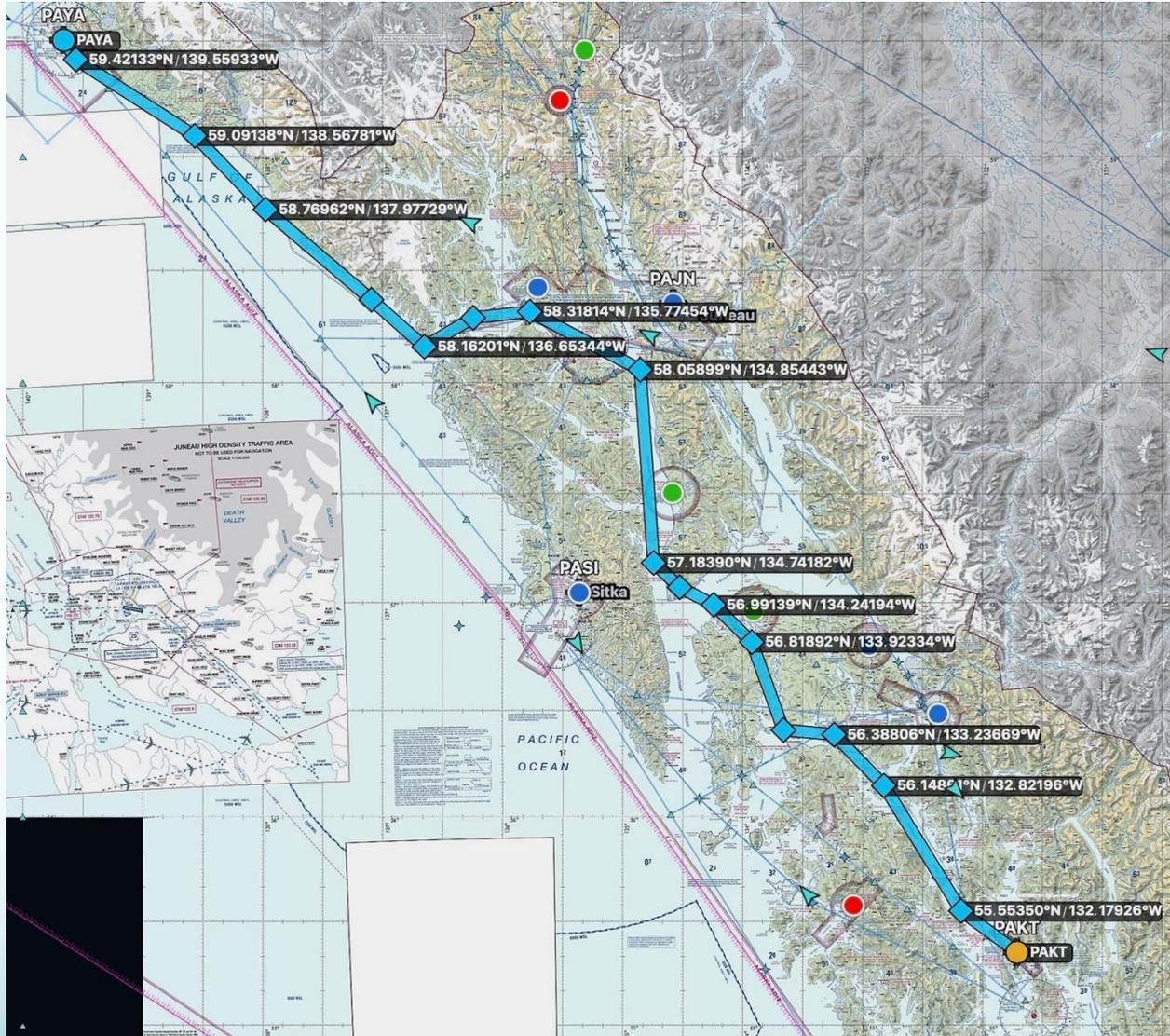
**Call ahead for customs at Northway. It is typical to be
told to go to Fairbanks or Anchorage.**



Coastal route Bellingham to Ketchikan



Coastal route Ketchikan to Yakutat



Coastal route Yakutat to Anchorage



Coastal route

- Be prepared for fast and drastic weather changes

Arrival at Ketchikan after
departing with a VFR
forecast!

Coastal route

- Be prepared for low-level flying



Icing can occur at much lower altitudes



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**Ketchikan is very scenic but be prepared for delays.
Ketchikan is a Temperate rain forest.**



The salmon runs can be neat, but smelly



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Yakutat—the great lunch and fuel stop between Ketchikan and Anchorage



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Piedmont glaciers along the coast



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Icy Bay is gorgeous!!!



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Blue ice!!!



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Target ahead!

Intercoastal is great for Whale watching!



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Valdez



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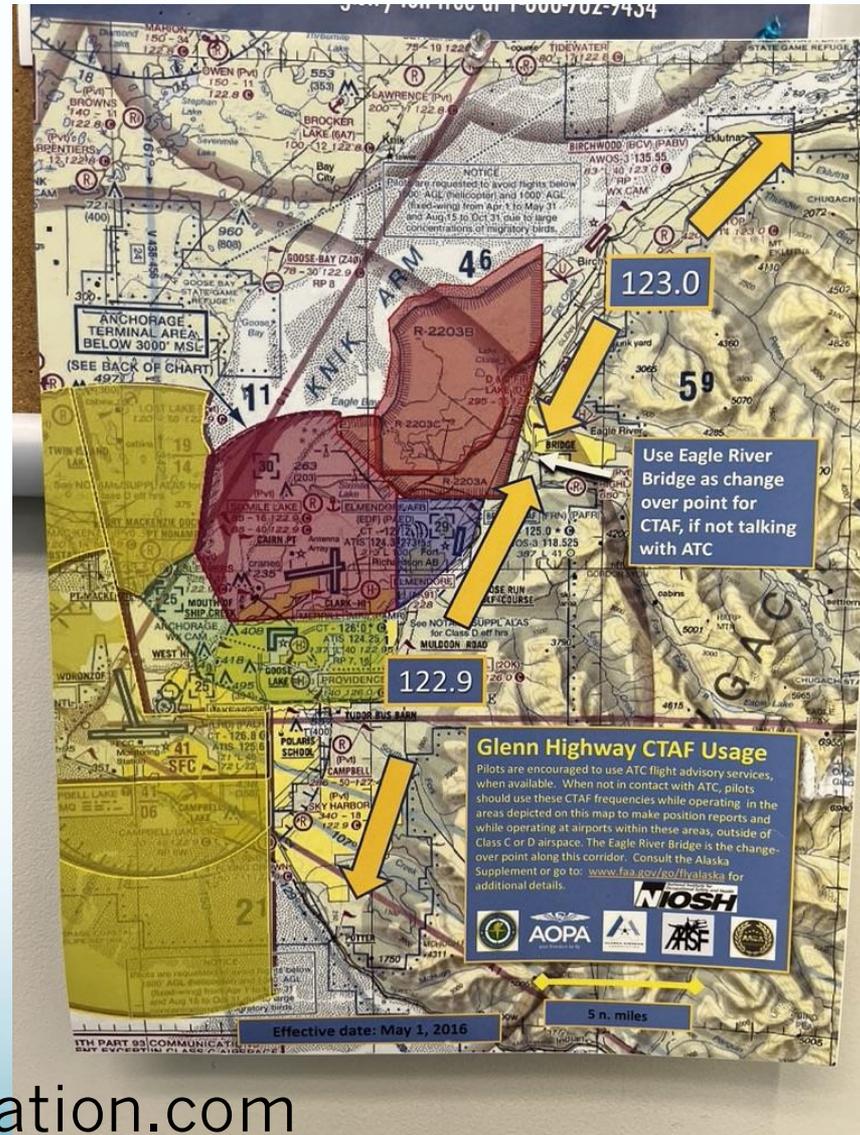
Flying the Cook Inlet from Whittier to Anchorage



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- The airspace around Anchorage is busy and complicated
- Controllers are super friendly, but you are expected to know it



It's easy to confuse Merrill Field with Elmendorf AFB



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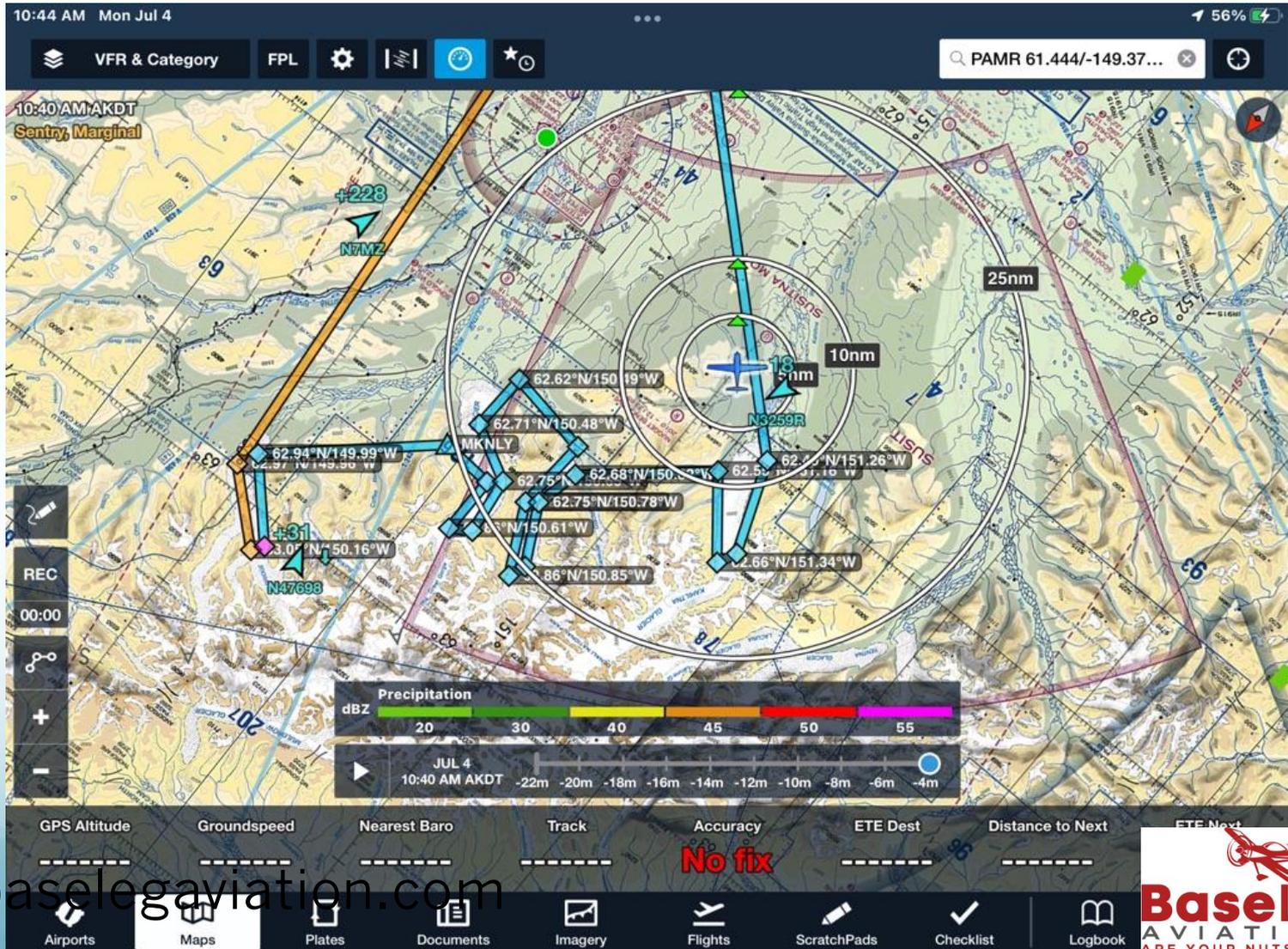


- **Glacier flying is fantastic**
- **FAA publishes reporting points and frequencies**
- **Keep your eyes and ears open!!!**
- **Lots of traffic during tourist season**
- **Use the FAA webcams!**

- Always stay to the right side and give yourself room to turn around
- Slow down---turning radius will be smaller
- Pay attention to altitude and climb performance



Glacier route for Denali



It's easy to lose sight of other aircraft



Blue Sky days are the best for
photography and helps avoid flat
light conditions

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N34WM Piper PA31 Point Thomson Alaska 17 MAY 2023

Pilot Flight Time:

PIC - 1636 hours (Total, all aircraft), 89 hours (Total, this make and model)

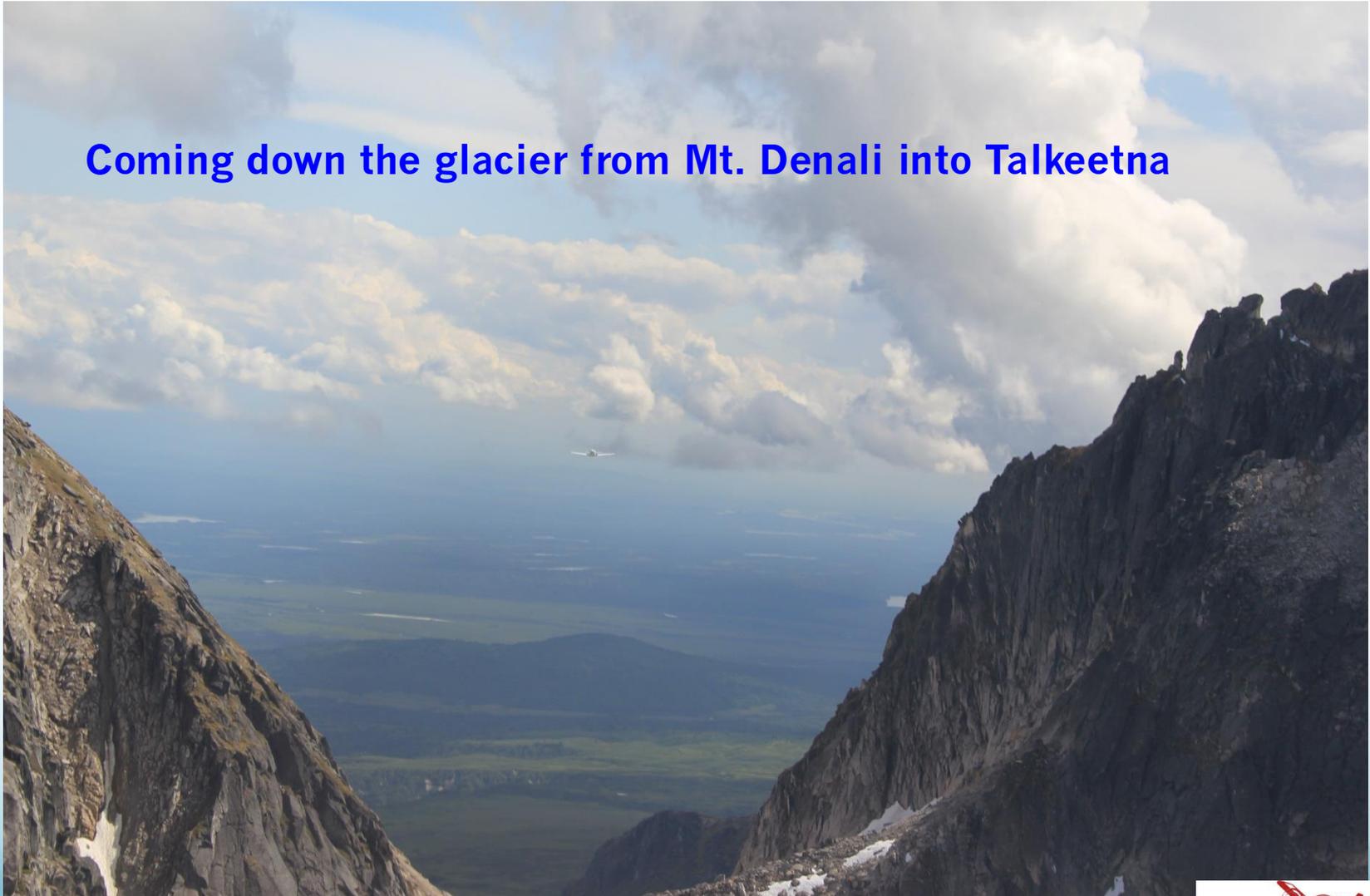
Pilot-rated passenger 7145 hours (Total, all aircraft)

The pilot reported that while established on an RNAV GPS instrument approach to a remote airport, flat light conditions made it difficult to discern topographical features of the snow covered terrain below. Prior to reaching the decision height altitude, the pilot said he looked outside for the runway environment, but the flat light condition caused him to spend more time looking outside and he became disorientated. When he looked back at the airplane's instruments, he noticed the airplane was below the glide path and initiated a go-around maneuver; however, the airplane subsequently impacted snow-covered terrain. The pilot reported that there were no preaccident mechanical malfunctions or failures with the airplane that would have precluded normal operation.

Probable Cause and Findings:

The pilot's inadvertent descent below the published minimum descent altitude, while **operating in flat light conditions**, which resulted in controlled flight into terrain.

Coming down the glacier from Mt. Denali into Talkeetna



Whittier boat day trip—see the glaciers up close

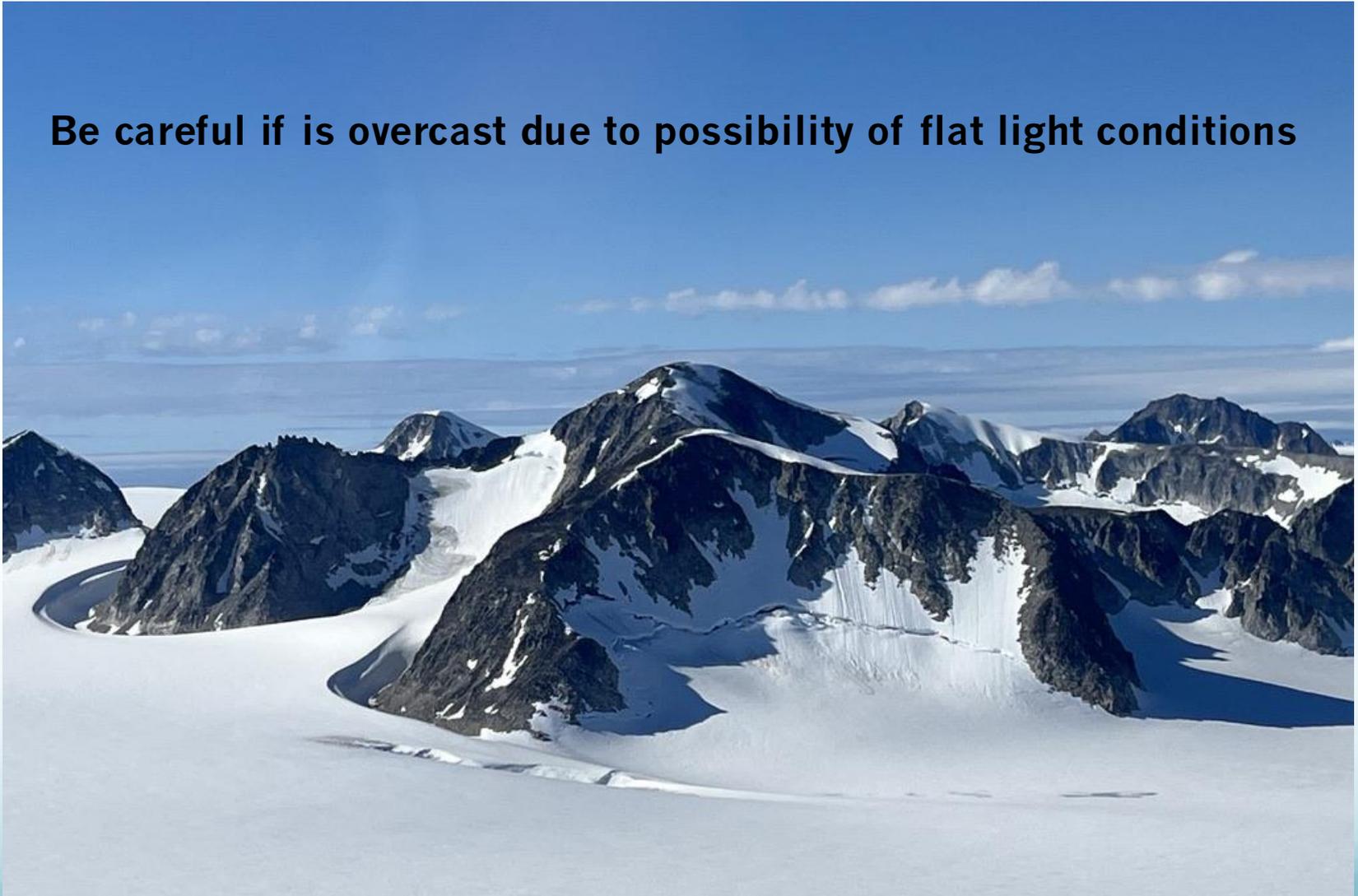


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On top of the Harding Ice Field south of Anchorage

Be careful if is overcast due to possibility of flat light conditions



Take a helicopter flight and drink some glacier water



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If you think you will only go once, consider taking one route there and another route home. It will be 2 weeks of non-stop gorgeous scenery!



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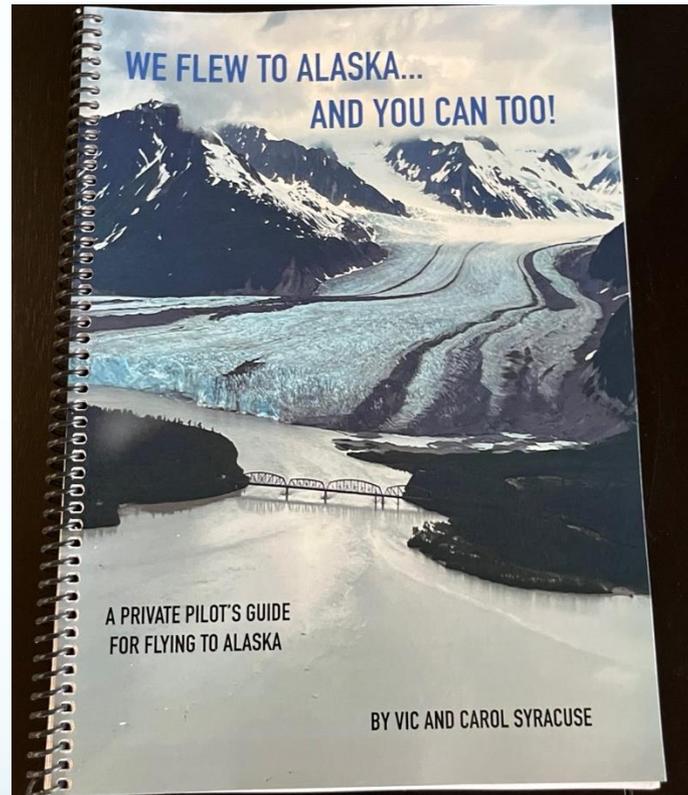
Some thoughts on group trips



- Can be lots of fun; can also be frustrating if not prepared
- Pilots should practice flying together before leaving—it's harder than you think to keep track of other aircraft in "loose" formation and ground clutter
- Compare airspeed readings at various power settings
- Recommend the leader fly at a given groundspeed, and everyone else match that, as airspeed indicators will vary
- Everyone should have a good mechanical inspection prior to leaving—no shortcuts
- Make sure everyone can accept weather delays (or mechanical delays). Pushing the weather can be fatal!
- Share the "spares"

QUESTIONS?

**Get
The
Book!**



Aircraft Spruce

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<https://baselegaviation.com/alaska-trip-planning-and-information/>

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