

Friday, September 24, 2004  
6th Cobra flight, 16th solo  
Acoma Pueblo

Launched 7:30am, Landing 10:00am  
Flight time: 2:30 hour  
Total time: 32:25  
Dead calm on launch, thermally 7mph gusts for final landing  
2 landings

Launch Code Double Eagle predicted calm the night before. Winds aloft 9000ft calm. Left home at 5:20am. Got there around 6:05am. Worked on trike first. Put locking nuts on strobe lamp, new dipole antenna on attached to nose tube, topped off gas tank (overfilled and splashed out on other side of trike.) Packed a bag minimal gear, wing bag, water, tools. Started to hookup cigarette lighter power supply for the radio, but I was taking too long so I gave up. GPS log shows wheels up at 7:30am.

Trike felt heavy on launch. I wonder how big the gas tank is. Could it be 20gals? Did one touch and go to check things out, then headed northwest along the Rio Puerco.





First stop, Aircraft carrier mesa. The true name of this mesa is Redonda Mesa, but on my first ever flight with Frank, I called it Aircraft carrier mesa. It looks like big air craft carrier deck LZ high in the sky.

No way will I give it a try though.

AC mesa was the half way point to Acoma. GPS indicated I was fighting light winds 10 mph winds coming down the river valley.

To the east of AC mesa was a very gnarly looking mountain. I was kinda low, my altitude about even with the top of AC mesa, felt some turbulence. I flew around the north side, looked at freight train yard. Then headed west to Acoma.





Between AC mesa and the last ridge that hides Acoma is a wide, flat, empty valley. In the center of this valley, my maps and aerial photos showed a pair of buttes, like notch. I used this notch as a waypoint.



As I approached the notch, the batteries on my GPS died. I think it was the cold temps that got to them, cause the batteries were fine back home. Losing GPS is becoming a real pain, I got to get that cigarette lighter plug set up soon.

Acoma pueblo lies in a canyon. I had planned to enter the canyon from the north, then fly past Enchanted Mesa, the pueblo and follow the exit out the south end of the canyon.

I fired up the *GPS* briefly on the last gasp of its batteries, got a heading for the north side of this canyon and took off in that direction. Off to the left, where I had expected it, was the exit out the south end of the canyon. For a while I considered going in that way, but stuck to my original plans and headed to the right, figuring Enchanted Mesa would be on the other side of the ridge.





I climbed up a bit so I could look over the ridge and saw Enchanted Mesa through a gap. I hopped the ridge and flew by the mesa, taking a look at the top.



I recall from a tour of Acoma pueblo a folktale about some people who lived on top, but a rainstorm washed away the natural staircase they used to go up and down. They had no food or water and eventually jumped to their deaths.

I was always curious about this, so I took a peek at the top of the mesa.

I didn't want to intrude on the pueblo, so I flew about a mile off to the east, down the center of the canyon.



There are some weird sandstone formations to the west of Enchanted Mesa.



Past the pueblo at the east end of the canyon was an isolated spire of rock.



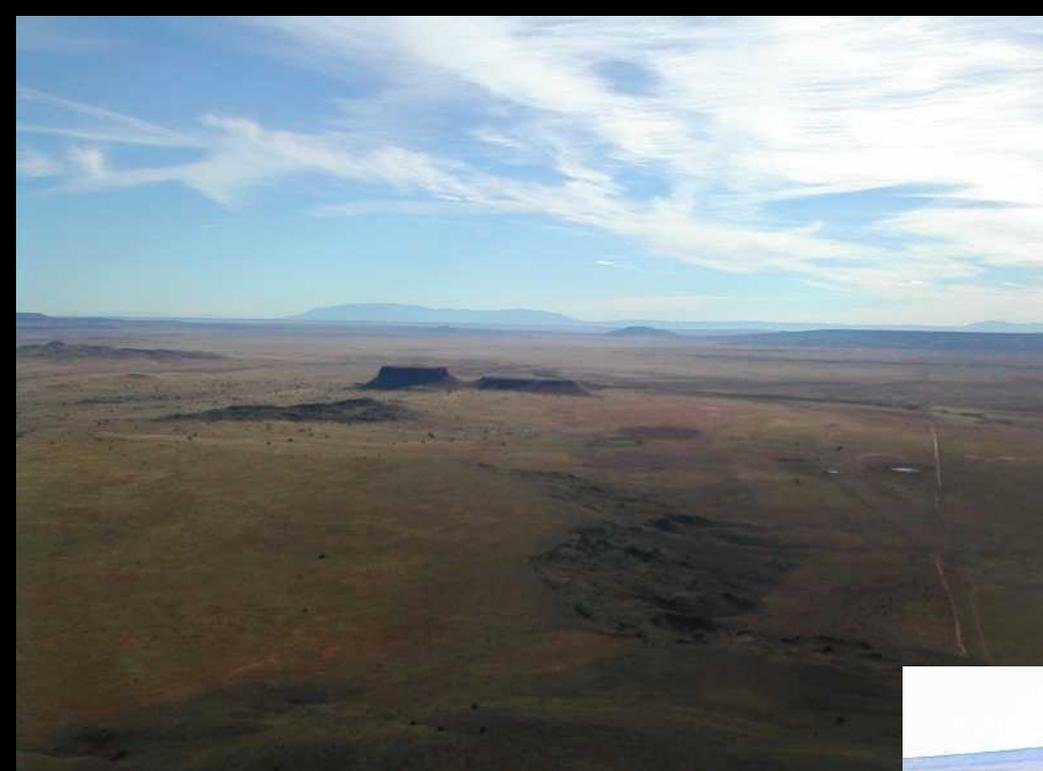
A mysterious canyon to explore next time.

I had been flying one and a half hours from Belen. Time to head home.

I found the exit canyon followed it out.



Just past the exit canyon was this nice butte. Above it in the distance you can see the notch formation.

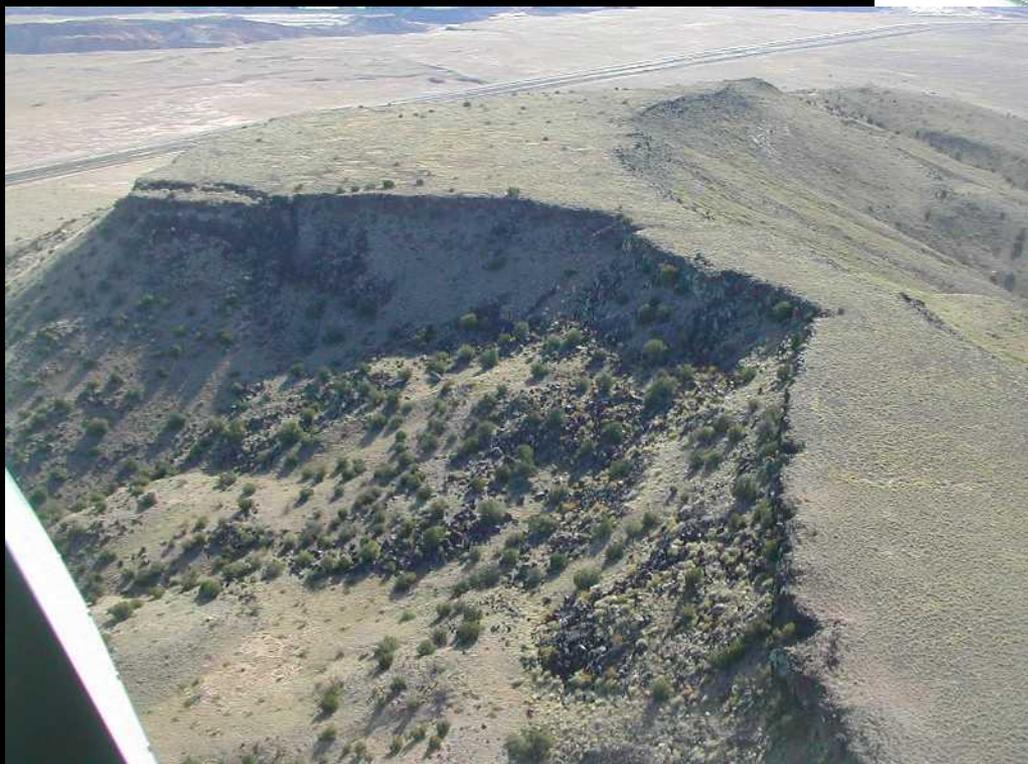


Ahead is the notch and way beyond it, slightly to the right is AC mesa, and on the horizon, the Sandia mountains.



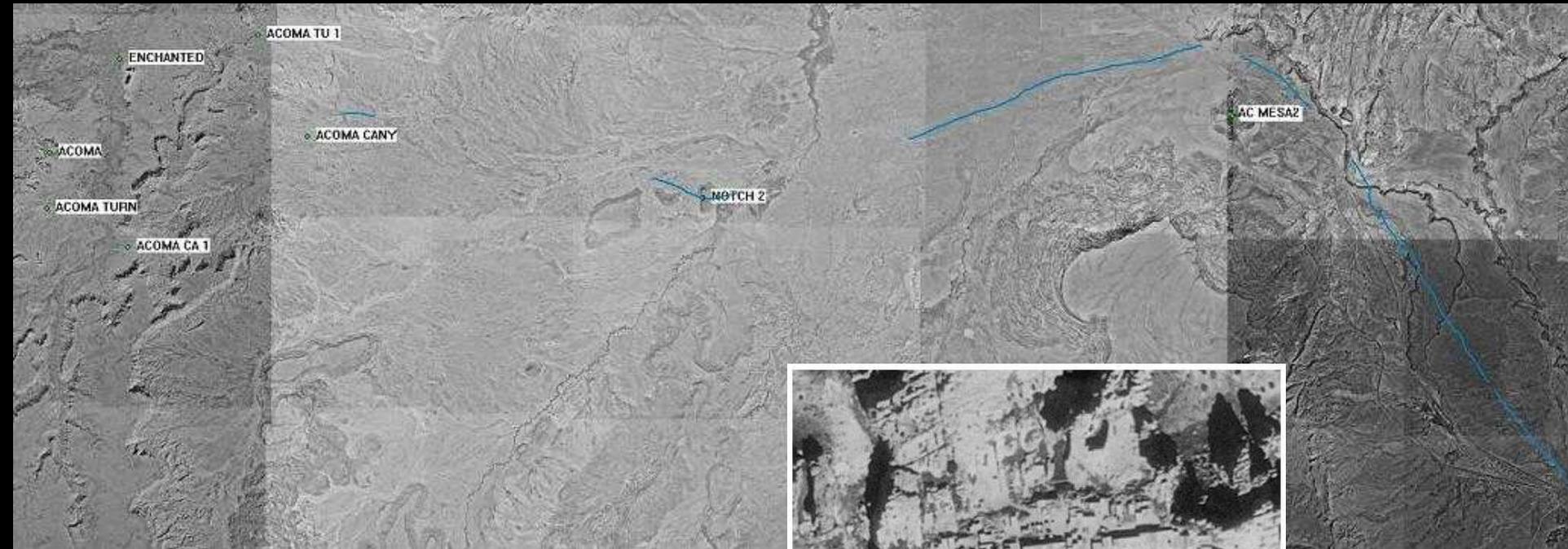
Some interesting green color next to the notch

On final for AC mesa.

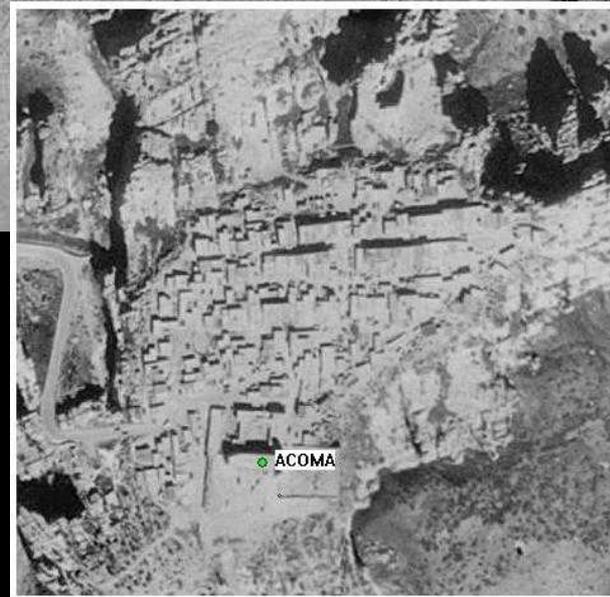


No winds on the way back. Made good time. Landed at 10am. It was thermally and I allowed myself to drift up a bit when I flared. Need to watch that. But I recovered and had a good landing.

Nice flight. I want to repeat it with an earlier start and a little more exploration time.



Updated USPhoto maps, it can show GPS tracks now. Glad I used it before the flight, cause I knew the lay of the land ahead of time and was able to continue when my GPS went out.



1-meter resolution USPhotomap image of Acoma