

Wednesday, November 24, 2004
20th Cobra flight, 30th solo
Grand Canyon of the Rio Puerco,
Caldron of Hell, Mid-Valley, 14 landings

Launched 7:10am, Landing 9:45am (10 min pitstop at Mid Valley)
Flight time: 2:20 Total logged time: 65:35
Launch: 4mph on runway 21
Landing: 7mph on runway 21

Launch Code predicted 4 mph winds and the winds aloft forecast was W at 15 mph at 9000 ft. No plans today, just fly around, then spend some time installing my BRS chute on the trike.

I took off, did two touch and goes. It was bitter cold. No one was in the pattern or anywhere near the airport. I took advantage of the empty skies and did some engine out on takeoff drills. I climbed to 300 AGL, took my foot off the gas and tried to do a quick 180 and land back on the runway. I did this on the "3" side of the airport, away from the homes.

I couldn't make it from 300 ft, I had to step on the gas to make it back to the runway. I could consistently make it from 400 ft. I'll keep working on this and from now on, I won't relax on takeoff till I clear 400 or 500 ft.

After 45 min of this, I headed out along the Rio Puerco, grabbed this pict of a small kiva.





Saw some red sandstone badlands, decided to check them out.



Saw an interesting gap in a mesa further up the canyon, decided to check it out too. I climbed, picking my way from one patch of landable terrain to the next.

The further I went, the more interesting it got. Looked like the "Grand Canyon of the Rio Puerco" was flowing through a gap in a mesa.

The mesa wound through this terrain like an elevated road. A nice wide, flat emergency landing area I could use if I lost my engine. It would be a logistical nightmare to get out, but I could safely land on that mesa.



View looking south from the mesa over a basin called Red Tank. On the horizon, at the far left is the spine that comes off the south side of Ladrón Peak.



With some apprehension, I made my way along the mesa towards the gap. No turbulence so far.

I felt like I was walking a tightrope, flying over this narrow bridge, with hellish landscapes on either side.



I could have followed the bridge around to the left after I crossed the gap, but I wasn't sure where it led.

Caldron of Hell



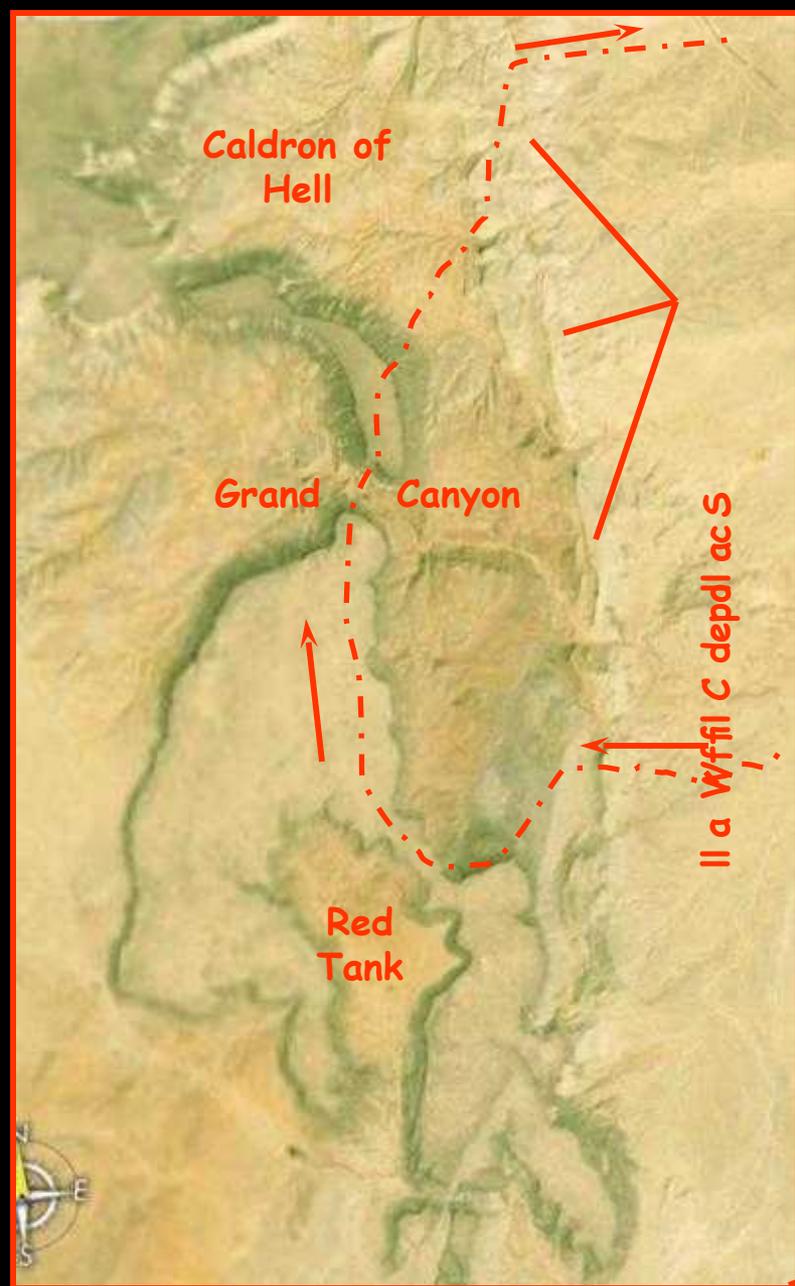
I left the safety of the bridge mesa (left side of pict), and crossed the corner of the "Caldron of Hell". The scalloped cliffs in the foreground create a wall encircles the Caldron.



With relief, I returned to the flats by the Rio Puerco. I crossed over to the chain of volcanoes.

Reached the Rio Grande near the Isleta Pueblo. Followed the river down to Mid-Valley airport. You can see Tome Hill which is next to the airport above the river in the picture. Made two landings at Mid-Valley then returned to Belen.





Nvidia Earthviewer Map

What a flight. Got some good training in, and then I stumbled onto the some most spectacular scenery I have ever seen (hiking or flying).

I borrowed the name "Caldron of Hell" from a hangliding area at the Sandia Mountains, The name instantly came to mind as I flew above the blood red basin. The best thing is that this area is a short 20mile hop from Belen airport. I will be back.

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