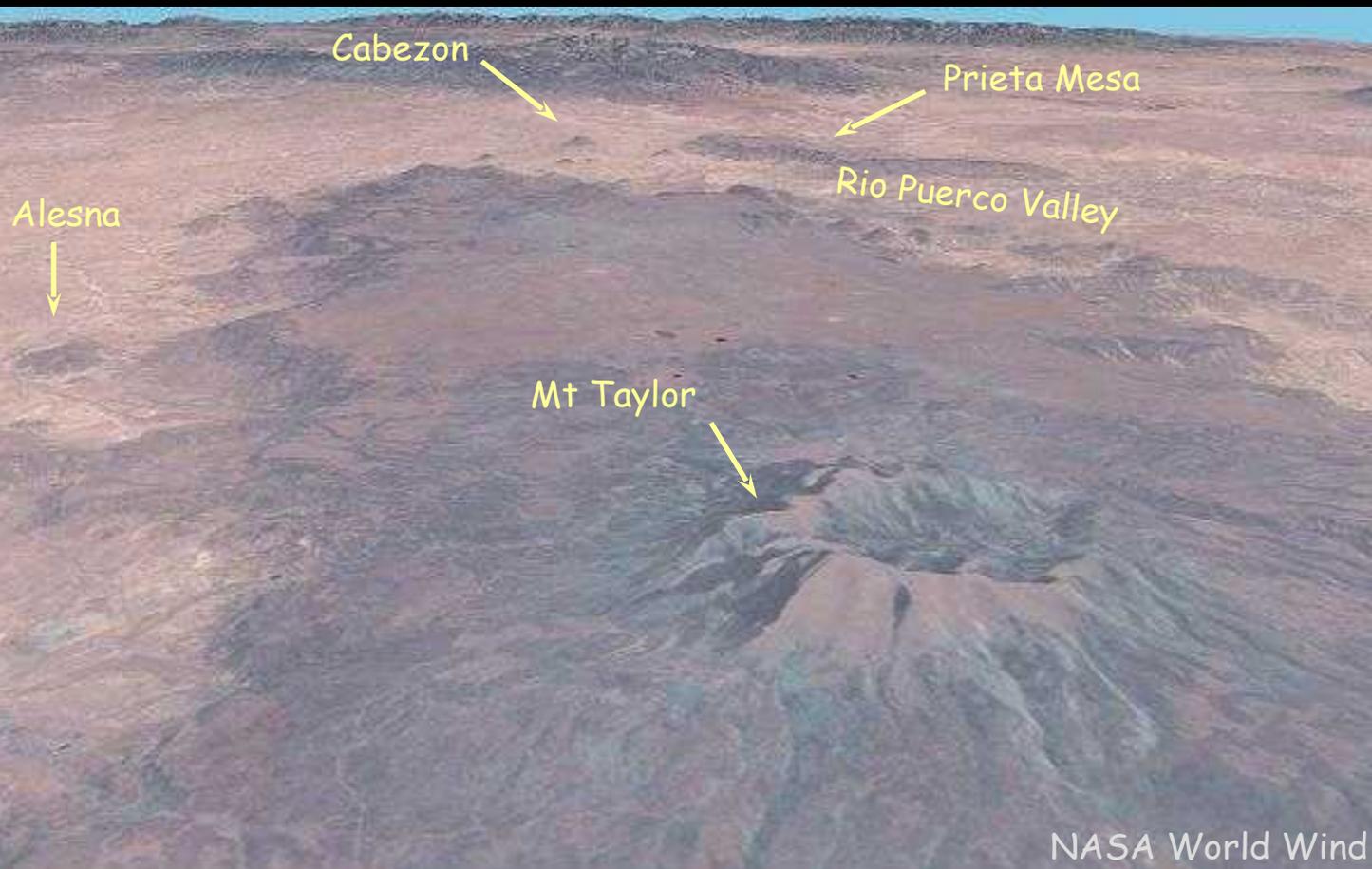


Friday, December 31, 2004  
27th Cobra flight, 37th solo  
Circuit around Mt. Taylor  
6 landings

Launched 8:30am, Returned 1:30 pm  
Flight time: 4:20 Total logged time: 83:00  
Launch: calm on runway 21  
Landing: 5 on runway 21

A large volcano near Grants, New Mexico rises to a height of 11,301 ft and has been visible on every flight I have made. It was called "Tsoodzil" by the Navajo, "Cebolleta" and "San Mateo" by the Spanish settlers before being renamed "Mt. Taylor" by the Americans. Today I will circle around to the backside of the volcano and return south along the Rio Puerco. USAPhotomaps was a great help in picking out a route around the lava fields and mesas and locating safe landout options.



When the volcano last erupted 2 million years ago, it blew out a large valley on the eastern flank of the mountain, similar to the Mt. St. Helens eruption. I won't be venturing in there today.

Before flying, I changed the gear box oil and reinstalled my airfilters (cleaned at home). Launched at 8:30, did two touch and goes then headed out.



The winds aloft forecast at 9000 ft was SW at 15mph.

But much higher, I could see a bank of high stratus clouds approaching from the north. These clouds would shut down all thermal activity for the day which was a good thing, since I would not make it back to Belen for 5 hours.

Crossed the Caldron via the bridge mesa.

Once over the top, I picked up a 10mph SE tail wind and headed straight across the flats. I flew over the notch on my way to Enchanted Mesa.



I climbed high to avoid the rotor generated by a wall-like mesa that hides Enchanted Mesa from view. Exited Acoma Canyon by "Dead Man's Rock."



The road I followed paralleled a "Chinese Dragon" arroyo. At the top of the picture to the left you can make out the cleared mesa top of an abandoned airstrip. (click the mouse)



Details of the abandoned airfield.

This landout area allowed me to take a scenic short cut over the mesa to Grants NM. Note all the juniper and pinion trees.

From the top of the mesa, I could look down on the Mc Cartys lava flow. Some parts of it are only 1200 years old.

The lava flow looked very hostile. I followed a chain of farms and farm roads on the south side of the lava flow all the way Grants.



As I approached the Grants airport, my GPS ground speed accelerated from 60 to 75 mph. A venturi created as the winds squeezed between Mt. Taylor and mesas to the SW?

My plans were to fly to Grants and if everything looked good, continue around the backside of Mt Taylor. Well, everything was good and Launch Code was predicting calm conditions all day at Double Eagle on the east side of Mt Taylor.

Landed, played with the airport dogs, talked to two old-timers at the FBO office. Told them where I was headed, and took off. The winds were only 5mph on the field, but 200 ft above it was blowing 20mph.

View of Mt Taylor from Grants, NM.





I had to cross over a series of mesas west of Mt Taylor.

San Mateo mesa is on the horizon.



The first mesa was made of salmon colored sandstone.

Mt  
Taylor

La Jara  
Mesa in  
fore-  
ground



Cerro Alesna spire  
was visible in the  
distance behind  
San Mateo Mesa.

When I climbed to  
8600 ft to clear  
the rotor at San  
Mateo and my  
tailwind increased  
even more. Ground  
speed reached  
83mph.



## Cerro Alesna

90 degrees to the left was an ugly open pit mine. Be glad I didn't take a picture of it.

I pressed on to the NE, and finally glimpsed Cabezon in the distance.

Some other volcanic stumps were visible. Bear Mouth on the right side next to the mesa and Cerro Parido in the foreground.



Looking back past Cerro Parido  
I could see Cerro Alesna in the  
distance.



Some interesting eroded bowls  
near Cabezon.

Looking south down the Rio Puerco Valley I could see Ladron Peak on the horizon, slightly above Nuestra Senora.

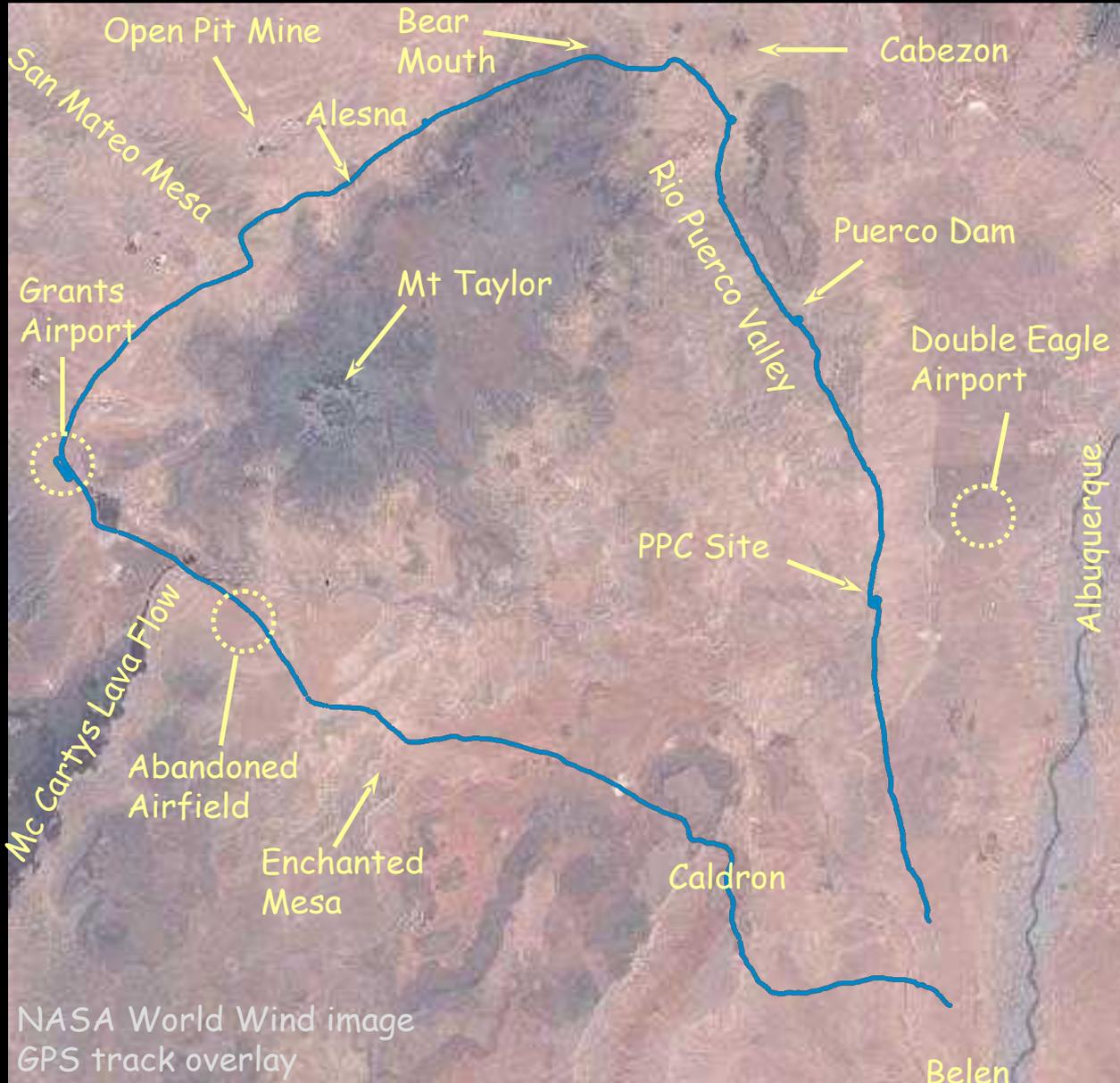
At this point I was 40 miles downwind from the summit of Mt Taylor and 65 miles from Belen. As I worked my way around the corner, the winds shifted from W to SE (right up the valley). I crept south at 30mph.



There were no major turbulators ahead, so I eased the trike lower in altitude and began to pickup ground speed. I was able to cruise south at 45mph (10 mph headwind).

The camera battery died after I took this shot of the remains of the old Puerco Dam. I missed seeing this when I flew up the Rio Puerco to Cabezon in October. Not much there.

Continued down the Rio Puerco Valley and landed at the PPC site. It had rained two days before, making the dirt field a bit crusty. The trike quickly rolled to a stop. Chatted with some PPC flyers then took off. There was a 5 mph cross wind, so I kept the control bar in a bit, but something felt wrong. I wasn't gaining speed so I aborted halfway across the field and headed back to try again.



I realized the crusty dirt field was generating extra wheel friction, which was exacerbated by pulling in the bar slightly. The combination prevented me from picking up sufficient speed. I tried again with a neutral bar position and popped the trike off the ground when I reached 40mph. The take-off was uneventful.

Made my way down to Belen, made a touch and go before landing and taxiing to the hanger.

This was my longest flight to date. My GPS odometer logged 238 miles. A nice long fun flight to wrap up 2004.