



Bucket Lists, Part III: Be a Box Checker!

by Matthew McDaniel



Even a short scenic drive or hike among any of the Coastal Redwood or Giant Sequoia groves of California can be a breathtaking experience. The author took this photo in one of Yosemite National Park's several Giant Sequoia groves. Yosemite is a great layover escape for pilots operating to/from the western Sierra-Nevada foothill airports or several of the airports in California's Central Valley. The massive scale of the trees simply cannot be captured in a photo, but the large passenger vehicle driving through the grove at the bottom of the photo does provide some scale to the largest trees on earth (by volume) that surround it.

Author's Note: The following is the third installment in a series of articles which will resonate most with King Air corporate and charter pilots, but can apply to the owner/pilot, as well. After all, making the most of layovers and planned or unplanned travel downtime is a goal any pilot can pursue. If you have layover pursuits or places you've enjoyed visiting that you feel are "must-sees," please feel free to send an email with any ideas you might have for future installments of this series (contact information follows the article).

In Review

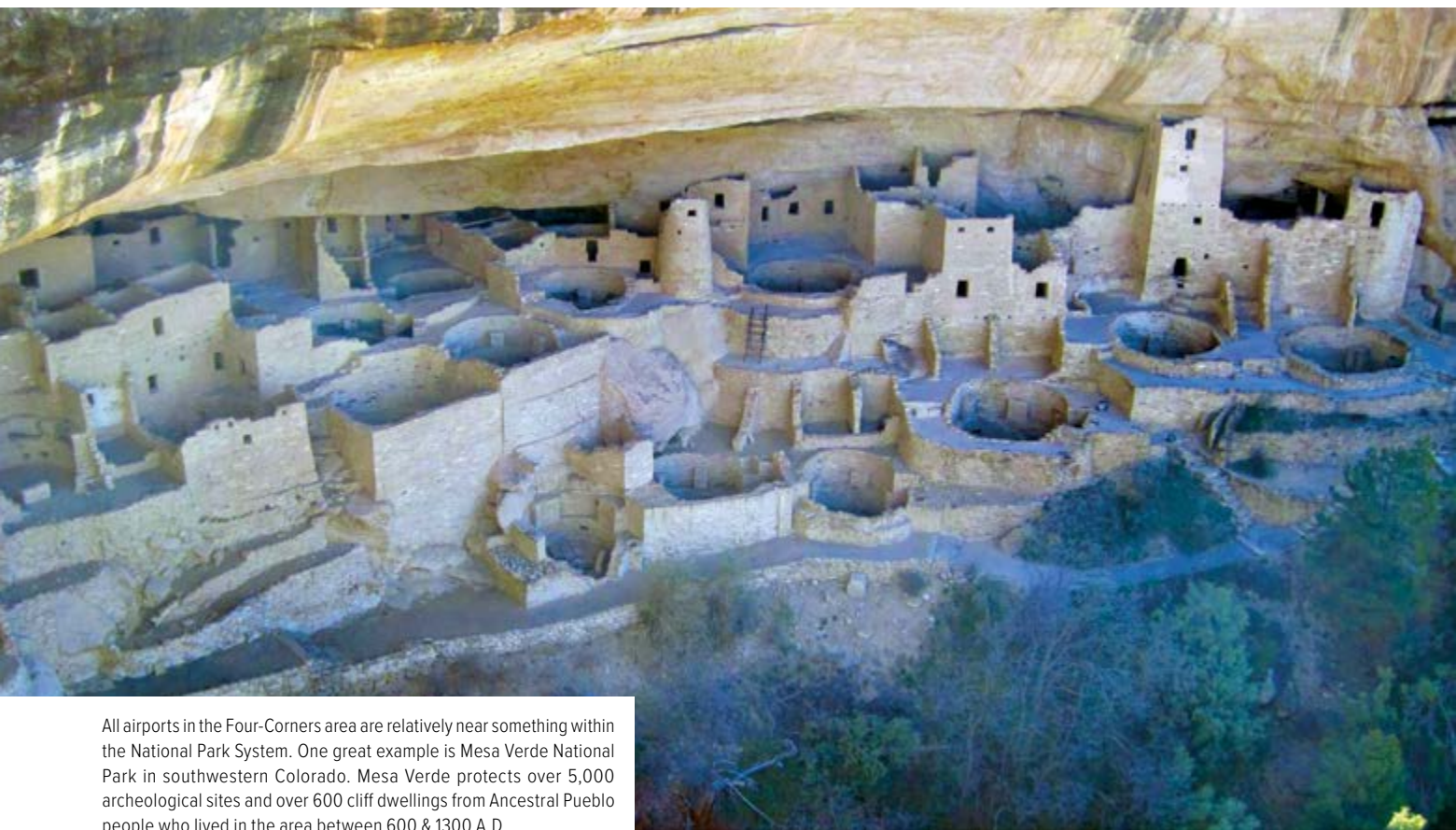
In Part I and II of this series, we introduced the concept of layover list making. A sort of bucket list, used to enhance your layovers (long and short) by encouraging you to get out and explore, checking boxes on your list(s) along the way. In the end, you'll surely return home with more stories to tell, more memories made, and far less FBO coffee and cookies consumed. As with anything in life, endeavoring to make your layovers more productive and memorable will be as successful as the energy you put into it. Starting a list or two is the first step but checking the boxes off your list is the real goal. Flight safety is always your first priority as a professional or owner-flown King Air pilot. So, flight planning and preflight/post-flight duties should never take a backseat to layover touring. Nor should adequate

rest be sacrificed leading into flying duties. However, when surplus time is in your day's clock, exploration is hard to beat for using that time to remind you that flying really can take you to interesting places.

During my many years of aviation layovers while flying as a corporate, charter, fractional, airline and traveling-instructor pilot, I've had many lists going concurrently. In this installment, I'll discuss one that can be pursued within both your work travel and family travel life. Over the years, I've found it one of the simpler ways to utilize downtime while reconnecting with nature and the great outdoors.

America's Best Idea

The National Park Service (NPS) manages all public sites within the National Park System. While it has



All airports in the Four-Corners area are relatively near something within the National Park System. One great example is Mesa Verde National Park in southwestern Colorado. Mesa Verde protects over 5,000 archeological sites and over 600 cliff dwellings from Ancestral Pueblo people who lived in the area between 600 & 1300 A.D.



The USS Constitution is usually moored at the Boston National Historical Park in Boston, Massachusetts, though it is currently in dry-dock undergoing restoration at the time of this writing (January 2020). “Old Ironsides” is the oldest commissioned naval vessel still afloat, having been first launched in 1797. When not undergoing restoration or repairs, she’s open for tours year-round and typically sails a couple of times a year. She’s the only survivor of the original six frigate warships built to help form a U.S. Navy fighting force.

oversight of 61 official National Parks, it operates over 400 individual units, each into one of 19 different NPS naming designations. These include national monuments, lakeshores, seashores, memorials, battlefields, historic sites, etc. National Parks often begin as one of these lower tier sites before being expanded and upgraded to National Park status. The point is, if you have interest in the U.S. National Park System, there are units dotting the width and breadth of the country and they encompass far more than just National Parks, for example,

The Grand Canyon. NPS sites make a great layover list to pursue. Best of all, an annual NPS pass is only \$80 and can be used to visit any unit or site within the NPS system, as often as you like, for a full year from purchase date. An annual pass is typically valid for its holder, plus a spouse or guest (such as a co-pilot) and dependent children. It is truly a bargain that’s hard to beat, as just a couple site visits (paid at the single-visit rate) can often exceed the cost of the annual pass. Additionally, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) protects and manages many

public lands that do not fall under the NPS. Many BLM sites are every bit as impressive as NPS sites and are equally accessible.

It has been said that the U.S. National Park System is America’s best idea. The concept of setting aside areas for protection and preservation and making those areas equally accessible to all citizens was a globally unique idea when it began in the U.S. in the early 1900s. In the century-plus that has passed since, many countries around the world have created their own similar systems, some quite impressive in both scale and long-term vision. So, while this discussion is specific to the United States, similar concepts can certainly be applied to flying and touring in many countries, from Australia to Zimbabwe.

Scenic Drives

Of course, many of our National Parks are enormous and could take years of dedicated visits to fully explore. Again, that’s not the sort of touring one would do on a layover, nor it is necessary to do so. Many parks include one or more scenic drives that can be done in a matter of hours or less (if driven straight through) or can be extended to all-day trips if partaking of various side excursions and/or making frequent stops along the way. The following are some examples of common King Air destinations with scenic NPS drives nearby.

Gettysburg National Military Park, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania: The site of the most famous of Civil War battles and President Abraham Lincoln’s equally famous Gettysburg Address, is only a 45-minute drive from Pennsylvania’s capital of Harrisburg. In an hour or just slightly more, it can be reached (by car) from several of Maryland’s most popular airports, such as Hagerstown, Fredrick and Baltimore. While this drive through southern Pennsylvania’s rolling farmland (including many Amish homesteads) is beautiful in and of itself, it is the history lesson on the Civil War that is truly unforgettable. The number



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of monuments honoring the Union and Confederate units and soldiers who fought and died there can be overwhelming. However, for any history lover it is not to be missed. With more time, bus tours guided by well-informed park rangers can be taken in lieu of self-touring.

Park Loop Road, Grand Teton National Park, Wyoming: Only a brief drive north of the popular Jackson Hole airport lies a scenic drive to rival any in the United States. The 42-mile loop drive offers many opportunities to see abundant wildlife with backdrops of majestic mountains, lush valley meadows and the Snake River. For longer layover excursions, Yellowstone National Park is only slightly further north, beyond Grand Teton.

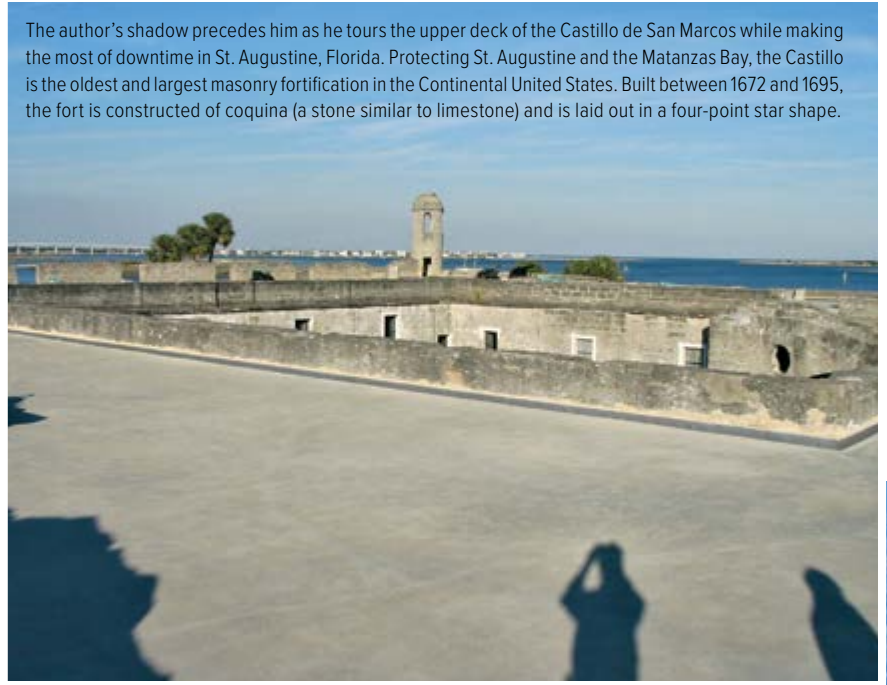
Cades Cove Drive, Great Smokey Mountain Park, Tennessee: Heading to Tennessee's Tri-Cities area, Knoxville or possibly Chattanooga? If so, consider a quick drive to the most visited National Park in in the U.S.,

where the 11-mile Cades Cove Loop drive is popular by both car and bicycle for viewing wildlife, fall colors, and many adjacent historic buildings and trails.

Red Rock Canyon Scenic Drive, Nevada: On the far west side of Las Vegas (only 17 miles from the Vegas "strip"), there is an impressive BLM site known at Red Rock Canyon. It is truly an area worth visiting when needing to escape the chaos that

Vegas is famous for. The 13-mile scenic loop drive is equally popular with drivers and cyclists for viewing the rock formations and the various desert plants and animals that live there. The visitor's center is a great place to start your time at Red Rock. Once you've been there, you'll be looking for ever-longer layovers in Vegas so that you can return and continue your explorations among the colorful Aztec Sandstone.

The author's shadow precedes him as he tours the upper deck of the Castillo de San Marcos while making the most of downtime in St. Augustine, Florida. Protecting St. Augustine and the Matanzas Bay, the Castillo is the oldest and largest masonry fortification in the Continental United States. Built between 1672 and 1695, the fort is constructed of coquina (a stone similar to limestone) and is laid out in a four-point star shape.



A view of a small country church and a meadow within Great Smokey Mountain National Park, taken while driving the scenic Cades Cove Loop Road. This National Park is a gem, straddling the Tennessee/North Carolina border.



An example of just one of hundreds of interesting rock formations within Joshua Tree National Park in Southern California. Joshua Tree is loaded with hiking trails and picnic areas that put you up close and personal with such terrain. This park is an easy drive from the L.A. Basin, especially if your flights are taking you to the airports on the eastern side of the city.



The Wupatki National Monument in northern Arizona is one of many historical Native American ruins scattered across the Four-Corners area. It is only 30 miles north of the popular Flagstaff area, making it a perfect day or partial-day trip from that region.

Shark Valley Loop, Everglades National Park, Big Cypress, Florida: Just outside of Miami's western suburbs is the Shark Valley entrance to Everglades National Park. The same 15-mile paved loop is shared by park tour trams and bicyclists. The visitor's center offers bicycles and safety equipment for rent for cycling as little or as much of the mostly flat Shark Valley Loop as your time or fitness level allows. Close encounters with napping and lethargic alligators are common along the trail. Native birds and other wetlands wildlife is abundant, as well. At the half-way point, the Shark Valley Observation Tower allows a bird's eye view of the largest gators living in the park (some exceeding 30-feet in length), as well as a panoramic spectacle of the swampy lands that make up the Everglades.

Shedding a Tier

The areas discussed above are relatively well-known and popular upper tier sites within the NPS. However, the lower tier sites within the NPS (and on BLM lands) are also chocked full of perfect layover diversions.

Presidential homes, libraries and birthplaces, historic military forts and battlefields, memorials, ancient Native American sites and ruins, and so much more all make for great day or partial day excursions. Below are just a few (of the hundreds of options) to introduce some possibilities to you and to whet your appetite for layover explorations.

Honoring the Wright Brothers: What better diversion for a waiting aviator than exploring sites honoring the Fathers of Flight? Dayton, Ohio, has an entire Aviation Heritage Park devoted to the bicycle mechanics with preserved or exact reproductions of their workshops, homes, labs, etc. All of this is within minutes if you're laying over in Dayton, and within an hour if you're killing time at any of the Cincinnati, Ohio/Covington, Kentucky area airports. The Wright Brothers National Memorial is located at the Kill Devil Hills, North Carolina, site of their flight testing leading up to and including the first powered, heavier-than-air, controlled flights in history. While this area has its own dedicated airport (Kittyhawk Airport), it is also only about a 1.5-hour drive south of the Norfolk and Virginia Beach, Virginia, area.

Fort Sumter, Charleston, South Carolina: One of dozens of historic military coastal fortifications with the NPS, Fort Sumter is perhaps the most famous due to the notoriety it earned by being the site of the Civil War's first shot. Like many of these historic forts, Sumter is near a fairly urbanized area, served by several airports likely to see King Air type traffic. In fact, Charleston International (CHS), Charleston Executive (JZI), and Mt. Pleasant Regional (LRO) are all within 15 miles or so of the historic downtown Charleston area. Ferries run frequently between Charleston and Fort Sumter Island. If you don't have time for that, you could simply enjoy the Fort Sumter Visitor Education Center, co-located at the ferry's downtown docking area. Charleston and the surrounding area have many other military forts and various historic sites within an hour's drive.

Muir Woods National Monument and Alcatraz Island, San Francisco, California: The Bay area of northern California is served by dozens of general aviation airports capable of hosting turboprop traffic. Exploration during layovers in such an area is not difficult. Muir Woods is a small park north of the Golden Gate Bridge and within the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. Its main attraction is its grove of old growth Coastal Redwood trees. Named for the famed naturalist whose writings first drew widespread attention to America's natural wonders and the need for sustained preservation efforts, Muir Woods

offers beautiful hiking trails among the enormous Redwoods. Alcatraz Island, of course, is most famous for its long-closed, maximum-security prison which has become an iconic symbol of crime and punishment in America. Now preserved and maintained as an NPS site, ferries to and from the island run frequently from the San Francisco wharf area. Self-guided tours of the island, the prison buildings and the remains of military fortifications from the pre-prison years are a fascinating way to while-away a few hours of downtime in the Bay area.

The Four-Corners States: Within the states of Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Utah are dozens of NPS sites. While these states are large and sparsely populated overall, they all contain many airports a King Air pilot might have reason to visit (from large Class B and C airports, to rural pilot-controlled airfields). Wherever you might be stuck waiting in these states, it is likely you'll be relatively close to something amazing to see. Many major ancient Native American sites are preserved in each state. Some are near the major cities, like Petroglyph National Monument on the western edge of Albuquerque, New Mexico, and the Tuzigoot and Montezuma Castle National Monuments, north of Phoenix, Arizona. While others are near only small-town airports, such as the impressive Hovenweep and Canyons of the Ancients National Monuments, both on the southern Colorado/Utah border, just north of the Four Corners marker.



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Equal Beauty on a Smaller Scale

While the NPS is vast, the 50 State Park Systems and thousands of County and City Park Systems are even more so. Every state, most counties and many cities (from large to tiny) have a park system in place with protected sites following much in the same vein as the NPS. While the parks themselves are generally much smaller than national parks or monuments, they offer similar sites of natural wonders, unique topography, memorials, historical markers or just quiet green space for relaxing while enjoying the view. It is difficult to find an airport that can accommodate a King Air within the U.S. that is not also within a short drive (or sometimes even walking distance) of a state, county or interesting city park site of some type. Two of my favorites over the years have been:

Devil's Lake State Park near Baraboo, Wisconsin: Situated

between several small-town airports in south/central Wisconsin, only 30 minutes from the popular Wisconsin Dells, and an hour from the Wisconsin capital of Madison. This park is stunning! Centered on a 360-acre lake, the park's hiking trails range from quaint strolls along the lake front to strenuous climbs up a natural staircase of quartzite rock to areas of sheer cliffs, balancing boulders and towering chimney rocks.

Brown County State Park, Indiana: Only an hour from both Indianapolis and Louisville, this park lies immediately north of (but not within) the Hoosier National Forest. It is about halfway between the medium-sized towns of Columbus and Bloomington, Indiana. Not only is it the largest state park in Indiana, at nearly 16,000 acres, it is one of the largest state parks anywhere in the U.S. Most don't think of hills when they think of farm states like Indiana. Yet, this part of Indiana is mostly steep and rolling hills, densely wooded areas and stunning vistas. Very popular during the autumn foliage viewing season, the park can be enjoyed via several scenic drives (which include creeping through wooden covered bridges) or by getting out and hiking any of the miles of groomed trails (through thick forest or across open meadows).

Conclusion

When pursuing your layover bucket list, the only limits are your imagination and energy. It could be museums, architecture, hiking, city walks, scenic drives or bike rides, music stores or venues, 5-Star restaurants or dive cafes, or any other of a million different things that hold the interest of us pilots. The point is equally about checking off items on your list(s) of places and experiences not to be missed and about not wasting a good portion of your life waiting in FBOs and hotels!

Layover bucket lists can be effectively endless for filling an aviator's downtime, while also pursuing one's personal interests. Many great smartphone apps and websites exist for locating hiking

trails, parks, museums and other points of interest near you. The NPS and most State Park Systems have informative websites to help you narrow down your options based on the time you have to spare. Sometimes just heading out on a blind search for mental stimulation can be just as rewarding. In the end, use whatever information and motivation is necessary to go out and explore. If you just can't take another minute of mundane waiting, that's your subconscious telling you that life is passing you by and to seize the day. Killing a few hours at some awe-inspiring site sure beats killing a gallon of stale coffee at an FBO for me! 📷

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Matthew McDaniel is a Master & Gold Seal CFII, ATP, MEI, AGI, & IGI and Platinum CSIP. In 30 years of flying, he has logged over 18,500 hours total, over 5,500 hours of instruction-given, and over 2,500 hours in various King Airs and the BE-1900D. As owner of Progressive Aviation Services, LLC (www.progaviation.com), he has specialized in Technically Advanced Aircraft and Glass Cockpit instruction since 2001. Currently, he is also an Airbus A-320 series captain for an international airline, holds 8 turbine aircraft type ratings, and has flown over 90 aircraft types. Matt is one of less than 15 instructors in the world to have earned the Master CFI designation for 9 consecutive two-year terms. He can be reached at: matt@progaviation.com or (414) 339-4990.

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