

TOUR REPORT

Thursday, 23rd March – Monday, 3rd April

We arrived Dallas/Ft Worth on an American B777-300ER in the early evening, with a three hour wait before our Envoy Air/American Eagle Embraer 145LR took us to Roswell, New Mexico.

Next morning we set off on the short drive to Roswell to view the airliners stored and being scrapped. Although ramp access was not permitted we did manage to photograph quite a few things through the fence.

After a couple of hours here we set off for the drive to El Paso. We noticed that en-route Alamogordo White Sands Regional Airport was just a 5-mile detour off the route. Decision was made to have a quick look, not really expecting anything. As we neared the airport suddenly a row of red tails became visible. Present were 6 P-2V Neptune fire bombers which had arrived from Montana 2 weeks earlier. Access to the large ramp was kindly given and we also photographed 4 other Neptune's in use as spare sources. As they will be retired at the end of the summer we were very pleased indeed to get these. Thank you Neptune Aviation – they even gave everyone a sticker and a patch.

The night was spent at El Paso and it was here the next morning we had a drive around the large airport. Another special propliner was seen – a NASA Super Guppy, looking immaculate in the morning sun, and was photographed through the fence (pictured right).



On the drive to our next appointment we passed pretty close to the wall on the Mexican border – no “bad hombres” observed climbing over it. As one of our group commented – build a 14ft wall and someone will produce a 15ft ladder !

Next stop was the excellent War Eagles Museum at Dona Ana County Airport. For a \$4.00 entry fee this museum was just excellent and everyone wanted to stay longer. At the far end of the ramp was an A-26 Invader and a Super Dak. The lady behind the desk said we could not go there as it was private. However a chat with a volunteer working at the museum (who had a penchant for the Victor and the Vulcan) enthusiastically drove the group down there in a WW2 ex-US Navy truck! The evening was spent at the very nice Four Points by Sheraton Hotel at Tucson Airport.



The programme for the next day (Sunday) was:

- the excellent Pima Museum
- a look round some of the civilian-owned scrap yards in the Tucson area
- Cessna overflights of Pinal Air Park and the Davis Monthan AMARG
- and a specially arranged 'double tour' of the latter

Pictured above are C-5s and the last few remaining B-52s being cut up.

As well several hours looking around the huge collection in the Pima Air Museum it had also been arranged for a special tour of the museum's aircraft restoration facility.

Due to the heat build-up during the day, the Cessna 172 flights were flown in the morning, with six people (two in each aircraft) enjoying amazing opportunities.

Pictured right are EB-57s and F-16s.



Several members of the group said that the combination of Pima and the Cessna overflights made this day the highlight of the trip.

Next morning was spent having an informal look at Marana Pinal Air Park and Marana Regional Airport (once known as Avra Valley). At the latter, having been warned to watch out for rattlesnakes, we photographed several DC-4s in a state of disrepair. Inside a hangar we talked to the guys who had almost finished reworking an A-4 Skyhawk into an airworthy specimen for a rich Argentinian who already has one. Oh, and the aircraft looked immaculate in Argentine AF colours.



Heading for our night stop in Mesa we did a small detour to Coolidge Airfield where the International Air Response DC-7 in Delta colours still sits on the ramp (pictured left), and today was joined by a grey Shorts Skyvan. Three withdrawn-from-use C-130s completed the photographic session here.

Last call of the day was Mesa's Falcon Field. Although not on the itinerary, we arrived just as the museum was closing but they kindly allowed us in to photograph what was parked outside: a B-25J, C-45, C-47 and a magnificent PV-2 Harpoon.

Next morning saw us look at Goodyear from the outside before heading for Kingman. As we arrived early we stopped to eat at the Route 66 Diner on the road of the same name.

The day concluded with an excellent tour of Kingman where over 200 aircraft were stored. The vast majority were CRJs, a DC-4 and two DC-8s were very welcome. Both of the latter are still active. A night in a hotel in this high desert town resulted in another visit to the Route 66 Diner, a two minute walk across the road.

The next morning saw us heading off towards Los Angeles, but with an en-route stop at Mojave. Sadly the tours here were stopped several years ago, and there was nowhere near as many aircraft in store as in previous years. However the nice Voyager Restaurant has an outdoor area on the edge of the ramp where photographs can be taken.

A visit to Lancaster's Fox Field saw a C-17 on the main ramp by the terminal having an engine change. The Argosy, C-97 and C-119 which have lived here for years are now behind a fence by a museum hangar, which was closed, and looked like it had been for some time. Very nice hotel in nearby Palmdale served very acceptable beer.

Next morning we headed for Victorville where, again, there were nowhere near as many stored aircraft as in previous years. One of our group had flown in most of the BA 737s and 747s that were present, and a drive round the outside of the fence brought us extremely close to them. At Victorville there is a café / snack bar with views onto the ramp, and it was nice to see Omega Air Tanker 707s and a DC-10 active.

That evening we arrived at our hotel which was located at Los Angeles' LAX Airport, where we had three free days.

Some hired cars to explore the local area, whilst 3 of us took the opportunity to take a Robinson helicopter 'camera ship' over LAX for some stunning photographs – see right - highly recommended!

All in all a very successful and enjoyable trip was had by all, with sunshine every day.

Highlights were undoubtedly the flights over Pinal Air Park, the AMARG and LAX, not forgetting the Neptunes and Super Guppy.

