

# KERN VALLEY BACKCOUNTRY FLY-IN

BY: SCOTT BOLING



Like most aviation enthusiasts, the hustle and bustle of my daily grind always seems to get in the way of flying adventures. Throw into the mix the severe weather we had this last winter, and spring fever hit hard for many of us. A few months ago, I was communicating with several pilots about a fly-in that was being organized to highlight the beauty of the Lake Isabella area, located in California in the southern Sierra Nevadas. A gentleman named Anthony Longobardo was leading the charge of putting together the 1st Annual Kern Valley Backcountry Fly-In. This seemed to be exactly what we were after, so without hesitation, we started making plans. I asked my oldest son if he'd like to go since I knew my wife would forego the trek. It turned out he wouldn't be able to pull away from college, so I asked my next oldest. He, of course, didn't hesitate and seemed to be already packed before I even finished asking.

The morning finally arrived to begin our journey. The planned route would take us 579 nautical miles from our home state of Idaho, southwest through Nevada. It actually took us over seven hours to complete due to stronger than expected headwinds. When we finally landed Thursday afternoon, we were greeted with gorgeous California type weather. We were also greeted by a very nice gentleman on a lawnmower that was just finishing up the designated camping area off Runway 17. Turns out, he's the airport manager of Kern Valley and would play a huge role in helping to keep the event on schedule. We had shown up a day early since we didn't know how the weather would hold up. Once we unpacked and set up camp, we headed into the town of Kernville, which is only about 2 1/2 miles up the road. There we found many great places to eat with a wide variety of foods.





The next morning we were given an amazing California sunrise and another beautiful day. We watched the planes arrive every so often, as if they were on a designated time schedule. Still to this day, nothing captures my interest more than a small plane coming in to land. We initially were going to fly out and explore the area while we waited for others, but each arrival created another opportunity for great conversation. Like with most Fly-in's, simple introductions led into more interesting topics. Before too long, it was as if we were among friends we hadn't seen in a long while. Once evening fell, they chartered us into town for dinner. We divided up into groups and hit several promising hot spots. There was chatter about the weather turning the next day, so we weren't sure what to expect. The winds were suppose to continue building up speed throughout the day, followed by rain on Sunday. Perhaps that's why there were some who decided to skip the travels, but it was still nice to see twenty-five to thirty aircraft tied down at the field. There were also many families that drove in to enjoy the festivities and the camaraderie a fly in offers.

Saturday morning, we woke to the sweet sound of a Cessna 120 lifting off at 6:00 am. The local pilot jokingly mentioned that he was only checking the weather, but we all knew he was politely telling everyone to get out of bed. Still, there's no better alarm clock. We ventured out in waves just before breakfast, depending on speed, strips of interest,

and the direction folks wanted to take. Several of us ended up flying out to Death Valley National Park to Panamint Springs for breakfast. We then divided back up and hit select strips on the way back. Kern Valley doesn't offer fuel, so we found ourselves climbing up and over the ridge towards Lone Pine to top off. We landed with the wind blowing 28 mph. The weather they called for was finally arriving. Over the next few hours, the small groups of planes started to make their way back into Kern Valley. There was a STOL Evaluation scheduled for Saturday afternoon, but it was cancelled due to high winds. We made our way back into Kernville and were treated to a classic car show put on by the local rotary club. It doesn't matter if you're a plane or car junky, the two seem to go hand in hand. There were amazing representations of many of the great classics from almost every era. Top it off with a classic burger, fries and shake lunch from the local diner and the day was turning into another successful venture. All of Anthony's hard work was paying off. Unfortunately, Anthony had been severely injured a couple weeks before and didn't get the chance to fully reap the rewards of all his hard work. It was nice to see him in attendance for most of the Fly-In.

Later that night, they had to move the Tri-Tip BBQ dinner into one of the main hangars since the winds hadn't yet let up. They had a guest speaker from the local military base that came in to discuss operating in a MOA and Restricted

areas from a GA pilot perspective. He did a great job explaining the basic procedures and answering questions from the group. He even helped many of us understand where we fit in from a military perspective and what exactly gets communicated to those military aircraft in the air. He did a great job and we all appreciated his time.

All-in-all, it was a wonderful night that concluded with a huge raffle of donations from local businesses, aviation companies, and even the Recreational Aviation Foundation (RAF). The coveted prize everyone was eyeing was a set of 31" Alaskan Bushwheels donated by Airframe Alaska. Once the festivities concluded, several planes headed back out before dusk to hit just a few more strips, while the rest enjoyed a group bonfire. I took advantage of the opportunity to hit one more hot shower just before dark. The RAF made a substantial donation to help supply the Kern Valley Airport with shower facilities. However, the local building codes didn't allow for a permanent structure, so they came up with an amazing "somewhat mobile" alternative that worked beautifully. Thank you RAF and all those who put in countless hours to get everything completed before we arrived.

By Sunday morning, several planes had left early in preparation for the coming rain showers. However, Kern Valley was probably the only area that didn't receive rain. We slowly packed up and headed back over to the Kern Valley Airport Diner for one last breakfast before heading home. As we left, I took a moment to reflect over the last several days. Sure the weather could have been a little better, but like all good aviators, we simply made the most of the opportunity. I enjoyed the memories I made with my son and the many new relationships that were formed. I look forward to coming back next year and meeting friends that are able to journey back out. ✈️

