



Day 0 - Sling at Oshkosh.

# THE SLING HW POST-OSH TOUR

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*Sling HW -  
"go everywhere, take everything"*

**It's Sunday morning. Oshkosh is over. But ... good grief, she literally has brought everything!**

**L**INDA Sollars is relocating from the East Coast to Los Angeles for some months – to spend time spanner'ing her aircraft in the Sling environment, developing some social media ideas, contributing to the development of the new MOSAIC aircraft certification standards and hanging out with her west coast mates.

I'm joining her from Oshkosh to LA, in her High Wing Sling, to assist her to document her journey on film, to see as much as I can of the USA for myself

and to visit the Sling distributorship in Torrance, California.

The route is undecided, but I want to see as many of the great en-route geographic and historical sites as possible. What could possibly go wrong?

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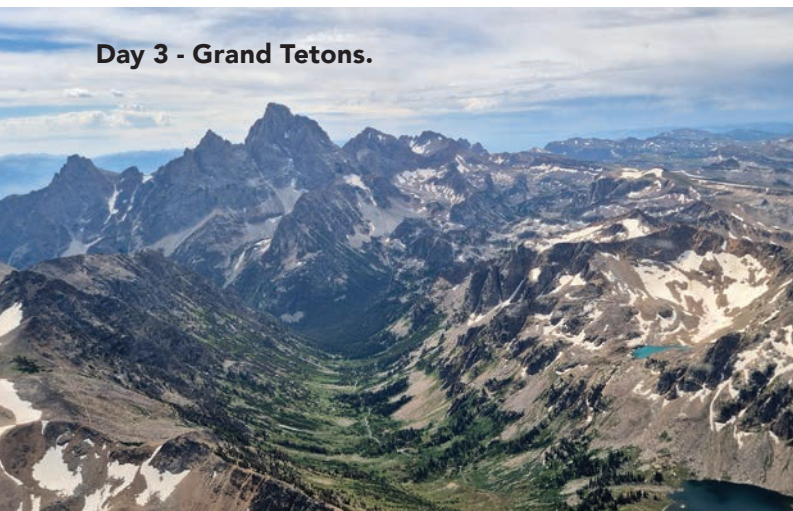
**The pilots are getting fractious.**

When I suggest, during last minute packing, that the weight and volume of stuff that Linda plans to load behind us may be a little excessive, she says something about, “Oh, I thought in this plane we could go anywhere and bring





**Day 2 - Camping West Yellowstone.**



**Day 3 - Grand Tetons.**



**Day 3 - Sling hammocks.**

everything". Shit, since I own Sling, I'm the dude who has to demonstrate that the claim is at least in the right ballpark.

We've not only got two 160 litre aluminium ferry tanks (used to cross the Atlantic two years back), we've also got a walk-in wardrobe's worth of clothes, all packed in suitcases, a number of toolboxes and multiple sets of spares, a commercial carwash-worth of cleaning utensils, cameras, batteries, memory devices and other associated social media accoutrements, camping gear including a tent, stoves hammocks, sleeping bags, crockery and cutlery and the like, books, computers, manuals and hard drives, charging devices, a Starlink satellite internet panel, as well as food, drink and an oxygen bottle for high altitude. Luck-

**Day 3 - Salt Lake Sunset at Spiral Jetty.**



ily for me, it literally doesn't fit.

Also luckily, as often happens in aviation, another pilot offers help. Bo Huang, whose father circumnavigated the globe in a Sling 2 some years back, is also flying back to Los Angeles, alone, in a TSi, and he's parked alongside us as we prepare to leave. We transfer one of the big aluminium fuel tanks, two seats, a few bags of clothes, tools and some other odds and ends into Bo's aeroplane. It's still a tight fit, but now we're able to close the doors (just)!

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## there appear to be no clear rules at all

There're at least 150 aircraft, on three converging taxiways, waiting to leave. A large collection of assorted World War 2 aircraft is at the front, but various military jets apparently need the runway. It takes ATC 45 minutes to start things flowing, and there's grumbling over the radio. The pilots are getting fractious.

### HEADING WEST

The US Midwest is a blanket of patchwork fields as we head due west towards Mount Rushmore and Custer County Airport. For lunch we land at Pipestone – where the FBO vehicle sits unlocked in the parking lot, keys under

the visor. We eat Mexican in the only open restaurant in town.

As we head west it gets drier. Twenty miles short of Custer is Mount Rushmore – which we're able to fly past at 800 foot to see the heads of the Founding Fathers carved into the mountain. Low light makes for a less than perfect photo opportunity, so we land, rent a car and repair to a cheap, nearby roadside motel. Just across the road is a clapboard building owned by the local brewery, for beer and dinner on the stoep. A dramatic blonde is doing country music on the guitar. It's Sturgis, so there're a bunch of bikers in the brewery and motel.

In the morning, we're off driving the Needles Highway and Black Hills circuit to Mount Rushmore. To me it all looks and feels like a cowboy movie. Wild, spacious and indisputably gorgeous.

By midday we're flying on to West Yellowstone. Yesterday was 680 nm. Today's it's just 330 nm. Linda uses oxygen over FL100 but I tell her she's a bit soft.

We place the Starlink antenna on top of the panel, and we've got 200 Mbps wireless. We're on the global super-highway, and now we've got a bunch of mates and Oshkoshers giving us advice. There is no other country we could be making decisions like this, on the fly.

Linda's back country pilot app confirms that there's camping at the Yellowstone Airport, so we land there

in perfect, clear weather, but strongish wind. There's a P51 Mustang on which the pilot is trying to fix a hydraulic leak.

It's going to be light until 9pm and the park is open until then, so we hire a car and head off to see Yellowstone National Park. The breathtaking countryside comes right out of the movies. No South African boy could fail to be moved. Endless meadows, limitless rivers, grand, snow-tipped mountains and fir trees as far as the eye can see.

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## The wealth is mindboggling

There's apparently a loose arrangement not to fly below 2,000 feet AGL over sensitive areas in the USA (eg national parks). But it's confused by the fact that much of what appears to be national park is Tribal Trust Land for native Americans – where there appear to be no clear rules at all. For a South African (with an anarchic bent) it's a strange country – mostly you can do pretty much what your heart desires, but if you are caught breaking the law, it's something of a police state. As far as I can see, while flying, so long you keep out of controlled airspace and other people's way, you can go just about anywhere!

Every which way, we get great views

of the Grand Prismatic and Old Faithful geysers on the way out of Yellowstone, and Linda and I spar gently about whether flight following is preferable to flying off-radar.

Routing south, we fly down the Grand Tetons (13,775 feet), still snow-covered in late summer, and stop at Alpine, just south of Jackson Hole, for brunch. It feels a bit like Franschhoek – multi-million dollar seasonal homes for the itinerant rich, supporting a rural worker community around them. Our transfers are by hitch-hike, with no wait time. Mostly in giant twin-cab pick-ups. The airfield is again an aero-estate. Immaculate 2,000 m tarmac; homes \$5 to \$15m each. The wealth is mindboggling (especially for a farm boy like me!).

Tonight will be our third night, and we plan a back-country landing, on an unimproved road along the lake edge. There're mixed reports on the length and quality of the landing surface, so we identify some equally dodgy alternatives if it looks too hairy. When we arrive it's rough – essentially a classic “middle-mannetje” dirt road. We decide to give it a shot, manage to land safely and there's no-one, not a noise, nothing. We take a 3 km walk to the Spiral Jetty.

When I wake in my hammock a wave of rapture passes over me. I feel like a student again. I'm pretty much as free as a bird, I've not a single anxiety and

#### Day 4 - Mesas and buttes.



I'm delighted to be reminded of just how much empty space there is in the USA. It really does feel like the land of freedom and opportunity!

The weather remains immaculate. We strike camp and successfully get airborne. It's a short flight across the red, orange and blue soda waters of the Great Salt Lake, as we hop across various islands, often sporting rough runways, to land at Skypark Airport, Bountiful in Salt Lake City.

We refuel (wings only, no need for ferry tanks), which gives us 8 hours endurance. That'll get us through the next two days. Climbing over the high mountains east of Salt Lake City, we route south towards the Arizona deserts, past Moab and other places with exotic names. We've booked a lodge a short walk from the Goulding Monument Valley Airstrip – again a magnificent tar runway. We're arrive

not long after mid-day and have our first shower in three days. In the evening we take the opportunity to do an evening flight over the incredible sandstone buttes and mesas. I even get in a 5 km run towards the iconic "Mittens and Merick" Butte, reminding me of my (third) favourite film – Thelma and Louise.

It's roughly 250 nm as the crow flies from Monument Valley to Las Vegas. But it's closer to 400 nm if you follow the Grand Canyon. We land briefly at Page, on the edge of the Canyon. Perched alongside Horseshoe Bend, we bump into Morgan, the owner of a flying school with 3 Slings, in Hawaii. Then we put down again at Grand Canyon West Airfield – which has helicopter tours and a glass bottomed walk-way out over the abyss. That all costs time and money, and having flown ourselves though the canyon for

a couple of hundred miles, we hardly need more dramatic views.

Henderson Executive Airport is one of a number serving Vegas. There're a bunch of private jets and a fair smattering of piston singles and twins. We're told that during big events, for example the Vegas F1 race or the annual Consumer Electronics Show (CES), there are literally thousands of private aircraft. We fill the plane with avgas (\$6 per gallon, or about R27 per litre), and as at most US airports, this means that there are no other charges.

We Uber to The Strip and check into the Hotel Luxor - \$80 a night for a room with two big double beds. Then we walk The Strip, eat steaks, drink beer and watch a show called "Rouge" ("the sexiest show in Vegas"). For my benefit, of course – but Linda quite enjoyed it too.

Friday, after a roadside breakfast, we head out northwest, up the western edge of the High Sierras (14,400 feet), and then up the Yosemite Valley, past el Cap, the Dawn Wall and Half Dome. This is an emotional moment for me as I've twice spent multiple days and nights on The Nose climbing el Capitan – but I've not been back in more than 12 years. Judging by our experiences over the past few days and the attitude of the ATC we'd chatted to along the Sierras, no-one's going to hassle us, no matter what height we fly up the Valley, so we have it all to ourselves.

We head on to see Lake Tahoe and

then land at the Minden Airport, just over the mountains to the east, a centre for some of the world's finest gliding. There we're received like long lost brothers by the gliding and Scale Wings 51 Mustang community. They share a magnificent, spotless, air-conditioned hangar, sheltering a variety of aircraft, including a Jonker Brothers J3 glider and a Scale Wings Mustang replica. Gordon and Bruce hold an (unofficial) gliding world record time and distance flight of over 3,000 km and 17 hours, flying through the night. It's unofficial because, inter alia, they wore night vision goggles – not allowed by the powers that be!

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## we didn't file a single flight plan

Drinks were at the Genoa Bar and Saloon – the oldest drinking establishment in Nevada. On show is Raquel Welch's bra – donated by her during a Lake Tahoe holiday.

Saturday morning sees us all assemble for a photo shoot over the lake with a beautiful 85-year-old "Howard", the photo ship. (Apparently the only aircraft type never to have had a single SB issued!). Fortunately the weather continues to play ball. After the shoot we lunch in the Taildragger Café,

and then we depart for the last leg of our journey.

We again cross the mountains and Lake Tahoe to the west, and fly on to see San Fran and the Golden Gate Bridge. Turning south along the coast it's a mere 300 nm on to LA.

We head in over the Santa Monica Airport, home to one of the four Sling Pilot Academy campuses, skim past the Hollywood sign for a photo opportunity, round the Altadena and Pasadena mountains and land at the Whiteman Airport to be met by long-time friend, airline pilot and solo World-Rounder, Steve Vlasic, who puts us up for the night at his nearby home. Our journey's done!

## WRAP-UP

Sunday we get to organise our lives. I spend the night with Jean d'Assonville - shareholder in the Sling USA distributor and his wife, Michelle. Monday is my birthday and we're driven into the office by Jean's Tesla. I get to tour the Robinson factory, am flown for lunch to Catalina Island by Shannon Russell, and enjoy a birthday dinner out in Redondo Beach.

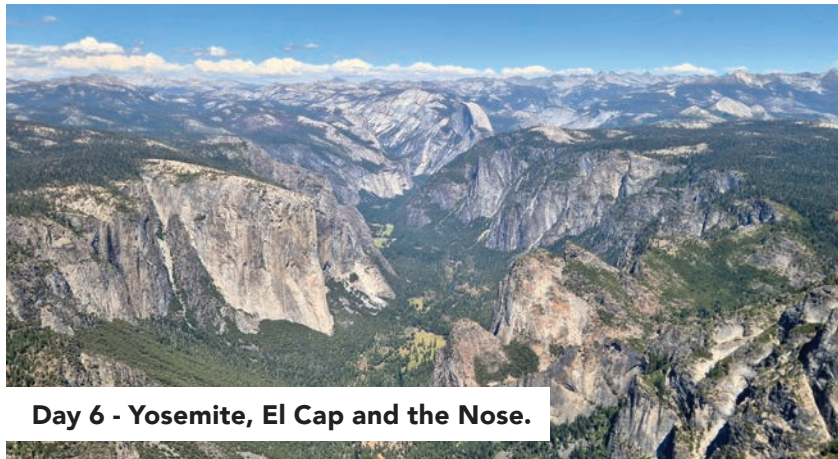
Total journey time was 5 nights and 6.5 days. We flew about 2,800 nm – nearly a sixth of the way around the world. But it was easier



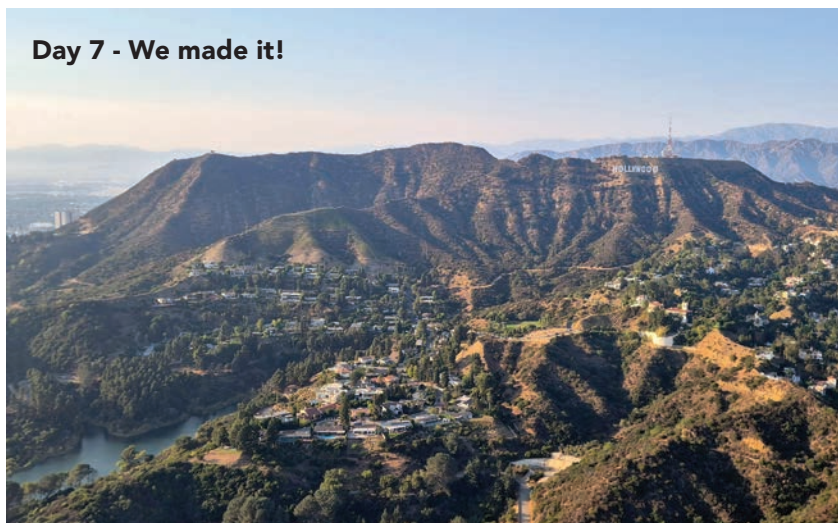
**Day 5 - Grand Canyon somewhere.**



**Day 5 - Vegas - Crazy place.**



**Day 6 - Yosemite, El Cap and the Nose.**



**Day 7 - We made it!**



### The Route.





than flying JHB to Windhoek and back.

The USA is a wonderful country to fly in. If you have a friend with a plane it's even pretty cheap by global standards. It's a simple task to get a local licence validation (though I don't have one!), and ATC is incredibly supportive. We planned as we travelled, and we didn't file a single flight plan.

I hope to see you flying in the USA soon! ✈️