

Dear Board of PlusOneFlyer,

I am sadly reporting an incident I had on September 22, 2020 close to Yellowstone National Park.

This flight was during a two-week cross-country trip that I have been planning and doing every year since 2015 (previously made with N133BW). For the 2020 version of this cross-country trip, I choose to use the Cessna 182, N756RA as it was with the most equipped avionics to safely fly in this part of the country with the mountains and weather.

To be prepared and not just have a check out of the plane, I had three flight training sessions with CFI Gregg Beaty to master better the capabilities of N756RA. These trainings included a night cross-country and multiple IFR approaches. Additionally, I had a fourth flight by myself a week before this trip, on Sunday, September 13, 2020. I prepared all the details of my cross-country flight to safely fly everywhere I planned in accordance with the weather and my skills.

My departure was originally set for Friday September 18<sup>th</sup> but I postponed to Sunday September 20<sup>th</sup> as weather forecasted wind greater than 20knots, gusting 30 knots and I was not comfortable to fly and land with that wind. Most of my flights since 2012 was in San Diego where strong cross wind are very rare.

On Sunday September 20<sup>th</sup>, I flew from San Diego to Escalante (1L7) a 4 hour flight, then on September 21st to Yellowstone, a 3hour flight. These were two of my best flights since I started my pilot training in 2012. I was prepared and in control of the airplane, its avionics, and my flight planning.

In Yellowstone, I camped directly at the airport at the pilot campground.

On September 22nd, my 45<sup>th</sup> birthday, I thought what could be better than waking up in a tent, on an airport and to go fly above Yellowstone National Park the day of my 45<sup>th</sup>!

As I was preparing the plane, I had the opportunity to talk with two local pilots and ask them about any local safety advice and recommendations for my flight over Yellowstone. In addition to the main landmarks to fly over, one of the two local pilots recommended that I fly West of Yellowstone to a local airport (U53) with a 4000 foot grass runway next to a lake saying that it was great to fly into this kind of flat grass field airport when flying locally in Yellowstone.

On Sept 22<sup>nd</sup>, I Took Off from KWYS airport around 9 am local time with my fiancée in the plane, flew for approximately 1h15min above Yellowstone National Park and then flew in the direction of U53, known as Henrys Lake airport. As I flew next to KWYS, I listen the AWOS: wind calm, occasional gust 20knots, viz more than 10, clear below 12000, altimeter: 30.22.

My first intention was to fly there and assess if it would be safe to land on the grass field airport. Approaching U53, I descended to Pattern Altitude and entered the left downwind of the field to land eastward as explained previously by the local pilot, who said that at this airport they had to land east and take off to the west.

On downwind, I was at 7600 feet, (1000 feet above the runway elevation) I observed the windsock (there is no weather reported at this airport), and I saw the windsock stable, not flapping with about 30 deg cross-field. I interpreted that the wind was from the south but not gusting. The runway was long and large, I did not feel any turbulence on downwind, neither on base over the lake, I was doing a

standard left traffic pattern, everything was normal, so I decided to continue and land. On final with the crosswind from the south, I applied right aileron and left rudder to keep the plane aligned with the runway (to the East). Because of the wind, on short final I decided to keep my speed at 72knots.

Everything was normal until a few feet above the runway, I was about to land on the right wheel when I saw my speed rapidly decreasing to about 60 - 58knots and felt a violent gust wind pushing me to the left as I touched down and started rolling. I immediately felt that the surface was really bumpy.

I applied the right rudder and turned the aileron more into the wind to bring the plane to the center but it was so strong and the surface so bumpy that I was still going to the left.

Everything arrived very fast in this moment and 3 options came into my mind:

1. Go around, but because of the bumpy surface and my position already left to the runway and I thought it was too late
2. To apply more right rudder to force the plane to go back to the runway but with the plane shaking on that bumpy runway and the strong gust wind pushing me violently I felt that pushing more right rudder would have flipped the plane upside-down
3. To control the plane going out of the runway through that fence and decrease the speed by braking and pulling the yoke.

I decided on option 3 in that fraction of a second.

Nobody was injured. My fiancée and I went out of the plane and assessed the situation. As the fence is made of barbed wire and iron poles, the airplane was damaged.

I immediately called the owner of the plane, Tom Reid to let him know the situation. After our initial conversation he had to make some intermediate calls and instructed me in the meantime to take pictures of the incident. I then immediately proceeded to take pictures of the plane and surrounding area.

Simultaneously I called West Yellowstone and spoke with Susan who gave us the contact of a local plane towing company. This company referred me to the number of a company based in Boise that could do plane towing and maintenance.

During this time, and only a few minutes after the incident, two police cars arrived on the field. One was Trooper Adam Anderson of Idaho State Police and the other was Deputy Sheriff, Koyle Parkinson of Fremont County Sheriff Office. Shortly following their arrival, the owner to the field next to the runway also arrived. I did not get his name.

After briefly speaking with the police I called back Tom Reid on Facetime to show him in more detail how the plane was damaged:

- Left flap
- Horizontal Stabilizer (left and right side)
- Propeller (by going through the fence, not by ground strike)
- Base of the right strut
- Many scratches on the paint from the barbed wire

Then, while still on Facetime with Tom along with the owner of the field next to the airport and the 2 police officers, we all decided to move and taxi the plane to a safe location with the permission of Tom. The owner of the field told Tom Reid that he owns airplanes, was a pilot (albeit not current) and he could do it but Tom told me to do it as I was the Pilot in Command. So, with the owner of the field in the passenger seat, I taxied the plane back to the runway and up the runway, parked the plane at the end of the runway, tied it down, secured the plane and covered it. The owner of the field then left and both Deputy Parkinson and Trooper Anderson remained with us.

I then took additional pictures of the secured plane and left the key of the plane in the oil door as agreed upon with Tom Reid. Deputy Parkinson had me talk with NTSB on his phone. I spoke with Ms. Tealeye Cornejo, Air Safety Investigator (Field) of the National Transportation Safety Board and I described what happened. Both me and my fiancé left with Deputy Parkinson who brought us back to Yellowstone airport.

This is the best description of the situation I can describe.

I would like to underline that since I started my pilot journey which started with my paragliding license in 2005, tandem paragliding license, then ultralight aircraft, Private Pilot License and IFR in 2012, Commercial Pilot License, SE and ME in 2016, I have always kept as a priority to prepare every flight and be on the safe side of my flying experience.

However, on September 22<sup>nd</sup> I believe the on the spot decision I made to fly to an unknown grass field airport, and combined with the strong wind gust I experienced on my touch down made me roll through the fence.

Among all decisions I made as PIC, landing on U53 was not my best decision and I deeply regret it today.

The plane is damaged, and I'm really confused and sorry to put so many people in trouble because of that decision.

I dreamed about being a pilot since I was 6 years old where I grew up in France. It took me until 2011 to be able to start my airplane pilot training in San Diego. I hope this event will not stop forever my flying passion, but I take full responsibility for my decision.

This will undoubtedly be a significant lesson for my future flights, When asking local pilots about local conditions, be certain to ask about any safety considerations.

I want to stress my concern how much I care about the plane, the plane's owners and the club. I am deeply sorry for the trouble and problem this event has brought to everyone.

With respect,

Gilles Bonkoski