



## FLIGHT



### ABOVE

Expert pilot Van Micheal Pray enjoys desert landscapes from the air

PHOTO BY D. A. DEMEO

### RIGHT

Tandem jumps allow beginners to safely experience free fall

PHOTO BY KEITH LAKE

Look up! There's plenty of activity in the skies over the California desert. Although much of the traffic comes from commercial, military, and space flight, recreational flights thrive on the desert winds and topography. Southern California has a long history with flight, and the desert has been the proving ground for many exciting developments. It's the place that launched several world records, including the 49,000' altitude achieved by sailplane pilot Bob Harris as he flew over Mt. Whitney in 1986.

Recreational flight in the desert typically includes the piloting of traditional planes, private jets, and sailplanes, stunt flying, skydiving, and flying experimental craft such as ultralights and sailplanes. Hot-air balloon touring and hand gliding are pursued as well, but are not as common. Several desert airports are found on public lands, hosting recreational flyers and providing hubs of activity for clubs and individuals. In addition, flight related events may be scheduled on BLM lands, with a permit. Although learning to fly and operating a single- or twin-

engine airplane can be quite costly, activities like soaring, skydiving, and piloting ultralights are far less expensive.

Flying for pleasure in the desert has as much to do with the amenities at the destination as it does with the accomplishments entered in the pilot's log. The Agua Caliente Airstrip, owned by San Diego County, is a favorite landing spot because it's an easy walk to Agua Caliente Hot Springs County Park, open from Labor Day to Memorial Day. The park has picnic tables, hiking, campsites, and two geothermally heated pools (hot springs). Acacias, willows, palms and mesquite define the lush landscaping.

California City Municipal Airport is the home to fixed-wing, skydiving and sailplane operations. For suggestions on other public airports in the desert, consult the resources section.

*Books and Online Resources for Flight can be found at [http://www.npca.org/desert\\_recreation/flight.pdf](http://www.npca.org/desert_recreation/flight.pdf) and on page 48 of this report.*





#### FAR LEFT

Tim Bennicoff is suited up and ready for his next jump

PHOTO BY D. A. DEMEO

#### LEFT

Cindy Brickner and her Carolee Soaring partners pause near their fleet

PHOTO BY D. A. DEMEO

[HTTP://WWW.NPCA.ORG / DESERT\\_RECREATION / FLIGHT.PDF](http://www.npca.org/desert_recreation/flight.pdf)

#### PERSONAL PROFILE

### Tim Bennicoff

ENGINEER

A skydiver since 1993, Tim Bennicoff is a true-blooded “jumpbones.” In his real life, he’s a methodical engineer for a military contractor. On the weekends, he heads to Skydive California City — a drop zone and social club serving adventurers for over 45 years. He joins his friends at a height of 12,500 feet above ground level (AGL) and “shows silk” at about 2,200 feet AGL. On the way down, he might do some “relative work” and create 4-way or 8-way formations with others on the jump.

Sure, the activity attracts high-energy people who like to have outdoor fun — for a beginner, it’s all about the thrill of the adrenaline rush. But, as you get hundreds of jumps under your belt, it’s also about the weightless serenity you achieve during free fall, and the opportunity to escape the pressures of everyday life.

Surprisingly, the cost of each freefall isn’t as expensive as you might imagine. Once you invest \$3,000-\$4,000 in a “rig,” the main and reserve ram air parachutes, and automatic opener, each jump costs about \$25. At the onset, a 40-minute class can prepare you for a tandem jump, or an eight-hour class can set you up for an accelerated freefall.

Responsible skydiving includes using the directional control of the parachute to keep close to the landing zone, and maintaining a deep sense of cooperation with your fellow jumpers. For the operator, it includes striving for fuel efficiency and flying over non-residential areas for the dozen or more ascents made each day.

#### PERSONAL PROFILE

### Cindy Brickner

FLIGHT INSTRUCTOR AND BUSINESSWOMAN

Cindy Brickner started her love of flying at 17 years old, working as a waitress in a local desert airport. In her 30 years of soaring, she’s been the director of a national sailplane organization, a flight instructor, and the owner of Caracole Soaring. She refers to this challenging activity as “an aerial form of hiking that is less stressful on the environment.” Getting airborne typically only requires 10–15 minutes of support from a tow plane or ground winch, but it’s followed by 2–7 hours of flight that produces no fuel emissions or intrusive sounds. A “boomer” lift from the thermal currents over a dry lake, the desert dirt devils, or the mountain wave currents can sustain lengthy flights of 600 miles as high as 30,000 feet.

People drawn to fly sailplanes are usually strongly motivated and driven by the desire for a more natural experience. They often dream of flight and hope to fly self-propelled, like a bird. A beginner can best get started by going through a club or school to earn a license. The cost and time involved in training are similar to motorized flight, but the pursuit of the hobby costs much less. Once in the air, the views are astounding. Glider pilots frequently marvel at the beauty of nature they encounter during all seasons of the year.

# FLIGHT BOOKS AND ONLINE RESOURCES

## SUGGESTED BOOKS:

*Pilot's Guide to California Airports*, R. Fouquet, Aviation Book Company, 1993

*JUMP!: Skydiving Made Fun and Easy*, Tom Buchanan, McGraw-Hill Professional, 2003

*Glider Flying Handbook: #FAA-H-8083-13*, Edited by Federal Aviation Administration, Aviation Supplies and Academics, Inc., 2004

*Cross-country Soaring*, Helmut Reichmann, Soaring Society of America, 1993

*Ultralight Airmanship: How to Master the Air in an Ultralight*, Jack Lambie, Motorbooks International, 1982

*Flying Ultralights: Instructional Briefings*, Doug Chipman, Aviation Supplies and Academics, 1995

## WEB SITES:

Directory of Flight Resources in southern California (<http://www.at-la.com/@la-fly.htm>)

Experimental Aircraft Association at Edwards Air Force Base (<http://www.eaa1000.av.org>)

Orange County Soaring Association (<http://www.ocsoaring.org>)

Soaring Society of America (<http://www.ssa.org>)

Southern California Douglas Soaring Association (<http://www.netmeister.net/~scdsa>)

29 Palms Soaring Club (<http://members.aol.com/mressell/TNPsoaring>)

United States Parachute Association (<http://www.uspa.org>)

U.S. Ultralight Association (<http://www.usua.org>)

## A PARTIAL LIST OF PUBLICLY OWNED DESERT AIRPORTS WITH RECREATION:

Airports in the San Bernardino County Airport System (Apple Valley, Baker, Barstow-Daggett, Chino, Needles, Twentynine Palms) (<http://www.co.san-bernardino.ca.us/Airports>)

Jacqueline Cochran Regional Airport, owned by Riverside County (<http://www.rivcoeda.org/html/Aviation/aviationdesert.html>)

Palm Springs International Airport, owned by the City of Palm Springs (<http://www.palmspringsairport.com>)

California City Municipal Airport (<http://www.californiacity-ca.us>)

Inyokern Airport (<http://www.inyokernairport.com>)

Palmdale Regional Airport, owned by the City of Los Angeles World Airports (<http://www.lawa.org/welcomeLAWA.html>)

Mojave Airport, part of the East Kern Airport District (<http://www.mojaveairport.com>)

Southern California Logistics Airport (<http://www.logisticsairport.com/index.php>)

