

# Bush planes open frontiers



## Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

Most of my childhood friends wanted to be a ball player or an astronaut when they grew up. For a while, I considered a career as a big-league ball player. With my eagle-like vision, no pitcher could ever get a baseball past my powerful swing, but my love of the outdoors took over.

What I really wanted to be was a professional hunter, or PH, in Africa. Pointing out dangerous game, distant and well camouflaged, to hunting clients with my superb eyesight, and saving the client from a charging elephant or buffalo, with amazing accuracy with my finely crafted double rifle.

Those dreams came to a crashing halt, somewhere in the fourth grade. The blackboard went completely fuzzy, as did everything else in the world. It was so difficult to see, that I started running into things when I walked. I assumed it was a communist plot, but my grandmother thought otherwise.

I was carried off to an eye doctor who diagnosed the problem as nearsightedness and fitted me with a pair of glasses. So much for my hunting career. Who wants a dangerous-game hunting guide who walks into trees



At the age of 10, I flew on one of these in Ontario, and for a while, wanted to be a bush pilot. (Tallgirl /Wikimedia Commons)

and has the nickname “four eyes?”

After that, I thought about being a bush pilot. These courageous people fly outdoor folks deep into the wilderness, landing on gravel bars in rivers, dropping them off, and coming back for them when their adventure was over. It sounded like a pretty good way to make a living and have some fun at the same time.

In days gone by, the true wilderness was only accessible on foot or horseback. The bush planes changed all of that, making the wildest backcountry accessible to anyone with a wallet fat enough to afford the charter.

When I was 10, my father took me on a trip to northwest Ontario for some fishing. The camp we stayed at was only accessible by air, being on an island in a large flowage called the Manitou.

The plane was a de Havilland Beaver float or pontoon plane that took off and landed on the water.

It was an hour and a half flight, never climbing above 2000 feet, and a remarkable experience.

The de Havilland DHC-2 Beaver was first built in 1947 and was considered the “best bush plane ever built” by many. This plane was instrumental in opening up wilderness frontiers to sporting people since its introduction. The company built around 1600 of them before ceasing production in 1967. Many of them are still in service today, carrying people deep into the wilderness.

The aircraft that really opened up our access to the wild country was the de Havilland Canada DHC-6 Twin Otter. DHC had a great reputation for building sturdy bush planes, like the DHC-2 Beaver, and decided to make a utility commuter plane that could operate nearly anywhere.

When the first Twin Otter was introduced in 1966, it could be ordered from the factory fitted with floats,

skis, or typical landing gear. From the onset, the Twin Otter was a hit in the remote regions of Alaska and Northern Canada. This aircraft opened up air service to many small communities that were not profitable for the larger airlines. Anyone with a few years under their belt and has hunted or fished in the far northern regions, has some experience with a Twin Otter.

DHC was sold to Boeing in 1986 and the new company stopped making the plane, despite promises made to the Canadian government to keep building the aircraft. This airplane was so perfect for travel in the wilderness that it was reborn by Viking Air, who digitally scanned old plane parts so they could be reproduced. The first Viking Twin Otter took to the skies in 2010 and many more have been built since then.

I still like the old flying in the old DHC Twin Otter and the DHC-2 Beavers, and

many are still in existence and transporting people to wilderness destinations on a daily basis. A used DHC Beaver will run you about \$1.2 million to purchase. To charter one costs around \$850 an hour.

The new Twin Otter will set you back 6 million if you want to purchase it or can be chartered for \$3,750.00 an hour. You can carry 19 people plus gear on that Otter, so the costs are really not that out of line.

Many hunting and fishing camps do not have suitable landing areas for fixed wing aircraft, and this is where the helicopter has really taken off. While hunting Caribou in Quebec, all the hunters were brought to camp on a helicopter. Later during our stay, some of us were flown to another area to hunt, as the migration was many miles away from camp.

I flew in a helicopter in Newfoundland on a moose hunt a few years ago. We drove to a pick-up place, and the four-seater chopper

carried us, our food and gear, an hour away into the Gireaux Wilderness area. Ten days later, the pilot returned and carried us, and all the gear, back to the drop zone.

Bush pilots are interesting people. They all have a strange sense of humor, and they are all very courageous, flying into desolate and dangerous areas, dropping off their passengers and flying back alone. Most of these pilots have made crash or emergency landings in their career, and some even live to talk about it.

If you ever have the opportunity to go to a wilderness area, and a bush plane is part of the deal, I strongly recommend you do it. The old saying “getting there is half the fun” really describes it. It is a fantastic part of the adventure. I remember flying out on a helicopter, so crowded we had antlers, hunting rifles and other gear, in our laps for the flight out.

I never became a professional hunter or a bush pilot but there is still time. All I need is permission from my wife, but like everything else, most of my good ideas die in sub committee.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press, Delta County Independent, and several other newspapers, as well as a feature writer for several saltwater fishing magazines. He is an avid hunter and world class saltwater angler, who travels around the world in search of adventure and serves as a director and public information officer for the Montrose County Sheriff’s Posse. For information about the posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email [info@mcspi.org](mailto:info@mcspi.org).

# Rohmans named BLM Colorado Volunteers of the Year

SPECIAL TO THE MDP

The Bureau of Land Management is pleased to announce Marian and Peter Rohman of Montezuma County as co-recipients of BLM Colorado’s Volunteer of the Year Award.

The award is presented annually to a volunteer in Colorado who has made significant contributions to the BLM’s mission.

The Rohmans are experienced botanists who, in retirement, have been leading a botanical inventory of the Canyons of the Ancients Monument since February 2018. Their goal is to produce a comprehensive list of all the plant species and varieties within the monument, supported by voucher specimens and photographs of each taxon.

Every year, the couple contributes upwards of 1,000 volunteer hours. In

the past year alone, the Rohmans conducted 42 field trips to various parts of the monument. During the 2022 field season, they collected 249 plant specimens and took over 2,350 photographs.

“BLM Colorado has been presenting the Volunteer of the Year Award since 2006,” said Southwest District Manager Stephanie Connolly in a press release. “This year we are thrilled to recognize two outstanding recipients, Marian and Peter Rohman, for their significant contributions to our botanical understanding of Canyons of the Ancients National Monument.”

The couple also focuses on visiting seeps and springs in the Monument to record riparian species. They create monthly slide shows of wildflowers in bloom that run on a continuous loop in the

visitor center, concentrating on highly visited areas of the monument such as Lower Sand Canyon and Sand Canyon and Lowry pueblos.

The slide shows are accompanied by a plant photo book, which has been a huge hit with visitors. The BLM plans to make the photo book available as a brochure.

In addition, the Rohmans document populations of Colorado state-tracked species within the Monument. They recently completed field work for three species that will be submitted to the Colorado Natural Heritage Program. The Rohmans identified 510 plant taxa within the Monument. Twenty-four new taxa were added following the 2021 field season, with additional taxa still to be added.

“Marian and Peter go above and beyond every



BLM Southwest District Manager Stephanie Connolly presents the BLM Colorado Volunteer of the Year Award to Peter and Marian Rohman, alongside Canyons of the Ancients park rangers Amala Posey-Monk and Anna Arsic. (Submitted Photo)

year, and we’re delighted to recognize them for their hard work and dedication,” said Supervisory Park Ranger Amala Posey-Monk.

“They are true stewards of this landscape, monitoring the McElmo Natural Area in the Rare Snake and Lizard Wilderness Study Area and other remote WSAs, often reaching areas of

the Monument most visitors never see. They are our eyes and ears and often report back their findings, which helps law enforcement and recreation.”

Every year thousands of volunteers offer their time, skills, and service to help care for BLM public lands and resources. Volunteers contribute countless hours to a variety

of BLM program areas, including recreation, wild horses and burros, and environmental education. The work of BLM volunteers is critical in helping protect valuable resources.

For more information on how you can get involved in volunteering for the BLM, please visit <https://www.blm.gov/get-involved/volunteers>.



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