



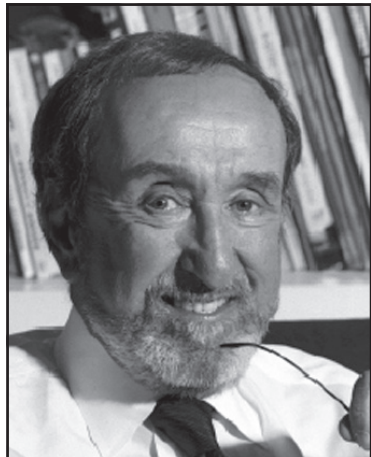
Executive of the Month

RHINO ON THE RUNWAY ADDS EXCITEMENT TO ADVENTURE

Goetz of Goetz Fitzpatrick LLP takes an aero-safari tour of South Africa

Peter Goetz

For years, I have been sporadically writing a column in this publication focused on construction and



real estate law. I am giving my normal assignment a rest to tell you about the most fabulous vacation trip I have ever taken and I have taken many.

Early last year, I booked a fly yourself tour around South Africa where each member or family are given a small single engine Cessna airplane to pilot themselves on a 2-1/2 week itinerary around the interior and coast of this magnificent country. Stopovers were arranged at game reserves, historic battle sites, interesting cities and towns. It sounded too good to be true, but it was.



As you can gather, this safari was organized for pilots and significant others. When I heard about this trip last year while attending a general aviation show in Philadelphia, I called my wife, Barbara, on the way home and told her that we would be signing up for the trip of a lifetime. When she heard that we were going to pilot our own plane around South Africa, she virtually

cried out in joy.

I am a pilot – for over 45 years – with over 4,000 hours flying time, and Barbara is a student pilot about to get her ticket. Since I started flying in the late 50s, my fantasy was to have been a bush pilot in some remote area such as Alaska or Africa and now it looked like my fantasy was soon to come true.

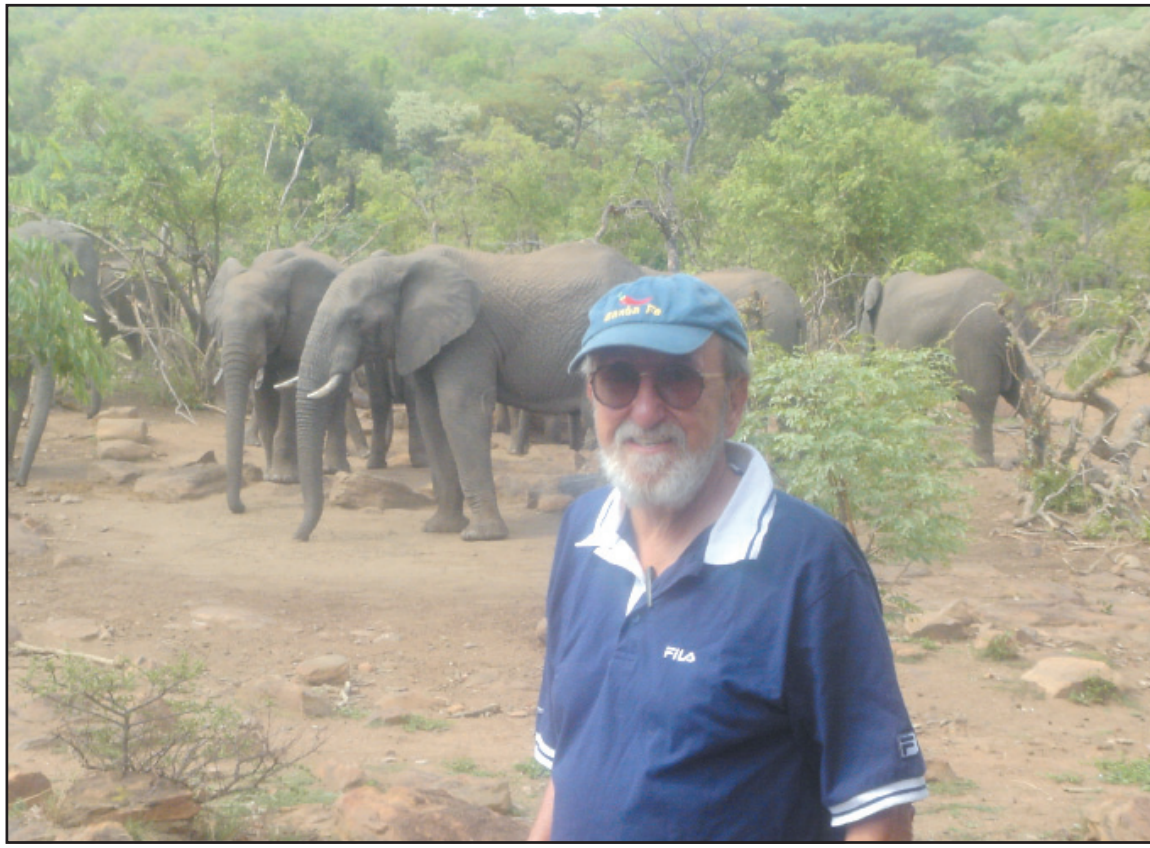
Last November, we flew to Johannesburg, commercially that is, to meet the other tour members and our leader who organized this fantastic tour, David Vanderspey. It turned out that David was the quintessential renaissance man who divided his time flying aero-safaris in Africa, sailing races from Capetown to Brazil and being a husband to a beautiful young wife and father to two lovely children.

The day after arrival, we drove to our airport of origin, Lanseria Airport in the outskirts of Jo-Burg to be flight tested by an official examiner so he could issue me a one year temporary South African Pilot's license. Barbara was certified as a student pilot who could fly the little Cessna 172 provided a licensed pilot was on board - me. It turned out that the only other member of the tour was a patent attorney from England and his wife, who was not a pilot.

After spending the day seeing the sites around Jo-Burg, Soweto included, we were off on our flying

adventure. The plan was to fly in a squadron of three planes with David in the lead to take care of the radio work, as the african accent of the flight controllers was barely understandable. I quickly learned that when I could not understand the controller, after two requests "to repeat", I just said "yes" and everyone seemed happy.

Our plan to fly in a squadron of



Peter Goetz at an elephant watering hole in South Africa game reserve.

three was good on paper but did not always work when we were aloft. One of the invariable group would fly off course to look at some interesting area such as a Zulu village or waterfall and we all would soon find ourselves out of sight of each other. David was very experienced in this situation. Since we were always in radio contact with each other he somehow got us all back together again even though sometimes it took us as long as an hour to regain visual contact and regroup. I was never really concerned, although Barbara would lament to me "What are you doing, we are lost in the middle of Africa." Since we all had a handheld G.P.S. we really were never lost, just disconnected.

David was a bush pilot so our flying altitude generally was between 200 to 500 ft. above the ground - wow! This was real fun. We visited historic Zulubattle fields with an historian, including the famous Rorke's Rift; remember the movie "Zulu" with Michael Caine. We visited game reserves and saw from our range rover all of the "big five" wild animals close up. We also visited a diamond mine, Capetown and Robbins Island where Nelson Mandela was incarcerated for eighteen years as a political prisoner. Although all of our stopover accommodations were five star quality, we also ended up staying at a farm in Pietermaritzburg

when we got weathered in and could not reach our scheduled destination. We stayed at a lovely farmhouse and we all had a family dinner with the farm owners who were friends of David and their teenage daughter.

With few exceptions, we never

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landed on paved runways. The usual airstrip consisted of low bush grass or dirt and was really not distinguishable from the air without the aid of a G.P.S. or David landing first. Twice, we were landing at airstrips adjacent to game reserves when halfway down the runway after touchdown, we were confronted by a large flock of wild ostriches strutting toward us at a fast pace. Both times, they veered off at the last minute to avoid a head on collision, but only after I was convinced that we were going to have ostrich salad for dinner.

One day, we were on final approach at an airstrip near Maquetti Game Lodge when I noticed a small gray mound on the center line of the

grass runway. As we continued our approach, the mound grew larger. Finally, about 1/4 mile on final, the gray mound turned out to be an enormous rhino happily grazing on the grass. I aborted my landing and buzzed him in hopes that I could scare him off but he stood his ground. I radioed to my co-squadron member to be cautious as we had a rhino on the runway. He laughed and thought I was joking. Our leader, David, who we desperately needed in this situation, was back at another airport 150 miles away trying to fix an engine starter problem. I made a number of low passes at the rhino to no avail. Finally, after about a half hour of discussing whether we could land long and touchdown past the rhino and whether the rhino would be annoyed sufficiently to charge us after the plane stopped, our problem was solved. The rhino peacefully lumbered off the runway and we landed safely while watching this huge beast graze on the sidelines.

Time does not allow me to tell you the many incredible experiences we had but, as I said earlier, it certainly was the trip of a lifetime.

My next article will be back to legal issues.

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