



The Cessna 206 'Sky Wagon' truly lives up to its name: with full tanks, there were 100 kg left before reaching MTOW.

LOGBOOK By Olivier RIPOCHE and Philippe CARRE, photos by the authors

Out of... South Africa

COMPLETE CHANGE OF SCENERY! Olivier and Philippe rented a plane in Pretoria, South Africa. First in February 2024, during the hot and humid southern summer (up to 95 °F), then in August, during the dry winter with temperatures ranging from 41 to 68 °F. This log is a synthesis of those two trips.

Operating on the idea that we need to break winter—and its French brand of masochism—into manageable parts, my friend Philippe and I decided to dive into a completely new aviation experience, guided by Bush Pilots Adventures, a training and aircraft rental organization.



based at Wonderbroom Airfield in Pretoria (an hour's taxi ride north of Johannesburg), offering air travel opportunities not only within South Africa but also to Mozambique, Botswana, Namibia, or Zimbabwe in a Cessna 182 and Cessna 206. Here's your key to an aviation paradise, especially for safe family or friend trips from lodge to lodge.

Getting your PPL validated in South Africa

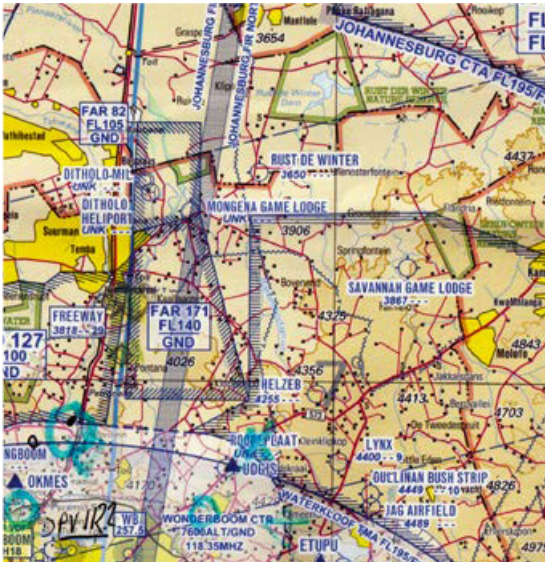
There are two local validation programs for your French PPL: 28 days or 5 years. Only the latter requires a theoretical multiple-choice exam that needs

necessary to prepare before leaving, using a booklet provided by the school and the revision site pilotexamssa.com. The test takes place the day after you arrive in Pretoria.



Challenge #1: you need to get familiar with South African regulations two weeks before you go, which are a bit different from ours. This will be a chance to review flashing green signals, how the compass behaves in the Southern Hemisphere, 'Special Rules Areas', 'General Flying Areas', and some tricky aspects of this different administration, like the timing of medical check-ups.

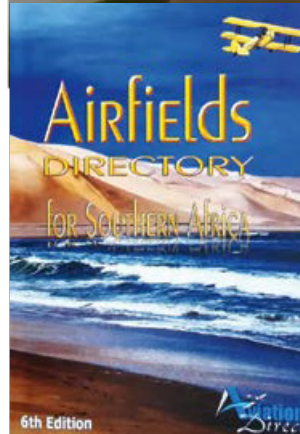
Challenge #2: your friendly navigation test is planned without GPS, of course. Remember to adjust the magnetic declination (18°W) the right way. The isogonic lines are on the maps where everything is marked... except what's really useful! We miss the IGN...



Challenge No. 3: understanding the radio. First, there's the unique local accent. Without using phonetics, you might pronounce a typical phrase: "Alpha Góólf, dīscēnt to trrrī taousand fīt." Listening online to the approach at JNB airport can be helpful to get an ear for it. Moreover, regional frequency operators seem to think it's normal to speak a meter away from the mic and ask for reporting points like Nboloko (easy), Kwaggafontein (a bit trickier), or even Bronkhorstspuit (say it in Afrikaans).

Training with Bush Pilot Adventures

We're off for a dynamic three-day tour to some unusual airfields, ranging from 2000 to 4500 ft altitude, with a density correction of 120 ft per degree difference



from standard (+25° in summer). Landings are brisk, and takeoffs are long! A few lines of information can be found in the Airfield Directory guide that lists all the airfields in Southern Africa. The evening's joy is parking the plane in front of the bungalow.

First release flight: a 'POGO*' through Soweto. To make the most of the vibrant Sling Aircraft most of it, our goal was

At best, a 1:500,000 scale map without report points like NE or W1 or indicated frequencies. Jean Yanne never took the county roads. We do! (Staying on course recommended.)

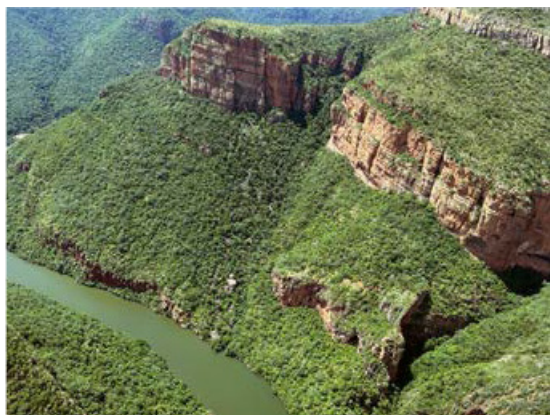
to visit the manufacturer, located at Tedderfield airfield, in the southern suburbs of Johannesburg. We had watched "Pilot Bambi" videos and followed the adventures of the two founders around the world in a Sling 2, a two-seater LSA with a Rotax 912, then the return from Holland to South Africa in the Sling 4, a four-seater kit plane with a Rotax 914 iS. The minimum overflight height for all urban areas is easy to remember: 1,000 feet! We fly over downtown with its skyscrapers, the upscale suburb of Sandton, and the contrast of Soweto, to meet the friendly team taking us on a demo flight. But near the Tropic of Capricorn, night falls quickly, so we must head back to Wonderboom, this time skirting the metropolis from the east where TCU and summer CB clouds have gathered.

In this 3-hour session, each little detail marks a unique landing experience!

This Sling 4 has circled the globe, and its Atlantic crossing to Oshkosh earned it about thirty kit orders in the USA.

*The term "POGO" is like saying "hop, skip, and jump," used for short flights like Toussus – Le Bourget.





Blyde River Canyon marks the edge of the northern plateaus, leading to the Kruger plains.



Figure out how to land! You're on your own...

Here's to the great outdoors!

Our wives having graciously joined us for an eight-day excursion, we asked our coordinators: Andrew, Ryno, and Charl, to craft an initial route covering four lodges, checking the condition of their bush runways. And so, we set off with our GPS tablets, essential because the dashboard navigation instruments are mostly for show. At the coordinates given, some runways are 8 meters wide and paved, others grassy with oversized trees, or laterite paths scattered with brushes and stones.

Basic Precautions:

- At the back of our trusty 'Sky Wagon,' a few packs of water for the desert and an emergency kit: mechanical tools, a multimeter, a spare inner tube, etc., which you might need to use in the scorching heat if necessary.
- Every bush landing should be preceded by a low pass to inspect the runway and scare off wildlife, followed by a quick turn to land without delay. We worried about a herd of zebras returning at the wrong moment or an upset elephant charging us while taxiing...
- When parked, surround the wheels with dry thorn bushes, as hyenas enjoy chewing on tires. No tables in the bush!

The flight manual for the C206, dating back to the sixties, won't provide you with precise takeoff distances or tested obstacle-avoidance paths.



Nighttime protection against hyenas.



You'll have to make your decisions by balancing factors like slope, wind, density altitude, ground type, tall trees, and surrounding terrain, to earn the trust of the rental companies. This sense of responsibility is familiar in countries less 'civilized' than ours.

A tough and involving decision

Arriving in a Land Cruiser at the Entabeni site, we faced the following dilemma:

- A wind between 5 and 10 knots comes down from the hills, meeting the uphill and bumpy runway. There's a hint of a takeoff gap, but we can't see what's beyond it.
- Heading downhill with a tailwind, the runway ends where the branches of magnificent mango trees reach out. What should we do?
- Our first option is to position ourselves at the top of the runway to take off downhill.

Herbivores prefer the clear views of a landing strip, as it helps them react faster to predators. So it's essential to fly low to clear the area.

based on the real-time wind info sent (via WhatsApp!) by our driver waiting below. But, in the end, we decide to take off uphill, with tasks divided: one of us focuses on flying, while the other keeps a close eye on the takeoff path, processing the accelerations felt before and after the mid-runway bump, to confirm with a "We're continuing!" worthy of an engine failure post-V1 on a multijet.

The rewards

Between lodges designed for dozens of tourists and those more intimate, built in traditional style or as super-tents, the hospitality and comfort are unforgettable. We especially loved:

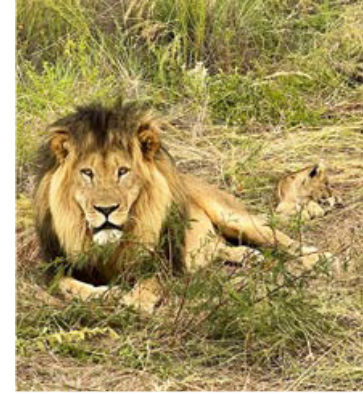
- Leshiba, a kind of lost valley where you'd expect to see dinosaurs, which are actually white rhinos with their horns intact. Note that we're asked not to post photos on social media, as the metadata includes the animal's geographical coordinates, which poachers find very interesting!
- Klaserie-Nzuba, the pinnacle of personalized service.
- And also "Pafuri tented camp" for its tents 100 meters from the Luvuvhu river, almost on the Zimbabwe border.

Typically, two "safari" outings are scheduled per day: morning at 5:30 AM and from 4 PM to night. These are interspersed with delicious breakfasts and meals, served with genuine care. Everything was there! Whether in a 10-person Land Cruiser (we were alone) or on a walking safari, all the bush animals showed themselves with their respective safety distances.

On the way to the beaches of Mozambique

From Nelspruit (South Kruger), our small group took off early for Vilankulo to reach the Indian Ocean beaches. A 3-hour and 15-minute low-altitude flight, given the weather conditions, with poor visibility and formation flying (a single flight plan to cross

Great observation spot at Leshiba. But make sure to close the windows at night!



Even when just a few meters away, the big cats see our Land Cruiser as a single unappetizing entity, as long as we stay still and quiet.

the border with two planes), leading to the warm turquoise waters of the Indian Ocean, with Bazaruto Island emerging 10 nautical miles from the coast, beyond the coral reef and its whales.

Back to the Zimbabwe border

Fish and seafood are, of course, on the menu for affordable meals during a few days of rest on endless beaches. We soon missed the big animals and headed back four days later for a smooth 3-hour and 30-minute flight; landing in Polokwane to

go through immigration again and refuel. After an hour of flight headed northeast, we touch down on an 800-meter dirt strip at Matiba as night falls, after performing an 'inspection pass' at less than 100 feet above ground, propeller spinning, headlights on to scare off the animals, which are consistently present on every runway we've used during our trip!

There's another hour of travel in an open-top Land Cruiser—blankets are a must because the nights are chilly—then we arrive at our camp in the middle of nowhere, just like 'Crocodile Dundee.' Nile crocodiles and hippos are just 100 meters away: it's magical!

In conclusion

Looking for a break? Can you find time for this adventure, even before you leave? If you've got some savings to dip into, go for it! Traveling with two trained pilots is more reassuring, whether for the lively 'school' week or for exploring with friends by renting Cessnas to fly to the ends of your dreams.

