

# Island hopping in the Bahamas



**Five days on a Lake Renegade in a wonderful archipelago**

The Bahamas, an exotic destination made up of over 700 islands scattered in the Atlantic Ocean. Nearly every one completely uninhabited, but others representing some of the world's most exclusive and expensive resorts. They are all magnificent.

Our trip is the result of a long series of events, propitiated by the purchase of a Lake amphibian by the Aero Club

Como. Having prepared the newly purchased amphibian for flying, the Club enters the Lake Amphibian Flyers Club (LAFC), the international association of Lake owners and pilots. First thing accomplished : a presentation of the Club and the usage of Lakes in Italy in the rich association's forum.

From that moment on, things go very quickly : several members of the LAFC discover that in a faraway continent, unknown people live playing with the same toy and who decide to come and visit us. During the first

months after the publication of our presentation in the forum, some 15 Northamericans come to have a look at how this small European flying community is handling Lakes.

Among them is Tom Frist, flying around Europe in his Citation Encore with some friends in September 2003. He stays for a couple of days at the Grand Hotel Villa Serbelloni at Bellagio and immediately finds a familiar atmosphere of Lake lovers at the Aero Club Como. Tom can see the best of our region in our I-AQUA, from the left front seat (he flies as Pilot in Command, possessing an Italian convalidation of his US licence).



Tom Frist flying his Lake Renegade N197TF in the Bahamas.



The Lake and her crew on the shore of an uninhabited island.



Baj and Schettino at a small airport in the Bahamas. Left, a panel exposed at Walker's Cay airport.

At the end of his stay, he launches his proposal : "As you are coming next year to the annual meeting of Lake pilots in Florida, why don't you bring your trip forward a few days so that we can fly together to the Bahamas in my Lake?"

Of course we accepted with pleasure and here we are at the beginning of February 2004, heading to Nashville, Tennessee, where Tom lives.

Still suffering from jet-lag after our arrival in Nashville, we try his Lake in

cold weather (it is even snowing slightly). The same day we move to tropical Florida in his comfortable Citation.

At Winter Haven we immediately meet our old friend Paul Furnée and find the Lake we will be using for the rest of the trip, the turbocharged Renegade N197TF, where the last 2 letters reveal the owner of the aircraft. Walker's Cay is our airport of entry.





Above, being overtaken by a Grumman Goose. Below, typical Bahamian landscapes from the windows of the Lake Renegade N197TF.

Tom is a connoisseur of the region and everything becomes easy when he takes control. It would take too long to list all the adventures we lived during the five days in the Bahamas, or to describe the beauty of these island.

From a pilot's point of view, it is impressive to see the number of airstrips. Even tiny islands have a concrete or earth strip where a light aircraft can operate. You can use them with no formalities, in most cases making blind communications on the UNICOM frequency 122.8. Close to most airstrips are small restaurants and resorts and often the seashore is at walking distance.

This area is a true paradise for sea-plane pilots. It is full of beautiful plac-



es to (water) land, often on wild islands, where you feel like Robinson Crusoe or where you can swim in the warm waters of the Caribbean.

"Island hopping", a common way of visiting these islands, certainly be-

comes more complete if you can hop not only from one airstrip to another or from one airport to another, but from one bay to another bay or beach or port.

Open ocean waters are normally unsuitable for operations with a light

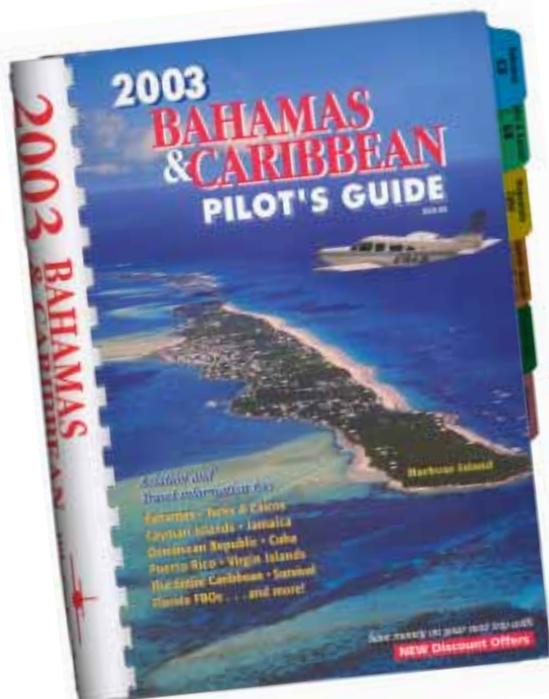




Airports in the Bahamas. Above, Norman's Cay. Above right, an airstrip without assistance or infrastructures. Below right, a crosswind approach. Operating on unknown waters is easier than at airports with obstacles in a strong crosswind.



Above left, a monument commemorates the landing of Columbus at Cape Santa Maria, Long Island. Above right, the wreck of a DC 3 in a bay of Norman's Cay, seen from our Lake taxiing nearby. Right, the Lake is parked in shallow waters while Baj walks to the shore, at Elbow Cay. Below right, beautiful colors of the Bahamian sea. Below left, a precious guide, giving all information needed for flying in the Caribbean.



seaplane, but there are plenty of sheltered areas where you can safely take-off and land. It can be stated that around any island there is always a place suitable for operations with a light seaplane.

Thanks to Tom's open character and amiability we had the chance to meet a lot of interesting people.

At Staniel Cay we spent the evening in a fascinating bar. The walls were covered with pictures of Sean Connery in the same bar, during the shooting of the James Bond movie, "Thunderball".

It's better to stop writing now and let the pictures tell the story, describing this very interesting region better than a thousand words.

Cesare Baj  
Enzo Schettino