

## ‘It took a while’

Adventure launched at Zelenople Municipal Airport

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Ross Edmondson poses at the Zelenople Municipal Airport on Saturday with the modified Cessna 182 he flew around the world. Butler Eagle/Steve Ferris

FRANKLIN, Beaver County — When Ross Edmondson turned his Cessna 182 into the wind at the Zelenople Municipal Airport and took off down the runway on May 6, 2019, he expected to be back in a year.

He persevered a four-year delay caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and completed his mostly solo around the world flight Friday, June 30.

A native of the United Kingdom, Edmondson, 39, was the guest at a Saturday cookout in a hangar hosted by the Condor Aero Club, which he joined when he lived in Wexford and called the local airport his base.

“It took a while,” Edmondson said. “It started as a one-year trip then COVID happened.”

He touched down in New Zealand in his initial attempt and was stuck there because of the pandemic. He said he spent most of 2020 flying around New Zealand and Australia and making friends in the aviation community.

Eventually, he left his plane there and came home to wait out the pandemic. During that time, he found a new job in Texas working as an engineer in the biofuel industry and spent time working in Iraq.

Leaving the plane that he modified for the journey and not completing it was frustrating, but he said it allowed him to spend more time in those countries than he would have if his trip had not been interrupted.

Not wanting to let the plane sit idle for too long, Edmondson said he flew to Australia once during the delay to fly the plane to keep it in running order.

“It’s like a car. If you let sit for too long, gremlins start to set in,” Edmondson said.

He returned to Australia in May and resumed his flight June 2 from Brisbane. He crossed the Pacific Ocean, the United States and completed the trek Friday.

“I wanted to finish here so it was an around-the-world trip. As you can see they throw a nice welcome,” Edmondson said.

He said friends and family members joined him for some of the legs in the journey, but he flew solo for many parts of the trip, including the Pacific crossing.

The 2,500-mile flight over the ocean between Hawaii and California, the longest leg of the journey, created the need for the modifications he made to his plane.

Edmondson said he installed high frequency radio with long range capability to replace the original radio that had only a 100-mile range.

The fuel capacity he added tripled the amount of fuel the plane can carry to 260 gallons. That amount of fuel can sustain a 20 hours in the air, and nearly all of it was needed for Hawaii-to-California leg that took 17 hours, he said.

Installing larger cylinders in the plane’s six-cylinder engine increased the displacement from 470 cubic inches to 520 cubic inches and boosted the output to 270 horsepower, he said.

The 700-hour, around-the-world flight spanned a total of 83,000 miles and took him to 570 airports in 35 countries.

The plane, a 1981 model he purchased in 2018, is the second he has owned since he started flying in 2005. Edmondson said it is a versatile aircraft that can land on 1,000 feet of grass, dirt, gravel and frozen lake surface.

He said he has landed on frozen lakes and other makeshift runways during his many adventure flights that he documented on his website <https://katamarino.co.uk>.

In addition, his plane is adorned with a decal promoting the African Promise, a charity in Kenya that was started by a high school friend to create a self-sustaining primary education program, he said. His website includes a link to the charity.

Edmondson planned to climb back into the cockpit Sunday, July 2, and fly “back to real life” to his new home in Texas. He said he is planning his next adventure flight to Antarctica.