



Bob Thomas/The Arizona Republic

Ray Arnold, who delivers mail in a wilderness region of central Idaho, says, "Flying is the only way into these mountains."

## Neither snow nor rain...

### Mail courier wings his way in wilderness

By Bob Thomas  
The Arizona Republic



Loading and unloading of mail, supplies and passengers (above) is a ritual at each stop. Getting in and out can be tricky, however. Snowed-in airstrips (below) are the norm.



CASCADE, Idaho — Ray Arnold worked throttle, flaps and rudder with quick, practiced synchronization while the stall warning of his light plane squawked like a wounded buzzard.

On both sides of the descending, six-place Cessna, the tree-covered sides of a narrow canyon in the River of No Return Wilderness Area rushed by in a dizzying blur.

The stall squawk was continuous now, and Arnold punched the throttle and pulled the nose up, a maneuver that momentarily blocked his vision of the up-rushing ground.

The plane hit the rutted, ice-covered surface of the dirt landing strip with a hard thump, and Arnold, his whiskered face intent and purposeful, gave the engine a jolt of gas so that the prop could blow back more icy air over flaps and rudder to help him steer the bouncing aircraft.

He gripped the wheel hard, fighting to keep the plane from skidding off the "runway" while both feet played a tattoo on the rudder pedals.

There was a distinct hump in the middle of the runway, and the end of the strip ran uphill, helping Arnold slow the craft on the icy ground. As it was, the Cessna still used every foot of the runway before finally making a half-turn stop in thick, crusted snow.

"OK, folks. We're here," said Arnold in a calm, businesslike tone. "Let's get out and unload your stuff. It's getting late, and we've still got one more stop to make."