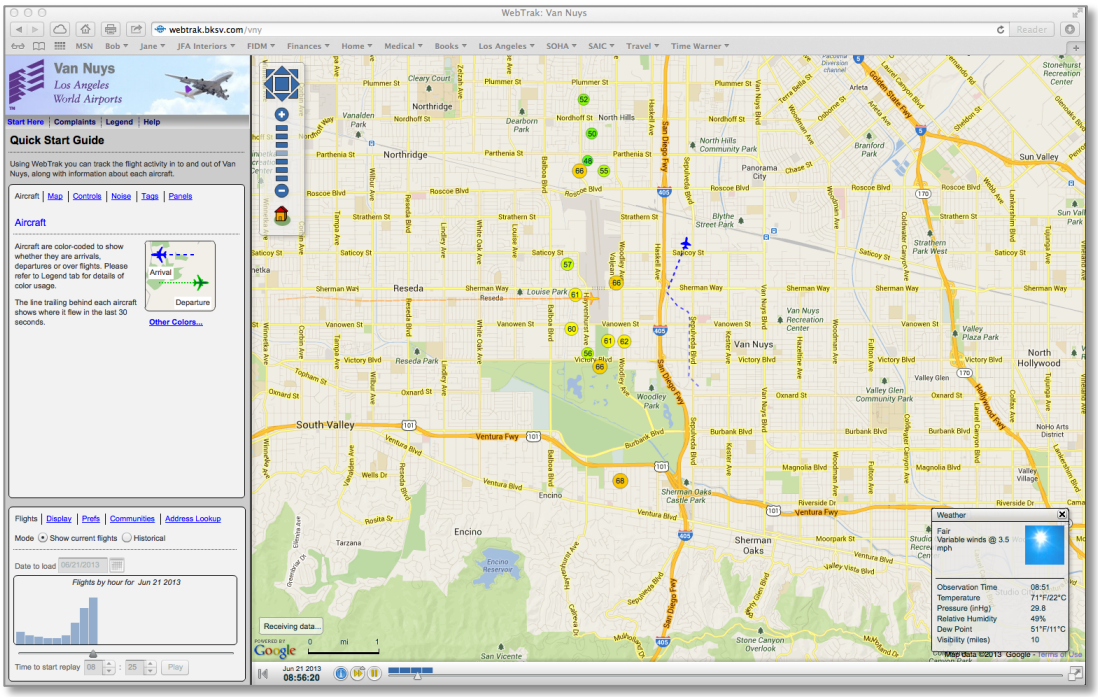
Using WebTrak To Identify Helicopters and Planes in Los Angeles County

You can use Los Angeles' aircraft tracking system to identify noisy helicopters and airplanes almost anywhere in the county. The system is called WebTrak Community Web Replay. It captures radar tracking and can be played back like a video recorder. It also uniquely identifies aircraft that have more advanced transponders (the device that pings aircraft information back to the radar system).

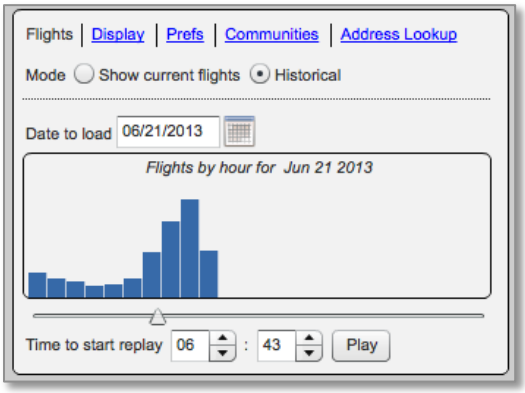
Individual WebTrak systems operate at four airports around the Los Angeles area: (1) Los Angeles International Airport (webtrak.bksv.com/lax); (2) Van Nuys Airport (webtrak.bksv.com/vny); (3) Long Beach Airport (webtrak.bksv.com/lgb); and (4) Ontario International Airport (webtrak.bksv.com/ont). A screen shot of WebTrak: Van Nuys is shown below for an area near the I-101/I-405 interchange.



WebTrak records most aircraft radar tracks and stores them in an historical database so you can go back in time and review past aircraft events. Radar may not detect an aircraft if it is flying too low, is near a mountain, is flying in a canyon, or has turned off its radar transponder (they are not supposed to do this). So, once in a while, you may not be able to find an aircraft on WebTrak. WebTrak has a built-in 20 minute delay in its recording of flight tracks, and it takes about two hours before aircraft identification information is available. So, it's best to wait a couple of hours before trying to find and identify an aircraft using WebTrak.

How To Find and Identify an Aircraft

1. Log onto one of the four WebTrak systems appropriate to the area that you are interested in. No username or password is required for logon. Use your cursor (mouse) to move around on the WebTrak map into the specific portion of the area that you are interested in. You can increase or decrease the size of the map using the plus and minus buttons at the top-left of the map.
2. You will need to know the date and time when the helicopter or airplane event occurred. The controls shown to the right appears in the lower-left corner of the WebTrak screen. Click on the "Historical" button, select the date and time of the event, and click the "Play" button. WebTrak will display the recorded aircraft flight tracks beginning at that date and time.



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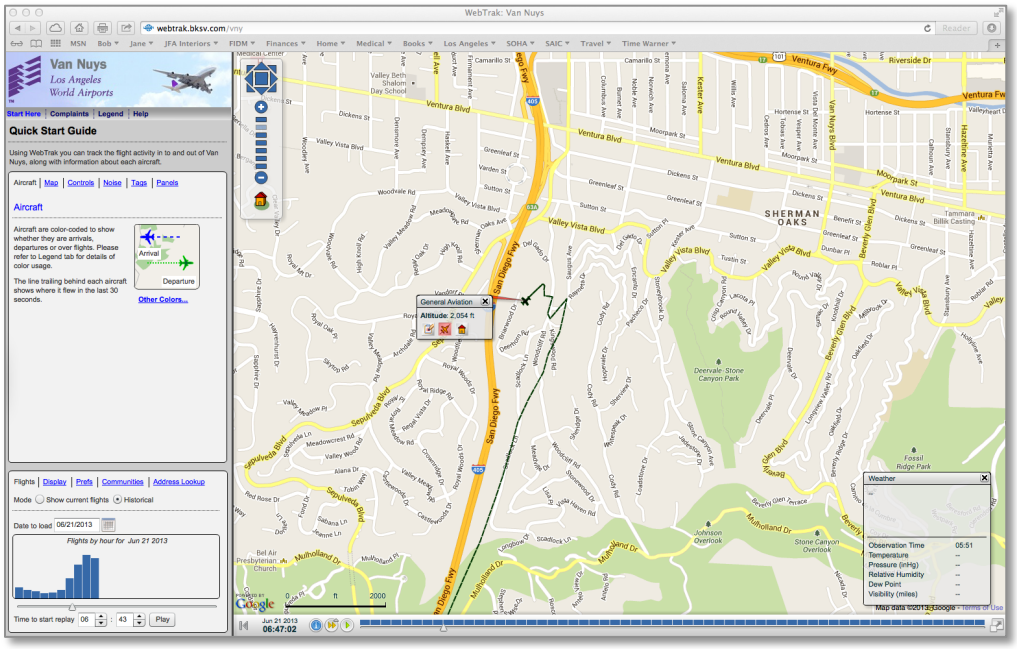
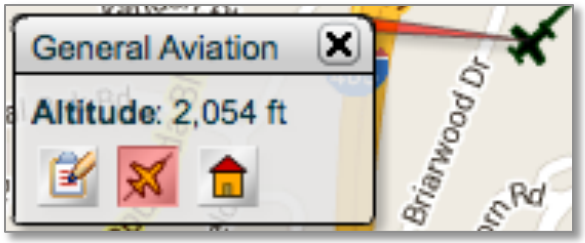
3. You can simply watch the screen as WebTrak plays back the aircraft tracks as shown in the figure below. You can also move the little triangle at the bottom of the screen toward the right to fast forward through the recording. You can pause the recording using the "Pause" button ( ) at the bottom of the screen, and start playing again using the "Play" button ( ).



4. The figure above is an historical WebTrak record of a helicopter hovering in Sherman Oaks on June 21, 2013 at 6:47 am near Woodcliff Road, just south of Valley Vista Boulevard. The dashed line shows the helicopter track. Although WebTrak shows an airplane symbol (fixed wing aircraft), this is a helicopter because an airplane could not move in the manner shown. Double clicking on the symbol brings up the information box shown to the right. The helicopter altitude is 2,054 feet above mean sea level. Ground level in this area ranges from 815 to 960 feet above mean sea level. So, the helicopter is actually hovering about 1,100 to 1,250 feet above ground level. To find the elevation of your own location, enter your address and ZIP code on veloroutes.org/elevation. This helicopter has an older style transponder (called Mode C) that only provides location and altitude. Many helicopters in Los Angeles have this type of transponder. Some helicopters have a more advanced transponder (Mode S) that also provides either the FAA N-number or Flight ID. Enter the N-Number at http://registry.faa.gov/aircraftinquiry/NNum_Inquiry.aspx to identify the owner; enter the Flight ID at http://www.faa.gov/air_traffic/publications/atpubs/CNT/3-3.htm to identify the airline.



5. Clicking on the left-most symbol ( ) allows you to file a noise complaint. When filing a complaint, you must provide information on how you can be reached, so that the noise officer at that airport can follow up on the complaint and provide you with further information based on their investigation. If you file complaints regularly, you may want to set up a username and password; then, you can more easily log in and post complaints without having to re-enter your information. However, please understand that these noise complaints are not coordinated across WebTrak systems, collected at the city or county level, sent to elected officials, or mapped to identify noise hot spots.

LAAHNC is working to establish an easy-to-use countywide helicopter noise complaint system that would identify noise hotspots. For further information about LAAHNC or reducing helicopter noise in Los Angeles, visit our website at LAHelicopterNoise.org or contact us at info@lahelicopternoise.org.