

"MAY MEET" MAGIC at KAMLOOPS, B.C.

Imagine... a Drop Zone in a beautiful semi-desert river valley, surrounded by rugged hills, at the edge of town in the interior of British Columbia, a few hours from Vancouver, a few more from Alberta. That is where we are: Kamloops Skydiver's SPC, a proud tradition since the 1950's, and home of the "May Meet".

Every year, on the Canadian Victoria day long weekend, skydivers from around western North America, and often other places around the globe gather over four days to kick off their seasons with a concentrated burst of activity, both sporting, and social. This year's Otter Boogie will be the 40<sup>th</sup> consecutive event.

I moved from the Ottawa area to Kamloops in 1980 because I knew there is a big ski hill here. With 1200 jumps and a decade of competitive skydiving under my belt, I assumed my career would have to slow down, plummeting-wise, what with having to commute to "The Lower Mainland" to jump at Chilliwack and Abbotsford. Instead, I was astonished to learn that Kamloops had a very active DZ nestled in the boonies just a half hour by bicycle up the first turn north of town! A Cessna 206 was hauling six-ways off a dirt strip all day long on weekends with first jump courses going steady and 30 or so regular athletes just "givin'er".

Led by such heroes as Dwayne Piper, Hans Sturm, Paul Hindle, Gordon Warner, and Trish Sullivan (to name only a few), this mob had all the bases covered: fun, competition, training, demos, night, water, lots and lots of social activity. For example, the first "end of year party" I witnessed was a live-band hootenanny in a ballroom, attended by about 300 people. Not bad for a city of maybe 60,000 in the day.

Like clockwork, each year came the "May Meet". Every jump plane within flying distance (there were nine one year) would close their home DZ and head for Kamloops. As the historical focus was on competition, judges from the Provincial Associations would come, and truly a lot of skydivers, families, friends, dogs, cousins, etc. From a weather point of view it makes sense, especially out of Alberta. Kamloops, after all is in a banana belt. Snow disappears by February, and May weather is often fine. Thus Kamloops is the logical central location for the first boogie of the year. More western events follow, of course, on the July, August and September long weekends at Edmonton, Abbotsford, and Pitt Meadows. Our thanks go out to the Farrington family from nearby Washington, and their friend, Mr. DeHavilland.

Evolution shifted the Kamloops DZ to the local Municipal Airport in 1990. Records indicate that this location had been used in the 50's as well, before there was any built-up area. Since the move in '90, skydiving has become a fixture over the west end of our north shore subdivision, with locals barbecuing, swimming in their backyards to the tune of a Cessna 182, freefall noise and crackling canopies. Neighbourhood feedback is generally positive, allowing the Club to grow and develop into an active training facility with licenses, instructor and rigger ratings being turned out. The "May Meet", which has morphed into a full-fledged Boogie, is supported by the community as a regular event at Kamloops, B.C, also known as "The Tournament Capital of Canada".

Our region boasts more than just a DZ. Forest, lakes, rivers, mountains, desert flora, abundant fauna abound. The rise just north of the airport (which happens to be just 2200' high) is a good example of unique diversion. It is an old volcano with fascinating geology (mud flows hoodoos, etc.), herds of big-horn sheep, and beautiful yellow-flowering cactus. Canoeing, camping, swimming, hiking, trout fishing are all within easy reach. Kamloops itself has nine golf courses and six more within an hour. So 'cmon out for a visit, anytime!

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