

Swooping is Not a Crime

By Brian Germain

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A large sector of the skydiving population is currently in danger of extinction. This is because of the widespread proliferation of new DZ rules that prohibit 270 turns for landing or ban high speed approaches entirely. Consequently, many jumpers now find themselves homeless and considering alternate sports - not a good thing for skydiving.

These new restrictions come in the name of safety. We have lost many friends this year due to canopy collisions, and the management at several

dropzones has responded by adding new rules in

an effort to prevent such accidents from happening in the future. There are several aspects within this direction of policy that concern me.

Remember 9-11? We felt unsafe after the tragedy, and so we willingly gave up many of our rights as free citizens. Now they are taking nail-clippers away from little old ladies. It is getting ridiculous, as is the policy banning advanced approaches. It is a knee-jerk reaction to fear, and I think we all know where that slippery slope leads.

"My rights end where your rights begin."

This is the fundamental idea that forms civilization. In other words, if I fly my parachute into you in the pattern, I am in the wrong. I think everyone agrees with this and it therefore can and should be asserted that if my behavior does not



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have an effect on anyone else, I should be allowed to continue to do what I am doing, provided I am doing it in a safe manner.

We all need to challenge ourselves. This is what keeps us showing up at the dropzone every weekend. Thousands of people enjoy the challenge of high-speed approaches and define the swoop landing as an essential part of their experience. They wait all week to get a few jumps in over the weekend, and now many of them are unable to get what they came for. To take that away is to cut many people off from the very reason why they skydive in the first place. Is that really where we want to go with this?

We cannot afford to alienate anyone. There are precious few experienced skydivers in the world and I would argue that we are the reason for the dropzone in the first place. I understand that there are a few DZOs that are doing very well running purely tandem operations, but this is the exception, rather than the rule. Most dropzones are a business of passion, rather than a pragmatic financial pursuit. If we wanted to make a million dollars, we would have done something else with our time. We do this because we love it.

The atmosphere created by having fun jumpers around is essential to the success of a dropzone, even if the profit is significantly less. Sport jumpers give the tandem students a reason to come back and learn how to skydive. They come back for the jumping, true, but they also come back for the connection to other people. They want to be part of a community, as do we all. We must therefore allow all aspects of the sport to continue to proliferate so that our numbers may grow. It is that simple.

We can create sustainable solutions.

It is possible. We simply need to think things through and adapt to the changing needs of a growing sport. I remember the debate on my dropzone as to whether or not we wanted to let the students jump ram air canopies. Many were concerned that the "squares" were too much responsibility and that students could not be trusted. Are we saying the same thing about ourselves now?

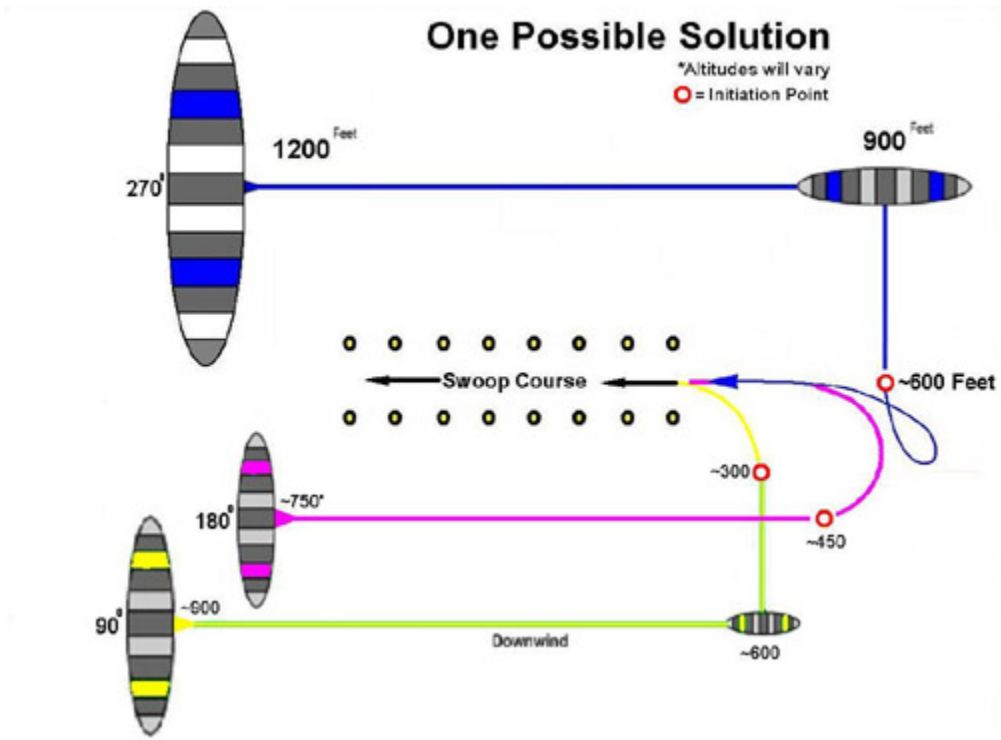
We need to trust each other. True, we need to create a structured environment in which we can create a degree of predictability in the air over our DZs. Otherwise none of us would be able to manage all the variables in our heads. But as soon as we start back peddling away from danger, we are becoming more similar to the groundlings we pass on the road on the way to the dropzone.

We must have specific runways where the high-speed pilots can land safely, out of the way of everyone else. We must communicate our intentions in the loading area. We must create sustainable vertical separation before reaching pattern altitude. Most importantly, we must increase our level of awareness under canopy so that no matter what the circumstances, we can fly in traffic without risk of running into each other. We do this by remaining calm and keeping our eyes open.

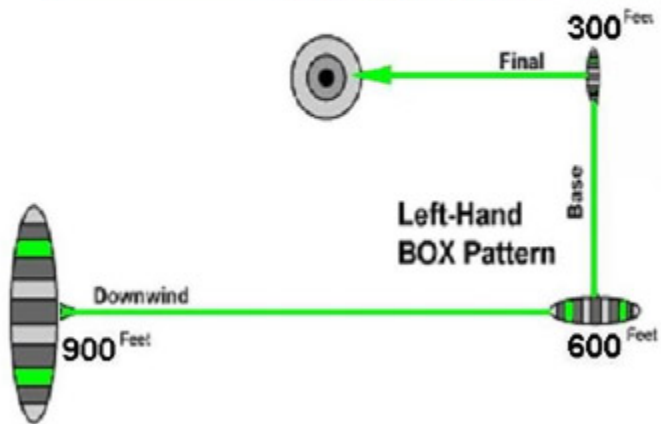
We need to stop pointing fingers and making over-protective rules, and simply do what we need to do in order to be safe and still have fun. Let's work together and unite as a whole to make the dropzone a welcoming place for everyone.

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**The following diagrams map out two possible flight pattern designs that present minimal conflicts between swoopers and non-swoopers. They are not the only solutions, but they do work. (see following pages)*

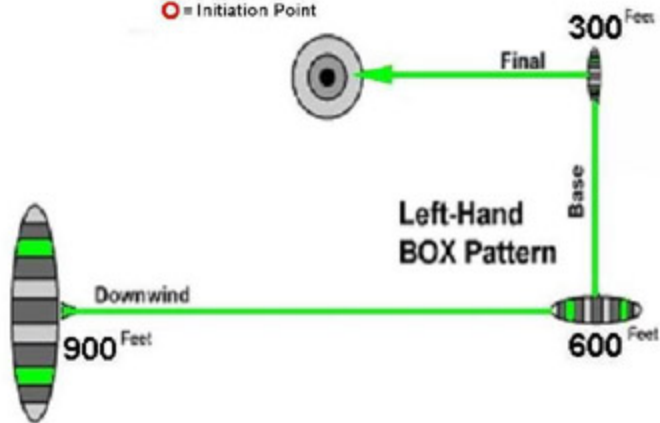


The Great Wall



Another Possible Solution

*Altitudes will vary
○ = Initiation Point



The Great Wall

