

AOPA Fly-Out Excursion – *The Secret City Unlocked* – Los Alamos NM, Sept 14, 2018

Pilot Briefing

We are excited to have you visit our great airport and the Secret City! In preparation for your arrival, the Airport Manager and local CFIs have put together this Pilot Briefing to help familiarize you with the airport.

Los Alamos Airport (KLAM) is affectionately known by locals as the “USS Los Alamos” due to location on top of a mesa with canyons on three sides – hence the reference to an aircraft carrier. Flying into Los Alamos provides stunning views of the Rio Grande river valley, colorful mesas, beautiful mountains and the remnants of long-ago volcanic activity. While flying into KLAM can be a very rewarding experience, it is an unusual airport with some important safety considerations.

Density Altitude: The airport elevation is 7,171’ MSL and the density altitude on a hot day can easily reach 11,000’ MSL. We recommend referring to your aircraft’s POH performance data prior to operating at KLAM.

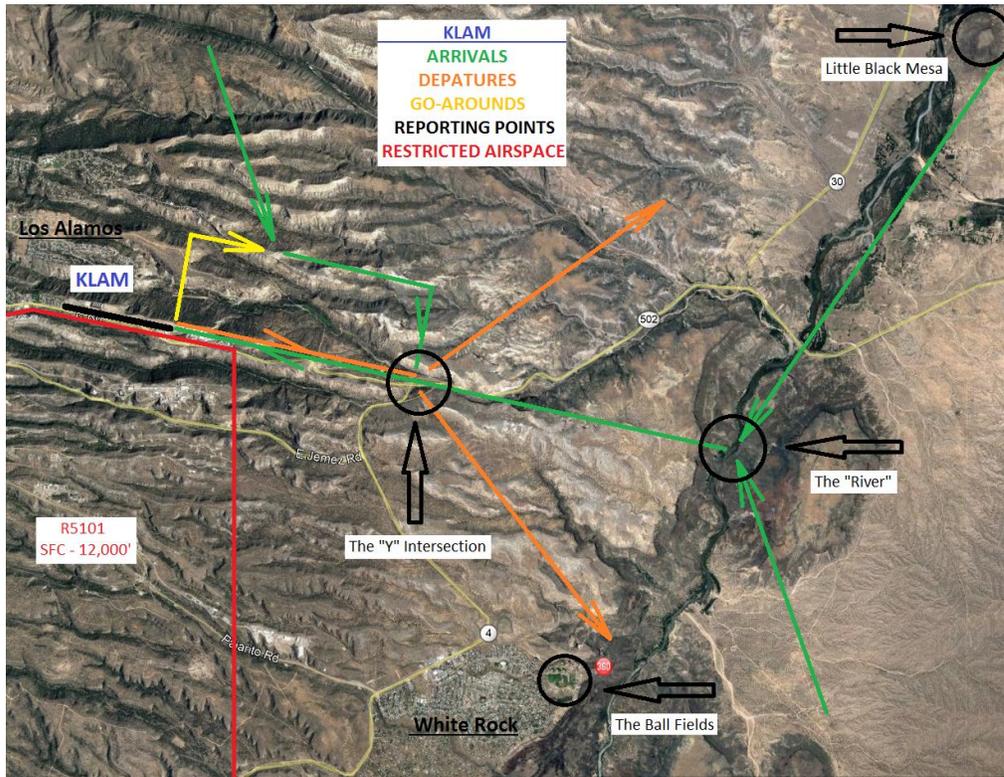
Winds: The local winds are often calm in the early morning, easterly by midmorning, southerly by noon, westerly in the late afternoon, and calm by dusk. Gusty winds can occur, and when combined with the canyons to the south, can produce considerable turbulence on approach. A reported 10 knot crosswind will feel more like 15-20 knots. Mountain Wave activity is also possible with the passage of a cold front or strong winds aloft that are perpendicular to the mountains (east/west). Because of the dry air, lenticular or rotor clouds may not provide a visible warning – it is best to check current and forecasted weather conditions including winds aloft.

One-Way Runway: There is a blast fence and a housing development immediately off the west end of RWY 27 and terrain rises steeply to over 10,000’ MSL only seven miles from the airport. Thus, all landings are to the west on RWY 27, touch-and-go landings are not allowed and, due to the restricted area (R5101) immediately to the south, all go-arounds are to the north. All takeoffs are to the east on RWY 9. Although winds may not favor RWY 27 for landing or RWY 9 for takeoff, do not attempt a takeoff to the west or a landing to the east; attempting to do so has caused several accidents. It is far better to wait for the winds to change or fly up another day.

Go-Arounds: The rule of thumb for local pilots is: “Wheels on the ground don’t go-around”. Due to the rising terrain, potential turbulence and density altitude, a successful go-around is highly questionable once the aircraft has touched down. Make the decision to go-around early in the approach (at or above 300 feet AGL is recommended) and always turn right (north) – this avoids flight into the restricted area to the south and the 500’ canyon provides some additional altitude to work with. However, if a strong south wind is blowing, the air flowing over the edge of the canyon may cause the aircraft to initially descend and then rise as you approach the other side.

Making Good Decisions: Density altitude, weather, and terrain, can all conspire to make operations challenging if not impossible out of Los Alamos at any given time. Most pilots can deal with one of these factors, but when they start stacking up **Watch Out**. Ask the airport manager for information about the airport and local operations. If the weather is bad, it is better to wait it out than to take a chance. The weather usually changes quickly and vast majority of the time, the flying weather is superb – especially in September!

Recommended Routing from Santa Fe: When flying out of KSAF, we recommend flying north to the intersection of the Rio Grande river and highway 502. Remaining east of the river will ensure separation from the restricted area and will help to deconflict traffic departing from KLAM. From the river, fly a straight-in approach to RWY 27. Remaining north of highway 502 while on the approach ensures separation from the restricted airspace. See the attached maps and arrival/departure procedures and make the position reports in addition to typical traffic advisories.



ARRIVAL POSITION REPORTS (as applicable and in addition to common traffic advisories):

- Abeam Little Black Mesa
- Abeam the Ball Fields
- Entering downwind from the north
- Over the River
- Over the Y Intersection (Highway 502/4)

DEPARTURE POSITION REPORTS (as applicable and in addition to common traffic advisories):

- Over the Y Intersection (Highway 502/4)
- Abeam Little Black Mesa
- Abeam the Ball Fields
- Going around to the north

AIRDROME COMMENTS:

- All landings are on RWY 27
- All takeoffs are on RWY 9
- Pattern altitude is 8,171'
- No touch-and-go landings
- All go-arounds are to the north
- Restricted airspace to the south
- Rising terrain to the west

TRAFFIC COURTESIES:

- Inbound traffic prior to the River:
 - It is common for arriving traffic to hold east of the River for departing traffic
- Inbound traffic after the River:
 - It is common for departing traffic to hold short for arriving traffic
- An aircraft at the fuel pump:
 - It is common for other aircraft to hold on either the North or South ramps