

It was Saturday, and I needed a place to fly to! The small town of Edgemont is in the southwest corner of South Dakota, right next to the Wyoming and Nebraska state lines. It was having its “Fall Festival”, and the weather was simply beautiful with highs predicted to be in the mid 70’s. The 30 minute flight from my base at Custer County airport took me over the southern boundary of the Black Hills and onto rolling prairie lands, to reach this ranching community of 800 people. The city airport is unattended, so I parked the Highlander and walked the mile and a half into town. Once there I went over to the local cafe for a pick-me-up coffee and a cinnamon roll at one of their outside tables.



Downtown, as I am on final approach to airport

Since “festivities” had not yet gotten under full swing (I learned later that they had, I just had not recognized the fact that what I saw was all that I would get), I decided to begin my “town tour” at the historical museum on main street. There I learned that in its “heyday”, in the 1950’s and 60’s, Edgemont was home to a population of over 2,000 (larger than the City of Custer). It was a major switching yard for the BNSF (Burlington, Northern and Sante-Fe railroad) which employed over 500 and had its own large staff hotel. There was also an active uranium mine in town with a processing plant that had another 500 workers. The plant, which began operations in the mid ‘50’s finally closed its doors in 1979, and with that, the town began a slow decline to its present day population which is less than half that of Custer.



My first stop was for a container of coffee

Edgemont is a typical mid-west community with its one “main street”, a couple dozen stores, shops and saloons. There are a couple of eateries, including the cafe where I had my coffee. There is a bank, a telephone exchange, the library and a couple of professional offices. The whole town can be walked in about 30 minutes, and walk it I did. I wandered over to the railroad tracks (it is still a major storage yard for the BNSF and trains are constantly coming through as they off-load and on-load box and hopper cars. There is a major fund raiser underway to erect a covered bridge that will replace the old washed away boardwalk bridge that leads to a small island in the middle of what was to be a 1890’s effort to bring commerce to Edgemont by building a canal to transport goods to and from town. Because of funding problems, the project was abandoned in the early 1900’s. During WWII there was a large munitions storage facility just south of downtown, with the igloo shaped bunkers still recognizable from the air. That army base closed down at the end of the war.



City Park with its arts and crafts show in progress

The Fall Festival seemed to have all of the obligatory mid-western attributes. There was the craft fare at the city park along with a quilt judging contest (I actually filled out and submitted the balloting paper that someone thrust into my hand as I walked by), and a fairly good antique/classic car show on Main Street. The John Deer, Oliver and Ford tractors lined up across from the town’s historic building (listed on the National Register) were soon to be off for the tractor pull at the fairgrounds. I didn’t get to that spine tingling, heart stopping event, but instead made the 15 minute stroll back to the airport, (where I was still the only plane parked on the ramp), for my return flight to Custer.



The classic car show was actually quite good

It is small towns like Edgemont, with its local Fall Festival that makes our country great. Unfortunately most of us “sophisticated” Northeasterners will never have a chance to experience this taste of Americana. I am glad that I had that opportunity.



And, of course, the obligatory farm tractors