

Kite boredom

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My first introduction to kite surfing came during a surf trip to Martinique beach when a kite surfer friend of mine interrupted my leisurely pursuit of waves by fooling me into helping him sort his kite lines. This seemingly minuscule task took about two hours and when we finished the kite still wasn't flyable.

From that moment on I decided that kite flying of the "extreme" nature is for the birds. That's when I stumbled across an advertisement for "Kite Fest 2008."

The event took place Sept. 6 and 7 at Conrad Beach near Laurencetown. Despite dangerously high winds and rain peeing down, which made Sunday's event a total bust, Saturday saw around 80 or so people come out to participate.

Kite surfing is currently the fastest growing water sport in the world, a sport during which you're not only at the mercy of the ocean and the wind.

Joachim Stronik, owner and general manager of the Trail Shop, says this is because "the sport is extremely fun, and easy to carry around."

While I talked to Stronik about kite boarding, he informed me that there was a large kite surfing event taking place the following weekend. Not just a large event - the largest event. The Professional Kite Riders Association (PKRA) world tour was making one stop in North America. This year, for some crazy reason they chose the booming oceanside town of Summerside, P.E.I.

I decided in pursuit of good journalism, if I wanted to really understand kite surfing and all the hype surrounding it, this event would be the place to educate myself.

David Corning, a Dal computer science graduate and current environmental engineer student, is also a passionate kite surfer.

From the kindness of Corning heart he offered me not just a ride in his sweet navy blue minivan, but also provided me with the essentials to survive a weekend camping on the island for the kite surfing event.

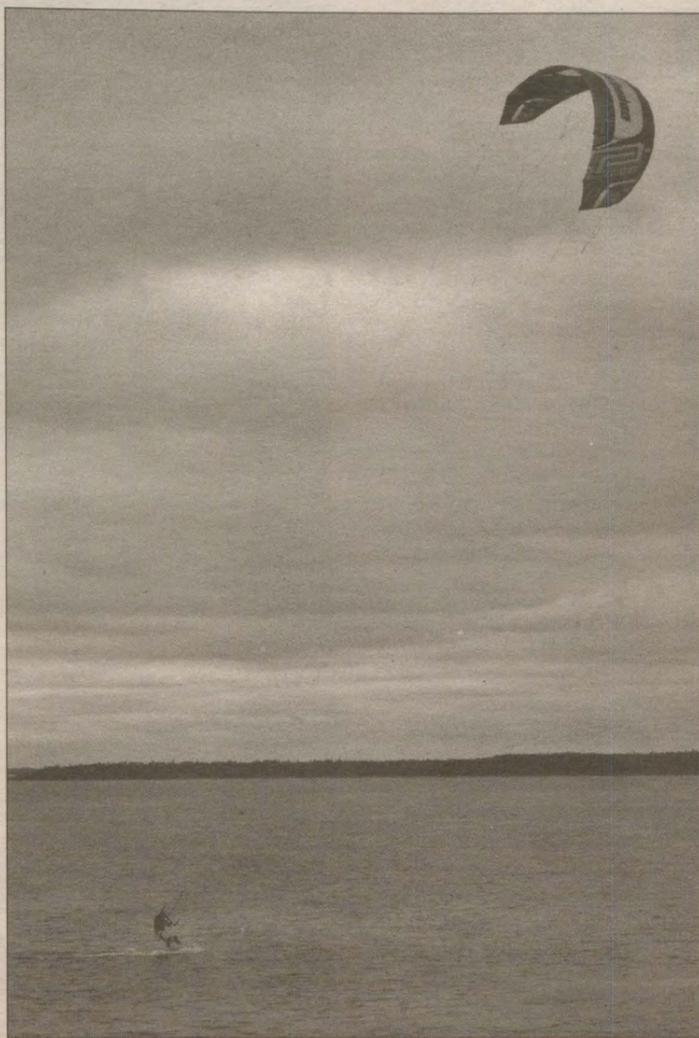
Only having been at the sport for a year or so, Corning, or D.C., as his friends call him, started as a grass-roots kiter, getting into it as a "Power Kiter", meaning he was just into flying stunt kites on land. He then took things a little further and got himself a mountain board, giving him the ability to rip up and down beaches. These days D.C. does it all, including snow kiting, but says he enjoys kite surfing the most.

We arrived in P.E.I. the evening of Sept. 12, and upon arrival I was introduced to the rest of the "crew" of Haligonian kite surfers. Those folks were a fine mix indeed: A 43-year-old trucker, an early 30-something successful entrepreneur, a 26-year-old technical professional, and a straight edge outdoorsy couple.

The group spent most the evening talking kite talk; who's making the best kites, new technology and the top riders. Six beers and a Sapporo later, the conversation turned to wind speed and that's where my brain froze; I said good night and retreated to my tent, hoping tomorrow's PKRA Big Air competition would shine new light on this preposterous sport.

Around 10 a.m. or so I crawled out of my tent to wet grass and iron skies. The wind had departed and so had my interest.

Fortunately, due to the lack of wind the big air competition, and last day of the PKRA 2008 World Tour North American stop, was cancelled. I travelled all the way to this sleepy summer tourist trap island to cover one event and the thing was cancelled due to the lack of the one ele-



NICK KHATTAR/DALHOUSIE GAZETTE

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ment this ridiculous sport requires. In an excellent display of brilliant planning and foresight, the organizers of this event, which has a price tag of just more than \$150,000, decided it would make most sense to hold the event from Tuesday Sept. 9 to Saturday Sept. 13. The organizers must have figured this would be the best way to ensure the fewest amount of spectators showed up.

At the previous stop, the PKRA had more than 10,000 fans while the P.E.I. stop boasted a whopping 100 spectators at full force, thus ensuring that the PKRA will no doubt be looking elsewhere for North American stops in the future.

As it became painfully obvious that the PKRA tour, the reason we came to the island, was over, our

crew hurried off for breakfast.

I spent the rest of that grey and drowsy day with the crew travelling around the island in a three-car convoy checking out kite surfing "hot spots". But I did get to take a crack at flying a trainer kite. This, unlike most kites, is a tiny flying wing controlled with two handles, as opposed to a bar like the power kites, and does not require a harness.

Of this activity I will admit that I was fairly amused, and it is pretty addictive. Mainly because it isn't nearly as easy as it looks. It actually takes some skill and concentration.

That night I got to play with a real power kite. The guys were great. They rigged me into the harness, gave me a little lesson, and let me on my way. Mind you it was in near

darkness that I was trying to fly a 3.5-metre kite, but all the same I think I did fairly well by the end.

The next day was the day me and D.C. had been waiting for. The wind wasn't exactly gale force by any means, but it was windy, and kiting was on the agenda. We headed to a place called "Malpeque" which is dubbed to be the lsh of P.E.I. kite surfing. It has shallow water in most areas, deep water in some spots, and is great for launching.

Launching as I came to find out is one and probably the biggies of kite surfing's Achilles Heel. Just think about it, you have this giant neoprene wind catcher attached to you by 30 or so metres of line, and you need to launch the sucker without getting yourself tangled or killed. Now just imagine doing that when you crash your kite in the middle of a windy ass harbour.

Before I could say "this blows", D.C. was fitted into his wetsuit, had his lines untangled, strapped up, his harness fitted, his paddle mounted, his helmet and his board ready. Luckily even after all of this, the wind was still blowing. The forecast had said the wind was meant to pick up just after lunch, so a whole crew of kites from N.S., P.E.I. and New Brunswick were suiting up.

I was hoping someone would offer up their gear to me and give me the chance to hit the open ocean; hopefully not fulfilling the desires of everyone I work with for me to get blown out to sea never to be seen

new idea by any means, but the water sport aspect of it is. In terms of water sports, it is far less impacting than wakeboarding, or other water sports that require a boat. Lastly, on the positive side, kite surfing is ideal if you live somewhere you can't surf conventionally.

Unfortunately, the sport seems to have far too many cons to make it really appealing. Here's why. First: You need an incredible amount of gear. Wet suit, board, harness, paddle, kites. Kites range from \$700 to \$2,000 and it is almost absolutely necessary that you have at least three for different wind speeds. Also, because you are flying kites on the ocean and over rocks and sand, they have a tendency to wear out fairly quickly, thus meaning you have to either repair them frequently or replace them. Wetsuits run between \$300 to \$1,000. Boards vary between \$200 to \$800 and having only one is not ideal. Harnesses and quiver kits run around \$200. All the above are necessary, so the start up cost to get into kite surfing may postpone your down payment on a house.

I feel as though we have enough "extreme" sports that require far too much industrial production as it is. If you want to surf, move to Mexico and get a board. If you want to skateboard, contact your local dealer and get a deck, trucks and some wheels. Certainly there are far worse sports in the world that I could criticize, but kite surfing and kite sports are the new big thing, and it is appealing

again. Unfortunately for my Gazette co-workers the chance never presented itself. Instead I stayed on the sidelines capturing the action on my haggard three-year-old Canon, thus remaining a criticizing bystander, passing judgment about a sport I've pretty much never tried.

Hours later I had my pictures, a good idea of what this kiting business was all about, and a much-needed nap. The wind was starting to pick up, but like one of the crew said, "there's always got to be the sacrificial lamb." I'm not too sure what he meant, but it sounded fitting to end the day with.

So here are my conclusions about kite surfing. It's an efficient way of utilizing the wind for personal enjoyment. Second: It isn't a

to a demographic that has the money to make it bigger and bigger. I just feel that a) the sport isn't insane or dangerous enough to warrant public interest and b) that it requires far too many elements to be considered a new and legitimate subculture "extreme" sport.

But I am grateful to D.C. for taking me on this journey and opening my eyes to this new happening. I believe he said it best with "if you go into these things with all sorts of high expectations, then you're always going to be disappointed."

I had a good time on my kite surfing trip, watching, and D.C. had a good time; as he will again, kite surfing. So maybe that's the only important part: Good times.