



Presseausendung

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Kiteboarding in 6.500 Feet

Snowkiting.at Press Department

Hardy Brandstötter – The Mountain Calls

The Mountain Calls

Normally, watermen indulge their passion for kitesurfing at sea level: In Maui, Gran Canaria, and Cabarete, records are beaten there and new maneuvers invented. The two Austrian kitesurfer Hardy Brandstötter and Carina Eibl went a different way and tried to develop new ways in the middle of the Alps at over 2,000 meters (over 6,500 feet).

Text: Heiko Mandl

Hardy is the first one who dared to get into the cold water. It is a sunny day in early November 2006, and autumn has been with us for a long time already. Nature is fully prepared for winter's arrival, the green has given way to the brown and red, and the animal world either said their good byes to head south, or is prepared now for the hibernation. But it seems like the winter does not want to come this year! For some this is half of a disaster, but for us it is a fortune. Normally at this time of year the kitesurfers aren't dragging their necks in the water, the skiers, however, are carving the snow. Hardy and Carina follow our initial guinea pig: The heat is on. Even at just 5 degrees Celsius (41°F) water temperature!

The Idea Came First

The idea for our project has inundated my thoughts for a long time: A kitesurf session on one of our many mountain lakes right at our doorstep in the Alps. Actually it began three years ago in winter. I stood wrapped up in my snowboard gear in front of one of the many reservoirs in the skiing areas. It had a respectable six Beaufort and I was dreaming of a kite session somewhere in warmer climes. And then I thought: "This would be something new." A day kitesurfing with a couple of select people somewhere on a mountain in the Alps would be great.

For me as photographer the idea was doubly appealing, the scenery of the many three-thousanders in the eastern

Alps would be surely one of the most impressive backgrounds for the good pictures. It is easy to answer the question as to why the idea had to be put on hold for three years before its realization: To have a beautiful day in the Alps with wind and bearable air and water temperatures is more or



less like getting a six in the lottery. Already the selection of the right lake was not easy at all. First, I presented my idea to my friends. At the beginning they were skeptical in the sense of: "Sounds good, but where, how, when, and is it possible?" But over time our ideas gained direction.

The Search, or: Which lake will we use and when should we start?

The first problem was the selection of the right lake. Soon thereafter we were certain about the fact that our session could only commence along with a Föhn (strong warm mountain wind from the south). Thermic winds were out of the question and a front of bad weather would not be ideal for the photos and at 2,000 meters (c. 6,500 feet) it would also be extremely dangerous. The problem then was that a strong Föhn generally blows most often in the spring and autumn. Since in spring there is still too much snow on the ground, soon we were quite clear about the fact that the only possible way for the realization of our project was to do it in the fall. After a couple of trips into the mountains we also found the lake we wanted to use: Our choice was Tauernmoosboden, which is near the ski resort Weisssee. The reservoir faces the north-south direction and after researching the weather and wind, we knew that there were strong southerly wind peaks up to 100 km/h (c. 60 miles/h).

Time flew by and we waited patiently for "the right day." Our little secret accompanied us for months on our surf trips. Hardy and Carina were touring the most beautiful places of the world, always with the idea of our project in mind and I had for long time the exact pictures, which I would hopefully soon take, in my head. It was in this way that two years passed.

The Day X!

It had been so very long that we were waiting patiently for the perfect day and nearly lost all hope, and everything went by so fast at the end. I just came back from a one month kitesurf trip from Italy and knew that the autumn in the Alps was one of the most beautiful and warm in the last dozen years. But I could not imagine that our plan would be realized still in the same autumn. As already mentioned, everything happened so very fast: the weather forecast for the next days was up to 20 degrees Celsius (68°F) and strong wind from the south. I called the my two friends and told them, they should stay on "stand by." What we disregarded, however: The reservoir belongs to the Austrian Federal Railways and water sports are not permitted. We could not get our heads around it. Was everything for nothing? The research? The long wait? That cannot be the end of it all! After innumerable phone calls, e-mails, and statements of liability we finally obtained permission on that day to surf on the lake from the Austrian Federal Railways. Hope really dies last! Now nothing got in our way. The lake is just around the corner, so it was quite easy to start.



The First Contact!

The drive alone from Uttendorf at 2,100 meters (nearly 6,900 feet) was something special. The mountain road led up the face around steep curves. There are no guardrails or similar safety measures whatsoever. Once up there, we were just overwhelmed by the scenery. The mountaintops sat enthroned on 3,000+ meters (9,800+ feet) over the cleft glaciers and our lake was protected between ice and rock immediately in front of us. We had only one problem: Instead of the announced 100 km/h not one leaf was moving. All the effort we put in and then this: Our guide Herb (short for Herbert) calmed us down: "Normally the wind comes at noon. And it comes always when there is a Föhn." We must wait for it! The dreamlike scenery helps us to quickly forget the bad starting situation. Herb shows us the surrounding mountains: "The Hocheiser in front of us is 3,200 meters (10,500 feet). Behind it is the Grossglockner, Austria's highest peak at nearly 3,800 meters (c. 12,450 feet).

Sudden Wind

At noon we were able to detect the first gusts. The wind, however, was still too weak to start our kites. But this should change fast. One hour later Hardy was on the water and I was able to take my much longed for photos. He seemed to have a lot of fun: Kiteloops, Jibes and unhooked jumps looked good in this altitude. In spite of the cold water, he gave his best!

We had to wait a long time and work for three years for this moment, and sometimes the hope alone was what kept our project alive. But now it is done: Carina and Hardy had a good time up there. The Tauernmoosboden is the highest lake in Europe (or maybe World) that has been frequented by kitesurfer for sure. The afternoon flies by way too fast, and with the first long shadows that spread over the lake, the wind also subsides. Content, we pack up all of our stuff in the cars. I have now enough photos to be able to tell all about that experience. We are clear about one thing, that this day is too special to repeat the whole thing again. Therefore, we leave Tauernmoosboden behind forever. In a couple of weeks the first Alpinists will go over the ice to climb the high mountains in the Alps. The lake will then be what it always was before our surf session: A quaint lake in the Alps.

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