



# Discourse

from the end of the line

April 2010



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Port-au-Prince, Haiti fly  
kites over a tent city.  
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## FROM THE EDITOR

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(under "Publications").

Sitting in The Mad Greek restaurant in scenic Baker, CA, I listened to one of the most unlikely kite stories: kite-buggy on the rainy beaches of Senegal, watched by millions of crabs! As explained by Kiwi Craig Hansen, the Senegalese use monofilament fishing nets, and many fish are injured but not caught. Crabs take care of these unfortunates. Because the predominately Muslim population doesn't eat crab meat, crabs' numbers have multiplied to huge proportions. Illuminated by the buggiers' headlamps, some crabs gave way to the beach side, while others scattered into the surf, just deep enough to keep their eyes above water to watch their three-wheeled quarry. Unbelievable, but only a small part of the story of four kite-buggies crossing the Sahara (page 18).

Continuing the buggy theme is a quick review of this year's North American Buggy Expo (NABX). Notable this year was a world kite-powered speed record, 82.9 mph! And just in time for spring is a reminder that there is another form of kite traction practiced in Idaho by Snowkite Solider.

For more conventional kite subjects, read Eishin Iddittie's recollections of Masaaki and Shingo Modegi, kite maker Teizo Hashimoto and his wife, and the formation of the Japan Kite Association. Masaaki Modegi has been one of the world's great kite ambassadors, following his father's tradition. A photo gallery of Indian kites is brought to us from Indian kite flier and enthusiast Vijay Nathaniel. Finally, Shelly Leavens brings us wonderful memories of Texas' Zilker Kite Festival shared by Richard and Marian Robertson. "Kiting's First Family" has experienced Zilker for almost 50 years!

Scott Skinner  
Board President  
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Passionate about people, words, photography, and lifestyle, Crafar is the sole charge photo-journalist on a large, weekly community newspaper. She has extensive media experience, including work on "The Dr. Phil Show."



Victoria Crafar

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Iddittie was in elementary school around the time Shingo Modegi started the Japan Kite Association (JKA). Iddittie researches Japanese historical and folk kites, and he has been an editor of the JKA journal for 15 years.



Eishin Iddittie

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Vijay Nathaniel

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Owings lives with her son, Cody, husband, Steve, and dog, Lucy. She works as a registered nurse and frequently goes on mission trips. She has been to Haiti 4 times and plans to return soon. She enjoys taking pictures, travel, and fishing.



Jaclyn Owings

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Sainz is the Horatio Alger of American kite making. Renowned for his elaborate, beautiful kites with Aztec motifs, he has conducted kite making workshops around the country and is a board member of the Drachen Foundation.



Jose Sainz

SCOTT SKINNER  
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A former Air Force instructor pilot, Drachen's board president has flown and designed kites for three decades. Skinner's military training created the structure for him to express himself as a visionary kite artist.



Jose Sainz

# KITES IN HAITI

Jaclyn Owings



It is truly a moment of awe when - above the smoldering trash piles and ruined rubble of homes and livelihoods - kids, living in the squalor of bed-sheet tent cities housing 1,000 or more persons, can create such a magnificent art.



Jaclyn Owings

Kites, soaring into the cerulean blue sky, climbing toward the setting sun on the wings of sea breeze, create strong imagery. Add to that image the daily grind of post-earthquake survival in tent cities: no running water, plumbing, or electricity, the likelihood that many of the kids lost a family member in the quake, food is scarce, and on the other side of the camp there are decaying bodies strewn throughout the rubble - and suddenly the imagery becomes more powerful, more meaningful.

The kite is now symbolic of hope and unyielding spirit. Mere refuse plastic, broken sticks, and scraps of unraveled ropes fashioned by hand into a kite, soaring over a desperate struggle for survival, unequivocal loss, and despair.

It was a moment in time that will stay with me until the end of my days. It is poignant and majestic, and it is a bud of hope that the Haiti of tomorrow will be stronger than the Haiti of today.

ABOVE: A kite soars over Port-au-Prince, Haiti.  
BELOW: Children fly kites in a Haitian tent city.





Jaclyn Owings

A kite made from refuse.



Jaclyn Owings

Boys attempt to get kites skyward in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.



ADVENTURES IN KITE TRACTION

## RECOLLECTIONS ON (ALMOST) 20 YEARS OF KITE BUGGYING

Scott Skinner



Scott Skinner

LEFT: Peter Lynn's Buggy Number 1, with past and current editions close by. RIGHT: Peter Lynn with the first "dead man" handles - aptly named, as he is flying Traction Kite Number 1, unsafe at any speed!

I first saw Peter Lynn in his kite buggy in either 1990 or 1991 on a beach in Japan. My first thought was, "He's done it, he's found a way to get in *everyone's* way!" But that was shortsighted and selfish – what Peter had really done was to reinvent kite traction, this time as a sport for thousands.

This new, three-wheeled buggy, coupled with recently developed power kites, created the perfect storm, leading to twenty years of kite and buggy progress since. Kite Buggy Number 1 was actually a converted "kite boat," one which Peter confesses

worked best when cruising about 3 feet below the water line with Peter's nose causing the bow wave in front! A converted sport parachute was the first "motor" and the Lynn family quickly moved on to two-line sport kites, like large Hawaiian Team kites, that provided (a little) more safety.

This year's North American Buggy Expo (NABX) celebrated 20 years of modern land kite traction. It has become the primary North American traction event, where all the latest gear can be desert-tested on the very fast surface of Nevada's Ivanpah Lake.

It wasn't always so! Twenty years ago, on his son, Fritz's, spring break, Fran Gramkowski brought his buggy to the desert for a week of practice. Corey Jenson, from Carmel, California at the time, came to join them, and the time and place for the event was set. Corey has since relocated to Las Vegas – mainly due to the proximity of the dry lake bed – and has become the official Mayor of the event. It's unbelievable to think that Corey and I spent Thanksgiving of 1995 on Australia's Lake Gairdner doing this very sport. Fran and Corey were instrumental in those early years of buggying, as they were kite retailers who supported the idea that this could really work!

It has been extremely interesting to watch the technological developments that have accompanied the sport: modern traction-kite design has been driven by the need for safe, efficient buggy "motors." From early quad-line foils, developed by Ted Daugherty and others; to the two-line peels, Pauas, and zip-tips of Peter Lynn; to the NASA-wings that took Europe by storm in the late 90s – all were pulling us forward to what is now available: LEI kites developed in the kite-surfing industry, twin-skins, continually refined by Peter Lynn, and Power Foils made by Vlieger Op under the Lynn name.

Because buggy-racing is much like sailing, upwind and downwind performance is important, and simple brute force is not the answer. Additionally, a de-power capability is extremely important since we try not to be a "jumping" sport. (Of course, the British would disagree, as a whole school of buggy riding has developed there that features jumps, aerial 360s, various two-wheel tricks, and speed too!) Controlled use of power during gusts has been shown to be an invaluable racing asset. Control of the predominantly four-line kites has gone to the control bar, since so many people come to the land-based sport from kite-surfing or

snow-kiting, where it is the standard.

Buggy design has progressed as well. In his earliest production models, Lynn started with some basic parameters in his design: weight under the legal airline limit, center of gravity below the height of the rear axle, and frame components able to fit within airline baggage limits. Because of the evolution of the sport, these limits have been left behind. Here in the United States, dry lake beds in the west have proven to be the best venues, so longer, heavier buggies have evolved. Airline limits are avoided by driving with buggies (they easily fit in car racks), having a friend drive (my preferred method – thanks, Blake!), or even shipping, another reason that Corey and WindPower Sports in Las Vegas are so popular.

The premium has now moved to speed. Long, heavy, full-suspension buggies will always have a place here. Arjen van der Tol and his Dutch team set speed records both last year and this year (now at 82.9 MPH) with a combination of leading edge kites, buggies, and pilot skills. With current GPS technology, a top speed can be quickly verified. NABX intends to be the clearinghouse of all information related to kite land speed records. (See [www.NABX.net](http://www.NABX.net) for current information.)

Finally, it has to be said that 2010 was a year to celebrate kite traction. Organizer Dean Jordan, another of those early-year buggiers, wanted this to be a NABX to remember. In a far cry from those early days, this year we had meals in the desert, parties on three nights, and even a beer sponsor – all is good in the world!

Also on hand at Ivanpah Lake was Lenka Chludova, who I would describe as a video DJ. She presented our sport in exciting visual ways, using her own original footage as well as submitted footage. This was a



Scott Skinner

LEFT: Detail of tire and disc brake on the Peter Lynn Speed Buggy. RIGHT: Pete Lynn, Peter Lynn's son and crash test dummy for many of Peter's early traction ideas.



great way for newcomers and veterans to meet and mix when the wind and sun went down. Craig Hansen and Steve Gurney of New Zealand also presented a slide show on their unbelievable buggy trip across the Sahara Desert (article on page 18). See [www.NABXtv.com](http://www.NABXtv.com) for more, and support it with some of your own buggy shots.

Speaking of buggy shots (I'm not talking about shot-cars, another desert incarnation whose evolution has paralleled the kite buggy's), take a look at the GoPro SD or HD camera. Here is a compact, multisport digital video camera that can be helmet-mounted, or with a down-tube attachment can be placed anywhere on a buggy for action shots of you and your buggy-friends. It comes in a water-proof casing (that also means dust-proof for those of us in the desert!) and takes some amazing action shots.

As we head into the future of land-based kite traction, it is interesting to me how close Peter Lynn came with his original Buggy Number 1 to where the sport is now going. Add aerodynamic fairing, stronger suspension and components, and Buggy 1 might be a speed record contender.

If we continue to come to the southwest's deserts for speed runs, might our basic buggy configuration change? (There was a "crab-buggy" from Mexico here this year.) Could there be two-wheel configurations, built solely for speed? Might we start using framed kites like Joe Hadzicki's Power Blast to optimize high-speed performance? (Joe still buggies as fast as any, but is the most power-hungry, using his Power Blast on handles with no harness.) Could we all end up using a variation of Pete Lynn's "kite-on-a-stick?"<sup>1</sup>

I can pretty much guarantee that it will be a heckova ride!

#### NOTES

1. See *Peter Lynn Newsletter*, "Kite-on-a-Stick," March 2010 online at: [http://www.drachen.org/personalities\\_lynn\\_news\\_March2010.html](http://www.drachen.org/personalities_lynn_news_March2010.html) and *Peter Lynn Newsletter*, "Going Fast on a Kite Buggy," April 2010 online at: [http://www.drachen.org/personalities\\_lynn\\_news\\_April2010.html](http://www.drachen.org/personalities_lynn_news_April2010.html)

ADVENTURES IN KITE TRACTION  
**IMAGES FROM NABX**  
Jose Sainz



Jose Sainz

The 2010 North American Buggy Expo (NABX), where the latest traction gear is desert-tested on Ivanpah Lake, a dry lake bed in Nevada's Mojave Desert.



Jose Sainz

Buggies zoom across the fast lake bed surface. The speed record was set this year at 82.9 MPH, with a combination of leading edge kites, buggies, and pilot skills.





Jose Sainz

Back row, left to right: Dave Culp, Dean Jordan, Pete Lynn, Corey Jensen, and Scott Skinner. Seated left: Peter Lynn in the first buggy he made. Seated right: Phil McConnochie in the first production buggy made and sold.



Jose Sainz

This year's NABX celebrated 20 years of modern land kite traction. NABX has become the primary North American traction event.







ADVENTURES IN KITE TRACTION

# WELCOME TO THE MAD WAY SOUTH

Victoria Crafar



Mad Way South

A camel watches as a Mad Way South kite flies over the Sahara Desert. Two teams of two men cross the Sahara in a wind-powered race to raise money for SHE Rescue Home.

The story about to be told is one of great heart. At times unbelievable and utterly mind-blowing, it has come straight from a self-confessed mad-man. He is Ashburton, New Zealand's Craig Hansen, aged on the edge of half a century, and the record is entirely true and correct. It speaks of four men and a support crew who conquered the rugged, unforgiving Sahara Desert and its many barbs - all the while in buggies - by harnessing the power of wind as their fuel alone. It tells of determination, innovation, inspiration, and new world records.

Welcome to the Mad Way South. It is all for a good cause.

Enter Kiwi (New Zealander) Steve Gurney, former professional multi-sport and triathlon athlete, now adventurer and legend. About four years ago, he and Craig were already acquainted and had missions on their minds.

At that stage, the target was the Namibian Desert to the Skeleton Coast solely by wind power, and funding was being sought from the New Zealand Government's Sport and Recreation (SPARC) department. Out of many applications, the men made the final three, but missed out on the support. It went to two New Zealanders who were planning to walk across Greenland. However, the

homework had already been done. "We knew it was possible, but we didn't have the right time or money to do it," says Craig.

Enter Australian Geoff Wilson, veterinarian and adventurer, obsessed with all things wind-driven. Hearing of Craig's interests and goals, he got on the blower. "He said to me, 'Hey listen, have you ever thought about crossing a desert?' I had the redundant plan in my draw. I pulled it out, put it on my desk, and said, 'Yes, of course.'"

Geoff dreamt of crossing the Sahara. Craig wasn't too sure on doing something as dangerous as that, but the more they conversed, the more Mad Way South became a reality. The details were nussed out. The Mad Way South was to be a wind-powered race to traverse the Sahara Desert, between two teams of two men - the Kiwis and the Aussies - epitomizing the age-old tradition of trans-Tasman rivalry.

The reason behind the madness: SHE Rescue Home, a secure haven for young Cambodian girls at risk of being trafficked or who have been forced into the sex trade. All funds raised by the trip and its effects would be given to the organization.

"That's what motivated me to take on something more dangerous like the Sahara Desert," Craig says. That, and he is a rather competitive person and can not often let a challenge go by the wayside. "I knew I would want to be there to win." But it would have to be fair.

Ex-Zimbabwean, military-trained Craig is a masterful kite flier with many years of experience. Geoff, while passionate, did not have Craig's expertise. So they decided to pick up a handicap for Craig, and an advantage for Geoff. Craig says, with a grin and a giggle, "Steve Gurney became my

handicap, which is a helluva thing to say in New Zealand. I said to Geoff, 'Don't worry about it, he's a good bloke. He'll be right. I'll ask him if he wants to come.'"

Although Steve had little knowledge of flying kites, knowing Steve and his capacities, Craig was confident. "He was chosen as the handicap for a reason - because he absolutely was not going to be a handicap. He was going to be an incredible advantage."

Meanwhile, Geoff gained a professional kite instructor. Enter Australian Garth Freeman, a kite flier since age 12.

Having secured the personnel, other issues had to be considered, like making the race fair. "Like match racing in sailing, everybody races the same boats. Then it's about personal skill, time, effort, energy, and personal ability, more than money and who has got the best gear."

Nine months of detailed and conscientious creation, preparation, and planning ensued. "I'd wake up at 3am thinking, 'Crikey, what about...' and would have to go and make it." Almost everything needed for the trip was engineered from scratch, mostly done by Craig and the "nothing's impossible" team at Peter Lynn Kites, Ashburton. (Incidentally, and rather fittingly, Peter Lynn himself designed the first kite buggy 20 years ago. Craig is co-owner of the factory.) "We needed to prepare some gear that had never been made before. So we needed to invent some stuff. It didn't need to be high tech, it just needed to do the job." Steve made the racers' buggying suits. They were made out of cheap white linen, purchased from perhaps one of New Zealand's most "budget" stores, The Warehouse.

Next, maps were sourced. The only available were 25-year-old Russian Cold



Mad Way South

Nine months of preparation and planning led to this adventure for four buggies and their nine-man support crew. The team travelled approximately 1367 miles.



War maps, which somehow made it to market. The guidelines were expensive and in Russian. "So we learned a bit of Russian."

Then, specific roles such as way finding were designated to each individual, including their nine-man support crew.

At every end, their individual preparation for the group continued and the initial gathering point was defined. It was to be a couple's garage in Kent, London. "They were family friends of Geoff, of whom we abused terribly," Craig jokes.

Tons of gear was about to make its way from the other side of the world - "by hook or by crook" - by multiple routes. Reaching its destination at various times, the gear, teams, and crew dripped in to the Kent garage before driving to Portsmouth to catch the ferry to Spain. It was the first time the whole Mad Way South crew met.

The following 38 hour ferry ride could be likened to the calm before the storm. "So by the time we got to the boat, we were zombie-ish. So we got some down-time, caught up on some sleep, and then had our first meeting as a group and worked out who was who."

Then they drove from Northern to Southern Spain, crossed into Gibraltar and into Africa, and drove to Morocco before delving into the dangerous desert. "Steve identified the definition of adventure very early on," Craig says. "The definition of adventure is: outcome unknown, and there were a lot of things we went into where the outcome was unknown. The big unknown, of course, was the weather. What weather were we going to get? We went by previous records and made our best decisions based on those."

It was getting towards crunch time. On the

way to find their starting point, the enormity and responsibility of the situation caught up with Craig, especially when they considered the distance they had just travelled was around the same as what they were about to buggify. "We'd just spent four days trying to get to where we were about to begin, and for me that quantified it. It gave me goose bumps." The group were about leave from Agadir, Morocco, to take head-on the Sahara, and hopefully make it to Dakar, Senegal, inside 30 days. "We laid in our best plans and prepared as best we could for all situations and different outcomes, but we just didn't know what was going to happen," Craig said, quite honestly.

After an hour of driving to find a suitable start point, the Toyota truck convoy halted. "I don't get car sick, but I had to call the vehicles to a stop, and had a vomit, because of the realization of it all. My body just couldn't take it, I think." Months of preparation came to a head - the promises each of them had made to sponsors, their families, and to themselves.

So the scene was set.

"It was something nobody had ever done before and it was something that was going to be done purely by the power of nature - which in itself is not extraordinary; people have been sailing around the world for years. But they're able to choose the direction they travel in. We were, first of all, trying to cross a piece of land which doesn't have the advantage of going anywhere you want. There are obstacles. It's supposed to be 'free' and 'sandy.' However, that's not what we found. Planning is always a good thing and we did all of that, but sometimes ignorance is also a good thing, because if we'd known then what we know now, we never would have started in that area."

"We just absolutely could have said, 'This is

impossible,' but because we started with such ignorance and ended up having to cross terrain that was unimaginably difficult, we had no choice but to cross it, because we had begun. So we did. We crossed it because we had to. But if we had the choice, if we'd walked up and looked at it, we would have said no, and started further down the track."

However, this meant less mileage would be covered, hence less funds raised - and it didn't help record chances either. After all, the goal was to cross the whole Sahara. "We'd set a goal of 80 kilometers (50 miles) a day, at 10km (6 miles) an hour. That was our plan. In reality, we ended up doing up to 16 hours a day in our buggies. The first day, we started on a beach and did 40km (25 miles) in 45 minutes. Towards the end, 20km (12 miles) took 13 hours. It was ridiculous."

This great start was just the Sahara's welcoming gesture. She didn't seem to appreciate the visitors entering her depths. The deeper they got, the tougher she became. "There were some days when I thought, 'Crikey, Hansen, we're really in amongst it now."

From Google Earth research, the lot of them knew the desert would be partially vegetated. "How wrong could we be? There were huge amounts of vegetation and all of it was full of thorns. There was no bush that didn't have a thorn on it, and there were rocks and sand dunes everywhere in quantities that we never anticipated." The reality check would not only effect racing times, but would also test the strength and ability of each of the Mad Way South members, including their buggies and kites.

"We didn't expect it to be as hard as it was. We did have a contingency plan. We said we'd give it three days. If we were not able

to successfully work out a plan to negotiate this difficult terrain at the beginning - we thought it might be 30 or 40km (20 or 25 miles) from our limited research we were able to do on Google Earth - that we would call it quits, drive 100km (62 miles) down the road, and start again. Well, we ended up in this terrain for 600km (373 miles), at least!" All in all, the terrain was an ultimate test. "It tested us to the absolute limits of our personal mettle and tested our buggies to the point where they broke and we had to do some major repairs."

To pass the time of his working days, besides having a stake in Peter Lynn Kites, Craig also directs Genesis Computers, which specializes in system integration for law and accountancy firms. This means one of his main concerns is building redundancy into systems, so if something happens, a backup comes into play and the system remains stable and in operation. When applied to Mad Way South, the teams' buggies were designed to tow a trailer, which quite simply was another buggy, to act as the redundant contingency. It came in handy. "It absolutely saved our bacon."

Under the strain, buggies cracked near the welds and tires wore. It became a case of Steve to the rescue. A Canterbury University graduate of engineering, Steve's specialty is metallurgy. "Steve worked out what was going on, designed templates out of cardboard, and stuck them on where they should go with duct tape."

The shadowing support crew whipped the cracked buggies away to a local workshop and the issues were fixed with stainless steel. Three days later they were able to continue in their normal buggies. By all accounts there is no lack of finding stainless steel in the desert - destitute ships line the coast and are scavenged by all and sundry.



Mad Way South

"We were, first of all, trying to cross a piece of land which doesn't have the advantage of going anywhere you want. There are obstacles. It's supposed to be 'free' and 'sandy.' However, that's not what we found." - Craig Hansen



"It's something we didn't bank on, but it was providence at work." Providence seemed to have played a crucial role on the journey, as later events shall tell too.

However, the state of the gear bothered Craig. It hit him at his core because it was part of his responsibility to the crew. It became yet another inner battle to deal with. "When the buggies started to fail in the first week, I just thought, 'No! I've got it all wrong and I've really let all these people down, the 13 people here. I've really done it this time.' But it wasn't as bad as I thought."

Besides the numerous challenges Mad Way South had faced already, the biggest risks were yet to be met, but they were coming. "The biggest single risk was the political instability. You're pitting yourself against nature and mankind - mankind was the biggest risk. Certain people didn't come on the adventure because of that." Growing up in war torn Rhodesia taught Craig that most situations in geographical locations such as the Sahara often hang on a knife-edge. "Things can go really badly, really quickly."

One night, men armed with AK47 rifles approached their campsite, wanting to know who and what they were doing, and at one stage, the Kiwi team was followed by men in Land Rovers with AK47 rifles sticking out. "Fortunately they lost interest in us." These occasions are simply a couple of examples of encounters the group had with lawless people of the land. Luckily, each time they managed to steer the conversation towards a safe and positive outcome.

Really, what the team lacked was a decent guide, someone that would go ahead and secure Mad Way South's safe passage. They did have one, but he proved to be an "out-of-work actor" who did little but tag along.

Craig says, "Steve really put a lid on it when [conversation with the guide] started to get wild."

Their only other two strategies to deal with aggressive souls were 1) to hand out colorful Peter Lynn baby octopus kites to children, so by the time their parents got there, they'd see the buggies had made their offspring happy; and 2) to respond to aggressors by waving and greeting them with the standard French line "Ca va?" "We learned that very quickly. Everyone wanted us to stop all the time," Craig says.

Minefields were always a problem, and not always marked. For a sizable part of the trip, the buggies were confined to the road because of them. However, it wasn't a land mine that almost killed one of the Kiwis.

Steve endured four skull fractures, a broken scapular, disrupted sinuses, and a torn rotator cuff, not to mention brazen bruising and wicked wounds, partway through the journey. "It was just a moment of inattention. We'd been bugging through some pretty difficult terrain. It was late in the day and we'd been up since early, early in the morning. We'd had pretty low wind. I'd completely wrecked my body armor that day. I'd been flipped upside down, and Geoff had been rescued from a mine field by one of the local people."

The teams and crew kept in touch with radios and Spot GPS tracking gear. "We had managed to make our way down to a beautiful beach. It was just heaven after just having smashed our way through all this rugged terrain. The sun started to set. We were up to 60kmph (37mph). "But I guess we were all tired and really starting to enjoy it. We'd come down off the plateau 300 feet (90 meters) above." Wind was dropping, light was waning on the seaside cliffs, and bigger kites had to be tacked on to catch the

right breeze. "We had 6.4 meter (21 foot) kites on 50 meter (164 foot) lines. We're talking about a lot of power. If you get it wrong, you're going to be in trouble."

The pair was getting towards the end of the beach. "I climbed up some of the rocks with my buggy to look for a way out to the south so we didn't have to climb. Otherwise it would be a real pain. Steve had continued on from where I'd jumped up onto the rocks and started negotiating the hill to see if there was a way further down, but it just got steeper and steeper." Then, disaster struck.

"Momentarily, Steve lost his attention on the kite. The kite looped in the power zone, picked him up, and smashed him into the side of the cliff, knocking him unconscious." The kite looped and did it again, when he was unconscious, dragging him further up. "I was looking down towards it and thinking, 'Well, that's just horrible.' I didn't think anyone could survive that." Craig says on his way to Steve's aid, he wasn't sure how he was going to tell New Zealand that one of its most bright sporting icons, Steve Gurney, was dead. His body had looked like a rag doll being tossed around the cliff face.

But Steve's grit stayed true to his constitution. "He walked out of the valley of death, literally." When Craig got to him, Steve was unconscious and his sunglasses were mangled into his brow. Craig put the dreaded "man down" call out to the Australians by radio. After initial damage control, Steve got to his feet and with assistance hauled himself back up onto the plateau. "Jeez...Steve's tough." Craig scaled it pulling both his buggy and Steve's.

At the top, Geoff the vet patched Steve up before the long, painful bumpy ride to the local, make-shift hospital. He was told by the Saharan medical professionals that he

was fine, just bumped and bruised. It wasn't until Steve returned to New Zealand and had a more thorough, technologically advanced check up that revealed the true extent of his injuries. However, Steve was back in the buggy a few days later, flying his kite only with full use of one arm.

Not long after the crash and the 1000km (620 mile) mark, an entire team meeting was called. Gear was being destroyed and they were getting hurt. "And all for competitive edge. It was becoming lunacy." As the starting point's primary objective was remembered, so was the reason for the trip: the SHE Rescue Home. "We stopped racing at 1000km (620 miles). It was too dangerous. So we formed the ANZAC team. We were in this together." That they were, and it was about to get even tougher.

While in the desert, Mad Way South members met several interesting people doing equally extraordinary things. One lady was running the length of it. Two Polish men were taking it by motorcycle; their mission was to motorbike from Poland to Dakar and back. When the team met the Poles, they said going through the border post at Rosso (southwestern Mauritania's major city and a direct route to Dakar) was a bad idea, as it was a pretty rough place. The Mad Way Southerners had already experienced Nouakchott, a city they passed through in the early hours under the cover of darkness to avoid its manmade threats. The Poles had been there too, and they reported Nouakchott was a walk in the park compared to Rosso.

In going to Rosso, the team risked losing everything they had, and their Mauritanian visas were running close to their expiration date. According to their new friends, Digamma's border could be a better option. The pros and cons were then weighed. The decision was made to buggy through the



Mad Way South

"We stopped racing at 1000km (620 miles). It was too dangerous. So we formed the ANZAC team. We were in this together." - Craig Hansen



border post at Digamma, which would mean crossing a dry wetland. Although the wetland's outcome was unknown, Digamma was safer, so they left the path to Rosso for the dry wetland.

Enter Sahara's fury. "We buggied in that night deeper and deeper into it on a narrow path through the trees." Tricky, but possible - the team slowly pushed its way through the various obstacles like acacia bushes. Then Craig saw a familiar sight. "I managed to fly my kite between these two trees, looked up, and saw these weaver bird nests," Craig says, knowingly. His childhood was graced with the pleasure of having weavers around, and their behavior would be monitored by many as an indicator of the weather and seasonal changes. If weaver birds built their nests mid-way up the tree, it would be a normal rainy season; if they built low, it indicated drought; if high, beware, the floodgates will soon unleash. The nests Craig spotted were high. He thought about telling the others his inkling, but feared sounding mad. Steve was almost straight-jacket material at that stage anyway, hallucinating off his malaria prevention medication.

Trudging along in the dark, Craig and Steve took hourly turns towing each other, until all four could trudge no more. They lay on dry mud, wrapped tight in their kites, and tried to nod off to sleep. "The mozzies (mosquitoes) were quite good at penetrating everything." The little buggers breached the kites and their sweat-wet racing suits, so the threat of malaria was also present.

The buggies then received a nasty wake up call at 3am. "A wind of unbelievable proportions came up. It was blowing the buggies away from us with all our gear." It tugged their tightly wrapped kites off them too. "It was really this mad wind, followed by torrential rain. Three rain drops and

you're wet," Craig says. "So we started walking. I knew we were in trouble at that point. I don't know if everybody realized that." Sixteen hours of hard slog followed.

The cats and dogs eventually stopped, and by 10:30am it was 100% humidity, 40C (104F) plus, and there was no shade in sight in the now-wet wetland. They had no food, no water, were "miles to nowhere," and they couldn't spot a border post anywhere. Their support crew had no chance of rescuing them because all roads were closed and, rubbing salt into the wounds, the crew had the team's passports. Time was running out.

Plugging on saw mud build up on their shoes to the size of red-light-district-style platforms, and the buggy wheels picked up just as much. "We were in all kinds of trouble. We had no idea how we were going to get out." Two and a half days of this carried on. "On our feet, awake, trying to get out of this place." It was "murder" scaling the dunes to use the highest point, trying to spot Digamma.

Then, finally, something. The color yellow flashed in the distance. It was a heavy truck, stuck. The team crawled its way to it. Here, providence was perhaps at work again. The vehicle was freed a half hour after they got there. There was room for two in the cab and the rest in its trailer. Steve and Geoff called shotgun, and Craig and Garth took the back. "We were literally levitating!" The driver thrashed the truck over the dunes at about 140kmph (87mph) so he wouldn't get stuck again. The trip lasted 60km (37 miles). The team soon reunited with the crew, and they all ended up at Rosso anyway.

It cost them \$2,000 AUD to get through the volatile border post. "Stuff got pinched. It was just a nightmare," Craig says. Disappointed, the entire group boarded a



Mad Way South

In the Sahara Desert, torrential rain leads to a mucky aftermath. "We were in all kinds of trouble. We had no idea how we were going to get out." - Craig Hansen

ferry to St. Louis, Senegal, “knowing we had to get back to Mauritania to cross the desert. We hadn’t crossed the desert. It was just the absolute low point of the whole thing.” Their Mauritanian visas had now officially expired too.

But the French-settled town of St. Louis had a surprise in store for Mad Way South. The owner of the hotel they stayed at had been involved in desert-testing buggies sent from Peter Lynn in the 1970s. The group told him of its plight and the amazing adventure they had been on and how they absolutely needed to complete it. The fellow, whose family had rooted in St. Louis at the time the French settled, was somewhat an unofficial Mayor of the town. “He’s the most connected man there.” He knew everyone, the authorities and their strings, and he was excited at the prospect of being involved in bugging again. Providence?

The Mad Way Southerners, besides their visa issues, had a couple of complaints from locals against them. They’d allegedly hit somebody with a buggy wheel on the way past and had two minor vehicle accidents. One of their drivers had even been arrested and locked up for it. Thanks to the hotelier and his connections, the problems were resolved by morning and the driver was released.

Additionally, a new window of opportunity to complete their task presented itself. A quirk in the local geography featured a Mauritanian sand pit that ran parallel with the coast. It ended at Port St. Louis and started from where, days ago, the team had left their route to go into the wetland. Their St. Louis savior organized for the border guards to be bribed so they would let the buggies through without visas. The catch was, their passing had to be done that night, and they had to be back before the border guard was changed at 6am.

Suddenly, crossing the Sahara was back in the cards. The team would sneak through the border, head up the beach 60km (37miles), and buggy all the way back to complete their adventure and overall goal. “It was just this mad bugging rush in the darkness,” Craig says.

It wasn’t easy either. For approximately 40km (25 miles) of the Mad Way South’s final leg, “camels the size of pick up trucks” in herds of between 40 and 50 were resting on the beach, having come out of the desert to avoid the desert rains’ mucky aftermath.

“We had 6m (20ft) kites up that were way too big, and we were helicoptering down the beach with the wheels off the ground. We had no choice.” For several reasons. Gear in working order was running low, everything was wet-through from the continuing heavy rain, and they had to meet the 6am deadline. Otherwise it would be a case of consequence unknown.

“The next morning we crawled across the border with an offshore wind. The kites were out over the sea.” The wheels of the four buggies rolled into the Senegal River’s waters at 6am on the dot. “That was us. We had crossed the desert, and that was like, wow, at last! It was a funny feeling. We were smashed to pieces,” says Craig.

The Mad Way South crew retreated to the hotel, had a feed, and got some well-deserved shut eye. It was done. The Sahara had been conquered by wind power alone. It was time for some reflection. “I have a huge amount of respect for the desert. It didn’t go quickly. It tried everything it could to try and stop us from doing it. Everything conspired against us to do it, but we just kept doing it. We weren’t going to stop trying.”

Their efforts had finally come into fruition





Mad Way South

"We all have a deep bond," says Craig. "We shared some stuff. We were successful and triumphant through some very difficult times." ABOVE: The Mad Way South buggiers stand united and ready for adventure. BELOW: Together, they join the exclusive, international Buggy Naked Club.

and because of it, new world benchmarks were set. They'd achieved Mad Way South's ultimate goal - crossing the Sahara fueled solely by wind - which was a first, and they blew the wind-powered distance record out of this world. The record was 1000km (620 miles). According to Craig's GPS log, the men travelled a total of approximately 2200km (1367 miles). "It is 2169km (1348 miles) definitely, maybe more," Craig says. These numbers are in the process of being ratified by Guinness World Records.

Along the way, the men also joined an exclusive, international organization, the Buggy Naked Club, after one particular, brief brainwave. "We did it on this deserted beach, which turned out to be not so deserted," Craig says. Out of respect for their efforts, the foursome was sponsored membership by the club and recently received their pins in the mail.

Now, a little more than six months have passed since their return from the mighty Sahara. But the Mad Way South lives on, as it will for a while yet. "We all have a deep bond. We shared some stuff. We were successful and triumphant through some very difficult times. We saw people at their best and at their worst, and we're still able to be friends. The more I got to know Steve - oh, I don't know. I love Steve as a brother as I realized on our trip. I just admire him, you know. He has found a place in my heart. I just wish he wasn't so hard on himself. He could really afford not to be."

All four are still in constant contact. "Geoff is the eternal optimist. For him, the glass is not just half full, it's half full and overflowing. Garth, well, he is a gentle giant and the best neighbor a man could have."

The Mad Way South instigators often share their story with community groups, businesses, and other organizations,

inspiring people and raising even more funds for SHE. They have been trying to source interest to make a documentary about the entire journey.

All up, after everything, the Mad Way South proved Craig's life-long suspicion. "It's OK to dream. It's OK to think up big things and have a go at them."

Thank you for taking the Mad Way South.

ADVENTURES IN KITE TRACTION

## INTRO TO SNOWKITING

Snowkite Soldier



Photos Aaron Beck



Idaho's Snowkite Soldier promotes and teaches an exciting new sport called snowkiting. Ever fly a kite? Ever ski or snowboard? You already have the skills to learn this amazing sport, a combination of kite flying and skiing/snowboarding. It's a thrilling alternative that combines windswept backcountry landscapes and miles of powder with the freedom to ride in places you never imagined.

This eco-friendly adventure allows you to never buy a lift ticket again. Today's equipment is user-friendly, safe, affordable, and doesn't require huge strength. Pick up a kite and unlock the magic of a chairlift in a backpack.

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# JAPANESE KITE SCENE

Eishin Iddittie



Masaaki Modegi

A kite store in Nagasaki, Japan  
opened after World War II.

## ABOUT KIYO HASHIMOTO

The Japan Kite Association lost our oldest member during this New Year holiday season. It was Kiyo Hashimoto, the wife of Teizo Hashimoto, who was a worldly, well known Edo kite maker. Kiyo passed away on January 5th, 2009, right before her 106th birthday.

Kiyo helped Teizo on almost everything, except painting kites. She was in charge of nearly all his kite business deals, from buying materials to selling kites. Teizo and Kiyo had no children. When Kiyo married Teizo, his father was still healthy, and she took care of the two men. In Japanese culture, the oldest son lives with his parents, and the son's wife takes care of the household chores.

When Teizo passed away in 1991, people thought it was the end of Edo kite culture. I think the death of Teizo's wife Kiyo was the end of a great kite generation, but it doesn't mean that Edo kite culture is gone.

During the Edo period, 300 to 400 years ago, Japanese kite culture started spreading into people's lives. Over generations, kites slowly changed from an adult luxury to children's toys. Popular kite painting subjects were *kabuki* heroes and characters. Japanese kite culture had its golden time from the Meiji Era (1868-1912) to World War II (1939).

Luckily, Teizo's death didn't lead Edo kite culture to extinction. Many times, a kite maker's death leads to a kite culture's death. Eighteen years after Teizo's death, Japanese kite

tradition reached a critical phase. I would like to talk about that next.

#### ABOUT TEIZO HASHIMOTO

Teizo Hashimoto was born in Tokyo in 1904. Teizo's father, Tomekichi Hashimoto, was a dealer in seasonal merchandise. He made kites, Koi *nobori* (Koi fish streamers), fans, lanterns with puns and paintings, and flags upon special request. Tomekichi worked at the Hasegawa Store, and his co-worker was a professional *ukiyo-e* master in the Utagawa style. Tomekichi learned *ukiyo-e* from his colleague.

When Teizo turned 13, he learned kite making from his father. Teizo became a kite maker when kites were most popular, and he died after kite culture was declining. He saw the whole kite culture from beginning to end.

After the war, Japanese kite culture fell for two reasons. First, Japan had rapid economic growth and many cities adopted modern societies. With so many new buildings, open spaces were filled quickly. Second, children were exposed to more options for play, and they lost interest in kites. With these changes, there was less demand for kite makers to produce kites.

Later, there was a craft revival movement. People tried to reconstruct traditional toys and provincial crafts. There were associations to research and collect them for archival purposes. Some stores started selling Japanese kites as traditional toys. Those kites were expensive collectors' kites, and children couldn't afford them. Sometimes the kites were just for decoration and didn't even fly. People who bought these kites weren't kite fliers. They were mostly kite collectors.

People wanted gorgeous kites rather than

simple kites. Kite makers had to adjust to the demand. Even retired kite makers started making kites upon special request. Under the new kite movement, Teizo kept making flyable kites, except for the miniature Suga-dako.

#### THE BEGINNING OF JKA

The Japan Kite Association (JKA) started as a beautiful coincidence. The father of current JKA president Masaaki Modegi, Shingo Modegi, started a western-influenced restaurant in Japan called Taimeiken. There is now a JKA office at the top floor of the Taimeiken building.

Shingo always had great ideas for his business. He started a tradition of making restaurant napkins, coasters, and wood block print calendars from *washi* paper to give away to his customers. Unfortunately, Taimeiken stopped making calendars, but they still use *washi* napkins and coasters.

The person who designed the calendars was Shingo's friend, Keiichi Torii. One day, Keiichi was walking down a street in Tokyo. He saw a person with a *yakko* kite on his hand. Keiichi asked the person about the *yakko* kite and found that it was made by Teizo Hashimoto. Keiichi went to see Teizo immediately, and he called Shingo from Teizo's house because he knew Shingo loved kites.

#### ABOUT SHINGO MODEGI

Kiyo repeatedly said, "Shingo rushed into our house in a chef's uniform. And Shingo and Teizo talked about kites all night long."

A kite lover, Shingo was always worried about the decline of Japanese kite culture, including the decreasing demand for kite makers. Both Teizo and Shingo were from Edo (old Tokyo). After they met through



Masaaki Modegi

Shingo Modegi standing in front of his restaurant, Taimeiken, with kites displayed in the windows.



Keiichi, Shingo and Teizo were strongly connected for all their lives.

Soon after, Shingo established the Japan Kite Association with 10 founders in November 1969. In the beginning, there were about 100 members. There were no membership fees, no rules, and no president. Shingo devoted his personal time and money to running the JKA. Shingo's motto was, "Everybody can be a member of the JKA, from kids to presidents to university professors." All members thought Shingo was the president, but he supported the JKA from backstage.

Shingo's personality was a typical Edo one. He had a great spirit. Everybody was fond of him. Shingo loved flying kites rather than making them. When people asked him about this, he always answered, "Home run king Babe Ruth didn't make his own bats, did he?" Those were words from a kite flier in New York. Shingo loved that expression and adopted it as his own.

Shingo focused on preserving traditional Japanese kite culture, and he bought kites made by professional kite makers from all over the country at a higher than normal price. He was helping kite makers' lives. Shingo also sold Teizo's kites at the Taimeiken restaurant. He sold them for less than he bought them to help Teizo.

Taimeiken was decorated inside with lots of kites. Shingo wanted the customers to feel special and enjoy a gorgeous atmosphere with their meals. His efforts gradually led him to open a kite museum. Shingo passed away half a year after he opened the museum.

#### JAPANESE KITES BACK THEN

The Japan Kite Association had regular kite flying days on January 3rd for the New Year,

May 5th for Children's Day, October 10th at Nikotama River, and they had annual meetings in April and November. Two-thirds of the members were avid kite makers, and the rest were kite collectors. Some members were fond of both making and collecting kites.

Other than kites, there were provincial craft lovers' groups for crafts such as *kokeshi* dolls or mud dolls. Compared to doll clubs, collecting kites was less popular because kites were expensive, and it is difficult to preserve paper kites.

During that time, Shingo's son, Masaaki, had graduated from university and was his apprentice. Masaaki worked at Taimeiken, wearing black suits on his thin body. He traveled everywhere with Shingo for kite festivals, but Masaaki rested and waited for his father in the car. Now JKA president himself, some members who knew Masaaki from the past were surprised and happy to see him working so hard for the JKA.

#### CRAFT SHOPS IN TOKYO

As I mentioned before, the JKA was established during the time traditional Japanese kite culture started to die. If you wanted to purchase a kite at that time, you had to order it directly from a kite maker and wait a few months before it was done - or buy a kite at a craft shop. But there were only a few craft shops in bigger cities.

You could find the following kites at a small craft shop in Tokyo during the 1970s:

- Tsugaru Dako made by Keizo Nakano
- Rokkaku made by Torasuke Wada
- Edo Dako made by Teizo Hashimoto through Hayashi store
- Tsugaru Dako made by Tatsusaburo Kato
- Sagara Dako made by Motoyoshi Matsushita



Masaaki Modegi

The kite museum established by Shingo Modegi. From left to right, Teizo Hashimoto and his wife, the painter Jyunkichi Mukai, and Mr. and Mrs. Shingo Modegi.

- Fukusuke/Sake kite made by Takosen
- Itsuwa Dako/Butterfly kite made by Takao Inoue
- Cicada Kite/Sumo kite made by Natsue Isozaki
- Tosa kite made by Hanzo Yoshikawa
- Magoji kite made by Magoji Takeuchi
- Yokanbei kite made by Saburo Fujiwara
- Hata by Daiki Morimoto and Keitaro Ogawa
- Baramon Dako made by Yoshiharu Sakai and Gontaro Nohara
- Onidako Ondako made by Hiroji Doi

The first professional Japanese kite book, *Japanese Kite*, was written by Yusaku Tawara. He owned two big craft stores, Echigoya and Sen, which no longer exist. These stores carried double or triple the varieties of kites than a small craft store.

#### DISAPPEARING KITE SCENE

The majority of Japanese kites were made by professional kite makers, but not all kites were made by professionals. Farmers used to make kites during the slack season on the farm, and grandparents made kites to celebrate a new born in the family. Kites made by regular people were not sold in a market. Kite collectors had to order directly from them.

The Kazusa Toji Dako is known as a special seasonal kite that is traditionally made by a family and not by a professional kite maker. One of the successful amateur makers of this kite was Umekichi, who had his own business as a farmer and fisherman. Another successful amateur kite maker was Gensui Tada from Yamaguchi prefecture, who made the Oniyozu Dako. Gensui started selling kites he made at home in his spare time, and he successfully opened up a market to sell them.

There are some intricate traditional kites

that even professional kite makers don't want to make, unless someone places a special order. One of Teizo's famous kites was the Mushae with Hasso Tobi (jumping over boat to boat) or Kamo Goe (fight at Ichino Tani cave) paintings. Both are lavish and intricate. Teizo sold quite a lot of these kites at the end of his kite life. Personally, Teizo was fond of simple kite styles such as the Nakabari, a small and stylish Kaku-dako style, or the Dai nimai, similar to the Nakabari but slightly bigger.

Teizo made 10,000 kites yearly and sold them to wholesalers until 1973. They were all great simple designs such as the Yuki Usagi (snow rabbit) or Yuki Daruma (snowman). Both were popular paintings. On the Yuki Usagi, Teizo made the snow rabbit's ears look like the leaves of a daphniphyllum (flowering plants native to Asia).

Generally speaking, Japanese kites are flexible. They can be great decorations as well as being flown up in the air. Unfortunately, the Japanese kite tradition is dying, and only outstanding and gorgeous kites are surviving. The reality is that simple kites are disappearing, although they are very precious and important to the Japanese kite tradition and history.

Less people fly kites, and more people look for kites as decoration. The current kite culture is changing. It's part of a natural generational trend. Teizo and all of his kite maker friends went through the same situation.

#### JAPANESE KITES FROM NOW ON

Of course, we still have professional kite makers who make a living on kites in Japan. But I think it's only a matter of time. The profession will disappear someday. Does that mean Japanese kites will be gone?





Eishin Iddittie

A Japanese craftsman who makes a local kite called the Kisarazu Toujin.

No, it won't happen. Never. When we look back at the last 100 years of kite history in Japan, semi-professional or amateur kite makers have always been there. That is what will happen in the future. Semi-professional and amateur kite makers will keep Japanese kite traditions for the next generations. Some younger people and *tako hachi* (a nickname for kite makers) are even devoting themselves to making kites part-time.

Japan is still a country where many people live to an advanced age. After people retire, they have plenty of time. Some people devote their time to Japanese traditions, like regional festivals or regional cultural activities. A good example is Kazuo Tamura, who is a master of the big kite from Shirone.

Even the younger kite members of Yokaichi City - which is well known for big kites - keep and practice their tradition. They also have the technical skills to fly their big kites all over the world.

Many JKA members keep and practice their regional kite traditions and convey them to the next generation. Teaching old traditions to a new generation is not easy. You need to put in effort, and it takes time. Fortunately, kites are fun on both the teaching and learning sides.

As JKA members, our mission is to grow professional kite makers and support them, and to pass kite making on to the next generation with a new style. To do so, archival investigation, restoration/reconstruction, and accurate historical descriptions are very important.

Successfully passing Japanese kite traditions with a new style on to the next generation is a true *wadako* (Japanese kites) revival.

*Translation by Kiyomi Okawa*

# FLYIN' HIGH AT ZILKER

Shelly Leavens



Jordan

Winifred Gustofson at the first Austin Kite Tournament in 1929. The event was moved to Zilker Park in 1936.

## ONE OF KITING'S "FIRST FAMILIES" & THE LONGEST RUNNING KITE FESTIVAL IN THE UNITED STATES

For the past twelve years, Richard Robertson, 82, of Austin, Texas has been attending a class entitled "Writing Your Memoirs." It has encouraged him to start chronicling his life, much of which includes stories about his lifelong passion for kiting. Besides Austin being a desirable place for the Robertsons to live, work, and rear a family, the city is also home to the longest running kite festival in the United States. The Zilker Park Kite Festival (hereafter referred to as Zilker) is held the first weekend in March and had a record-breaking day at this year's 82nd Annual, when it lived up to its reputation as being Austin's harbinger of spring. The organizers estimated that nearly 15,000 people came out to the newly renovated "Great Lawn" to bask in the warm sunshine, and to watch and fly colorful kites soaring on perfect, light breezes. It doesn't get much better, especially for the Robertsons.

Zilker has been an important part of the Robertsons' lives for 48 years. In honor of Richard and Zilker, we've compiled a brief history of the festival, along with excerpts from Richard's charming memoirs. [Note: Memoir excerpts are italicized in the text.]

## ZILKER – EARLY HISTORY AND ED ST. JOHN

In 1929, Ed St. John, a young civic leader and later president of the Exchange Club of Austin and the Austin Chamber of Commerce, was looking for an activity in which the youth of Austin could be creative and active. He



remembered flying kites as a kid in the fields now known as Zilker Park, where his father leased land for his brick making plant from Mr. Zilker. "So we got the clay in Zilker Park, and they transported the clay [to the brick plant] by buckets on cable, conveyor... Mr. Zilker decided he was going to sell the brickyard but he leased it to dad for 25 years. He appealed to dad to give up his lease," said Ed in an interview with Richard at the 50th anniversary of Zilker.

With his memories of kite flying, Ed needed to garner attention from the Exchange Club in order to make his idea into an event. He described to Richard how he got it going:

*"I made this kite, it was a pretty little old kite, it wasn't too practical from a flying standpoint. It would fly alright but not very much, but it was pretty, had a lot of colors. So I let my little nephew fly it. [Then] I took it up to the Exchange Club and I said, 'Now look, we could get a lot of ideas if we just recognize artistic kites, craftsmanship, small kites, high kites and all that type of thing.' See I had nothing to go on, I didn't know. We just created all this stuff, nothing was official. They got a little enthused about it then, seeing this kite. So we set it up. Got a permit from the city to hold it."*

On March 10, 1929 the first annual Austin Kite Tournament was inaugurated. It was held at Lamar Park, (which is no longer in existence) and continued at Lamar until 1936, when it was moved to the "polo grounds" at Zilker Park. For Ed St. John there couldn't be a better place – considering how tied Zilker was to his personal history. The festival moved only once more, to the Great Lawn of Zilker where it is now held.

Beyond encouraging children's activities, the festival has always benefited local children's groups. As a result of Ed St. John's pioneering vision and commitment to the

cause, no other American city of any size has had such a longstanding and continuous kite festival. Beyond growth and development, the basic tenets of the festival have changed little over the years, something that Richard would like to believe will continue for a long time. Participants have always been required to fly only homemade or handcrafted kites (Ed's idea of encouraging creativity), and no one can fly the same kite in more than one event. This results in many unique kites in each event, and certainly lots of kitemaking by the Robertsons through the years.

#### A FAMILY NARRATIVE: THE ROBERTSONS REALLY GET INTO KITES

*"Who would have thought that an eight year old boy building his first kite would eventually have two hundred kites of all varieties that can decorate the sky as well as any artist's canvas? I have always been interested in kites and as an adult have become heavily involved in this wonderful hobby of making and flying kites."*

Richard, a Texan his whole life, graduated from the University of Texas in 1951, went to work at Fort Hood, and the following fall married his sweetheart and #1 kite-sewer, Marian. Richard, Marian and four children moved back to Austin when he found human resources work for the State.

Marian (also writing memoirs) describes the early years:

*"I had discovered his great fascination with kites early in our courtship while attending a college-group church retreat, when instead of joining a group swim in the lake, Richard chose to make and fly a kite on the lake shore while the rest of us luxuriated in the cool waters of Lake Buchanan."*

She also elaborates on what drew her to

become heavily involved.

*"As time moved on, the kites and the years floated by and things began to change. Kites appeared that had been sewed from a variety of bright materials, patterned boldly for impressive long distance viewing. Sky art began to link hands with flying efficiency and dramatic design, and kiteflyers all over the world drew in their breath and exhaled a universal collective "Ahhhhh"! Paper and plastic and wooden sticks began to be replaced by fiberglass, carbon, and graphite rods companioned with mylar, ripstop, and Tyvek materials painted and appliquéd. As kite designs improved, flyers began to demand that their kites be strong, sturdy enough to last for years, and beautiful. Oh, my word. Suddenly my interest in sewing, color, shape, and design drew notice and willy nilly, I was pressed into service. Now think of 6 to 10 kites per year...and think of storage!!!"*

Like many obsessive hobbies, there are communities of people who are equally obsessed. Richard found fellowship through the American Kitefliers Association (AKA) and has been a member for 43 years. He felt the main purpose of the club was to connect kite fliers, and for him and a few others especially, to exchange kite making plans. They relied on each other for testing materials, designs, and methods. It resulted in a network of kite makers, where Richard found himself centered and corresponding feverishly. At the heart was 38 years of correspondence with AKA founder Bob Ingraham, forming a close friendship despite only meeting twice.

*"In 1967 I discovered the recently formed American Kitefliers Association, begun in 1964 by Bob Ingraham from Silver City, New Mexico. When I joined there were about 180 of us – all men and all over 21 years of age because that was the*

*requirement. Bob put out a roster and the members wrote to each other, exchanging kite plans and ideas. There were very few books published on kitemaking. From the newsletter and correspondence with other men, I was able to bring a number of new and different kite designs to the annual [Zilker] festival. My kids enjoyed winning and all participated in some part of the kite making."*

*"We're really enjoying being a kite family," Richard wrote to Bob at the upswing of his family's involvement with the AKA and Zilker. As soon as the AKA allowed youth memberships in 1971, every Robertson was a bona fide card-carrying kite flier, and Bob gave them the moniker of "Kiting's First Family." He and Marian had five children, three daughters and two sons. All were raised to love making and flying kites, including one of his sons who battled bone cancer his senior year of high school and died when he was still just a young man in college. The family's loss is reflected in his letters with Bob, who sent him one of his special delta kites when he heard the news. Richard wrote in response to receiving the kite and in appreciation of his friendship, "Thank you. In the midst of some very stressful times, I received therapy from the kite activities."*

Kiting was a hobby that clearly brought their family together, and Richard and Marian started working on more complicated kites with advanced designs.

*"When we tackled the making of a 49 square foot parafoil in 1972, [Marian] sewed from midnight 'til one or two in the morning. It took 100 hours to complete, we received tips from our friend Domina Jalbert, and it flew beautifully. We still fly it from time to time. In the seventies we learned to make Chinese centipedes and in 1977 flew our 100-foot version. Among*

Richard Robertson



Marian Robertson



Richard Robertson



Marian Robertson

ABOVE LEFT: Jeannie and Linda Robertson with their kites, February 1970. ABOVE RIGHT: Richard with the W kite in 1969. BELOW LEFT: The Seven Sisters Kite in her heyday, the summer of '69. BELOW RIGHT: Richard discovers the Seven Sisters Kite in safe storage forty years later.

*many others, we made an 18-foot turkey vulture, a 14-foot pterodactyl, a 13-foot golden eagle, and a 50-foot Mylar serpent. Later we made a 15-foot Cody and a 12-foot Six Flags Over Texas Seven Sisters Kite."*

There was a turning point when the couple attended Betty Street and Bill Lockhart's 1990 Junction Kite Retreat. "We of course got hooked on Junction," said Richard. While they missed the first annual Junction, they have gone to every one since and plan to go again this year. They have met many people influential to kiting there, and Richard has been encouraged to start sewing again in earnest. Last year, despite missing a couple of days, Richard built a box kite out of recycled post office Tyvek, while Marian made a tie-dyed coffee filter kite that now hangs on the wall in his office. "It's beautiful," he says.

*"My wife and I each take our sewing machines and materials and look forward to seeing our friends at what we call 'adult summer camp.' We appliqué ripstop nylon and frame with carbon, fiberglass, or graphite rods. A 7-foot Mary Poppins is one of our best creations and a 10-foot genki kite with swimming dolphins has been a favorite with spectators at kite events."*

#### ZILKER THROUGH THE YEARS

With his and Marian's clear aptitude and interest in making kites and their undying support of Zilker, (Richard is considered a long-time "unofficial promoter"), Austin Parks and Recreation asked him in 1983 to put together a workshop to teach people how to make kites. For 27 years the workshop has been held two weeks before the festival and provides a "kick off" to the big weekend.

*"In the early days of our family participation, I did not fly competitively.*

*With five kids I was busy making and helping fly our homemade kites. Usually we have some of our kids and some of our 10 grandkids with us at the annual festival... now, with over 200 kites in our inventory, we need to have some of them flown at Zilker. So, this year, in addition to the "old coot award" (trophy for the oldest flyer), I won a first place trophy for the Most Unusual Kite category."*

The morning of the festival, they get there at 6:30 a.m. sharp to "stake things out." The Exchange Club gives the Robertsons and their Suburban full of kites and kids a VIP parking spot. But, Richard says, it's not like the days when he used to back up directly on the lawn to the kite ring and unload the kites. He says he's never sure which kites he will bring (it depends on the wind), but he always brings enough variety for his family and all their friends to fly. "Anybody who wants to come fly a kite, well, I have a kite for them to fly. Everyone has fun," he says in his sweet southern drawl.

One of Richard's most memorable festivals was when their oldest son Rick, in high school at the time, decided to register that year as "Hoot Beaver" for a practical joke. He didn't tell anyone he had done it and all the kids won prizes in the competition. The following day Richard got a call from the local newspaper asking, "Who the heck is Hoot Beaver?" It turned out that Rick had still given his correct address and phone number for the registration, and the whole family had a laugh. It also turned out that Hoot Beaver was a real person – he was a man that ran a fishing camp near Rockport, where the Robertsons had their summer home. The name had stuck with Rick.

#### ZILKER 2010

*"All day, the sky was crowded with birds, butterflies, dragons, jet airplanes and the*





Rick Robertson



Bill Campbell



Bill Campbell

ABOVE LEFT: Richard and Marian at the 2008 Zilker Park Kite Festival. ABOVE RIGHT: Grandkids Bryan Campbell and Travis Robertson at this year's Zilker, ready to fly the Pterodactyl Richard and Marian made in 1976. BELOW: Richard with Puff the Magic Dragon at this year's Zilker. The kite won first place in the "Most Unusual" category.

occasional googly-eyed octopus. Kites were everywhere: in the air, on the ground, and, in a few sad cases, lodged in trees." - Partick George, *Austin American-Statesman*

Zilker had 174 kite fliers and 5,000 spectators for the 40th Anniversary in 1968. The numbers this year were nearly triple. This is in large part due to the year-round efforts of Bunnie and Dorsey Tidwell of the Exchange Club, who have organized the festival for many years. Last year the city needed to renovate the Great Lawn, so rather than skip a year of the festival, they moved the flying across the road to the old "polo grounds." This year they are back to an even Greater Lawn, complete with sprinklers and new sod. The festival is largely volunteer reliant, has vendors galore, a place to make kites, and even a kids' 50-yard dash. In short, it's an 82-year-old tradition of fun for the whole family – one that goes to a good cause to boot. "We take a part of the proceeds from the vendors and we put that in a mission by supporting non-profits in the Central Texas area that are serving children and getting them out of a bad situation," says Bunnie.

When asked which kites he planned to bring to Zilker this year, Richard commented on a few of his favorites. "Puff the Magic Dragon is a crowd pleaser, it is a double wing kite with a 13-14' wingspan, and while colorful and fun, never did fly very well. Two years ago I took Puff to Junction to the 'Ask the Expert' session, and they fixed it up. Now that it flies better, I am happy to bring it back out. It used to have small speakers taped onto the cross spar that would play the song 'Puff the Magic Dragon.'" Richard also loves to take the Pterodactyl, which is now over 30 years old, and the kids love to fly it. He also mentioned taking his Spencer Chun Tetrahedral, and the ever-popular Mary Poppins kite.

The day after the festival Richard noted in an email, "The six grandchildren who were there all flew my kites in the competition. I did get to fly Puff the Magic Dragon and it won first place in the 'Most Unusual' category. It was a grand day. We were there from 6:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. and came home exhausted!"

#### A COLLECTION OF KITES AND MEMORIES

Understandably, Richard and Marian have quite a collection of kites – many going back to 1967. They still have the first kite they made from nylon, plus an 8 foot Eddy kite, which was featured in Bob Ingraham's *Kite Tales*. They also still have the first Scott Sled they ever made out of plastic. The couple recently needed to clean out an old garage space and came across a big box imbued with memory.

*"Leaning up against the standing wood rack was a mattress box with a wooden frame around it. We knew what that was! Forty years ago we built a Seven Sisters Kite that was about 5 feet by 6 feet that had all of the sticks tied and glued together. We couldn't get it in our station wagon to take it to fly so we got a mattress box, framed it with cast off 1 by 2s from Pier One, put suction cups on it and took it to the Zilker Kite Festival. Our son, Rick, won a first prize with it, but we had no place to store it. So it had been in the garage for nearly forty years. We put it on top of the Suburban and brought it home. I pulled it out of the box and lo and behold it was completely intact except for pin holes in the silk span covering. It will fly again before we completely retire it!"*

Now, while Richard and Marian no longer build as much as they used to, nor does Richard correspond in the same way he used to, they still attend Junction and email back and forth with kiting friends and family. Richard doesn't plan on missing

Zilker any time soon either, but he did comment on the effect kiting has had at his age. "It gets a little more physically demanding," he says. "The Zilker Festival made me a serious kiter. It brought a great activity for our family. It has and continues to have a healthy and wholesome activity for families. Who would have thought an eight year old boy with a brown paper barn door kite would still be making and flying kites almost 75 years later?"

Fly on, Robertson family. Fly on, Zilker.

To view more photographs of this year's Zilker, visit: <http://galleries.austin360.com/gallery/zilker-kite-fest/>

#### RESOURCES

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# A FESTIVAL OF FLYING KITES

Photographs by Vijay Nathaniel

## ABOUT THE JAIPUR KITE FESTIVAL

This festival of flying kites is one of the most auspicious occasion for Hindus.

Sankranti, unlike other festivals, is not dependent on the position of the moon, but on the position of the sun. On this day, the sun enters the zodiac sign capricorn.

Members of various communities - irrespective of cast or age - gather on rooftops or hang out of their windows. The city comes to a halt for the day. People gaze up to the heavens instead of down the street.

The entire family is connected to the festival celebration. The sky is full of colorful kites in various size and shapes until night.

- Vijay Nathaniel

## INTRODUCTION BY ALI FUJINO

One of the best aspects of the world of kiting is that it encompasses the world. Experiencing kites means you travel, or as we say, "go with the wind."

Over the years, we have had the pleasure of learning about kites of various countries and also meeting those special individuals who guide us through these kite encounters. Such is the case of Vijay Nathaniel, whose personal interest in the fighter kites of his country brought him to help with many of the wonderful Desert Kite Festivals orchestrated by his friend Ajay Prakash.

Vijay was one of our "India kite ambassadors," meeting and assisting first time kite visitors to India and introducing us to the wonderful sights and sounds of the fighter kite. This was always done with the biggest of hearts, a volunteer who gave us endless attention.

Although we have not had the opportunity to see Vijay for the last four years, social media keeps us in touch. These photos are a grand example of how his heart and love for kiting has not strayed.

Enjoy!





Vijay Nathaniel

ABOVE: Indian kite maker Babu Khan at Chaugan Stadium.  
 BELOW: A kite from the Babu Khan Collection. Khan kites are constructed of intricate tissue paper applique.



Vijay Nathaniel

ABOVE: View at the festival site at Chaugan Stadium.  
BELOW: Officials at the festival site.



Vijay Nathaniel

ABOVE: *Patang* fighter kites displayed in one of the shops.  
 BELOW: Kite shop in Johri Bazar.





Vijay Nathaniel

ABOVE: The photographer's niece wearing his jacket and cap.  
BELOW: The photographer and kite on a rooftop.





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