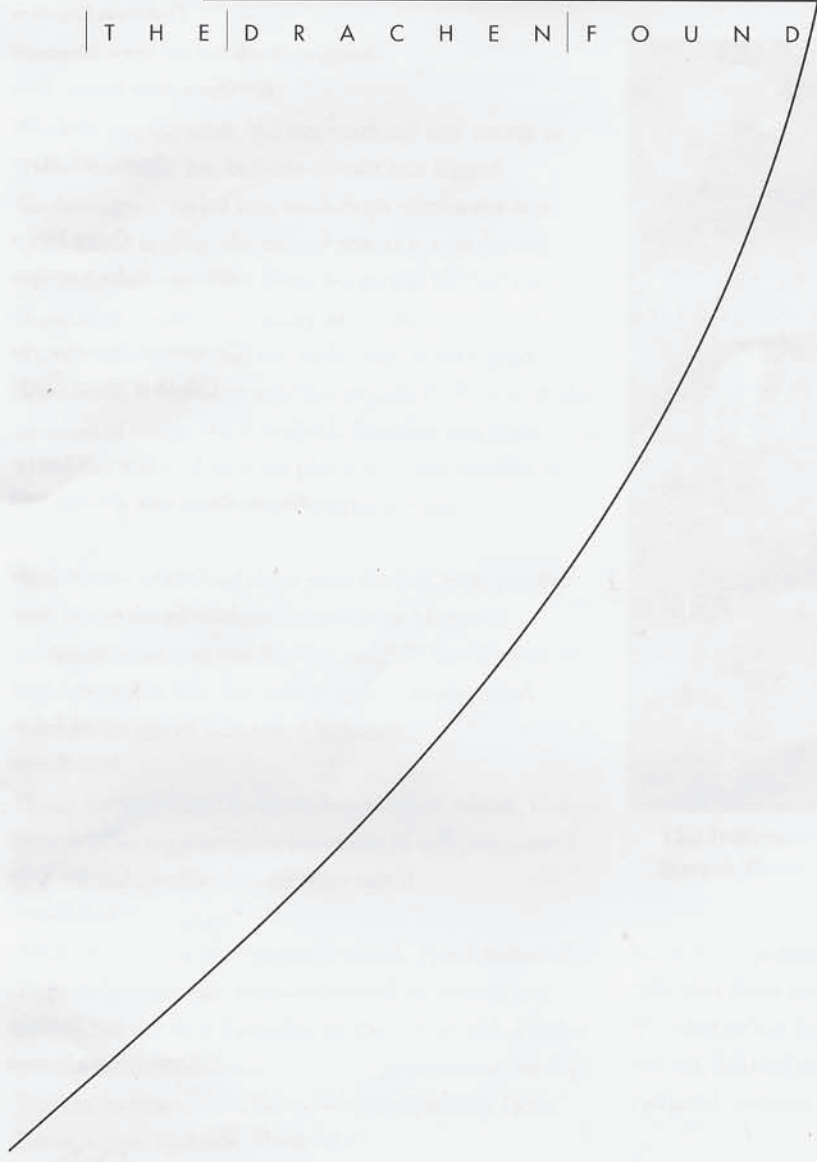


# K I T E J O U R N A L

| T H E | D R A C H E N | F O U N D A T I O N |



## BLUE PRINT FOR A GLOBAL COMMUNITY? A DECADE OF KITE RETREATS AT JUNCTION, TEXAS

by Ben Ruhe

After 10 storied years, the international kite retreat at Junction, Texas, has become instant kite legend. Sophisticated, varied kite workshops conducted in a quite rustic setting, the annual retreat is now history. Perfectionist organizers Betty Street and bill lockhart, faced with mandatory change of an almost perfect format, decided to end the gatherings at their peak. Altogether, it has been a golden decade for kiting, in the opinion of many. As it evolved, Junction was often viewed as a sort of utopian global kite community; at the least, it was surely the blueprint for one.

Junction regulars, and there were dozens, were predictably disconsolate. Robert Trepanier of Montreal summed up in two words: "I'm sad." "There'll never be anything quite like this retreat again," commented Bonnie Wright of Clayton, California.

Praise for Street and lockhart was another refrain. Her genius as an organizer, his sweetness as self-proclaimed greeter and trouble-shooter were noted.

And a note of awe was repeatedly struck. Ron Lindner of High Ridge Missouri, attended nine of the retreats and said: "Over the years I was able to take classes with a major portion of the world's kite masters — Hashimoto, Modegi, Skinner, lockhart, Tom, Sainz, Schimmelpfennig, Lynn, Peters, I.ester, Malinski. Think of it!"

What beset Junction were administrative changes and retirements at host Texas Tech, mandating a change in how the retreat operated. Rather than have their proven formula altered, Street and lockhart sadly decided on discontinuance.

There is talk in the kite world of attempting to continue the annual gathering at Junction, or elsewhere in the U.S.,



Photo: A. Fujino

**The International gathering of kite enthusiasts:  
Stretch Tucker, USA.**

but it was conceded by those involved in these ad hoc talks that Betty and bill would be a hard act to follow. Whether or not Junction can be resuscitated as a copy of the old, beloved retreat or in some new form to be conjured, remains a leading question for the coming year.

In line with its unique character, Junction predictably had an unusual birth. While in Malaysia flying kites, Street and lockhart were asked by a Malaysian airlines official to teach sewing techniques to national kite fliers. The pair was unable to oblige but lockhart asked: "Since you have an airline, you can fly your people to Texas, can't you?" The line could and did. This was the almost accidental impetus for the first workshop.



Photo: A. Fujino

**10 Years of participation: Katy Nixi.**

Speaking for himself and Betty Street, lockhart recalled of this gestation that they had been to kite retreats in the U.S. and knew how they operated. There was a small nucleus of kite fliers in Texas, but no major kite events in the state, and they felt this should be remedied. Since both were Texas Tech professors, they had access, at a significantly reduced rate, to the university's remote, 416-acre auxiliary campus at Junction, in the striking hill country of west Texas. Finally, as art educators, they realized they could impose high esthetic standards and seek innovation. "At the very least," says lockhart, "we felt anyone who builds a kite, even if it is a copy, should at least leave his thumbprint on it, some new element, maybe only a different color — call it creativity."

Thus, the end of May gathering at Junction was born. With little advance publicity, the first year's turnout was less than 50. There were four Malaysian presenters (who also, of course, came to learn to sew) and five other instructors, all Americans; 11 states were represented. Donating their services, Street and lockhart decided they would make up any financial loss, but needed to break even to continue a second year. Thanks to care about costs and in part to money raised by donated kites and related paraphernalia at an auction, they ended in the black. The retreat would now be an annual event. Word of mouth in the kite community did the rest.

The formula was straightforward. Keep costs down so the retreat was affordable. Keep things low key and free form, but maintain the schedule. Bring in the best possible presenters from around the world. Program half-day workshops; the other half day would then be free for working on, talking about or flying kites, or for wandering the campus. In isolated, secure Junction, workshops, library and other facilities would remain open around the clock.

As Scott Skinner of Monument, Colorado, a sometime teacher at and devoted supporter of the retreat, says: "At first, people filled up their schedules, they wanted accomplishment, a finished kite. Then over the years they saw that wasn't the point of Junction at all, and took it easier. There was no pressure. People had space to ask questions and receive immediate replies — or three hours later. You got creative ideas anywhere, from the lunchroom to the classroom to the flying field."

Skinner points out it was not unusual to find dozens of people busily making kites at 1 a.m., or flying them out on the vast football field, observed by armadillos, deer and the gigantic Texas prairie moon. This was Junction's charm. For staff, Betty Street recruited mainly students of hers. Their devotion and efficiency were notable.

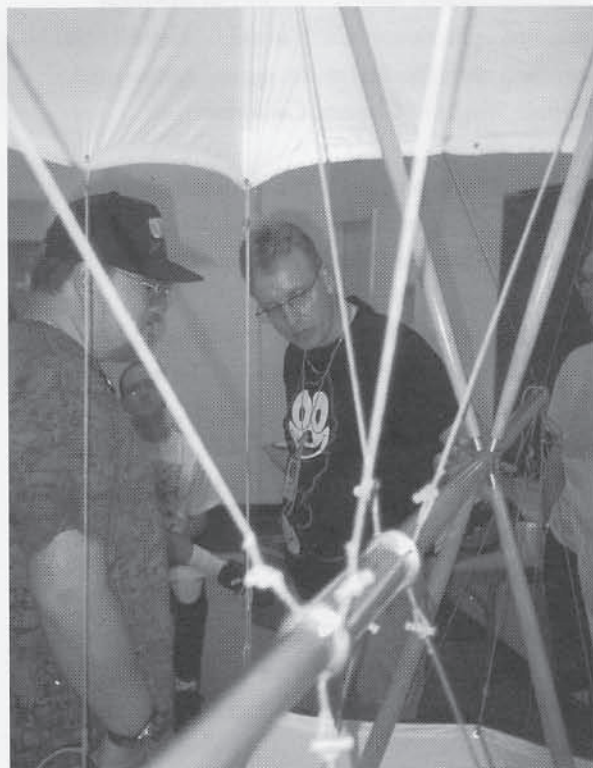


Photo: A. Fujino

**Historical kite excellence: Achim Kinter (Germany) presenting his Madiot kite.**

A kitchen crew supplied hearty, basic fare, enlivened by such Texas specialities as biscuits with gravy, and hominy grits. Bowing to the inevitable, the caterers obliged the many Asians who attended by serving rice at every meal, including breakfast.

As interest rose, Street refused to permit the retreat to grow beyond a certain point, in order to maintain quality. An attendance of 150 was set as the maximum, 125 was better. Numerically, the retreat may have peaked in 1996. There were 23 presenters, and 10 countries and 17 states represented.

In order to take advantage of the many opportunities offered by the campus and surrounding area, Street and lockhart early on added courses in glassblowing, pottery, and boomerang throwing. There were expeditions to a ranch for horseback riding, fossicking for fossils, tubing in the Llano River, and treks to remote bat caves.

Always entertaining to watch on the sprawling campus were its colony of hummingbirds, ever busy at feeders, and resident jackrabbits, with foot-long semi-transparent ears. Nature walks were a favorite of many. Some years, Mexican hat and blue bonnet flowers carpeted the

Junction fields. Other years the hill country was brown and bone dry. Always, though, there was the big sky and fierce sun of the American Southwest.

Why did Junction work so well? "Junction wasn't run by committee, it was run by Betty," comments lockhart. "She kept the highest standards. She kept bringing in the best presenters from around the world, while bringing back favorites year after year. It was the perfect mix."

Although the retreat had more than one year in the red financially, when the high cost of bringing instructors from overseas topped income generated by fees charged students plus the proceeds of the annual auction, Junction ended up in the black over-all for Street and lockhart. In addition to donations of money and services from interested people, Junction never failed to benefit greatly from the auction at the end of each gathering. Often a bit raucous and always fun, these sales of donated kites and gear brought profits as high as \$10,000 per auction. A masterpiece kite offered at one of them sold for \$2,000, another for \$1,500. The sales were often an amusing case study in national dynamics as Japanese collectors cheerfully dueled with Americans and Europeans for the choicest offerings (more than once Yankee pride fell victim to Japanese financial muscle).

Looking back, Street and lockhart are pleased to note that over the years they drew their presenters from a total of 21 countries, counting emigres, and that 32 American states contributed students. Teachers over the years, in addition to those cited above, ranged from Europeans Brockett, Bodoczky, Velthuisen, Fabre, Diem and Fosset to Down Under masters Wolfenden and Alvares. There were also Balinese, Indians, Afghans, Chinese, Guatemalans. Japan contributed a sizable contingent of dedicated instructors, including Sato, Matsutani, Endoh, Tsutsumi, Inoue, Nakamura, Oe, Takeda, Toki. From Canada and the U. S. came Kurahashi, Murosako, Toy, Hadzicki, Sotich, Collado, Chun, Scholz, Swanson, Street, Goodwind, Grambowski, Sinotte, Wharton, Stanfield, Tucker. "It's like something out of a kite magazine," one awed student said.

Lockhart says: "Junction was a loving environment to work in. If one felt like it, one could just leave one's stuff lying and take a hike to the river to look at the fireflies,

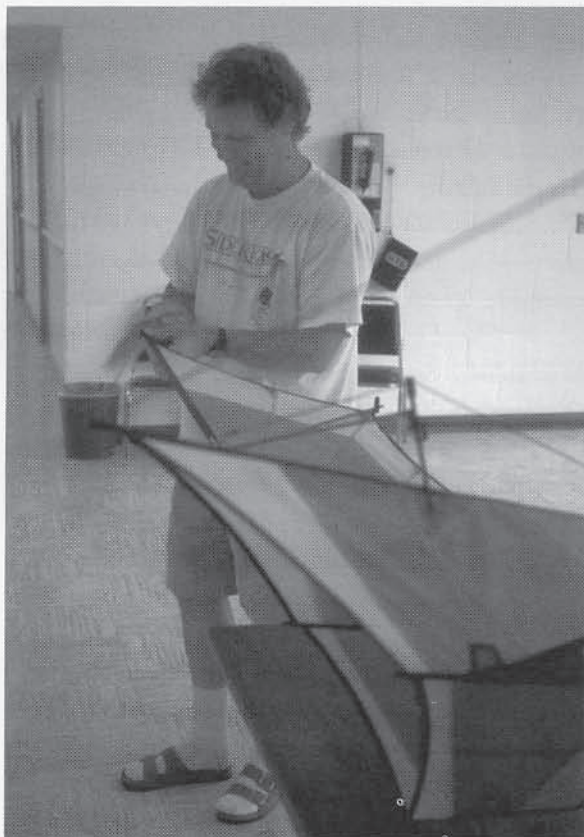


Photo: S. Skinner

Finishing touches: Bobby Stanford, USA.

Continued page 5.

**WHAT THEY HAD TO SAY:  
LOOKING BACK AT THE INTERNATIONAL JUNCTION KITE RETREAT**

**Linda Johnston, Seattle:**

"It's about as close to heaven as I've ever been."

**Richard Dermer, Stillwater, Oklahoma:**

"Only six people attended all 10 junction workshops, and my wife Marty and I were two of them. All told, there were three Texans, two Okies, and a Chicagoan with perfect records. Junction felt like a summer camp for adults, a place to leave your cares behind. The message was 'Come down to play with your toys, and make new ones.' My only two original kites were conceived here, one of them all straight lines, the other all curves. My introduction to miniature kites by Charlie Sotich the very first year led me to collect miniatures from all over the world and my little exhibit of them is going all the way to Geneva this year. I hope it's airline-proof."

**Stretch Tucker, Ocala, Florida:**

"Bill and Betty did a brilliant job with presenters: top quality, good topics, a diversity of subjects. High-status kite people kept coming back every year."

**Joe Hadzicki, San Diego:**

"Junction was a sort of little hot point that drew the kite world together. In addition to the kiting at the highest level, I liked the ambiance. I found myself skimming rocks on the river, catching lizards, riding a bike aimlessly. Overall, it was wonderfully expanding."

**Jim Day, Seattle:**

"Kite fliers have in common a screw loose. Their outlook on life makes them enjoyable and interesting. They are children at heart, with an imagination. Junction was fun, it put my mind in gear."

**Anne Whitehead, Wellington, New Zealand:**

"My husband and I learned to schedule our vacation in the U.S. so we could come to the workshop. It was four

days of eating, sleeping, and indulging—or over-indulging—in kites, a chance to exchange ideas with like-minded people. I learned a lot here and I liked being able to keep up with world kite developments. I also liked learning there was always another way to do things, to solve problems. For me, Junction was inspirational."

**Jose Sainz, San Diego:**

"There was no competition, no tension. If you came up with an idea, you shared it with others and received an instant response. Junction had camaraderie, was like a family. It was a place to make lifetime friendships."

**Judy Kingery, Abilene, Texas:**

"I'm one of the '10-ers.' I have a stressful job and after the first retreat I looked forward all year to coming back to this magical place—a place of joy and peace. My favorite memory? Elmer Wharton's class on making a centipede kite out of bamboo and paper. I loved his wit and good humor, and went home and actually made a centipede. It took me a long time, but it did fly."

**Mrs. Tokuko Sato, Aomori, Japan:**

"Kites are a wonderful bridge between East and West. I came to nine of the retreats and loved the democratic atmosphere of Junction, a far cry from stratified Japanese society. Beyond the kites, there was the wonder of west Texas: I loved being awakened by birds, seeing the jackrabbits hopping around, the sun burning through the mist, the lizards scuttling. Compared to where I live, Texas is so dry and parched! I took just one holey fossil rock from the river home each year—I felt they had a religious force, were somehow holy in themselves." ♦

Continued from page 3.

to hunt for 'holey' rocks (150-million-year-old fossils) or to look for armadillos and deer.

"A state official came by one time to observe and commented later the retreat generated a lot of creative energy. I agreed. Then he asked me whether there was an old Indian burial ground on the campus. Advised there was, he seemed satisfied. 'That's where the magic comes from,' he confidently told me."

His best memories of the decade? Lockhart speaks of all the friends he and Betty Street made. "It's like an extended family," he says. "And there were wonderful kites flown here. There was a lot of inspiration. The retreat more than lived up to the dream Betty and I had." ♦

### "Martinized" at Junction

Ed Wright, of Clayton, California, is a shrewd observer of the contemporary American kite scene. A Junction Retreat regular, he held forth at length and with a remarkably accurate memory on the charming vagaries of the May weekends there down through the years:

"Bettyandbill, Billandbetty — It's one word. Betty's the wiry little Texas lady who is tough as nails on the outside, sweet on the inside. She's so efficient she should be German. Bill's the old Texas gentleman. He's the gentlest guy you'll ever meet. He does everything in the nicest possible way.

"My favorite Junction story? I remember the young German Detlaff Kohler—'Mustache'—trying to catch an armadillo outside the mess hall. He was obsessive about armadillos. He collected everything he could on them. It was pitch dark and he was chasing the thing all over. He never came close to catching it. The thing was way too fast for him. At an awards ceremony later, we presented Mustache with an armadillo-catching outfit, including beer-can shinguards. Everybody laughed.

"I remember Peter Malinski and his friend Jorgen Moller Hansen repeatedly warning people to stay well clear of Malinski's complex, large box kite, then Moller Hansen falling into it one night when it was dark and he was unsteady on his feet. There was a loud sound of breaking kite ribs. This was an infamous moment in Junction lore.

"One year Lee Toy and Scott Skinner—'Skinny-san'—put cyalume on cords and practiced jumping rope in the parking lot. When asked what they were doing, Scott's answer was: 'Playing Junction!'

"Wolfgang Schimmelpfenning was another of the German visitors. When he saw a big wolf spider, he jumped back in genuine alarm. After that, we called him 'Wolfie Spider.'

"I remember Martin Lester teaching a course in building your own soft, inflatable bug kite. When asked how long it would take to construct the kite, he said: 'Oh, 45 minutes to an hour.' Eight hours later we were still hard at work. We told him: 'We've been Martinized' (after the ad). Being a Brit, he didn't understand, and we had to explain it to him.

"The facility here and the freedom to come and go with nothing being locked up and classrooms open all night was wonderful. The support staff was superb — it had to be to put up with us. Disasters like having no wind for flying were taken in the right context. Nobody came to Junction obsessed by kites. There was no political agenda here, it was without the pressures—and egos—of many other kite events. You came here to just kick back and meet your friends. Everyone shared ideas and you filed them away in the back of your mind for the day you would use them." ♦

## NOTES ON FIGHTER-KITE FLYING IN INDIA

by Ben Ruhe

Because kites were flown extensively in the Indian subcontinent down through the centuries, references to them in literature are frequent, and often piquant.

Following is a squib from a section on mid-19th century sports and pastimes in Two Kings of Awadh (a region in the north), by Dr. Safi Ahmad of the Aligarh Muslim University:

“Kite flying came to Lucknow from Delhi. This recreation developed and Lucknow became a well-known center of the sport which was patronized by royalty and the nobility. Ingenious devices and tricks were invented and kite flying matches became a special feature of social amusements. This pastime became so popular from the king to the common man almost everyone indulged in it. The kings and nobles extravagantly spent money and it is related that Asaf-u-daula’s kite had a fringe of silver and gold brocade worth five rupees, which earned the same amount to anyone who happened to get it in loot when it fell to the ground (viz., when it was cut out of the air by another kite and retrieved by an onlooker).”

Detailed and charming is the British Raj viewpoint of kite flying in the Allahabad area, also in northern India, by Fanny Parks, wife of an East India Company official. In the volume Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque, published in London in 1850, she writes:

“May 9th was the Sohobut Mela, or Fair of Kites, in Alopee Bagh; I went to see it; hundreds of people, in their gayest dresses, were flying kites in all directions, so happily and eagerly; and under the fine trees in the mango tope, sweetmeats, toys and children’s ornaments, were displayed in booths erected for the purpose. It was a pretty sight.

“The kites are of different shapes, principally square, and have no tails; the strings are covered with manjha, a paste mixed with pounded glass, and applied to the string, to enable it to cut that of another by friction. One man flies his kite against another, and he is the loser whose string is cut. The boys, and the men also, race after the defeated kite, which becomes the prize of the person who first seizes it. It requires some skill to gain the victory; the men are as fond of the sport as the boys.

“The string of a kite caught tightly round the tail of my horse, Trelawny, and threatened to carry away horse and rider tail foremost into mid-air! The more the kite pulled and danced about, the more danced Trelawny, the more frightened he became, and the tighter he tucked in his tail; a gentleman riding a horse nearby caught the string, and bit it in two, and a native disengaged it from the tail of the animal. A pleasant bite it must have been, that string covered with pounded glass! Yah! yah! how very absurd!”

A nostalgic segment by Jon and Rumer Godden from their book about growing up in India titled Two under the Indian Sun (Knopf, 1966), brings Indian kiting into the 20th century:

“We flew kites, too; we loved them. Made of colored paper and fine bamboo, Indian kites are as brilliant as huge butterflies and almost as light. The gatekeeper Guru bought them for us in the bazaar and showed us how to glass our strings, how to run the fine thread through a mixture of flour paste and ground glass until the whole string was armored, and then to wind the string round the polished bamboo roller that had a slim bamboo handle at each end and which our small hands could grasp. He showed us how to launch and fly our kites, how to send them higher and higher, standing with our legs well apart, holding our rollers in both

hands, bracing ourselves against the tug and pull. He taught us how to make our kite bob three times as a challenge to the other kites in the sky and then, as a distant cry of “Dhari, dhari!” rose from an invisible rooftop, to cross strings with our opponent until the vanquished kite, cut loose, floated helplessly away over the river.

“Sometimes we heard a shrill commotion in the road below and, looking over the parapet, saw a crowd of boys running with bamboo poles after a drifting kite, tracking it until it lodged, perhaps, in a tree, and then fighting to possess it. A damaged kite, mended and patched, could do battle again.

“Mam said it was not fair of us to cut the boys’ kites adrift. They cost money, though very little, two or three for an anna. An anna was divided into four pice, and again into twelve pies, and below that were cowries; perhaps those boys counted their money in cowries and might have to save up for week after week to buy one kite. We had pocket money and, if we lost a kite, had only to send Guru into the bazaar to get another. ‘It isn’t fair.’ We agreed, and went on fighting.

“This gave a wanton boldness to what we were doing; perhaps nothing was further away from Randolph Gardens than this flying of kites on the roof, but that was not the only reason we loved it.

“To hold a kite on the roller was to hold something alive, something that kicked in your hand, that pulled and sang as the string thrilled in the wind. The string went up and up until the kite seemed above the hawks circling in the sky; it linked us with another world, wider, far wider than ours—and we were linked too in the kinship of enmity with other unknown flyers on other unknown roofs, those invisible children. Indeed the kites could have been taken as a symbol of our lives.”



Photo: A. Fujino

**Indian Kite Master: Asghar Baylim**



Photo: A. Fujino

**Old Delhi Kite entrepreneur tending his shop.**

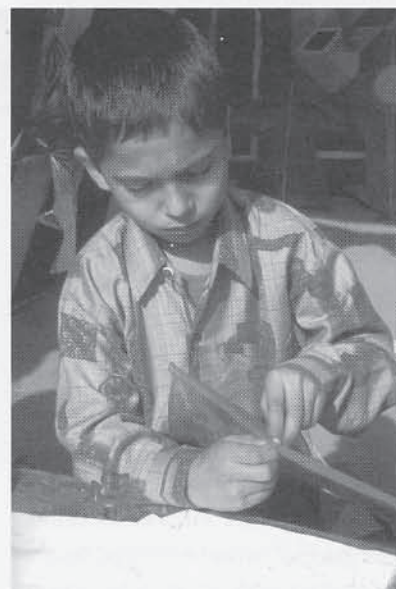


Photo: A. Fujino

**4 year old Saif Baylim making repairs.**



## BOOK REVIEW: *A KITE JOURNEY THROUGH INDIA*

by Scott Skinner

You have to forgive me; every time I pick up a book by Tal Streeter, before reading a word, I turn first to the photographs. I followed this prescription for success with *A Kite Journey through India* and knew that this was a book to rival Streeter's *The Art of the Japanese Kite*. A glance at the book's portfolio of show kites dispelled the notion that all Indian kites were the same, and the intricate geometric paper cuts inspired the patchworker buried within me. Other photos gave other clues to the treasures held inside: "Rooftop flying in Ahmedabad," "Kite looters use long poles to reach for failing kites," "Shop entrances festooned with kites and kite reels," and, ever present, "the kite smile from Ahmedabad's streets and rooftops." My own kite smile grew as I began to devour this book.

Tal Streeter is a writer of quiet adventure, of journeys that are motivated by an object—the kite—and pursued by his curiosity. This journey through India is an adventure that takes the reader into shops, homes, and onto kite fields to experience India's kite culture. Many Westerners have heard of the kite flying in Ahmedabad and Streeter wastes little time in taking his readers there. A trip to the kite market in the City of Four Threads (gold, silk, cotton, and manjha) gives insight into the serious sport of kite fighting. While kite penches (tangles) occur overhead, buyers crowd the small street stalls and negotiate prices for the finest kites. A child "is taught to be a discriminating buyer, testing the balance and evenness of the lateral ability of the kite, bowing the kite between his hands to ensure that it bends in a graceful, even arc." On this day's journey, Streeter follows the city's manjha thread and describes the manjha-making marketplace as well. The vibrant colors of this lethal paste, the graceful twists of finished line, and the ingenious methods of applying paste to line are memorable visual and verbal images.

The journey into the kite culture of India brings us personalities as well. We meet Bushad Kumar, a man so kite-crazy that his wedding was delayed while he flew kites on his rooftop; Jaswant Singh, who describes tukal kite fighting in Punjab; and Bhanu Shah, flyer, collector, and organizer of the Ahmedabad Kite Museum. Bhanu Shah is the true patang gela, a passionate kite-crazy, who, from humble beginnings, has collected thousands of kites and whose dream of establishing a kite museum came true in 1985. The Ahmedabad Kite Museum, housed in the city's Cultural Center, features the kites of India's prominent kite cities: Baroda, Surat, Jaipur, Jodhpur, Bareilly, Lucknow, Agra, Mathura, and Ahmedabad. It is compelling to read of the exchanges and the bond between two men—Streeter and Shah—who have so influenced contemporary kite culture.

*A Kite Journey through India* brings the reader full circle, beginning and ending with one family, the Bahadurs. Tal himself describes Surenda Bahadur as a sort of "mythic kite figure" while Dinesh is described as the archetypal Indian kite zealot, a man who since childhood had given himself over, body and soul, to kiting. I like the fact that Streeter describes the passion of both men, for it is this passion that keeps alive the kite traditions of India. Discover a hidden world of kiting and feel for yourself the passion of Tal Streeter's *A Kite Journey through India*. ♦

The book can be purchased by writing Kite Lines Magazine's Book Store, Kite Lines,  
P.O. Box 466  
Randallstown, MD  
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410-922-1212  
410-922-4262 fax

## SURPRISINGLY DELIGHTFUL TRIP TO INDIA REVEALS THE ART OF FIGHTER KITING

by Scott Skinner

After four trips to China, even I was surprised at my own reluctance to travel to India. I just couldn't convince myself that the positive experiences would outweigh the negative. Horror stories of other group tours did nothing to persuade me that the kites of India were worth the trouble of travel to India.

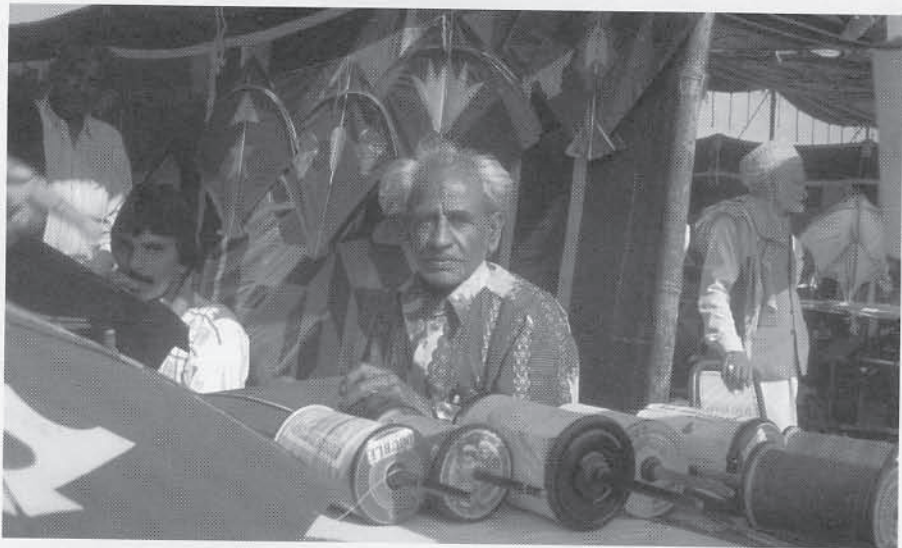


Photo: A. Fujino

I was wrong! Thanks to the professional organization and skill of Ajay Prakash, travel to India is a much different proposition from my uninformed impression. Ajay is a professional travel agent and knows how to get things done. From arrival in Delhi to departure a week later, there was never any doubt that our kite group would be taken care of. The trip was not without some difficult moments, like overnight train trips and an overnight wait in the Bombay airport. But there was never any doubt that we would be met when and where we needed to be and that transportation and lodging would be waiting.

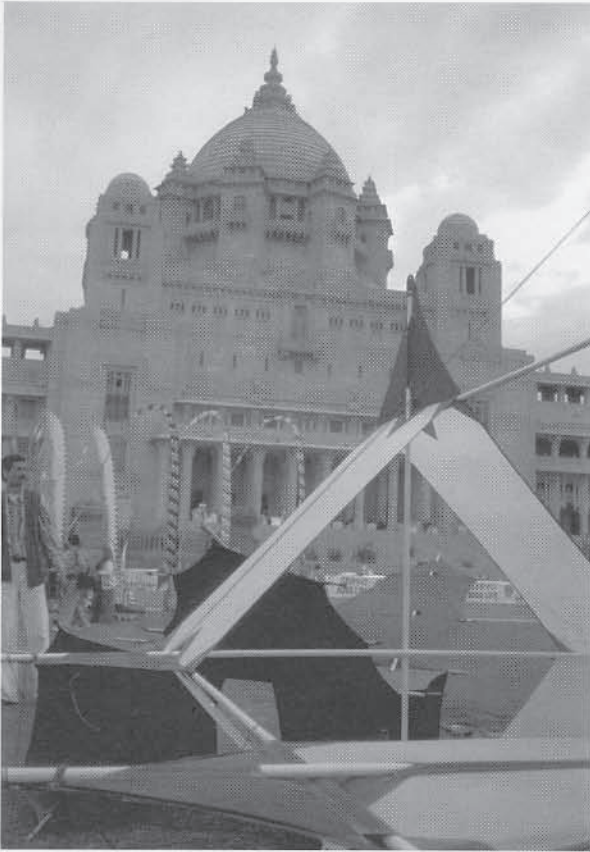
Finally, comment in this journal would not be complete without a mention of the kites. Watching the Indians flying by hand, hundreds of feet of line at risk, and the kites barely visible, was a treat. It is very hard to fully grasp the nuances of fighting strategy—the lines are invisible and the kites so far away—but watching a kite swooping down for the kill was a spectacular experience. It was great watching the Desert Kite Team—three personable Belgians, Guy van Acker, Frank Coenraets,

and Andries van Locker—do battle in the skies with the native Indian flyers. After being shut out the previous year, the now experienced Belgian team showed very well and actually won one head-to-head match.

Creative kite making is alive and thriving as demonstrated by Jodhpur's Asghar Baylim. He makes paper and bamboo airplanes, birds, bats, and even flying men. His own fighters were flown daily, from sunup to sundown, by his four year-old son, Saif, and were fine examples of Indian fighting kites. The skill, shown by Saif, shows that we Westerners have a long way to go to match skills with kite flyers who grow up in a culture of kites. Fantastic appliquéd fighters by Babu Khan were also passed among the visitors and flown with pride by all who had confidence in their flying skill.

The last and, perhaps, most memorable experience was using our precious free time in Delhi to follow Tal Steeter's directions to the kite district. The journey took at least 30 minutes in a pedal-cab, weaving through the

Photo: A. Fujino



The Palace of Maharaja gaj Singh as seen through Guy van Acker's compound Cody.

narrow streets of the old city, listening and watching as the “cabbie” asked passersby for kites. Then, sure enough, kites began appearing on overhead wires and the kite district was found! Kites sold by the pile made our purchases look rather anemic, and motorized line winders gave a clue as to how much line departs the shop on a daily basis. Returning from the heart of old Delhi to the famous Red Fort, we witnessed spontaneous kite battles on the only clear stretch of ground we saw. Terrific! There is little doubt that I will find a way to return and witness even more of India's kite culture. My thanks to Ajay Prakash for making the experience so colorful, comfortable, and almost entirely painless. ♦

Photo: A. Fujino



Indian fighter kites for sale - One can never have too many.

## TOUR OFFERED FOR THIRD INDIAN "DESERT KITE FESTIVAL"

One of the richest and most rewarding kite adventures ever experienced is that of a trip into the heart of India to be a participant in the living heritage of Indian fighter kiting.

Members of The Drachen Foundation were guests of the Indian government in January of 1998 and traveled extensively through this Asian country exploring India's passion for and development of the fighter kite. Foundation staff discovered that India is not difficult, but one of the last honest and accessible kite adventures to be explored.

That adventure was made possible through the professional guidance of Ajay Prakash, and now he is offering a wonderful and affordable tour of Indian kiting to all.

The Third Desert Kite Festival, January 9-23, 1999

- Jan. 9: Leave from New York for Delhi via Air India.
- Jan. 10: Arrive Delhi late at night, met and assisted by Nomad Travels staff. Transfer to hotel.
- Jan. 11: Fly to Jodhpur (a wonderful desert city in central India). Check into hotel. Welcome dinner in the evening.
- Jan. 12-14: Attend Desert Kite Festival (sights of Jodhpur included and are not to be missed!).
- Jan. 14: After dinner, take coach bus to Jaisalmer, the land of sand dunes.
- Jan. 15: Arrive in Jaisalmer. Check in, have breakfast, relax, and do some sightseeing. Stay overnight in Jaisalmer.
- Jan. 16: Morning free. Evening camel safari, dinner, and flying over the dunes. Stay overnight in Jaisalmer.
- Jan. 17: Leave by coach bus for Jaipur. (Possible detour and a night at Mandawa, lovely historic resort, restored with original wall paintings.)
- Jan. 18-19: Stay in Jaipur, also known as the Pink City or the Kite City. Elephant ride to the fort city. Stay overnight.
- Jan. 20: Leave by coach bus for Agra via the ancient Mughal capital of Fatehpur Sikri. Visit the fort city. Stay overnight in Agra, home of the Taj Mahal.
- Jan. 21: Visit the Taj Mahal at sunrise. Leave by coach bus that evening for Delhi. Stay overnight in Delhi.
- Jan. 22: Sightseeing in Delhi, including a not-to-be-missed meeting with local kite makers.
- Jan. 23: Flights back home.

Cost of the tour is about US\$2,000 to US\$2,200

Tour includes:

- round-trip airfare from New York to Delhi
- one-way airfare from Delhi to Jodhpur
- ground transportation between Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, Jaipur, Agra, and Delhi
- full room and board in Jodhpur during the kite festival (does not include \$50 festival registration fee)
- double room and breakfast in all other locations
- camel safari
- elephant ride

Contact: Ajay Prakash at Nomad Travels. (Telephone: 202-1503 or 202-1549; fax: 204-5396. Remember to add country and city codes.) ♦

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## FLORIDA SKIPPER SEES KITE FISHING AS "THE BETTER WAY"

by Ben Ruhe

Kites are well known for fun and games. Their ceremonial significance in Asia and elsewhere is also clear. What is less understood is their ancient and continuing utilitarian use.

In Oceania and Southeast Asia, kites have been employed in fishing for many centuries, probably before recorded time. Locals in north Sulawesi, Indonesia, still use them to catch a kind of garfish. The lure is a tangle of spiderweb, which entangles itself in the teeth of the fish. Elsewhere in Indonesia, in Lampung, Sumatra, fishermen use kites to catch the same kind of surface feeding, ultra-wary fish, but here they use a noose and bait trap.

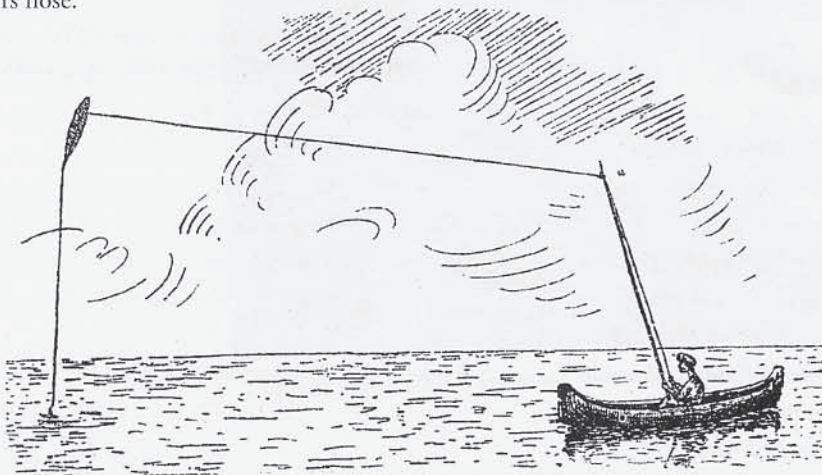
The use of kites in modern day Western sport fishing may date back to 1911 when fishing guide George Farnsworth introduced them in California. They were used to troll bait fish well away from the boat. Farnsworth discovered that the shadow and noise of his boat scared the tuna he was seeking. This innovation allowed him to sail well away from a tuna school, while keeping the angler's bait skipping invitingly in front of the fish's nose.

Zane Grey, author and big-game fisherman, embraced kite fishing thereafter and was quoted as finding the results "electrifying." He once caught five large tuna in a single outing using the technique.

Kite fishing has long since spread to Florida, and Steve (Tight Lines) Magee, out of Key West, is one of the intelligent charter boat skippers who employs the method.

As Magee, captain of the 34-foot *Ramerezi*, says: "Kite fishing is more effective than trolling. It's more challenging, more fun. It's like fly fishing—it takes a lot of skill but it's very productive, particularly in catching large, smart, skittish fish. It's ideal for catching big sailfish.

"Instead of a drowned bait, your bait remains alive and splashing on the surface, without a leader to spook the fish. Everything eats the bait. When sails are thick in the water, some skippers—including me—are so confident that they'll bet the fishermen. If the clients fail to catch a sailfish, there is no charter fee payable; if they do, however, the fee doubles. It's my 'put-up or shut-up' response to sometimes rather demanding clients." ♦



Kite-Fishing with rod and noose or hook, Banda Islands, Eastern Malay Archipelago. After Dr. Max Weber, *H.M. 'Siboga' expedition, 1899-1900, Leiden, 1902.*

## AN ANCIENT, REMARKABLE FISHING METHOD

by Ben Ruhe

The use of kites to catch fish is a very old technique, possibly dating back to the Stone Age, but can still be seen in selected regions of Southeast Asia where it remains a daily activity. Kite fishing occurs across 65 degrees of longitude, from Singapore and Java in the west to the Santa Cruz islands near the Solomons in the east, and it straddles the equator over that length of large and small islands.

While there are variations by area, some generalizations can be stated. Kite fishing from canoes is aimed exclusively, apparently, at the slim, nervous, tasty garfish, widely known as the *belone*. Line is generally held in the hand, although a rod is employed in certain zones. The kite is constructed of leaves or leaf-strips everywhere, although the shape differs locally and depends to a great extent upon the kind of leaf—sago palm, banana, epiphytic fern, ivory nut—employed.

The lure and capturing contrivance is either a running noose of fiber or, more recently, wire, with small fish or shrimp attached as bait, or a tangle of sticky spider's web which becomes tenaciously enmeshed in the fish's long teeth and wrinkled jaws when the garfish strikes.

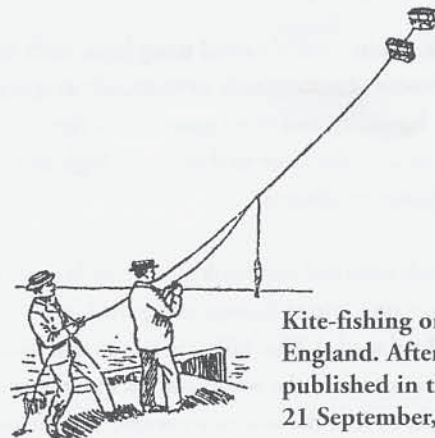
Anthropological evidence indicates a single point of invention for kite fishing, placing it in the Banda Sea islands north of Timor, in present day Indonesia. Dispersion from there could readily have been carried out by long-distance fishermen and keen merchants plying the trade winds. Such a thesis agrees with well-accepted dissemination theories to Melanesia for other cultural appliances from the Malaysian-Indonesian archipelago. Included are the Indonesian loom, a special form of fish-trap made from the naturally barbed leaf-stems of rattan, certain practices in the chewing of betel nut, and the use of a coconut noisemaker to attract

sharks for capture, among others.

Kite fishing is effective when the lure is cleverly flown so as to skip along the top of the water, simulating a live fish. Garfish typically feed on small fish swimming near the surface. While a canoe close by might scare off the skittish garfish, the swaying kite above the bait may be taken by the fish for a hovering aquatic bird in pursuit of a shoal of small fry and thus actually attract the garfish to the site.

All of the paraphernalia associated with kite fishing—leaf kites, noose and cobweb catching contrivances, fiber lines, bamboo rods, wooden line spools, catching nets—has been extensively collected and can be viewed at such institutions as the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford and the Natural History Museum in London, as well as in institutions in the Pacific Rim area such as the South Australia Museum in Adelaide and the Bishop Museum in Honolulu.

Much of the foregoing has been gleaned from an essay titled "Kite-Fishing" by Henry Balfour of Oxford, published by the Cambridge University Press in 1913. The bibliography lists extensive literature, in various languages, on the subject. ♦



Kite-fishing on the coast of England. After a sketch published in the *Daily Mail*, 21 September, 1901.

## KITES KEY TO EARLY WEATHER STUDIES AT PIONEERING BLUE HILL OBSERVATORY

by Ben Ruhe

At the turn of the last century, meteorology became an important new science around the world and kites played a major role in the compilation of data for this work. A major research center was the Blue Hill Observatory at Milton, Massachusetts, established in 1885 on the highest point of land near Boston.

Blue Hill was set up and financed by Abbott Lawrence Rotch (pronounced "roach"), a New England Brahmin married to a lineal descendant of Thomas Jefferson. It soon became associated with Harvard's Astronomical Observatory and its observations and investigations were published in the university's annals.

On Blue Hill in 1894, the first meteorological instrument able to record graphically and continuously was lifted by kites and the possibility of obtaining data simultaneously in the free air, by means of kites, and on the ground was demonstrated. A kite supplied by William Eddy, a Bayonne, New Jersey, inventor, was used to make the first sounding. Eddy patented the deltoid, tail-less kite, a variation on the ancient Malay kite, in his name and his invention is today recognized as one of the nine generic, or basic, kites.

Very valuable results were obtained using kites, such as automatic records of atmospheric pressure, air temperature, relative humidity, and wind speed. Kites flew instruments to altitudes close to three miles high in a variety of weather conditions.

In 1901, Rotch obtained meteorological records over the Atlantic Ocean on a trip to Europe using the kite technology developed at Blue Hill. He also shared Blue Hill information around the world and his observatory's pioneering helped lead the way to a massive, systematic

global study of weather, which continues in an ever-expanding, ever more sophisticated form to this day.

Everyone who was anyone in the English-speaking aeronautics world at the turn of the century turned up at Blue Hill, or was in communication with the observatory: William Eddy, of course; Alexander Graham Bell; Samuel Langley of the Smithsonian Institution; the Wright brothers; the Anglo-Australian Lawrence Hargrave (inventor of the workhorse cellular box kite). All these names connect to Blue Hill records, correspondence, and photographs.

As an inveterate traveler, Rotch established close ties with the European meteorology community, and the surviving archives of Blue Hill, now mostly held at Harvard, contain an invaluable trove of late 19th and early 20th century meteorological scholarship, a significant portion of it involving kites.

Kites fell out of favor for meteorological investigation after Rotch's untimely death in 1912 and as a consequence of World War I priorities. By 1935, when John H. Conover arrived at Milton to work at the observatory, the old kites and the large windlass holding eight miles of wire that used to fly them were gone. "Sold for scrap or trashed," he suspects. Conover worked at Blue Hill until 1959 as a researcher and then acting director, and in retirement wrote the scholarly book, *The Blue Hill Meteorological Observatory; The First Hundred Years—1885–1985* (available for \$60 from The American Meteorological Society, 45 Beacon Street, Boston, MA 02108). The book is 514 pages long and well illustrated, and includes much fascinating information on the innovative use of kites in weather studies at the turn of the century.

Conover, 81, of Dedham, Massachusetts, says in an interview that Harvard decided in the 1950s to end its ties with Blue Hill for financial and other reasons, among them the problem of conducting scientific work in the vicinity of powerful new television and radio transmitters creating excessive electromagnetic interference. The carefully kept Blue Hill records, including those involving kites, were studied by Conover and others, and the best and most relevant for long-term use were sent to Harvard starting in 1959.

At Harvard today, this documentation, including beautiful kite plans, can be found at the Blue Hill Observatory Library maintained by the engineering faculty in Pierce Hall. There is more material in the general Harvard archives. A small but choice cache of papers and pictures is housed at the Collection of Historical Scientific Instruments in the Science Center. This latter trove includes key examples of the actual research apparatus hoisted into the sky by kites, as well as original kites and kite equipment.

Some record artifacts, notably a collection of old photographs, remain at the observatory on Blue Hill, which continues its weather observations on a reduced scale and is now being renovated, preparatory to reopening in mid-September as an educational museum, complete with computer lab. The work is being done under the auspices of Blue Hill Observatory Inc., a newly named nonprofit organization headed by orthopedic surgeon William Minsinger, of Randolph Center, Vermont, a meteorology buff since his youth. Educator Charles Orloff, of Yarmouth Port, Massachusetts, another longtime meteorology enthusiast, serves as executive director of the museum.

The \$1.5-million rejuvenation includes a re-creation of the square, wood, and tarpaper kite shed, which housed the steam-driven windlass from which the weather kites were flown. As its own contribution to this work, The Drachen Foundation is cooperating with Blue Hill in refurbishing the shed. At the highest elevation in the Boston area, Blue Hill, with its 50-mile panoramic view of eastern Massachusetts, can almost be guaranteed to produce a substantial breeze for this festivity.

Because historic turn-of-the-century kite flying at Blue Hill occurred at a time before the sky was crisscrossed by aircraft, weather observations could be routinely made

there at quite high altitudes using high tensile wire line. It was inevitable that long kite trains would go down in mishaps, and Conover, in his fine book on Blue Hill, recounts this unusual incident from 1913: "On February 7 a kite flight that employed five kites broke away in the evening. The wire lay across New Haven train tracks in Braintree and with the passage of a train it became entangled in the wheels. It was estimated that five kilometers (three miles) of wire wound around an axle, necessitating a halt in the train's movements."

Conover fails to comment on the emotions generated by this accident, although they can easily be imagined. Rather, he goes on—deadpan—to tell about another amazing incident: "Only a month later, on 6 March, two kites were out of sight in a cloud from which heavy rain was falling. There had been no lightning previously, but occasional sparks had been coming off the wire. Suddenly there was a blinding flash in the kite house. (A weather researcher) jumped out the door, saw a line of white-hot beads falling from a line where the kite wire had been, and heard an even peal of thunder, without the usual crash, for the line of the flash had been straight along the kite wire. Two men were shocked, one severely, but no permanent injuries resulted. The engineer picked up his belongings and went down the hill, never to return."

So much for the notion that weather observing on a Massachusetts hilltop over the last 113 years has been a deadly dull scientific grind. Not exactly. ♦



## KITE FLYING AT BLUE HILL

by Ben Ruhe

The technical aspects of flying kites to obtain meteorological records in the upper air at Blue Hill Observatory remain fascinating. Following are facets of this pioneering scientific work, as outlined by director A.L. Rotch in a paper for the 1903 St. Louis Exposition:

- The height of the kite was obtained by attaching a barometer to it and by taking trigonometrical measurements when the upper kite in the train was visible.
- Kites were flown off steel music wire having a tensile strength up to 650 pounds.
- The steam powered windlass used at Blue Hill was designed by S.P. Fergusson of the observatory. It had devices for measuring the length of wire unreeled and recording the pull of the kites. It was able to wind and oil the wire used under uniform and moderate pressure upon a storage drum.
- To attain heights beyond one mile, in order to lift the increased weight of the longer and larger wire, additional kites were attached to the line at intervals of about one mile. Thus a height of three miles would require about six miles of wire to be lifted by five or six kites.
- The kites first used were the tail-less Malay, or Eddy kites, tailless, which presented a convex surface to the wind. Later, the Hargrave box kite, as modified by Henry Clayton of the observatory, became the work-horse for lifting apparatus.
- The highest recorded flight ever attained at Blue Hill was 4,815 meters above sea level (15,793 feet, or just short of 3 miles) on July 19, 1900. (Set with a train of kites)



Photo: S. Skinner

### Blue Hill Weather Observatory reopening to the public Fall, 1998.

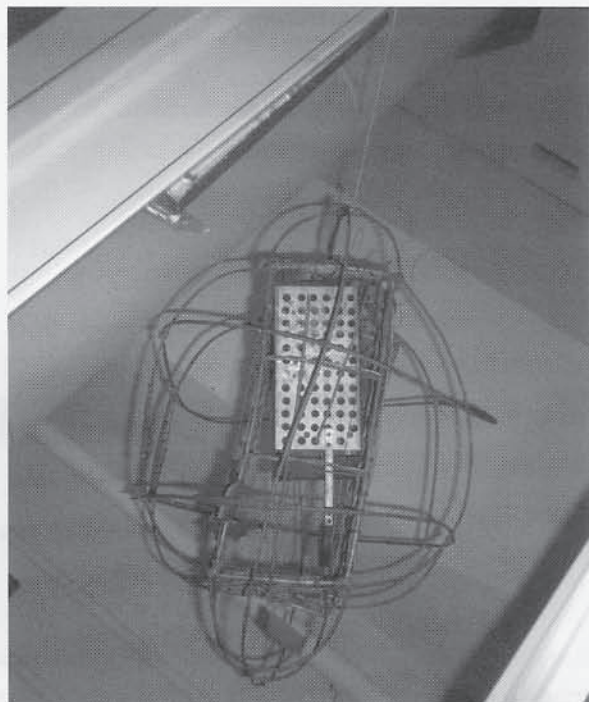
- “Breakaways” were far from uncommon. For instance, in 1902 a downed meteorograph and kite were found 13 miles away from the observatory, and two kites and instruments were lost at sea in spite of a search in Boston harbor. These flights may have reached the 16,000-foot to 20,000-foot level, judging from the length of wire out and its inclination angle.
- The oldest kite from Blue Hill, now deposited with Harvard’s Collection of Historical Scientific Instruments, is an Archibald model made of cloth. It was used in experiments with anemometers from 1882 to 1884.

## SCIENTIFIC INSTRUMENTS USED AT BLUE HILL OBSERVATORY

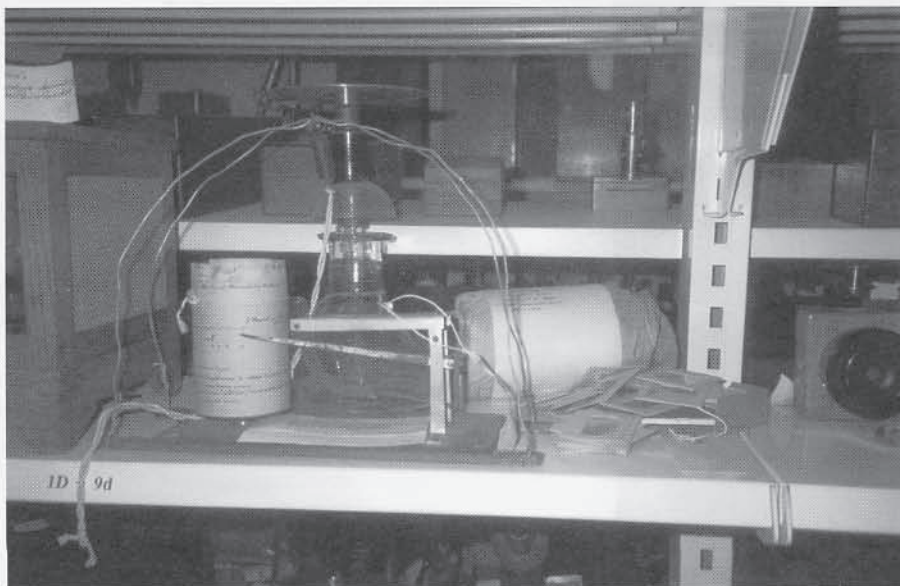
by Ben Ruhe

Among the more than 150 objects from Blue Hill now housed at Harvard's Collection of Historical Scientific Instruments are kites and apparatus used with them. A partial list of this holding, as compiled by John Conover in his book on the observatory, follows:

- E. D. Archibald's kite. Cloth, employed in experiments with anemometers, 1882-84.
- Kite meteorograph. Pressure, temperature, relative humidity, and wind speed. Made by S.P. Fergusson.
- Samples of coverings for kites, 1894-1905.
- Dines kite meteorograph, 1902. Pressure and temperature. Wooden case, cloth cover.
- Automatic camera used to take pictures from kites. Made for A.L. Rotch by L. Gaumont and Cie, Paris. May be set to take pictures from 80 minutes to 2 hours after start of timer.
- First thermograph lifted by a kite to sound the atmosphere. Made by Fergusson. Tracing of first sounding with explanations on clock drum. August 4, 1894.
- Kite meteorograph. Pressure, temperature, relative humidity, and wind speed. Made by Fergusson, 1898.
- Kite (unassembled in long wooden box including cloth) made by Lawrence Hargrave in 1896 for prize offered by Boston Aeronautical Society. Awarded prize by Blue Hill committee on tests as best kite for use in high winds. Hargrave kite frame and cloth. ♦



**Metal basket crafted to lift weather instruments by kites.**



**Scientific Weather Thermology, lifted by an Eddy kite to obtain the first temperature sounding of the atmosphere.**

Photo by Permission of Harvard University's Collection of Historical Scientific Instruments

Photo by Permission of Harvard University's Collection of Historical Scientific Instruments

## THE DRACHEN JOURNAL

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