



## Presseausendung

**Mondsee Jänner 2008**

### **Snowman**

Snowkiting.at Press Department

### **Hardy Brandstötter – The Snowman in the northern Alps**

Text: Alex Boyce

Hardy Brandstötter is not someone that normally comes to mind as a pioneer or extremist, but after spending time with this Austrian kiter and speedflyer one begins to realize that kiting really is an extreme sport and his dream to explore all the sport has to offer, and push the limits as far as they will go is what makes kite development what it is today. Most kites use their gear according to what the manufacturer designs, this guy tells them what he needs and they try to make it...

We hooked up with Hardy and his brother Heinar In Northern Italy at a snow kite secret spot near Bolzano, right near the Border with Austria. I had personally never meet him before or heard of him but after a few conversations realized this guy was one of the first serious snow kites and all round Snowman. (Heck a waterman is an expert on the water, this guys an all round expert on the snow, so why not snowman.)

We meet up at the bottom of the slope which required us all to cram into a cable car to the top which was up at about 2200 metres. After a short hike in distance but long in time through 1 metre of fresh snow we got to the launch area. Checking the area out revealed a large high plain completely untracked, an amazing playground with nothing but fresh snow and a 10knot wind that started building to 20 knots. This was snow kite paradise there were sliders, half pipes, quarter pipes, cliff jumps and large flat cruising areas, all there for the taking. After seeing quite a few snow kite locations I would say this is almost one of the best. The wind window was 360 degrees, and for mountain areas was pretty smooth. If you could find the energy you could kite for 20 km in on direction and back again without seeing anyone else.

After taking all this in, Hardy and his brother plus Fabian our local guide, by this time had pumped up and were launching carefully making sure they didn't get blasted over the cliff as on snow its possible to get hit by strange gusts that come from nowhere, and we were where being nowhere is not always helpful as injuries at this altitude and temperature, as Hardy pointed out can kill you.



After the first session warming up and getting into the area Heinar pulled a few slim chances and flew quite a bit, Hardy at this point was just cruising learning the land. During a quick rest and after a few probing questions about some of the things he hinted at before, Hardy the pro snowkiteboarder started to explain his view on kite sports. Snow kiting is what to you? Answer: fun, and serious stoke. What was speed flying? Answer: Flying a 12 metre cross between a open cell kite and paraglider, at speeds of 80-90 km per hour down a steep slope, off cliffs and doing touch and go landings. He did assure us though that he has managed 110km an hour when he modified the wing slightly.

It should be pointed out that at this point he is a serious athlete, among some of his friends is Hermann Maier, a fellow kitesurfer who he taught and also one of the world champions of downhill skiing. Hardy pointed out how he liked his life and in the last 20 hikes to go speed flying he only actually flew in 4 of them. As the other 16 times were too dangerous, safety is his priority.

After a few more pieces more of German style bread which Honey incidentally doesn't go with very well, the kites were launched and we headed further out to explore. Heinar started off by finding a nice natural rail which normally in summer looked like a fence, and after ripping that up we spotted a perfect quarter pipe, the snow was deep, the wind strong and the pipe was there for the taking, Hardy started testing the lip and did some jumps into the lee of the mountain, which is harder as the kite doesn't have anything to pull against so soaring is not as easy. With these conditions though it was possible to laydown some nice turns off the lip of the pipe, and power down the mountain. This session started to show what snowkite freeriding really was all about, fresh snow and your buddies taking what was there and just going for it. After a bit of searching for the right wind Heinar found the perfect launch spot for some serious jumping, but at this point it is more like flying as hang times of 10 + seconds are possible as the land drops away beneath the rider.

Hardy explained the serious side to all of this fun though, he was just in the final stages of preparation for an epic 1600 km solo kite marathon across Siberia from the northern point of the lake Baikal near Severobaykalsk over the Tukinskie Mountains to Irkutsk in the far east of Russia. "In order to train for snowkite you need to snowkite," which kind of summed up the ideal way to train for that type of undertaking. The trip will be completely solo with no modern navigational aid only the use of a sextant and compass, he will be carrying only 85 kilos in weight and every gram counts, if he washes less he can take less soap and more gas to cook with by using the weight saving. The only communication he will have for 5 weeks will be via a emergency satellite transponder which he can activate should there really be trouble. Hardy views it as a personal challenge and explained how he likes to be in that type of situation, he will even be eating the food locally and will not be using space mission style food packs.



He also suggested schnapps was an important ingredient and if the locals used it then he would as well. His latest mission has been almost 2 years in the planning stage and with support from some of his sponsors.

Leaving the mountain Hardy gave a quick demo of what speed flying was, on a small slope, it left a similar feeling compared to seeing kiting for the first time, I wanna try that.

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