

New water sports catch a wave in region

BY TOM TRACEY

Record-Eagle staff writer

By day, Traverse City native Tim Cairns works as an accounting manager at Ascomnorth. By evenings and weekends, he is a kite boarding/wind surfing enthusiast, who works the waves at local beaches.

"Every windy day has its own unique combination of wind and waves that will

challenge your physical and mental abilities," Cairns said. "If you miss it, you have missed it forever and you're one day older."

Kite boarding and wind surfing are two extreme sports that are fast gaining momentum. Although they demand the utmost in focused energy from their participants, the trade-off is gaining an almost Zen-like

experience that thrills all senses of the body.

"Kite boarding is a good way to get out and get in touch with yourself," said veteran kite entrepreneur Brian Buchler of Grand Bay Kite in Traverse City. "Whether you're ripping up the flat water or tearing it up in the waves, it's a good way to go out and have a ton of fun."

From avid wakeboarders to housewives, kite boarding attracts people from every walk of life, said Keegan Myers, who along with brother Matt co-owns Broneah Kite Boarding shop next to the Traverse City Visitors Center.

"The sport is so multi-dimensional," he said. "You can take the sport to the extreme level or you can just do it for exercise and to enjoy the beauty of the water and wind."

Casual shore observers watching surfers on boards propelled by sails may wonder about the difference between kite boarding and wind surfing.

According to Cairns, the wind surfer requires very little beach space to launch and little water space to ride. The mast of the wind surf sail is attached to the board. Fancy footwork and years of practice are required to keep the board on a plane throughout the completion of the turn as the sail is rotated.

Kite boarding, however, is best executed where there is plenty of open space, he said.

"The kite board kite usually has approximately 100 feet of line between the kite and the control bar," he said. "As a result, the kite board kite is best launched where there is a large beach and where the underwater topography does not include



Record-Eagle/Lara Neel

Michelle Bak of Williamsburg tries her hand at controlling a kite boarding kite with help from Matt Lang, 17, a member of Broneah Kite Boarding in Traverse City.

an immediate drop-off near the shoreline."

Beginning kite boarders can learn jumping and freestyle tricks in less time and with less wind than beginning wind surfers, Cairns said. And while kite boarding takes up more space on the beach and in the water, it takes less space in a vehicle.

"Kite boarding is such an easy sport to travel with and there are so many great destinations for the sport that all your trips turn into kite boarding trips," he said. "You can also always tell a kite boarder when the wind is blowing. Typically they will be very frantic and doing anything they can to get on the water as quick as possible."

With extreme sports come extreme fashions. What skate boarding and snow boarding did for Generation X, kite boarding and wind surfing are doing for cross-generation participants.

Form follows function at the Myers brothers' Broneah shop. Utilitarian surf gear such as "hoodies"

(hooded sweatshirts to quickly warm surf-drenched bodies) and "truckers" (wide-brimmed caps to ward off incessant sun) keep their crew protected.

If getting in a "session" while "lit" seems "sick" to you, maybe it's time to "pull the trigger" while "going off" your "job jive" before your rig "tea bags."

If so, newcomers are advised to keep it simple and get lessons.

"Taking a kite out without instruction is like trying to fly an airplane without going to a pilot's school," Myers said. "Your first step into kite boarding is to take a lesson no matter your athletic ability. If you take the proper steps getting into the sport, you will have a great experience with it."

When choosing equipment, Buchler advises beginners to talk to other kite boarders.

"There is no need to get the best thing out there or the newest," he said. "The most important part of the sport is just to be out there

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