

## Kite Nazis

SOME ARGUE IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE KITERS ESPOUSE THE AGGRESSIVE TERRITORIAL LOCALISM ENDEMIC IN SURF CULTURE. **BY MICHAEL BEHAR**

➔ **Full disclosure: I am** not a surfer. I'm a kiter who is certain our sport will always engender a peaceful coexistence. Unlike surfers, kilters won't war over turf. We'll eschew keyed cars and shattered windshields. And we'd certainly never create a clothing line that advertises our innately defensive posture (Locals Only). Kilters are better than that, right? Wrong.

Here's what I learned after conducting a quick survey of surfers and kilters, including pros from both sports: I am hopelessly naïve. "Places I traveled to kite five years ago were super friendly," Mauricio Abreu told me. "Now they are increasingly hostile." Abreu is a 31-year-old team rider for Liquid Force Kiteboarding who grew up in Brazil, a country he claims breeds "the most aggressive and disrespectful surfers anywhere." Brazil hardened Abreu: His threshold for localism is unusually high. So I'm shocked to learn Abreu already detects hostility percolating among kilters.

"When surfing started, it was all about clubs," says Jeff Kafka, who runs Wind

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It's no wonder surfers become territorial and fight to keep local waves to themselves.

Over Water, a kite school in San Francisco. "People would travel from club to club. Other clubs would let people in and show them their waves." Then the sport exploded, and by the late 1970s that hospitality had all but evaporated. The honeymoon was over. "I grew up around surf bullies smashing people's teeth in," Kafka says.

Though kiting is still in the honeymoon stage, Abreu sees change afoot. "If you watch *Endless Summer*, we are

where that movie was — the stoke of travel, discovery and everywhere you go people are excited to see you," he says. "In a matter of 10 years, that will be gone."

The International World Games Association puts the recreational surfing population at 20 million. Wannasurf.com lists 7,722 surf spots around the globe. That's an average of 2,590 surfers per break. It's no wonder surfers are pissed off. Kilters need only wind and water,

which are plentiful. There are 221,000 miles of coastline on Earth, according to the CIA World Factbook. This tally doesn't include freshwater shores. Not all is kite-friendly, but the fact that there's so much left to explore makes it seem ludicrous we'll ever fight over rideable real estate. The problem is that people aren't traveling to the ends of the Earth to kite. We congregate. If you only have a week, you're not going to pick a random swath of coast you spotted

PHOTOS: TRACY KRAFT, (OPPOSITE) CHRIS SARNECKI

on Google Earth. You'll go to Cabarete, Máncora, South Padre, Hatteras, Cumbuco or Tarifa — where sessions are nearly guaranteed.

When we're not traveling, kilters reside where population densities are high — near the coast. The result is that kitable real estate is dwindling fast. Spots in the San Francisco Bay Area are inundated with kilters. The same is true on the East Coast. And, big surprise, these are the places where tensions run high.

"Sometimes it's so crowded it's hard to get a trick in," says Kafka. "I usually hold back and just go somewhere else. But I could definitely see someone out there getting irritated."

Wes Matweyew, 39, tells me about a couple of unfamiliar kilters who showed up at C Street, his local spot in Ventura, California, and proceeded to ride directly in his line. "Every other word out of my mouth was effin' this and effin' that." Later, on the beach, he stomped on

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the kite of one of the riders, putting a hole in it. Matweyew, who spent his younger years surfing around Ventura, feels bad about the incident. He blames his behavior on being "brought up with the whole localism thing. I'm living proof that the surfing mentality is already taking hold."

Even so, tiffs between riders are rare. Meanwhile, industry gurus estimate the worldwide population of kilters is on the rise — 250,000 and counting. So how do we remain civil as our numbers soar? One strategy is for kilters to embrace the surfer protocol. "If you go to a place and there is epic wind, and there are three locals, let them have priority," suggests Abreu. And if you're kiting in surf, don't be a wave hog. "If there is a local crowd, I'm not

going to pick the best waves," says Kafka, who often shares the swell with surfers at Mavericks, a famous big-wave break in Northern California. "I'm going to sit on the shoulder, go for the leftovers — it's all about real estate."

Then again, if kiting becomes mainstream, our amicable nature may be doomed. A colleague who is neither a surfer nor a kiter, but is indeed a keen social critic, summed it up this way: "Think niche versus popularization. Coastal insiders had surfing to themselves for a long time. Then the Beach Boys screwed everything up by popularizing the sport among people who were Beach Boys fans, for God's sake. If Third Eye Blind starts writing kiteboarding anthems, you will all turn into defensive pricks overnight."

**If there were a million kiteboarders worldwide, would crowded sessions cause animosity?**

