

## Message in a Bottle

KITERS CHART A VOYAGE TO HEAL OUR OCEANS. BY MICHAEL BEHAR



### Somewhere in the

South Pacific, Graham Hill sails a 60-foot catamaran, *Plastiki*, made from 12,500 reclaimed plastic water bottles. Hill — the founder of TreeHugger, a leading green news website — patches into a satellite and fires off an e-mail about kiteboarding's environmental impact. "Kiting has a fair amount of impact," he writes. "The kites could be recycled into bags, clothing or shower curtains. But the boards are worse, as they are probably never reused."

His comment surprises me. As a wind-powered sport, I assumed kiting was Earth-friendly. It's not. Kites are manufactured in China and shipped worldwide. Kiters drive and fly to launches, and virtually all the equipment is made from petroleum-derived polymers. But Hill, an avid kiter, is not trying to kill your session buzz. He just wants to underscore that we can make our sport a lot greener.

*Plastiki's* crew members have a particular beef with disposable plastic water

bottles. To draw attention to the ailing health of the world's oceans, David de Rothschild, who founded Adventure Ecology and has twice snowkited across Greenland, and Matthew Grey, *Plastiki's* expedition director, constructed a catamaran made from recycled materials and are sailing it from San Francisco to Sydney, Australia. Besides the boat's pontoons, which are stuffed with empty water bottles, the sails and hulls are made from reusable plastics, and the masts are cut from scrap aluminum. Renewable energy (solar, wind) powers the electronics systems. In theory, the entire boat could be recycled. "Once in Sydney,

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we could make [the boat] into printer cartridges, watch bands and even Nike jackets," says Hill, who joined the expedition.

*Plastiki* set sail in March 2010. After an initial 40-day leg that was too sketchy for kiting, the crew finally got a session at Christmas Island on "massive, shallow, blue lagoons full of fish, turtles and rays — a spectacular sight," says Hill. "We were told it had been windy there for a year and a half straight." Samoa was next for some wave riding and then on to New Caledonia. Amidst the fun, the mission — promoting that clean water is a precious resource not to be squandered — always remains



squarely in their crosshairs.

Hill asks that kiters eschew single-use water bottles and stick with reusable canteens, pointing out that nearly every plastic water bottle ever made still exists. He continues, "Riders should minimize transportation, buy gear secondhand and get involved in [protecting] the part of the ocean where they kite." The next time you stumble over a discarded plastic bottle while rigging up, stuff it in your kite bag and recycle it later. "The role of plastic in our oceans is a disaster," says Hill. "But it doesn't have to be if we consciously redesign the material and how we use it through its lifecycle."

*Plastiki*, made entirely from recyclable materials. Below: Treehugger.com founder Graham Hill.



Hill gets a session while *Plastiki* makes a stop on Christmas Island.