

SNOWKITEUSA

OUT WITH THE JEDI MASTER

THE USA'S BEST KNOWN
AND MOST DIFFERENT
POWERKITING
LOCATIONS HOST
ANNUAL EVENTS WHICH
RUN ALMOST TOGETHER
IN SPRINGTIME EACH
YEAR. FOR BUTCH AND
THE CREW, 'SNOW KITE
MASTERS' KICKED OFF A
WHIRLWIND
10 DAYTOUR...



Butch sunset hand drag: Jamie Clayton



Rob Whitall with proto Frenzy: Jamie Clayton

We had dreams to ride the 'States for a few years, having ridden all the best spots in the UK, both banned, public and private access. After a full on Sunday session one wintry weekend over a quiet drink at the Jolly Sailors, our local at Brancaster, it was decided. Our main target was the NABX (North American Buggy Expo), the USA's largest land kiting event on the 35 square mile Ivanpah Dry Lake to the south of Las Vegas. Originally called the Spring Break Buggy Bash, it takes place every year in late March and our trip there was featured in *PK19*.

But before NABX, we allowed time to investigate a frostier option. Much further north, the Wasatch Plateau in Utah is base for the Ozone Snow Kite Masters USA, a non-competitive event where riders of all abilities can share the freeride experience and progress the sport. At 10,000 feet altitude, the hills and gullies form natural half-pipes and park like features, while the slopes offer miles of back

country free riding in one of the world's most breathtaking locations. The event gathers the cream of American snowkiters, showcasing the sport and its myriad of possibilities.

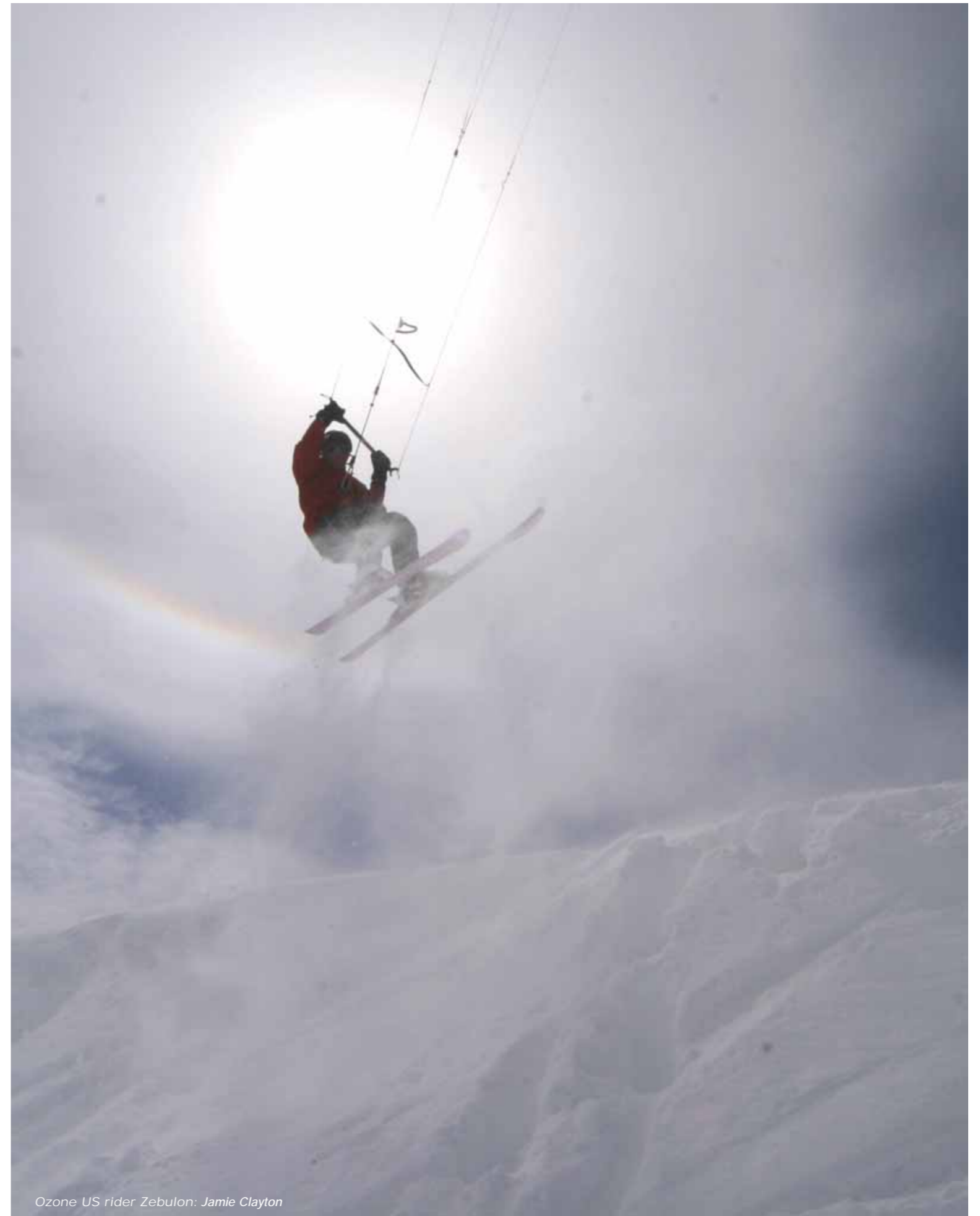
Now we weren't the kind of guys who would let a few hundred miles of American scenery stand between us and some of the best kites in America. Rider/cameraman Mark Archer and Phat Dan Vaughan from Ozone UK, photographer Jamie Clayton, Butch and his lovely wife Shell were all set for one hell of a whirlwind ten day kite trip!

THE ROLLING ZONE

It wasn't hard to spot the event area! Dan had done a sterling effort driving through the night, fuelled by Red Bulls and big coffees bought at endless big service stations along the way. Copious amounts of flags and windblades had been erected, steadily flapping in the favourable southerly winds that buffeted the area – a snowy

carpet of rolling hills and valleys, one after another, stretching as far as our tired eyes could see. This place was clearly a snowkiters' paradise. Flats for freestyle, big hills and bowls for boosting extended flights, plus endless back country terrain.

After meeting our hosts and helping set up the remainder of the banners, tents and badass sound system, we left Brian and Heather Schenck of Ozone USA to finish off while Dan and Butch rigged an 11 metre Riot and 12 metre Frenzy, ready for a wake-up session in the deep crusty snow with looping kites powering us effortlessly up some fairly steep hills in the early morning light. The 'Event Village' was erected at 9,700 feet. From there it didn't take long to expose the most awesome views, while the event area started to fill up with kites of all shapes and descriptions, with riders from all over chatting and enjoying the start of an awesome weekend to come. ▶



Ozone US rider Zebulon: Jamie Clayton

ONE HELL OF A WHIRLWIND TEN DAY KITE TRIP!



Chasta Handplant: Jamie Clayton

“BIG JUGS OF BEER AND UNTOLD SHOTS OF SPIRITS FLOWED...”

THE JEDI MASTER

Returning from that first wee snow session, totally in awe of the location and its potential with a kite, we met up with Rob Whitall and were introduced to Chasta, that small, smiling and extremely energetic French dude who was to show us the true might of a Snowkite Jedi Master. I've watched countless DVD's and web movies of Chasta, Alex Peterson and the other top snowkiters of the world, but it doesn't come close to preparing yourself for actually seeing these guys in action on the slopes.

The speed, the amplitude and the sheer balls of these dudes is truly mind blowing. Boosting huge jumps and glides off hills that defy belief and soaring through the air, backwards or forwards with the greatest of ease, while spinning, grabbing and tweaking moves you would have never thought possible. We could do nothing but stand and stare, in awe of the talents of the riders around us – “Looks like we better step things up a notch then boys! Right, let's do it!”

As Dan and myself powered up the nearest hillside, readying ourselves for our first attempt at proper extended flights, we watched for tips from the other riders, effortlessly launching from the top and flying way over our heads to soft landing zones in the fresh powder below. That was all we needed to see, as we eased gently into the awesome sensations of pure flight. Alongside us, US Ozone riders Zebulon, Eric B and Brian Schenck were busting large with big spins and kite loops, showing the many spectators how it's done. With Jimos Stavros alongside Gustav Schmiege and Adam Caudill, a plethora of talented photographers was ready to capture the magic.

Being a photographer sounds like the easy job, but when you're faced with 18 inches of fresh powder and a series of hills to climb at an altitude of 10,000 feet, you soon realise it's not all roses. They paid their dues big time as they trudged from one location to the next, puffing and wheezing in the thin mountain air, with no complaints and huge smiles on their faces as they approached the next spot. Legends indeed!

That evening, the snowkiters partied at a bar in nearby downtown Mt Pleasant. Hard! Big jugs of beer and untold shots of spirits flowed; big stuffed animal heads littered the walls of 'The Triangle Lounge' alongside various antique firearms which presumably killed them, with gin traps adding to the ambience of this middle America heartland. Being first through the doors earlier that evening and last out later that night, the Ozone UK crew proved their compatibility with even the most hardcore of American bars, coming away with a new twang in our accents – “You're in Utah now boy! Squeal piggy squeal!”

FROM WHITEOUT TO EPIC

The second day of the OSKM was heralded by a complete whiteout. The drive up to the event location from was a mission in itself, with very limited visibility which sometimes came down to no visibility at all. We eventually got there to find a steady wind of 20 knots howling across the completely white backdrop. Despite zero visibility, a lone kiter was rigging her 8 metre Ozone Access ►





Pix: Jamie Clayton except ● Rochelle Butcher

and headed off into the blizzard.... alone! Some called her 'crazy,' others 'mad.' We called her 'hardcore.' Had her kite gone down and taken her with it, finding a brightly coloured canopy would have been a mean task in such conditions, let alone the girl who had been flying.

That day turned out to be one of the most epic in our powerkite experience on land, water or snow. After diving back into the wagon and driving back down, we came to Electric Valley. At lower altitude we found clear vision and more massive areas to kite, so parked up behind a line of big wagons on the roadside between two huge freshly powdered fields. To the left, a 100 foot climb to the top of a small ridge revealed a vast spanning valley, filled with the gnarliest natural snow park. Bowls, ridges and cornices surrounding massive areas of undulating hills and small 'wave like' snowdrifts ideal as mini kickers to enter the skies above. To the right was another lower level field, dropping slightly to an icy white valley backed by a snow white, steeply

banked hillside. And continuing behind, another monster hill upon which riders were boosting large into the skies and gliding for what seemed like an eternity; before kite looping back up the face, landing smoothly and powered, already starting their return ascent.

The next three hours were supremely spent. Spins, grabs and inverted antics busted out with an amplitude and style previously reserved for our land based day jobs, whilst we proved that KGB (kite ground boarding) and indeed buggy skills can transfer directly to the snow, surpassing the style and fluidity that we are accustomed to in our normal riding conditions.

Later, back on top of Skyline, the cloud had lifted and the event site was once again a mass of coloured canvas and lines. After our 'flat' session of the morning we were primed and ready for more extended flight. Once you boost, the ground drops away and you get the feeling you're way up there; 7, 8, 9, 10 seconds go

by with the kite above your head, then crank on your hand to bring the kite back into the power as you come in to land, or loop it back to initiate another ascent. I'm sure our shouts could be heard for miles as Dan and I took turns at boosting bigger than ever before, grabbing and tweaking for all we were worth. Rob and Chasta joined in our wee session, giving tips on kite control and kite loop landings, really upping the mantle on what is possible with a kite in flight.

We finished the OSKM with a hint of sadness, helping to pack away the many banners and tents, knowing we'd experienced the last snowkite session of the season and having learnt that snowkiting is indeed the daddy of all kitesports! By the same time next day, the snow would melt into dirt and mountains into lake beds. We're off to the NABX at Ivanpah Dry Lake... PK

Report: Butch
Photos: Jamie Clayton, Rochelle Butcher

SNOWKITE SEASON USA

- Jan 1-15: To Cross the Moon (North Dakota) 1
 - Jan 13-14: Telefest and Snowkite Freeride (Lake Gogebic, MI) 2
 - Jan 20-21: Snowkite Rally (Mille Lacs, MN) 3
 - February 2-4: Kitefree (Lake Winnepesaukee, NH) 4
 - February 17-19: Snowkite Rodeo (Georgetown Lake, Montana) 5
 - February 17-19: TC Kite Derby (Traverse City, Michigan) 6
 - February 24-25: Kitestorm (Burlington, Vermont) 7
 - February 24-25: Kite Crossing (Mille Lacs, Minnesota) 8
 - March 3-4: US Open Snowkite Masters (Skyline, Utah) 9
 - March 10-11: Snowkite Freeride (Hill City, ID) 10
 - March 10-11: Therapy Sessions (Lake Dillon, Colorado) 11
 - March 17-25: Cascades Snowkite Tour (WA to CA) 12
- Updates and details will be posted on www.windZup.com during the 06/07 season. Keep in touch for current information as more dates will be announced!

