LADY'S MILE SALT FLAT

A massive pan of salt scarred earth on the island of Cyprus has been earmarked for a land based powerkite centre, newly opened for tests, tuition and recreational riding this year. Butch enjoyed a preview of a location where pure wind and hard ground complete the deal…

The discovery of the Lady's Mile salt flats on Cyprus has opened up a brand new location where the potential for landbased kiting activities is immense, alongside equally great kitesurfing. This location will provide visiting riders with the first true holiday landkiting location – a full blown riders' destination with great winds and perfect riding conditions.

Surf Cyprus, which runs kitesurfing on the island, has teamed up with the Paracademy training team to provide kite buggy and landboard courses from beginner through to advanced riding. Paracademy will also be offering riders the opportunity to just bring kites and take advantage of the school's test centre which will boast a wide range of race and freestyle buggies and boards. Other plans for the year ahead include a range of buggy, landboard and kitesurfing instructor courses, plus some kite landboard and surf competitions.

Down on the Lady's Mile

Lady's Mile Beach is an east facing stretch of Mediterranean coastline, situated on the south coast of Cyprus, 30 minutes drive from the capital Limmasol. The area is set directly next to British military bases and largely consists of a 3 square mile salt lake, stretching far inland with shimmering heat rising from its baking hot surface. It is devoid of any obstacles or hazards, apart from a steel framed dugout used as sun protection for the local radio control bumblebee car pilots!

Our trip coincided with the transitional change in seasonal winds, bringing the first easterly since the previous winter. But whether it's offshore or onshore has no bearing on the salt pan – since the wind is equally smooth and steady in both directions, land kiters can session here all year round.

After a quick kitesurf session to cool off in the building heat, we turned our backs on the glorious warm blue water and zoned in on the awesome salt pan that lay before us. Lady's Mile is similar to another Mediterranean salt flat we visited two years previously at La Franqui in the south of France, but proved much grippier due to the fact that this area hardly ever sees any water. Sand, salt and small stones have compacted to create a KGB and kite buggiers' dream with a smooth, hard packed and super fast surface, but without the tarmac like texture and extreme grip of the dry Nevada lakebeds in the USA.

A necessary transition was made from bare chest and board shorts to body armour and jeans for the afternoon session. By now the wind had built towards 30 mph, but remained super steady and consistent. The Ozone Access was rigged and launched, before undertaking a mellow cruise across the vast plain to check out overall surface conditions in the Surf Cyprus buggy which tanked effortlessly across the hard ground, picking up way more speed than I was expecting.

With the relevant information gathered, an upwind tack back to base was followed by hurried assembly of my Quadrolution race board to really test the speed of that surface. I'm much more comfortable at speed on a mountain board than in a buggy and was soon to be blazing across the seemingly never ending salts, pulling 90 foot power slides at the end of each reach as I prepared to head back in the other direction. Word of warning – bring your GPS for this place!

A short freestyle session followed, then a refreshing pint in the Lady's Mile Restaurant just 20 metres from the water's edge, perfect for watching local kiters and windsurfers going hard in the howling conditions.

The Lady's Mile Restaurant is open every day in the summer and most days in the winter months. It is ideally located to provide good food and refreshment to both land and water kiters in need of a break. The people here are lovely sos long as you obey the rules! For instance, a £50 fine is the penalty if the proprietor calls the cops on kitesurfers who come through the swimming zone – and you better believe that she will!

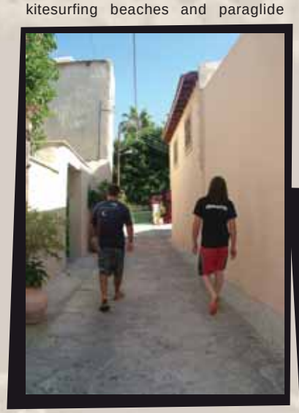
East to west

The wind switched back to westerly overnight and I was interested to see how Lady's Mile would handle this change back to the seasonal direction. I was not disappointed. The wind was as clean and as steady as the previous day, if not better, proving that this location can be perfect in both winter and summer prevailing wind directions.

Suited and booted for another KGB session, the D-EX Genesis powered me out and over the exquisite surface, leaving long flowing lines in the gritty salt sand, coming to abrupt ends as the power of the Ozone Instinct slung me up from the earth into the dry afternoon air. I was really impressed with the surface – just the right amount of grip, enabling you to hold down loads more power than on your local beach, but also letting you scrub speed off without fear of being bucked out of your buggy or wearing the tread out on your mountain board tyres. As the name implies, it's all dead flat without much variation which is why the guys plan to erect a series of kickers and railslides to make things a bit more exciting. And there's one thing to beware of which is the abrasive quality of coarse salt! Watch out for your fingers on hand drags and be sure to wear pads and helmet all the time.

Another afternoon session at Lady's Mile, enjoying lighter 15 mph westerly winds, brought our first flying experience in Cyprus to an end. Everything was on board so we carried on east, headed for our flight home. Just when we thought we had seen it all, we discovered another vast dry salt lake, more than four times the size of Lady's Mile on the outskirts of Larnaca. This looked like a potential powerkite paradise, blessed by even stronger winds.

In a mere three days we had explored and discovered two magnificent powerkiting sites, along with endless kitesurfing beaches and paraglide launches, all within a short drive of the Surf Cyprus shop and Columbia Hotel in Pissouri where we stayed. Lady's Mile is an epic location, well worth the trip in itself, and as promised the wind had blown every day.



Cyprus now rates among my Top 5 Riding Locations to date, just below Muruwai beach in New Zealand and just above Ivanpah Dry Lake in Nevada. The potential for an off-season training ground for freestylers and racers alike is very evident, as is the potential for land kite holidays without dragging all your kit there by plane. The wind is consistent and so is the salt pan's surface. Couple that with warm weather, beautiful blue water and a short flight from the UK and you have a top class location for land and water kiters combined.

Facts for the travelling kiter

Cyprus is the third largest island in the Mediterranean and has a typical climate with abundant sunshine and little rainfall. The national language is Greek, although English is widely spoken.

- ► Alphajet flies from Luton to Cyprus daily, landing at both Pathos (best choice) and Larnaca.
- ► Columbia Beach Hotel in Pissouri is one of the most desirable Cyprus holiday spots, set on a 2 kilometre long blue flag beach with panoramic views out to sea, just a 2 minute walk from Surf Cyprus.
- ► Pissouri Village is small, but has many restaurants and bars. Best dining can be found at Bunch of Grapes, Hideaway or Hillview. For the besttime after dinner, head for Georges Iron Horse Pub, The Spartie Bar or the Pissouriana where Surf Cyprus's Dan and Jemma work the bar in the evenings.

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