



"I REALLY LIVE TO EXPLORE NEW TERRAIN IN THE MOUNTAINS; TO JUST FOCUS ON KITING / SKIING AND BEING SELF-SUFFICIENT. THERE ARE ALSO SO MANY ASPECTS TO THINK ABOUT TO OPTIMISE PERFORMANCE AND COMFORT WHEN YOU DO DISTANCES; IT'S NOT ABOUT A ONE DAY PERFORMANCE."

Out there, wind or no wind

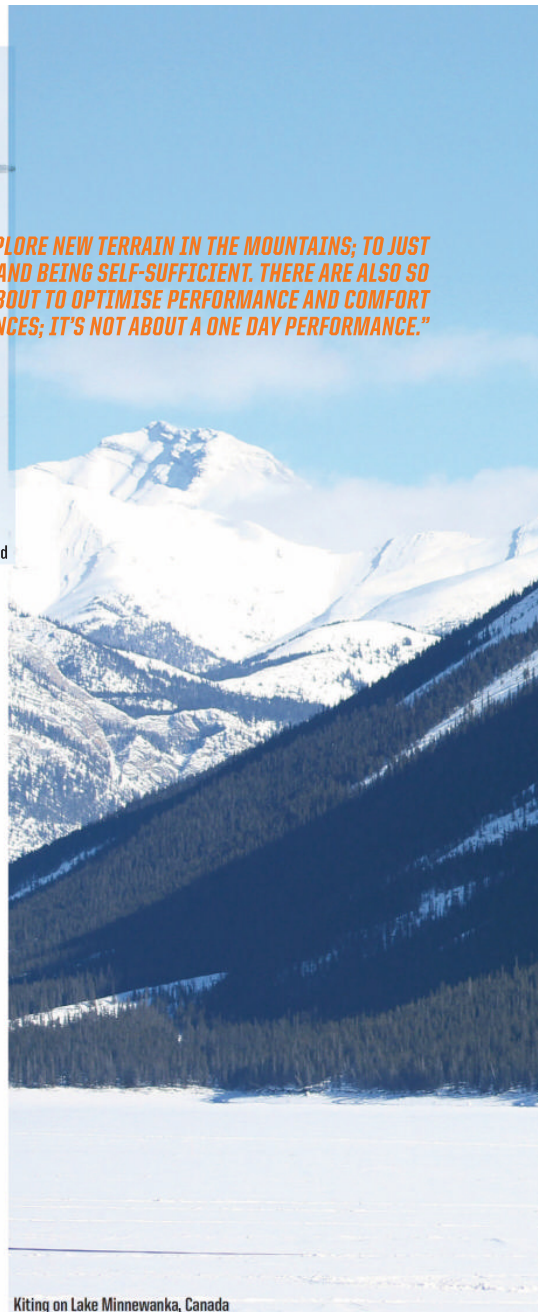
FOR THE LOVE OF WINTER

THERE WILL ALWAYS BE PEOPLE WHO ARE ATTRACTED TO KITING TO DO MORE THAN JUST COME FILL UP YOUR LOCAL SPOT, OR CROWD OUT ALL THE BEST WARM-WATER SPOTS THAT YOU WANT TO VISIT. HERE AT KITEWORLD WE LOVE THE FACT THAT KITING APPEALS SO BROADLY, OFFERING DIFFERENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FROM ONE KITER TO THE NEXT.

Although she also loves to kite in the water, Marie-Eve Mayrand chooses to live in Calgary in Canada because of the winter snowkite opportunities. She has managed to develop a flexible, remote-working lifestyle and frequently frees up time to visit the Canadian Rockies for more challenging snowkite terrain. Her sessions can often last all day because it might take a few hours to skin up to a launch spot, but she sees it all as part of the rewarding experience.

Winning in 2016, Marie also went on to claim snowboard category podiums at the Red Bull Ragnorak races in 2017 and '18. The 39-year-old entered the Arctic VAKE 250 kilometre race for the first time this year, too. We'll come on to that later in this feature, but firstly we wanted to find out a bit more about Marie-Eve herself, who has featured in KiteWorld before, when she wrote about the unusual kitesurfing opportunities in Haiti a couple of years ago. She's a dynamic and passionate kiter all right!

WORDS: MARIE-EVE MAYRAND



Kiting on Lake Minnewanka, Canada

Desired domain



I have a masters degree in Marketing and used to be Marketing Manager for an international corporation, but a couple of years ago decided to put my outdoor activities first (kitesurfing in summer, snowkiting in winter, plus other activities like biking, hiking, paragliding, river surfing and more). I started my own marketing company and also did my IKO training to become a kite instructor so I could teach friends whenever possible. I don't have a 9-5 job, as I set up my own schedule and am mostly able to work remotely. It wasn't easy at first but I have now found my routine and have enough work to be able to make it happen. To train for any long expedition takes a lot of time, so having a flexible schedule certainly helps.

I live in Calgary, Alberta and whenever there's enough snow I snowkite close to town, just a short drive from home. I also spend a lot of time in the Canadian Rockies, specifically for snowkiting. There is a place called the Spray Lakes in Kananaskis that has easy access and all wind strengths (very light to nuking) which is great for training. It's very flat, though. My favourite spots are more remote, in the real Rocky Mountains back-country. To reach some of those places we



Winter camping practice



have to skin up for three, perhaps four hours, to get above tree lines before we can kite. Avalanche and sometimes crevasse gear (for glaciers) are necessary. It can be a lot of work, but when the conditions are right, it's magical! I also had the chance to snowkite with the Montana and Wyoming crew in the USA - where they have great terrain, too.

I have always loved winter and started snowboarding when I was teenager. When I started snowkiting I used a snowboard and a split board in the back-country. It was only as recently as 2018 that I started using skis and found them much easier in the back-country. It meant that I had to learn how to ski though and when I decided to do VAKE (where skis are mandatory), some of my friends decided to help me out, so we did two-days training with the sled at -26°C, camping in very wintry conditions at night. In addition, I did more trips in the back-country with my sled, even on non-windy days, just to skin up and down the mountains.

I really live to explore new terrain in the mountains; to just focus on kiting / skiing and being self-sufficient. There are also so many aspects to think about to optimise performance

and comfort when you do distances; it's not about a one day performance, but more about the overall preparation and team efforts. Every little aspect of the preparation count: food, water, sled, weight, how to communicate, kite choice and ability, etc.

I'm very stubborn and I love challenges. To train for Ragnarok I'd kite for five hours straight on the Spray Lakes without stopping, just trying to cover 100 kilometres a day. I'd go back the next day and repeat. After doing three Ragnarok races and making the podium each time, I was looking for the next thing. VAKE had been on my radar for a while, but I'm also considering doing a bigger expedition in the future. It's always a hard choice between a kitesurfing vacation (as I do LOVE water as well) or doing a longer expedition.

"TO TRAIN FOR RAGNAROK I'D KITE FOR FIVE HOURS STRAIGHT ON THE SPRAY LAKES WITHOUT STOPPING, JUST TRYING TO COVER 100 KILOMETRES A DAY. I'D GO BACK THE NEXT DAY AND REPEAT."



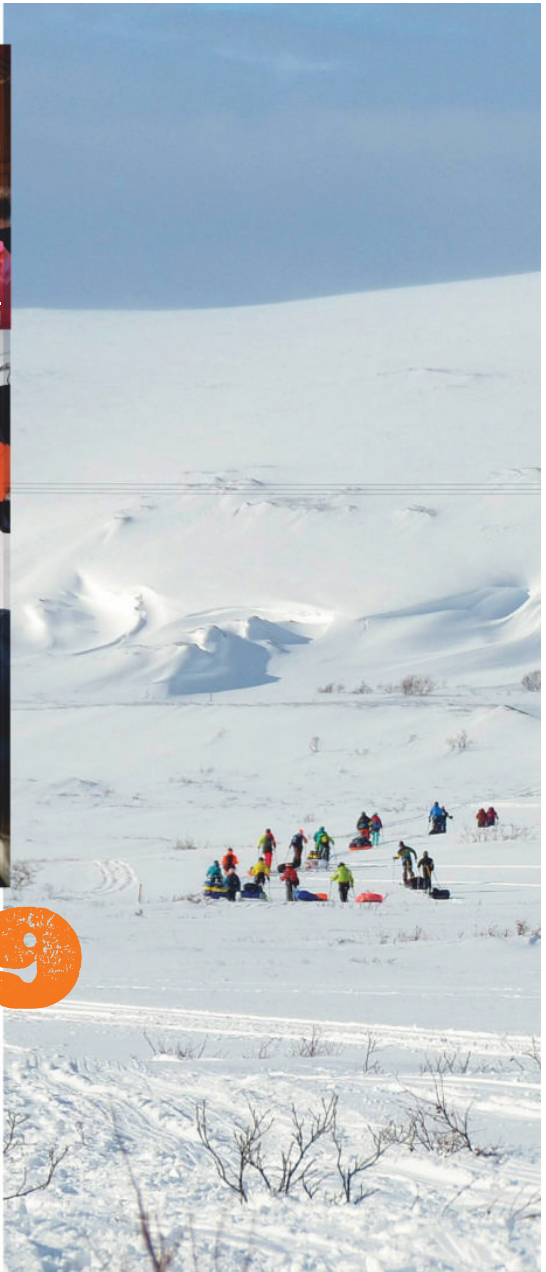
Marie-Eve and teammate Froydis Sjøvold, awaiting transportation with all their gear after taking the boat to Vardo. This was four days before the competition



Rider's meeting in Berlevåg. Best to know what you're getting yourself into!



The mandatory rests were often welcomed. Here the pair share the tent with Team Camilla / Photo: Ville Pääkkönen



VAKE 2019

THE VARANGER ARCTIC KITE ENDURO 2019 (VAKE) LONG KITING WISSA (WORLD ICE AND SNOW SAILING ASSOCIATION) WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP RAN FROM 2 - 7TH APRIL IN FINNMARK, NORWAY, DRAWING 35 TEAMS FROM 12 COUNTRIES, INCLUDING CANADA, CZECH REPUBLIC, DENMARK, FINLAND, FRANCE, GERMANY, NORWAY, ROMANIA, RUSSIA, SLOVAKIA, SWEDEN AND SWITZERLAND.

Marie-Eve was a first time entrant into the 250 kilometre race and, along with her team partner, Norwegian Froydis Sjøvold (in her fourth race), they were one of three all-female teams racing at this year's event

WORDS: MARIE-EVE MAYRAND

As with other extreme races, one of the hardest decisions to make for VAKE was choosing the right kites to pack. They add to the weight of the sled, so it's important to choose strategically while staying light. This was difficult as I was so used to having all sizes of kite on hand, but ultimately this was a test of skills, navigation, teamwork and problem-solving.

My teammate Froydis Sjøvold and I are quite different weights so we decided to share kites and take different sizes between the two of us. I ride Ozone kites so had my 13 and 9m RIV3 race kites as well as a 4m Ozone Explore (single skin). Froydis had a 15m Flysurfer race kite as well as an 8m Soul. We thought that kite combination would cover almost every wind.

We travelled by bus on a scenic route from Vadso to Berlevåg to meet the other teams and reunite with old friends from the kiting circuit. People come back every year as it is such an exciting event and congregation of snowkiting enthusiasts. We had two nights and one full day in the sports hall to get ready, go through the weigh station, have the riders' meeting, and relax a little before the race.

On the morning of the race, locals had gathered in the streets to cheer us on. There is a kilometre long uphill walk (ski touring)

before racers are allowed to launch their kites.

It was windy but the forecast looked like the wind would die down in the afternoon, so everyone was eager to take advantage of the morning wind with bigger kite sizes to cover as much distance as possible.

Jonas and Florian took the lead immediately after launch. Froydis and I opted to start with mid-sized kites, so I took my 9m RIV3. We moved quickly through the initial waypoints and were excited to place eighth when we cleared waypoint five. All the teams were quite close together after the start but it wasn't long before the pack spread out.

LIGHT WINDS AND CHECKPOINT ONE AT STERNEVANN

After that we were hindered by light winds. As I started packing my kite to start walking uphill some teams passed by, somehow keeping their kites up; they struggled but made it to the top before we did.

The slowing winds continued to bother us through the Storløftfjellet waypoints until we reached the first manned checkpoint, Sternevann, at 6:31pm for a mandatory two-hour rest. The stop was rejuvenating and we also met the other teams

closest to us. When we recommenced the race we still had 29 minutes left in the day. We covered some distance on foot and then set up our tent for our first night in the Arctic open.

The time frame for kiting is from 7am to 9pm - at 9pm sharp, all teams must stop moving. The VAKE organisation track all teams on GPS and you must set up your tent wherever you are. We were quite close to two other teams on the first night (we could see them from afar); but by the second night we were alone.

DAY TWO: WHITEOUTS AND FROZEN LINES

We had to walk for six or seven kilometres before being able to launch our biggest kites. The light wind slowed our progress and it took almost half a day to get to Mattavarri checkpoint. There was also a complete whiteout in that area with very low visibility and contrast. I had to stay very close to my teammate as we couldn't even see each other! The humidity of the whiteout froze my lines and bridles and I had to stop to remove the ice several times.

We engaged in stiff competition with the other all-female duo - Team Camillia - as we gained and lost ground on each other. They passed us in the whiteout. We managed to do five more waypoints by the end of the day, including a mandatory stop at



The teams make their way up to the start
Photo: Trygve Utstumo

Jakobselva. There was some significant upwind distance that day and I genuinely thought my knees would give up.

DAY THREE: IN A BIND AT KOMAGÆR

Lighter morning winds guided the choice for our biggest kites again. My sled flipped over on a downwind section as I was probably going too fast. We also had to make it through the waypoint called Sh#Swood! An appropriate name considering the very tall trees which posed significant difficulty for some teams, especially with lighter winds. But we had a stroke of luck with good wind aiding us to cover the area quickly and reached the last mandatory two-hour rest at the Vadsø checkpoint, where we changed to smaller kites to take advantage of the wind which had picked up significantly.

We arrived at Falkefjell, placed second among all-female teams and 13th overall. From there we had to cross the valley towards Komagær – one of the most challenging sections. We lost a lot of time in Komagær because of trouble with my kite bridles. Some teams passed us while I diagnosed the problem. Finally, I found that my bridles were cut and I had to switch to my 9m kite to get going. By that time we had little chance of overtaking the other all-female team.

“I HAD TO STAY VERY CLOSE TO MY TEAMMATE AS WE COULDN’T EVEN SEE EACH OTHER! THE HUMIDITY OF THE WHITEOUT FROZE MY LINES AND BRIDLES AND I HAD TO STOP TO REMOVE THE ICE SEVERAL TIMES.”

Working together, crossing the road close to Vadsø
Photo: Jan Erik Barlien



“ON THE COURSE, KITES GOT CAUGHT IN TREES, KITE BRIDLES FROZE AND GOT CUT, SLEDS FELL INTO CANYONS OR CREEKS AND BLEW OFF-TRACK. THE HARDEST THING ABOUT THE RACE IS TO ADMIT THAT ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN.”



By way of the highway
Photo: Marit Helen Pederen

Checkpoint: STJERNEVANN
Varanger Arctic Kite Enduro 2019
Long Distance Kiting WISSA World Championship

No.	Team	In	Out
1	The Windy Alpbays	14:01	16:51
2	Beckett Brothers	14:30	17:01
3	Navrhuju Snist Psy	14:57	16:57
4	Grande Leo	15:01	17:58
5	Alliance	15:21	17:52
6	Seac Bonus Boys	15:32	09:46
7	Team Skutumpah	15:40	19:40
8	Beckett Brothers	15:47	19:47
9	Team Confusion	15:57	19:57
10	NORMAN EXPRESS	17:57	18:56
11	Swedish Whitout	17:57	18:57
12	EVSONIA	17:57	18:58
13	Swish Kit	18:02	20:01
14	Team Leo	18:08	20:11
15	Team Canille	18:09	20:12
16	FRODIS & ME	18:37	20:37
17	TEAM NOBE	19:20	20:06
18	Swish Distan	20:06	01:39
19	Challengers	20:29	23:37
20	Team Torino	21:43	23:53
21	Team Torshovius	21:53	24:53
22	Polishites	21:56	23:58
23	SPICES	21:57	23:57
24	SNOWFLAKES	21:59	24:51
25	TF&S	22:04	25:04
26	Swish Fox Club	22:06	25:06
27	Whokitanga	23:10	24:05
28	Swish the Lemis	24:05	
29	Team	25:07	24:58
30	Beckett Brothers	25:11	24:25
31	SQUADRA ANGO	26:45	24:22
32			
33			
34			
35			

Checkpoint performance



Vardø - returning to cold comforts!

Our only hope was to reach the finish line before 9pm, failing which we would have to spend another night in the open. Another whiteout in the darkening hours with light winds stalled our progress in the final phase, but we were excited to cross the finish line at 8:23pm on day three of the competition.

While there was no podium for women or mixed-teams, we finished second among the all-female teams and 18th overall - which was a tremendous accomplishment for a first-timer like me with a new team.

MEMORIES OF VAKE

The event attracted a high calibre of kites equipped with the latest gear. The Czech team, Navrhuju Snist Psy, was particularly impressive. In past years there were many teams that didn't manage to finish the race, but in the last couple of years it seems the teams are getting better and stronger.

On the course, kites got caught in trees, kite bridles froze and got cut, sleds fell into canyons or creeks and blew off-track. The hardest thing about the race is to admit that anything can happen. You think you have a good ranking and then something happens with your kite bridles that seems to take forever to fix. Five teams passed us while I was trying to fix my kite. Things like that can be really frustrating. Fortunately, no one was injured this year, though, New laws relating to the national park - home of the polar fox - proved challenging for the VAKE organisation. Certain areas were restricted and the race had to be rerouted closer to the shoreline. Kudos to them for manoeuvring the legal requirements to still put up a great race.

I was also impressed by their zero-waste policy - participants would be disqualified if they dropped or lost anything during the race.

It was a fantastic experience to kite in such a breathtaking landscape with priceless views of the sea and the national park. I learned a lot and have emerged a better kiter. I am also glad

to see more women participating in these endurance races, competing with male teams.

My best memory was discovering this new and tight group of people who are all passionate about distance kiting and to see how all teams prepared differently for it. Kiting in Norway's incredible terrain in the Arctic Circle is a memory I'll always cherish and crossing the finish line with Froydis was a great accomplishment and totally one of my best moments in kiting.

Marie-Eve is sponsored by Ozone Kites, Muller Windsports, Mystic and Sundog Eyewear. Thanks also to North Face Canada.

Follow her @marieevemayrand

Applications for Vake 2020 are open now: www.vake.no/KW

- 1st Navrhuju Snist Psy (9:56am): Honza Simek and Miroslav Schutz (CZ)
- 2nd The Windy Alpbays (10:04am): Jonas Lengwiler and Florian Gruber (CH / DE)
- 3rd Beckett Brothers (11:16am): Thomas Francis Beckett and Anders Francis Beckett (DK)

