

# The Elements-Expedition

Wind Fire & Ice

A kite ski crossing of Iceland !

2010 February 15 – March 8



## 10<sup>th</sup> February News

Since the middle of December, we have a close look at the weather in Iceland. Its this island in the middle of the north Atlantic that has attracted our attention and our ambitions for this new cold adventure (See 'Wings over Greenland' for our last big expedition) It's a big temptation to us who have been roaming many cold places of this planet to lay the perfect trace across the country of Elfs and Trolls. From the northernmost hills in the highlands down to the south cost. The perfect ride across volcanos, icecaps and the desert like highlands of the wild interior ...



A ride in full autonomy. In our pulks (sleds that we are dragging behind us) - everything for our cold adventure: food, camping gear, clothes to protect us from the cold and the gusts of wind and some alpine equipment to guarantee our safety on the glaciers and icecaps. In summary, the strict minimum for our progress during the precious hours of daylight in February at these high latitudes.

Within this strict minimum we carry no less than four kites and 2 parawings – each of us. Everything is possible in Iceland! While I am writing this update, there is just a gentle northern breeze of 3 kts at the northern foothills of the Vatnajökull Icecap (the largest Icecap in Iceland), while only 40 kilometres farther east the same wind is blowing at 35 kts. Only one week ago some parts of the island have seen a strong gale peaking at 70 kts...

In short - we have to be prepared for everything – for the best and for the worst. For the favourable breeze, calms as well as angry storms. For good going under our sails, as well as for sitting out storms sheltered in our tent – in the hope that it won't be squashed by the gusts of wind. Everything may be on the program!

This year, early in January an anomalously strong anticyclone has taken and held position on the Baltic sea and Scandinavia and blocked the classic west to east progression of the depressions born over the Atlantic. In turn they have been constrained to atypical south-north trajectories. As a consequence, the mild and humid air originating only a bit north of the Tropic of Cancer in combination with strong southerly winds have brought a lot of rain over whole Iceland and molten most of the snow including the highlands and inner mountain ranges.



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Some phone calls to Reykjavik unfortunately confirm the atypical situation. And if the cold is now back in Iceland since about one week, (the thermometer once more drops below -20 C from time to time), precipitation have now unfortunately become rare...

We understand, that our planned crossing is compromised under these conditions and may not be possible in its original form due to the deficit of snow this February. If our initial ambitions now seem very difficult to realise – except if last minute changes in the snow cover come to our relief, we still stick to our plan and cross what remains to be crossed under the given conditions! Snow and wind, both are always abundant on the Vatnajökull Icecap and part of the highlands. And riding this Icecap of 8300 km<sup>2</sup> – roughly the size of Corsica and renowned for its hostile climate- remains a challenge of its own. Today it is still only rarely tackled at all in the middle of the winter.

We will be out there kiting nevertheless!

*Our kites:*

- *Ozone Acess XT 4*
- *Ozone Frenzy FYX 7*
- *Ozone Manta M3 10*
- *Ozone Yakuza 12*
- *Parawing Beringer 5S*
- *Parawing Beringer 8S*

## 18<sup>th</sup> February News

Hi everybody,

Reykjavik, February 18. Sunshine during the day and beautiful northern lights yesterday night. Since some time already the weather situation and the forecast brought what didn't dare to hope for any more: stable north easterly winds from the glacial Arctic Ocean have now invaded the country. Yesterday has seen  $-25^{\circ}\text{C}$  on the glaciers - the weather we have been dreaming about for so long to get out on our journey across the island, the crossing that we have been preparing since a few months now.

But - if the weather is now with us, the many contacts around the country that we have called since our arrival could only confirm our worst fears: the snowcover remains deficient or even absent in the largest part of the highlands. We have to be realistic, the planned crossing won't be possible this time.



We thus have resorted to our plan B - which we think is still a nice one...! What was planned to be a major leg of our crossing will be our new playground for the next two weeks: We are going to roam the Vatnajökull - an Icecap as large as Corsica- with our kites.

Not only do its mean elevation and proximity to the ocean normally guarantee a decent snowcover and consequent winds - the place is still not frequently visited on skis at this time of the year, in winter, because of its rude climate. But its a really interesting place by itself. Most of its topography makes it kiteable as long as we avoid the steeper parts and some crevasse areas on its eastern and southern parts and there are many places of volcanic an geothermal activity. We hope to fly our kites over the solfatara de Kverkfjöll, to ride the south ridge of the Grimsvötn caldera, kite on the frozen Tugnaa or to loop our wings over the north east ridge of Hvannadalsnhukur, - Icelands main summit...

In our pulks (sleds) we have everything for 16 days in autonomy. 40 Kg of food, 5 liters of fuel for our stoves (the only way to get water in its liquid state), tents, sleeping bags, ropes, crampons, ice axes, satellite phone, emergency beacon, repair kit for everything essential and no less than 6 kites: Acess 4, Frenzy 7, Manta M3 10, Yakuza 12 and two parawings.

The wings we need to progress fully powered but still safely in winds ranging from a light breeze to stormy conditions.

Saturday morning a large 4x4 is going to drive us out to the border of the Skalafell glacier on the outskirts of the icecap, where our adventure on the Vatnajökull is going to start.

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