

# OUTDOORS

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## Harnessing the wind for a ride

BY LAUREL BEAGER  
Editor

Gavia Yount smiled as she held the strings of a kite flying in the sky Wednesday afternoon.

But this was no ordinary kite. Yount was seated in front of her father, Jim, in a buggy that was powered by the force of the wind pushing the large kite.

Gavia, 8, was just learning to use a traction kite and Jim says she now has the hang of the basics well enough to have fun while improving her skill and ability to handle stronger winds and unpredicted gusts.

Jim Yount said he's always loved sailing and soon after moving to International Falls in 2002, he watched a video of kite skiing and was instantly hooked.

Since then, he's bought a few kites and first used a kite with downhill skis on Rainy Lake.

"This past winter I bought the kite buggy which should work fine on Rainy Lake most of the time: at least a little bit of crusty snow, but less than six inches of snow would be fine for the buggy, by my guess, but almost no one uses a buggy on snow," he said. Buggies are mainly used on sand, grass and occasionally pavement. Downhill skis and snowboards are usually used for snow.

What does it feel like?

"It's like sailing squared," Yount told The Journal in an email. "Alternately wrestling or pleading with the

wind and occasionally just completely in sync. It's a very fun challenge expanding your mind to watch the wind, the kite and where you're going all at the same time."

Kiteboarding is popular on water, said Yount, adding that it helps enormously to start from a beach on the upwind side and to have winds stronger than typical on Rainy, "so I've never pulled it off."

Yount explained that to use a traction kite three sets of skills are needed: multi-string kite flying (two, three or four strings), sailing skills (how to work across and upwind using wind power) and vehicle skills (skis, buggy, waterboard, snowboard, skateboard, etc.).

"If you only have some of those you learn the others," he said.

Besides steering the kite in the sky, Yount said learning how to "de-power" the kite to keep it under control is important.

"With a three- or four-string kite, you can even land it gently in a strong wind and relaunch it when you're ready," he said.

Yount said some people use the kites to fly up the sides of mountains and then ski back down. "If I never leave the surface that's fine with me, but I did fly once, briefly, and landed well," he said.

Different kites handle high and low winds differently. Generally, he said, if



STAFF PHOTOS BY LAUREL BEAGER

A traction kite is used by Jim Yount and daughter Gavia, 8, to pull a buggy across a field west of the Rainy River Community College dormitory.

the wind falls below 10 mph the kite will fall from the sky, but people can learn to easily relaunch it when the wind picks back up.

The forecast Wednesday called for 15 mph winds gusting to 20, but based on how the kite behaved, Yount estimated the winds were more like 5-15 mph.

"The kite fell out of the sky often and we had to wait for gusts," he said. "In stronger winds you need a smaller kite or more skill or more stupid or better insurance."

With many kites, strings can be adjusted to handicap the kite if the handler thinks the wind will be too strong, he noted.

Meanwhile, Yount said instructing Gavia with



Gavia Yount grins Wednesday as she watches the kite catch the wind. Her father Jim, seated behind her, instructed her on the skills needed to use the traction kite.

her seated in his lap in the buggy worked surprisingly well.

"I could use my buggy

both controlled the kite at the same time, which was probably pretty good for passing on the skills: much better than words alone."

Yount said there's potential for the sport in Borderland and added that a few local folks are interested, but said the popularity is much greater in places like California and Hawaii, which feature predictable, steady winds.

"In my case, on the rare days that the wind is excellent, I still want no rain or snowfall, someone else has to watch my kids, I can't be busy with other obligations and my back has to be behaving," he said. "So I don't actually get out much. But the buggy at least opens up the non-frozen months."

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