

ALL AT SEA

ALL PHOTOS → Jodie MacDonald



CAPTION → Big, bad Shannon

PART TWO: WALKING THE LINE

We all begin life with dreams of becoming something great. A pilot, or possibly an astronaut, even a doctor, maybe a professional athlete. I myself trained for most of my youth pursuing a professional snow skiing career. But for most people dreams are relinquished to the demands of society and responsibility. We are suffocated by rules, debt, material goods and 'needs' that are spoon fed to us like the curious children we once were. Personally, I've done everything I can over the years to fight these invisible chains and, while not always successfully, I have found a few things that help keep the onslaught at bay.

Firstly, surround yourself with others who fight even harder than you do. We are all products of our environment. Put yourself in an atmosphere filled with inspiration and wonder; then work hard and the dreams will become reality. A planned, articulated future scares me to

death. Not only do I not know what's around the corner, I don't want to.

And that leads me to kiteboarders. I'm making my living running a kiteboarding expedition around the world and it would have never been possible if kiteboarders themselves didn't think along these exact same lines. Kiteers are a special and unique group, willing to take absurd risks with their bodies and wallets in search of experiences few other people will ever realise exist.

Long before The Best Odyssey set sail, one of my dreams was to get a chance to ride with a pro. I'm not by nature a very good spectator, so I envisioned not only just watching from the beach, but interacting and riding with as well as actually getting to know what makes a pro kiteboarder tick and, of course, learning a few things along the way. As it happens, this dream came true when making a kiteboarding film with Shannon Best and Clinton Bolton, international team riders

INTRO → Apparently it's possible to grow tired of running surf and kite charters through Indonesia. Gavin McClurg claims to have been ground down by it. Chancing his arm on a daring dream, would life on a 57-foot catamaran and a series of globe-trotting ten and 14 day 'Best Odyssey' remote expeditions chasing wind and waves be any better? You bet. In his first column he went some way to explaining that setting it up wasn't a bed of roses. Here in his second column, he comes up against another challenge, the notorious Shannon Best

for Best Kiteboarding, just a few months into our five year journey, back in 2007.

That particular expedition began in Antigua, in the West Indies. Just an hour from English Harbour lies Green Island, which is surrounded by a barrier reef, has a lovely, small launch beach and one of the finest, most picturesque lagoons I've visited in more than 11 years at sea.

Hummingbirds, cactus and wind were our only company, which would blow steadily for ten days. The only thing missing from an otherwise perfect start was Shannon, who had been held up in Miami with visa issues. In the meantime we had perfect skies and conditions for kiting; time to get the kites in the air.

We spent two days kiting the turquoise waters of Green Island, without another boat or soul in sight. Receiving news that Shannon was finally free of his visa troubles, we sailed around to Great Bird Island to greet him at the airport. I have to say my first impression of the

tattooed hulk that is Shannon Best was less than stellar. Frightened would be a better word. There we were waiting in anticipation, our videographer rolling tape when Shannon emerged from the airport. We were all sporting huge smiles and he, well, he was not. In fact the first thing we heard Shannon say, or should I say, scream, was, "Shut that fucking camera off, you're not taping this!" The camera was stowed, we all stared at our shoes and I, for one, thought we might not be in for the best week. Thankfully I was wrong.

Part of our mission is to discover and pioneer new locations, but some places are better left a bit mysterious. The place we sailed to next is one of them. I can't in good conscience give this spot away. Let's just say that this 'Paradise' held everything I've ever imagined when it comes to kiting: butter-flat water, a left hand outside reef break, palm trees, soft pink sand and no hotels or sunbathers in sight. Lobster and sashimi was a simple dive or cast

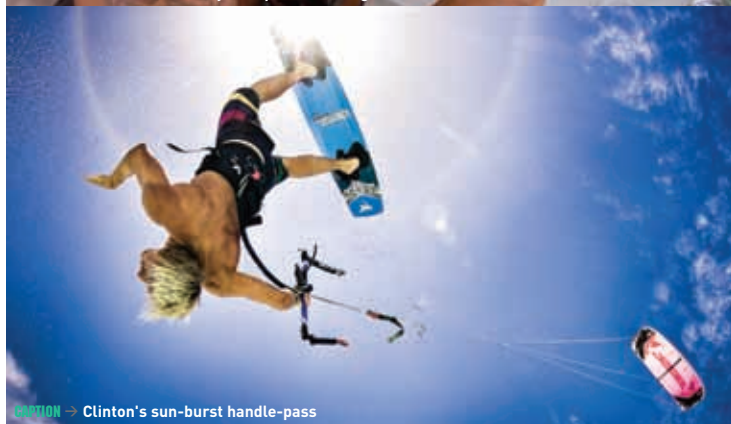




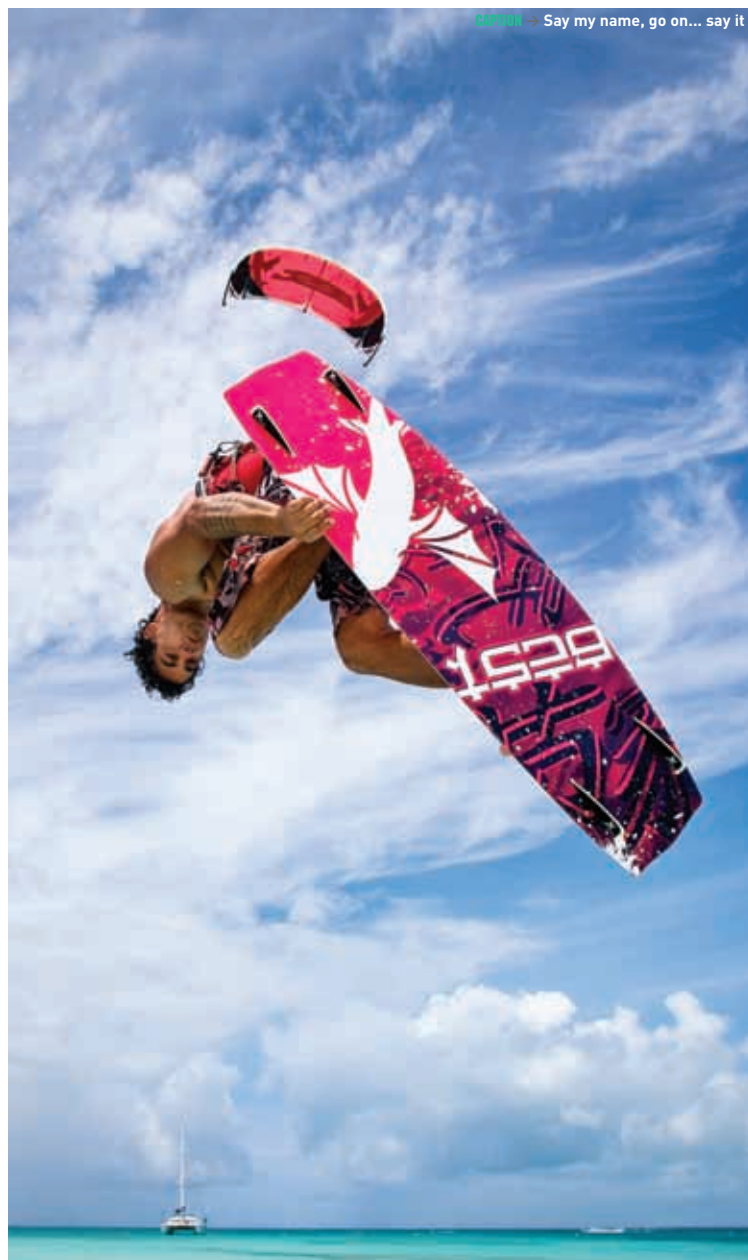
CAPTION → Clinton



CAPTION → Food can cheer anyone up in a morning



CAPTION → Clinton's sun-burst handle-pass



CAPTION → Say my name, go on... say it

away and so it didn't take Shannon long to cool off after his long flight and several day delay. Taking one look at the boat, the lagoon and the wind, he was all smiles. Time to roll camera.

I knew very little about Shannon Best. I'd heard he was a remarkable huckster, his accent gave him away as Australian, he was covered in tattoos and clearly a force to be reckoned with, but otherwise I only knew him from the instructional video series, 'Kiteboarding 101'. For the first few days I sensed his teammates and work partners were a bit intimidated by him.

One morning we wanted to get started filming early. When Shannon didn't make it up for breakfast I asked Stacey, the team manager, to wake him.

"Uh, that's really not something I'm prepared to do. Shannon is on his time and does what he wants."

Fair enough, but the conditions were

perfect for kiting and you need actors to make a film. I went below, pounded on his door and hey presto, Shannon promptly arrived on deck. Sometimes it's nice being the Captain! I did, however, make sure to have a cigarette and coffee ready. I should mention that Shannon is made of very solid material and, while I like to take risks, I'm not insane.

We spent six days in our tucked away paradise. In that time we got scorched by the sun, Shannon taught some tourists how to fly a trainer kite, we filmed over 20 hours of the best kiteboarding I've personally ever seen, in crystal-clear water that few can imagine. Clinton and Shannon honed and improved their game until we all marveled in amazement. How do they do that stuff? Half of it I couldn't even put a name to. But beyond the tricks, Clinton and Shannon proved to be more than just excellent riders, but also

humble athletes and giants of men. Shannon actually turned out to be respectful, kind, funny and entertaining. He's also wildly passionate about kiteboarding, even after all these years. He helped me nail my first forward roll and taught the kids on the beach with the enthusiasm of a first time instructor. Clinton, who was vastly mature beyond his 20 years, is helpful, attentive, respectful, and LIVES to kite.

We approached each day with renewed zest and crashed each night more exhausted than the last. It was with silence and a bit of sadness that we left 'Paradise', an abrupt end to an adventure that had seemingly just begun. But Discovery was happy to be on the move again, flying south at ten knots, the shallow reefs racing by under her hulls. We threw the fishing lines out for one last go and hooked into a Sierra mackerel, but

before Shannon was able to pull it in a Wahoo raced in and snatched the tail half of our meal.

Now, nearly two years after their departure, as I sit a world away typing this story in Western Micronesia, I'm still in awe of spending time with two dreamers who've chosen a life so fully against convention. I suppose we're all walking our own line. Where it leads, none of us care to know.

Gavin McClurg is the Captain of Discovery. He and his crew embarked on 'The Best Odyssey', a five year world kiteboarding expedition, in February 2007. To view the trailer of the film of Shannon and Clinton in this article, visit:

www.OffshoreOdysseys.com/downloads/Besttrip.shtml or www.kiteworldmag.tv/allatsea2 **KW**