

# NAMIBIA



Anders Bringdal screaming down the speed strip

# If YOU BUILD it...

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PHOTOS PETE/SEB CATTALAN

French couple **Sebastian Cattalan** and **Sophie Routaboul** had a dream - to find the best speed sailing spot in the world. They believed they had found it in one of the most isolated towns on Earth, Luderitz, Namibia. The place is an old mining town in South West Africa on the Skeleton Coast and with a landscape similar to the surface of the moon it would not have been most people's first choice.

*„Luderitz is a natural speed strip, with phenomenal winds“*

Luderitz is a quirky town lodged on the least hospitable coast in Africa. It was founded in 1883 when Heinrich Vogelsang purchased Angra Pequena and some of the surrounding land on behalf of Adolf Luderitz, a hanseat (First Family) from Bremen, from the local Nama chief. It began life as a trading post, fishing and guano-harvesting town, but when diamonds were discovered in 1909 in nearby Kolmanskop, Luderitz enjoyed a sudden surge of prosperity. Now the diamonds are mostly found elsewhere and Luderitz has reverted to its former self. Its appeal as a town lies in the fact that little has changed since the early 20th century

(and in fact it has hardly grown at all).

Seb and Sophie were, despite the difficulties and isolation, absolutely convinced it would make a speed sailor's dream spot, even allowing for the ten hour 1200km drive from Cape Town. The road goes through the dry semi-desert area of South Africa's Northern Cape Province and gradually enters the Namibian desert areas around mid-way. It slowly transforms into an incredible landscape. Luderitz has generated enough wind over the aeons to move all of the desert sand away, leaving bare rock, diamonds and no vegetation.

The reason they believed the spot to be so good was down to three essential elements. Luderitz is a natural speed strip, with phenomenal winds that could provide conditions perfect for breaking the outright WSSRC 500m record. The wind in Luderitz blows consistently from August to March every year. The wind is strong and in spite of the surrounding desert is not too hot, which gives a higher density to the airflow. It is accelerated as it comes from the cold Southern Ocean waters over the dry savannah of South Namibia and into the Namibian Desert. It is precisely in Luderitz that the wind, channelled through a range of high hills perfectly shaped to increase its speed, reaches the sand desert, where high daytime temperatures amplify it by creating an additional low-pressure 'suction effect'. As a result, it benefits from extra strong winds very regular in direction and strength. The right angle needed to reach high speeds in kitesurfing or windsurfing is around 140 degrees to the wind. This is the usual angle at Luderitz.

The gentle sloping beach and natural sand bars make the water extremely flat and with a little human intervention it gets even better.

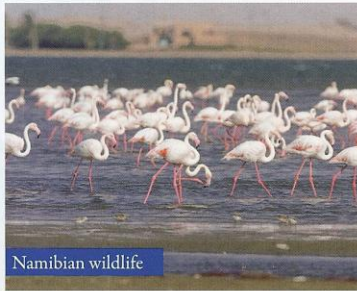


The specially dug trench

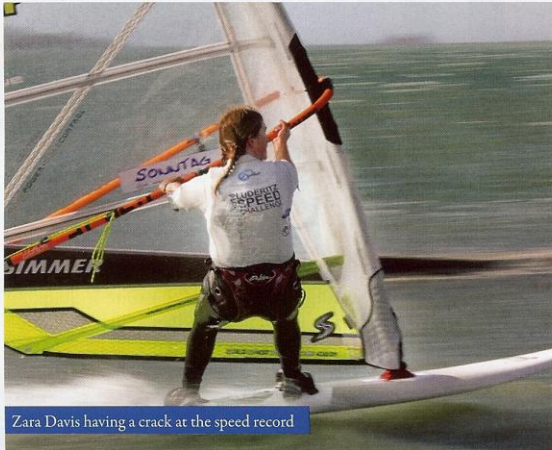
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Digging the pit



Namibian wildlife



Zara Davis having a crack at the speed record



Mr O'Shea loving SA



The long and winding road

With this unshakable belief in the place, the dynamic duo set out to convince the locals to stage an event there. Even though most of them had never heard of kite or windsurfing they agreed and even put money into the project. Adopting the mind-set 'if we build it, they will come' they initially put a lot of their own money in to get the ball rolling. It was a real leap of faith. This money was used to prepare the site and for the WSSRC (World Speed Sailing Record Council) to have a commissioner present. It took over 18 months of hard work, tough negotiating and planning but in September 2007 they staged the first world record attempt in Luderitz.

This first event saw a number of impressive performances, suddenly placing Luderitz on the world sailing map in a major way! Sjoukje Bredenkamp, a professional kiteboarder from South Africa, established a new outright record becoming the fastest woman in the world, with 42.35 knots over 500m beating Karin Jaggi's record of 41.25 knots. Alex Caizergues, Manu Taub and Seb, all French professional kiteboarders, established several new kitesurfing speed records and took respectively the second, third and fourth outright all-time speed sailing records, with 47.92 knots, 46.98 knots and 46.71 knots. Not bad for an inaugural run.

With the belief in the site proven, they went on to stage annual events in

2008, 2009 and 2010. Rob Douglas from the USA was the first kiter to claim the outright speed sailing record in 2008 with 49.84 knots. Next was Seb who became the first sailor to break the 50 knot barrier in 2008 with 50.52 knots. Alex Caizergues improved this with 50.57 knots the very next day! Alex then managed to better that with 50.98 knots in 2009, just shy of the 51.36 knots outright record set the same year in the south of France, by the boat Hydroptere, a 60ft hydrofoiling Trimaran.

In 2010 a short canal was dug upwind from the original strip, to make a better run with a deeper angle and more water depth. This crucially meant it could accommodate windsurfers properly for the first time; the new canal improved the water state and allowed for faster speeds with greater control, this resulted in Seb being the first person to break 55 knots with 55.49, then a few minutes later, Rob Douglas again took the glory and raised the bar with a stunning 55.65. Importantly it did also prove that the site could be good for windsurfing records as well as kites with Anders Bringdal setting a new Swedish Windsurfing Record of 44.65 knots and Zara Davis (GBR) setting a new Women's Production Windsurf Record. These speeds were achieved despite a wall of sand piled up half way down the course to windward! More windsurfing records were indeed possible and a venue that could rival the legendary

*„ It took months to dig out with big earth moving equipment to get it right.“*

Trench at Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mere, which had dominated speed sailing for so many years had been found.

Most people would be happy with this achievement and be content with running events every year with minor improvements but the Luderitz event organisers wanted more. The problem with 2010's canal was it was in an eco-sensitive area and kept getting destroyed by the tides. In addition, the sand that was removed was damaging protected species of plants. It was decided to move the canal extensively beyond the reach of the tide (besides spring high which occurs only twice a month) 300 metres inland and have the opportunity to tweak the angle. This new canal has taken two years to finalise and has been a large scale and difficult project to undertake. The newly built channel was completed in October 2011. It only had a short test period in 2011 to make sure it worked and was safe.

It took months to dig out with big earth moving equipment to get it right. The run is not for the faint hearted. It is a maximum 5 metres wide. It has a short run up strip at 110 degrees before turning a corner (at 40+ knots) down to the main 500-metre measured distance. A wider area of about 100 metres is all you have to stop before you hit desert. Hair raising stuff! A world record attempt had been called for November 5th 2012 for windsurfers only for the first month then the Kiter's get their go for two week till the middle of December. The fact that the windsurfers are getting a larger share of the time is a big shift in focus. Most entrants will be there for a month which is a big commitment as it doesn't blow every day so there is a lot of down time.

The confirmed entrants read like a who's who of windsurfing. Farrel O'Shea and Zara Davis (UK), Anders Bringdal (SWE) and Andrea Baldini (ITA) complete the International Mistral Team. Bjorn Dunkerbeck is also confirmed which will certainly entice Antoine Albeau and Finian Maynard to be in attendance. To keep Zara honest will be her old rival, Karin Jaggi the current women's windsurfing record holder. Plus many more international riders from all over the world will be descending to this heavily oversubscribed event.

For all the riders this new course in this very isolated place offers them the unique opportunity while also keeping the speed discipline in the hearts and minds of the sailing world and repaying the locals by bring much needed tourist income to the region.

Keep up to date with the events progress on the Speed World Cup website [www.speedworldcup.com](http://www.speedworldcup.com) or Facebook - Speed World Cup. ●