

## Go Sail A Kite! By Tom Holtey

TopKayaker Shop: [Link to: Kite Sailing Supplies](#)

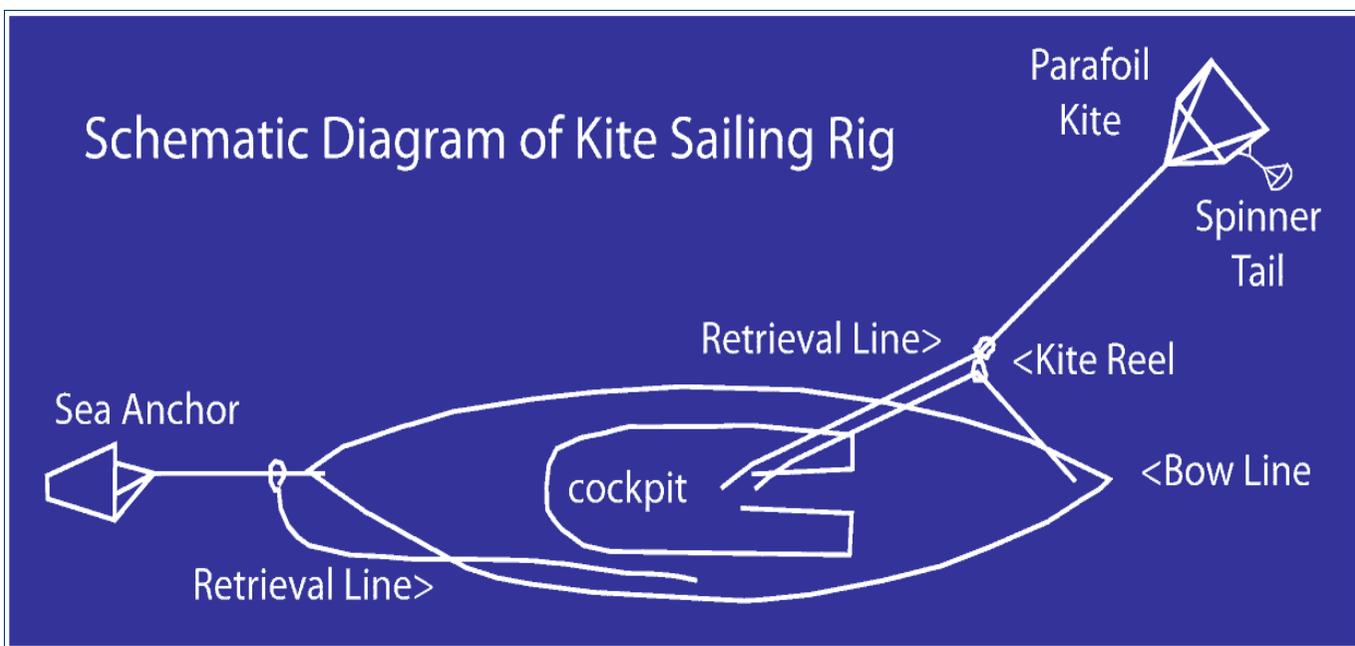
While in Hawaii working at Go Bananas, my friend and co-worker, John Enomoto, taught me how to rig a parafoil kite for kayak sailing. He and many other Hawaiian kayakers have used this rig to "sail" the down wind legs of remote coastlines. The consistent trade winds that blow there help to make this a viable option, quickly taking the paddler down coast almost effortlessly in what would otherwise be a wallowing slog in a following sea.

I remember one trip on the north coast of Maui where the last 10 mile leg of a 40 mile or so coastal camping trip was kite sailed. I sailed right past Ho'okipa and on into Kahului Harbor. If I am remembering right, it took me about an hour, so I can assume that I was reaching speeds of close to 10 MPH. Most paddlers travel about 2 to 3 miles per hour.

This sail rig is still in use today by the intrepid kayakers of Hui Wa'a, and raced in their annual sailing competition the "Wind Bag Regatta." We're sharing their photos here of past "Regattas" to help show the fun and variety and principle of this growing sport. Kayak Kite Sailing (down wind only) Use with a sea anchor to start kite and act as a "dead man switch." For strong, steady winds only. Light, variable winds will not work.

Overview: The paddler, paddle stowed, deploys a sea anchor, or drogue, from the stern, stopping the kayak from drifting and pointing it directly down wind. The paddler then deploys a kite, letting out enough line to keep the kite high enough to be safe from touching the water. The kite line, reel and kite, fastened to the bowline, are let out to the bow so it can "tow" the kayak strait. The paddler then retrieves the drogue and places it in the lap to act as "breaks" and safety stop. Now the kayak is under sail (kite?) and moving down wind, by wind power.

The sailor can use the paddle for bracing or steering as necessary. A rudder can help to sail off the wind by a few degrees. Once the sailor has reached a stopping point the drogue is deployed, and the kayak comes to a stop. The kite reel is retrieved to the cockpit and the kite reeled in and stowed. The drogue is then hauled in and stowed. Paddling can now be resumed. *Diagram below by Tom Holtey*



I use a Para foil 3.5 (square feet?) It must have a tail to stabilize it. (Click on diagram at left to see an enlarged view in a popup window) They often come with long streamers. Cut this in half or better yet, replace with a round "spinner" on a swivel clip. A good hand reel is necessary. I have a basic, heavy-duty, molded plastic grip, to wind string on, with small hooks to snug string to prevent letting out all the line. Carefully fold and roll the spinner (streamer) then carefully fold and roll the kite, with spinner tucked inside, starting with the tail end of the kite and working to the harness end. Wrap shrouds around kite roll. Roll and fold kite in such a manner that the kite will easily deploy, like a parachute, when you want it to. It all fits in a small nylon sack. Pack it carefully! In the kayak seat you have little mobility to get your kite into the air. The shrouds will want to tangle! You have only one chance to make it fly, if it hits the water it won't work and will be trouble to retrieve, you will probably have to wait for the kite to dry before a second attempt.

Your kayak must have bow and stern lines. Bowline clipped on the front handle and into the cockpit where you can reach it. Stern line clipped to gunwale, where you can reach it, long enough to reach rear handle.

Get a medium size sea anchor, drogue, approximately 16-18 inches in diameter. Put the drogue on a line long enough to hold the drogue comfortably in your lap while tied to, or clipped, to the stern handle and not dragging in the water. Tie/clip the drogue line to the stern handle, then clip, or tie with a loop, the stern line to the drogue line as a retrieval line. Carefully fold, roll and wind shroud of the drogue just like the kite.

Test the Drogue system first!

You should be able to deploy the drogue, off the side into the water. The kayak will drift down wind while the slack comes out of the line. Then when the drogue fills it self, the kayak will stop drifting, held by the drogue. The drogue will be directly up wind behind you, off the stern, while your bow will be pointing perfectly down wind. Then when satisfied by the drift stopping of the drogue, haul it in with the retrieval line. This should work smoothly. Coil the retrieval line and the drogue line will lie on the deck from stern to lap. Fold, roll, and wrap the drogue for storage or loosely to act as a "dead man switch" and place in lap. The Drogue system is essential for deployment of the kite, and for safety. The kite will pull the kayak sideways to the wind if the kite is deployed with out the drogue keeping the bow pointing down wind, and the kayak will refuse to sail strait. It may even tip you over. You will retrieve the drogue after the kite is launched, and the kayak will sail. Keep the Drogue in your lap, loosely folded. It will deploy if you should fall over board, as a "dead man switch." A kayak under sail/kite will not stop! Not until it runs out of wind or water, leaving its crew to tread water.

To rig the kite as a sail is easy. You will need to make sure your kite reel/handle can be attached to the bowline and slide freely fore and aft along it. You may be able to simply unclip your bowline and run it through the large grip hole in the reel and re-clip it in the cockpit, or you may need to add a clip to the reel and clip it to the bowline. Now that you have devised a way for the kite reel to fasten to the bowline and slide to the nose of your kayak by the pull of your kite, then you need to add a retrieval line to haul the kite reel back to the cockpit for reeling in the kite. A simple line will do. It is very important to make the kite "tow" or pull the kayak from the bow. Otherwise it may want to drag the kayak sideways in an inefficient manner, possibly decreasing stability.

Make sure all retrieval lines are coiled and secure while underway. Install shock cords and or cleats to secure these lines and keep them on deck. You may want to test kite deployment from the cockpit while on dry ground in an open park before you try on the open water. You should consider a paddle leash to keep your paddle from going over board and left behind (it will be almost impossible to find) and possibly a lifeline to keep the kayak from running off into the sunset with out you. Beware of too many line and snags. Make sure the little things like the storage bag or your chart are securely fastened, you may be going as fast as 10 mph, and stopping, let alone turning around will be difficult at best.

To put it all together; paddle out into open water to a pre-planned strait line route with a down wind course. Secure paddle on deck, not drifting on paddle leash, a side or bow mount is best. Deploy drogue, as described above. Once kayak is well stopped and pointed down wind, unwrap kite and clip the reel to the bowline as described above. Launch the kite by holding the upper harness and shrouds as high as you can reach. The kite will unfold and unroll, then fill with air and start to fly. Let your fingers let the shrouds slip through till you have the single line, then start to let out line from the hand reel. Let out enough line to fly the kite high enough to keep free of the water and fly steady in the strong wind currents, but not too high. About 30-40 feet or so.

If the kite flies too high it will not pull the kayak as well. Snub the line in the reel on the small hooks. Secure it well so that no more line is paid out. Let the kite pull the reel to the nose of the kayak along the bowline, making sure the retrieval line is unencumbered and secure. Now pull up the drogue as described above. Keep it loosely folded in your lap or tucked into your life vest or shorts. It will deploy if you fall out of the kayak. The kayak will not stop with out it! (Photo: Our friends Norm & Bobby have their own ideas.)

Now you are sailing. Take paddle into hands, use paddle in a brace or rudder stroke as necessary. If you have a rudder it may allow you to sail off the wind as much as 10-20 degrees.

To stop, stow paddle and deploy sea anchor. When stopped, haul in kite reel with retrieval line. Reel in kite and stow. Haul in drogue and stow. Paddling may now resume.