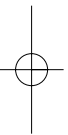
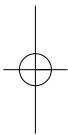


A few years back we ran an article by our Test Editor Ian Leonard about how he learned to loop, at the age of 43. The article inspired hundreds of readers to go out and throw themselves over the front in similar style. Well now Test Team tea boy Gregg Dunnett has raised the stakes and done the same with the vulcan. It has taken him a full two years of concentrated effort and he made every single mistake along the way, but get ready to challenge the freestyle generation because despite all the suffering and setbacks, he got there – and so can you...

SCALING THE VOLCANO

(or how to learn to vulcan)

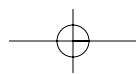


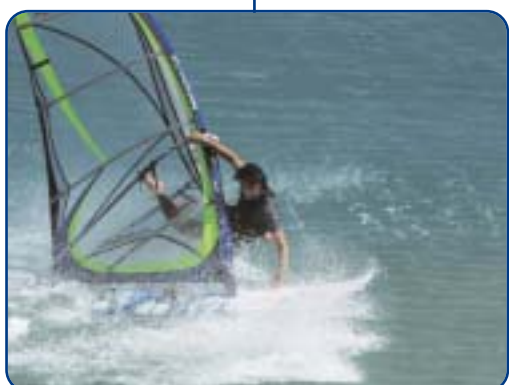
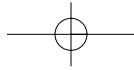
At the gateway to modern freestyle sits a huge stone sentinel barring entry to those not worthy. You can't get past him with your impressive carve gybes, nor will your radical wavesailing gain you access to the flatwater kingdom within. Even if you land a forward loop, sending a sheet of spray to shower his stony feet, he'll merely raise his hand and point to a range of mountains, the nearest of which is a smoking, rumbling giant of a volcano. Although there are many more much higher mountains behind it, only when you have climbed the volcano will he stand aside and usher you in. The password to modern freestyle is ... the mighty vulcan.

The vulcan first registered on my consciousness when the first sequences were published in the magazines nearly a decade ago. It got its name after the inventor who thought it looked so odd that he named it after the Star Trek race with pointy ears. I loved it – it looked amazing and incredibly difficult, not to say dangerous and I was totally secure in the knowledge that I'd never be able to do it. The board got flicked around so you could see the underside and there quite clearly were stamped the words "Supermen Only". Word of the move spread around the globe, sequences were captioned as "performed by one of the ten people on the planet who can do it..." Then Josh Stone took the rotation a further 180° and the spock was spawned, he still kept going so we soon had the spock 540, and then the grubby, as, very quickly, 95% of windsurfers got totally left behind and



Ninja donkey kick early vulcan attempts captured by test photographer, Mark Mills





SCALING THE VOLCANO

(or how to learn to vulcan)

bewildered by the 5% that could do 'modern' freestyle. And as the freestyle frontiers rolled forward, so the international superstar boys and girls started to forget all about the humble vulcan – they had bigger and more complicated fish to fry. Yet it remains there as the fundamental gateway; the pivoting, pivotal move at the very start of all the more sophisticated tricks and variations being thrown down. Even the very latest moves like the gozzada start with a vulcan type manoeuvre, and for this reason it is, and will forever remain, the bedrock of modern short board freestyle.

You used to see really good sailors – the type with stickers all over their sails who chuck massive forward loops on their first run out and last one in to remind everyone else that they are very good indeed – learning to vulcan, and boy did it look odd. They'd sail very short reaches somewhere out of the way and apparently try to combine a chop hop with twisting their ankles violently every time they should have turned around. Odd behaviour even for professional windsurfers. I remember a holiday to Guincho in about 1998 where a local hotshot spent every afternoon for a whole week doing it, getting absolutely nowhere and looking extremely pissed off with life. I knew what he was trying to do and was even more pleased that I'd never have to go through that sort of pain and humiliation. My goals were more simple. I wanted to learn to wavesail sort of respectably and was happy with my jumps and gybes and had idealistic, wafy daydreams of being able one day to forward loop. That – as far as I was concerned – was what windsurfing was about. Sure I respected the freestylers, but I had the same respect for them as those types who climb vertical rockfaces without the aid of ropes. A cool thing to do but ultimately a different sport altogether.

This perception of freestyle didn't change overnight, but it was gradually eroded. My own sailing improved; I learnt to do half decent helicopter tacks, began to try 360s and think seriously about looping, and at the same time the pros kept moving the bar up so that these moves became more and more mainstream. When I finally threw myself around the front into a forward loop it was far from the exclusive club it once was, but it was a massive milestone for me – I had arrived. But actually I hadn't, I was still moving forwards (sorry). Through joining the Test Team I had the fortune of meeting Mr Jem Hall who immediately informed me that my sailing was shite and offered me hundreds of thousands of top tips that I could work on to try to improve it. Although I was a little overwhelmed, I actually owe him a huge debt of gratitude. I'll never tell him that of course (and I'm safe writing this as he won't read anything that doesn't have a picture of himself next to it). He can take no credit for my looping (that move is all about reaching a point where you're so incredibly pissed off with yourself and windsurfing and life in general that you're still not looping after YEARS of being ready, that one day you just snap and do it, bang, just like that. It takes no skill, you can't teach it – all an instructor can do is follow you around shouting at you, psyching you up or out, depending on if you're ready inside.) But Jem can take all the credit for me getting 360s. These are totally different, they're not scary to do, but you have to put your body, the sail and the board into positions at the right time and flow between them smoothly and understand how it all works. It took me a year and over a million pounds worth of Jem Hall coaching tips to get round my first and now they're safely tucked away in my motor memory. I didn't know it then but these two moves would prove vital training for my arduous assault on the vulcan.

Most European sailors call the vulcan 'the volcano', presumably a mistranslation somewhere along the line, but

it's actually a better name – when non-windsurfers ask about it you don't suffer them thinking you're some geeky Star Trek fan (and Microsoft Word doesn't auto-capitalise it: a small point, but an important one). It's also so appropriate because learning the move is exactly like climbing a mountain, not some bump in the ground in the Lake District but a serious, snow capped, dangerous monster with fire in its belly. The expedition preparation, the stages you go through, the view from the top – it's all there. I can't remember the exact moment when I decided to try to climb it, but it must have been about 2 years ago that I began to think about it, actually seriously think about giving it a go. It was beginning to loom very large on my personal horizon – my brother who lives abroad began sending back e-mails and text messages saying: *"Hot and windy here, did my first vulcan today"* which gradually changed to: *"Vulcans consistent now, working on spocks."* Actually if I'm totally honest, I pretended to try them for a while and wrote back saying: *"Cold here, tried a vulcan today."* However, this was the first step because after this I realised that I would actually have to – and like to – be able to at least attempt the move. That was a while ago now and I've done a lot of climbing since then. What I hope to do with this article is sketch out a route up the volcano and inspire others to follow it. It isn't the only route for sure, it may not be the best, the safest or the easiest, but it is a way up, and if you follow this you'll have your own stories along the way, but you'll have as good a chance of any of one day standing on top of the volcano.

1. Getting Your Act Together

Climbing the volcano is an expedition. Anyone who sets out without the proper preparation will either fail, or stun the world with their genius or luck. My preparation is as already detailed. I was a competent sailor, never the best at the beach but confident with jumping, gybing, sailing in strong winds and waves, and could actually do the odd forward loop before I set out (but don't imagine I mean slick planing forwards here). I also began to study vulcan sequences and technique articles and even ask Jem how to do them. However, I never actually read the articles, I just looked at the pictures and daydreamed about how nice it would be to do the move, and I certainly never listened to Jem, not at this stage anyway...

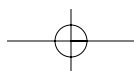
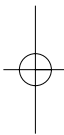
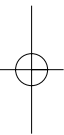
2. Base Camp

Base Camp for me was a bar in Antigua. Over a rum and coke I suddenly decided that tomorrow was the day, I was going to try a vulcan. Over a second and third rum and coke I brooded about the decision, reviewing my preparation and expedition readiness and over the fourth rum and coke, I announced my decision to the bar. There could be no backing down now.

3. The First Assault

On the beach the next day the moment of departure drew close. I walked through the move on the sand, my mind filled with Jem Hall tips. I was to flick the board downwind off a small piece of chop, pulling my back leg into my bottom and then quickly extending it away to land tail first while at the same time changing my hands quickly – fast hands were the key – and looking back the way I had come and keeping my weight over the centreline of the board. I was to do all that in the half second or so before the board landed. I had no idea at this stage that such an approach was simply impossible. My readiness to learn vulcans was probably about right, but my preparation – listening to Jem's tips and walking through it a few times on the beach – were about as likely to see me succeeding as packing a couple of egg sandwiches and putting on two pairs of socks would see me reaching the summit of Mount Everest.

The actual moment of the first real attempt at the vulcan





is not that dissimilar to the forward loop. A significant proportion of your brain thinks you're going to hurt yourself. You have to psyche yourself up, choose your moment and really go for it, throwing yourself into the unknown.

I sailed out to sea, and off the first proper, defined piece of chop I leapt up, pushed the board into a wild ninja donkey-kick and frantically threw the rig about with my hands. Instantly the board landed sideways and I was thrown into the water, the rig crashing down on top of me. I wasn't even close. However, thanks to that wonderful drug adrenalin, I was able to repeat this several times (with various minor adjustments happening at random depending on the exact shape of the chop or height of jump).

My first mistake was in thinking the vulcan is exactly like the forward loop. It isn't. In the loop you jump, sheet in, hold on – that's all there is to do, the rest just happens. All you need to do is decide that you really want it, and it's yours. So I thought that if I really wanted the vulcan it would be mine. But it doesn't work like that – you have to climb the volcano first before you can enjoy the view from the top. I thought I could sprint up it in one go. I couldn't, I was swatted off the lower slopes by a disdainful flow of angry lava.

4. Base Camp (Again!)

The good thing about climbing this particular mountain is that you can take it with you wherever you sail. I retreated to Base Camp 2, in Clacton on Sea (where I was living then – there isn't anything particular about Clacton that makes it special for learning vulcans) the following summer in order to plan things a little better. I couldn't climb the volcano in one go, I had neither the resilience nor the talent, the only way forward was to take it in stages. You have to combine the psyched-up go-for-it of the forward loop with the analytical step-by-step approach of the 360.

5. Assault 2, Stage 1: "Getting The Board Round"

The first stage in climbing the volcano realistically involves learning to get the board the full 180 degrees around. It is a seriously steep and difficult start to the climb. To do this I decided to forget totally about my hands. Either by letting go of the rig completely or not letting go at all. My only concern was getting the board round. Over 5 or 6 sailing sessions I must have done at least 200 jumps. Mostly they ended with the board getting about 90 degrees round, and me crashing into the water with a sharp pain in my ankles. But occasionally at first, and more frequently as time went on, I began to fluke a few jumps that spun the board right round. It inevitably stopped the instant it hit the water and I always fell straight in backwards with the rig right on top of me but I still seized upon it, trying to work out what I was doing differently when this happened and learn to do it again. The success rate was painfully low but there was a learning curve emerging from the mist.

6. Assault 2, Stage 2: "Learning The Hand Change"

Stage 1 was not exactly in the bag but I decided that improvements had dried up and I was simply reinforcing bad habits, so I changed tacks. (Not literally, this was a purely starboard tack assault.) I set myself a new goal of getting the hand change sorted out. Ignoring the board this time I would do a chop hop and grab the other side of the boom while in the air, landing in a crumpled heap every time, but quite quickly learning the few tricks that could help make a big difference to this stage of the climb. You need to start off with your front hand right at the front of the

boom, then when you take off you let go immediately with the back hand and pull the front hand in front of your body, where the back hand then takes over and grabs the front of the other side of the boom. You then land and crash, and repeat at least 100 times or until it becomes relatively automatic. At this stage I occasionally tried to combine the two procedures once or twice, but quickly realised that I was still not ready. Rather than do one or the other, these attempts just resulted in me actually doing neither, and a return to my ninja donkey kicks.

7. Stage 3: "The Plateau"

If you're still with me then perk up – the end is within sight, just. All that lies ahead is an almost sheer cliff face to the summit with no sign of a path, and before you even get there, a long, almost flat plateau covered in deep, impassable snow. Of course if you're young and naturally gifted you could probably jog to the top from here. If you're neither of those, don't worry, I've found the way forward. To get across the plateau you must refine and develop the techniques of the first two stages. You must be able to jump the board around and be aware of where you and it are in the air. You must learn to land so that the board slides backwards, even if for just a fraction of a second. You must learn to change your hands and know where they and the rig are at all times. It's a long trudge with little reward along the way and all the time it seems to offer no clues as to how you're actually going to tackle the final push when the time comes. For me this plateau stage took place over a summer's sailing on the south coast and a prolonged session in Pozo. The sheer cliff face never seems to be getting any closer, but one day you arrive there. You know when you're at the base of the final stage when you can 'land' your vulcans with the



SCALING THE VOLCANO

(or how to learn to vulcan)



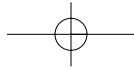
board turned around, and the sail in the right position to waterstart sailing back the other way. The final challenge awaits you.

8. Stage 4: "Death Or Glory"

The summit is perhaps just a few hundred metres above you, but it towers like a sheer black wall. Somehow you have to find a path that will lead you to the top. Somehow you have to combine the two movements, switching your hands and flicking the board right downwind while staying balanced, composed and over the board. It's not easy going and the only way to get there is an undignified scramble. Don't look down and don't give up now. The view from the top makes it all worthwhile. I'd tell you the whole secret, the route right up the final push, but I don't remember the way. All you need to know is that once you're standing there at the base of this final crag, it's not as steep as it looks, there are plenty of handholds and footholds too. It's just a scramble up some rocks, that, when seen from the ground, looks like you're free climbing up the North Face of the Matterhorn. (Apologies to climbing enthusiasts if I'm mixing my metaphors here.) For me, I had to make a big effort to change the hands before I landed; I was flicking the board around, and then trying to scramble the sail around before the board stopped sliding. I also had to choose my take off ramp early and make a real effort to keep my weight forward, so as not to fall straight out the back. I also found making my straps bigger helped so that I could stay over the centreline of the board when I sailed out switch-stance. Once you get into the final push you don't think about how high up you are, you're too busy concentrating on each individual handhold.

062 > 11/04

www.boards.co.uk



9. The View From The Top

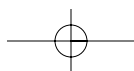
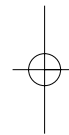
I finally reached the summit on a test trip to Jericoacoara and the view was awesome. All that climbing was below me, I took one more step and the whole thing just clicked into place. I sailed along, chop hopped, vulcaned the board around and changed my hands, then just stood there sliding backwards and grinning until the board slowed down. Then I sheeted in and changed my feet to the other straps and kept on grinning for a very long time afterwards. Honestly, the view from the vulcan is awesome. You get time to look around and see the board sliding backwards and the sail hanging there in space waiting for you to catch hold. What's even better is you get a good view of exactly who's watching you. But best of all is how totally smooth everything is, it's like landing on velvet. It's a brilliant feeling.

I should point out to those that know me, and still see me regularly crashing vulcans, that I'm by no means pulling them to order yet. It seems that every time I go sailing I still have to re-climb the final section, and I can't even begin to do them on port tack, but it's getting easier to do every time on starboard. You don't have to climb down the mountain when you're there. Once you've got the vulcan dialled it's yours and no-one can take it away from you.

“If you can gybe, jump and tack a shortboard there's no reason why you shouldn't learn to vulcan.”

Much of the incentive to writing this article was to get more people through the pearly gates of freestyle by learning the vulcan. This was originally intended to be a similar feature to Ian Leonard's famous *Load Aim Loop* article, which has been fundamental in pushing many people into doing forward loops after many years of not trying but really wanting to. But the vulcan is very different. There can be no 'intention to vulcan' form to fill out and have held against your head like a loaded gun. There's no point thinking you've got to do it or face the shame of a beach full of people who know what you so desperately want to do. Unless you're very gifted the only way to vulcan is to put the hours in trying them. Again and again and again. It's exactly like climbing a mountain. But the honest truth is that although it's a pretty big mountain to climb, and it sure looks impressive, there's a pretty easy path all the way up.

Final note: As stated the idea of this is to try to get more people trying vulcans. If I've made them sound insanely difficult and not worth the effort, then I've got two sentences left to change your mind. If you can gybe, jump and tack a shortboard there's no reason why you shouldn't learn to vulcan. It's probably as 'hard' as walking up Snowdon, and you see parents dragging their 4 year-olds up there. From a pure technique point of view, this isn't supposed to be the definitive word. For that, ask advice from people you see actually doing it and get them to walk through the move on the beach. They'll be happy to show you (and they'll be delighted to demonstrate it). And finally it is worth the hours you need to put in. For its own sake, it's a useful and oh-so-cool way to turn around. But the best bit is that it opens the door to things you probably never thought were possible – grubbies, spocks, spock 540s – it's your passport to serious modern freestyle. The vulcan really is the key to the door.



SCALING THE VOLCANO

(or how to learn to vulcan)



HOW TO VULCAN

It took hours and hours to get these shots. Every time I tried to vulcan in front of a camera everything went completely wrong and I'd end up throwing myself into the water repeatedly in front of bored photographers. Finally I managed this. The technique isn't particularly special, but you can't deny it's a vulcan, and it looks great to me. So here, with comments from **Jem Hall** (who also took these pix) is how to do them:

1. Put your front hand near the mast and use an overhand grip. Unhook and sink really low on the board and crouch down to push it into the water, ready for popping it out.
2. 'Pop' the board out of the water. You do this by pulling up with your front hand and front foot, and lifting the windward side of the board so that air can get underneath it, just like a chop hop. Or, if you're not on flat water, aim to start the vulcan off a nice steep piece of chop. Look behind you whilst drawing the rig across your body. (Gregg needs to look back here.)
3. Flick the board around downwind with that deft, light motion you've been developing for the last few months. At the same time keep your weight forward, keep looking behind you (back where you came from) and begin changing your hands. In this shot Gregg has let go with one hand which is wrong. He should have his arms crossed over, the new front hand already on the front of the new side of the boom. As the board lands you should have your weight over your toes, leaning forwards and keeping the rig forwards.
4. Now the board is landed and sliding backwards. You need to keep the weight forward so the tail doesn't dig in, so bend that front knee much more than Gregg is here. You should be putting your new back hand on the boom here too. Gregg is also a step behind, now changing the front hand, and doing it from underneath, which is also wrong. But he's getting away with it because his weight is just about forward enough.
5. The board is still sliding but slowing now, and his back hand goes onto the boom.
6. He immediately sheets in on the new side, meaning the balance goes and there's an undignified panic where he rapidly changes his feet to the new side which the camera misses. To avoid this you just need to chill out a bit and wait until the board comes to a complete standstill, then sheet in, then change your feet staying low and looking forwards.
7. And if it all goes a bit wrong at this stage, drop low again. It helps you balance on the board and helps control the power from the sail, but looks better if you don't stick your arse out.
8. Finally sail away; you're a very happy person and rightly so.

Note: Jem also recommends spending time practising your flat water popping and sailing switch-foot in order to improve your control of the end of the move, which is definitely time well spent. The other top tips he considers vital to the move are:

- Keep your weight over the board**
- LOOK BEHIND YOU to rotate the board**
- Move those hands fast**
- Enjoy the slide**
- Master and gain stability whilst switch-foot**

Should you need help with your vulcans or any move then contact Jem for details of overseas and UK based coaching - 07762 664077 / hugeforwards@jemhall.com / www.jemhall.com