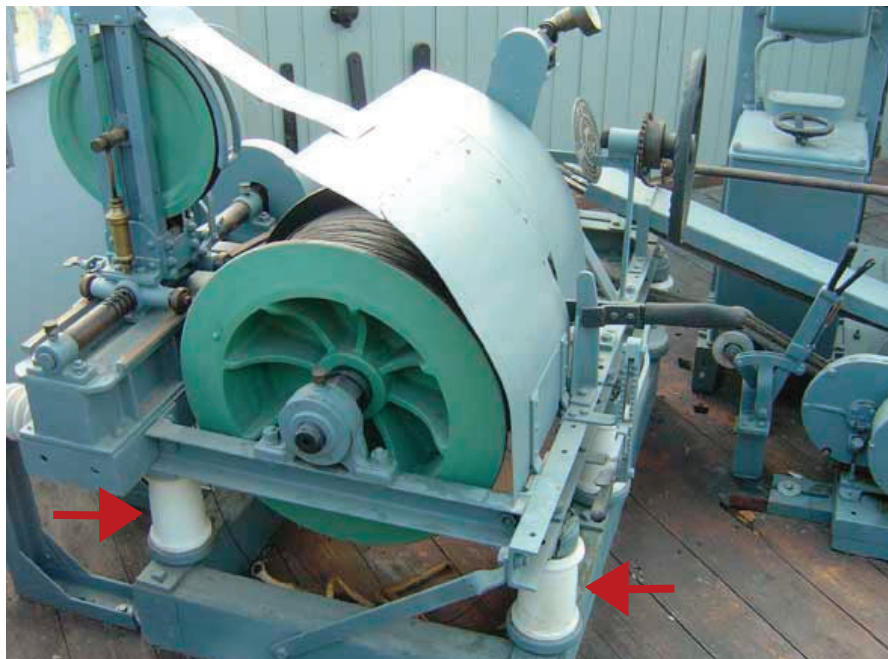


'A Prime Risk for Lightning Strikes'

Since he once viewed a dramatic lightning strike on a kite train at a kite festival, inventor Peter Lynn was particularly interested to study the winch house at Lindenberg. Kites there were flown typically with a 1 millimeter (.039 inch) steel line---a magnet for trouble. What the New Zealander learned was that kites were flown 4,000 days between 1905, the opening of the weather observatory, and 1938, the apparent close of everyday kite operations there, to altitudes regularly exceeding 3,000 meters, sometimes as high as 7,000 meters. The winch on a hill was "a prime risk site for lightning strikes,"



Peter Lynn

says Lynn. "The staff at Lindenberg was certainly cognizant of the risk---their winch was isolated by substantial porcelain insulators. And of course they kept meticulous daily records. However, from what I've heard of Lindenberg history there were no reported deaths or injuries from lightning strikes there. And a closer look at the winch photo shows that the insulators had been bypassed by steel straps (for added rigidity, I presume) at some time early in the game. (Arrows point to straps.) So, after they'd had some experience they ceased being concerned about this risk. And the only possible conclusion from this is that, in practice, lightning strikes weren't actually a problem." He adds: "The strike I myself observed occurred at a festival in Lunen, Germany, in about 1997. It was spectacular, a giant flash and bang followed by the Cody train separating into individual kites and drifting across the Ruhr Valley. Fortunately, the anchor truck was unattended at that moment, so nobody was electrocuted."

When Schmidt made his find in Munich, he was already committed to kiting. He came to kites as a boy when he flew paper and wood models with his father, who made them, "Wonderful kites," recalls Schmidt. After losing interest in the sport for many years, Schmidt became intrigued again in the '80s after visiting a kite store and discovering the modern materials available---ripstop, carbon fiber, fiberglass. He realized there were wonderful possibilities inherent in these new materials.

His initial flirtation with two-line sport kites ended when he discovered the world of historic kites and Schmidt was soon recreating antique flying machines, a Hargrave, several LeCornus, a three-winged Brogden. Later of course Grunds.

"Schmidt's kites are exactitude," comments Ali Fujino, director of the Drachen Foundation and a great admirer of his work. "He's a painstaking researcher, so he can piece together reconstructions and reproductions. Some of his reconstructions started with almost nothing---shreds. He is keeping alive the memories of great old kites and kitemakers."

Schmidt's old kites stir fascination wherever he travels, as far afield as a festival in New Zealand. Schmidt plans yet more of these memorable kite recreations in the future as his personal contribution toward keeping green the dramatic and important history of early kiting.