

SUPM

Stand Up Paddle Mag UK

SCOTLAND OCEAN NATION

By Cal Major

ALL IN YOUR HANDS

By Scott Warren

BUDAPEST OR BUST

By John McFadzean

SUP SURFING VS SUP FOILING

IN CONVERSATION WITH

Jack Somerville

WW SUP ON THE WYE

By Sarah Thornely

THE GOWER LUMENATOR

By Stuart Gammon

BELGIAN SUP TOP 5 SPOTS

By Véronique Musumeci

Q&As with...

Craig Jackson

James Sutherland

Iain McCarthy

Molly McKibben

Sancha Myall



New Jo Moseley column

ShePaddles: Emma Love speaks to Sarah Blues and Julie Kelly

SUPJunkie GBSUP reports by Sarah Thornely

SUP & cook by Caroline Dawson

Twelve pages of Gear Shed

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SUP Shropshire river paddle

Photo: Emma Graystone Photography

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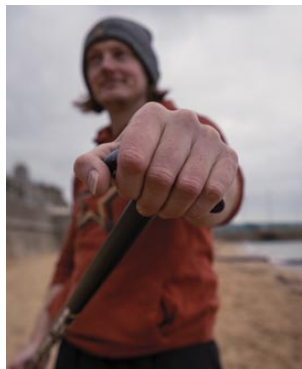
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Ed's note

The long road to learning



SUP Mag UK has always prided itself on publishing informative, educational and (hopefully) entertaining content. We cover a broad range of topics, with stand-up paddle boarding being the umbrella. Anyone who participates regularly will be well aware of SUP's

versatility. Not only that, but paddle boarding has the power to open riders' minds and allow the 'net' to be cast even further. We know many a stand-up paddler who started at SUP before diversifying their activities whilst keeping paddle boarding at the top of the list, naturally...

As has been well publicised, there have been many new recruits into SUP these last few years. Some will have fallen by the wayside, granted, but a large percentage will be heading down that path of progression and development. To safely navigate the route, however, it's vital the correct signposting is put in place. As much as anything to keep those with fewer skills safe, but also to ensure the overall experience of paddle boarding and its buddy sports is positive and fulfilling.

With so much knowledge and info available from various sources, it's sometimes hard for those searching to know where to look. One such resource, however, is this very magazine. Based on my above comments regarding the type of publication SUPM is, those paddlers and riders looking for inspiration, aspiration, and knowledge would do much worse than opening these pages and soaking up what's on offer. The contributors we work with are full of information about every part of the sport. From a learning point of view, this is excellent news as it means there are tons to pull from and refer back to time and again.

Unlike a website or social media stream, a physical publication like SUPM is real, hard and tangible. Having a physical 'thing' in your hands can often be more engaging and a way to absorb even more knowledge. There's nothing wrong with going online and searching for what you need. But magazines and books sometimes feel 'more real' and can therefore make 'gening up' all the easier.

If you're reading SUP Mag UK for the first time, we hope you enjoy this issue. As a fellow addicted paddler, why not make it a regular thing and reap the benefit of a subscription? The reasons outlined previously. And for anyone already a SUPM convert, then tell your friends!

Ultimately this magazine is for you guys. You're the ones that make it what it is. So the more readers we have, the more likely we'll be able to continue producing a quality publication. If you're intrigued by SUPM's subscription plans, head over to <https://standuppaddlemag.co.uk/subscribe>, where you can find more info. If you have any questions, just shout. Go on, you know you want to!

Back to this issue, and we're chuffed the first one of 2023 is off to a flyer. Hopefully, you'll be getting plenty of paddling in this year. And all with SUPM for company and additional stoke.

Big thanks, as always, to contributors, brands and anyone who helped put this issue together. Get in touch if you want to get involved or have a natter. The door's always open.

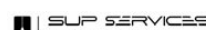
Tez Plavenieks, April 2023

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PADDLER

The International magazine for recreational paddlers
Issue 70 Early Spring 2023

magazine

OCF 2023

By Greg Spencer



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PADDLEBOARDING FOR GOOD



Jo Moseley

Hello, my name is Jo Moseley, and I am the author of **Stand Up Paddleboarding in Great Britain – Beautiful Places to Paddleboard in England, Scotland and Wales** and host of **The Joy of SUP – The Paddleboarding Sunshine Podcast**. I am also a proud ambassador for the **2 Minute Foundation** and **Seaful Charity**.

In this column, I look forward to sharing inspiring stories of environmental projects, mental well-being initiatives and how we can make SUP open to more people. If you have a story, please email me at thejoyofsuppodcast@gmail.com and follow me on Instagram [@jomoseley](https://www.instagram.com/jomoseley).

One Wave Sidmouth – helping others one wave at a time



Photo: Stuart Bertie

As paddleboarders, we are fortunate enough to experience the mental health benefits of being on the water. As my friend Craig Jackson of SUP Shropshire

says, once he's on his board, the world's cares float away. Evie Smith-Woolley and Charlotte Norton have taken this one step further by bringing the global mental

health surf campaign One Wave Is All It Takes to the Devon seaside town of Sidmouth. OneWave is a non-profit surf community raising mental health awareness with their simple recipe of 'saltwater therapy, surfing and fluro.'

Launched in March 2013 on Bondi Beach, Australia, over 200 beaches are now part of the global project. On Fluro Fridays, participants dress up in bright fluro outfits, surf/SUP and share their stories in a safe space. As the founder Grant Trebilco says, *"When you come to Fluro Friday and sit down in the Anti-Bad Vibe circle, you can just be yourself. If you had a good week, you can support other people; if you have had a bad week, you can get support."*

OneWave Sidmouth usually gathers on Fridays, but occasionally Saturday or Sunday, dependent upon tides and daylight, to SUP, swim, beach clean and talk. Fatstick Paddleboards have generously donated boards and the group has wetsuits and buoyancy aids if you don't have your own. There is no participation fee, and locals and holidaymakers are welcome. The season starts on Friday, 24th March, the tenth anniversary of One Wave's launch. OneWave is growing, and you can find OneWave Bracklesham Bay in West Sussex and OneWave Polzeath in Cornwall. For more information, find One Wave Sidmouth on Facebook or Instagram [@onewave_sidmouth](https://www.instagram.com/onewave_sidmouth).



Congratulate to Sarah Leighton, who was commended in The Great Outdoors Magazine Personality of the Year awards. A paddleboarder, hiker and cyclist, Sarah has a wonderful sense of humour and a huge amount of SUP experience and knowledge. It's a great achievement, so do follow her on Instagram at [@fitforadventure](https://www.instagram.com/fitforadventure) or www.fitforadventure.org

Photo: Sarah Leighton



Congratulations to Natasha Sones, who recently became the first paddlesports winner of an Adventure Queens Grant, a not-for-profit women's adventure community. Their support will allow Natasha to fulfil her dream of exploring Finland on her paddleboard this summer. Natasha will SUP the Eastern archipelago around Helsinki, which comprises 330 islands. You can follow her journey on Instagram [@natashastarseeker](https://www.instagram.com/natashastarseeker).

Photo: Natasha Sones



River Dee. Photo: Ian Thompson

Welsh Dee Trust: It Shouldn't Be In The Dee

I'm sure you have read media reports highlighting pollution challenges in our freshwater rivers. Organisations like the 2 Minute Foundation, On Planet Patrol, the Canal and River Trust, the Rivers Trust and Surfers Against Sewage are all making a difference.

I was keen to hear more about another, the Welsh Dee Trust, an environmental charity with the objective of restoring the brooks, streams and rivers of the Dee catchment for wildlife and people. The River Dee spans the border of Wales and England and having paddled on it, I know how beautiful it

is. The Welsh Dee Trust is an organisation that prioritises actions and wants to make real changes. One of five work programmes at the Trust, 'It Shouldn't Be In The Dee,' aims to identify and solve sources of pollution, such as plastic and litter, sewage and urban runoff, with the help of local communities.

A series of successful stand-up paddleboarding litter picks with SUP Lass Paddle Adventures in 2022 tackled some hard-to-reach places on the River Dee. They found that plastic drink bottles were the most prevalent single-use plastic pollution. A clean,

healthy Dee relies on the community coming together, and the contribution from paddleboarders and volunteers on and off the water has been excellent.

The Trust is working with researchers and students from the University of Chester on a study to understand the distribution of microplastics in the catchment with the support of citizen scientists collecting water samples for analysis. There are many opportunities to get involved with Welsh Dee Trust, including volunteering on other SUP litter picks in 2023. If you'd like to be part of one, find out more at www.welshdeetrust.com and follow SUP Lass on Instagram @sup_lass and www.suplass.com

People of Colour Paddle – dedicated to including people of colour in paddlesport



I have followed SUP coach and sea kayaker Dr Adya Misra for some time on social media, paddled with her for my book and interviewed her for my podcast. I was very interested in her next project setting up People of Colour Paddle in spring 2022. POCP is the UK's first nationwide paddlesport club dedicated to the inclusion of people of colour at recreational, competitive and elite levels. As a club, it is managed entirely by volunteers.

Logo: Adya Misra

Adya, a British Canoeing coach in kayak/coach and SUP, is the founder and chair. Alongside her is Paddlesport Instructor Anna Stishova, who has been part of the creation of the first Muslim Girls Paddlesport Club in Bolton and Janine Alexander, whose passion is connecting people from disadvantaged communities with outdoor spaces.

In 2022, Adya and POCP paddled with SUP schools in Bristol, Glasgow, Birmingham and Liverpool. As a British Canoeing affiliated club, POCP will start club sessions in Merseyside in March 2023. There are other membership events planned too, that Adya is looking forward to. She told me, "We are excited to be able to create authentic opportunities for people of colour to try paddlesports in their local spaces this year."

To find out how to get involved and support them, follow @peopleofcolourpaddle and @queenadya on Instagram or People of Colour Paddle on Facebook.

Ghost Fin – turning the tide on plastic pollution

As beach cleaners and coastal paddlers, we will all have picked up old fishing nets on our trips. It is exciting, therefore, to learn about Ghost Fin's commitment to turning this waste into paddleboarding fins. Founded by Vince Weavers, Co-founder of lifestyle brand Ebb and Flo Living in Cleethorpes, Ghost Fin's goal is to be the UK's first board fin made solely from end-of-life fishing nets, ocean plastics and discarded (ghost) fishing nets.

According to the award-winning charity Ghost Fishing UK, dedicated to removing abandoned marine gear with specialist volunteer divers, over 14 million tonnes of marine debris are added to oceans worldwide each year, and 10% to 20% of this is fishing gear. You can see the scale of this problem and why Vince and Ghost Fin are committed to finding a solution.

The initial prototype of the fin, known as Finnegan, was finalised in early 2022 and tested by Vince. In December 2022, the first batch of 25 fins went into production. 15 passionate ambassadors will trial and test these fins prior to general commercial and retail sales. As you can imagine, creating the fin takes time, energy and finance. To support the fin development, the company have launched a range of T-shirts, jewellery and a beanie made from recycled polyester. Go to www.ghostfin.com and Instagram @ghost_fin to learn more and sign up for the latest news on Finnegan's journey!



Ghost Fin. Photo: Vince Weavers

I hope you've enjoyed and been inspired by these stories. Do get in touch if you'd like to make a contribution. See you next time! Jo



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ANOTHER
DAY AT THE
OFFICE



ER
HE





SCOTLAND

OCEAN NATION

WORDS: CAL MAJOR **PHOTOS:** JAMES APPLETON

ALMOST TWO YEARS AGO, I PUSHED OFF FROM THE BANKS OF THE RIVER CLYDE IN THE CENTRE OF GLASGOW TO STAND-UP PADDLEBOARD AROUND MY FAVOURITE COUNTRY IN THE WORLD – SCOTLAND. AFTER TWO SOLID YEARS OF WORK, THE FILM SERIES WE MADE ABOUT THE EXPEDITION IS NOW AVAILABLE TO STREAM FOR FREE ON STV PLAYER. GETTING HERE HAS BEEN QUITE A JOURNEY, AND WE’RE EXCITED TO SHARE IT!

The film series, *Scotland Ocean Nation*, is full of adventure, and exploration, both of Scotland’s waters above and below the surface and into how we connect with our ocean.

Over ten weeks, I paddled day and night to cover the 1200km from the centre of Glasgow, up the stunning west coast, around the indomitable roof of Scotland, and back down the beautiful east coast to the last harbour in Scotland. Before starting the journey, I had a reasonably clear picture of how I imagined the expedition to be... the reality was wildly different!



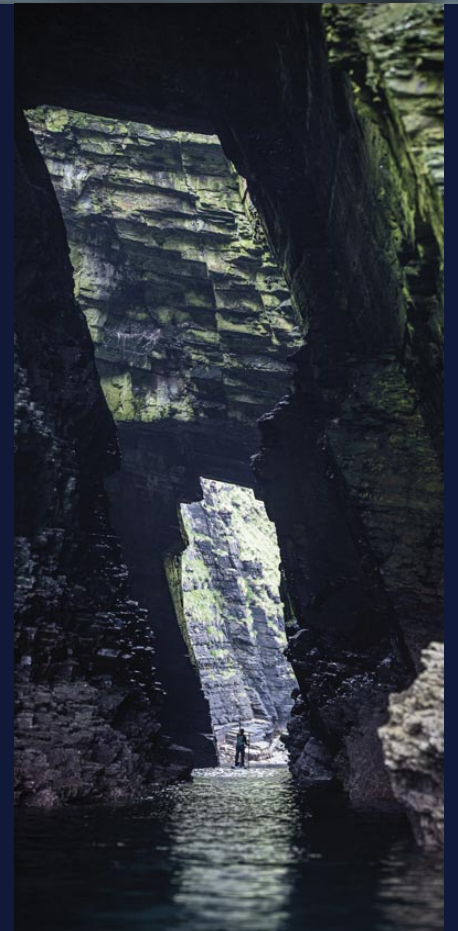
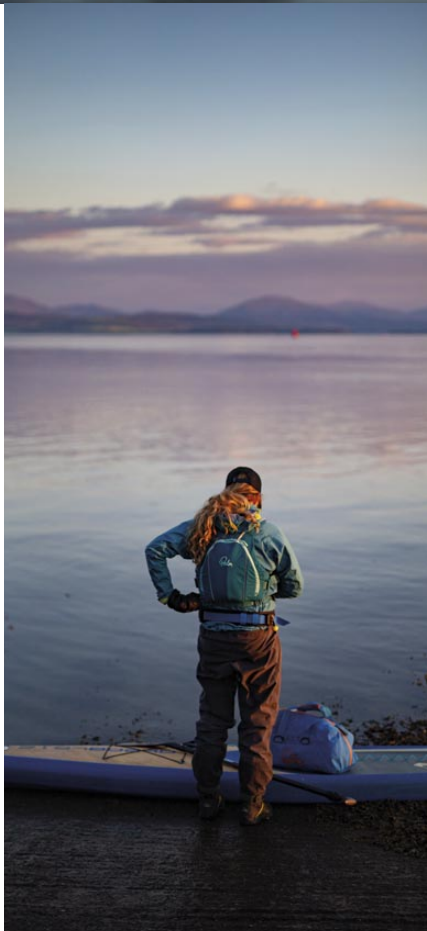


Challenging

For a start, filming the expedition was way more challenging than we'd anticipated. I love making films and being able to share stories this way. But with the remoteness and logistics of an expedition like this, we needed a very small film crew - namely myself on a SUP and my partner, James, on a kayak. So we had our work cut out! James is extraordinarily multi-talented, acting as the cameraman, underwater photographer, drone pilot, sound technician and director while ensuring his kit was always safe and charged, and everything backed up.

I took on my own series of roles. Behind the scenes, there was a lot of organisation - both the logistics of the paddling and arranging interviews and meet-ups. We were each playing the part of multiple people while trying to capture as much as we could on camera and paddling for up to 16 hours a day! It was full-on, but this was reflected in the epic encounters we had the great privilege to experience.

We had hoped to bring some of Scotland's world-class wildlife to viewers at home, both above and below the surface - to inspire awe at our incredible natural world. I could never have imagined the amount of wildlife we would see. Above the surface, we





encountered huge flocks of nesting seabirds, pods of enormous dolphins, sea eagles, otters and orca. Below the waves, we swam through vast seagrass meadows fighting climate change, kelp forests harbouring heaps of life and Scotland's equivalent of coral reefs. I was absolutely amazed by our dives and snorkels, having not realised that there was such wonder to behold in the British Isles. We also wanted to highlight what's happening to this incredible wildlife and nature, especially what is often out of sight and out of mind in the ocean's dark depths.

Damage and horrors

Our eyes were opened by the people we met around the coast and the stories they told us about what they had seen happening, especially the damage that bottom-towed gear can do to fragile habitats like the ones mentioned above. But we also encountered our own horrors: A humpback whale calf entangled in fishing rope, a gannet with barbed hooks stuck in its feet and remote islands piled high with waste from fish farms. It was an illuminating journey, and our duty to communicate what we saw to folks at home felt very real and urgent.



THANKS SO MUCH FOR READING, AND I HOPE YOU ENJOY WATCHING THE SERIES WE MADE ABOUT THE EXPEDITION! SCOTLAND OCEAN NATION WILL BE AVAILABLE TO STREAM FOR FREE ON:

[HTTPS://PLAYER.STV.TV/
SUMMARY/REELSoul-
SCOTLAND-OCEAN-NATION](https://player.stv.tv/summary/reelsoul-scotland-ocean-nation)



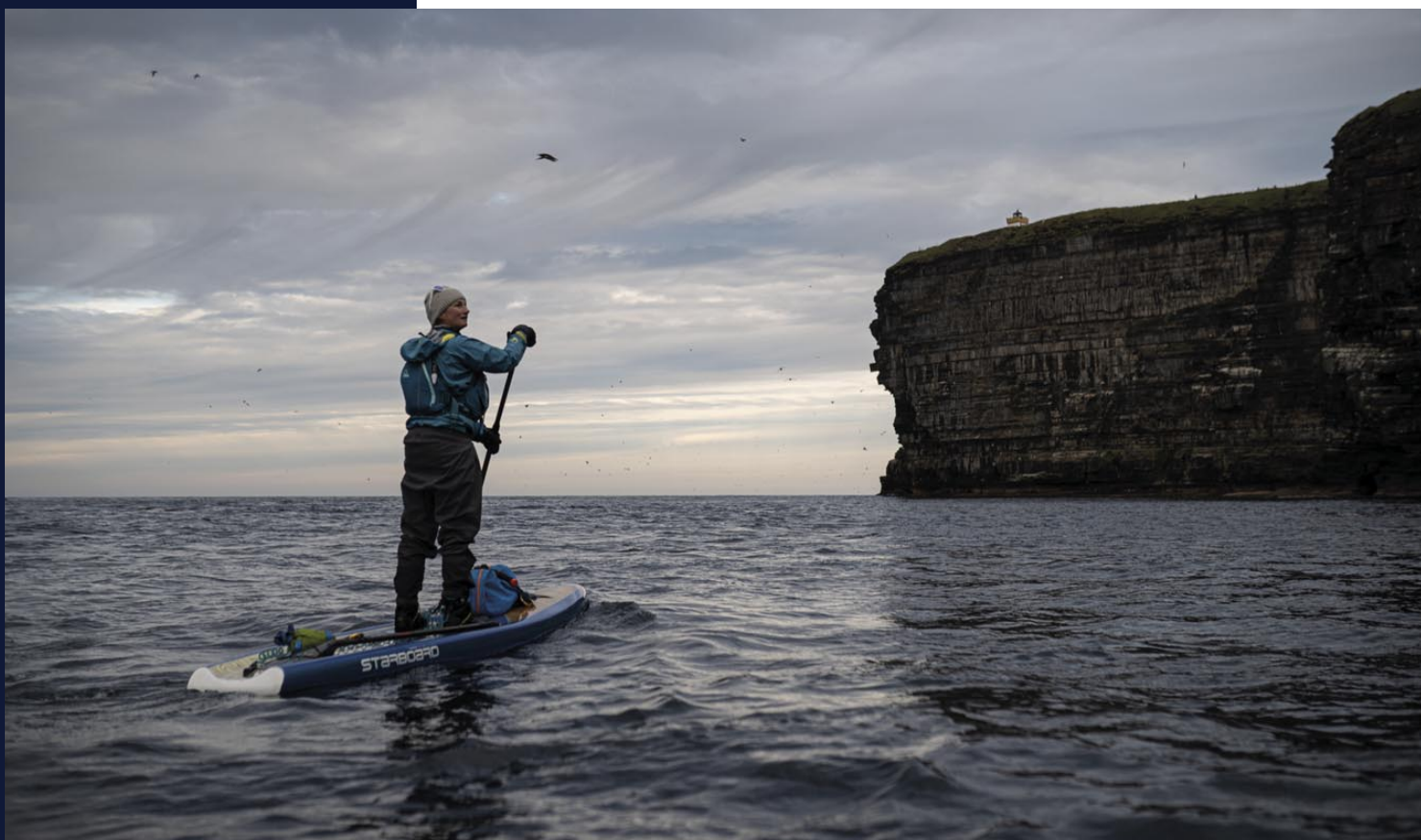
I also hadn't envisaged being quite so impacted by the people we met. We worked hard to meet up with, and hear from, Scotland's Ocean People from all walks of life around the coast. This meant deep and meaningful conversations with artists, spending days on fishing boats with fishers, visiting universities to talk to scientists, and spending time with trauma survivors, all of whom have their own connection to the ocean. It was both fascinating, warming and heart-wrenching to hear these wonderful people's stories, and I am very grateful to them for sharing their powerful insights.

Stokes my fires

I also learnt a lot, spending all that time out at sea. I love adventure, and how it can

immerse me into an environment I might otherwise not explore. I find that hours out to sea on my SUP are phenomenally powerful for my well-being and sense of both spaciousness and connection to something bigger than what I find myself engaged in 'normal' daily life. It fills me with passion and stokes my fires to protect the incredible places and wildlife I feel so grateful to find myself amongst.

I'm delighted to be able to share our film series in the hope that it helps to inspire others to care too. I hope you enjoy the adventure, are inspired by the beautiful humans we meet and their raw and powerful connections to our magnificent ocean and are wowed by the incredible





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SUPJUNKIE REPORTING



The UK SUP race season 2023

Photos: SUPjunkie

Is it really that time again? My how the winter flies when you finally hit March, and your focus turns to SUP racing whether you've booked any events. Those who have trained over the winter will probably worry as much as those who haven't - do we ever think we are fully prepared for that first race and those that follow throughout the season?

Boy, do we have some cracking events this year – from a packed schedule delivered by the GBSUP National Series Team to newer races and challenges and those that seem to have been on the calendar for years.



The National Series



Let's start with the National Series, our go-to set of races, including flatwater distance and ocean tech, juniors, challenge tour and sprints. The team has tried to give the paddlers what they want: variety and choices for all at great locations.

For all the GBSUP race events, most of the paddlers will be entering the race fleet, but the Challenge tour will cater for those who do not wish to race but want to take part – you may not feel ready to race and want to test the waters, so this is the perfect opportunity. There is always a guide on the water to encourage you, and the distance is shorter than that of the race fleet. Juniors will be included at all events, with volunteer instructors getting the most out of the

youngsters, whatever age or ability and making their day fun. If you know of any young paddlers who want to get involved or be on the water that day, please contact the GBSUP team. They are the future of our sport.

Flatwater distance series

On 25th March, the first flatwater distance series will be held at Bewl Water, the largest reservoir in the southeast. The race fleets will be battling it out over 12km, the Challenge tour 6km, and the Juniors will be well catered for on a 3km course, depending on age and ability. It's a stunning body of water with a waterfront café and plenty of space with great areas to watch the race unfold.

Next up in the flatwater distance series is Cardiff, home to many exciting races held in and around the Cardiff International White-Water Centre. Held on Sunday, 30th April, over the CIWW Paddlefest weekend, it's a great venue with lots going on. There is excellent viewing at the centre; you can even follow the paddlers and watch them along the river with plenty of bridge viewing.

Finally, in that series, it's Windermere – who can resist the beauty of a summer Solstice weekend on 24/25th June in the Lake District? GBSUP have visited there before with a point-to-point race down the Lake – it was a great challenge in a stunning part of the world.



GBSUP Fundraising

In 2022 nearly £4,000 was raised for the RNLI through raffle ticket sales and personal challenges, like Lauren Newman-Warren's solo triathlon – battling with only herself, Lauren has pushed her boundaries for a few years now and put a good amount of money in the charity pot for the RNLI. Why not set your own personal challenge, on or off the water and support the GBSUP-chosen charities in 2023? This year sees a change, with two new ones being supported, Above Water and My Black Dog.

Above Water

Above Water was set up by Brendon Prince primarily to teach water safety and drowning prevention to teachers, children and parents, with thousands of school visits either having taken place or being planned. As paddleboarders, we all use the ocean and inland waters, and we and our children must have as much access to good information about water safety as possible.

My Black Dog

My Black Dog is a game-changing charity offering peer-to-peer support for people struggling with their mental health. All their volunteers are people who have lived experiences of their battles and understand what you may be going through. CEO Niki Clarke had first-hand experience with depression before founding My Black Dog and is supported by Patron, Eddy Temple-Morris, who must be the most positive DJ on Radio.

GBSUP has always been run with a team of volunteers, from the directors and media team to the bib sorters, so if you would like to get involved and help in any way possible, please get in touch with them. From bigger commitments to helping at one race, it's all appreciated. The GBSUP website is also a great place to start for any help and info needed about the series, board classes or age categories, so please sign up for their newsletter and follow them on all social media channels.

Ocean technical series

On to the ocean technical series, they are starting with a bang on the 8th and 9th of July at the Falmouth Bay Open. Many paddlers chose this as their favourite event of 2022, so it should be another great weekend of racing. This has also been confirmed as the qualifying race for the ICF World Championships, so there are lots to play for the paddlers who wish to represent Great Britain in Thailand later in the year.

Paddlers will compete in three disciplines, sprint, technical and distance, over the two days on Gylly Beach, Falmouth. Paddlers must register their interest with British Canoeing before the event to be considered for team selection. All details and criteria are on the GBSUP website.

On 9th September, it's all 'oop north' to the Beadnell Belta, another cracking venue with superb hosts. We've heard they can get a wee surf break in

Northumberland, so it could be incredibly exciting and an opportunity to support the North and visit a beautiful part of the UK.

Then on to the finale of the Ocean Tech Series to be hosted by Barefoot SUP in Norfolk; again let's look forward to a cracking event in a stunning location. Champions will be crowned – we just cannot wait! It's a new venue on the calendar, so let's give Sam and her team lots of support.



MY BLACK DOG



Hot news!

The British National Championships will now be held on 17th September at Bray Lake, Maidenhead – paddlers will compete in 200-metre sprints, 3/4km tech and 8 km distance races to become the overall National Champion. The three board classes are 14' and under hardboard, 14' and under iSUP and N1Sco. The British Sprint Championships will be held on Sunday, 4th June, in Nottingham, home of the infamous yellow buckets!



Other UK races

Running from March through October, there is something for everyone, from the Central Belter in Glasgow to the iconic two-day team event Trent100 and a new race showcasing mind-bending endurance, SUP Twelve in Torbay. Whether it's gentle participation you want to all out, head down, full-on race mode, the UK has you covered.

Race The Train

Race The Train is a little-known unique event on Lake Bala, north Wales, open to all paddle crafts, including SUP and even bathtubs – you literally race the train down the length of the lake. Surely, all paddlers should do this race at least once in their lifetime!

after some happy years being linked to the GBSUP National Series, Brian felt the time was right to stop and put his feet up! Only kidding, as Mr Johncey will never put his feet up, there will be another fun event happening on 17th June which was the original date for BOTT 2023.

Norfolk Outdoor Adventures

The Paddle Skedaddle and Norfolk Broads Ultra are well established in the calendar now, being run by the highly efficient team at Norfolk Outdoor Adventures. The Skedaddle is a one-way point-to-point covering 26.5 miles of the three beautiful and major rivers of the Norfolk Broads, and the Ultra is a two-day or non-stop 80km on the quieter rivers and waterways of the Broads. Paddlers enter these races time and time again, which shows how popular they are.

SUP the Creek

SUP the Creek will finish out the UK season on the 21-22nd of October – again, another paddler's favourite, with the distance race being held on Saturday – Waterborn SUP run a professional but relaxed inclusive event, with three distances to suit all. The 'Battle of the Paddle' style tech race happens on Sunday down at Salcombe, and if 2022 is anything to go by, it will be truly epic.

So, lots to choose from, plenty of new races and beautiful parts of the country to visit whilst popping in an hour or two's racing in between. We look forward to seeing you and cannot wait to watch all the paddlers, be they the 'old hands' or the up-and-coming youngsters. Are you ready? – WE CERTAINLY ARE!

BOTT 2023

Battle of the Thames will not return in 2023 and possibly beyond. Brian and his team have enjoyed over ten years of success with their legendary ten milers, and





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WORDS: SCOTT WARREN

PHOTOS: P3T PHOTOGRAPHY



FOR MANY PADDLERS, FLATWATER IS HOME. THE SMOOTH, TRANQUIL WATERS OF INLAND LAKES, SHELTERED ESTUARIES AND RIVERS MAY OCCASIONALLY EXPERIENCE WIND CHOP BUT RARELY BECOME WHAT WE CAN CALL ROUGH WATER. THROUGH THIS ARTICLE, I HOPE TO GIVE INLAND AND COASTAL PADDLERS SOME INSIGHT INTO PADDLING WHEN THINGS GET ROUGHER SO YOU CAN EXTEND YOUR WINDOW OF GETTING OUT AND DO MORE THAN JUST CHASING THE FEELING OF SURVIVAL.

The cliché statement

Let's start with the cliché statement that your paddle should be an extension of yourself. Holding your paddle should feel natural, with the paddle being balanced in your hands. All too often, especially now, I see paddlers getting into SUP with the most basic, heavy paddles. If one thing will hold your paddling back, it's a heavy and dead paddle. So what do I mean by a dead paddle? It's a paddle which offers you no feel and won't give you any feedback through your hands. If you invest in one piece of kit, then a decent paddle should be it. It doesn't have to be a top-end £500+ paddle, but a decent mid-range paddle that feels light, comfortable and, most importantly, natural in your hands.

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A SEQUENCE OF HOW THE HANDS ARE PLACED CORRECTLY ENSURES CONTROL EVEN AT MAXIMUM EFFORT

The bottom hand

Firstly, let's focus on our bottom hand. As paddlers, our bottom hand is where we pull the paddle and produce our momentum. The placement of your hand and how you grip the paddle shaft can vastly change how your paddle feels and the resulting motion from pulling.

Placement – where should my bottom hand be?

Take your paddle in your hands and hold it out in front of you to begin. Now we want to bend our top arm at the elbow to make it 90 degrees, and the bottom hand should match this and be bent 90 degrees at the elbow. This gives us a good base position to work from, and changing this position can increase or decrease the power as you need it.

For social or recreational paddling, bringing the bottom hand up one hand's width will likely be more comfortable and take some of the power out of the stroke. This also works when cruising during a longer race to help conserve some energy.

If we need more power, such as paddling into the wind or against a strong flow, then dropping the hand down one hand's width will help. This position can also help increase your cadence for paddling into waves or sprinting.

Grip

Your efficiency and ability to produce power can all go out the window if your bottom-hand grip isn't correct. If a grip is too tight, you can get a forearm 'pump' or cramps and lactic acid buildup. Too light, and your top hand must compensate, causing fatigue in your upper arms. A nice balanced grip blending a relaxed hand with a firm connection is best.

You should avoid the death grip, where you are gripping so tightly it results in cramps

and fatigue in your arms. On longer paddles, if you are suffering from cramps, a great tip is to move your bottom hand's thumb to the outside of the paddle shaft, which can help reduce fatigue during longer paddles.



On the left side, we have a firm but relaxed grip. On the right is the dreaded death grip.



Moving the thumb outside to protect from the forearm pump.

The top hand

With the bottom hand focused on pulling, the top hand has two important jobs. Firstly, your control comes from stabilising the paddle and allowing you to use the blade more effectively during manoeuvres. Secondly, your top hand is where your connection to the paddle initiates and where your body weight connects through the paddle. Unlocking the top hand can massively open up your paddling skills.

Placement

Your top hand can make or break your paddling technique from recreational to performance paddling, so getting this right is fundamental to building your skills. The top hand should be comfortable on your paddle handle, and you shouldn't feel like you need to over-grip. Your hand should be relaxed and have your knuckles pointing slightly towards the sky with the paddle held vertically. This position means your body weight can go down and through the paddle helping with power and efficiency, and you're not isolating your top arm to paddle. You want to avoid a 'punch' positioning where your top hand comes up over the top of the handle. In that position, it's harder to stabilise the paddle and isolate the top arm and induces a push into the stroke.

Different handles offer different grip positions, but the hand should always be connected through the palm and lightly held by the fingers.

Increasing control

Think of your top hand as controlling a steering wheel in a car. You can turn the paddle left and right by bending your wrist to either side. If you follow with the bottom hand, you can suddenly open up additional skills like draw strokes to help keep you paddling straight. If you watch white water paddlers and surfers, for example, you will see that they use the top hand to control the paddle and the specific position their hands are in during manoeuvres.



LEFT: THE HAND IS BEHIND THE HANDLE AND RELAXED. **RIGHT:** THE PUNCH POSITION HAS BEEN ADOPTED



LEFT: WITH THE TOP HAND IN THE BEHIND POSITION, WE HAVE MORE CONTROL, AND LESS GRIP IS REQUIRED THROUGH THE TOP HAND.

BELOW: THE TOP HAND IS KEY TO PADDLE CONTROL IN DYNAMIC SITUATIONS SUCH AS SURFING.



Sizing your paddle

There are many methods to get it sized correctly, but I always return to this method as it works for any paddle regardless of the blade size or type. Start by turning the paddle upside down. This way, you're measuring the paddle shaft and can then size your paddle depending on your board, type of paddling and personal preference. Hold your paddle at arm's length out in front of you where the paddle blade blends into the shaft:



For recreational, social and touring paddling and when using an iSUP, your arm should be raised slightly



For racing or using a hardboard, including one with a dugout, your arm should be parallel to the ground



For surfing and whitewater, your arm should be slightly lower

Another good way to check your paddle height is by seeing where your top hand is when paddling. During the stroke, when you are midway through pulling, your top hand should be around your eye to head height. Too short or long and could bring on lower back or shoulder issues with prolonged paddling.

Below: paddle heights can be confusing.



Top tips

1. Keep your top hand connected through the palm, and don't use a punch grip.
2. Play with your paddle on land to become more comfortable with controlling your paddle.
3. Add a paddle grip if you struggle with bottom arm cramps.
4. Try paddles out before you buy, and spend plenty of time paddling each one.
5. Watch other paddlers to see how they control their paddle.



Above: elbows bent at 90 degrees to set hand placement.

Below: on the left, the hands are placed correctly. On the right, the bottom hand has moved too close to the top.





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Sarah BLUES

@plussizepaddler



Photographer: Graham Woolven

INTERVIEWS: EMMA LOVE

AFTER RECEIVING OVER 180 APPLICATIONS FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY, BRITISH CANOEING, CANOE WALES, AND THE SCOTTISH CANOE ASSOCIATION WERE PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE THE #SHEPADDLES AMBASSADORS FOR 2022/2023. TWENTY-ONE INSPIRATIONAL WOMEN WHO ARE PIVOTAL IN PROMOTING AND ENCOURAGING MORE WOMEN AND GIRLS TO GET ON THE WATER. IN THIS SERIES OF INTERVIEWS, EMMA LOVE CHATS WITH EIGHT OF THE AMBASSADORS ABOUT ALL THINGS SUP!

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SARAH BLUES HAS A PASSION FOR HELPING WOMEN OVERCOME COMMON BARRIERS TO PADDLEBOARDING. HER INCREDIBLE ENERGY HAS LED HER TO DEVELOP THE #PADDLEHERWAY & #PADDLEKITHERWAY INITIATIVES. NOW ON HER BRITISH CANOEING COACHING JOURNEY, WE CHATTED ABOUT ALL THINGS SUP AND SARAH'S PLANS FOR 2023!



PHOTO: ALICE CALLOW / RED PADDLE CO



PHOTO: DANIELLE WATSON / RED PADDLE CO

#ShePaddles

When did you first try paddleboarding?

I first had a go SUP'ing in May 2020. I still remember how quickly I realised I was really bad at paddleboarding, but how much I loved it!

And how did you build confidence and skills?

In that first year, I attended some lessons locally, and then I found Dorset Race Club. Joining this community helped my progression massively because I was paddling with and surrounded by many abilities, including coaches and instructors. By the end of that first summer, I knew I didn't want to stop paddling, even with the onset of the colder weather. As you can imagine, it was an absolute game-changer for me when I found out they continued to paddle through the winter. I was hooked!

You are now en route to becoming a qualified British Canoeing Sheltered Water SUP Coach. What made you decide to start your coaching journey?

My coaching journey started last year, and, to be honest, I wasn't sure if I wanted to go down this route. My motivation came from having many conversations with women telling me about their poor SUP experiences, including not being able to find coaches or instructors who would take them out on the water because of their body shape and size! In response, I approached and worked with some awesome women coaches on my #PaddleHerWay initiative. And to my surprise, I found that I loved the coaching aspect of it. I have completed British Canoeing Core Coach training and SW SUP orientation. The next step is my coach assessment which I plan to complete this year.

Tell me more about the #PaddleHerWay initiative.

#PaddleHerWay is an initiative created to help women overcome common barriers to paddle boarding, become more confident and learn to

paddle safely. These sessions are for women, designed by women and run by women. It is about creating a safe learning environment for women to work on their skills in a very non-judgmental and fun way and feel confident to go off and develop these in the long term. Last year I ran four days, and 130 women attended in total.

What motivated you to apply for the #ShePaddles Ambassador role?

For me, it was about gaining greater access to a forum to discuss the issues facing women. #PaddleHerWay had already started to evolve (when I applied), and I was having, and continue to have, many discussions with women about the barriers they experience. For example, the standard taught self-rescue (climbing back on your board from the side, unaided) is a huge barrier for many. Whereas being taught how to climb on from the back is, often, a game changer! Becoming an ambassador means I can get under the skin of what is being taught in BC coaching courses and ask how self-rescues are being implemented up and down the country.

Many readers will know of your #PaddleKitHerWay initiative. How is this progressing?

I set this up because women told me they were struggling to find a kit that fitted them. I decided to approach leading paddle brands and find out why this was the case. Their initial response was, 'no demand for kit for the average (UK 16) and larger sizing'. So, in 2020 I decided to create a questionnaire. Five hundred fifty women responded, and my research showed 70% of women struggled to find kit, and more of those were above a 16 than below a size 10.

When presented with my findings, I found brands began to come on board, and we were having positive conversations about expanding their sizing. But with the economic recession hitting (among other things),

PHOTO: SARAH BLUES



many companies began to backtrack. I decided to try again, and 1700 women filled in my questionnaire this year. My new research shows the need is now even greater! I have gone back to those same brands with my research and asked the same question; why is it that, as a size 20, I easily find regular clothes on the high street, but I struggle to buy paddling kit?

the average paddler size, and that they embrace diversity. Their boards are market-leading and great for my size and weight; in fact, their boards were a game-changer in building my confidence on the water.

on them at the end of the first session. I have not encountered any other boards where it has been possible to achieve this so successfully! They are a great company, and I am pleased to be part of their family.

I have used my Red SUPs for #PaddleHerWay sessions, and women who are size 28/30 have had no issues getting back on these boards and could stand up

The Paddle Her Way sessions will run again in 2023 in the southwest, the midlands, north Wales and Essex – look out for dates and booking information on all social media

Do you feel optimistic that brands will start to offer greater variability?

Having these conversations again is hard work, but more women are approaching these companies and asking the same questions. Plus, everybody is heading outdoors, and there is now even greater pressure on brands to make kit available for all. So yes, I am optimistic that we will get there, but we must keep having these conversations.

Are there any particular brands you currently signpost women to.

Lomo is leading the way with wetsuits; you can now buy up to a size 30; Sola go up to size 20 in their wetsuits, and TMF, their parent brand, is also up to a size 30. You can find them all online.

Tell me about your role as a RED Ambassador.

Red contacted me when I originally launched @plussizepaddler (with about 100 followers on Instagram), and I was asked to become an ambassador in 2021. I chose to accept this role because I like that their technical kit goes up to a size 22 as standard, that their marketing focus is on

TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT 2023 #PADDLEHERWAY EVENTS, PLEASE GET IN TOUCH WITH SARAH VIA, INSTAGRAM OR FACEBOOK @PLUSSIZEPADDLER.



PHOTO: SARAH BLUES

#ShePaddles

Julie KELLY

@juliekelly7730

I CAUGHT UP WITH JULIE KELLY TO HEAR ALL ABOUT THE INSPIRATION BEHIND HER 2023 SUP ADVENTURE, HER LOVE FOR PADDLEBOARDING, THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY AND WHY IT IS NOW HER TIME TO SHINE!



#ShePaddles

You have challenged yourself to paddle 162 miles in just 11 days from Liverpool to Goole. Where did the inspiration for this SUP journey come from?

During lockdown, I heard a podcast interview with Jo Moseley (#ShePaddles Ambassador 2019) about the release of her film Brave Enough. The film follows Jo as she paddles from Liverpool to Goole. It highlights her emotional highs and lows, her SUP litter cleans and the money she raised. I had been procrastinating about buying my own SUP. Listening to Jo pushed me to buy one and paddle the same route, encouraging others to join me along the way.

Are you paddling solo?

I will be paddling with my friend Lucy Crute-Morris. We have known each other since 1986, when we trained as Physiotherapists in Birmingham. She is also the first person I inspired to buy a SUP. We had planned this trip before I became a #ShePaddles Ambassador, but life got in the way. We start our cross-country SUP adventure on the 1st August, 2023.

Have you got a daily mileage target?

Lucy and I recently learned that we would need to paddle around 16 miles a day to complete the trip within our eleven-day target.

Do you have a personal connection to the route you are paddling?

My husband Phil is from Liverpool, so that is the westerly connection, and I am from Hull on the east coast. This route is an excellent way to connect those two parts of my world.

And for you and Lucy?

Lucy and I have navigated our own personal journeys, managing the various difficulties that life has thrown at us. For us, this trip is a #ShePaddles adventure and a great chance to inspire others to join us. The trip probably represents the definitive 'life's too short' attitude!



ALL PHOTOS: PHIL KELLY



has made the water accessible to me. Experiencing the river from the SUP gives such a different viewpoint. I have seen my first Kingfisher, and I often litter pick when I'm out, as it's important to protect our wildlife and nature, especially from plastic pollution.

Is being connected to a community important to you?

Yes! Now that I live in Yorkshire, I have connected with a fantastic group of people through the local activity group Active Filey. They run sea swimming sessions four times a week plus running, walking, and cycling sessions. We all have such a laugh, jumping in the waves, swimming in the dark in our wet suits with head torches. Members are now buying their SUPs and are keen to learn more. I am now helping Active Filey become affiliated with British Canoeing.

What would you say to anyone reading this interview who thinks they are too old, too unfit or lacking the confidence to start new adventures?

My husband was diagnosed with incurable cancer, and I thought I was going to be a widow at 42. My son also nearly died as a baby from meningitis. So, I realise life can be too short. My perspective is, I have got to look after myself; otherwise, I cannot look after anybody else. My activities are a sort of self-preservation. I like targets – something to aim for. And with the kids now grown up, it is time for my husband and me to shine. I don't care what other people think, and I don't care if they think I am crazy. I would encourage everyone to go out there, have a laugh, have a go, and you never know – you might inspire yourself and someone else!

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT JULIE & LUCY'S PADDLING TRIP, PLEASE GET IN TOUCH WITH JULIE VIA INSTAGRAM @JULIEKELLY7730

Will you be connecting with other paddlers along the route?

I took part in The Great Tour, a bike circumnavigation of the UK coast. I joined the tour cycling from Morecombe to Machynlleth (440 miles). We had day cyclists join us, which was a great feature of the ride. This is how we want our SUP adventure to be. We want local paddlers and clubs to paddle with us for a few hours or a full day along our journey. As you can tell, we want to celebrate getting out on the water and encourage others to join the growing SUP community.

What made you want to become a #ShePaddles Ambassador?

I wanted to inspire women to leave their comfort zones and try something new. At 55 years old, my outlook is, 'why not have a go'? The UK has some beautiful waterways, and SUP is accessible to women. I love the sense of community and support from like-minded people, and finding your 'tribe' opens up lots of fun and adventures.

Who has been your paddling inspiration?

I met Louise Royle when I joined the Kingfisher Canoe Club in Abingdon, Oxfordshire, in 2017. She has inspired me

to push myself and not be afraid to try new things. Her energy and enthusiasm are limitless, and I appreciate her guidance and support. I still plan to explore the world of white-water SUP, as Louise has shown me what is possible.

Tell me about your SUP journey.

I joined the local canoe club in 2017 after dabbling with sit-on kayaks, sea kayaking, and SUP. The club runs a yearly Dart trip and having never tried white water kayaking, this was my baptism of fire! I spent more time in the water than in my kayak and found it both frightening and exhilarating. I loved the adrenaline rush and the enormous sense of achievement when I managed to stay upright. I attempted to learn to roll in the pool sessions but just couldn't manage it and felt that kayaking was not for me. COVID and losing our clubhouse meant a break in my water-based activities, and I had watched Louise pumping up her SUP and realised that was my way back onto the water. I bought my first SUP in 2021.

What drives you to keep venturing out on your paddleboard?

I lived in Abingdon for over twenty years but had never ventured onto the Thames. Discovering SUP has been a turning point and

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SUP + COOK!

WORDS: CAROLINE DAWSON
SUP LASS PADDLE ADVENTURES

PHOTOS: HARRI CORP
HC_ADVENTUREMEDIA AND
CAROLINE DAWSON
SUP LASS PADDLE ADVENTURES

Caroline Dawson – aka SUP Lass – isn't just a top-shelf paddle boarding instructor and guide; she's also a dab hand in the kitchen. Being intrigued about her combining both passions, we caught up with Caz to learn more about her SUP + Cook experiences.

Many of you know me as Caz, owner of SUP Lass Paddle Adventures based in north east Wales. But did you know that when I am not on the water, I am a freelance food and drink consultant and judge for the Great Taste Awards? I also used to run an award-winning event catering business that ran pop-up dining experiences in weird and wonderful outdoor locations – mountain tops, forests and even castles. Most of my working life has been spent supporting independent food and drink

producers in developing and growing their businesses – both in the UK and overseas.

My life revolves around 'good' food - promoting it, cooking it and eating it.

Last year SUP Lass Paddle Adventures launched SUP + Cook experiences. We take out clients on the River Dee and provide them with fresh, local ingredients and cooking kit to rustle up a tasty two-course dinner on a secluded bank side location.

A paddle board provides a fantastic platform to carry gear; I, for one, have maximised this and am rarely without a means of making a brew or rustling up a hearty meal. With a little thought and planning, the water cooking boundaries can be stretched and explored. My aim is to source and promote seasonal, local and the occasional foraged ingredients in my sessions with clients. There is something magical about enjoying products, such as local lamb or beef, in the



Kelly Kettle:
<https://www.kellykettle.com>



Robens Fire Wood Stove

The Robens Fire Wood Stove is an elegant, flat-pack stove with its hard-wearing zippable bag. Its slim profile works well on the deck of a paddle board and can easily slip underneath other deck bags. The stove has travelled all over with me – UK and overseas, its versatility and the speed it cools down makes for a multi-functional bit of cooking kit.

The stove works equally well as a grill and a stove. I've cooked beef steaks, new season asparagus and halloumi with great success and have also used the wide top to scratch cook curries and dhals using my trusty Zebra billy can's. The stove has been designed with a generous front opening that allows for a range of sticks and branches to be used as fuel; it also has a great draw. The stove also makes for a great campfire.

For 2023, SUP Lass Paddle Adventures will further grow its cooking offer, both for clients and other instructors wishing to develop their cooking skills. Our sessions cover food safety and hygiene, menu planning and 'Leave No Trace' principles.

Robens:
<https://www.robens.de/>



environment where it has been grazed and reared.

I want to introduce you to some of my favourite cooking kit:

The Kelly Kettle

With memories of peaty brews going back 30 years, I was brought up on fishing and adventure holidays to the west coast of Ireland – the home of the original Kelly Kettle. The simple design of the kettle dates

back to the 1890s when it was originally made from copper and was used by ghillies to boil water for hot drinks on wet, windy days.

The primary use of a Kelly Kettle is to boil water in just 3-5 minutes, using just a handful of dry fuel, such as sticks or pine cones. I always carry some eco firelighters and light them using my trusty fire steel. I carry my kettle and tinder in a repurposed wax jacket and drawstring bag – both hard-wearing and water-resistant.

My kettle of choice is the 1.6-litre 'Base Camp' version (they come in a range of different sizes), enabling me to boil enough water for up to six clients. The roaring internal flame of the kettle always generates intrigue and conversation.

An add-on to the kettle is the Hobo camping stove accessory, which turns the fire base of the kettle into a highly effective, mini wood fuelled camping stove enabling you to warm soup or fry a couple of rashers.



WE'LL BE RUNNING REGULAR SUP + COOK EXPERIENCES THROUGHOUT THE SUMMER ON THE RIVER DEE. TO FIND OUT MORE VISIT OUR WEBSITE WWW.SUPLASS.COM OR FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA @SUP_LASS #SUP_LASS

FOR FURTHER INSPIRATION:

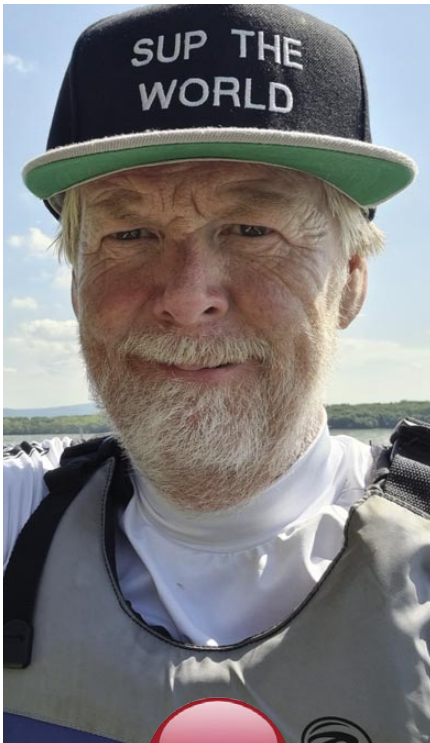
CHECK OUT TWO OF MY FAVOURITE BOOKS BY AUTHOR TIM GENT - CAMPFIRE COOKING AND CANOE CAMPING.

BUDAPEST

OR BUST

WORDS & PICS: JOHN MCFADZEAN

"JUST ONE MORE BEER FOR ME," I SAID TO WILLY BRAVO, AN ENGLISH-SPEAKING, SLOVAKIAN SURF INSTRUCTOR, AS HE MADE HIS WAY TO THE BAR. *"I'M GOING ON AN ADVENTURE TOMORROW."*



My 2021 solo SUP trip on the Danube – 360 kilometres from Passau in Germany to Bratislava – ended at the Mark Twain Bar on the outskirts of the Slovakian capital. It seemed appropriate that my 2022 trip from Bratislava to Budapest should begin at that same spot. It was perhaps less appropriate for me to visit the Mark Twain Bar the evening before my big adventure and certainly less appropriate to remain there drinking beer until well after midnight. But I did have a good excuse – I was there to meet a new friend. It was a SUP version of a blind date.

This year I wasn't paddling the Danube alone. A random social media conversation with a friend of a friend of someone I didn't even know, introduced me to Luděk Kocourek, an adventurer from Moravia, a region of Czechia. There was only one problem: Luděk spoke almost no English, and my knowledge of the Czech language was non-existent. Luckily, Willy Bravo was there to translate. After the fifth pint of beer, I believed myself fluent in Czech. It's surprising how easily you can speak a foreign language after a few drinks!

I wasn't feeling quite as fluent the following morning when the alarm went off, and I hit snooze for the umpteenth time.

A challenging first day

The first day of an adventure can set the tone for what is to follow. Day one was our most challenging day, with two tough portages to overcome, and I was embarrassed to start late with a sore head. However, my mood brightened as we paddled under the bridges of Bratislava,

especially the famous UFO Bridge, so named for the flying-saucer-shaped restaurant which sits atop the bridge.

We were running late all day. Carrying our boards and heavy gear from the main channel to the Old Danube at Cunovo and then again to bypass the weir at Dunakiliti was exhausting — an effort that left us doubled over and breathless. As day one came to a close, Luděk and I found a secluded grassy area to wild camp on the riverbank.

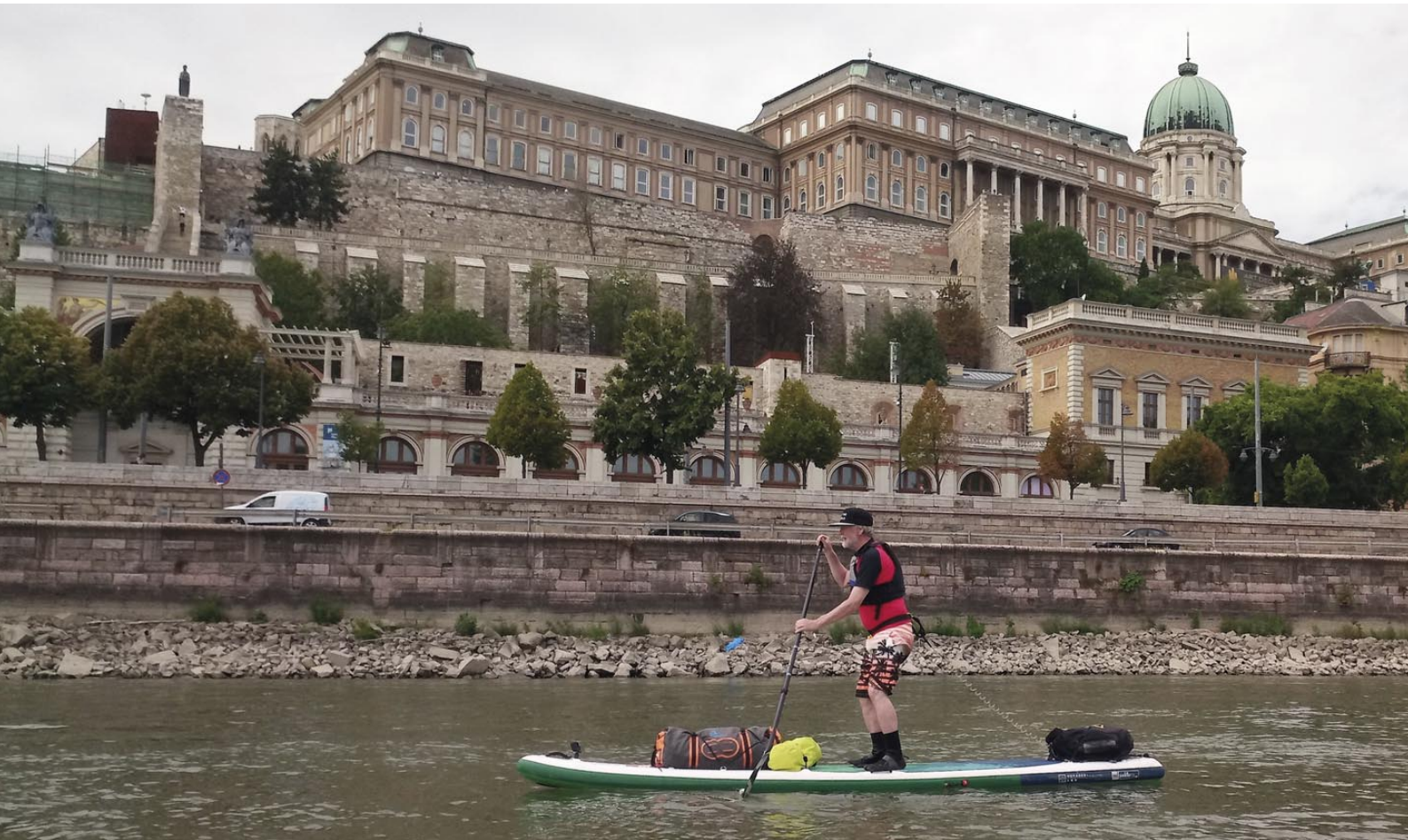
The following day we put 65 kilometres on the map and still had time for a two-hour break in the riverside Hungarian town of Gönyű for lunch and a catch-up with Hetti of SUP Gönyű.

Day two was when the language barrier finally caused a problem. After lunch, as we continued downstream, I assumed that Luděk had a wild camping location planned, and he assumed I did. We kept paddling, each waiting for the other to call a halt until almost nightfall. As the sun sank lower in the sky, we had no alternative but to overnight on the beach at Komárom, which was close to road and rail bridges. The sounds of traffic and trains disturbed my dreams as paranoia at camping in a busy neighbourhood set in. Huddled inside my tiny tent, I could hear strangers walking on the beach, gravel crunching under heavy boots. Male voices were talking in a language I didn't understand. Was it the police coming to arrest me? Or a mad axe murderer? I barely slept.

Paddlers' telepathy

That incident apart, language wasn't a problem. Our paddlers' telepathy was finely tuned; we each seemed to know the mind of the other because we were kindred spirits, fellow adventurers on the same epic journey. Of course, we also had Google Translate.

Day three was our shortest, just 25 kilometres to Eden Campsite, but it was the day I struggled. Too focused on reaching the next camp, I forgot to look up and enjoy the



JOHN IN BUDAPEST

LUDEK AND PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS, BUDAPEST



experience. Checking my tracker every few minutes to find that we were scarcely any closer to our destination, I heard my inner child shouting, "Are we nearly there yet?"

Negative voices in my head were telling me to quit. My calves were like stone, and my thighs begged for respite. My shoulders burned. My lower back reminded me that it had supported me for 58 years, and my head was down. Perhaps the night of insomnia at Komárom was a contributing factor. I fell back on the traditional adage for long-distance paddling, "One more stroke, John. Just one more stroke."

On any long SUP trip, you can decide to quit at any given moment, or you can decide to take one more stroke. I continued taking one more stroke until the negative voices in my head faded.

Because Europe had record-low rainfall during the months leading up to our trip,

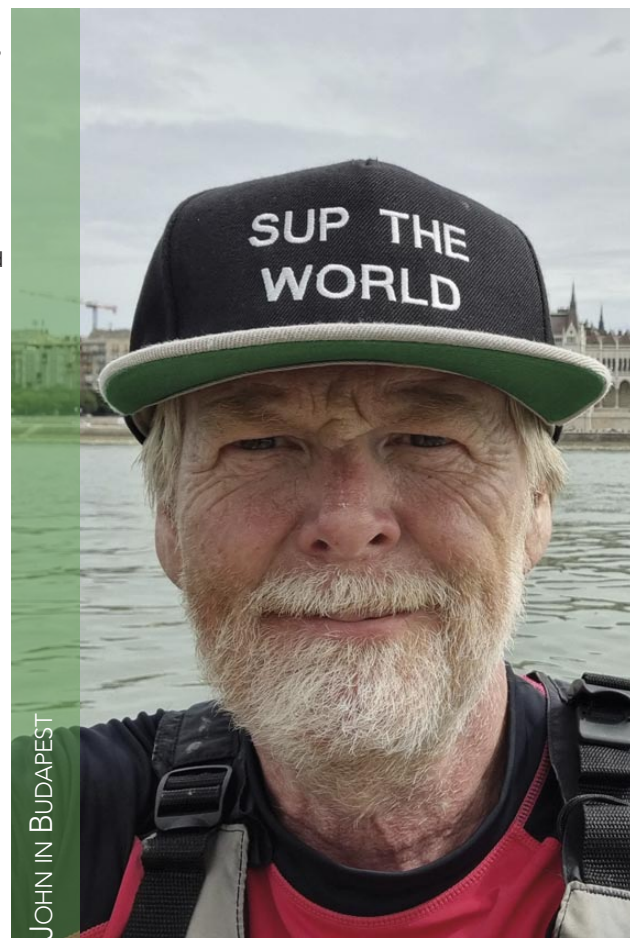
we got less assistance from the river flow than we might have anticipated. However, the weather was kind, with a gentle tailwind every day. Warm, daily sunshine energised our bodies, and there was only one spell of heavy overnight rain.

Why I enjoy SUP

It was plain sailing the following days, and I remembered why I enjoyed stand-up paddleboarding. I chose to look up and around: beautiful bridges and brilliant white cruise ships with pointed bows and passengers waving; gently sloping, sandy beaches filling the gap between the tree line and the water; children splashing; and a blue-domed basilica at Esztergom with gentle hills in the distance.

We eased our way towards Camping Domos and into the enchanting Szentendre Loop, a flat-water, tree-lined side channel of the main river.

My shoulders burned. My lower back reminded me that it had supported me for 58 years, and my head was down.



JOHN IN BUDAPEST



JOHN, HETTI AND LUDEK



LUDEK AT SZENTENDRE



LUDEK IN HUNGARY



THE BRIDGES AT KOMAROM

We had achieved something exceptional, and we both knew it.



THE OLD BRIDGE, BRATISLAVA

Budapest

I felt excitement and sadness as we departed from Szentendre on the final morning. SUPing through central Budapest had been a dream for a long time, and it was about to come true. But soon, it would be time to say goodbye to my Moravian SUP buddy.

A few short hours later, after floating under Margaret Bridge, we sailed in triumph past the instantly recognisable facade of the Hungarian Parliament Building. The magical moment of my dreams had arrived, a fitting reward for many hours on the river. As we drifted under Budapest's famous Chain Bridge, I turned to Luděk and caught his eye. We had achieved something exceptional, and we both knew it. My paddling companion had spent seven

days on the Danube, covering 294 kms from Vienna to Budapest, and I was pleased to paddle with him for six of those seven on my 232km odyssey.

Luděk raised his paddle in celebration. "This is the money shot," I told myself as I pointed my camera. Shortly afterwards, our journey was over.

Postscript

There was an amusing postscript to our adventure: we inadvertently exited the Danube at Sho Beach, an upmarket private venue catering to trendy revellers. The stylishly dressed manager generously allowed two scruffy, slightly smelly paddleboarders to pass through his immaculate establishment. I hope we didn't distract any clientele from their piña colodas.

Q&A

CRAIG JACKSON & JAMES SUTHERLAND

SUP SHROPSHIRE ADVENTURE GUIDING

PHOTOS: EMMA GRAYSTONE PHOTOGRAPHY & SUP SHROPSHIRE
THE SUP SHROPSHIRE CREW HAVE BEEN PUTTING IN THE TIME IN RECENT YEARS. THEY WERE GETTING PADDLERS UP TO SPEED SKILLS-WISE, HELPING RIDERS IMPROVE AND SHOWING ALL MANNER OF PEEPS THOSE GENERAL SUP STROKES. SO MUCH SO THAT WE THOUGHT IT WAS HIGH TIME SUPM HAD A CATCH-UP. SO WE DID!



Please give us a little of your background first.

Craig: My name is Craig Jackson, and I am currently a serving Fire Officer with Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service, where I have been for the last 19 years. Growing up in the West Midlands, I interacted little with water activities, and it wasn't until I joined the Fire Service in 2004 that I understood rivers and water safety.

James: Hi, my name is James Sutherland. I am a volunteer crew member with Severn Area Rescue Association, a Land and water rescue charity. I am also the Road and Water Safety Officer within the Shropshire Fire and Rescue Prevention Team and a self-employed event specialist/brand ambassador.



How did the idea for SUP Shropshire come about?

James and I became Water Skills Academy (WSA) SUP Coaches in 2020. We used the award to volunteer at Chelmarsh Sailing Club, and we soon upskilled to the WSA SUP Adventure Guide in 2021. We aimed to broaden our knowledge of the SUP world and not look at forging a SUP business.

We were fortunate enough to be contacted by Jo Moseley, author of #SUPGB, to help support a section within her new book of paddle spots around the UK.

I (Craig) took Jo on a journey along the river Severn in Shropshire. During this journey, Jo pointed out that it was clear that I had a passion for safety and that she had learnt so much whilst on the river and that it made her feel confident to explore more. As mentioned previously, James is also our Water Safety Officer in Shropshire Fire Service, and that prompt from Jo got me thinking. More people were accessing the river locally, and it was clear that some education was required to produce safer paddlers and ensure everyone enjoyed our stunning river.

What's SUP Shropshire's ethos?

We connect people to our rivers by creating safer paddleboarders, protecting our rivers and the oceans they feed and supporting mental well-being through paddleboarding.

Who makes up the SUP Shropshire team, and what does each bring to the table?

Craig: I am passionate about our core values; my time in the Fire Service so far has provided me with many tools from Leadership programmes, training and assessment qualifications, mental health and suicide awareness, water rescue skills, and, on several occasions managing large scale multi-agency responses to severe flooding on the River Severn. I found quickly that these skills were transferable to organising and running safe SUP adventures.

James: I've taught in various environments as a ski instructor, dive master, swim teacher, powerboat instructor and SUP instructor. My focus has always been on maximising fun while highlighting the safety



ANY BIG GOALS ACHIEVED?

In 2022 James and I set out to raise awareness of pollution in the river Severn and raise money for two charities, Seaful and Severn Area Rescue. We did this by paddleboarding the length of the river Severn. Paddling 11 and 12-hour days with a distance of 50-60km daily, we covered 218km in four days. Many blisters!

elements. By developing a strong core skill base early with students, many doors can be opened, and with a bit of self-discovery, you will learn skills that will stay with you.

How have the last few years been for you guys, what with COVID and such?

Craig: SUP Shropshire has never been a venture to make money, and we have been fortunate to be in full-time employment. Saying that, I am in a profession where we continued to provide a service, one that brought many challenges with the pandemic. Being able to paddle when the laws permitted was a blessing to maintain my mental well-being. However, the pandemic saw more people getting out and enjoying the great outdoors. This has brought many people our way to learn how to paddle safely on our river systems.

James: We started SUP Shropshire after the COVID period, having seen so many pick up our sport during the lockdown and then, as rules were relaxed, people were venturing out into different areas with little to no training. This inspired us to share our knowledge and background with others to make paddling safer for all.

What's the plan for 2023 as far as milestones for the business?

Our objectives are to continue promoting safer paddleboarding, and this sees the release of our latest awareness sessions on the safe and effective use of throwlines.

We are passionate about our environment; Craig is an Ambassador for Seaful Charity, working closely with the founders Cal Major and Lorna Evans. Over the past two years we, with the support of Chelmarsh Sailing Club and volunteers have delivered bespoke SUP sessions to over 200 children from inner-city schools. We provide an opportunity to support natural connections to the water, hoping that one day that connection will encourage someone to support the health of our rivers and oceans. The children learn that the same water they are playing on is their drinking water pumped from the river Severn. The youngsters also leave with an understanding of mental well-being with a session run by our friend and Mental Health Trainer, Matt Loftus. We aim to continue this through 2023 and beyond.





And personally? Anything specific you want to tick off?

Craig: I'm steadily progressing with my Whitewater skills, and I plan to move into the WW coaching scene to share my stoke for the awesome power of our rivers.

James: I'd love to do more coastal paddling and work towards my expedition guide.

Talk us through your main paddling areas and what they offer.

Chelmarsh Sailing Club. South Staffs Water owns this reservoir outside Bridgnorth, in the Shropshire Countryside. Paddleboarding is a membership only, but for £10 a month, you can have unlimited access to showers and a bar. There is an excellent SUP community, and it's a beautiful location to unwind in nature.

River Severn. The longest river in Britain runs through the heart of Shropshire. With the Severn only passing through a few small towns on its route through Shropshire, you are blessed with beautiful landscapes, from flat open fields to rocky sandstone outcrops and views of the Shropshire Hills. Along the



WHAT'S YOUR FAVE BIT OF SUP KIT AND WHY?

Craig: At present, it has to be my McConks Go Wild Paddleboard. It is a beginner to intermediate WW board and super fun. At 9'8" and 36" wide, it's very stable and allows you to develop those core whitewater skills.

James: I love the Fourth Element, baselayers, as they keep me warm all year round and aren't restrictive in their movements.

route, you will see an array of waterfowl, including many Kingfishers and the chance to glimpse the elusive Otters. As we are on a higher part of the Severn, we have some fun rapids from grades 1 to 2-3 for those seeking adventure.

Shropshire Union Canal. A canal isn't everyone's cup of tea, but they are a stunning substitute when the rivers are high. We have friendly pub park-ups where you can enjoy a pint and a bowl of chips after your paddle and routes that will take you through more Shropshire countryside and sandstone tunnels.

Have you got any particular favourite SUP locations (home or abroad), and why?

Craig: I recently paddled on the Huron river in Michigan, USA, and although I saw turtles along the way, it still didn't beat spotting an Otter or Kingfisher on the river Severn. The river Severn is close to my heart, but I must admit that my recent adventures just over the border paddling with our close friend Caz Dawson (SUPLass) and the gang on the river Dee through the Welsh hills and rapids have been pretty epic!

James: The Lofoten Islands are top of the wish list at the moment; any time on the board is great, but I do enjoy a good coastal paddle.

Talk us through your SUP gear.

Craig: I wear Palm Atom Trousers with a Palm Atom cag for the cooler months. You must wear suitable footwear when paddling on rivers, and my choice of shoe is Palm Gradient boots. During the summer, I wear Fourth Element thermocline clothing. Again another river safety must is a QR belt, and I use HF and Palm type belts.

For my general paddling, I use a two-piece Blackfish paddle which is like an extension to my arms and super lightweight. I have two boards that I use mainly: the McConks 12'8" Go Explore for my river running and a McConks Go Wild for my white water antics.

A decent drybag is also a must, and as an adventure guide, it's helpful to have one that is easily accessible and spacious; for this, I use Fourth Element, often referred to as my Mary Poppins bag. A decent drysuit is next on my wish list.

James: I've recently invested in a Gill Verso drysuit, a game changer during the winter months. Most of my paddling during the year involves my Peak Dry trousers (ideal for teaching when in and out of the water with beginner paddlers) and my Peak adventure cag in a dry bag close to hand.

I use a Peak Rescue Wrap PFD as my leash can attach to the cows tail and quick release system and the pockets on the front allow for good storage for my phone (and VHF when needed) as well as 5m tapes and karabiners.

Most of my paddling is done on my 14' Sic Maui Okeanos board, with the two-piece Blackfish paddle we got last year before our wee adventure down the Severn.

Is there anything specific you'd like to see more of from the industry regarding SUP gear?

James: Seeing all board manufacturers supply their boards with Qr belts would be a brilliant step forward for safety.

Craig: Many brands choose influencers on social media to be ambassadors for their SUP gear. I have nothing against that, but I've recently seen many photographs pushed by the brands showing little regard for safety. If a brand chooses to advertise this way, then more thought needs to be given to providing the influencer with not just the product but the correct safety equipment and training. An image paints a 1,000 words.

I would ask the industry and the readers how to promote safe paddling to those that don't engage with SUP social sites and magazines.

Are you involved in any other outdoor activities? If so, how does this complement your stand up paddling?

Craig: SUP provides me with a space to switch off and have fun, but juggling this with shift work and family life can be difficult at times, so when I can't get out on the water, I will be running next to the local stream, picking up litter or mountain biking over the Shropshire Hills.

James: I'm a Powerboat Instructor, so I see the water differently when doing that, but I'm normally out each day with my two sprocker spaniels, so they are a good excuse for fresh air.



TO FIND OUT MORE INFORMATION:

WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/
SUPSHROPSHIREADVENTURE
GUIDING

@SUP_SHROPSHIRE

WEB:

WWW.SUPSHROPSHIRE.COM



How do you see the 2023 season of SUP panning out generally?

We have seen a huge spike in the uptake of SUP over the past couple of years, and we are still seeing new paddlers come onto the scene. This year we will see those who have built their confidence during last summer will look to push their ability further and seek to explore more adventurous locations, hopefully through a guided tour with a qualified coach.

Any final comments on SUP?

All we ask from all coaches and those linked to social media SUP pages is to share your love for the activity and appropriately offer advice to others if you see something dangerous while on your adventures. You only know what you know, and only some people that own a SUP are engaged in the SUP world. Always wear appropriate safety equipment for the environment and seek coaching, especially when moving into new environments, and, most of all, have a bloody scream doing it! Safe and happy paddles.

Thanks and praise?

Wow, where do we start? Firstly, thank you to Tez and SUPM for sharing a piece of our story. Thank you to the SUP community for taking part in our sessions. Our volunteer work with Seaful and other charities is only possible due to our wonderful volunteers and the backroom teams at Chelmarsh Sailing Club. Thank you to the organisations that supported our River Severn trip and continue to do so now, PaddleLogger, Fourth Element, KleanKanteen, McConks, Blackfish Paddles through Get On The Water, SUPFM – praise to Andy and Jenny McConkey for their continued work to support SUP safety initiatives.

Last but not least, our wonderful families, James' wife Jo, my wife Emily and son Edward. Working shifts and volunteering really take up your time, and we wouldn't be able to do what we do without the love and support of our family.





Photo: Joshua Telling



Photo: William Evans

MADE FOR ADVENTURE Built to last



Young or old, abled or less abled, large or small,
we know paddleboarding is for everyone.
Let us help you find the right board for you.

Use voucher code 'SUPintoSpring' at checkout for a surprise free gift and spring discount.

THE BUBBLE CREW

WORDS: SARAH THORNELY
PICS: ANTONY THORNELY
FOR SUPJUNKIE



ELEVEN YEARS AGO, I STARTED PADDLING WITH THE REAL BLUE CHIP SUPER CLUB, AND OVER THAT TIME, I HAVE RACED, BECOME AN INSTRUCTOR, SUP SURFED, HAD SOME WONDERFUL ADVENTURES, AND BEEN BITTEN BY THE BUG THAT IS WHITE WATER PADDLING. FIVE YEARS AGO, I HAD MY FIRST EXPERIENCE OF 'BUBBLES' AND SINCE THEN HAVE TRIED TO WW SUP AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE. I'VE TAKEN SOME PROFESSIONAL INSTRUCTION FROM THOSE WITH HUGE AMOUNTS OF TALENT AND EXPERIENCE, LIKE LOUISE ROYLE, TOM WESTAWAY, AND JESS PHILIP.

Wye Valley

Some of our more experienced club members also love the white water, and once or twice a year, we go hunting for the right conditions. Usually, it's the River Barle on Exmoor, but after last year's trip with an acute lack of water on the day, we decided to head off to the Wye Valley, where conditions could not have been more different. Monmouth was our base; from there, we had a full-on logistics plan for the day. We were lucky enough to have Antony as our on-land crew and photographer, which meant we could all relax in the knowledge that had there been an issue, Mr T would be on hand.

The plan was to set off from Kerne Bridge and travel around 20 km to Monmouth, stopping for some fun at Symonds Yat rapids. The levels were very high, and the flow was fast, so we would be taking dynamic risk assessments throughout the morning to ensure the trip was as safe as possible. As a group of paddlers, we each take responsibility for ourselves and our decisions on the day, and we are experienced (and old enough!) to hold our hands up and pull out if unhappy. There are no egos here, especially with the conditions on the river Wye on a dry and surprisingly warm day in the middle of March.

Having pumped boards, suited up, and moved kit between vehicles, we doubled up passengers and drove up to Kerne Bridge. The car park did not look inviting with an out-of-action payment machine, so we drove another couple of kilometres to Lower Lydbrook. There is nothing like having a couple of locals with you who know this stretch of the river well, including parking.

Safety is paramount

It's incredible how much time it takes to be ready; there is no point in rushing as you certainly cannot afford to forget anything. Safety of yourself and the group is paramount. Once we were kitted up, we had a safety







briefing. We are all very accomplished paddlers, but these conditions were the most challenging we had been out in. We shared knowledge, safety advice, and top tips for being on the water on this day, and only when we were all happy did we set off. We had found the safest drop-in, which enabled us to get on our boards in a large calm eddy, before getting out into the fast-flowing middle lane. Anyone who has paddled the River Wye will know that it is good and wide, with sweeping bends, so although there were strainers and hazards about, they were all to the sides of the river, which meant we could give them a wide berth.



Jim: "The best fun you can have on a SUP, especially for those adrenalin junkies out there, as you never know what to expect."

Shout-outs

Paddling in a group is great fun and helps with safety. Rather like being in a cycling peloton, a shout-out is made and passed down the line when the paddler at the front spots something potentially dangerous. It's all about teamwork to keep the group free from danger.



calm enough for us to stop there and discuss the rapids. We then paddled further down, letting Antony find a safe place to take photographs. There is an island in the middle of the river where the rapids begin, and on this day, you could not see it, just the trees coming out of the water. The river right route is called the 'chicken run' as it's calmer, and a couple of our group chose to take it. River left was looking fast with some big standing waves. I could not see any of the usual rocks on that side, so again, it showed just how high the river was running.

A few fallers

Steve led the way, as being the local lad, he had the most experience in this section. Tom followed and then me, leaving a good amount of space between us all. Some of us would likely be swimming, and there is nothing worse than another paddler being right on top of you. In no time, we were all through that section, riding those waves, and yes, we had a few fallers. Everybody who went in got back on their boards quickly and hugged the side to wait for the others. That adrenalin rush and relief that you are safe and gave it your best shot – I don't think you can beat it. It's a bit like the rush of catching a wave in the ocean!



After the fun of the rapids, it was just a few more paddling miles to reach Monmouth. Time to take in the stunning river Wye even though it was swirly, dark, and quite menacing on the day. We finished the run in 2 ½ hours, such was the flow.

We'd all put ourselves slightly out of our comfort zones but having paddled with most of these guys for 10 years, we have each other's backs. After a mini debrief, good banter, well-deserved cake, and lots of gear sorting and car collecting, we returned to our hotel.



White water-specific boards

As we set off, we knew this trip certainly wasn't going to take the 4+ hours that we had initially thought; there were lots of boils, eddy lines, and messy, confused waters moving every which way, so it was a great challenge to stay on the board until we found our sea legs. Due to the conditions, most of us have white water-specific boards, but some had chosen to bring slightly longer boards for this trip. Before we set off, it was apparent that the only place we may see some white water action would be Symonds Yat.

Just before Symonds Yat, there is an excellent pub on the right, and we stopped for a snack/hydration/comfort break – the pub is accustomed to paddlers and was very welcoming. Antony was waiting for us on the other side of the river just before the rapids. Once we had radioed him, we paddled the couple of 100 metres down for another stop and to re-assess, as well as those very important photo opportunities!

High water levels

I've been to this location before, but never have I seen the water so high on the steps. The concrete pontoon was nowhere to be seen, but it was safe and

A memorable day

I'm grateful to be a part of this club and a team that genuinely looks out for each other. I shall continue pushing myself to enjoy the 'bubbles' as much as possible. Trying to remember everything I had been taught, I can now see from the photos how to improve. If you are considering having a go, finding an experienced instructor who will quickly get you on your way safely and with the correct skills is essential. Thanks to all the team who made this another memorable day for the Bubble Crew, and here's to the next one.





TOP FIVE PADDLING SPOTS OF BELGIUM

WORDS & PHOTOS: VÉRONIQUE MUSUMECI, AKA SUPANDSEE
VÉRONIQUE DISCOVERED HER 26 FAVOURITE BELGIAN SUP SPOTS
AND WROTE ABOUT THEM IN THE FIRST SUP GUIDE THAT WAS
PUBLISHED IN BELGIUM IN 2021. A SHORT HOP ACROSS THE
ENGLISH CHANNEL AND YOU'RE THERE!



A stand-up paddler since 2017, Véronique has explored many Belgian waters with her various inflatable SUP boards. A great admirer and ambassador for her country and SUP, Véronique likes to share her passion by writing articles for various international watersport magazines, sports blogs and on social networks. After the success of her first guidebook, appearances, and interviews on Belgian radio and television, she is now publishing her second book with 40 extra SUP spots.

Last year she took the Paddler magazine's readers on a tour of five beautiful SUP tours through the Little Kingdom.

Now for SUPM, she embarks on a journey to discover five more highlights of the Trappist beer country.

LAKE NISRAMONT: A breathtaking setting

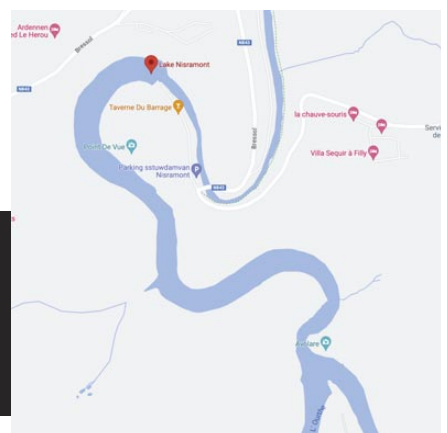
In the heart of the Ardenne, fed by the Western and Eastern Ourthe rivers, the lake is an essential place to commune with nature. And, with some luck, you may even spot beavers, cormorants or kingfishers. Via a dam built in the 1950s to supply the region with drinking water, the lake holds three-million m³ of water. The dam is 116 m long and 16 m high. It is also a hydroelectric power station and a wastewater treatment plant.

The wooden hut near the boat launch reminds us of Canada and sets the tone for this nature session. You will paddle surrounded by wooded slopes and pass a few hikers, kayakers and fishermen. The usual birds of the region will be there. After 2.3 km, you will arrive at the 'Two Ourthes' separation. You will have to choose which branch of the river to explore. The rivers will become narrower, and you will discover the meanders of the site. Turn around whenever you feel like it!

It is possible to make a beautiful 14 km – approximately five hours walk – around the lake, offering unique views of the green nature. The trail starts from the dam and is conveniently signposted: follow the red diamonds.

The trail consists of stairs and steep paths. The difference in altitude is +/- 700 metres.

Stopping for a few breaks and turning back for a shorter walk is possible.



ENTERING THE WATER:

50°08'38.8 N 5°40'02.9 E

Concrete access ramp.

Parking: Bressol, 6983 La Roche-en-Ardenne.

The parking area is about 100 metres from the launch site.

Google map: <https://goo.gl/maps/g2W9msFJnf8eQ6uz7>

THE KLEINE NETE RIVER: From one mill to another

If you are looking for a nature cruise, the Kleine Nete is for you! This idyllic river, one of the purest in Flanders, is rich in flora and fauna. It is part of the Natura 2000 network. The entire route is 25 kilometres long, but you can opt for a shorter one. If you like photography, you will be well served, and there are plenty of photo spots.

Everything has been considered: piers, litter bins, picnic benches and information boards – a perfect day out with family or friends. Moreover, the Kleine Nete is a shallow river with fewer risks for children here. The route I present here is around 15 kilometres and starts at the picturesque water mill in Retie, Kempen, and ends at the Bobbejaanland amusement park!

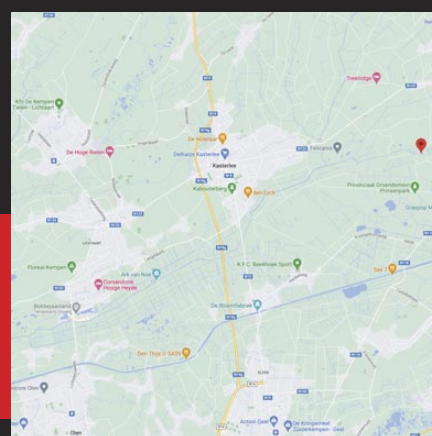
The Retie mill dates from 1756 and replaces an original wooden water mill. It is assumed that the first mill at this location dates back to the 14th century! The place is bucolic. At first relatively narrow, and the

river widens and narrows in different sections. You will pass through a tunnel of trees reminiscent of the Sicao Green Tunnel in Taiwan! Sometimes you will have to stoop to get through. You may see spotted dragonflies, smooth snakes, geese, water rails and kingfishers. The green orchid is also present in the area.

After 5.8 km, you will reach the Kasterlee water mill and have to leave the water to go back up further. At the end, if the amusement park is open, keep your eyes and ears open; you may see and hear the screams of the thrill-seekers on the rides!



PHOTO: AUDREY ZECCA



ENTERING THE WATER:

Watermolen 10, 2470 Retie

Kayak pontoon.

The Retie watermill is the furthest starting point.

Google map: <https://goo.gl/maps/F4Pr1ew5QFJFNpNca>

THE SEMOIS: Take a step up

THIS FRANCO-BELGIAN RIVER, a tributary of the Meuse, has its source in Arlon and flows 210 km further to Monthermé, in the French Ardennes. In the heart of a natural massif, the Semois offers spectacular views in a picturesque atmosphere. In addition to SUPs and kayaks, hikers can follow this route along its entire length on one of the most beautiful routes in Belgium, the GR16.

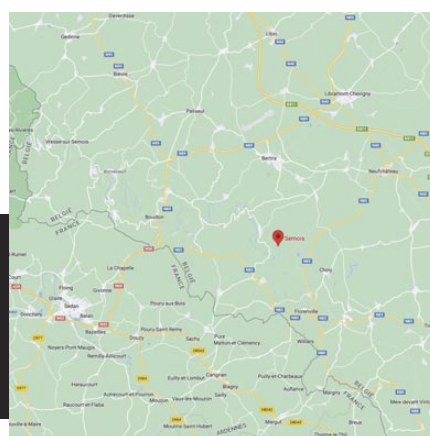
Its many meanders offer a new viewpoint on this valley surrounded by forests and pretty little chalets. Along the water, you will have the chance to follow this route and pass through the loop of Frahan, one of the most photographed sites of the Belgian Ardennes! Paddle through a region steeped in history in the footsteps of Godfrey of Bouillon.

During this SUP session, you will encounter beautiful Ardennes panoramas, wooded banks, rich fauna and the mythical view of Frahan and its bridge. In addition to the usual grey heron, you may see some large white egrets. These birds, which were rare

30 years ago, have returned to our regions. Magnificent views and discovering the Ardennes' biodiversity are on the agenda! There are various possible routes of 7, 11 and 17 kilometres.

It is difficult to go upstream and, therefore, to make a return trip. Make sure you have a vehicle at the start and the finish.

The descent is sometimes fast because of the current and the 220-metre altitude at Poupehan to 180m at Alle-Sur-Semois. Hold on tight!



ENTERING THE WATER:

49°48'30.5 "N5°00'14.6 "E

Concrete access ramp.

Parking: Available and free of charge near the launch (Parking for mobile RVs is free).

Google map: <https://goo.gl/maps/wexjLZoHkmConK4z7>

THE MEUSE: Paddle between majestic rocks, Renaissance Castle, Wild Island and Anseremme Priory!

The departure of this half-natural, half-historical loop can be made to the left to directly discover the cliff of Moniat and the pretty priory of Anseremme. The picturesque rocks of Moniat are on the port side.

From the top of the cliff, hikers enjoy a beautiful panoramic view of the Upper Meuse, Anseremme Priory and the small island. On the starboard side, you can see the priory, the former dependency of the abbey of St. Hubert. It is situated in a grandiose setting and has a magnificent park on the banks of the Meuse. With some luck, the distinguished SALLY boat will be moored at its pontoon. The priory, considered one of the most beautiful residences in the Mosan valley, is now a banqueting hall. An excellent idea for a place to celebrate!

You will then paddle along the Van Geert quay with the small boats moored there. Admire the beautiful houses, some made of local stone, in the shade of the trees. It is time to turn back at the lock of the island of Moniat to go towards the Castle of Freyr and its rock.

The path towards the castle is charming. You will pass the small Mosan enclosure and its stone bridge where the marina of Anseremme is located. Afterwards, you can paddle around the small island with its water birds. Of course, you should avoid going on the island to preserve peace and quiet.

A few paddle strokes from the island and you will discover, on your right, the Renaissance Castle of Freyr-sur-Meuse, and on your left, the most famous climbing site in Belgium.

The castle and its gardens have been classified as Exceptional Heritage of Wallonia. Would you have imagined paddling a few metres away from 300-year-old orange trees in Belgium? However, this is the case; the gardens have a touch of Versailles because they were inspired by the work done under Louis XIV in Versailles. Come and lose yourself in its labyrinth after your session.

Also listed as a Belgian Heritage Site, Belgium's largest rocky massif comprises seven main rocks. They are all named with names such as 'La Tête du Lion', 'Du Fromage' or 'Les Pucelles'. This climbing paradise offers more than 600 routes of all levels. Standing on your board, you will undoubtedly feel very small at the bottom of these limestone rocks with your feet in the water. Look up to admire the brave climbers.

Keep paddling before turning back to the starting point. You can paddle another 4 km to the Hastières dam. On the way, a green landscape dotted with rocks and a small marina will brighten your session.



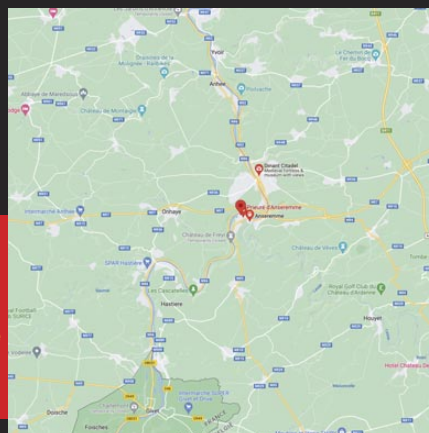
FREYR ROCKS



FREYR CASTLE



PRIORY ANSEREMME



ENTERING THE WATER:

50°14'31.3"N 4°53'41.2"E

Concrete ramp. I suggest you take the plunge at the concrete ramp at number 47 of the rue de Givet. Another ramp is located in front of the Château de Freyr, but, private, and the parking is more complicated. Be careful of the slippery surface when entering the water.

Google map: <https://goo.gl/maps/e1Z9mYQ8vb73q7nE7>

THE HISTORIC CENTRE CANAL: Explore the century-old lifts

The Historic Centre Canal was dug in 1884 to link the Meuse and Scheldt basins and opened to navigation in 1917. The first lift was inaugurated in 1888! The Hainaut region flourished with coal and other industries but had no natural waterways to export its coal from the north to the south of the country.

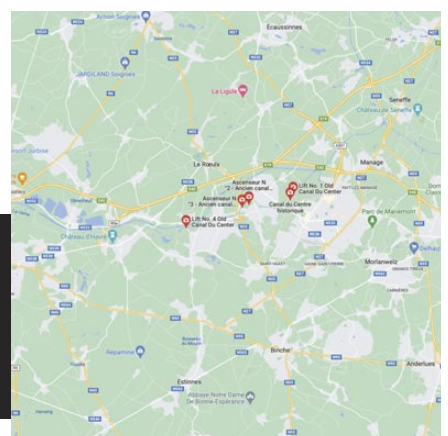
The Historic Centre Canal includes four lifts using only water power, the only ones in the world still in their original working condition. Unsurprisingly, these industrial-era hydraulic lifts and the surrounding area have been listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1998. The canal, a masterpiece of Belgian civil engineering, is now exclusively used for river tourism, a perfect place for a stand-up paddle!

When you leave at the foot of lift number 1, you will be transported back to the 19th century and witness the Belgian industrial revolution. A delicate mix of rustic nature and unique historical relics awaits you on this

7km trip along the Old Canal in the historic centre! You will also be surprised by the structures associated with these impressive lifts, which allow you to cross a height difference of 15 to 16 metres! Along the way, you will encounter all sorts of bridges: fixed, lifting, and turning, and you will even have to lie down on your board to pass under several of them! If, like me, you have the soul of an Indiana Jane; you will love these passages! Note that you risk getting wet when lying down under your board.

Drawbridges, locks and pretty little red brick houses with green shutters are all reminders of this flourishing era. These charming buildings are also part of the Unesco heritage. The site is very photogenic, and the reflection of the houses, the various bridges and the trees on the water are magnificent.

In addition to these historical relics, this session offers you a generous nature. In 1911, a planting programme was implemented, and today there are mainly lime trees, ash trees, maple trees and chestnut trees. Keep your eyes open from the 5th kilometre onwards, and you will see the impressive, modern Strépy-Thieu funicular lift in the distance on your right, several hundred metres away. The largest boat lift in Europe allows you to cross a difference in height of 73.15 metres! The sunsets on this historic canal are magical!



ENTERING THE WATER:

50°29'14.0 "N 4°10'32.9 "E

Stone steps.

Free and easy parking in the vicinity of the launch.

Google map: <https://goo.gl/maps/xRsWqxmUCfez3ruY9>

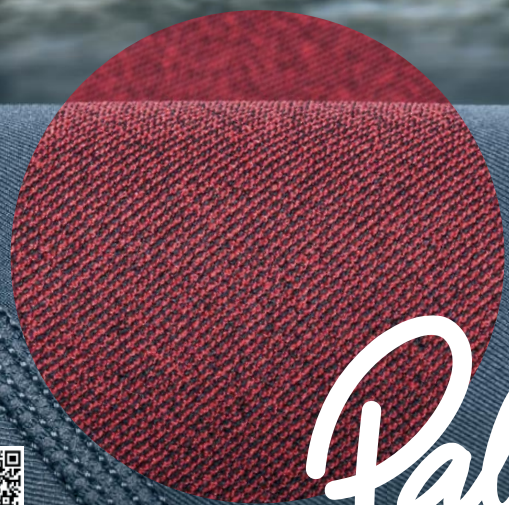


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VIDEO



Palm®

SUP SURFING VS SUP FOILING

WORDS: TEZ PLAVENIEKS

PHOTOS: TEZ PLAVENIEKS & OLI LANE-PEARCE

IT'S NO SECRET I LOVE A WAVE. IF THERE'S A BUMP TO BE HAD – NO MATTER HOW SMALL – I'LL TEND TO SNIFF IT OUT. THE FLY IN THE OINTMENT IS BEING A SOUTH COAST (UK) BASED WATER NUT THOSE PROPER SWELLS CORNWALL, DEVON, AND WALES GET AREN'T AS CONSISTENT IN MY 'HOOD. WE GET GOOD DAYS – MOSTLY IN WINTER. SOMETIMES A LUCKY PULSE WILL HEAD UP THE CHANNEL IN SUMMER. BUT MOSTLY IT'S A CASE OF HUNTING OR TRAVELLING, WHICH I'M UNABLE TO DO AS OFTEN. AND YET I STILL GET MY FAIR SHARE OF WAVE RIDING SESSIONS. EVEN MORE CURRENTLY, INCLUDING A HYDROFOIL TO MY SUP SET UP...

Defining what a wave is

I grew up a surfer. Learning when I was five, but residing in the middle of the country, I didn't have beaches and swell on tap. My wave sliding occurred with school holiday overseas trips and weekend sojourns down to the SW. Thanks to my parents, the latter became more frequent as I got older. Maybe this way is their way of appeasing two grumpy teenage boys (my brother is also a surfer).

Back in those days, a wave was a wave in the traditional sense. Open a surf mag, hit up Google and do a relevant search, and you'll know what I mean. Peeling, lined up, offshore and breaking along idyllically sand-fringed coastlines. Deciding when to go was arguably much simpler with 'proper surf beaches'. Look for the swell, look for the offshore wind and head on down.





As I grew up, wind sports entered the fray, and I spent a fair chunk of time 'surfing' the breeze. For me, it scratched the itch and is just another way to slide on liquid. To this day, I still use the wind and enjoy that side of watersports immensely too. But back to the topic.

Wind creates waves, albeit not necessarily the type needed for riding a 6' something shortboard. Riding surfboards became increasingly limited as I rarely found myself in a conducive location. If only there were something I could employ to make better use of these slack swells – enter SUP!

With the inception of SUP, it quickly became apparent that I could use the oversized nature of a paddle board to ride smaller waves and access breaks you couldn't with a surfboard. Pretty soon, SUP surfing became my most used method of wave riding. Not least because my local favours a paddle board due to how far offshore the swell can break (sometimes a mile out!).

Riding a SUP alters your perception of what a 'wave' can be. You don't need anything big. And often, you don't need anything powerful. Sometimes residual wind swell is enough to propel the rider and SUP along. Of course, should a proper groundy arrive, with some decent head-high action to be had, then fun, fun, fun! But often, that's not the case.

The perpetual cycle

Over the years, I've done a fair bit of travelling to SUP surf – both overseas and domestically (which has stalled recently). There have been some cracking days and some not-so-great sessions. Whilst a paddle board allows the milking of lax swell, it does



Fly above water

I won't go into the technical aspects of foiling too much as I've covered those points in separate wing and SUP foil how-to articles in other issues of SUP Mag UK. Suffice to say, once you've spent a bit of time with a foil and foil board and dialled your skills in, it's not that hard a skill to pick up, especially if you have prior SUP surfing experience.

So how does SUP foiling now fit into my routine? Essentially it comes down to glide. Or rather, the abundance of it when on foil. SUP's glide is another topic I've waxed lyrical about often over the years. It's part of the addiction. As anyone who paddle boards will know, a few strokes are enough to get your board gliding atop the brine. And this is the hook for most, even on flat water.

Transfer this to waves, where the board's glide is amplified, and it's not hard to see why riders fall in love with SUP surfing. Adding a foil turbo charges the sensation and then some!

One of my biggest bugbears with SUP surfing in smaller waves is the sometimes inability to connect clean, walled-up sections. You may get on a pulse and carve a bottom turn only to have the whole thing close out or back off. Bigger waves offer more speed on fin and the ability to clear round sections – although not always. A foil eradicates this nuisance and gives excellent speed, efficiency and (another key point) length of ride.

Seriously, the length of ride I can achieve on a good day at my local with a foil is insane. You can ride the whole length of the sand bar, which waves break on, which can be a mile or so long. And then pump back out to connect with another pulse of swell, and ride that, all without coming off foil (if your legs can hold out). This takes a bit of practice, but it's achievable. And that's something you definitely can't do when riding a finned board.

Once you've spent a bit of time with a foil and foil board and dialled your skills in, it's not that hard a skill to pick up

get to a point (particularly after experiencing those good days) where unless it's solid, SUP surfing becomes (dare I say it) boring. I appreciate that this may sound rich for many, but it comes down to the amount of time afloat you get. The more time you get in good conditions, the pickier you are, as you're not chasing the fun as much.

Nonetheless, I was looking for something more as I love being on the water. For a while, I wasn't sure what this was from a pure wave riding point of view. But then hydrofoils came into my space, and things changed.

Lovin' it, lovin' it, lovin' it!

Riding a SUP foil board has once again revolutionised my wave sliding, and it's opened up more days and increased the quality of each session considerably. Keeping that word 'glide' in mind, I'm snagging longer rides more often.

And the paddle is still as crucial as ever. Taking off on a SUP foil board requires a more refined paddle technique, forcing you to improve. And the subtleties of what you do with the paddle once up and flying are super important. My point is SUP foiling is still as much a paddle sport as it is a foil, board and surf sport.

SUP surfing vs SUP foiling

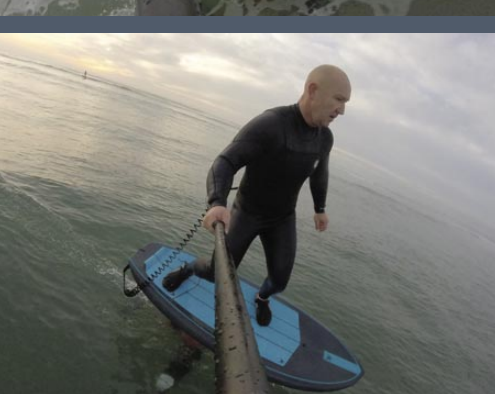
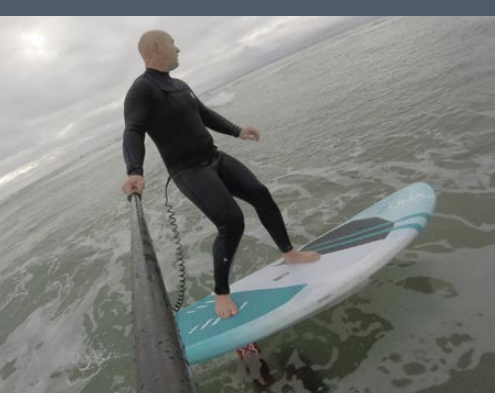
Having read the above, you may think that I've now ditched the fin. Not so. I'm a big fan of having many 'tools' for the job and mixing things up. I'm very much led by the conditions and Mother Nature's moods. Sometimes what's happening on the water is more applicable to a finned board. Whereas other times it's back to foil. And if it's windy, I bust out the sail or wing, so all bases are covered, which is the most important thing for me.

As such, there's no comparison between SUP Surfing and SUP foiling. With SUP surfing, it's about the connection with water. There's nothing like dropping down the wave's face, engaging your board's fins and rail, gouging a bottom turn, slingshot back to the lip and bouncing one off the top. Likewise, speeding along ankle biters for 700 yards plus (on an

average day) whilst hovering two feet in the air is also a unique and fulfilling experience. And now we have the technology and foil kit to do the same in downwind mode. That's a whole new realm for paddle foiling. Google it if you're not familiar.

I advise any seasoned SUP surfer looking for an additional challenge or experience to try the foiling thing. Keep a finned board in the van (or car) for when conditions are better. And then use the foil for those slacker days when you mightn't otherwise be bothered about going out.

SUP surfing vs SUP foiling? No comparison.





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Q&A

IAIN McCARTHY & MOLLY McKIBBEN

SUP HUB NORTHERN IRELAND

INTERVIEW: SARAH THORNELY

PHOTOS: SUPJUNKIE, ANNA McNEIL, SUP HUB & DILLON OSBORNE

OVER THE YEARS, I HAVE CONSTANTLY BEEN ENCOURAGING PADDLERS TO HAVE A GO AT SUP RACING, BUT MORE RECENTLY, IT'S THE YOUNGSTERS I WANT TO PUSH! THE GRASSROOTS OF OUR SPORT NEED ENTHUSIASTIC YOUNG PEOPLE TO GET INVOLVED, NOT SOLELY WITH RACING BUT TO GET ON THE WATER AND REALISE THE FUN YOU CAN HAVE. HOPEFULLY, THEY WILL THEN MAKE THE TRANSITION. ALL KIDS OF WHATEVER AGE LOVE WATER, FROM SPLASHING ABOUT IN PUDDLES AS A TODDLER TO MESSING ABOUT ON THE BEACH AS TEENAGERS.



PHOTO: ANNA McNEIL

On last year's visit to the ICF World Championships in Poland, I met one young paddler from a club in Northern Ireland. I knew I wanted to find out more, and joy of joys, it's not just Molly McKibben who is a rising star at SUP Hub NI, but the club is encouraging all youngsters to get stuck in!

Let's first hear from Iain McCarthy, founder of SUP Hub NI in Bangor.

Iain, can you let us know what your water sporting background is?

Thanks, Sarah, for starting by exposing my imposter syndrome – honestly, I was a part-time waterman, a hobbyist, a little bit of surfing, sea swimming, and kayaking, but mostly SUP. I started back in 2008/9 down in Croyde/Saunton/Putts, and when we were in the line out, we saw some guys with 'sticks'! My friends and I went to the local surf shop the next day, and I spent a £1000 inheritance from my Nan, who had

recently passed, on a Surf Series 10'6 board and a 100% carbon Werner 'Spanker' paddle (both of which are still in use today) and named Madge and Ginger after my grandparents. Since then, I've loved the adventure side of paddling, completing the Thames Source to Sea in 2011 with family and friends in 4.5 days, River Bann in 2020, but the best one must be the North Channel in 2019 which a few years later got me a Guinness World Record Certificate! (The machine that is Sam Rutt came and smashed it recently, but I still have that certificate on the wall).

When did you open SUP Hub NI?

We moved to Northern Ireland (where my wife is from) in 2016, and it shocked me how few paddlers there were in an area that was so perfect for paddling. So, I set it up out of the back of our campervan in April 2019 with eight boards and plenty of enthusiasm.

What was your vision for the club, and has this changed over the years?

This was a five-year project for which we had set the following targets:

- Get 5,000 people on the water.
- Promote our local area.
- Coach/train/develop a junior to get to a world championship.
- Bring a SUP champion to NI.
- Promote water safety and support our local lifeboats (Bangor & Donaghadee).
- Promote the physical and mental health benefits of the sport.
- Create a race series/league to promote the sport.

By September 2022, we had achieved every single objective we set.

Speaking openly, this hasn't come without cost and significant sacrifice. Whilst I'm incredibly proud of what we have achieved, these accomplishments have forced us to re-evaluate what we want for the next five years and 'how' we want to be that too.



PHOTO: SUP HUB



PHOTO: SUP HUB

How long have youngsters been involved in the club?

From the start. From the perspective of the 'target audience', I have three young children, and with the sea 200 yards away, it has been extremely important to me that they are confident yet respectful of the water. SUP is such a fantastic step on the water confidence-building pathway. Furthermore, from the perspective of me not getting any younger, we need a crop of younger people to keep this going who love it as much as, if not more, than I do.

When did you meet Molly, and did you spot her potential immediately?

Molly came to us between lockdowns when we had an open community day. My colleague, Adam Collins, and I both looked at each other and said, "She could be pretty handy at this," so after the session, we spoke with Molly and her mum Claire and said we think she could do well at this, would you be up for some further training, and it just evolved from there.

Can you tell us how the club has catered for Molly and the other youngsters interested in racing?

We've been super lucky with the most important thing; people. The internal support across the board between paddlers has been phenomenal. There's always someone ready to go for a paddle, so there are plenty of training buddies; we all get along and want to be there.

It's also been essential to expose ourselves to outside ideas and influence. I had much of my early coaching from UK legends Simon Bassett and Dom Moore. Still, we've always wanted the club to be an open book to various SUP coaches, as no one knows it all. We can always learn something, so we invited guest instructors Paul Byrne from Dublin, UK Champ Blue Ewer, who inspired our young ones to see first-hand.

We also convinced Michael Booth to come and play with us for a few days, which I don't mind saying was a life goal completed for me! We also invested in some off-season training with Larry Cain at Paddle Monster, which has also been invaluable in helping us look at ourselves and analyse better how we are training and performing. Through all of this, we have encouraged and included the youngsters to bring them on the journey.

Oh, and one thing that was a terrible financial decision but a fantastic pathway decision was that we bought a fleet of 16 race boards (mostly composites) of all different shapes and sizes for people to use. I've always found people very precious about their pride and joy boards, and I wanted an environment where if people had the basics down and were keen to learn, there should be no barrier to jumping on a £3k race board to give it a go.



HAVE YOU HAD SUPPORT FROM OTHER CLUBS TO HELP GROW THE RACING SIDE OF SUP HUB NI?

The SUP scene in NI is evolving; several SUP-specific schools and clubs are now here. We are leading the charge/carrying the torch for racing in Northern Ireland. Still, we have tied in with Paul Byrne and Patrick McCormick, who run the Irish race league series, so it's great to see the steadily increasing numbers of participants over time.

How many international events did you attend in 2022?

We attended the ICFs in Poland and the APP in London. We had targeted these for Molly just as an experience, we went with no expectations other than to learn, and she did so incredibly well despite several challenges. A huge thanks to Anni Ridsdill Smith, without whom Molly wouldn't have had a valid competition board in Poland, as we travelled with a brand-new Infinity Candice Blackfish we'd got for her, only to realise upon registration in Poland that Juniors were I-SUPS only – always learning!

Have you plans to return to those events this year?

I'll let Molly answer that; it's a big year of study in her life, so we want her to focus on that, but we'll be at various events throughout the year. We took 11 people to Scotland for the Great Glenn Challenge last year, and I suspect there will be more this year.

Let's chat with Molly now - can you tell us when you first took up SUP?

I first took up SUP in 2020 at the very start of the lockdown as it was one of the only sports that could continue. Through a five-week course set up by Sup Hub NI for beginners interested in learning how to

paddle board safely, Iain McCarthy and Adam Collins recognised that I had a natural flare for the sport. This was a tough time for me as all other sporting activities I participated in from a young age had been stopped due to Covid-19 restrictions, including my two main sports at the time, Taekwondo and hockey. Although lockdown was an extremely tough concept to grasp and deal with, especially for someone who lives their life around sport, it was almost a blessing in disguise as it allowed me to focus on a new sport that I potentially wouldn't have had as much time to focus on.

Are you a naturally competitive girl, and do you enjoy other sports?

I am highly competitive with myself and others, not just in sports but in all aspects of life and have been for as long as I can remember. Being involved in sport since I was five years old has made me slightly 'sport mad', which is a good thing as I'd much rather spend my time doing something I love and is also good for my mind and body. Aside from SUP, I have competed competitively in Taekwondo since age five. This taught me morals surrounding sports from a young age, such as being committed and dedicated and pushing myself to success, setting the footsteps for all sports later in life. I have travelled to



MOLLY ON THE START LINE OF THE APP LONDON SPRINTS.
PHOTO: SUPJUNKIE



MEETING WORLD CHAMP
CONNOR BAXTER AT THE ICF'S
PHOTO: SUP HUB



ANOTHER WORLD CHAMP MICHAEL
BOOTH IN HER HOMETOWN OF BANGOR.
PHOTO: SUP HUB



WITH HER FRIEND AND RISING IRISH
CHAMPION CAOIMHE GALLIGAN BYRNE.
PHOTO: SUP HUB



MOLLY AT THE
DISTANCE FINISH LINE
OF THE APP LONDON.
PHOTO: SUP HUB



MOLLY WITH LIFESAVER ANNI RIDSILL SMITH OF
FRANGIPANI SUP AT THE ICF WORLDS IN POLAND.
PHOTO: SUP HUB





MOLLY IN THE ANNUAL SANTA SPRINTS AT SUP HUB. PHOTO: ANNA MCNEIL

many cool places with Taekwondo, including Holland for the Dutch open and Estonia for the European championships. After competing in these championships, I competed for Northern Ireland in the world championships, where I became the under-17 World Champion – this extremely successful and proud moment reflected my hard work and dedication to the sport until then. I have also played hockey for seven years, playing on the top teams in school since I was 14, and I am now the captain of the 1XI. I have tried multiple sports, including football, diving, water polo and sailing. It's confirmed that I've been a water baby since day one.

How did you discover the racing side of sup?

I was unaware for quite a while after I started paddle boarding that there was a competitive side to the sport, and many other people are the same. I was introduced to racing through Sup Hub NI, as they provided me with race boards and endless opportunities to improve my technique and performance.

Sup Hub is built on a passion and love for paddle boarding, and I saw that from the start through lots of conversations and discussions about the vast world of paddlers that I originally had no idea about. This drew me closer to the sport as I love trying new things outside the everyday 'norm'.

Other than for leisure, SUP isn't a popular sport in Northern Ireland, possibly due to the unpleasant Northern Irish weather conditions; only crazy people like me would go paddle boarding in winter over here. Therefore, I would have known how far SUP could go because of the guidance and

DO YOU HAVE FRIENDS WHO SUP OR RACE?

I never originally had friends who were interested in competitive paddle boarding. This meant I had to find my way into the paddling world, as I didn't have a buddy who wanted to accompany me each time. SUP has allowed me to meet many new people and gain great friendships through the sport that will last a lifetime. One of the guys I have paddled with since day one is Josh Reddy, who was also at the APP in London; he is now one of my best friends and a training partner when he returns from university. I still enjoy the sport's social aspect, and it's a very close-knit community that supports and encourages each other.

endless provision from Sup Hub! My first racing experience was local competitions such as Sup Hub's race series and racing in the south of Ireland.

Do you attend the regular race sessions at the club?

My first competitive racing experience was local competitions such as our race series, which consisted of seven races at our local beach in Ballyholme. There have also been races in the south of Ireland that I have done well in. In preparation for bigger competitions, I regularly trained with other teammates to help keep me motivated throughout the colder weather.

This helped me a lot as it enabled me to improve myself by always striving to keep up with the best of the bunch and learn new techniques through their experience. Iain ensured everyone had access to top tips and advice from the best of the best by getting the one and only Michael Booth over to take some workshops and sessions, as well as the UK champ Blue Ewer.

When did the idea come about to compete internationally?

I started paddle boarding a LOT, whether through instructing, training or for fun and with the experience and time on the water, I naturally began to improve. I began to train more regularly, improving my technique, speed and endurance, which interested me in seeing where I could compete using the skills I had been developing.

I went into the international paddle boarding scene quickly as my first big competition was the ICF world championships which was a big leap! The main reason for this is that there are few competitions for me to test my ability against the best locally, which meant I had to go straight into the big events. Therefore, it was natural to look for international competition when my skills improved, and I began working hard to become good enough at the sport.

Were you nervous before the ICF World championships in Poland?

Yes, very nervous! I only knew a little about what to expect other than it would be an extremely tough competition. I didn't have a valid board to compete on to add more nerves to the mix, so I had to borrow an unfamiliar one (Anni Ridsdill Smith to the rescue!). I was competing in the junior sections and was also nervous that I would be the worst in the pack. I had confidence in the preparation I had put in before the competition and in my ability which helped my mindset a little before competing.

Due to being so competitive, I get nervous in any competition scenario; even if I've had years of experience in the sport, I still get nervous. Therefore, my nerves were heightened due to the ICF World championships being such a large and high-profile competition that I'd never been to before. Being unaware of what to expect and how the competition would run made the whole experience a learning curve for Iain and me, but because of this, we will be more prepared and ready for what's to come this year.

Who did you travel with?

I travelled with Iain, who was brilliant at making sure we were always at the right place at the right time, as well as taking pictures with all the best paddlers and my mum Claire, who I think needs a mention for her special talent of carrying all my equipment the whole time!

How did you find the whole experience of competing with the best paddlers in the world?

I loved every minute in Poland as it allowed me to experience the best standard of SUP and meet some fantastic and lovely people! Everyone I met at the ICF comp was kind and helpful throughout the week. The atmosphere and vibes made it such a good and enjoyable time while competing in a



PHOTO: DILLON OSBORNE

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PHOTO: SUP HUB

very smoothly run competition, considering how many participants there were. Competing at such a large-scale event was daunting and scary, but I'm glad I pushed myself outside my comfort zone and made the most of the event.

We also saw you at the APP event in London - how did you find that as an experience?

The APP event in London was super cool, especially as it was also the first time I'd ever been there, which meant I got to do some sightseeing once we had finished focusing on races. The London event was a lot smaller than Poland, although there were still some big names as well as some very talented paddlers that I was looking up to. A highlight of my time in London was undoubtedly paddling down the river Thames; that was an incredibly cool experience not many people can say they had!

Do you have any SUP heroes, and have you met any of them?

The ICF world championships were the place to be when meeting your SUP heroes! I got to meet so many awesome paddlers who I look up to and see them do their thing in real life! I have to say Fiona Wylde is my all-time SUP hero; she's an incredible paddler and role model to anyone with type 1 diabetes like me, proving that nothing can stop you from doing what you want to do. Meeting and seeing her in person was incredible.

What are your plans for 2023?

My plans for 2023 are to keep paddling!

I want to thank both Iain and Molly for sharing an inspirational and incredible story of the rise and rise of stand-up paddling in Northern Ireland; we shall very much look forward to Molly's racing journey, whether in 2023 or beyond.

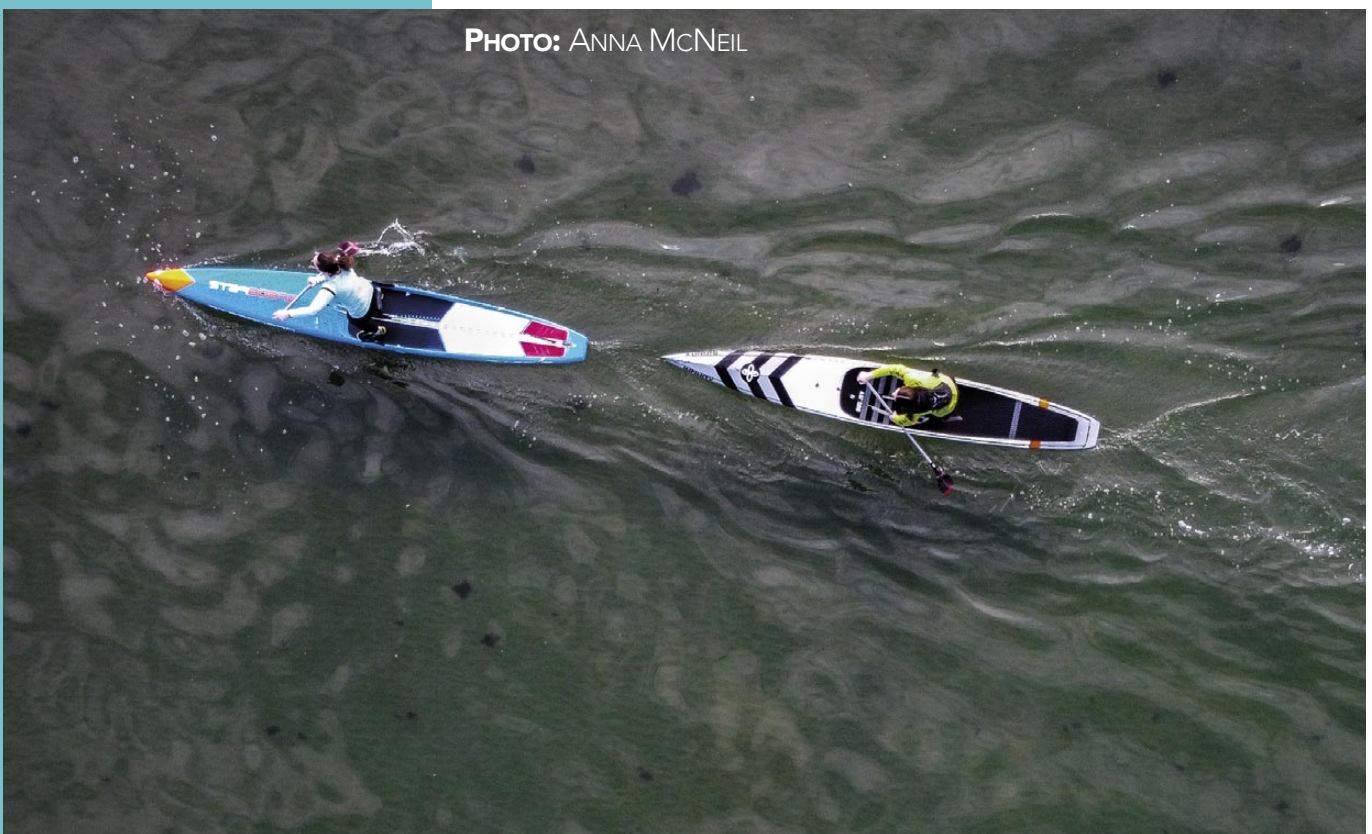


PHOTO: ANNA MCNEIL

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Before we start, let our readers know a little about yourselves, your background, etc.

I'm a Dorset girl who went backpacking at 19 and returned 12 years later with three children and Australian citizenship. I've never lived further than a few miles from a coastline. I have an addiction to the outdoors, whether on the sea, river or up a hill. My happy place is in nature.

When and how did you get into SUP?

It was early Summertime in 2016. I had already seen people paddling in 2015 and knew I wanted to try. I had finally reached a point in parenting where I had little me time, which I needed. So, I booked a lesson in Lyme Regis and loved it! I went home, found a secondhand RED 10'8 board and never looked back.

How did you feel the first time on the water?

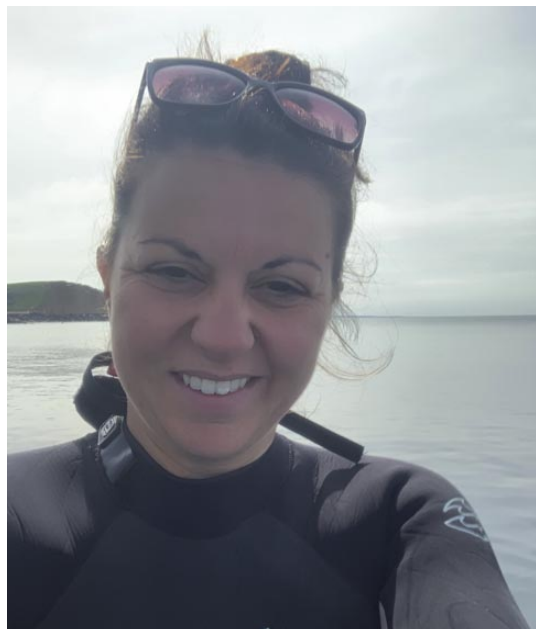
Energised! It ignited my need for adventure again and in an achievable way for a mum with a few hours of freedom. I found it so peaceful and relaxing, but at the same time, I was burning my energy and exploring locations within the school run.

Can you describe what it was that made you want to continue to develop your SUP skills?

My need for new paddling locations that often came with different and sometimes challenging conditions made me realise that I needed to educate myself better. I wanted to train as an instructor to gain self-confidence, knowledge, and better water safety skills.

What qualifications have you achieved, are what are you aiming for in the future?

I'm a qualified BSUPA Instructor and work with my local British Canoeing Club providing SUP safety classes. So, I plan to become a British Canoeing trained Coastal/Inland SUP leader.



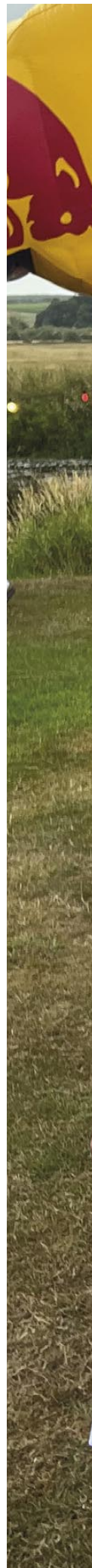
You started to race; why was that? Please give us a rundown of what you've achieved.

Can we reword this? I do not really race – I am not brave enough.

OK, so you started to enter challenges; why was that? Please give us a rundown of what you've achieved.

By this point, I was completely addicted to paddleboarding. It felt like I needed to prove something to myself and maybe my family as to why I was spending so much time doing it. I wanted to see how far and for how long I could paddle with the bonus of paddling in new locations.

I've entered the Head of the Dart, SUP the Creek, SUP bike run and my absolute favourite, the Trent100.





Racing or recreational SUP – any preference?

Recreational 100%. I am happy to achieve my own goals and support others.

You started Saltbirds SUP, has the growth and success of the group taken you by surprise?

OMG yes! It's been a fantastic few years with so many fabulous memories. I have witnessed many people push themselves and grow their confidence; it has been really rewarding. Saltbirds is now a registered community interest company. So, we can continue providing free weekly social paddles and advice on equipment and locations: affordable SUP safety skills sessions and Blue Mind Therapy.

What are your plans for Saltbirds in 2023?

We have the HotD, Trent100 and a Cornwall SUP weekend in September.

The weekly social paddles and monthly SUP safety sessions start in April. We always welcome people to join us, so if you're heading to Dorset on holiday, look us up!

And for yourself?

I am super excited to be ticking one off a bucket list this year. In June, Shanna, my crazy SUP buddy, and I will be paddling/wild camping on the Caledonian Canal. We will be driving up from Dorset to Fort William, then paddling the Caledonian Canal in 2/3 days and hopefully fitting in the three peaks as well. We will raise funds for Mind UK and Saltbirds CIC to buy much-needed new equipment.

What would you say to women who have been tempted to try SUP but have been put off for a variety of reasons?

Just do it! Find a location you'd be comfortable learning, whether on the sea, river, or a lake. Book a lesson, trust your teacher, and ask them all your questions and concerns.

Another thing I'd like to add is there are so many free social groups around the UK which are great for meeting like-minded people and exploring different locations and a brilliant point of contact for advice. Search your social feeds and find one near you.

If you had to choose one last thing you to achieve within SUP before giving it up, what would that be?

I want to enter the SUP 11 city tour, maybe next year!

What's your favourite water in the UK for SUP?

I'd have to say the Jurassic Coast. We have many stunning destinations from Old Harry Rocks, Lulworth Cove, Weymouth Bay, Lyme Regis, Seaton and my local with its stunning red cliffs West Bay.



WHEN PREPARING FOR CHALLENGES, WHAT QUALITIES DO YOU LOOK FOR IN A FELLOW TEAMMATE?

For me building a team for a long-distance challenge is about finding a group that shares the same level of determination – the same hunger to prove something and a good balance of humour. On the Trent100, we group whoop-whoop loud for every kilometre and, at low points, had everyone playing alphabet games.

What's the one river that would be on your bucket list?

The Dordogne in southern France. I'd love to paddle camp the length of it and explore some amazing castles en route.

What drives your passion for SUP?

The constant need to find new SUP locations and all the fabulous people I've met from paddling.

Would you like to become a ShePaddle ambassador for British Canoeing at any time in the future?

Absolutely! What they each represent and bring to the female SUP community is fantastic.

How do you achieve a family/SUP balance?

As a single mum with three kids, it's always been hectic. A drop off here and a pickup there, so find a SUP spot in-between. My kids also understood that mum was better for burning some energy and chilling out paddling for a few hours so that they would encourage it. When they were younger, they'd come paddling with me. My two daughters will join me occasionally, but my son has always preferred the surf.

I can honestly say my children have been my biggest support.

Quickfire questions:

If you could paddle with anyone in the world, dead or alive, who would it be?

Simon Reeve.

Pick two celebrities to be your parents.

Emily Pankhurst & David Attenborough.

Which famous person would you most like to see play you in a film?

Mila Kunis.

An ideal night out for you is.

Wine in hand on a beach or up a hill.

What one luxury item would you take with you on a desert island?

Aqua hairbrush.

What would I find in your fridge right now?

Blue Cheese.

What would you prepare for us if we came to your house for dinner?

Cheese and crackers, I'm not a good cook.

What three words would you use to describe yourself?

Chatty, short and adventurous.



Who are your paddling buddies?

Shanna, Laura, Tach, Clare, Sarah, Penny, Caroline, and many more.

I'm a very lucky paddler!

Any final shout-outs?

To my babies' thanks for sharing me, the house and the car with my boards.

**Thank you so much,
Sancha, for your time.**



IN CONVERSATION WITH JACK SOMERVILLE

The journey of a young paddleboarder who became a British Canoeing SUP Sheltered Water Coach at the age of 16

WORDS & PHOTOS:
DANIEL CHAN

ABOUT DANIEL CHAN

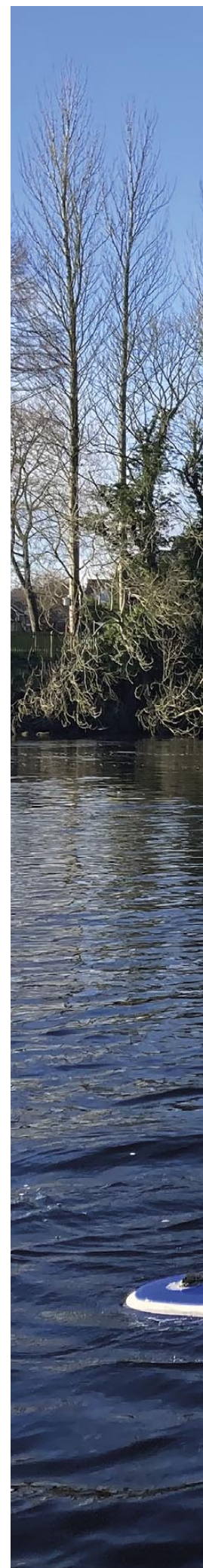
Daniel Chan is a British Canoeing Stand Up Paddleboard (SUP) Performance Coach with extensive experience of working with young people. He is a British Canoeing Paddlesport Instructor Tutor, SUP Instructor Tutor, Core Coach Tutor and Canoe, Kayak and SUP Sheltered Water Coach Award Tutor and Assessor.

THE BRITISH CANOEING COACH AWARD IS DESIGNED FOR PEOPLE WHO WANT TO COACH PADDLERS TO DEVELOP PADDLESport SKILLS WITHIN THEIR CHOSEN DISCIPLINE AND ENVIRONMENT. THIS INVOLVES PLANNING, DELIVERING AND REVIEWING PROGRESSIVE SESSIONS SAFELY, EFFECTIVELY AND INDEPENDENTLY.

One of the youngest

Jack Somerville's chosen discipline was coaching Stand Up Paddleboard (SUP) in sheltered water. Achieving this qualification just days after his 16th birthday, he is one of the youngest to hold the British Canoeing Coach Award. The minimum age at the time of assessment is 16.

"It was a memorable Saturday, 10 December 2022, one that will stay with me for a long time," Jack says. That was the day of his assessment. "It was a cold, sunny, yet frosty morning, and I was both nervous and excited. There had been a lot of planning and preparation for this, and I wanted to show what I could do."





Sea Cadets

Growing up and living in a town near the sea in Northern Ireland, Jack was never far from the water. From my interactions with him, it was clear that Jack is a young person who is passionate about SUP. Like many, his introduction to SUP began through a taster session – for him, this was through the Sea Cadets in June 2019. *“I was instantly hooked! SUP is so accessible, allowing me to get out on the water and go where I want. I enjoy going on journeys.”*

Jack shares, *“Being on a paddleboard lets me see things from a different perspective. It’s a way for me to be in the moment, being at one with nature, and leaving any problems behind to enjoy the surroundings. I often take a packed lunch and a drink, stick them in a dry bag on my paddleboard, and go out for the day.”* This resonates - SUP is an enabler of what I call the ‘freedom of water’.

Jack’s journey on the coaching pathway with British Canoeing started with becoming a Paddlesport Instructor. *“I gained knowledge, experience and confidence in running introductory sessions on my own and supporting coaches to deliver progressive sessions, including as part of the British Canoeing Paddle Discover and Paddle Explore Awards.”* Jack was especially positive about this aspect, *“I valued working alongside several coaches, as I found there were different ways to support people. It was great to see the things that worked well and those that weren’t quite as effective in particular situations. I was also able to shape my ideas and continue to develop my technical understanding and personal skills.”*

Time on the water was also essential. *“I would get out on my paddleboard as much as possible, trying new things and stretching my technical abilities.”* He adds, *“I also took up opportunities to speak or present in front of others, which really helped my self-confidence.”*

Independent learning

To become a British Canoeing SUP Sheltered Water Coach, there are two components of face-to-face training: two days’ practical core coach training (or an online course delivered through modules) and two days of practical discipline-specific training for SUP in sheltered water. Independent learning is an important part, with a requirement to complete the Coach Award eLearning, complemented by developing coaching skills on the water. A one-day assessment concludes this.

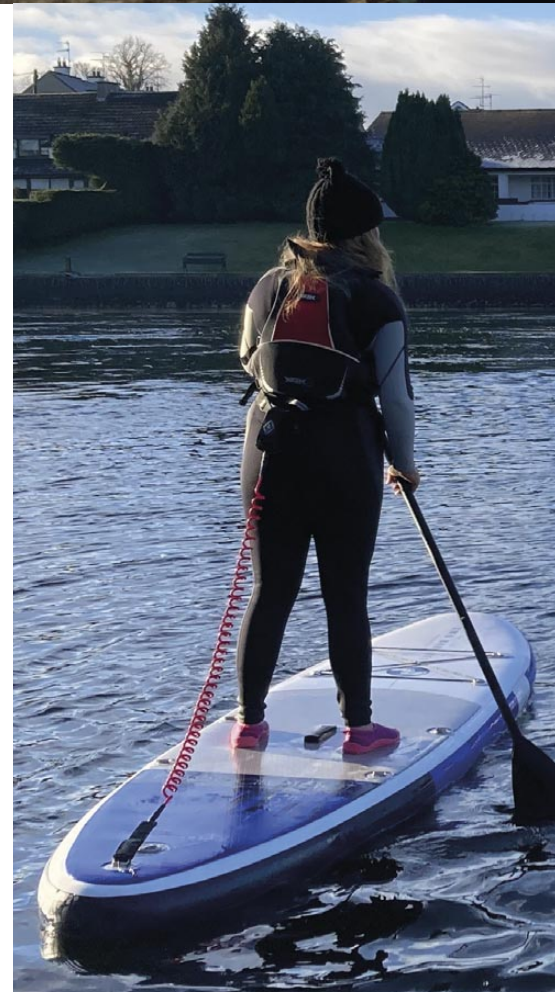
These were the steps that Jack went through, although he had a glimpse of some of this beforehand. *“It was an insightful experience to volunteer to receive coaching as part of Coach Award assessments for others. It was great to develop my skills*



I also took up opportunities to speak or present in front of others, which really helped my self-confidence.

while seeing what the assessment was like. Through this, I first seriously thought of becoming a coach myself. At that time, I was 15 years old, but I was happy to learn that I could start taking the steps towards this.” It’s important that young people who are passionate about SUP and want to share their passion in this way can do so.

“I travelled to Dundee in Scotland for my core coach training and discipline-specific training courses. This was quite a trek involving a ferry and a long drive each way over two separate weekends, and getting back after midnight.” Jack continues, *“I was the youngest on these courses, and it was a little intimidating, but I found that we were all learning from each other. The content of the courses was very interesting to learn and put into practice. I can’t quite believe how much I learned and the many different ideas forming part of my ‘coaching toolbox’.*





I initially found that I was overthinking things with my nerves getting the better of me.

I love the ethos of paddler-centred learning and the impact of flexing my coaching style according to individual paddlers.” He also completed first aid and safeguarding training ahead of his assessment.

James Dougherty

He credits James Dougherty, a volunteer who leads paddlesport for the Sea Cadets in north east England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, with helping to ensure that the programme fitted in with his commitments at school. *“Studying for GCSEs at the same time was not easy, but you make time for what you think is important, and James was fantastic in helping to coordinate all of this. I can’t thank him enough.”* Even better is that the British Canoeing Coach Award also gives eight UCAS points.

“I wouldn’t have been able to do this without the support of my family, including allowing me the time to spend on the water and transporting me to where I needed to be. The Sea Cadets have also provided incredible support throughout my coach award journey, particularly regarding the courses and training opportunities. For example, it has been helpful to experience a range of different kit and equipment.”

Jack’s assessment was in Northern Ireland in one of the places he usually goes paddleboarding. Despite the familiar location, Jack reflected, *“I initially found that I was overthinking things with my nerves getting the better of me. But it was a supportive experience. And, after my nerves went, I enjoyed it, particularly as the people I was coaching were genuinely improving during the session.”*

Discussion task

The assessment day also consisted of evaluating SUP knowledge, understanding and experience, personal paddling skills and rescue skills, and a discussion task. *“I had practised the rescues many times and was confident in my technical knowledge and skills. But, the discussion task was different. It’s not often that I formally discuss and share my thinking about how my coaching meets the needs of the people I am coaching. It was interesting and beneficial. And, of course, I was delighted when I found out that I had passed!*



the sport. In the same way that I look up to the coaches who have supported me, I hope I can also make that impact for others."

Invaluable skills

The skills Jack has developed have also proven to be invaluable. *"There was one time when a few friends and I were at the beach with our paddleboards. There was another person there who was also on a SUP with his family watching. When he fell off, he wasn't able to climb back on. After a few attempts, it looked like he was getting very tired. I approached him and supported him back on his paddleboard, and accompanied him back to shore to his relieved family members. This was memorable because it felt like an instinct to paddle over and carry out the rescue. It's a key reason I wanted to become a coach – to ensure people are safe when they enjoy being on the water."* The attributes that make an effective coach, including communication, group management and risk assessment, to name a few, are transferable into wider contexts too.

"I received really useful feedback from the assessment too. I am still quite young, but I am looking forward to continuing to share my passion for SUP with others. I have had some experience of coaching those who are older than me, and it's something that I will continue to reflect on. I know I can do it, and more experience will make it easier."

"The best thing about coaching SUP is that I get to spend time on the water with paddlers and play a part in them achieving their goals. As a coach, I want to be an ambassador for

Qualifying as a British Canoeing SUP Sheltered Water Coach is a fantastic achievement, and this is particularly impressive given his age. It is a source of immense pride to see this culmination of Jack's passion, dedication and commitment. This marks the beginning of a new chapter in his coaching journey, where he will continue to develop. Jack concurs, *"As I look forward, I want to go paddling in different places and environments and continue to develop and broaden my horizons."*



PROTECTING THE PLACES WE PLAY



At NRS, you'll find passionate rafters, whitewater kayakers, sea kayakers, stand up paddlers, kayak anglers and fly fishermen whose lives and livelihoods are intimately connected with water. Our future depends on healthy waters where our customers and we can recreate, recharge and reconnect with nature. With that being said, we realize that access to paddling is a privilege and that too many people around the globe either do not have that same access or do not feel welcome to recreate on our public lands and waters. Beyond fighting to keep our important places wild and free, we've also committed to breaking down the barriers to the outdoors, in hopes that our important places are truly enjoyed by all. This is a long-term, sustained effort aimed at building strong, durable relationships with those out there doing the hard work to make lasting change. We're proud to work with a growing group of people and organizations, to continue to hold ourselves accountable and keep integrating these stories into the fabric of our company and community.

WORDS: BY SUPDUDE.STU WITH ELLA, MY FAITHFUL COMPANION

PHOTOS: STUART GAMMON, & GRACE SPRINGER AT COWSHED COMMUNICATIONS

LAST YEAR, I WAS TASKED WITH ORGANISING AND LEADING A UNIQUE PADDLE BY A COMPANY CALLED GREEN SPACES DARK SKIES. THE EVENT WAS A STAND-UP PADDLEBOARDING EXPERIENCE DOWN THE RIVER TOWARDS THREE CLIFFS BAY AT DUSK WITH OVER 40 PADDLERS CULMINATING IN A DISPLAY OF LUMENATOR LIGHTS WHILE BEING WATCHED BY OVER 300 PEOPLE CARRYING LUMENATOR LIGHTS UP ON THE HILL AT PENNARD CASTLE. THE ENTIRE EVENT WAS TO BE FILMED BY A PROFESSIONAL FILM CREW, INCLUDING USING A DRONE TO CAPTURE THE BEAUTY OF THE SURROUNDINGS. THE EVENT WAS CALLED THE GOWER LUMENATOR EVENT.



THE GOWER LUMENATOR EVENT





UNBOXED: Creativity in the UK

Green Spaces Dark Skies is one of ten major projects commissioned as part of UNBOXED: Creativity in the UK, the groundbreaking UK-wide celebration of creativity in 2022. Outdoor arts pioneers Walk the Plank, Green Spaces Dark Skies occur from April to September. Thousands of people will become Lumenators, carrying special lights designed by Siemens at up to 20 secret locations. There, they will create art outdoors, recorded by film and photography.

Before the paddle, everyone who participated had to register online and collect earpieces from a special tent provided by Green Spaces Dark Skies at the Gower Heritage Centre. This allowed them to hear specially selected music and poems during the event, adding to the overall ambience and enhancing the experience.

Additionally, safety was my top priority for the event, and a full SUP safety team was arranged to ensure the safety of the



Additionally, safety was my top priority for the event, and a full SUP safety team was arranged to ensure the safety of the paddleboarders.

paddleboarders. This team consisted of highly trained individuals to assist if needed, adding an extra layer of security to the event.

The combination of safety measures, the carefully chosen route, the spectacular lumenator lights display, and the specially curated music and poetry all came together to create an unforgettable event. It was a



testament to the power to create an unforgettable event. It was a testament to the power of collaboration and teamwork and a celebration of the natural beauty of the Gower Peninsula. The event was truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and it will be remembered for years to come.

Meticulous planning

The planning process for the event was meticulous and required a great deal of effort and attention to detail. Several key elements needed to be considered to ensure the event's success. Firstly, the safety of all participants was paramount. We had to ensure that all the SUP boarders were experienced and had appropriate safety gear, including buoyancy aids and leashes.



everyone was in the right place at the right time. The stand-up paddle boarders were kitted out with their gear and were eager to begin their journey down the river.

The sun began to set as we set off, casting a golden glow across the water. The paddle boarders made their way down the river, and it was a truly magical experience. A poem had also been written about the journey, including Ella, my faithful pup, as I lead the paddlers down the windy river. The peace and tranquillity of the water, combined with the natural beauty of the surroundings, made for a truly unforgettable experience.

As we approached Three Cliffs Bay, the excitement began to build. The SUP boarders, with their boards, formed a big circle carefully created by sand artists who were there creating fantastic designs in the sand. Holding up our lumenator lights high in the air, the effect was truly spectacular, with the lights casting a warm glow over the water and creating a beautiful, otherworldly atmosphere.

A serene and immersive audio experience

As we held our lumenator lamps, the earpieces provided a serene and immersive audio experience that enhanced the event's beauty and created a sense of unity among everyone involved. The colours of the lumenator lamps changed in synchronization with the music and poetry, creating a mesmerizing visual and audio experience that captivated the senses.

Even the people at Pennard Castle, who were watching from afar, could experience the synchronized colour changes of the lumenator lamps as they listened to the same audio through their earpieces. This created a sense of connectedness amongst all participants, regardless of where they were positioned along the route.

The gentle music and poetry also added to the event's emotional impact. The poetic verses spoke of the beauty of nature and the importance of preserving it, reminding everyone of the need to protect the environment and celebrate the natural world around us. It added an extra layer of meaning and purpose to the event, inspiring participants to appreciate the beauty of the Gower Peninsula and the need to preserve it for future generations.



We also had to consider the weather and tidal conditions to ensure the event could occur safely.

Secondly, we had to consider the logistics of the event. The route that the stand-up paddle boarders would take had to be carefully planned, considering the length of the route, the timing of the event, and the location of the lumenator light display. We also had to ensure enough space for all the participants and adequate parking for those attending the event, including temporary traffic lights so everyone could safely cross a busy road to the river.

Thirdly, we had to think about the visual impact of the event. We wanted to create a memorable experience for all involved, which meant that we had to carefully consider the use of the lumenator lights and the location of the display and also be careful of the natural surroundings and not to damage the river bank and disturb the wildlife. We also had to consider the event's timing, as the display would be most effective at dusk when the natural light would fade.

Beautiful, clear evening

The day of the event was a beautiful, clear evening, and everything was set up perfectly. We had a team of volunteers to assist with the event logistics, ensuring

Pennard Castle

As we looked up towards the hill at Pennard Castle, we could see the 300 Gower lumenators lights, creating a beautiful scene that was truly breathtaking. The whole experience was made even more special by the presence of the professional film crew, who captured the beauty of the event from every angle, including the drone flying past us and circling the castle.





Overall, using earpieces and the carefully curated audio experience added depth and meaning to the SUP event. It created a sense of unity amongst all participants and enhanced the overall ambience, creating a truly unforgettable experience. The synchronized colour changes of the lumenator lamps and the audio experience created a mesmerizing visual and audio display that left a lasting impression on everyone involved.

As darkness set in and the lumenator lights display ended, it was time for the stand-up paddleboarders to return to the Gower Heritage Centre. The long walk back with their boards and the flutter of bats in the dark sky was amazing and a chance for participants to reflect on the unique

experience they had just shared and to soak up the tranquillity of the night.

Gower Heritage Centre

When we arrived at the Gower Heritage Centre, we were greeted with a celebration party with live music, hot food, and a spectacular fire-breathing show. It was the perfect end to an incredible event, and everyone left feeling uplifted and inspired.

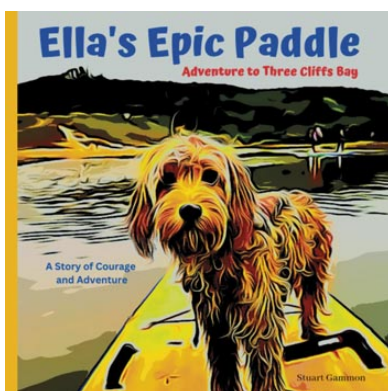
The party celebrated the event's success and a chance for everyone to come together and share their experiences. It was a reminder of the power of community and the joy that can come from shared experiences. The live music and hot food provided a festive atmosphere, and the fire-breathing show was an exciting way to end the night.

Overall, the event organized by Green Spaces Dark Skies was an incredible success. The careful planning, attention to detail, and focus on safety contributed to a memorable experience for everyone involved. The use of lumenator lights specially curated music and poetry, and the stunning natural surroundings all combined to create a magical evening that will be remembered for years. The celebration party at the end of the night was the perfect way to end the event and provided a chance for everyone to come together and celebrate the success of the evening.

As the event ended, it was clear it had been an enormous success. The SUP boarders had enjoyed a unique experience they would never forget, and the Gower Lumenators had witnessed something extraordinary. The whole event had been captured on film, and it was clear that the footage would be stunning and was later shown on YouTube and BBC Country File on television.

Incredible experience

The Gower lumenator event, in collaboration with Supdudestu organized by Green Spaces Dark Skies, was an incredible experience and an inspiration to create something meaningful. The beauty of the Gower Peninsula, the tranquillity of the river, and the sense of community all contributed to a unique and unforgettable experience.




The event was so inspiring that it led me to write a book called 'Ella's Epic Paddle to Three Cliffs Bay.' The book is a tale of adventure, courage, and the power of community. It follows the journey of a young pup named Ella, who sets out to SUP the river to Three Cliffs Bay with her dad and, along the way, faces challenges, including an after-dark paddle experiencing bats and jumping fish that require her to summon her inner strength.


The book celebrates the natural beauty of the Gower Peninsula and the spirit of adventure that drives us to explore the world around us.

It is a tribute to stand-up paddleboarding and a reminder of the transformative power of shared experiences.

'Ella's Epic Paddle to Three Cliffs Bay' is available on Amazon.co.uk, and I hope it will inspire young readers to explore the beauty of nature and the importance of community. The book is a testament to the magic of the Gower Peninsula and the sense of wonder and awe that comes from experiencing it first-hand.

Looking back on the event, I am incredibly proud of our achievements. It was a huge undertaking with many challenges to overcome, but it was all worth it in the end. The event was a beautiful celebration of the natural beauty of the Gower Peninsula, and it was a testament to the power of collaboration and teamwork.

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SUPM GEAR SHED

Stand Up Paddle Mag UK

Fatstick Pure Wood 10'6 x 32" x 190L

Words & photo: Tez Plavenieks

Fatstick's Purewood looks the biz. Everyone loves a bit of wood - this is repeatedly proven when boards such as Fatstick's Pure Wood 10'6 lie waiting on the beach. Evoking that retro surfing style, there was a buzz of interest just before launching. That in itself makes the 10'6 worthy of anyone's quiver. But the Pure Wood isn't just skin deep. There's a lot more to it than that.

Anyone aware of Fatstick head honcho Reuben (May) and his penchant for a wave or two with be unsurprised the Pure Wood feels lively and turny underfoot. From the get-go, while balanced and stable, you can feel it raring to hunt down some swell and get a few liquid glides under its belt. Flat water paddling is absolutely fine with the 10'6, and the board has decent glide and tracking and can easily accommodate any paddler wanting to cruise or



paddle recreationally. Yet being spurred on by the Pure Wood's hunger for swell, I went on the search.

Fortunately, during testing, I found a bump or three. Conditions weren't perfect - with quite a bit of chop in the mix. But then this is SUP gear testing, and tricky conditions show how capable a board can be (or not, depending).

Riders should have no fear though, as the Fatstick's stability is bang on. I remained upright even with an annoying sideshore rip, choppy water state, and shift waves. Of course, any paddler worth their salt will have brace strokes on lock to remain in position. But the Pure Wood helped massively with this and made even flukey conditions worth a go.

The Pure Wood's hull has a progressive rocker, with double concave, leading to a reasonably chunky square tail. Fins can be tweaked to desired flavour with four FCS performance slots and

a familiar centrally located US type. I favour a thruster configuration. That said, it's always worth experimenting to find your perfect set-up when given options. (I also had a quick spin on the Pure Wood as a single skegged old school 'logger' and found this worked fine too).

The Pure Wood gets up to speed admirably. That makes pivoting and catching waves early doable - much appreciated when presented with some conditions. It drops in progressively and manages to keep its nose even in sucky waves. Engaging the 10'6's rail sees it head off down the line, the board's momentum keeping it clear of sections and flotsam. Carving from the tail, it's efficient and loose enough to engage riders thoroughly. If your chosen wave allows, you may be able to get the Pure Wood 10'6 more vertical, but this it's more about flow and style than anything.

Fatstick Pure Wood 10'6: £925

(with glass paddle)

Fatstick Pure Wood 9'8: £899

(with glass paddle)

<https://fatstickboards.com/products/pure-wood-sup-package-in-stock>

CONCLUSION

It's been a while since I stepped on a Fatstick hard SUP. But what a sled to try with a bit of time having elapsed. A sweet SUP for recreational paddling, no question. Where their 10'6 shines, however, is in the small to medium wave arena. Riders looking for some old-school longboard surfing performance should apply here. Mellow, open-face carving, toes over and snagging long glides is where the 10'6 shines. I enjoyed it, and you probably will too!



Aqua Marina Coral Touring 2023

By Sarah Thornely (Supjunkie)

Incredibly compact in a neat rucksack, this board weighs in at 9.3kgs due to its lightweight drop stitch technology. The fast and efficient double action pump with two settings meant I would be on the water once the recommended max air pressure of 15psi was reached.

I'm used to longer and heavier boards, so this was an absolute pleasure to lift easily with the comfortable neoprene centre handle and pop on top of the van. The swift attach fin is just that, no screwdriver to fiddle about with; snap-in, and it feels secure. The three-part fibreglass/carbon paddle could well be sufficient for the beginner paddler, but I'm guessing the intermediate paddler might want to upgrade to something a bit lighter – we all do eventually!

Designed specifically as a shorter touring board but with an advanced cruising shape, it is loaded with adjustable bungy straps front and back, gliding effortlessly across the water, tracks well, and has good manoeuvrability. Once you get used to stepping back and over the rear bungees, you can easily spin this board around. The comfortable EVA deck pad runs to the back of the board and incorporates a tail kick pad.

The rectangular rail edge 'for cleaner back-end water release' did seem to work – my other half on the bank was getting me to move up and down the board to check the weight front and back. It created a cleaner and smoother release, reducing tail wake



and increasing glide. With a moderate nose rocker, I'm guessing you could also have fun in small waves.

Adventure paddling and touring have become so popular over the last few years. I believe this board would suit a beginner/intermediate – maybe someone who has owned the classic 10'6 beginner board and wants to move on to longer distances and further their adventures. Plenty of straps for dry bags with a payload of 130kgs. Also included are a coiled ankle leash and a carry strap for the board.

I had great fun paddling the Coral Cruiser on my local river and could easily compare it against my other boards, which range from 10'6 to 14', and it has its place. It's a nice board; tracking, manoeuvrability and speed are tops for me. I'd love to see a couple of extra carry handles added and, as

standard, a quick-release belt added to all board packages. Although the board was packed with mostly cardboard and paper, there were a few plastic bags I'd love to see less of – simple remedies to make the whole package even better.

If you love pink, you will be delighted – the colourways are Raspberry (pink) and Night Fade (purple).

Aqua Marina has a huge range of inflatable boards, from all round, touring, racing, river and surf to fitness and kids' boards with funky designs. Definitely worth checking out their website.

Price: £649
www.aquamarina.com



NRS Zen Rescue WW PFD

By Zac Green

Applicable to WW SUP paddlers, the NRS Zen got put through its paces during my kayaking ww trip to the Zambezi.

There are three pockets: a clamshell-shaped one on the front panel, a handwarmer section between the two layers and a zip closure pocket in the second panel. I found that putting bigger items, such as a sling, in the bigger pocket on the second layer didn't affect the bulk of the vest at all while also being very quick to access in a pinch. The clamshell pocket fits the rest of my safety gear nicely, with many attachment points for knives, carabiners and prusiks.

The side entry is set up very well with colour-coded buckles to ensure it is fastened correctly. I found myself leaving the buckles done up and putting it on over my head as I found it simpler and quicker. The vest features a rescue strap, and thankfully I didn't have to use it under pressure, but it is well made and looks tidy when tightened.

It is made of nylon with Cordura reinforcements and has aged very well in the time I've been using it with no rips or fraying straps, no matter how many bramble bushes I've walked through.

Price: £179
www.nrseurope.com



Rapid response – YellowV Niagara 14' x 32" x 6"

Words & photos: Tez Plavenieks

This is the second inflatable SUP from new to the UK YellowV I've tested. For this review, I'm riding the brand's Niagara 14' touring iSUP, which I billed as an overnight adventure sled.

And I have to say that upon first look, it's a beast (in a good way). So, in theory, it should be more than fit for lugging all those essential adventure paddling sites with you.

YellowV has certainly gone the whole hog with its aesthetic. The black and yellow livery of the Niagara 14' is unique, giving the board an individual quality. But it's more than looks alone. Fixtures and fittings are tip-top; when inflated to its max PSI, there's minimal deflection, even with this being a 14' paddle sled.

Hopping aboard the Niagara, it's flat with a significantly squared-off tail. Devoid of nearly all rocker, there's just a smidgen up front at the nose. As such, it's incredibly stable. Nervous paddlers will have no issue piloting this baby. As will riders wanting to fully haul everything along for the journey (including the kitchen sink!). Two main stowage points are located fore and aft, and you could lash down other belongings with



additional tie-downs if you wish. YellowV's Niagara 14' really is the caravan of iSUPs.

Being so flat and lengthy ensures the Niagara paddles straight lines incredibly efficiently. Its glide is exemplary, and there's plenty of tracking. Riders won't have to overthink their SUPing with this board. Instead, engage the autopilot and focus on your surroundings. Taking in all the outdoors has to offer. With that in mind, it's also not a bad SUP to take your first paddle strokes with. There's not as much manoeuvrability as with shorter paddle boards. So for learning turns and such, you'll need less board. But it'll work fine for simply finding your balance, standing and dipping your blade in the brine.

The YellowV Niagara 14' will also double as a tandem iSUP. Should you fancy having a family member (kids, for instance) tag along for the ride. Another good way of

introducing someone to paddle boarding it's another tick in the box for the Niagara's stability and glide.

Price: £680

<https://yellowv.co.uk/collections/sup-boards>

CONCLUSION

There's no question about the YellowV Niagara's touring SUP credentials. Sticking closely to the brief, it'll carry all your belongings and some, ensuring plenty of overnight SUP adventures. Equally, it'll work fine as a recreational paddle board. The Niagara doesn't turn sharply but more than makes up for this in terms of glide and tracking. Plus, get the family onboard for some shared SUP adventures. What's not to like?



Flymount Aero 40 action cam mount

Words & photos: Tez Plavenieks

There are some things in life you can't do without. Flymount's latest action cam mounting creation – the Aero 40 – is one such item. Crafted to attach your trusty GoPro (or equivalent action) to a round cylindrical object – such as a SUP paddle shaft – the Aero 40 will help all riders nail those awesome shots.

It's no secret I've been a big fan and user of the Flymount original for many years. The reviews in SUPM are produced using Flymount cam mounts. If I didn't have access to such a product, the reviews would be less dynamic, that's for sure. I have used several other GoPro mounts nothing comes close in terms of security, durability and performance. I can attach the Flymount and cam, and away I go.

The brand's Aero 40 has been designed with fewer metal parts and a more efficient design. With a one-screw action, it fits to your paddle (or chosen surface) via a plastic clamping mechanism. This is padded to avoid scuffing. The camera mounting part is internal and free swivelling to the screw mechanism, forming a locking clamp when tightened. It's dependable and trustworthy. I've had the Aero 40 through the wringer a few times, which hasn't disappointed me.

Conclusion

UK design and manufactured Flymount action cam mounts are awesome bits of kit if you fancy nailing the POV shot. The Aero 40 is a great new addition to the product line up that Flymount offer. For any SUP GoPro users, you'd do much worse than getting yourself an Aero 40.

Price: £65

<https://flymount.com/>

Typhoon Hendra Hinge women's specific drysuit

By Sarah Thornely (Supjunkie)

Let's get something out there straightaway, ladies – a drysuit is not a fashion item. It's a fantastically technical piece of clothing designed to keep you completely dry, and choosing one is now a whole lot easier.

The Typhoon Hendra Hinge IS a women's specific drysuit, meaning we've come a long way from all having to 'make do' with wearing something usually designed for men.

I love adventure paddling and white water, so I need something to keep me bone dry and a rear hinge entry to have a quick toilet break without taking all my layers off.

Designed with the female form in mind, it's stylish and made with Typhoon's advanced high-quality TX-4 fabric – meaning it's fully waterproof, breathable and warm. The seat and knees are reinforced, and comfortable socks are incorporated. The YKK® Aquaseal zip has been cleverly extended almost entirely around the suit for ease of use and is nearer waist level, so if you are a kayaker, you don't end up sitting on the zip. The cuffs and neck are nice and snug, with Velcro on the cuffs to keep everything tidy. Internal braces mean you can adjust the length of the leg or waist height to make the dry suit fit even more perfectly, and the braces have a simple removable buckle for the drop seat feature.



The waist has a 'skirt' which is fully adjustable too, giving more options for your own personal shape. The whole suit is easy to get in and out of and fully adjustable, making it simple to go to the loo.

Designed in smart navy blue and black panels with striking orange detail on the arms – such a great idea for safety so you can be seen even when wearing a PFD or in the water.

I first used the Hendra at a white water session at Hurley Weir, which was pumping that day – I spent plenty of time in the water, and at the end of a good four hours, I was warm and dry – it was the end of November, so I wore some simple base layers and socks underneath. The suit was flexible enough for me to be able to move around on my board and gave me no issues getting back on either – I never felt restricted at any time whilst on or in the water.

This drysuit had a thorough water test that day, and it did not disappoint – stylish and very practical, it just worked – Typhoon's pedigree certainly shone through.

The suit is certified with CE and UKCA approvals. Typhoon pride themselves on being a UK-based company with years of delivering commercial, military, and leisure products with a complete after-sales service for repairs and servicing. Look at their website, as they have lots to offer, apart from the Hendra Hinge Drysuit.

Price: £649.95
<https://typhoon-int.co.uk>

NCW 3mm hooded neoprene SUP jacket

Words & photos: Tez Plavenieks

Cold weather can be extremely prohibitive for those in UK watersports. Whilst summer does have those fair weather days, other times of the year, cooler temperatures put the kybosh on things for many. Having the ability to layer up is one way to ensure comfort when out afloat. A good quality wetsuit is one thing (for those practising submersible disciplines), but what else can you wear?

NCW (North Coast Wetsuits) passed me one of their 3mm hooded neoprene jackets a while back. As you can see from the photos, it's the pink version I've been testing. It should be made clear there are other colours. Not everyone will want pink, I appreciate. It is designed with versatility and a product initially conceived with SUP and wind sports in mind. But there are way more applications than this. I've since used the jacket in various guises on the water and on land when cycling, skating and even on the coldest days while playing the drums in my 'bat cave'.

The jacket is super hard wearing with a double YKK zipper and hood, and it fits neatly over most wetsuits and clothing. Its elongated bottom thighs remain warm, while the Velcro cuffs ensure a snug fit. Wearers even have the option of tightening the hood should they require giving it a stormproof quality.

On the water, NCW's 3mm hooded neoprene jacket is a real furnace. For instance, wearing a 5/3mm winter wetsuit suddenly gains so much more heat-retaining properties. Gone is that evaporative cooling which can mar many a SUP session having taken a dunking. Instead, wind chill is kept at bay, and comfort is retained.

One thing I was sceptical of is the hood. Oversize hoods can often fill with water after a fall. But the 3mm jacket from NCW doesn't. It empties efficiently as you clamber back onboard but doesn't force a water flush through your wetsuit. I've used the jacket SUP foiling, surfing, flat water paddling, wing foiling and messing about at the beach with my kids, and taking some hefty stacks. It's proven to be one of those essential items I often use in all cases. And I know a few others who've also had the same revelation, having used it.

CONCLUSION

If you're layering your SUP attire, NCW's 3mm hooded neoprene jacket is worth adding to your paddling wardrobe. Combine it with a wetsuit for immersive water activities, or wear it when flat water SUPing. Even stick it on your back when walking about town for warmth on chilly days. There's an application it'll fit. But from a pure cold weather/water SUP point of view, it's a definite must-have in my book.

Price: £119.95 (available in grey, blue and pink fleck)
www.northcoastwetsuits.co.uk



Aqua Marina Coral – Night Fade 10'2

Words & photos: Sancha Myall – Saltbirds SUP

To look at is a beauty! A lovely shade of purple (Night Fade) with motivational, adventurous quotes like 'Wonder is around' printed on it. The nose cargo straps are of excellent quality, bright colours and brilliant in that they can be adjusted.

The bag/backpack is made from recycled plastic bottles, which is an important fact to me. We should all try to buy sustainable where we can, and it is excellent that Aqua Marina is considering it within their range. The board bag is a bright shade of purple; it's a good size to carry and easily fits the board. You can't fit the paddle and pump in, so you couldn't carry it all easily to a remote location, but as the board is lightweight at 9kg and comes with an over-the-shoulder carry strap, you would be fine with carrying it.

The two-stage double-action pump was relatively easy to pump up this board. It went from flat to fully pumped and ready in under four minutes. The swift attach centre fin could not have been easier. I've not used one like it before, but it



was super easy; it just slotted into place with a lever clip at the end.

The paddle is a carbon hybrid pastel paddle that's reasonably lightweight. I did find the paddle shaft width a little wide for my childlike hands, but I'm sure it's pretty standard. The handle was very comfortable, with good grip cover.

Sea paddling, I went out in West Bay on the Jurassic Coast for a 5km paddle. The conditions were good, with low wind and a little swell, and I was straight-up paddling with no issues. My balance and stability were fine; the board handled it well despite the messy swell in different directions. I could move across the water quickly, but when turning, I found the board so responsive that I almost came off. I don't think this is a bad thing; I think it's great – just something I'd need to use to.

Canal paddling, 14km paddle on the Bridgewater to Taunton Canal. This is where I started to appreciate the board. It was an absolute pleasure to paddle. This board glides and glides nicely! It's fast because of how well it glides, so keeping momentum is no trouble. It's responsive, easy to control, and lightweight to portage. The paddle was efficient, and I had no trouble keeping it straight or causing any drag.

I was surprised by the price but having enjoyed it and being happy with the results; it's worth it. It comes with a two-year warranty, and it's capable of a lot of miles in many locations, which is what it's all about to me.

Price: £549
www.aquamarinauk.co.uk



Lifejacket Skincare

By Dale Mears

Time to start thinking about protection on the water. Whatever watersport you do, are you protecting yourself from Melanoma? Skin cancer?

Lifejacket Skincare is a men's (but not exclusively for men) skincare range. They provide a wide range of products from daily moisturiser to sun gel products and even hats and bank wear. All have one thing in common; they protect you from the sun.

After years of outdoor activities, I switched to one of their SPF daily moisturisers. Whether out at work or hitting the water, I am now protected. Secondly, sunscreen was often not applied when hitting the water due to the greasy hand situation or sweat running into my eyes. This is fine with the lifejacket SPF 30 and 50 sun gels, and they are non-greasy, don't run and come in various sizes to stow away.

On the water, I use an SPF 50, and they also have a spray for us balding men and a mineral stick for the nose, lips etc., ideal for skiing and other activities, not just watersports.

<https://lifejacketskin.com>

CONCLUSION

I was really surprised at how much I enjoyed this board. I'd have been over the moon if it was my first board! This board is most suited to small, framed paddlers/beginners. It's perfect to start learning on, and you won't be disappointed. This board is suitable for going long distances with a great,

less wind-affected shape. You can grow your paddling skills and still be happy with this board for a few years.





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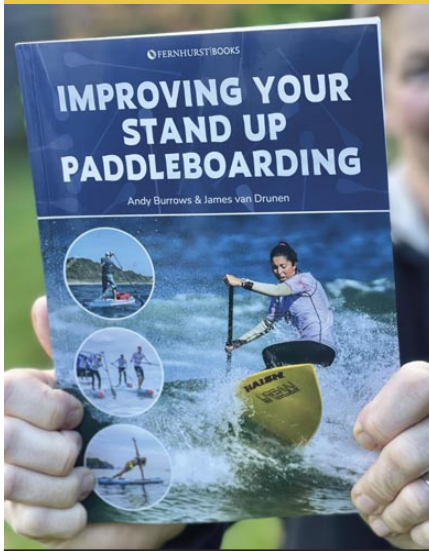
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Improving Your Stand Up Paddleboarding

By Andy Burrows & James van Drunen
Review: Sarah Thornely (Supjunkie)

With Andy and James at the helm, this book is incredibly comprehensive. Aimed at those who can already stand-up paddleboard, it showcases most SUP disciplines, including racing, touring, surfing, yoga and white water, and has taken direct help from some of the leading paddlers in their chosen fields.

The book teaches you about the journey to 'unconscious competence', which will give you a greater understanding of improving your efficiency, technique, skills and



physical capabilities. We all know how important goal setting is, and this is also covered – the book feels nicely interactive, and there are some simple graphs to work through, including downloadable dartboards. Being physically fit is essential, and there are step-by-step photos to improve endurance, agility, speed and balance with simple training templates.

Over the last few years, 'blue mind' has been continuously mentioned when discussing SUP, and it is now scientifically proven that water makes you calmer. There are many references in the book to happiness, enjoyment, freedom, spirituality, a meditative state, a spirit of adventure, excitement and confidence.

Andy and James have tried to be different; they know there are books out there teaching the basics and guidebooks to show you where to paddle, but with this colourful and engaging book full of step-by-step photos, they have given us all something new.

After ten years of paddleboarding, I found lots to interest me. An excellent gift for yourself or the paddler in your life! Available from all good bookshops, websites and direct from the publishers in the UK.

<https://fernhurstbooks.com>

C-Monsta wetsuit hangar and organic clothing

Words & photos: Tez Plavenieks

Any wearer of wetsuits will know how frustratingly hard it can be to dry your essential rubber. Nothing is worse than getting into a damp wetsuit, and it's one reason those of us in the brine regularly have more than one suit. Yet the time still comes to dry your gear.

A good circulation of air helps. Anything you can do to open up your wetsuit or accessories (like boots) is good. And fortunately, C-Monsta has just the thing. Made from recycled plastic, the C-Monsta V2 wetsuit and accessory drying hangar is a must-have for your SUP toy box. The C-Monsta's robust design ensures it won't break and will stand the test of time more cleverly though its unique protrusions are crafted to have you hang a wetsuit, boots, gloves and rashy in a way that'll ensure a quick drying process. Being able to 'attach' all your rubber kit is great; in no time, it'll be moisture free.

Hang your C-Monsta at home or outdoors (dangling from your van door, for instance) and be ready and dry for your next paddling sesh! C-Monsta, don't stop there, though. The Scottish brand also has a range of simple yet effective organic clothing. Of which we were sent the C-Monsta 100% organic cotton crew sweat.

The jumper's minimalist design and snuggly feel are great for post-SUP and surf time. Also, fitting once more with C-Monsta's environmental credentials, it's printed in a low-waste facility powered by renewable energy. I love the crew, the hangar and C-Monsta's ethos as a brand, and I'm pretty sure you will too!

Price: C-Monsta hangar - £29.95

C-Monsta crew sweat - £45

<https://c-monsta.com/collections/shop>



Helly Hansen Women's Lumines Jacket

Words & photo: Anne Egan

I've been wearing the Lumine's jacket since the end of January last year, and it's become my 'go to' jacket to wear even on a couple of evening SUP and kayak paddles in the summer, where the heat of the day wore off.

It is a very flexible jacket with zip vents on the underarm to prevent overheating or fully zipped for insulation. This is achieved with HELLY TECH® Professional fabric construction, delivering professional grade waterproof/breathable protection, and the H2Flow™ ventilation system, which uses strategically placed ventilation to improve overall airflow and providing optimal temperature regulation.

To deliver maximum visibility and safety, the jacket uses VizLite® Dual Technology phosphorescent tape, which contains microscopic glass beads that act as light reflectors and photoluminescent crystals, absorbing UV energy, which is then emitted as a light source in low or zero light conditions.

There are more than enough pockets with two chest zipped pockets, including one 'Life Pocket™' for keeping items such as phones, designed to preserve battery life. There is also the usual side zipped pockets plus a large webbed inside pouch.

In summary, we're entering winter once again, and the Lumines will be the jacket I'll be reaching for – it's functional, extremely comfortable and breathable with the combined importance of visibility in lower light conditions – it doesn't get any better.

Available in men's and women's specific designs only in the Nimbus Cloud colour and expect to pay around £280. There is also a 'light' version of the jacket available in black for around £100 less.

Price: £280

www.hellyhansen.com

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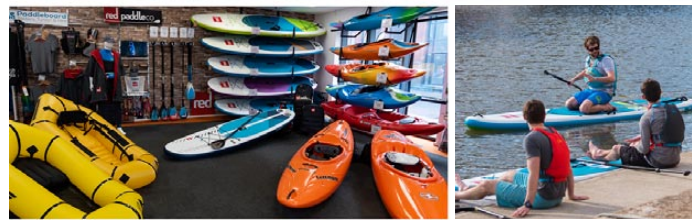
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Like a bird – Indiana Wing Foil 5'8 x 29" x 118L

Words: Tez Plavenieks

Photos: Tez Plavenieks, Oli Lane-Pearce

Names mean nothing, especially when it comes to water sports equipment. A case in point is the Indiana Wing Foil 118L. Of course, the 118L does the wing foiling thing, no problem. But it's a much more versatile foil board than being specific to just wing alone.

Most foil boards these days are capable of straddling various disciplines. In the bigger sizes (100L and up), boards designed for flying above water will do so with a wing and with a paddle (usually). In some cases, they may even apply to foil pumping or tow foiling. The Indiana 118L certainly fits this bill.

I've been able to test this 5'8 extensively. Being fortunate enough to lay hands on the 118L as soon as it arrived in the UK. Initially used in those first sessions as a big wingsurfing board, it quickly became apparent that it'd work for SUP foiling in waves with no hassle. And work it does - incredibly well.

The Indiana's brushed green paint and carbon livery stands out on the beach. But the shape catches the eye, especially if you know about foil board design. With its flat deck, low rockered hull, sharp rails and minimal additions, the Indiana is poised to fly as early as possible, be super stable at



rest and in the air and deliver the best foiling experience possible.

And it does; the aforementioned design traits allow the 118L to release from the water super early. It, therefore, tutors in the ways of the foil and will help riders dial in their technique to tackle more performance-orientated kit. Should they wish to. Although, from a SUP foiling point of view, there's no need. You have everything you require right here.

The Indiana's flat deck is super stable when paddling to the take-off and quickly moved into position. 5'8 may sound short, but there's just enough glide to paddle up to foiling speed. And with the barest hint of a push from a wave riders will take off and fly! As such, the act of getting on foil has never been easier. And it's the same in wing mode as well. A small gust is all you need to have the board release and levitate.

In flight, rail-to-rail weight transfers result in fun arcs and turns. The board remains pumpable and direct regarding foil to rider feedback. Should you touch down, the pop-back-up is efficient. And being short means little swing weight for a superior ride experience.

Price: £1510

<https://shop.indiana-paddlesurf.com/indiana-wing-foil-118l-carbon-1577.html>

CONCLUSION

It may say Wing Foil 'on the tin', but the Indiana 118L is one of the best SUP foil boards I've tested. Still great to wing, though (especially in super light wind), the 5'8 is an excellent example of quality design. If you fancy some fly above water action, you will do much worse than choosing this sled.



Dryrobe® Women's Eco Thermal Gloves

By Sarah Thornely (Supjunkie)

As soon as that first flush of sunshine gives us warmth and we spot snowdrops in the hedgerows, here in the UK we believe it's officially spring but then, come March and April, we might get knocked back by the cold weather and sometimes possibly have snow! So, when a pair of Dryrobe Thermal Gloves arrive in late February, you know you will undoubtedly use them, and so it came to pass that I did on day one! The bitter wind was brutal on a long walk with the other half, so I popped them on, and they didn't disappoint.

Gloves or mitts? Sometimes I'm unsure which are best, so these fill that gap. Made from 100% recycled fabrics approved by the Global Recycle Standard (GRS), they are water resistant with an ultra-warm polar fleece inner. They will help your hands warm up quickly, especially if you are a wild or open-water swimmer or paddleboarder like me. Hands often get wet when lifting the board out of the water, and cold extremities are uncomfortable. They have an elasticated cuff which also locks in warmth.

If you want dexterity, the gloves have fold-back magnetic mittens and thumb flaps, so you can quickly switch to fingerless gloves when needed.

As you would expect from Dryrobe, the quality is second to none, and they also look very smart. Check out the sizing on their website, which means you will get the perfect fit. Dryrobe also offers free delivery and returns.

Price: £40

<https://dryrobe.com/>



Feathery fun – O’Shea 10’6 x 34” x 260L HPx 2023

Words & photos: Tez Plavenieks

O’Shea has always delivered the goods by providing quality inflatable paddle boards for the real-world rider. I’ve tested plenty of the brand’s offerings over the years and never encountered any issues. Some models are more in line with specific rider needs than others. But that’s a good thing as it means you can always find a design to fit your requirements.

So with O’Shea’s 2023 range now landing, what can the company do to improve upon an already quality product?

The HPx line-up of O’Shea iSUPs is billed as their premium choice. Lighter (up to 20% lighter than Fusion or MSL construction) and more rigid, they’re a joy to use and lug about to and from the put-in. O’Shea’s 10’6 version is reviewed here. Speaking to brand owner Farrel before getting the demo board, he signposted the fact all HPx iSUPs have new welded seam construction as standard. This gives a better aesthetic, firstly, but also increases the overall structural integrity of the board.

Hopping aboard the 10’6 for the first time, there’s plenty of rigidity and minimal deflection, even when carrying a passenger

(my son, who decided to get involved during testing). Paddling around, it’s an iSUP that keeps its shape and allows the rider to focus on simply having fun. You might not have experience with multiple inflatable boards, but I can’t stress enough how much a rigid SUP improves the overall experience of paddle boarding.



A fairly flat rocker helps the 10’6 with glide, while tracking is pretty good. This being a shorter iSUP means there’s still a manoeuvrable and playful element which should keep engagement levels high. And from a stability point of view: no issue at all. The 10’6 sits planted and remains composed - even if the water state gets a little choppy.

On deck, you have a super grippy yet comfy pad, a space to stow belongings via bungee chord and sturdy D-ring attachment points. Underside, O’Shea’s fin system is simple yet effective, with two fixed

side bites and an easy screw-in central US box skeg. Ultimately, the O’Shea 10’6 is a fine example of what a recreational inflatable SUP board should be.

Price: £809

<https://oshea-shop.com/collections/oshea-hpx-sup-paddle-boards>

CONCLUSION

O’Shea’s 10’6 HPx inflatable paddle board is a fun and functional design that has fulfilment written all over it. This is all without skimping on quality. In particular, the 2023 welded seam technology makes a difference to overall rigidity, whilst the lighter HPx construction gives additional appeal. You will do much worse if you’re after a new recreational iSUP this season.



ddipp® Sea Monster robe

By Sarah Thornely (Supjunkie)

Changing robes have become one of the most sought-after items for outdoor sports over the last few years, where you need to retain body heat and keep warm after your chosen exercise. You’d think the bigger brands would have the changing robe market well wrapped up, but it’s great to see a new British brand hit the market running with some innovative features.

The first thing that’s apparent is the weight of the robe, coming in at only 1.1kg. The ripstop outer shell is waterproof and breathable, comes in five colours ranging from aqua to contemporary light grey, and has a waterproof rating of 5000mm. Orange is splashed about with ddipp’s cool logo on the back, front and sleeves, continuing inside with the super soft, shearling fleece lining.

The inner and outer fabric is 100% recycled polyester from recycled PET from drinks bottles. The zip tapes and teeth are also 100% recycled, which leaves a few ‘parts’ to follow suit – ddipp is completely honest about its sustainability journey and is striving to find these last few percentages of recycled alternatives. Check out their website for more transparency, supply chain, and performance information.

Key features include zip-off lower sleeves for all seasons, an adjustable drawcord hood and cuffs, a durable chunky reversible zipper, multiple roomy internal pockets, deep-lined hand pockets, and a waterproof outer pocket. What’s unique about this product is the ability to pack the robe away in one of the internal pockets, which doubles up as a zipped bag with a carry handle. Genius!

Don’t just take my word for it; 220Triathlon Magazine has just rated this robe with a winning score of 95% when reviewing 20 of the best.

The ddipp company ethos of what’s essential in life is spending time with those you love, getting outside, and having fun. “As a family-owned business, we want customers to feel respected and dealt with positively and fairly,” and from their 5-star reviews, it appears they are doing just that.

£150 for the adult robe. £120 for the junior robe.

<https://ddipp.me>



Vroom glider – Sandbanks Style Sports Touring Classic 12' x 30" x 6" 297L

Words & photos: Tez Plavenieks

Until now, I hadn't stepped aboard a Sandbanks Style inflatable SUP. That's mad, considering the brand's based just down the road from me in Poole. Also, Sandbanks Style has gained quite a following in the past few years. Now ticking a Sandbanks Style review off, I was sent the snazzy-looking Sports Touring Classic 12' package.

Being slightly narrower than Sandbanks Style's Ultimate iSUP, the Sports Touring Classic definitely feels alive when afloat. It can still be loaded up for getaways and adventures. Although, for me, it'd be more for rapid paddles around my local. Others may chuck it at a few races as it'd perform well for those first-time stints on the event course.

The 12's glide is cracking, knifing an efficient line with ease. I found that railing works well, whereby you heel the board over slightly onto an edge to reduce drag. This

makes the board feel quicker and even more race-like. But equally, it'll ride just as well when paddled flat.

Manufactured in double-skin laminated fusion, it's robust and hard-wearing. It'll take a few knocks and a bit of abuse. Weight is acceptable and not prohibitive. And for me, the aesthetic of the Sports Touring Classic is the best of the Sandbanks Style range. (I appreciate looks don't affect performance and are a very individual thing).

Special mention should be given to the board's fin, which has a distinct shape. Aiming to deliver the best straight-line paddling and manoeuvrability, it ticks that box. Combined with the overall liveliness of the 12'

moves, pivot turns are super fun to practice. But without affecting the board's 'just paddle' aptitude.

Price: £599

www.sandbanksstyle.com/products/sports-touring-classic



CONCLUSION

As the first test board from Sandbanks Style, the 12' Sports Tourer is a goody. It looks great and delivers a fulfilling SUP experience afloat. It'd be a good choice as a step-up board from a standard 10'6. And the overall package, in terms of what you get, is very appealing – price too, as it happens.



NRS Women's HydroSkin 0.5 Pant

By Sarah Thornely (Supjunkie)

Think of your favourite leggings and add a hefty dose of innovative properties, comfort for miles and a very stylish textured weave. For colour, you have 'Dark Shadow' akin to air force blue, and it's nice to have something different to black that is smart and flattering.

Being tall, I once again appreciate the length of these pants – they have a yoga-style waistband with extra fabric on the back for maximum coverage whether you sit, stand or are constantly bending and stretching when exercising or moving around your equipment on or near the water. They fit like a glove and are made from Terraprene (TM) neoprene which NRS has recently updated to include improved stretch.

The premium nylon-spandex exterior sheds water, and the hydrophobic interior provides next-level softness whilst locking in warmth.

The HydroSkin Women's range has clearly been designed with us (women) in mind, from the styling to the cut and comfort – it's good, and I mean really good technical wear, without being fussy or unforgiving.

I wore this in chilly March, battling the flow and wind on my local river, and the product certainly lived up to expectations. The pants gave me the right amount of warmth that day but bear in mind you could easily slip them under another layer. I can imagine wearing these for many, many months of the year.

What I also love about NRS (est. 1972) is that since 2013 has been 100% employee-owned. Very cool.

Price: £100

<https://www.nrseurope.com>

NRS Women's HydroSkin 0.5 long sleeve shirt

By Sarah Thornely (Supjunkie)

NRS has recently updated its HydroSkin range to include improved stretch, warmth-to-weight ratio, and new water-shedding materials. All are made with their Terraprene (TM) neoprene, made from limestone and recycled rubber tyres, using low-emission water-based adhesives. It may not sound very sexy, but it's excellent news for our environment, and NRS is "deepening our commitment to the planet."

This long sleeve top is not only beautifully made but so, so comfortable. Buttery soft to the touch and hugs you nicely without being restrictive. I am a huge fan of the strong and vibrant colourway (not all ladies appreciate pink!), so thank you for that NRS.

I also appreciated the fit; I am tall, and the sleeves and body length were perfect. No tugging at them to keep them in place, and because it's so form-fitting, it restricts water entry meaning you stay warmer for longer. The 0.5mm Terraprene (TM) neoprene with heat-reflecting titanium locks in your body's warmth. The water-shedding fabric is perfect for my stand-up paddleboarding and outrigger canoe sports.

Depending on the conditions, you could layer up this top or wear it under a cag. I road-tested this on a very blustery and cool day on the river, and it certainly did what it was supposed to. Isn't it wonderful not to overthink the technical gear you are wearing – you can concentrate on what you are doing and have a fantastic session on the water?

Price: £100
<https://www.nrseurope.com>



Palm Solo PFD

By Dale Mears

The new award-winning SUP-specific PFD from Palm is an excellent option to replace an old PFD or buy your first one. Palm Equipment has looked at what the SUP market wants and listened to its user base to bring this new affordable PFD to market.

First up, this is one of the most slimline PFD you will find, it really is slim, and the cut is excellent, meaning it does not impede when paddling. Now one of the biggest things we see posted on socials is, "I'm struggling to get back on my board due to my PFD" this takes away a massive part of the problem.

Secondly, pockets. Many PFD have big bulky pockets or none at all! I paddle with and have for some years the Palm Ace, a great slimline PFD; however, it lacks a pocket making carrying some essentials tricky. Palm has fixed this by designing an elasticated pocket system on the front. If you struggle with bulky pockets, leave it empty, and you will not notice it is there; however, this pocket boasts extreme storage capacity. I have been carrying a 4-metre rescue sling, karabiner and a river knife in mine! It's ideal for a phone, snacks and safety gear (please note it is not a waterproof pocket). The pocket fastens



down using velcro and has an internal clip to secure a knife, keys, phone, etc.

The Solo vest also features a new side entry system making it easier to put on over sup gear; from drysuits, wetsuits, coats etc., it's straightforward to throw over your shoulder and put on rather than a bulky front zip or over-the-top style PFD. The Solo features all the usual things you would expect, fully adjustable shoulder straps, waist and side. The side straps are buckle fastening too hence the side entry and offer plenty of adjustment.

The foam is a new Gaia and EPE PVC-free foam, so less environmentally harmful, and

the primary material is nylon 420D ripstop fabric so that it will withstand use and abuse dragging yourself on and off your board.

Although this is a SUP-specific PFD, this is an excellent option for all paddlesports and doesn't limit itself to SUP.

I think all this is great, and I've been using it for a while now and love this vest; however, the number one selling point for me is this PFD retails at an RRP of £70. Some other brands have recently put out SUP-specific PFDs, but I don't feel they compete with Palm's offering on price, fit or quality.

Price: £70
<https://palmequipmenteurope.com>

Bluefin Nitro 14' x 28" package

By Helen Nightingale

The Nitro is Bluefin's new inflatable race board and comes in a package with everything needed to get started, including a fin and paddle. At 14' in length and 28" wide, it's perfectly placed for those wanting to start racing or perhaps cover greater distances on day trips.

My first impressions were that the board came well shipped, with most items wrapped in brown paper. Well done, Bluefin. The board, paddle and fin are stylish and designed to go together. The paddle blade is quite unusual, which may cause confusion over the front and back. A bonus point was a picture showing which way around to hold the paddle. I was also pleased to see a US fin box and removable fin because I like to change fins according to the type of race and water conditions.

One negative was that no QR waist leash or information on when one should be used was supplied. However, the ankle attachment supplied was perfectly usable on my own QR belt. The bag felt flimsy and cheaper than others but appeared reasonably water-resistant and easy to clean. The bag is the same size as for smaller models in the range,



and it wasn't as easy to get the board back in the bag as it could be. The fin is large compared to my other race fins and felt plasticky and heavy. However, it is more likely to withstand use in shallow waters or hitting submerged tree roots than carbon fins.

The pump is very compact, but with a double chamber and three settings, it is effective and of nice quality. However, with it being so compact, it took more work to pump the board up compared with taller pumps.

On first trying the board, I used all the standard kit supplied with the package.

However, the waterproof phone pouch supplied fell apart on taking it out of the packaging when still in the car park. It was brilliant to supply one, but the quality made me nervous about taking it on the water. I am small, 5'0 and around 57kg. The maximum rider weight for this board is 190kg, so as I do with other boards, I pumped to the minimum recommended PSI. The board did not feel stiff, especially on moving around on it. It felt much firmer and handled better when pumping up to max recommended PSI. The board felt stable, comfortable underfoot, and tracked well.



The supplied paddle felt heavy, and the blade shape needed to be more intuitive to get a good catch. The blade felt thick and heavy, and the pins holding the shaft at the right height felt clumsy and cheaply built. The paddle felt entry-level and more for all-rounder use than racing. An adjustable paddle is ideal for starting out, so you can shorten it as your technique improves, so this is a plus. On changing the paddle from one side to the other, forward momentum noticeably slowed. As I was paddling on still, flat water with no obstructions, I tried out the ankle leash. The ankle strap was the comfiest one I had tried.

I was keen to test a variety of my race kits instead of the packaged ones. Maintaining momentum and comfort was improved by swapping out to a more standard-shaped and significantly lighter race paddle. I have a selection of Starboard and Black Project US box fins, plus a flexible plastic river fin. Only the river fin fitted, but it did fit well. I often train on a river fin, so I used this. The board still felt nicely stable on the smaller fin, and I was pleased with my 2km time trial for a reasonably priced inflatable.

Towards the rear of the board is a rear arch bar in the centreline. This makes it easy to get your feet central while moving to the back of the board. Aside from the arch bar, the board's surface is all the same. Some boards have texture changes or small gaps in the tread, making it easier to tell how far back you have stepped compared to this model. Behind the arch bar is the air valve and then the carry handle at the far back of the board. The air valve sits exactly where my foot falls on step back turns. Although it means I know exactly where my foot is on the board, it wasn't comfortable and was distracting on buoy turns when trying to concentrate on dodging other racers. Despite this niggle, the board felt stable while moving back and forwards and nicely non-tippy while turning. The coiled leash stayed well out of my feet while at the back of the board.

I've raced the Nitro at club level and greatly enjoyed it. Most of the field were racing hard boards, so there was no equal comparison. It paddled relatively slowly over distance, and it was harder to maintain speed than I am used to on narrower/hard boards. I was very impressed with how well the Nitro performed at the start. I had no worries about losing balance in the chop, and I was even more impressed with how the board handled in a sprint race in a tight pack. It was more stable and faster than I expected.

Price: £699

<https://bluefinsupboards.com>

CONCLUSION

This was a super fun board for recreational paddling and racing at entry level. It was wide and stable enough for friends to be happy to have a try on. I would happily use it for events like the Trent 100, especially with the board having bungees for carrying essential kit. It would also be great in GBSUP challenge events and divisional club racing. Quality does seem lower than other inflatable race boards, but the price tag is more affordable. I would prefer more of the price to have been invested into board quality and a true US fin box above providing a paddle, fin and other accessories, which is where quality appears to fall. I will certainly choose to enter fun races with the Nitro and my own paddle but stick to a skinnier hard board for more competitive events.



Fly away – McConks 6' x 28" x 150 prototype inflatable SUP foil board

Words & photos: Tez Plavenieks

Cotswolds-based brand McConks has always been a forward-thinking, progressive SUP business. They've always had their fingers in other watersports pies due to owners Jen and Andy indulging in various other watersports growing up. Dig beneath their standard 10'6 offerings, and you'll find many other diverse and versatile toys in the McConks product catalogue. I've been fortunate to test their electric hydrofoil boards in the past. But until recently, there's never been a bona fide McConks inflatable foil board.

This model is very much a prototype, and I'm not even sure if McConks will be putting this into production. No less, it's interesting to get McConks take on the fly above water disciplines.

The 6' inflatable foil board reviewed is a well-manufactured product. Once inflated, it's a super rigid platform – although the compact nature of foil boards automatically reduces much of the deflection you get with standard iSUPs. That said, it's robust and hard-wearing with a quality grip pad. Ignore the straps come handles, as they're not accurately placed. Not that those detract from the board's overall performance though.

Most notably, with inflatable foil boards is what your foil attaches to. Being inflatable means there's an additional carbon plate

that needs to be affixed to the hull. This should be rigid and offer as minimal 'play' with the foil as possible. Some iFoil board makers don't get this right resulting in the foil plate flexing when trying to take flight. As you can imagine, this is a nightmare for riders learning – everything needs to be as rigid as possible.

Fortunately, the McConks inflatable foil board is bang up to the task. During testing, I paired it with my usual high-aspect (wide-span) foil which can put additional stress on foil plates. The McConks remained rigid and movement free, ensuring an easy take-off and stable flight.

Foil boards are usually relatively compact – this one being no different. As an inflatable, however, it does sit on the water instead of in it, making it feel lively and nimble. Some paddlers may require time to dial it in. I used it on a few choppy days, but after a short period, everything settled down.

In flight, the 6' remains very composed for an iFoil board. Glidey redirects and pumping are responsive. Touchdowns are mellow, and should you fall, the air-filled nature of the McConks means it's no issue if you land on it. That's an additional attractive point about using iFoil and its ease of storage and transportability.

Price: £TBC
www.McConks.com



Dryrobe® Women's Eco Thermal Boots

By Sarah Thornley (Supjunkie)

Dryrobe is well known for creating the world's first outdoor changing robe. With the rise of SUP, wild and cold-water swimming and other outdoor activities, it's no wonder sales have rocketed, especially with their reputation for design and well-made products. So, what would be the perfect accompaniment when you step off or out of the water to keep you even warmer – thermal boots.

Easy to pull on and fully fleece lined with 100% recycled polyester, there is an instep inside for comfort and support. With a water-resistant, 100% recycled, quick-drying upper and adjustable ankle cord for a snug fit, these boots are now my go-to footwear for all trips to the water. Knowing the Great British weather, they will get many months of use as I try to paddle all year.

A decent grip tread sole is made with 80% EVA rubber (for softness and flexibility) and 20% algae-based Bloom Rise (TM). This means they are better for our planet, and for more information, it's worth checking out www.bloommaterials.com. Dryrobe is a company that is constantly evolving, with a commitment to innovative improvements to its range. They are proud to be B Corp Certified and are passionate about sustainability.

I am usually a UK 7½, so the size 8 was perfect. Nothing is worse than cold extremities, and these Eco Thermal Boots are a nice game changer. Comfortable and so, so warm!

Price: £80
<https://dryrobe.com/>



CONCLUSION

If McConks brought this model to market, they'd have a decent inflatable foil board to offer riders. If this is the case, we're sure it'll be tweaked, so you can be sure of a proper top-shelf product if it does materialise. Fun to use in SUP foil mode; it'll also accommodate wing action. Here's hoping we have something of this range from McConks soon.



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By Greg Spencer

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