GROWTH SPORTS: STAND-UP PADDLE SURFING

The art of standing up to paddle a canoe or kayak has its roots in the ancient ways of the Hawaiian islanders. It's becoming very popular among today's mainstream watersports enthusiasts because it is a great way to stay fit and also a very sociable way of spending time on the water.



Stand up for a quality workout

The sport of surfing changed in the 1960s when boards made from synthetic materials rather than traditional wood became common. It was still a coastal craze, however, with board manufacturers concentrating most of their efforts on the surfers' paradises that sprang up at suitable beaches in places such as California, Australia, New Zealand, the Bay of Biscay and the Pacific Islands.

Enterprising board and surfwear manufacturers may have dreamed of spreading the sport's popularity inland to Middle America and, from there, to every waterway on earth, but this remained impractical until a new, more recent trend convinced people that if you are prepared to stand up and paddle, you can enjoy intense exercise and have lots of fun on a board in places where decent-sized waves have never been seen. It is a recent development that is allowing many ordinary people to tap into the ancient Polynesian way of moving on water and has become known as stand-up paddle (SUP) surfing.

According to Dave Parmenter, a designer of stand-up boards for Honolulu-based specialist provider C4 Waterman, this emerging global sport owes everything to Hawaii, where SUP surfing has long been a way for beach boys to move around. All his company has done since its foundation in 2007 is modernise an ancient tradition, he says. Because Hawaiian people are open to sharing their traditions and are good teachers, he claims it is only natural for SUP surfing to have become popular on whitewater courses and other inland waterways. "The surfing market is limited, but what we have shown is that people can get on a surfboard

C4 Waterman designer Dave Parmenter tackling tough SUP surfing conditions in the Maldives.

C4 Waterman



C4 Waterman's Archie Kalepa was the first person to stand-up paddle the Grand Canyon.

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anywhere," he explains. "We have developed lightweight equipment with modern materials [often glass-reinforced plastic using epoxy resin, compatible with the polystyrene foam used in the core of the board] and if you employ the right technique, you should suffer no repetitive strain injury while having an excellent core body work-out that helps people lose weight. This is what started turning people onto this. And you and your partner can paddle next to each other and talk, just like hiking. It's simple and it's fun."

There is no need to wear a wet-suit to enjoy SUP surfing; any outdoor clothing that can stand a bit of a soaking, with a life-vest on top, is good, and items offering special protection against insects and from ultraviolet radiation from the sun are particularly appropriate. Many brands that specialise in windsurfing and kitesurfing jackets, fleeces, T-shirts and shorts are playing in the stand-up space these days, with Quiksilver, O'Neill, The North Face, Sugoi and NRS among the big names. C4 Waterman has its own range, which includes long-sleeve tops that offer additional protection against rashes and designs that mimic traditional Polynesian tattoos.

In terms of the paddles themselves, companies such as C4 Waterman recommend that enthusiasts calculate the ideal length of the paddle they use as around 20 centimetres more than their own height. The usual flat-styled canoe paddle with a longer handle is not ideal. C4 Waterman's SUP-specific product has a keel-shaped blade neck to help steer the board straight.

When snow is thin on the ground, Olympic gold medal skier Julia Mancuso is one athlete who is reported to be a big SUP fan for the workout it gives her on her abdominal and leg muscles and because it's an activity that is easy on the knees. "Women just love this for the fitness component," Mr Parmenter says. "And if the water's clear, you can see the bottom, every detail of the reef. It's like the Disney film Fantasia. You can't see that if you are down close to the water or in a kayak."

As well as surfers who find themselves too far from the ocean, SUP surfing is also proving attractive to serious kayakers. Dave Parmenter explains that many class V kayakers are having to travel ever further afield to find challenging new conditions; in lighter moments, a growing number of them are taking to stand up paddling to enjoy easier rivers in a new way. This is for everyone, he insists.



SUP surfing is particularly popular among women because it gives a core workout while still providing plenty of opportunity for socialising.

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