

# WW

conversations



Emma Love Photographer: Graham Woolven

## Interviews: Emma Love

On August 1st 2019, British Canoeing launched the Stand Up Paddleboard White Water Coach Award. In a series of interviews, Emma Love grabbed some zoom time with eight of the extraordinary women to have qualified or are on route to qualifying. All with unique stories and interests but all with one passion in common – the incredible paddlesport that is white water SUP!

Emma Love is an Ambassador for both British Canoeing #ShePaddles and California Watersport Collective.

<http://www.wotbikinipaddleboarding.co.uk>

# Beth Kirby

Facebook: Beth-K-SUP-Coaching



Photo: Beth Kirby

It was lovely to catch up with Beth Kirby and discuss SUP! Beth is a raft coach and medal winner, a kayaker and more recently, a qualified WW SUP coach based in the East Midlands. We chatted about Beth's passion for paddleboarding on white water and her predictions of how she thinks our amazing sport will develop in the next few years.



#ShePaddles



Photo: Chris Kippers Bond

### What was your first paddling experience?

My first paddling experiences were when I was a kid. We used to go on lots of water sports holidays, and I then went on to achieve my one star (kayaking) with the Girl Guides. But it wasn't until I went to university in Nottingham that my interest in paddling took off, and I now paddle pretty much anything I can on white water including, rafting, kayaking and of course SUP!

### What was it about white water SUP that sparked your interest?

Partly from seeing other people do it on the course and thinking to myself that having a go would be a bit of a laugh. I also came across it when I was not massively enjoying kayaking, mainly because of hating being stuck inside a boat. White water SUP felt like a perfect way of getting my enjoyment back. Interestingly, I have found that spending time playing on a paddleboard has helped build my confidence for getting back in a kayak.



Photo: Beth Kirby





Since British Canoeing launched the coaching qualification we have seen a lot more people coming to try WW SUP

Photo: Ewan Vernon

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**What's your primary motivation for paddling white water on a SUP?**

I enjoy the challenge of it, the feeling is fantastic when you successfully paddle down a rapid, and WW SUP is very different from the other paddling I do. There's a massive technical aspect to it that interests me, and I like the fact that it removes the barrier between male and female paddlers. We all have to work hard to stay on our boards!

**I know you are incredibly competitive when it comes to paddling and have accumulated lots of competition experience with rafting. This culminated in winning bronze and gold medals (in 2017) at the Worlds in Japan. Do you find your drive to win is transferring to white water SUP?**

I have not had a huge chance to have a go at the competition side, but I would love to one day. Some tremendous white water SUP competitions are happening in the USA that I would like to participate in. For the moment, I am focusing on building up my paddling skills; I would

describe my competitive edge as currently being focused on being the best I can be within the industry.

**What is your prediction for how our sport will grow and its direction in the next few years?**

As a sport, it is progressing pretty quickly in the UK. Since British Canoeing launched the coaching qualification (and with that, an increase in paddlers becoming qualified), we have seen a lot more people coming to try WW SUP. So already the sport is much bigger than it was a year ago. I predict we will see WW SUP progress in three directions, SUP X, river surfing and river running.

SUP X is excellent for mass participation and showcasing the sport – it is especially accessible on lower grade sections of the river. I think we will see SUP X competitions being held on artificial courses around the UK in the future.

With river running, I think we will see this split into those paddlers who are mainly interested in surfing on the wave and

those who love to paddle a stretch of a white water river. We witnessed a lot of interest in river surfing in August of last year where paddlers were heading out on the Thames. I think this will grow, particularly with freestyle kayakers wanting to have a go at something a little bit different. What would help develop this side of the sport is having artificial waves purposely built for WW SUP, as we have seen across the US.

**How did you find the process of becoming a qualified white water SUP coach?**

I enjoyed the process. I had previously not done any 'intentional' coaching and instead had just helped people out with little bits here and there. I found the 15 or so sessions you have to complete post orientation and prior to the assessment helped me think about how to structure support for paddlers ranging from beginners and up to advanced levels. It also made me reflect on how to understand different individual's motivations for getting on the water.

**With the British Canoeing WW SUP coaching qualification being relatively new and significant uptake of women becoming qualified or on route to being qualified, what advice would you give women who may be interested in going down the coaching route?**

Go for it! Attend the WW SUP two-day coach orientation; go and enjoy the experience and remember it is pitched at all levels of paddlers and up to grade two water. So, this is not about getting down big grade three rivers and stoppers; it is about focusing on the technical aspects of paddling. Keep in mind; women are better at the technical aspect of paddling because of our size and strength. Also, talk to the ladies who have already qualified or are on that journey; they will be able to give you lots of advice. And finally, think about having a female coach mentor to support you; they will help you on your path to instructing and coaching.



Photo: Ewan Vernon

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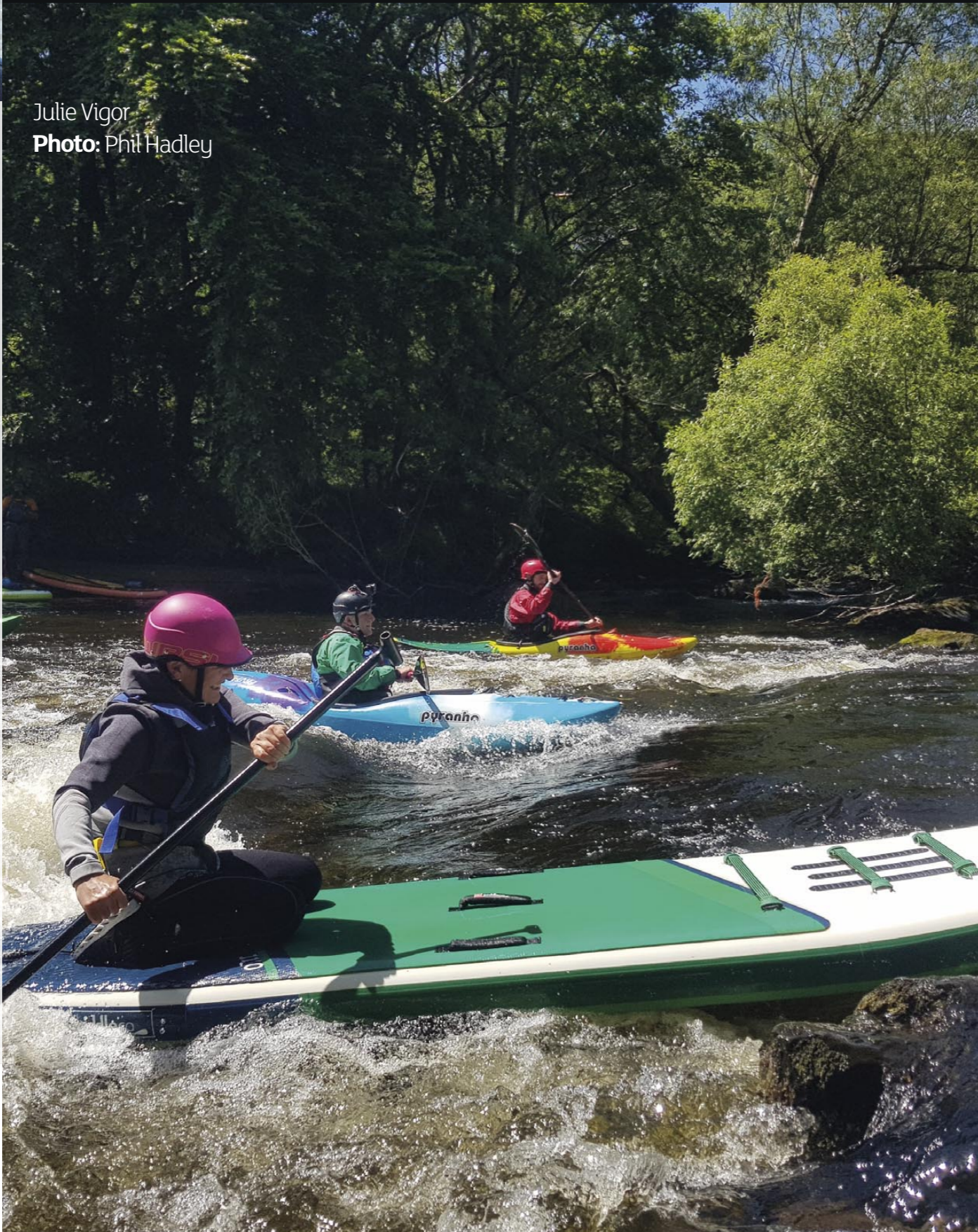
# Julie Vigor

@Julie.Vigor.SUP

The last 12 months for Julie Vigor have been full of successes, including representing British Canoeing as a #ShePaddles Ambassador, qualifying as a Sheltered Water Coach, launching her own business Phoenix Paddlesport and completing her WW SUP Coach Orientation. What is even more impressive, she only started paddling four years ago!

Julie Vigor  
Photo: Martin Harrall

Julie Vigor  
Photo: Phil Hadley



### Tell me about the very first time you had a go at paddling.

My very first experience of paddling was about 25 years ago. I was working in IT sales, and one of my clients invited me to paddle at Symonds Yat. We spent an afternoon going down the rapids in kayaks, and I think I swam every single time! I didn't paddle again until four years ago when my sons joined the Air Cadets. They had both decided to have a go at kayaking; I was invited to join them. I can only sum up the first couple of months as paddling around and around in circles, but then I was introduced to a fantastic coach. Suddenly we found ourselves being taught in a range of craft, including kayaks, open canoes and slalom boats – it was such a great way to get lots of paddling experience. I even entered a slalom C1 competition and much to my surprise, I won!

### What is it about white water SUP that has got you so excited, and what drives you to keep playing?

My first ever attempt was last year at Cullum Lock with WW SUP coach Louise Royle. Louise was kind enough to meet and help me with understanding how to paddle a board on white water. I fell off, swam lots and immediately fell in love with the sport! I now own my own white water specific board, a Tambo Core (10.5 Lady), which I adore experimenting on. You will often find me playing with pivot turns, breaking in and out etc. and trying to do all of this as fast as possible! What drives me to keep having a go? I enjoy the challenge of white water, and I love paddling SUPs. The combination of putting a board on white water makes that challenge even more significant. I love it!

### It has been a challenging year for so many of us in the UK, and I know you had lots of plans, including becoming qualified as a white water SUP coach. How did the year turn out for you in the end?

I found it tough not to get on the water, especially as I had by then decided I would like to become a SUP Coach. Lockdown made me focus on completing some of the British Canoeing online courses, including Safeguarding, Paddleability and Coaching the Mind. I also began learning yoga because I would love to teach this on SUPs eventually. When lockdown lifted, I was lucky enough to get out on the water and complete my Core Coach qualification. This, in turn, opened the door to completing some of the coaching orientations and getting ready for exciting assessments, and I am now a qualified Sheltered Water SUP Coach! So yes, what started as a challenging year, on reflection, turned into a positive and a very busy year! .

### I have heard you describe your SUP journey as several stages, including qualifying to coach sheltered, open and white water. Can you tell me more about this?

I guess to put it into context; my life has changed drastically in the past three years. I left my relationship, moved into my own home, stabilised myself financially, found an entirely new set of friends (through paddling), and I am now seriously thinking about living on a canal boat! But the most exciting aspect of all this change is that I can now follow my passion – being on the water! Before SUP, I loved paddling, but it was very much a hobby. Now it is much more! The pandemic has made me realise how important it is to follow dreams. My dream is to share my passion, and my goal is to teach SUP, whether on a river, a lake, via wellness sessions, SUP yoga, or white water. I love it all! So yes, qualifying to coach on sheltered, open and white water is very much part of my plan to be able to offer SUP in all its variety!



Julie Vigor Photo: Martin Harrall



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Julie Vigor Photo: Phil Hadley



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**Outside of your desire to coach SUP, do you have any white water rivers you would like to paddle in 2021 and beyond?**

I recently joined lots of European SUP groups on Facebook, and it has made me aware of the lovely rivers over there. My dream is to buy a campervan, go to Spain, to Northern Italy and head over to Slovenia to paddle on the Soca. I want to meet different people and do different things – I don't want to be tied down anymore. So many new adventures and opportunities are presenting themselves, and I am loving life!

**And do you have a favourite river in the UK you like to take your board on?**

Symonds Yat on the River Wye is a great favourite of mine. From a novice's point of view, it is fantastic because it is a relatively short bit of rapid, and you know you will come out of it at the bottom. It is a great park and play, easy to access, in a beautiful part of the world, plus there's an excellent pub for when you get off the water! And, if you want to carry on paddling (downstream) from the rapid, you can easily follow the river to Monmouth and Redbrook. It is such a gorgeous stretch of water to experience.



Julie Vigor Photo: Martin Harrall