

WW

conversations



Photographer: Graham Woolven

Emma in slalom action

Interviews: Emma Love

On August 1st 2019, British Canoeing launched the Stand Up Paddleboard White Water Coach Award. In 2020, five women gained this award, and four more are now on route to qualifying. In a series of interviews, Emma Love grabbed some Zoom time with these extraordinary women to chat about their individual journeys and why the incredible paddlesport that is white water SUP is attracting so many women.

Emma Love is a British Canoeing stand up paddleboard white water coach and #ShePaddles ambassador. Emma will be launching her own SUP business Wotbikini later this year.

www.britishcanoeing.org.uk/news/2019/shepaddles-spread-the-love
www.britishcanoeing.org.uk/news/2019/become-a-stand-up-paddleboard-coach

Jessica Phillip

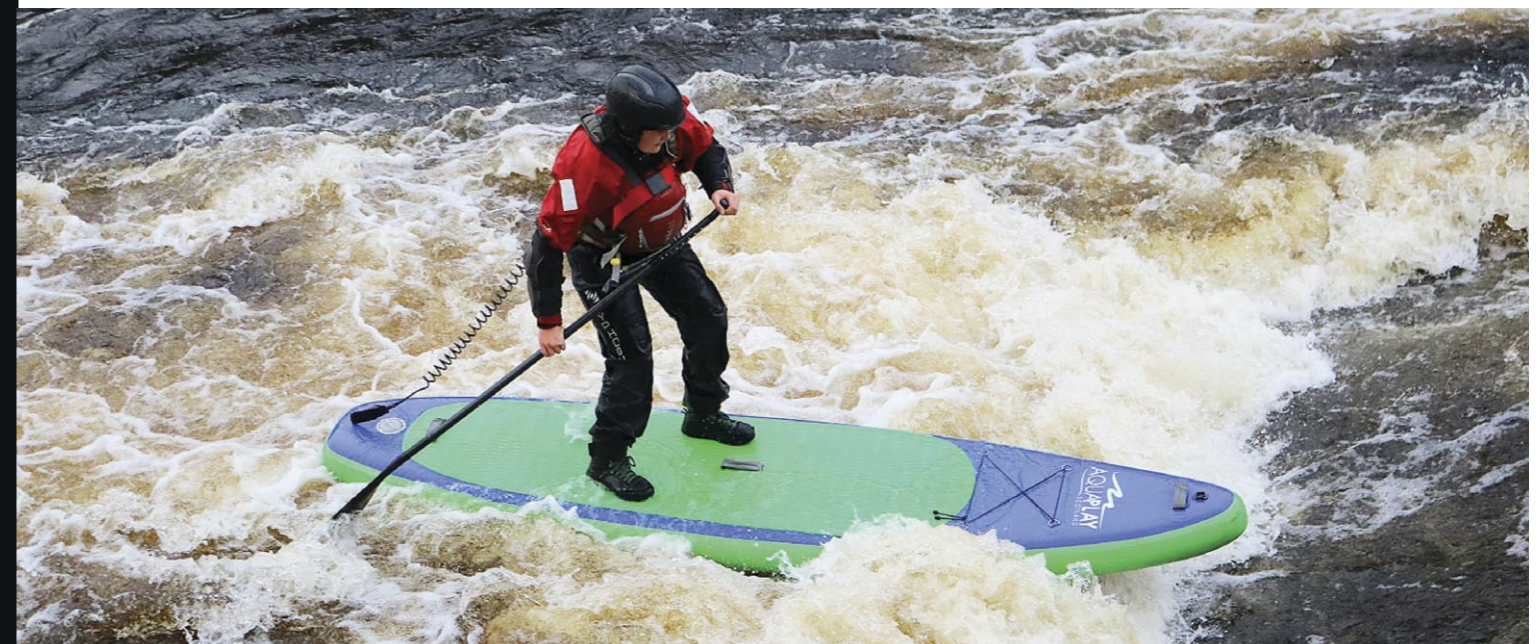
www.facebook.com/DipperPaddleBoarding



I was thrilled to interview Jess, one of five women to have qualified in 2020 as a British Canoeing Stand Up Paddleboard White Water Coach. Based in Fort William on the west coast of Scotland, Jess had just returned from three weeks sailing on the tall ship, Tenacious. We grabbed an hour to chat about her journey, the openness of our sport and the projects she is currently involved in.



#ShePaddles



Jessica Phillip Photo: Paul Klum

Tell me about your very first experience of paddling

It was probably when I was about 11 years old, at Loch Park with the Keith Swimming Club. They were doing sessions during the summer, and I just really enjoyed messing around in the kayaks. The group I was with were supportive, and I enjoyed being around them – it was a fun environment to develop my skills.

I know you paddle lots of different types of craft, what are you typically paddling at the moment?

It's quite a range, for work, I paddle open canoes, so river and flat water, plus I do a bit of sea kayaking. For fun, I like white water kayaking and then, of course, white water SUP.

Describe for me your very first white water SUP experience?

I was at university at the time, and I had come back to stay with my parents for Christmas. Jim Gibson had got really into paddling SUP, and he asked my brother and me if we would fancy going for a paddle on the river A'nn. I thought yeah why not let's give this a go! I felt confident having paddled this particular river in my kayak, but when we arrived, and I saw Jim in all his body armour, I thought oh gosh, what have I got myself into? When I got on the water, I thought this is ridiculous! Lots of falling off but also, really fun. It made what I consider an easy river challenging again, which was nice.



Jessica Phillip
Photo: Denise Pentland

You definitely need to be able to read the water, every ripple and wave – the board doesn't allow you to muddle through.

What's motivated you to continue playing on white water using a SUP?

I suppose for me; it started off being about community because I paddled with friends. Later on, it additionally became about making the rivers challenging again and pushing myself.

I find WW SUP interesting because it punishes you if you get things wrong, but this means you learn quickly and I like the fact that you have to get it technically right whereas with kayaking I find you can get away with a lot more. You definitely need to be able to read the water, every ripple and wave – the board doesn't allow you to muddle through.

Huge congratulations on becoming a British Canoeing SUP white water coach. 2020 has been an incredible year with so many women qualifying and more on route to becoming qualified. Why do you think we are seeing such a significant uptake?

I think we are seeing a lot of women qualifying because WW SUP is new and exciting! More women are taking up the sport, and so there are more developing and moving through. Also, because our sport is completely new, we don't have a stereotype attached to it as of yet.

I think that is a really interesting perspective, do you think other paddlesports come with a stereotype attached?

Yes, just because they have been set up a lot longer. For example, with white water kayaking, the image that comes to mind is typically a guy dropping big waterfalls; canoeing is maybe a big guy with a beard. I suppose even flatwater paddleboarding has a bit of a stereotype – a person in a bikini. WW SUP has not got a stereotype yet; it feels open.

What words of encouragement would you give to women who may be interested in becoming a coach but may feel unsure whether to take the next steps?

I'd say give it a go! Our community is supportive, and I found the actual assessment itself was the least stressful

I've done, it just felt nice. The sessions you complete running up to your assessment and the ideas you work through because of doing these, make you feel ready – it gives you lots of experience which is good. I also recommend having a mentor or another paddler to chat with. For me, I valued Paul Klym, who was on the same pathway; it was cool sharing ideas with him and adventures out on the river. I also continued to have support from Jim Gibson (my mentor) plus Phil Hadley, Alex Tonge and Anthony Ing who delivered the two-day WW SUP discipline-specific training, which was helpful.

2020 has had some real high points for you. Alongside gaining your coaching qualification and setting up your own business, Dipper Paddle Boarding, you are currently a British Canoeing #ShePaddles ambassador and part of the Scottish Canoeing Association 'Female Equality Group'

As an ambassador, I have found it pleasant connecting and getting to know people. I am excited to be involved in the new female equality group here in Scotland. It is very similar to #ShePaddles. Our main aim is to support women who are wanting to gain higher coaching qualifications, something we currently see a deficit of in Scotland. We also want to support and increase the number of women entering paddlesports at grassroots.

I know you have just come back from three weeks volunteering on a tall ship, have you also managed to have local adventures?

Last year, I was planning to head off abroad, but instead, I have been exploring little bits of water locally. In the summer I did a mini-expedition along Loch Treig from Corour to Tulloch Station, and more recently, I paddled the length of the Burn of Boyne right outside my parent's house. It is usually a very small rocky burn, but the levels had come up, so I thought, why not! It was a lot of fun, and I even saw a Kingfisher which I never thought I would see on this river. I have enjoyed exploring new places in Scotland and my local area; there are many more trips I still want to do!

www.canoescotland.org/female-equality-group



Jenna Sanders

<https://flyinggeckooutdoors.co.uk>

Chatting with Jenna Sanders was really interesting. Not only is Jenna a paddler, a British Canoeing coach, leader and coach educator, but she is also now on route to taking her white water SUP coach assessment! We discussed what originally made her fall in love with paddling, her experience as a student completing the white water SUP discipline specific training and what advice she would give women interested in starting their journey to becoming white water SUP coaches.

Jenna Sanders
Photo: Sophie Dollar



Which craft do you paddle?

First and foremost, I am a canoeist, that's where I have the majority of my leadership and coaching qualifications. I used to play canoe polo and white water kayak, but I much prefer white water canoeing. I got into paddling SUP (on flat and open water) quite a few years ago when it first became popular.

Describe your first ever experience of paddling

I was about 20 years old and on holiday in France with my parents. We visited the bottom of the Verdon Gorge, I decided to hire a kayak and paddle up the gorge, and it was just beautiful! On my return to Warwick, I joined the university kayak club, and it went from there.

Exploring that gorge was formative. For me, the primary driver for getting on the water is being able to access beautiful places. Interestingly with lockdown, it has made me realise that while I enjoy paddling in the countryside, I would rather be out on a river up in the mountains.

You started paddling white water SUP last year. I immediately assumed this would be an addition to your business portfolio, so I was very intrigued when you described your primary motivation as 'creating space for you to have fun'.

Yes, my first time playing on white water using a SUP was in spring 2020 just after the first lockdown was lifted, and it was just great to have time to mess about and coach myself. I've got all the basic principles; I know how to deal with white water and how to SUP, so it was really good fun to join these up, experiment, play and see what would happen.

If you're going to be a coach and if you're going to be a coach educator, it is really useful and essential always to have something going on which is new, that's difficult, and you're not good at. If you're always a beginner at something, you retain that bit of understanding of how hard it is to learn and this then benefits your students.

Will I coach this discipline? I genuinely don't know. The majority of my work through my business, 'Flying Gecko', is coach education and leadership. I don't have huge amounts of time for just pure coaching, but it would be nice.

What encouragement and advice would you give to women who may be interested in qualifying as a coach but are feeling unsure if they are good enough?

If you are already SUP'ing on white water, then there is absolutely no reason not to start on your coaching journey because the qualification pathway is so open, there are no time limits, and there is no stress. You can go and complete the first stage (core coach), see how you get on and if you enjoy it, then take the next step and complete the WW SUP discipline specific training. If you want to re-visit core coach at a later stage, you can, and the same goes for the two-day discipline-specific training. I would absolutely encourage women to go, give it a try and do it for your own fun and enjoyment. And if you get to the point where you are ready to do the assessment – awesome!

What would you advise women who are thinking 'I can't even envision getting to the Core Coach stage, let alone putting myself forward for the final assessment'?

I would recommend coaching and observing other WW SUP Coaches, going and chatting with them, getting on the water, playing, and seeing what is going on. When I am running a core coach, I want to make sure my students understand this is their space where they can make mistakes. Yes, there's a lot of theory because coaching is a skill set, but the course shouldn't be intimidating. I want to think that everybody running these courses are doing so in the atmosphere of let's try stuff and if it works, cool! If it doesn't work, cool! It doesn't matter, because you have learnt something.





Jenna Sanders **Photo:** Andy Cass



For many women, we have an expectation that we need to be perfect before we can even attend these courses. I know I did! Why do you think this happens, and how do we change this?

I find a higher proportion of women who come on my courses are self-deprecating, they will say, "I don't know if I am good enough to be here" and are visibly worried. Whereas I find men are much more likely to come and give it go. It is really hard to change this expectation, but as a coach educator, I make sure the environment is set up to be positive, kind and ego-free. The space needs to allow people to relax and get what they need out of the day. As a paddling community, we still need to be better communicators and say, "It is just a training course for you to come along, enjoy and take away new skills."

How did you find the two-day discipline training from the perspective of being a student rather than coming to it in your usual role as a coach educator?

I went knowing full well my WW SUP skills were somewhat lacking and what I needed from those two days was to understand the discipline better! I was purely there to learn. I was delighted to say to everyone, "You know what guys, I'm not very good!"

Running the training course were Anthony Ing, Alex Tonge and Phil Hadley and they are just so informative. I had so much technical and tactical input, and I just kept asking all the time, how do you do this and what about that? It was such a fun time, learning.

Jenna Sanders **Photo:** Andy Cass



Jenna Sanders **Photo:** Andy Cass