



Emma in action

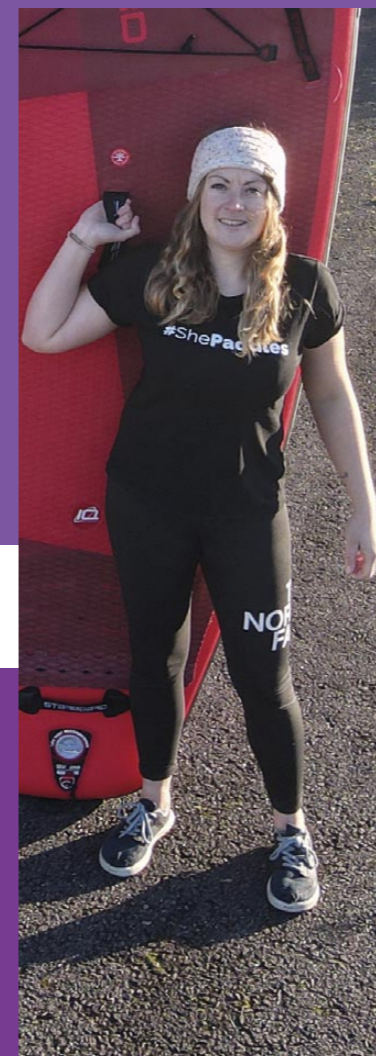
Photographer: Graham Woolven

#ShePaddles INTERVIEWS

Interviews: Emma Love

After receiving over 150 applications from around the country, British Canoeing, Canoe Wales and the Scottish Canoe Association were excited to announce the #ShePaddles Ambassadors for 2022. Sixteen inspirational women chosen to promote paddling and encourage 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!

www.wotbikinipaddleboarding.co.uk



Emy Mcleod

Based in Aviemore, Emy is an accomplished paddler, coach and runs her own successful paddle boarding club and business, Strathspey SUP. We chat about why she feels it is so important for children to be able to experience the outdoors, what continues to excite her about coaching and her plans to complete some incredible endurance paddling trips.

Pics: Neil Wilson

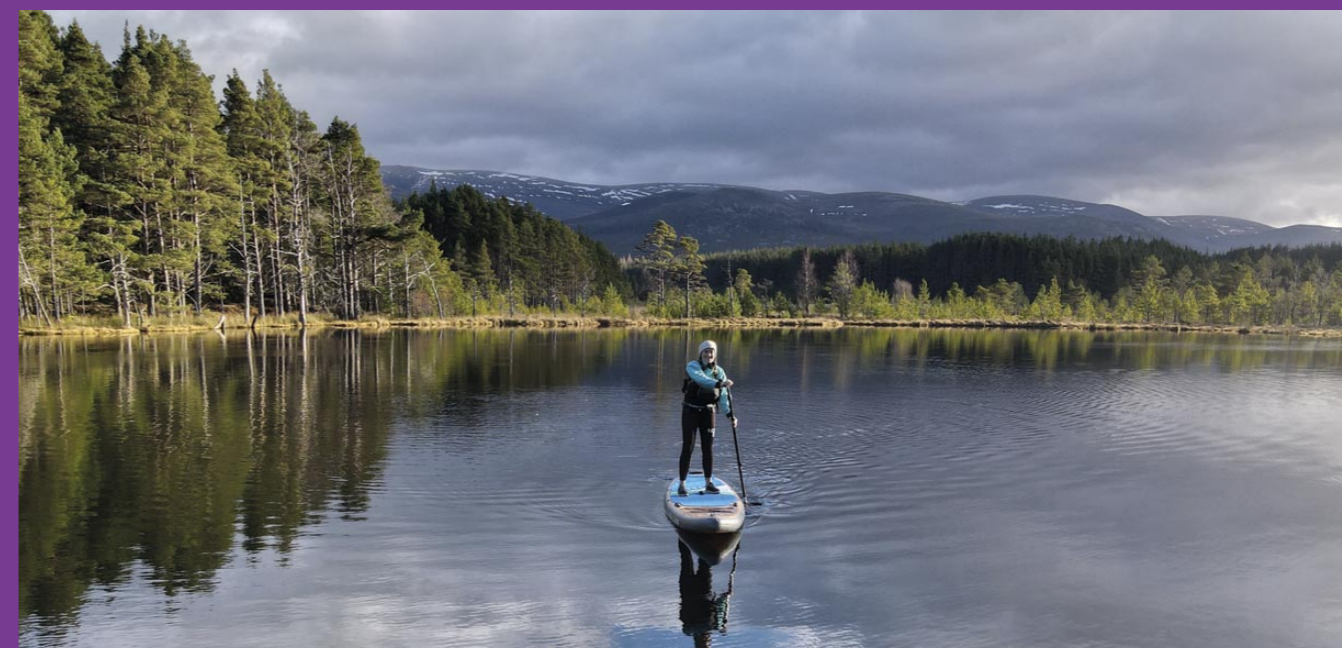
www.facebook.com/StrathspeySUP
[@strathspey.sup](https://www.instagram.com/strathspey.sup)

Tell me about the start of your paddling journey?

I still remember my primary and secondary school camps - we would go on little residential where we would be away for a couple of nights and take part in a whole host of activities, including canoeing. It was your basic 'get in a canoe', play some games, fall out and swim. It was great! I did a little bit of club paddling while at university, and this was then followed by a business career (in the music industry), but it wasn't my passion - I felt something was missing.

What led you to change from working in the music industry to becoming an outdoor instructor?

Before and for the first couple of years at university, I spent my summers volunteering for the Rotary Clubs. They ran a programme to promote leadership called the Rotary Youth Leadership Award on Loch Tay with the Abernethy Trust. I worked as a camp leader and mentor. I would watch their outdoor instructors, and I was like, this is what I want to do - I belong outside! So, I did an intensive six-month outdoor instructor training in the Highlands just near Aviemore. The course covered paddle sports, summer Mountain Leader, skiing, climbing, biking and rafting. It was awesome - I wouldn't be where I am today without going through that training. I now have my own paddleboard business, Strathspey SUP, I work as a freelance coach, and I am excited to be currently going down the British Canoeing Provider route.





Looking back on how formative your early outdoor experiences were, how important do you think it is for children and young people to be able to access outdoor residentials?

I think it is a really important part of children's education, even if it's for one or two days or even just an activity day. These experiences can plant a little seed, and each child is always going to have that memory of going to camp for the first time (and being away from home) or paddling down a loch or river in a canoe. With the pandemic, some residentials have shut down, and I know funding is an issue, but I hope this will be resolved – I think every kid should experience the outdoors.

Do you think there are now more outdoor industry opportunities than when you left school?

Yes, I think there are. I knew I wanted to do something outdoors, but unfortunately, I remember being told, *"There is not really a job there, and why don't you do something else?"* There now seem to be lots more courses and outdoor degrees – it's becoming more openly accepted as a career.

What is it that drives and inspires you to coach?

Seeing individuals progress is rewarding, and equally, I find their progress inspires me. If I can help them on their journeys, offer them some coaching and introduce them to something new, that's awesome! To see individuals grow, achieve goals, excel and go way beyond my ability is amazing to see.

I know you have a real passion for white water SUP – how did this come about?

Matt Gambles (Paddle Surf Scotland) got me into SUP years ago when he took me on a coastal paddle. We had a great time, getting to go places only accessible by paddleboards. But I think the 'spark' really came from going on white water. Jim Gibson introduced and has played a big part in my WW SUP development. I kept seeing Jim going out on rivers, and I was like, well, I will give this a try, and I loved it! It's good times with Jim; he has definitely helped and pushed me to get better. Now I coach alongside him, which is fantastic – we have been coaching every Sunday throughout the winter up on the River Spey. We have trainee coaches attending, people on their pathway to becoming WW coaches, some

who are now ready for their assessment, as well as people wanting to go for their training; it is a great community we have established.

I understand you have a keen interest in endurance paddling?

I like challenging myself, seeing how much the body can take, not just physically – I think it's a challenge mentally. I completed a trip with Jessica Phillip in October (2021) on the River Tay - we did 81.5 kilometres in a day totalling 11.5 hours. It was a mix of flat, white and moving water – we started at Kenmore on Loch Tay, at Grandtully, we paddled the Grade 2(3) white water sections. The water picked up again towards Campsie Linn and down the Stanley area, and then finally it went pretty flat towards Perth, where we hit a headwind, so that was pretty hard. We were lucky to have a good water level that day, which helped us a lot – if it had been lower, I think we would have bailed. We were careful to plan our trip with a backup crew and cut off points. We knew if we were not at these points at specific times, we would not finish the trip, and we would have to get off the water. It was a fantastic trip!

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Any trips planned for this year and beyond?

This year, I hope to paddle 'all' the Scottish canal waterways. Anyone can sign up on the website <https://www.scottishcanals.co.uk/canal-challenge-200-2/> to take part – just select the canal you would like to paddle. I've also got quite a few plans for the future – I want to see how long I can paddle for (again in a day), whether it's linking lochs together, making river descents or circumnavigating some of the Scottish islands. It's going to be awesome!

Charlotte Ditchburn

Based in Cumbria, Charlotte took up SUP just 18 months ago. We caught up over zoom to talk about her paddling journey, why she is keen to encourage more people to get involved in improving and campaigning for access to the outdoors and what steps we can all take to support this important cause.

Pics: Gemma Scope Photography and Jon Ditchburn

Instagram: @publicrightsofwayexplorer
<https://prowexplorer.com> #BigPaddleCleanup

What was your first paddling experience?

My family and I have always lived in the Lake District, so we have always been pretty outdoorsy, including paddling on the lakes. But our first canoeing experience wasn't the best. We set off, the wind picked up, and we went down to the other end of the lake pretty rapidly! At that point, my mum and I said, "We're not paddling back against those (scary) waves," and sent my poor dad back on foot for the car whilst we sat and had a coffee!

How did you discover SUP?

My first attempt was just over a year ago. I had moved to Suffolk (for work), and my immediate thought was, 'I can't paddle down here! There is nowhere to paddle – where are the lakes? Where do I go?' I then discovered a group called the Outdoorsy Type – they organise walks and get-togethers. I mustered up the courage to join them and enjoyed myself. They organised some SUP lessons, and I decided I would give it a go – most of our group had never been on a SUP, so we were all a bit wobbly jelly legged. Within the first two minutes of my being on a board, I ended up in the water! By the end of the session, I had managed to stand up and paddle, but my legs the next day! I hadn't realised just how many muscles I do not use, plus I couldn't lift my arms above my shoulders!



Why did you decide to apply for the role of British Canoeing #ShePaddles Ambassador?

I watched last year's Ambassadors being super inspiring and amazing, but I didn't see someone I related to, who did what I was doing. I sent my application explaining how I wanted to represent the everyday person who paddles. Plus, my passion for encouraging more people to get involved in improving and campaigning for access to the outdoors - both on the water and the land. Much to my surprise, I was offered the role!

I understand you are supporting the British Canoeing Clear Access Clear Waters Campaign.

Yes, I am really excited to be supporting this campaign. In England and Wales, we legally have access to only 4% per cent of our rivers. The Countryside and Rights of way Act 2000 opened up lots of land, but it didn't do the same with our waterways. The campaign wants to change this so that we will all have water navigational rights – this would align us with Scotland, where you can pretty much paddle wherever you like. The campaign also encourages everyone to do their bit by picking up any rubbish they see on the water. Sadly, 80% of our marine rubbish comes from our inland waterways. Just think, if everyone picked something up, can you imagine how much litter we would prevent from entering the sea?

It is extraordinary that we only have a legal right to access 4% of our waterways in England. What do you think the current effect of this is?

In England, it either creates a barrier - people are just too afraid to use blue spaces because they are confused about the rules and which permits or licences they need. Alternatively, people jump on the water, which means they can get fined. Wouldn't it be great if one day we all had the right to get on any water with the confidence of knowing that we are allowed to be here and can take our family and friends without worrying about a landowner appearing or a big company slapping a fine on us?



Who do you think needs to take the lead in making this change?

I think it's got to come from those prominent voices, including Natural England and British Canoeing. I am pleased to see how both these organisations recently promoted the Countryside Code and how this applies to us on the water. As paddlers, we need to make sure we use public rights of way and not just tramping over peoples' fields. We also need to know how to deal calmly with confrontational situations when they arise. Some landowners will never be happy, but if you know your legal rights and explain them, it may help you carry on along your route without getting into a fight.

At ground level, how can we help?

Clubs, instructors and coaches can help by introducing the Countryside Code to individuals at the beginning of their paddling journey. This would promote a collective understanding of the use and protection of the environment around us.

Will there be any national campaigns that everyone can get involved in?

Yes! British Canoeing is launching the #BigPaddleCleanup on March 12th. This will run from Sunday, June 5th (World Environment Day) to June 12th. The aim is to highlight the current state of our inland and coastal waters, add pressure on our government and large organisations to curb continued pollution and strengthen regulations around single-use plastics, effluent releases etc. I am excited to be getting involved and promoting this at a local level here in the Lake District.

Do you think we will have the right to paddle all of our waterways in both England and Wales one day?

I'm hopeful - Wales might well lead the way. They are doing lots with land access at the moment – for example, opening up footpaths to cyclists and horse riders. I predict they will go in the same direction as Scotland. I think there is hope for the future, it might take a few more years, but we should get there in the end.