

WW

conversations



Emma coaching

Interviews: Emma Love

Following the launch of the British Canoeing Stand Up Paddle Board White Water Coach Award in 2019, Emma Love interviewed four incredible women who were the first to qualify and four who are currently on route to qualifying. Since conducting these interviews in February 2020, many more women have started their own coaching journeys. A wonderful testament to the inclusivity of the incredible sport that is White Water SUP!

www.wotbikinipaddleboarding.co.uk

Photographer: Graham Woolven

Louise Royle

Facebook: Louise Royle



Photo: Louise Royle

Louise Royle was the first woman to qualify as a British Canoeing white water SUP coach. Already a very accomplished WW kayaker and now in her sixties, Louise is an absolute tour de force in the WW SUP community. She is a constant on the SUP X podium, an ambassador for Tambo SUP and a highly qualified coach who mentors many current and aspiring British Canoeing WW SUP coaches.



#ShePaddles



Photo: Sarapiqui, Coata Rica by Ian Royle

How did you discover paddling?

I was a qualified scuba diving instructor when I was still at school, I then ran the parachute club at university. I moved to Oxfordshire for work and was getting bored when a friend at work recommended joining Kingfisher Canoe Club. I went along for a kayak session and really enjoyed myself. At the end of the session, we had a go at capsizing and, much to the surprise of the coaches, I came up grinning and asked if I could do it again! That was in 1983 when I was only 24 years old. I am still a member, I have been on the committee nearly every year, and I'm currently a trustee and senior coach.

What sparked your interest in paddleboarding?

In 2016, my friend Jen suggested that, rather than being classroom-based, we should get Phil Hadley to come and do the British Canoeing SUP Discipline Specific Module for our coaching update. It was so much fun that we immediately went and bought our first paddleboards! I was approaching retirement, and I felt that SUP was perfect for my core and could help me continue with WW kayaking. But within two weeks, I was taking it to my local weir to play on



Photo: Soca, Slovenia by Ian Royle



Photo: Sun Kosi, Nepal by Ian Royle

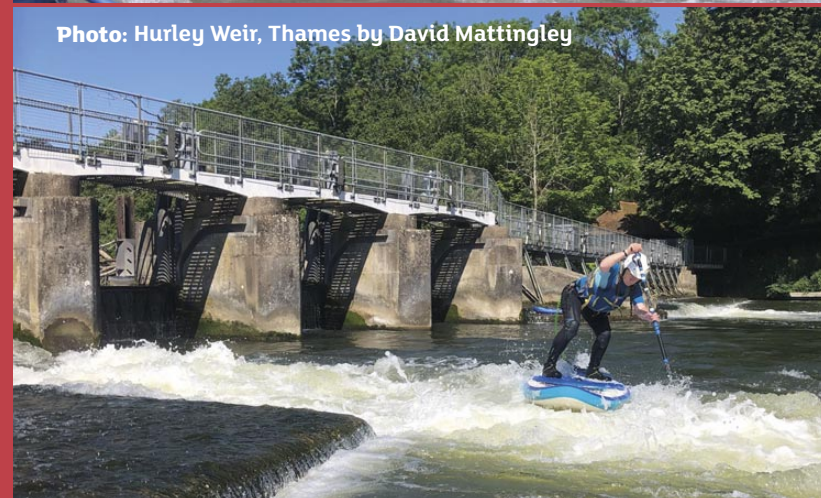


Photo: Hurley Weir, Thames by David Mattingley

In my 50s I kayaked the Zambezi and the Grand Canyon. When I was 60, I paddled the Sun Kosi in Nepal with Darren Clarkson



Photo: Sutton Courtenay Weir, Thames by Ian Royle

the white water wave trains. My immediate thought was, *"Wait a minute, Louise, this is a lot of fun. You're not too old to enjoy this, and you don't have to think about paddling purely flat water yet!"* A few months later, I met Barry Hughes (Nottingham White Water SUP) – he let me have a go on his board on the upper part of the Tryweryn and gave me my first lesson!

Would you now say your white watercraft of choice is a SUP?

Yes! SUP has given me the 'challenge' to continue to push myself in the white water environment. It gives me the challenge of working with the water plus the challenge of a new craft, so I can have all the 'fun' without having to push myself above grade four. Continuous grade four kayaking is too much for me now.

Which rivers have you paddled?

In my 50s I kayaked the Zambezi and the Grand Canyon. When I was 60, I paddled the Sun Kosi in Nepal with Darren Clarkson; this was a raft supported trip where I could SUP as much as possible, including the grade three-plus and four-minus sections where it

was pool drop. When it was continuously above grade three, I kayaked. I have also WWSUP'ed in Slovenia, Austria and Costa Rica with Davide Sartoni. Although I enjoy park and play, my main aim is white water SUP exploration! I love getting out into the wild and paddling natural rivers, enjoying the challenge, the adventure, the places it takes me and the people I meet.

Which of the WW SUP communities do you regularly paddle with?

It is fantastic how much the WW SUP community in the UK has grown over the last few years. I paddle locally with Kingfisher Canoe Club, Nottingham WW SUP, White Water SUP UK, South Wales White Water SUP, as well as with Davide Sartoni (USA) and with Honza Rott and the Tambo family from Prague when I can.

What are your recommendations for women who may be wondering whether to go down the coaching route?

To be a good coach, I think you need to be passionate about the sport. There is no point in trying to coach something

unless you absolutely love it. You have also got to enjoy learning. If you enjoy learning, then you will pass that on to the people you are coaching. Be confident enough in your abilities. One of the things that I know people struggle with is thinking that they are not a good enough paddler. There's no need to strive for perfection – aim at being effective, not perfect because nobody's perfect and everybody is different.

Work on your skills so that you can paddle consistently, effectively and comfortably in the environment in which you wish to coach. Paddle with other coaches, observe and help with coaching other people. Everybody has their own style, their things that work.

Develop various soft skills which you probably already have but don't realise the importance of, e.g. interpersonal skills, connecting with people, treating people as individuals. Work out their specific needs and goals; how you can use your knowledge of not just the technical side, but the tactical and everything else to help them progress.

Remember, there's no such thing as a perfect coach; it's a journey. The best coaches are the coaches who are forever changing, updating, adapting, and evolving.

And in terms of personal progression - what would you recommend?

I'm a great advocate of paddling 'up, down and sideways'! In other words, paddle with as many different people as you can rather than with the same people all the time. You can learn a lot from more experienced paddlers, but you can become too dependent on them if you're not careful.

Paddle with people who are not as experienced as yourself, and you'll find that you're probably better than you thought you were. Paddle with peers to consolidate your skills and learn how to lead a group. Combing all of these things together will help you to progress and have FUN.



Photo: Tryweryn, Wales by Gerb Southwood



Joyce Johnston

Facebook: Moray SUP Club

Joyce Johnston has been white water stand up paddle boarding since 2017, when she was introduced to the sport in the depths of a Scottish winter. Currently developing her coaching practice, Joyce's enthusiasm for SUP is as infectious as her passion for The Moray SUP Club community she paddles with.

Photo: John Roberts



#ShePaddles

Tell me about your paddling background.

I don't have a background in paddling; I'm not a kayaker or a canoeist. SUP is the only paddling I have ever done. I used to almost apologise for this, but now I am at a point of saying, actually, what I am doing is as legitimate as any kayaker coming into this discipline.

How did you get into WW SUP?

In 2017, Jim Gibson put up a post on Facebook asking if people were interested in stand up paddleboarding. For those of you who don't know, Jim ran Aquaplay (now retired), is a well-known paddler in Scotland, and he lives just down the road from me! As I say, I had no paddling experience, but I had previously done some enthusiastic but not terribly skilled surfing on a foamy board. So, when I saw Jim's post, I thought, well, that's going to be worth a go!

A few weeks later (in January), we met at Tamdhu on the River Spey. I looked at the water, and my immediate thought was, *"Oh my goodness, I'll go in this river. I'll be pushed down to Craigellachie before they know it!"* That is not what actually happened, (well there was a bit of washing), and the feeling was great, just great!

What made you decide to continue with paddleboarding post this WW SUP initiation in the depths of a Scottish winter?

It is something to do with the time of my life I am at – I am 55 years old. It's not some kind of midlife crisis, but there's something about my having a demanding full-time job and knowing how to do it, whereas, with SUP, I am an absolute beginner. Paddleboarding is, for me, an opportunity to try something new that I have no experience in and is about being able to allow myself to learn - that complete immersion is where the thrill is for me.

Do you have rivers local to you?

It takes me seven minutes to walk down to the river. To drive up to Tamdhu, it takes 12 minutes or so. The river Spey is also very close. This last year I have been driving up to Aberlour, paddling down to Craigellachie, which is about two miles in total, locking up my board and then walking back to get my van. The question would be, why would you not go out on the river with it being so accessible? I am so very lucky to have all this close by.

Is the community you paddle with important to you?

Fundamentally, yes! Community is as important as the new knowledge and skills that I have learned. As I say, I knew Jim before (we used to work for the same council), but without SUP, our paths would never have crossed again. Because of paddleboarding, I now have a whole community of people around me and they are all really dear to me now.

Tell me about the club you paddle with.

The Moray SUP Club was the first paddleboard club to be affiliated with the Scottish Canoe Association. The essence is if there is water, we will paddle it! You just have to make sure you have the kit you need for the different environments. We have lovely sandy beaches at Lossiemouth on the Moray Firth. We have the sea, the estuary, slow-moving rivers, white water, the lochs and the white water course at Grantully.



I understand SCA were very keen to talk to the club about the membership?

We did a kind of ‘wee’ podcast with SCA because they were particularly interested in our membership’s growth rate and gender profile. To put it into context, we became an official affiliated club two weeks before the lockdown in March of last year, but, even so, our membership continued to grow. Our profile of membership is fundamentally different to existing clubs because we have more women than men.

And why do you think you have a higher ratio of women to men?

I think this is because of the sense of ‘community’ – paddle boarding is an activity that has not already been ‘claimed’, and I wonder if that’s something that has encouraged women to find a space. It is not one of those sports where you have to nudge blokes out of the way; it is just a space that is already there that women can come into.

We know through research that if women see other women (who look like them) having a go at a sport, they feel more encouraged to have a go.

Do you think that your being on the water and on social media has helped other women to think about white water SUP as a sport for them?

Yes! This is something that is quite important to me with my paddling. I am a feminist, and a social worker and equality is very important to me. It is nice to be able to inspire other women to do positive things. For example, one woman, Jacqui, comes to mind who I surf with now as well. She had seen a post that Jim had put up of me going through the Washing Machine on the River A’an, and she said, “*I want to be able to do that; I want to be just like Joyce!*” I thought, how lovely, I have inspired another woman – it was such a nice feeling!

So yes, if women look at me and see that my hair is grey and they also see that I can really shift my board and this inspires them, that is a lovely gift to give to women.