

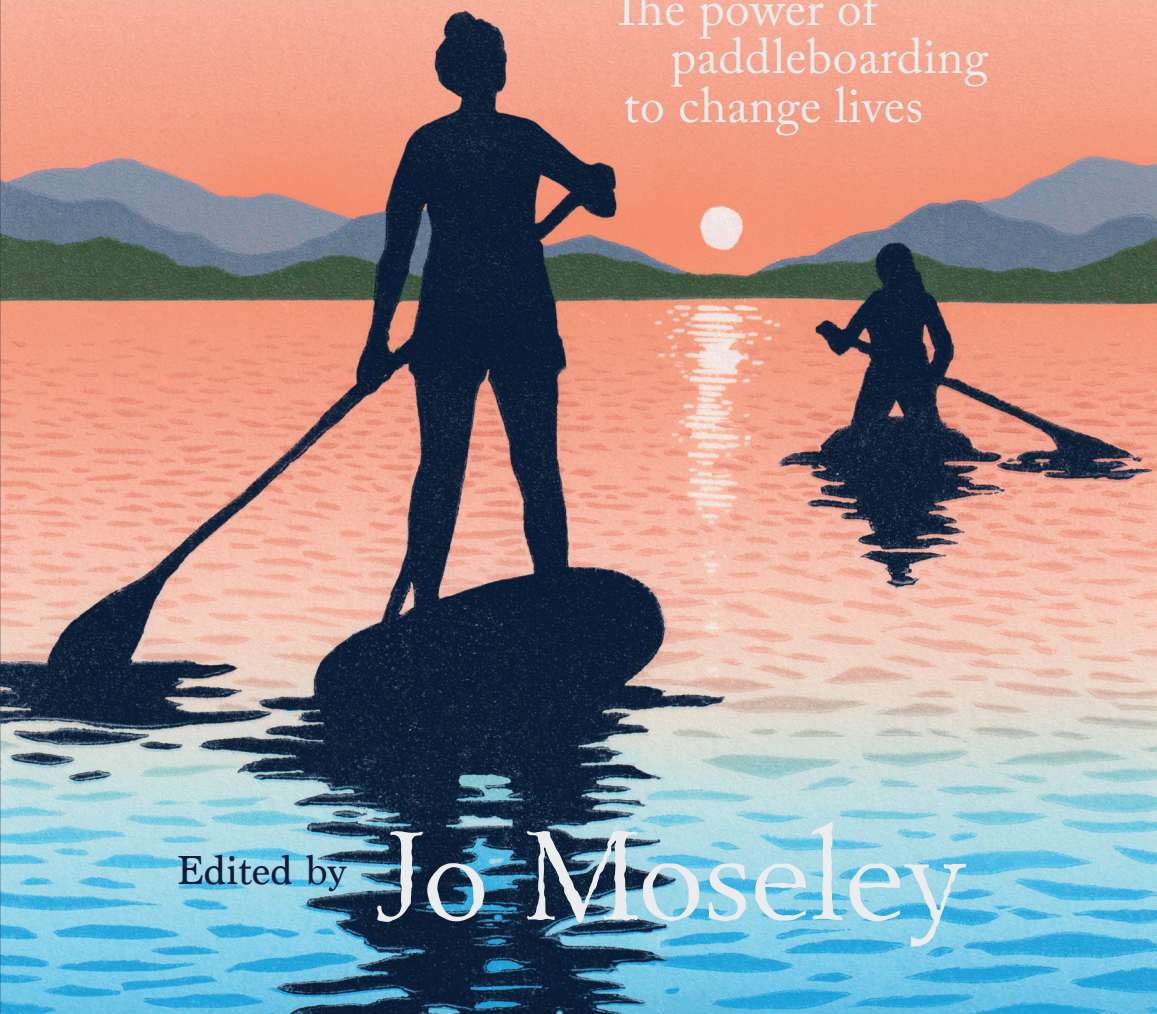
*'A joyful paddle for the soul – this book captures that
unmistakable spark that only life on the water can deliver.'*

SUP MAG UK

Adventures on the Water



The power of
paddleboarding
to change lives



Edited by Jo Moseley

ADVENTURES ON THE WATER

THE POWER OF PADDLEBOARDING TO CHANGE
LIVES

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INTRODUCTION

JO MOSELEY

Hello and welcome to *Adventures on the Water: The power of paddleboarding to change lives*. I am so glad to see you here. Perhaps you have been given this book by a friend who knows you love paddleboarding, or maybe you are browsing in a gorgeous bookshop wondering if it might be for you. Maybe you have been on the water for a while and are looking for more inspiration and connection. Whatever the reason, I am so thrilled to meet you.

My name is Jo, and I am the author of two best-selling books about beautiful places to paddleboard: *Stand-up Paddleboarding in Great Britain*, published in 2022, and *Stand-up Paddleboarding in the Lake District*, published in 2024, both published by award-winning Vertebrate Publishing. The former was the first guide dedicated only to SUP that covered Great Britain. The latter won the Lakeland Book Awards Zeffirellis Prize for Guides and Places 2025. I'm also the host of *The Joy of SUP – The Paddleboarding Sunshine Podcast* and I have a regular column called 'Paddleboarding for Good' in the UK's top paddleboarding magazine, *SUP Mag UK*. I am a proud ambassador for Cal Major's Seaful charity.

THE GROWTH OF SUP

There is no doubt that paddleboarding has experienced huge growth over the last few years, with many people discovering its benefits during and shortly after the Covid pandemic. Paddle UK (formerly British

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Canoeing) is one of SUP's national governing bodies; it has seen its membership grow from 40,000 to a high of over 90,000 members by June 2023, with approximately 50,000 members registering an interest in SUP. According to the Watersports Participation Survey in 2022, almost three million adults canoed, kayaked or paddleboarded at least three times in 2022 and there was a greater interest in SUP across the 380 affiliated clubs. More paddleboarders have been accessing British Canoeing Awarding Body regulated qualifications and awards, with over 25,000 SUP-specific certifications issued. Eighty-five per cent of Paddle UK members classify themselves as recreational paddlers, with the drivers being fun, enjoyment and being close to nature.

With the growth of SUP, an exciting library of literature has developed too, with how-to books, travel guides, memoirs and even our first novel. With the 'where and how' being covered so well, I am very excited to now turn to the 'who and why' of paddleboarding, sharing stories of how this wonderful sport has transformed the lives of so many of us in big and small ways here in Great Britain. When the river is flowing too fast or the winds and waves are too high, I hope that *Adventures on the Water* is the book you will turn to for inspiration, guidance and friendship.

I am honoured to share the inspiring stories from our brilliant guests, ranging from huge, demanding adventures to smaller, gentler outings, from names you might recognise and others who are new to you, both young and old. They will take you round the coast of Great Britain and further afield to the Yukon, the Grand Canyon and the Amazon, invite you to watch basking sharks and dolphins in Scotland, surf Northumbrian waves, celebrate community on the Grand Union Canal and whoosh along white-water in Wales. You will wobble, fall, laugh and cry, feel anxiety, courage and frustration, experience a sense of peace and share their triumphs with them.

We have paddlers who were there at the beginning of SUP in Great Britain many years ago and others who discovered the joy only recently. They each have a unique and special perspective to share which I hope you will love as much as I do. Choosing the twenty-five stories has been a huge privilege, and I know, should my publisher have allowed it, I could have brought you so many more. Another book, perhaps!

As well as sharing their stories, my guests have also kindly answered

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four extra questions – their favourite place to paddle, favourite piece of kit, favourite paddling drink or snack and their top SUP tip – plus details of how you can contact them and find out more. This is an excellent extra resource at the back of the book so please pop there and enjoy their wealth of knowledge.

My top tip for those new to SUP or anyone wishing to extend their skills, for example taking on coastal paddling or getting into white-water or racing, is always to take a lesson with a qualified coach or instructor.

For me, that first paddleboarding lesson was on 24 September 2016 on Derwent Water, one of the northern lakes in the Lake District. I was fifty-one years old and recovering from an injured knee after a fall at the beginning of the year. Having found the benefits of being active two years earlier, when I rowed a million metres to fundraise in memory of my mum, I missed not being able to move so freely. I was anxious, snappy and had lost that spark of joy and well-being that exercise had gifted. I walked with my eyes to the ground; I wasn't sleeping well and my perimenopausal symptoms and grief weighed heavily.

As my knee healed, I set myself a challenge called 'Rain or Shine 30' – to spend thirty minutes each day outdoors whatever the weather – which I began on the 1st of September. I had seen many inspiring photos on social media and read that as a full-body, low-impact workout, SUP could help heal my knee. My confidence had been knocked by the fall and my research had shown that paddleboarding could improve my balance and core strength which I was keen to do. So, I booked the afternoon with Bo from Lake District Paddleboarding and travelled up with a mixture of eager anticipation, excitement and nerves.

Quite simply, I fell in love that day.

For the first time in a long while, I felt confident, strong and optimistic. As I said, 'like a warrior not a worrier,' and I couldn't stop smiling and chatting on the journey home. I asked for a paddleboard from my family for Christmas and my fifty-second birthday present that year, and on Boxing Day I set out on to the North Sea with my cherished purchase from SUP North UK.

With just that one afternoon's experience on Derwent Water, I also decided that I wanted to set myself the challenge of paddling from Liverpool to Leeds – a total of 128 miles along the Leeds and Liverpool Canal. I was very naive about what it would entail but it seemed an exciting

plan. I knew from my indoor rowing challenge for Macmillan Cancer Support in 2014 that I liked a big goal I could chip away at.

However, when I started telling people about my idea, their response was less than positive. 'That sounds logistically complex, quite boring and, well, too difficult for a woman of your age,' I was told. Remember, I was only in my early fifties.

The Jo of today would have dismissed these remarks and carried on regardless. Paddleboarding has given me, and others whose stories you will read in this book, a core of self-belief that I did not have back then, despite having the resilience to somehow manage the juggle of divorce, loss, flying solo with my sons and looking after my dad who was experiencing his third type of cancer.

Back in 2016 however, I listened to the naysayers, doubted my ability and, somewhat embarrassed, I put the dream away. Not away completely, but in a little drawer in the corner of my mind and soul, peeking at it every so often as my confidence grew and my paddling improved.

In January 2019 something clicked, and I felt it was time to take the dream out of the drawer and bring it back into the sunlight. There were two main reasons. The first was that in the preceding months I had been to too many funerals of friends of my age or younger. Vibrant, interesting, creative women, the kind you admired and felt uplifted by after simply being in their company. They had shown me that life is short and precious and, if we have even the spark of a dream, we need to give ourselves the chance of making it come true. Getting to the start line would be something to be proud of in itself.

The second reason was that my youngest son, Johnny, was in his final year at school and would soon be leaving for university. With his brother Henry embarking upon his Masters, the prospect of being a 'single mum empty nester' was looming. I wanted to show my boys that I would be okay.

I wanted to show myself I would be okay too.

I also decided to add an extra thirty-four miles to the original plan so that it included the Aire & Calder Navigation from Leeds to Goole, thus making the journey into a 162-mile coast-to-coast. I would be fundraising for the 2 Minute Foundation and surf therapy charity The Wave Project, as well as picking up litter.

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Three years after being told the challenge was too difficult for someone like me, I set off on a rainy Saturday afternoon in July 2019 from Eldonian Village. Three friends braved the weather to cheer me off.

Eleven days, two tunnels, 101 locks, rain, wind and sunshine, laughter, frustration and tears, paddling into my home town of Skipton under the stars and a lot of litter collected – the adventure changed my life. Arriving in Goole in a thunderstorm that swiftly turned to a rainbow I dropped to my knees on the board and sobbed. My friend Jason Elliott had battled strong winds and rain in February 2019 to be the first person to SUP the route. I had now become the first woman to complete what would soon be officially called the Canal and River Trust Coast to Coast Canoe Trail.

The doubters had been wrong. I wasn't too old, and it certainly was not boring as they had suggested. It had been a remarkable modern day SUP adventure on my doorstep in the North of England along a canal built for a time long gone running through towns, cities, rural villages and country fields.

I am thrilled to say that since then a small but growing number of paddlers have completed the route, namely Gee Jackson, Sara Edgar and Sarah Chisem, Julie Kelly and Lucy Norris, Ant Ing and Chuck Norris, Mel Joe and Michelle Ellison, and Daisy Best, who has kindly shared her story with us (page 122).

A film about my journey, *Brave Enough – A Journey Home to Joy*, was made by award-winning film-maker Frit Tam of Frit Films. We are honoured that it has been screened at prestigious film festivals such as Kendal Mountain Festival, Keswick Mountain Festival, Adventure Uncovered and Shextreme.

In addition to the thrill of finally achieving my goal, facing my fears and helping heal my grief and anxiety, being on my board *Grace* – which I named after the RNLI heroine Grace Darling – has taught me the following incredibly valuable lessons, many of which are also echoed in the personal stories that follow.

We are not too old and it's not too late for our own SUP adventure.

However that may look for us and however recently we started our paddleboarding journey. As Millie Mears (page 62) and James Little (page 56) will show us later in the book, we are never too young either!

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In my 'Paddleboarding for Good' column in *SUP Mag UK*, I shared the story of a group of Women's Institute members, many in their sixties, seventies and eighties, from Elm Tree and Fairfield WI in Stockton-on-Tees, who went for a lesson on the Tees Barrage. They loved it! On local radio the organiser Christine said, 'I'm excited but nervous. But if you don't give it a go you won't know. These are things I should have done forty years ago but I'm doing them now, so I don't miss out forever.' Maureen, aged seventy-eight, added, 'At this age, anything is possible!'

Adventure is on our doorstep. With so many different bodies of water available to paddleboarders, from city canals to coastal routes, we can find adventure in places much closer to home than people might initially expect. According to the Canal and River Trust, fifty per cent of people in England and Wales live within just eight kilometres of a canal or river, and eight million people live less than one kilometre away. I had lived within just a few kilometres of the Leeds and Liverpool Canal for years and never really explored it before SUP came into my life. The challenge created both a new perspective and a deeper love for where I lived and the areas which I passed through. On my coast-to-coast journey, I slept in my own bed for two nights as the route passed through my then home town of Skipton, yet I felt I was on a grand journey of discovery.

We are braver, stronger and more resilient than we think. SUP not only helps us feel more connected to our values and dreams but can also change the stories we tell ourselves about who we are and what we are capable of, physically, mentally and emotionally. This has a positive ripple effect on other areas of our lives, personally and professionally. So many of the personal stories will attest to this.

Blue spaces can have a very positive impact on our well-being. Whether inland or by the coast, man-made canals or wilder rivers and lakes. My body, mind and spirit are strengthened by being on the water. I am always reminded of my good friend Craig Jackson, SUP Shropshire founder and Operational Fire Officer in the Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service, who says that as soon as he is on the water the stress just seems to float away. This is an example of the Blue Mind Theory coined by the late Wallace J. Nichols in his 2014 book *Blue Mind: How Water Makes You*

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Happier, More Connected and Better at What You Do. Blue mind is ‘the mildly meditative state people fall into when they are near, in, under or on water.’

According to Nichols, most of us live in a ‘Red Mind’ or ‘Grey Mind’ state. The former can be used for good when we harness it for action and achievement. However, it can also lead us to feeling anxious, overstimulated and overwhelmed, which over time can result in many of us feeling burned out and disconnected. The latter is when we feel detached, dissatisfied, numbed and lethargic. In *Blue Mind*, Nichols shares scientific studies, including fMRI scans, showing how proximity to water can lead to decreased stress and anxiety, increased feelings of well-being, and lower breathing and heart rates.

Dr Catherine Kelly, scientist, well-being practitioner and author of *Blue Spaces: How and Why Water Can Make You Feel Better*, also writes about how time by water is an antidote to the stresses of our daily lives. ‘Blue spaces help regulate the activity of the brain’s amygdala, the anxiety and panic centre, because water allows your attention to drift involuntarily and, therefore, more peacefully, rather than being forced or directed,’ she explained in an article for *Top Sante* magazine. ‘Blue space is more than a neutral backdrop, though – it’s alive not just with its own wildlife and vegetation, but with you and your emotions. It changes the neurological patterns of your brain, leaving you feeling more calm, peaceful and happy.’

Our waterways are interconnected. The discarded crisp packet I picked up in Wigan or Burnley would one day have ended up at the coast. What we do in one place affects not just our immediate surroundings but the wildlife and health of our distant oceans. We can individually and collectively have a negative and hopefully a positive impact on the places that bring us such joy. Caring for the environment is a key theme in the personal stories that follow.

Community plays a huge part in paddleboarding. I was stunned by the kindness of strangers online and on the towpath who wanted to support my challenge and our subsequent film. I simply hadn’t expected that anyone would want to join me as I made my way across the country and was amazed when people asked if they could be part of the adventure or

opened up their homes to invite us to stay. At the finish point in Goole, teams from Paddle UK (then British Canoeing) and the Canal and River Trust were there to welcome me, banging pots and giving me a big bunch of flowers – despite themselves being drenched in the pouring rain. I had only expected my dad and Frit, the film-maker, to be there. Friendship and support is something that many long-distance paddlers have so fully and joyfully embraced. Adrian Angell, an endurance paddler who has undertaken several huge challenges to raise money for Diabetes UK, wrote in his *SUP Mag UK* article of being cheered on from the riverbank by supporters as he made his way through London on his own coast-to-coast from Portishead Pier on the Severn Estuary to Southend-on-Sea Pier on the Thames Estuary. Sophie Witters and Dave Chant, who became the first pair to paddle from Land's End to John o' Groats, told me about the logistical and well-being support they received from people as they undertook the challenge. If there is an antidote to our tendency to doomscroll on social media, watching people share their joy and friendships on the water is definitely it. 'Bloomsrolling' is at its best after a weekend of sunshine and low winds.

My coast-to-coast really opened my eyes to the roles connection, friendships and community play in SUP. I had almost always paddled alone as I simply didn't know anyone locally who had a paddleboard when I began in 2016. There were far fewer groups online and none where I paddled most regularly at the coast and on the canal. As an introvert I also felt anxious and awkward about reaching out to paddlers I didn't know. With unhappy memories of never feeling good enough in school sports and team games, there was also a lingering fear that I would be judged or unable to 'keep up'.

This could not be further from the truth. As a new sport, we don't have the weight of history about who is and who isn't a 'proper paddleboarder'. As long as safety and well-being are covered, the community is very judgement free and welcoming. We are all still writing the story of SUP in Great Britain and there are so many ways that you can experience it – from a chilled sunset paddle and a picnic to an endurance adventure, the thrill of racing, SUP surfing or white-water, or a mindful SUP yoga or Pilates session, with a group, or alone.

Since those early days, I have come to cherish moments with other

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people, many of whom I originally met via social media and then had the good fortune to paddle with in person. There is something about moving on the water, side by side, unencumbered by worldly expectations, roles and distractions, that means the conversation flows more easily and often more deeply.

Shortly before submitting the manuscript for this book, I was fortunate enough to be invited to paddle with Arnside Sailing Club, based in Morecambe Bay in Cumbria, after speaking to their club about my books and favourite places to paddle in the Lake District the evening before. It was a dream come true to explore such a unique location. Think fast-flowing tides, the bore, quicksand and shifting channels. Setting out into the headwind, I knew no one and yet within those couple of hours together I had three profoundly touching and meaningful conversations with men and women that I don't think I would have had had we met in a typical social setting. I came away with that same feeling of being a warrior on the water – uplifted, inspired and with a full and grateful heart.

In her book *The Joy of Movement*, Kelly McGonigal talks about the power of synchrony – how moving in unison (as we are when we are paddling together) can help us feel more strongly connected. The research she shared from psychologist Bronwyn Tarr was conducted on strangers dancing together at a silent disco. While music and physical exertion played a role in this 'collective joy', it was the synchrony that was the crucial element. Since reading about synchrony, I have noticed it so often. Next time you are paddling with a friend or group why not see if you are paddling in synchrony?

CAN SUP HELP OUR WELL-BEING?

While I am sure we have anecdotally all experienced that post-SUP happiness, I thought it would be helpful to look at how SUP fits into wider scientific and social research into well-being.

In 2008, the New Economics Foundation researched and created a project called **Five Ways to Well-being**, identifying five key actions that can help us live well. You'll find these outlined on the NHS and GOV.UK websites and by mental health charities such as Mind.

The key actions recommended for Five Ways to Well-being are:

- social relationships and being connected
- physical activity
- awareness
- learning
- giving to others

How can SUP help us with the Five Ways to Well-being?

Social relationships and being connected. We have talked about how SUP offers the opportunity for social relationships and being connected. According to Professor Rose Anne Kenny, author of *Age Proof: The New Science of Living a Longer and Healthier Life*, good quality friendships and family relationships play a key role in health and longevity. Isolation and loneliness are known to cause inflammation, suppress immunity and speed up the ageing process. They are associated with negative physical and mental health, and an increased risk of coronary heart disease, stroke, depression and dementia. In a world where we are so interconnected online, it feels that offline many of us feel more isolated than ever and we are craving that personal connection of being with others 'in the real world'.

SUP is a great way to develop new connections and relationships. As adults this isn't always so easy. Suzanne Patterson, who loves paddling with Dorset SUP in Christchurch and organises sunset and full moon paddles, loves her local SUP community. 'I am always blown away by the number of people who come to these events,' she told me. 'One year we had 284 paddleboarders together at the same time and everyone I spoke to said it was the best experience they had had on the water. This is what SUP is all about to me, bringing people together to live in the moment and enjoy the company of like-minded people. I feel truly blessed and so grateful that I am part of something so wonderful. My mental health has benefitted hugely from paddling. Every paddle feels like therapy.'

Of course, some of us prefer a quieter paddle alone – even here we can benefit from simply saying hello and chatting to people that we might see locally on the way to the beach or lake, or in the cafe we pop to after a paddle. These are what sociology professor Mark Granovetter called 'weak ties' in his influential 1973 paper, 'The strength of weak ties'

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– he concluded that they can be very beneficial for our mental well-being. Like the 284 people who went for a sunset paddle in Dorset, we may never go to these people's homes or develop a strong friendship with them, but these casual interactions are important. University of Essex senior lecturer in psychology Gillian Sandstrom also investigated how much happiness people gained from weak ties, noting that on days that a participant had a greater number of casual interactions with weak ties they experienced more happiness and a greater sense of belonging. Maybe that's why so many of us enjoy a paddle with a local group or close to home where we bump into the same dog-walkers or hikers and have a short cheery conversation.

If you are in any doubt, going for a paddle with someone whose company you enjoy is good for you! Mixing the generations is also great for building strong relationships and communities that learn from each other. Anna and James Little (page 56) and Dale and Millie Mears (page 62) are wonderful examples of this.

Physical activity. I am sure we are all aware of the benefits of exercise for our well-being. According to the NHS website, it can reduce our risk of major illnesses such as coronary heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, a number of different types of cancer, falls, hip fracture, osteoarthritis, dementia and Alzheimer's disease, and lower our risk of early death by up to thirty per cent.

Many people say that one of the loveliest aspects of paddleboarding is that they are enjoying it so much it doesn't feel like exercise in the way they have grown up thinking about exercise – something they 'should' do rather than something that might make them feel great. We are having a low-impact, full-body workout improving our balance and core strength without really noticing it. According to researchers from Sheffield Hallam University who did a literature review for Paddle UK, a study from 2016 found participants in a six-week SUP course showed significant improvements in aerobic and anaerobic fitness, along with improvements in core strength and self-rated quality-of-life questionnaires.

According to Kelly McGonigal in *The Joy of Movement*, physical activity has a positive impact both on our brain and our body. For example, she tells us, it impacts brain chemicals that 'give you energy, alleviate

worry and help you bond with others. It reduces inflammation in the brain, which over time can protect against depression, anxiety and loneliness.' What I really love from this excellent book is that she shows how regular exercise – let's say paddleboarding here! – 'remodels the physical structure of your brain to make you more receptive to joy and social connection. These neurological changes rival those observed in the most cutting-edge treatments for both depression and addiction. The mind-altering effects of exercise are even embedded in your musculature. During physical activity, muscles secrete hormones into your bloodstream that make your brain more resilient to stress.' Scientists call these proteins that are released myokines or 'hope molecules'. So not only do we feel better after a paddle and more able to face the challenges of life we are juggling, but it also means we are more receptive to joy!

In her book *Move!*, science journalist, author and paddleboarder Caroline Williams researches the links between building core strength, something which SUP helps with, and alleviating stress. 'Any way of moving that activates the core muscles sends a message connected to the adrenal glands via the brain to help regulate stress', writes Williams. 'We don't yet know exactly how, but engaging the core seems to tell the body to calm down.' She also adds that studies have shown that standing up straight brings more positive thoughts. 'Keep your head up and gaze forward for even more benefits.' Isn't that just what we do when paddleboarding?

Awareness, or taking time to notice. Taking time to notice our surroundings on the water is a wonderful way to add to our paddles – paddleboarding offers so many different things to see. I've been fortunate to marvel at snow-capped fells in the Lake District, dolphins and huge barrel jellyfish on the Welsh coast, and starfish in clear waters on a Scottish sunset SUP. Closer to home, I love spotting the old white and black posts marking the distance to Leeds along the canal, the oystercatchers on the beach on a summer's evening or the beauty of a winter sunrise while the rest of the world is asleep.

Katie Owen, whom I met with her seasoned SUP buddy, Fudge the cockapoo, and her friend Gemma Marshall as they paddled the Great Glen Canoe Trail, is a huge fan of making the most of a sunrise SUP. 'Some of my best memories with Fudge are on our local beach, no more

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than five minutes from our house. Not paddling very far at all, sitting together on our board as we watch the dawn colours light up the sky before sunrise while enjoying our breakfast. One early June morning, not long after sunrise, we were getting ready to paddle back to shore and head to work when I heard a blowhole puff behind us. I turned round to see three dolphins making their way towards us. They swam under my board and around us for about five minutes before they continued around the bay. I couldn't believe that we had experienced this, together and on our local beach! Fudge was so calm and just sat and watched them with me. I couldn't have dreamed of a more magical time. I am so thankful for our board for allowing us to have these experiences with nature and for seeing places from a new perspective on the water.'

Likewise, Jules Middleton, a Church of England vicar who paddles in Sussex, goes out on the water for peace and space, a chance to simply be in nature. With a very demanding people-centred job, she told me that 'paddling is about connection to something bigger, for me that's a God who created this beautiful world. It's a place to be within and marvel at nature like a demoiselle fly landing on my shoulder, a fish jumping out of the river in front of me, a flash of blue as a kingfisher flits by, that feel like a spiritual connection to the world around me.'

Being mindful and taking notice of what is around us can help us feel more positive, prevent depression and increase our understanding of ourselves.

According to the NHS, 'Paying more attention to the present moment – to your own thoughts and feelings, and to the world around you – can improve your mental well-being. Some people call this awareness "mindfulness" ... Mindfulness involves paying attention to what is going on inside and outside ourselves, moment by moment. It's easy to stop noticing the world around us. It's also easy to lose touch with the way our bodies are feeling and to end up living "in our heads" – caught up in our thoughts without stopping to notice how those thoughts are driving our emotions and behaviour ... Mindfulness also allows us to become more aware of the stream of thoughts ... and start to see their patterns. Gradually we can train ourselves to notice when our thoughts are taking over and realise that thoughts are simply "mental events" that do not have to control us.'

I know I have a tendency to live in the past, ruminating on what

I should have or could have done, or worrying about the future and what might happen. Focusing on the way the sunlight sparkles on the water ahead – the glitter path of joy as I think of it – has often calmed my brain and, like Katie, helped me live fully in the moment and feel more hopeful for the future. I sometimes simply say to myself: ‘Breathe in, breathe out. Right now, right here, everything is OK. All will be well.’

Next time you are out on the water, why not take a moment to really notice your surroundings and see what happens?

Learning. Learning something as an adult is excellent for our brain, and learning to paddleboard is something we can approach with optimism and a positive attitude. Unlike a sport we might have been made to participate in at school, paddleboarding can be a fresh start to enjoying the water. Within a short time and with instruction from a professional, many people can soon feel that sense of accomplishment of mastering a new skill. Unlike surfing for example, which has a very steep learning curve, SUP’s accessibility means we are soon rewarded. This in turn keeps our curiosity piqued so we want to keep on improving. Research has shown that being curious helps our creativity, has positive benefits at a neurological level, improves memory and patience, as well as creating the dopamine hit normally associated with reward.

With so many different bodies of water there’s always something new to discover and study, from understanding the tides and coastal maps, to the heritage of a city canal or how a river is formed. Factor in going from recreational paddling to new skills learned in SUP surfing, racing or endurance challenges, and we can keep our minds growing and improving.

There are lots of ways to keep learning with online courses from Paddle UK, going on a white-water, yoga or coastal SUP weekend, travelling to new places or researching more about the history, culture, fauna and flora of the places you already enjoy. Developing your photography, bird spotting or wild camping skills can also add to your SUP journey.

Giving to others. Research has shown that giving to others, such as simply being kind or volunteering, has many benefits for our own well-being, including: learning new skills, making friends, improving our confidence and self-esteem, building a sense of connection to others,

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creating a sense of purpose, keeping our own problems in perspective, gaining a sense of reward and even helping us live longer! It helps counteract the effects of stress, anxiety and anger, and increases positive, relaxed feelings with the release of dopamine.

Litter picking has always been part of my SUP life – fundraising for the 2 Minute Foundation on my coast-to-coast and taking two minutes every day wherever I am to pick up litter or do a beach clean. My personal motto is: *I can't change the world, but I can change the little bit around me.*

Personally, I am a big fan of the 2 Minute Foundation (www.2minute.org) and the work of Ghost Fishing UK (www.ghostfishing.co.uk).

There are so many ways we can volunteer and give back to our communities and the environment, and paddleboarders have very much taken up the call to make a difference. Along with the causes the contributors have written about, here are a few suggestions:

- Join a Planet Patrol Clean Up – pick up litter and record it on their app or get involved in water testing or a spring or autumn water watch. Founded by world record holder and author Lizzie Carr MBE, Planet Patrol harnesses people power and data collection in its mission to address environmental issues (www.planetpatrol.co).
- Be part of Paddle UK's Big Paddle CleanUp (www.paddleuk.org.uk).
- Volunteer for the Canal and River Trust on the towpath looking after the canals or as part of their Plastics Challenge (www.canalrivertrust.org.uk).
- Support SUP schools and initiatives like Encounter Cornwall's youth initiatives to engage more schoolchildren and teenagers in life on the water with their Ocean School vision (www.encountercornwall.com) or Liverpool SUP's Water Well-being and Paddle sessions (www.liverpoolsupco.co.uk).
- Find out more about the SUP Planet Earth Foundation – this charity works in partnership with Red Equipment to boost teenage mental health by making SUP accessible to young people (@supplanetearthfoundation).

ADVENTURES ON THE WATER

- Volunteer as paddleboard support for outdoor swimming events or SUP events (as Simon Hutchinson shares in his story on page 96).
- Become a Marine Medic with British Divers Marine Life Rescue (www.bdmrlr.org.uk).
- Train to become part of a RNLI crew, volunteer in a local shop or fundraise for the charity (www.rnli.org).
- Become a community scientist reporting your plant and animal sightings to iNaturalist (www.inaturalist.org).
- Help plant seagrass with Seawilding (www.seawilding.org).
- Support the #PaddleKitHerWay campaign founded by Sarah Whitney that works with brands to make a more diverse range of kit sizes (@sarahblues_).
- Think about opportunities to use your current skills to help others enjoy paddleboarding. For example, SUP instructor Maddy Enoch contacted Paddle UK about using Makaton (similar to British Sign Language) to assist people who may need extra help with communication (@maddys_sup_world).
- You could volunteer your skills as a SUP instructor to approach groups who might not be benefitting from paddleboarding. Along these lines, Och Aye Canoe SUP school founder Sarah Thomson works with limbless and sightless veterans to experience freedom on the water (www.ochayecanoescotland.co.uk) and Danny Goodridge of SUP Active Yorkshire delivers Paddleability courses training others to deliver inclusive sessions (www.supactiveyorkshire.com).
- Become an Ocean Activist with Surfers Against Sewage (www.sas.org.uk).

Paddleboarding can fulfil the Five Ways to Well-being in so many different ways. In some areas it is being socially prescribed; for example, Isolation to Inclusion, a Canal and River Trust project, has been successful on the waterways of Leeds. I shared more about this in my 'Paddleboarding for Good' column for *SUP Mag UK*. Funded by Interreg, a European funding body, the project aimed to increase levels of happiness by reducing social isolation and increasing community connection. Using the blue space corridors of the Leeds and Liverpool Canal which

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travels through the urban communities was key to the success of the project.

Local health data was used to identify people experiencing the highest levels of loneliness and isolation in the communities closest to the canal. Co-creation groups were formed from these target groups. They looked at barriers to participation, what access was needed and activities that could be tried.

Those taking part came to the project after being socially prescribed into local community groups who then signposted them into the Canal and River Trust's offering, which included boating, paddle sports, foraging, bushcraft and poetry writing.

The sessions on and near the water had a huge impact on those attending. At the beginning of sessions, sixty-two per cent of participants said they often or sometimes felt lonely. By the end of the unit, only thirty-five per cent of people felt the same.

One participant said: 'The outdoor activities have given me purpose, hope and brought me inner peace. I've met loads of people in a similar situation to me. It's helped to improve my mental health and well-being. I needed this course to help me on the road to recovery.'

WHAT ABOUT SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH INTO SUP?

As a relatively new sport, SUP has not enjoyed the research attention of other sports such as running, hiking, cycling or wild swimming. However, research is beginning. Paddleboarder and occupational therapist Sara Jayne Kennedy kindly shared her University of Cumbria study 'An exploration of the occupation of stand-up paddleboarding and its impact on mental health and well-being' with me. Participants included a woman called Lorraine who had recently been receiving care in a psychiatric hospital. She said that while she still needs her medication (and of course no one is suggesting paddleboarding is a 'cure all' for mental health conditions or that medication isn't required), she now had another way to manage her condition too. 'There was a point where I stood up ... on the river ... and there was ... green all around me. And I thought this is where I'm going to recover.' Lorraine continued, 'To be able to self-rescue [get back on her board] is by far the most empowering thing I have done for years. I felt like a rock star. I thought, I'm the strongest

woman that has ever lived ... and now I teach other women to get back on their boards.'

The research findings concluded that participants experienced enhanced social relationships, reduced stress levels and were better able to manage mental health symptoms.

Sheffield Hallam University's literature review commissioned by Paddle UK into the physical, mental and economic benefits of blue space highlighted that a number of the studies proved the effect to be significant.

Likewise, paddleboard brand Red Equipment conducted a citizen science project into the benefits of SUP with 200 participants over eighteen months in conjunction with Blue Health Coach Lizzi Larbalestier. From the results, Larbalestier concluded that paddleboarding made the paddlers thirty per cent happier, with the top three motivators being:

- enjoying scenery and wildlife
- improving health and taking exercise
- relaxing, unwinding and letting off steam

Let's hope that SUP becomes the focus of more academic research. I will report back when I hear of any!

HOW PADDLEBOARDING CONTINUES TO ENHANCE MY LIFE

I have spoken previously of how SUP changed my life back in 2016 with my first lesson, in 2019 with the coast-to-coast, the launch of my film in 2020, and then in 2022 and 2024 as my first two books were published. If I am honest, I expected that the benefits would now be slightly less significant going forward. A gently upward trajectory of joy and peaceful paddles. I should of course have known better!

While researching and writing this book, I experienced another unexpected plot twist as a long-term relationship ended, I left my lovely job and moved to the coast to look after my ninety-one-year-old father. Starting over at sixty had certainly not been what I anticipated for the beginning of 2025.

However, I feel deeply that being out on my paddleboard, beach cleaning and having the support of SUP friends have all helped me navi-

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gate this time more optimistically. Sunrise paddles on the North Sea have reminded me that I am stronger than I think, that I can get back up should I fall, and this is simply another adventure in the winds and waves of change to navigate.

To paraphrase the words of *Little Women* author Louisa May Alcott, 'I am not afraid of storms, for I am learning how to paddle my board.'

Furthermore, it is helping me build new friendships and connections. I was so overjoyed to receive an unexpected WhatsApp message inviting me to paddle at 6.30 a.m. with new friends I could barely sleep. I regularly paddle with friends on the sea where I played as a little girl in the 1970s and I could not be more grateful.

SUP transformed my life for the better back in 2016 and nine years on it is helping me to create this new chapter.

Before I introduce you to the personal stories, I would like to leave you with my personal top tips for making the most of your paddle-boarding journey.

- **Be a beginner** – always allow yourself the chance to be a beginner, to start and yes, maybe fall, but to try again and remain curious. Be brave enough to suck at something new.
- **Experience the magic of stepping out of your comfort zone** – every once in a while, do something new: sign up for a group paddle or clean-up, go somewhere you have not been before or go a little further, join a white-water course or SUP yoga session. Why not train to be a SUP coach or instructor to share your skills with others? Feel the thrill of accomplishing something different.
- **Leave room for serendipity** – while it is always vital to plan for safety and well-being on your paddles, leave space in the itinerary where possible for the unexpected. A moment to pause and watch for kingfishers or dolphins, chat to people along the towpath who might share some interesting history or wait until a rainstorm has passed and the rainbow appears across your favourite lake. Be open to possibility and unexpected opportunities.
- **Put yourself in the way of awe and wonder** – if you can, paddle among the mighty fells of the Lake District, experience

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SUP in the city, notice the tiny damselflies flitting along the riverbank or the smell of lavender on the towpath, or simply sit with your flask of tea and cake and watch the tide ebb and flow after your paddle. Whether you have a religious or spiritual practice or not, allow yourself to marvel at something bigger beyond our normal, screen-focused days.

- **Surround yourself with people who lift you up** – paddleboarding is full of inspiring role models and people who want you to enjoy the SUP life too. They will add to your joy immensely.

I am so honoured and excited to now introduce you to the wonderful contributors who have generously shared their stories about how SUP has transformed their lives. We all want you to experience the same joy.

Wishing you all the very best in your SUP journey – I hope to one day see you on the water!



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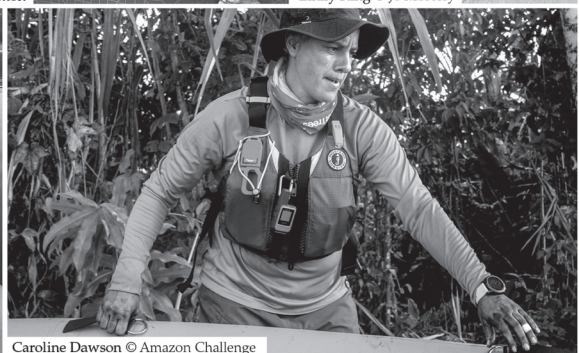
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