



STAND-UP PADDLE- BOARDING IN GREAT BRITAIN

BEAUTIFUL PLACES TO PADDLEBOARD
IN ENGLAND, SCOTLAND & WALES

JO MOSELEY

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near Tewkesbury on the River Severn © @jamesappletonphotography
Back cover: L–R: Sunrise at Runswick Bay © Charlotte Graham; A peaceful paddle on the River Dee; A sunny day
on London’s Regent’s Canal; Ullswater in the Lake District; The red cliffs at Sidmouth; The beautiful Afon Teifi;
A #2MinuteBeachClean; Looking over Aberporth.

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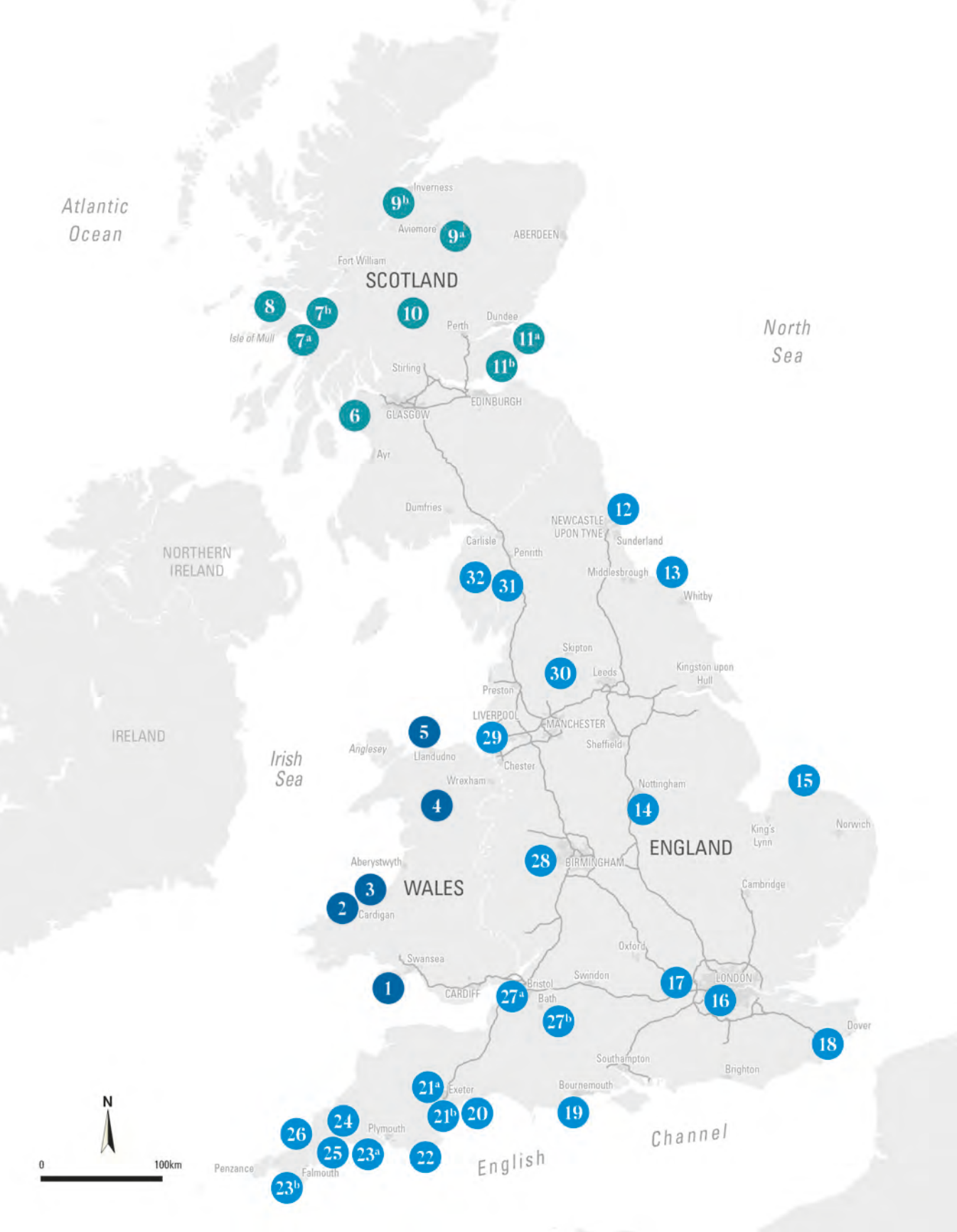
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SAFETY STATEMENT

Stand-up paddleboarding and wild swimming are activities that carry a risk of personal injury or death. Participants must be aware of and accept that these risks are present and they should be responsible for their own actions and involvement.

Nobody involved in the writing and production of this guidebook accepts any responsibility for any errors that it may contain, or are they liable for any injuries or damage that may arise from its use. Stand-up paddleboarding, outdoor swimming and particularly wild swimming are inherently dangerous and the fact that individual descriptions in this volume do not point out such dangers does not mean that they do not exist. Take care.





Atlantic Ocean

North Sea

NORTHERN IRELAND

IRELAND

Irish Sea

ENGLAND

WALES

Channel

English

0 100km



8
7^h
7^a

9^h
9^a

10
6

11^a
11^b

32
31

12

13

5

29

30

4

15

2
3

1

28

14

1

27^a

27^b

17

16

18

26

24

25

23^a

21^a

21^b

20

22

19

23^b

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Opposite Sunrise at Runswick Bay

Introduction

‘Do you remember how it felt the first time you went paddleboarding?’

This is a question I ask all my guests on my podcast, *The Joy of SUP – The Paddleboarding Sunshine Podcast*. For almost all, that moment is fresh in their memory.

In a world that makes so many demands upon us each day, with little time to simply be, stand-up paddleboarding (SUP) has given so many of us the opportunity to be a beginner once more, to fall and try again and to celebrate the small steps along the way. We have found friendships and freedom, learned that maybe we are stronger and more courageous than we thought and that there is adventure on our doorstep if we pause to look around. A chance to walk on water and, I hope, appreciate that we all belong there too.

I shall never forget my first time on a paddleboard on 24 September 2016 in the Lake District. From the moment I stood up and looked out across Derwent Water, I knew that this was something special. I had injured my knee at the beginning of the year, and my spirits and sense of joy were dulled by months of pain. In September, I set myself a challenge to spend 30 minutes each day moving outside. ‘For the first time in months, I felt like a warrior, not a worrier,’ is how I describe that afternoon. Yes, I fell and yes, I doubted myself as we made our way across the water, but I also smiled and laughed more than I had in months. Two months later I chose my first paddleboard for my fifty-second birthday present, a white, blue and orange Starboard Astro Zen that I still sometimes ride today. And so began my love story with paddleboarding.

In the years since, SUP has helped me navigate life with greater hope through grief, loss, anxiety, a difficult menopause, flying solo with my sons and being an empty nester. I have

written articles, made tiny award-winning films (*Found at Sea* and *Finding Joy*) and launched my podcast celebrating the paddleboarding community.

In 2019 I became the first woman, aged 54, to SUP coast to coast across Northern England, picking up litter and raising money for the surf therapy charity The Wave Project and 2 Minute Foundation. A film about my journey, created with Frit Tam of Passion Fruit Pictures, *Brave Enough – A Journey Home to Joy*, has been screened at prestigious film festivals and online to a warm reception and critical acclaim.

Paddleboarding has brought a sense of community, joy, strength and purpose that I had forgotten was possible outside my roles as a mother, daughter, sister and friend. My connection to the environment has deepened, as has my commitment to look after the waterways that bring such happiness. I never claim to be the fastest, strongest or fittest paddleboarder; I have watched in awe the technical skills of those who have so generously shared their time with me as I researched this book.

My goal with *Stand-up Paddleboarding in Great Britain* is to share these possibilities of place and people with you. You’ll meet paddleboarding friends and heroes and explore the magic of the rivers, lakes, lochs, harbours, beaches, canals and coasts that they are lucky enough to call home. Without exception, every place I visited and bring to you here surpassed my expectations and I returned richer for the experience.

I hope *Stand-up Paddleboarding in Great Britain* will spark your curiosity to discover new destinations in England, Scotland and Wales and also to find adventure on your doorstep on waterways that perhaps, like me, you have overlooked in the past. Whether you are a beginner or a more seasoned SUP enthusiast,










my wish is that there is somewhere here for you, and that you will feel the same sense of wonder I feel putting on my leash and setting forth on my board.

On her podcast *How to Fail With Elizabeth Day*, author and presenter Elizabeth Day shared the advice of acclaimed novelist Maggie O'Farrell: 'the best writing you can do is the writing you can't not do,' she said, 'you have to tell the story that is bursting to be told.'

Writing this book has been one of the greatest honours of my life. I truly hope I have done justice to the stories of place and people that I feel are bursting to be told.

For more information on the topics covered in the following pages, go to www.adventurebooks.com/blogs/blog/stand-up-paddleboarding-information

Key

-  Entry point
-  Exit point
-  Combined exit and entry point
-  Turn around point (the point of the route at which you start heading back to your launch location)
-  Public transport – bus
-  Public transport – rail
-  Underground
-  Metro
-  Parking

The history and growth of SUP

Over the last few years, paddleboarding and the SUP community have grown hugely. According to British Canoeing, the number of its members who tick SUP as their main interest has grown by 229 per cent from October 2019. It is the fastest-growing discipline within its membership. Of the SUP paddlers, 51 per cent are female, and 73 per cent of its SUP membership is between 30 and 60 years old.

I have always wondered when SUP as a sport came to Britain, and so with the help of SUP writer Sarah Thornely I contacted two early enthusiasts, Simon Bassett and Brian Johncey. Simon is chairman and joint head coach of British Stand Up Paddleboarding Association (BSUPA) and owner of SUP school 2XS, who began SUP in 2006. At that time he believes there were fewer than 10 people paddling in the UK. A year later he set up BSUPA, training instructors and setting up the BSUPA national

SUP race series. Brian Johncey, owner of Blue Chip Board Store, also started SUP around this time. The Blue Chip paddlers were the first on the River Thames at Hampton Court in 2007. In 2011 he organised a SUP racing event, the Battle of the Thames, with 48 competitors. By 2019 the numbers had risen to over 200. He says recreational SUP really took off in 2014, and that this accounts for 95 per cent of his board sales.

I feel honoured to hear these experiences, and if you know any others who can shed light on the history of SUP in the UK please do let me know. In the meantime, Steve West's book *Stand Up Paddle: A paddlers' guide* offers research and insight into the history of the sport worldwide.

It's also interesting to reflect that if you are taking up SUP today, you really are still at the start of things; we are all part of this exciting journey together.

How to get started in SUP

One of the attractions of paddleboarding, especially for anyone new to water sports, is its simplicity and accessibility. However, whenever we are near or on a body of water there are risks and challenges to think about. This is not just for our own safety and enjoyment, but the safety of other water users around us and the emergency services that would need to rescue us if something goes wrong.

In this section, I will go through a few ideas to think about when you get started with SUP and give you links to more specialised information to build up your knowledge and skills, and ultimately make SUP even more fun.

The basics

For those new to SUP, there can be a lot to take in. Here is a list of some of the equipment you will encounter:

- » **Inflatable board** – inflatable boards are ones that you pump up yourself, by hand or using an electric pump. When not in use,

they are deflated, rolled up and packed away for transport and storage. They usually come as a package with a bag, paddle and a pump to inflate them. Also known as iSUPs.

- » **Hardboard** – also known as rigid or solid boards, hardboards are usually made of fibre glass and epoxy resin wrapped around a foam core. They can be made in shapes and sizes more suited to specialist SUP disciplines such as racing or surfing. They do not fold down and you do not need to inflate them.
- » **Paddle** – this is like a handheld oar that you use to move through the water. It has a handle, shaft and blade: the blade is the part that goes into the water.
- » **Leash** – this attaches you to your board and can be worn around your ankle, calf or around the waist. Your board is a good buoyancy aid and wearing a leash means you won't be separated from it should you



fall in. For recreational paddles, such as the ones shared in this guide, a coiled leash is recommended. SUP surfers would wear a straight leash. It is important to keep up to date with leash advice.

- » **Buoyancy aid** – a piece of equipment that will keep a conscious person who is able to keep their head above water afloat. Also known as personal flotation devices (PFDs).
- » **Fin** – fins are attached to the back (tail) of your board to help with control, direction and balance. The number and size of the fins (for example, a centre fin and two side fins) on a board can vary according to the make and type of board as well as what sort of paddling you will be doing.

Choosing an instructor

My number one top tip for anyone getting into SUP is to take a lesson or course of lessons with a qualified instructor.

They cover safety, skills, equipment, the environment and confidence building; everything from what to wear and how to set up your board to SUP strokes, turns and stopping, what to do if you fall off and how to self-rescue.

Additionally, they might share knowledge of the local SUP spots. A SUP school, club or instructor may also run SUP socials where you'll meet other people from the paddleboarding community. It's worth investing in some lessons if you've been paddling for a while but didn't have chance to have a lesson at the outset. A good instructor will be more than happy to review your technique and help you build up your skills and knowledge.

In addition to taking lessons with a qualified instructor, you could also consider online safety skills courses, for example the Water Skills Academy's (WSA) safety video tutorials and iSUP Smart online course, the SUPfm SUP Safety Course and British Canoeing's Go Paddling website for SUP safety video tutorials. I have also listed some instructional books in the further reading pages (p211).

Learning and improving your skills, knowledge and understanding of the environments you'll paddle in will help make you safer and more confident of your ability to judge conditions every time you are on the water. This in turn will make it much more fun.



1 Paddleboards in the sunshine at Bristol Harbour 2 Looking out to Derwent Water

CHOOSING A QUALIFIED INSTRUCTOR

Most instructors and schools will put their qualifications and accreditations on their website or social media details. If you don't see that information, feel free to ask. Awarding bodies they may have trained with are the Academy of Surfing Instructors (ASI), British Canoeing (or a British Canoeing affiliated club), BSUPA, International Surfing Association (ISA) or WSA.

Licensing and access

PADDLING ON INLAND WATERWAYS

If you're wondering whether you can paddle anywhere you want on inland waterways, the short answer is no. There are over 68,000 kilometres of inland waterways in England and Wales. Of that, approximately 2,250 kilometres can be paddled uncontested, which equates to four per cent. This is why British Canoeing is developing the *Clear Access, Clear Waters* campaign working for 'fair, shared and sustainable open access on water for all'. As Ben Seal of British Canoeing explained to me, only a small percentage of waterways in England (and even fewer in Wales) have a Statutory Right of Navigation. British Canoeing has been campaigning for a change in the law and supporting paddlers to be proactive in paddling responsibly, respecting the environment and other users and demonstrating that they are guardians of our waters.

LICENCES

In England and Wales, you need a licence to paddleboard on inland waterways (such as river navigations and canals) managed by the Canal & River Trust and Environment Agency, plus others such as the Norfolk Broads. You can buy a licence from British Canoeing, Canoe Wales, the Canal & River Trust, the WSA or directly from some navigation authorities. When deciding where to buy your licence, look at what and where is covered plus the benefits, for

example liability insurance included within the membership fee, and which is right for you.

In Scotland, you do not need a licence to paddleboard due to the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. However, membership of the Scottish Canoe Association offers a number of benefits including liability insurance.

ADDITIONAL CHARGES

Some places such as the Royal Military Canal (p119) and Liverpool's Royal Albert Dock (p185) require an extra fee as well as a licence. Harbours may require a licence from the Harbour Master's Office. Some lakes are private and charge a launch fee so do check ahead.

Before you travel somewhere new, do your research so you have the right information and can explore with confidence. Visit www.gopaddling.info to see which, if any, licence is required.

Choosing your equipment

DECIDING ON YOUR BOARD

Buying your own paddleboard is a big decision, both financially and as an investment in your well-being; you want to get it right. I asked Sean and Claire Scott from The New Forest Paddle Sport Company for their advice:

- » **Construction** – consider whether you want a hard or inflatable paddleboard. Hardboards give a better paddling experience due to a shaped and more refined board, but are heavier than most inflatables and are difficult to transport and store. Inflatable boards are lightweight and robust and normally come as a package with pumps, paddles and bags, but are limited in performance paddling or trickier conditions due to board shaping.

- » **Location** – consider what type of paddling you want to do and where. There are lots of different boards designed for a range of activities, from SUP surfing, touring and racing to SUP yoga.
- » **Particular boards** – consider what you want your board to do. If you are new to SUP and want a board that will do everything, an all-round-style board may suit you best. Be aware, however, that these are slower and not manoeuvrable enough for large waves. If you want to go on river paddling tours or day trips, a touring-designed board is longer and narrower for increased glide and efficiency over distance. If you want to tour on a river or canal with lots of portaging (carrying) or do one-way trips then inflatables are easier to carry and pack away. For coastal paddling on day trips, hard touring boards will handle the chop and swell better than an inflatable.

Tips for inflatable boards

- » **In hot weather, let some of the air out of your inflatable board and keep the board out of direct heat and sunlight. Simply pump it up when you are about to go on the water.**
- » **Whether you use an electric pump or handpump is a preference and I personally enjoy the ritual of pumping up my board.**
- » **Do not be surprised that when you deflate an inflatable board it can be very loud. As a courtesy to people around me in a public place I try and warn them that I am about to deflate.**
- » **Investing in an upgraded paddle will have a positive impact on your technique, endurance and comfort.**

CHOOSING A PADDLE

It is important when buying packages to look at all the accessories and their quality, especially with paddles. The best thing you can do is try out lots of different paddles and boards before purchasing your first board:

- » **Material** – the more expensive packages come with carbon paddles and high-quality pumps and bags which will last. The cheaper packages tend to come with aluminium paddles which can corrode quickly in saltwater, don't always float and are heavy.
- » **Shape** – the shape of a paddle is very important as well as the size: standard blade shapes are the classic teardrop or the High Aspect shape, which is designed for racing and touring and will give you a more efficient paddle stroke.

I spoke with Claire Scott recently and learned that approximately 90 to 95 per cent of new boards purchased at her shop are inflatable. I use an inflatable board as I simply don't have the space at home to store a hardboard. Almost everyone I paddled with researching the book used an inflatable too.

COILED LEASHES

A leash is a vital part of your safety equipment. If you fall in the water, the leash means your board will remain nearby. Leashes can be straight (used in SUP surf) or coiled. Most recreational SUP packages are currently supplied with a coiled leash, which is worn around your calf or ankle. The leash sits on the deck (or top) of the board so that there is less chance it will snag on branches, ropes, moorings or obstructions under the surface. A coiled leash can also be used with a quick-release (or QR) belt, which is worn around your waist. The QR belt has a buckle and a pull cord

or toggle. It sits high out of the water and is less likely to snag on debris on moving water, as you find on estuaries or rivers.

You may find yourself in a situation where you need to separate yourself from your board, where there is a risk of entrapment on an obstruction. A QR belt will allow you to free yourself by pulling the toggle at your waist rather than trying to reach down to your ankle, which could be difficult if the force of the water is pushing you down.

Some brands sell QR belts with their boards, but they are available to buy separately. At the time of writing, a campaign is calling for manufacturers to supply them as standard. My preference is to now wear a QR belt.

Tips for leashes

- » **There is very specific advice for SUP surfing and white water SUP. It is important you follow the guidelines for these disciplines.**
- » **Have a lesson with a qualified instructor or coach, learn how to use a QR correctly and practise on land.**
- » **Ensure that you fix your leash correctly and securely to your paddleboard each time you use it.**
- » **Regularly check your leash for decay and potential breakage.**
- » **Keep up to date with safety and equipment advice from platforms such as ASI, British Canoeing, BSUPA, ISA, WSA, Stand Up Paddle UK, the RNLI, RLSS and SUP Mag UK.**



Equipment and kit

When you start SUP it can be daunting looking at the different options available, and what works for someone else might not work for you. The questions I ask myself before buying or choosing what to wear are:

- » Where am I paddling?
- » What type of paddling am I doing?
- » What are the air and water temperatures and wider weather conditions?
- » How likely am I to fall in, based on my experience, skills and the body of water?
- » Is it comfortable, do I like it and will it allow me to paddle freely?
- » What is my budget and how often will I use this piece of kit?
- » What is it made of and how sustainable is it?

Remember that this book does not include SUP surfing, where a wetsuit is best, or white water SUP, where you will need specialist equipment.

I spoke with Ben Longhurst at WSA who recommends focusing on preparing for the water temperature, not the air temperature, each season. For example, in winter both air and water temperatures will be cold, but in spring the air temperature will be warming up but the water temperature will still be cold if you fall in.

- » **Basic kit** – your basic outerwear for paddleboarding should be swimwear, quick-dry leggings, a rash vest, neoprene leggings and a top or a thin wetsuit. Even in summer you may need a windproof or neoprene jacket. Remember a cap or hat to protect you from the sun and long sleeves on your wetsuit or rash vest. In the autumn or spring you might add a cagoule, warm sweaters, waterproof trousers or a thicker wetsuit. In winter you may also add a warm hat and gloves.

- » **Footwear** – think about where your launch point is, how you will launch and exit, what obstacles there might be and what you might step on if you fall in, particularly on canals or rivers. Different options would be wetsuit socks or boots with a hard sole, aqua shoes, trainers or waterproof shoes. It's lovely to paddle barefoot on your board on the sea, however, think about where you will launch and exit as well as returning to your car.
- » **Gloves** – don't forget to keep your hands warm with neoprene, woolly or waterproof gloves. You can buy neoprene mitts which have a hole in, so you are still connected to your board.
- » **Wetsuits and neoprene options** – a typical wetsuit has long arms and legs, but you may prefer a shortie (a wetsuit with short arms and legs) or a Long John or Jane (a full wetsuit with no arms). A thinner, summer wetsuit might be referred to as 3/2 or 4/3, which means the body of the wetsuit is three millimetres or four millimetres thick and the arms and legs two millimetres or three millimetres. This gives you the warmth where you need it around your torso and the flexibility on your arms and legs for movement. A thicker, winter wetsuit might be referred to as a 5/4, which means the body of the wetsuit is five millimetres and the arms and legs four millimetres.
- » **Dry trousers and dry suits** – if you plan to paddle regularly throughout the colder months, you could look at investing in dry trousers and a jacket or an all-in-one dry suit. These may also have built-in socks, over which you then wear boots. Remember if you choose this option to get bigger boots to accommodate the sock and any layers you wear underneath.

- » **Changing robes and mats** – a changing robe will allow you to change and keep you cosy after you have been on the water. A changing mat is helpful to change on a rough surface, especially important if you have dry suit trousers with socks which you don't want to rip.
- » **Extras** – many paddlers put leashes, extra fins, gloves, boots and any wet gear in a large plastic laundry basket so it is all in one place.

Tips for essential outerwear

- » **It is better to take an extra layer and not need it than be chilly without one.**
- » **Think how far you will be from a change of clothes if you fall in.**
- » **A vest-style buoyancy aid adds an extra layer of warmth.**

BUOYANCY AIDS

Another key part of your safety equipment is your PFD or buoyancy aid. There are two styles: chest/vest or waist belt. I prefer a vest style with a zip.

- » **Chest/vest** – a vest style that has a snug fit and allows you to move your arms. Check that it is not too bulky at the front, which might make getting back on the board tricky if you fall in. Some brands also make PFDs that are a better fit for women.
- » **Waist belt** – contains an inflatable bladder and small gas cylinder, released by pulling the toggle. You can also manually top it up with a valve. You will need to replace the gas cylinder if you use it in an emergency. There is a waterproof storage pocket at the front. Palm make one called the Glide and Red and the Airbelt PFD.

CLEANING YOUR KIT

Cleaning your board, paddle and leashes regularly not only keeps them in good condition so that they last longer, but is also important from an environmental viewpoint. Rinsing with fresh, cold water and then allowing them to dry completely after each session is good practice. I also clean my board with an eco-friendly scrub, such as SUP Scrub. Hardboards will need more specialised maintenance and repair.

What to take on your paddleboard

I spoke with Ben at WSA for his thoughts on what to carry on our boards. The exact items you need to take will depend on the type of journey, when and where you are going and the weather forecast.

- » **Fully charged phone in a waterproof case** – keep the phone close to you, perhaps round your neck on a lanyard, rather than in your dry bag where you might not be able to reach it in an emergency. Always tell someone before you go out where you are going and what time you intend to return, especially if you are paddling alone.
- » **Dry bag** – attached safely to your board or one you wear like a rucksack. I have a smaller dry bag containing keys and a battery pack for my phone.
- » **A drink** – you will be surprised how dehydrated you can become paddleboarding and your judgement and ability will be impaired.
- » **'Pea-less' whistle** – to attract attention.
- » **Throw bag and line.**
- » **Snacks** – I prefer to use a reusable plastic or tin box or beeswax wraps, rather than single-use plastic bags.
- » **Hand sanitiser** – to use before eating.
- » **Extra clothing** – a hat, cap, gloves, an extra layer of warmth, cagoule in case of rain and a change of clothes.

- » Sunscreen and sunglasses – with floating straps.
- » Torch.
- » Knife.
- » Spare fin and fin bolt – if this is how your fin is fitted to your board. Also a spare leash, paddle and pump.
- » First aid kit – just to cover blisters, cuts, stings and other minor scrapes.
- » Repair kit – some duct tape, cable ties and cord can repair most things, from leashes to paddles, to keep you moving.
- » Litter picker and bag – to do a #2MinuteBeachClean.
- » Mask and snorkel.
- » Personal locator beacon or flare – for an emergency on longer adventure touring and coastal trips. You may also want to take a VHF radio qualification.
- » Space blanket or emergency shelter – for longer adventures.

Tips for what to take

- » Write your name and phone details on your board on a sticker or in permanent marker. If you're separated from your board while paddling on the coast, this will allow the coastguard to contact you and avoid an air-and-sea search operation being launched. You may also get your board back.
- » Keep spare clothes and food in the car.



1



2

Safety

GENERAL SAFETY TIPS

- » Be fit and healthy enough to paddleboard, including in an emergency.
- » Learn about tides, rips, currents, wind and weather. Check forecasts for these before you set out and be aware that conditions may change.
- » Always wear a PFD and correct leash.
- » If at the coast, do not go out in offshore winds which could blow you out to sea.
- » Keep communication equipment like a mobile phone attached to you, not your board.
- » Dress for the water temperature, not the air temperature.
- » Tell people where you are going, when you are heading out, when you are due back and if you are delayed.
- » Complete a SUP training course.
- » Watch the online safety videos from British Canoeing, WSA and SUPfm.
- » Being able to swim confidently will help if and when you fall in.
- » Go with a responsible friend so you can help one another should problems arise.

COLD WATER SHOCK

After hearing Professor Mike Tipton speak about cold water shock on Simon Hutchinson's *SUPfm* podcast, I asked him to share with us why we need to dress for the water temperature rather than the air temperature as paddleboarders. He advised that the sudden change from a comfortable air temperature to cold water immersion causes a series of cardiorespiratory responses, including gasping, hyperventilation and panic. Cold shock response includes an increase in heart rate, blood pressure and the work required of the heart; this can even lead to heart attacks.

BIOSECURITY

Invasive non-native species of plants can have a hugely detrimental effect on the waterways we paddle. It is important that as paddlers we don't take invasive species with us. Be sure to check your equipment as you leave the water, clean and wash all equipment and dry equipment and clothing carefully; some species can last for days in moist conditions.

For more information about the impact of invasive species and why we need to be meticulous about Check, Clean and Dry, go to www.britishcanoeing.org.uk/go-canoeing/access-and-environment/invasive-non-native-species#stop-the-spread

EMERGENCIES

In an emergency inland, ring **999** and ask for the fire service. In a medical emergency ask for the ambulance service. If you are on an estuary or the coast, ring **999** and ask for the coastguard. Tell them if it is a medical emergency too.

Planning

Creating a plan ahead of your trip not only makes it safer and means you can use your time more effectively, but also adds to the excitement and anticipation. Here are a few things for you to consider when paddling on different bodies of water. The list is not exhaustive, so do check for local conditions.

CANALS

Canals are a great place to start paddleboarding: they are enclosed, there are lots of places to launch or exit and you will never be far from the towpath. However, they have features to consider.

- » **Locks** – paddleboarders don't go through the locks. We leave the canal and carry (or 'portage') our board around the lock.

- » **Bridges** – some bridges, for example swing bridges, can be particularly low. If you don't feel comfortable going under them, leave the canal and walk around. Be aware that bridges can funnel the wind.
- » **Tunnels** – some longer tunnels require specific permission, so check your route. Some have traffic-light systems, such as Foulridge Tunnel (p191). Paddling on your knees is helpful, as well as fluorescent clothing, torches and a whistle or air horn.
- » **Narrowboats** – when approaching oncoming boats, keep to the right-hand side of the canal and pass port to port. Boats may also pass you from behind or create a wash or wake, so if you're unsure just drop to your knees until the water calms down again. Narrowboats have right of way over paddleboards and may not always be able to easily see you.
- » **Anglers** – sometimes anglers are tricky to spot if they are hidden behind a bush or tree. Be courteous, let them know that you are there and move to the side to avoid the fishing line.
- » **Swans** – move out of their way or leave the canal until they pass.

LAKES, LOCHS AND RESERVOIRS

- » **Wind** – large lakes and lochs will be affected by wind which will create waves. Depending on the strength and direction of the wind, returning to shore may be challenging, so check the wind forecast and be prepared for it to change. It may be beneficial to have the wind behind your back on the return journey when you are more tired.
- » **Shelter** – paddle close to the edge of the lake/loch/reservoir where it is more sheltered.
- » **Outflows and intakes** – be aware of these.

RIVERS

Rivers can be beautiful and they offer the chance to use the river flow to enhance your paddle. If you are new to rivers, start on one that has a gentle, meandering flow.

- » **Hazards** – check the water and pollution levels. There is the risk of obstructions from branches, either on or below the surface; your fin may get stuck on rocks or in the mud. Look out for any rapids that are beyond your level of experience or ability.
- » **Flow** – a river may be flowing faster beneath the surface. Take into account if it has rained in the days leading up to your paddle as well as the forecast.
- » **Weirs** – research how and where to launch and exit safely to go around them.
- » **Rowers** – Patricia Carswell, journalist and podcaster at *Girl on the River*, explained that rowers have to stick to a circulation pattern, rowing on the starboard (right-hand) side of the river. Because they face backwards, they can't always see paddleboarders. Wear something luminous to be seen more easily, stay in single file if in a group and do not underestimate how wide their oars are. If you see rowers ahead and you don't think they have seen you, shout 'ahead, rower'.

COASTAL PADDLING

- » **Forecast** – learn about the tides and wind. Also check the water quality where you are going.
- » **Lifeguards** – paddle from a lifeguarded beach where possible and ask the lifeguards if there is anything you need to know that's unique to the area. A lifeguarded beach will have areas designated for swimmers and bodyboarders only, so avoid these and launch and return between the black-and-white-chequered flags. You can learn the different RNLI flags and what they mean.

- » **Coastal erosion** – research this if you are landing on a beach.
- » **Estuaries and tidal rivers** – be aware of tides so that you don't find yourself stuck on mudflats. They are hard work to walk across, can be dangerous and you could damage them.

Tips for planning

- » **Check the weather and wind forecast.**
- » **Check the tides at www.tidetimes.org.uk or www.tide-forecast.com**
- » **Check the water quality in the area you are going to using [Surfers Against Sewage Safer Seas and Rivers App](#) or the [Rivers Trust map](#).**
- » **Other sources to help you plan include www.riverlevels.uk and www.riverapp.net**
- » **If you are going somewhere new, researching the area beforehand is important. Look at www.gopaddling.info for routes. Get advice from local SUP groups via social media or look for blogs. Do always check the person who is giving the advice knows what they are talking about. Go on a guided tour with a qualified instructor in the area.**
- » **Should you fall in a canal, try and stand up. You may be surprised how shallow the water is.**
- » **Paddle Logger (for iOS only) uses a GPS that lets you track paddles and add photos. A premium service has features such as sending a text message to friends onshore and a virtual flare in an emergency. RYA SafeTrx, Strava and GeoSUP also allow tracking.**
- » **Always be prepared to change your plans according to the conditions on the day.**

ABOVE ALL, REMEMBER 'IF IN DOUBT, DON'T GO OUT.'

Weather

Wind is the primary safety concern when paddleboarding. You should be able to plan, understand and react to the following wind direction and strength and a change in these. Avoid paddling in fog, heavy mist and lightning.

I am grateful to Brendon Prince of The Long Paddle and the water safety charity Above Water for sharing his vast knowledge. His advice is summarised here.

WIND DIRECTION

When commenting on wind direction, observe the direction it is coming from, for example if the wind is coming from the north, it is a northerly wind. To help you understand wind direction, imagine you are standing in the middle of a pie and it's cut into quarters; each quarter represents the wind blowing at you in the middle. The quarter of the pie facing you represents the wind blowing in your face. The quarter pieces to your left and right side are side-on wind and the quarter piece behind you represents tail wind. Wind into your face will dramatically slow your paddling. The chop created by wind from the side will test your balance and ability to paddle in a straight line. The best wind is on your tail or stern. Downwinding will help your paddle speed and make paddling much easier. With all wind directions, the board you paddle on makes a big difference in what can be achieved in each condition.

WIND STRENGTH

For a beginner, a wind speed of only eight kilometres per hour can create uncomfortable paddling conditions. Never go on to the water if the wind is stronger than your ability.

On coastal waters, offshore winds are to be avoided as they have the potential to blow you away from the safety of land. Wind strength

will always increase around headlands and further out to sea. If the wind blows above eight kilometres per hour then small waves or a chop will start to develop. If wind has been blowing from the same direction for a long time, over a large stretch of water, then swell will be created. This swell will turn into large waves when it rolls on to a beach or shallow water.

WIND CHANGE

Wind is created by the sun's impact on the sea and land. When the sea is heated by the sun it will suck air off the land, creating an offshore wind or 'land breeze'. You need to understand why local winds occur and how the topography of the coastline can change wind suddenly and affect your paddling.

TIDE HEIGHT

Tide height is the vertical rise or fall of the water through the tidal range. At low tide a muddy and rocky entry or exit may damage your board. At high tide entry or exit may be limited.

TIDAL FLOW OR STREAM

Flow is the movement of water, not the height of the water, and predominantly moves along the beach, NOT in or out.

On a spring tide, the flow of water from left to right or right to left (as you look out to sea) can be two knots (approximately 3.7 kilometres per hour) only 50 metres from the beach. This means you would have to paddle above this speed to feel like you were going in your desired direction. The flow will not carry you into the beach on an incoming tide or out (away from the beach) on an outgoing.

The incoming tide will carry you right to left as you look out to the sea or left to right on an outgoing tide. When flow changes direction you can experience up to one hour of slack water (no flow). As a paddleboarder, slack water can create dangerous currents that will move you in any direction. There are some areas of coastline where the flow is very fast (above five knots) and there can be NO slack time for the water between flow directional change.

Remember spring tides exaggerate the size of high and low tides with greater tidal flow between these extremes. Neap tides create 'middling' conditions: the high tide will not be very high, and the low tide will not be very low. If you are paddling in an area with a large tidal range, like the Severn Estuary (p179), this will increase the tidal flow speeds.

I will often plan my paddle to be with the flow in one direction and then return to my start location with the changing of the tidal flow. Remember tidal flow doesn't always match the times of high or low tides. Find out the tidal flow in your coastal area by checking the Admiralty Tidal Stream Atlas or leading navigation apps.

WIND AGAINST TIDE

For the perfect 'naturally assisted' paddle you need wind on your back and tidal flow in the direction you wish to travel. When wind and flow are against each other the conditions become VERY choppy and paddling is hard work. When wind is against tide, the path of least resistance for your paddle is with the wind – but it's probably going to be a bumpy ride!

Being environmentally thoughtful and responsible

One of the joys of paddleboarding is being able to spend time in nature and the benefits this brings for our physical, mental and emotional well-being. It is important, however, that as paddlers we respect these environments and, where we can, give back to say thank you.

HOW CAN WE MAKE SURE WE PADDLE RESPONSIBLY?

I asked Dr Sarah Perkins, SUPer and Senior Lecturer at Cardiff University's School of Biosciences, about how we can enjoy our time on the water as thoughtfully as possible:

- » Watch from a distance and never approach animals: steer a clear course, give lots of space and help them predict your movements. Be careful not to push wildlife along a narrow channel into neighbouring territory where it could be harmed as it defends its home, for example swans. Research where you are going so you know what you might encounter.
- » Think about less obvious places that our presence may impact negatively, such as gravel riverbeds where fish spawn, reed beds and sandy areas in the mouth of an estuary.
- » Choose carefully when you visit sites to avoid the breeding season from spring to summer and be especially careful not to disturb animals and their young.
- » Become a community scientist and conservationist by reporting your plant and animal sightings to iNaturalist. The app will use artificial intelligence to suggest what you have seen, even if you don't know.

SEALS

I was lucky enough to paddle with Charlie Gill, a Marine Stories Ranger from the Cornwall Seal Group Research Trust (p167), who shared some key advice about seals and what we can do to paddle responsibly:

- » **Hauling out** – seals need to haul out on land to conduct vital life processes such as pupping, socialising, digesting food and replenishing oxygen levels. When they are hauled out they are incredibly vulnerable to being disturbed.
- » **Signs of disturbance** – these include stampeding (when a seal rushes into the sea), tombstoning (when a seal throws itself into the water from a great height), flipper splashing, vocalisation and crash diving, which can all be harmful and even fatal.
- » **Reducing your impact** – keep quiet and downwind so seals don't hear or smell you. Be sure to keep a distance of at least 100 metres and do not observe for more than 15 minutes. Also, take your litter home to reduce entanglement and ingestion.
- » **Distress** – if you see seals in distress, signal to others and move away quietly. Report the seals you see to sightings@cornwallsealgroup.co.uk who will pass them to the nearest local recording scheme. If you see a seal that you think may need medical attention, phone British Divers Marine Life Rescue on 01825 765546.

DOLPHINS AND WHALES

Keep a distance from dolphins or whales and don't watch them for more than 15 minutes. Do not try to approach, swim with or touch them. For more information, go to www.ullapoolseasavers.com

BIRDLIFE

Tony Benton, a wildlife conservationist and birder in West Sussex, explained to me the impact disturbing birds, even unintentionally, can have on their ability to feed and survive. If our approach causes a bird to 'flush' (fly or run away) or change its behaviour we are too close. This might include a change in its posture, freezing, hunching into a protective stance, raising its head or uttering an alarm call.

To be more mindful of birds, paddle quietly and at a distance, kneel down when passing a bird to make your silhouette less threatening and use designated launch points to avoid damaging nesting grounds. Also, carry your board rather than dragging it.

You can read more on the RSPB and BSUPA's Bird Life Paddleboarding Guide, and British Canoeing has a helpful PDF download about birds, whales, seals and dolphins on the access and environment section of its website.

WiSe SCHEME

The WiSe Scheme is an accredited training scheme that provides information for commercial operators in the marine environment to watch wildlife in a wildlife-safe way. As paddleboarders we can also find out more by taking a public module: www.wisescheme.org

Making a positive difference to the environment

'I can't change the world, but I can change the little bit around me' is a phrase that's guided me over my paddleboarding journey. With this in mind, there are a number of organisations that are doing incredible work that you can learn from and join:

- » Planet Patrol, founded by eco adventurer, environmental campaigner and record-breaking paddleboarder Lizzie Carr MBE, is a global movement of paddleboarders

who pick up litter. There are community champions, organised group litter picks and a Planet Patrol app:

www.planetpatrol.co

- » Cal Major has founded both Paddle Against Plastic and the charity Seaful. Seaful's mission is to help more people reconnect to the ocean and waterways, for their mental health and to nurture stewardship of our blue spaces. I am honoured to be an ambassador for Seaful: www.seaful.org.uk
- » 2 Minute Foundation, founded by writer and environmental campaigner Martin Dorey, is a global community of 'barefoot warriors' encouraged to take just two minutes to pick up litter wherever they are in the world. I am honoured to be an ambassador for it: www.beachclean.net
- » Clare Osborn, SUP instructor, Blue Health coach and co-founder of #PaddleCleanUp, has written a brilliant download for British Canoeing on how to organise a paddle clean up in your community: www.britishcanoeing.org.uk
- » Canal & River Trust looks after 3,200 kilometres of waterways in England and Wales. It works towards boosting biodiversity, tackling climate change and invasive species and has its own #PlasticsChallenge campaign. There are lots of ways to volunteer: www.canalrivertrust.org.uk
- » Surfers Against Sewage is an environmental charity dedicated to protecting the ocean, waves, beaches and wildlife. Founded in 1990 by Cornish surfers, it is led by Hugo Tagholm. It has created the Safer Seas & Rivers Service app and the Million Mile Beach Clean: www.sas.org.uk

How I decided which places to include

Choosing which places to share with you has been both wonderful and difficult in equal measure. There are so many beautiful SUP spots and recommendations from paddlers wanting to share the places that are special to them. At times I have been lost in maps and writing research notes.

I have built my list around four key principles:

- » **The possibility of place** – I wanted to show the variety of bodies of water we are fortunate enough to have in England, Scotland and Wales. I also wanted to introduce opportunities to view interesting structures from a paddleboard, including lighthouses, sculptures, a crannog, historic buildings, bridges and castles.
- » **Range of distance, difficulty and challenges** – this book is aimed at recreational paddleboarders looking for new and interesting places to paddle. There are trips of a kilometre and a half and others of 26 kilometres. My hope is that the variety will offer inspiration to build up to more challenging routes as your experience, skills and knowledge grow. I offer alternatives for those new to paddleboarding and provide details of guided tours so you can enjoy the area with the reassurance of instructors' professional expertise. Your and other people's safety must always be a priority, and a tour would be the best choice if you are in doubt.

I have also chosen places that act as an example to help you understand what you may encounter elsewhere. For example, requiring a licence at Salcombe Harbour (p143) or special permission to paddle through a tunnel.

I have not included SUP racing, SUP surfing or white water SUP, which are distinct disciplines that require expertise, knowledge and specific equipment. I have pointed you to resources where you can learn more.

- » **SUP infrastructure** – you will discover places where there are car parks, launch spots and, where possible, public toilets and places to eat. I also include locations that can be reached by rail, bus, metro and tube if you are able to carry your board. I am still working on travelling by bike with a board on my back or finding a good bike trailer – please let me know if you have one! I do not include secret spots or places where an influx of cars parking on the roadside could cause disruption to the local community.

Please remember that many of the coastal areas are seasonal and some shops, cafes and public toilets might not be open outside of the summer. RNLI lifeguards are seasonal too.

- » **Balancing exploration SUP spots with honeypots** – honeypots have a detrimental effect on the environment, community and people's experience of their time in the outdoors. I have worked hard to offer alternative ideas and locations not covered in existing SUP guidebooks and online articles. I hope I have struck the right balance in terms of the 'bucket list' and the 'alternative' locations.

Hand on heart, I loved every single place I visited, and in their different ways they inspired me and have enriched my paddleboarding journey. I hope they do for you too.

Reflecting upon my time in Wales, three things stand out clearly: being glued to the wind forecasts, extraordinary wildlife experiences and the SUP family that welcomed me. I began on the River Dee (Afon Dyfrdwy), a magical midsummer evening exploring the river followed by the majestic Llyn Tegid (p23).

A few weeks later, with storms forecast, I set off for West Wales. How lucky we were to get some sunshine. On a paddle with friends along the lush Afon Teifi to Cardigan (p11) we chanced upon friends and witnessed a masterclass in SUP racing.

The blue of the sea along the Ceredigion coastline from Llangrannog to Tresaith will always stay with me (p17). We stood in awe as dolphins swam past and explored a quiet beach.

Oxwich Bay on the Gower peninsula (p5) held its own magic, as we SUP snorkelled from our boards looking for a shipwreck. Rewarded by the sight of a pod of dolphins leaping ahead, we ventured further to the beauty of Three Cliffs Bay.

I squeezed in one final adventure around the Great Orme at Llandudno (p29). The longest sea paddle, requiring the most technical understanding and research, gifted a huge sense of accomplishment.

The beauty of the places I explored and the kindness of the Welsh SUP community outshone the stormy forecasts. These are memories I shall treasure forever.

WALES









Oxwich Bay

SUP SNORKELLING, A WRECK, DOLPHINS AND PADDLING TO THREE CLIFFS BAY

One of the tiny rituals I have when exploring a new place to SUP is to take a quiet moment to look out at the sea, lake or river and wonder what magic lies ahead. It is no different when I arrive at Oxwich Bay on the south coast of the Gower on a Monday morning, as a glitter path of sunlight sparkles on the water as the waves gently lap the empty beach. I kneel on the sand to breathe in the peace and video the view – a reminder for those wintery months when the days are short and sunshine seems a distant memory. Before I can press record, a car pulls up and a little boy, already in his swimming trunks and rash vest, runs to the water's edge.

'Daddy, daddy,' he squeals, 'the beach is full of water! The sea is here to meet us!' Splashing along the shoreline, his excitement is palpable. He has already discovered the magic of Oxwich Bay and it's not even 9 a.m.

I have come to the Gower to meet Dr Sarah Perkins, Senior Lecturer at Cardiff University's School of Biosciences and also a highly accomplished SUP surfer and racer. We are here not only to paddle on the water but to use our SUPs to explore beneath as well; Sarah has packed a mask and snorkel for me.

Oxwich is a beautiful, golden, four-kilometre-long beach lined with sand dunes and a very gentle slope towards the sea. It sits within the Oxwich National Nature Reserve which also includes lakes, woodlands, cliffs and salt and freshwater marshes further inland. In May and June wild orchids can be seen in the sand dunes, growing in the chalky soil created by crushed shells blown from the beach. The nature reserve is also home to the UK's smallest resident butterfly, the small blue, or (as Sarah

later tells me) *Cupido minimus*. To the east is Nicholaston Burrows (also known as Crawley Beach), then Tor Bay and Three Cliffs Bay. I can see why Oxwich regularly features on 'best beach' lists – the Gower was the first place in Britain to be named an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, with its immense sea views, golden sands and dunes.

'We have two options,' says Sarah as we pump up our boards. 'We can have a gentle paddle along the cliff edge, take a look at the wreck and turn back once we reach the outer point of the bay on the west side, or have a longer paddle over to Three Cliffs Bay.' After a busy weekend on the Ceredigion coast in West Wales, a gentle SUP and snorkel sounds perfect. Leaving the beach, we hug the cliff, passing what looks like a fairly significant rockfall, and arrive at a large, white arrow painted on the rock, which marks the point of the wreck of the *Solor*. The *Solor* was a Norwegian vessel torpedoed in the Irish Sea on 27 January 1945 on its way to the Clyde from New York. Two crew members were killed and the ship's hull was badly damaged. Two days later, the *Solor* limped into Oxwich Bay and her cargo was unloaded. The boat soon broke into three, with only the middle section, which is now a popular diving spot, remaining.

We pop on our mask and snorkel, lying diagonally across our boards, and start to explore the world beneath. Our SUPs mean that any boats or jet skis (which are allowed in the bay) as well as other paddlers will be able to see us – they are not simply a platform for our underwater adventures but a safety feature too. Clouds have gathered in the sky and the water visibility is not good, meaning that the wreck and the conger eels Sarah said live within

Opposite Looking back on Oxwich Bay

it remain hidden for today. With a sense of easy companionship we float gently towards a slightly shallower spot and separately explore the rock pools for half an hour, spotting barrel jellyfish and tiny crabs.

Snorkelling is a meditative pastime which requires us to slow our breath and live fully in the moment. I spy a bright-blue plastic shoe wedged between two rocks and spend several minutes pulling it out, along with some plastic wrapping. I'm grateful to have been able to do a tiny #2MinuteBeachClean from my paddleboard.

As we turn back to the beach Sarah spots a pod of common dolphins across the bay, with their distinctive creamy-yellow, hourglass shape on the side. They leap and twist in the air as we stand, mesmerised, for a few minutes, before they continue to swim along the coast. My heart is bursting with joy.

'How do you fancy paddling across to Three Cliffs Bay?' asks Sarah.

'Oh, yes, please,' I reply, energised by the dolphins' visit.

Paddleboarding from the wreck to Three Cliffs Bay takes an hour, and we are met by a stunning beach with the three limestone cliffs, an archway leading to Pobbles Beach and the remains of Pennard Castle on the cliffs above. We watch a horse and rider across the beach and climbers on the rock face. While Oxwich Bay Beach is not lifeguarded, Three Cliffs Bay is in the summer months as there are strong rip currents and tidal systems. For more about rip currents do read William Thomson's *The Book of Tides* and Tristan Gooley's *How to Read Water*.

We set off back to Oxwich Bay Beach, and with the sea breeze it takes around two hours to reach. We also need to walk for a few minutes from the shoreline to our cars as the tide is now



1 Pumping up our boards at Oxwich Bay Beach 2 Sarah enjoying our magical paddle

going out. Stopping to look at starfish (or sea stars) and sea potatoes on the way, we take a moment to listen to the mud 'singing' as the water drains through.

A few days later I read an article by Stuart Gammon in *Stand Up Paddle Mag UK* about a trip starting inland at the Gower Heritage Centre, going along the Pennard Pill and arriving at Three Cliffs beach. Another friend messages me about her evening paddle with Stuart down the river. Adventures for another day.

From the gentle SUP snorkel to the more demanding paddle to Three Cliffs Bay, Oxwich Bay has gifted us a day of wonder and curiosity. As the little boy splashing in the waves had expressed so accurately earlier in the day, the sea came up to meet us and shared a very special kind of salty magic. I hope you'll experience it too.

Technical information

DISTANCE

TO THE WRECK **2km round trip.**

TO THREE CLIFFS BAY **9km round trip.**

LAUNCH LOCATION

ENTRY AND EXIT POINT **SS 506864/51.556, -4.158**

TURN AROUND POINT **SS 536875/51.566, -4.113**

ALTERNATIVE ROUTE Paddling to Three Cliffs Bay is more demanding due to it being windier and more exposed than the paddle to the wreck, so spending your time on the water close to the beach would be lovely.

Difficulty

An understanding of wind and tides is important when paddleboarding on the sea.

Oxwich Bay is well protected from the prevailing southwesterly wind and only gets waves when there is a large swell running. A northerly wind



here is dangerous and will send you straight out to sea. Be careful heading along the west shore on an outgoing tide, as the tide can flow very quickly out of the bay, especially at Oxwich Point. It is best to time a paddle to the wreck on an incoming tide.

Getting there

There is a bus from Swansea to Nicholaston Cross and then a 4km walk to the launch point. Buses from Horton also stop just outside the Dunes Cafe and Shop. The nearest railway stations are Swansea and Gowerton.

Oxwich Bay is about 22.5km by car from Swansea. Once you reach the Dunes Cafe and Shop in Oxwich, turn left towards the beach. You will soon come to a large, paid car park (SS 502864/51.557, -4.162), where there are public toilets. Recent restrictions have been put in place regarding where motorhomes and campervans can park; follow the instructions provided.

Route information

Be aware the tide goes out a long way, so you may have longer to walk and less to paddle.

There are no lifeguards at Oxwich Bay Beach, but there are in the summer months at Three Cliffs Bay.

1 The coast by the wreck of the *Solor* 2 A barrel jellyfish

There is also no webcam, but GowerLive has webcams on several beaches along the Gower.

Eating and drinking

- » There are a couple of food kiosks by the beach, or alternatively you could bring a picnic or stock up at Oxwich's Village Shop.
- » The Oxwich Bay Hotel is close to the beach.
- » The award-winning, Michelin-starred Beach House Restaurant is very close to the beach.

Instruction, guided tours and equipment hire

- » Stuart Gammon of SUPDude.Stu runs river paddles and after-dark glow paddles at Three Cliffs Bay, as well as sunset SUP at Rhossili Bay. He also offers beginner, intermediate and one-on-one lessons.
- » Oxwich Watersports offers paddleboard hire.

Further information

Natural Resources Wales provides information on Oxwich National Nature Reserve:
www.naturalresources.wales



