

Stand up on the River Great Ouse!

Ian Jackson from the Great Ouse Valley Trust checks out the increasing popularity of stand-up paddle boarding

You must have seen them. We've had kayaks and canoes of course, but now we have stand-up paddle boarding (SUP) in the valley. Said to be the fastest growing water sport in the world its appeal is easy to see. The boards are mostly inflatable and so conveniently portable, robust, straightforward to launch, and a fun way to enjoy being on the water – especially on our beautiful stretch of river! And the benefits are impressive. The slow rhythmic paddle action is calming, and exercises your whole body in a low-impact way. Paddle boarding has been shown to reduce stress levels and can improve your mental health as well as your balance! You need very little additional equipment, but a buoyancy aid is strongly recommended

So how do you get started? Many people rush straight in, buy online and jump onboard – straight into trouble. Paddle boarding is often done on water shared with other water sports and boaters, so knowing how keep yourself and others safe and out of trouble is vital. A better way is to take your time and consider having a lesson through a recognised SUP school, or hiring a board with tuition from a reputable company – the British Stand Up Paddle Association (BSUPA) can help you here. You need to be aware of all the safety aspects of being on water, and especially on a river where there are rules to follow. The most important of these is 'keep to the right!' Wind, current, and other river users all need consideration too. A registered SUP school will offer beginner to advanced lessons. Soon you will want your own board and again, a school can guide you. There is a wide choice depending on your weight, and how and where you want to use the board. Touring is popular but racing is a growing and exciting-to-watch discipline too. And, as board technology develops, so too does the quality of board and paddle manufacture.

One regulation that is easy to forget is the need for your board to have a license, along with every other user afloat! These vary in cost depending on which river you use but the Environment Agency covers the Great Ouse, and the current annual fee is £49.90 for a SUP. Shorter licences for day, week or month are also be available. If you are already a paddler and a member of British Canoeing, licenses are subsidised and cover hundreds of miles of river. Go on – try stand-up!

We are grateful to www.justsup.com for assistance in preparing this article. For more information visit the British Stand Up Paddle Association www.bsupa.org.uk

The Great Ouse Valley Trust promotes for public benefit the conservation, restoration and enjoyment of the landscape, wildlife and heritage of the Great Ouse Valley and environs in the county of Cambridgeshire. For more information about the Trust please visit www.greatousevalleytrust.org.uk



This is how junior paddleboarders learn the basics under the watchful eye of the 2nd St Ives Sea Scouts. Photograph by Ian Jackson