

S'UP YO?

THEY'RE FLAT BUT EVIDENTLY PHAT. CAN YOU GUESS WHAT THE CONTINENT'S FASTEST GROWING SPORT IS?

BY VINCE HEMPSALL



Photo: Ryan Cleary

THE STROKE ONE OF THE FASTEST-GROWING SPORTS IN THE WORLD IS PERFECTLY SUITED TO THE KOOTENAY'S ENDLESS WATERWAYS, LIKE THE TRANQUIL LAKE REVELSTOKE.

ACCORDING TO A 2013 REPORT by the Outdoor Foundation, not only is stand up paddleboarding the fastest growing watersport in America, it's the fastest growing sport—period. Fifty-six percent of those who participated in new sports last year donned bikinis and boardshorts, grabbed a paddle, stood on what look like a long surfboard and then wobbled their way along lakes, rivers and oceans.

In the Kootenay region, SUP is also seeing a huge rise in popularity and retailers are experiencing unprecedented growth. Eric Lange, the owner of Syndicate Boardshop in Invermere, has been selling paddleboards for five years and “sales have doubled every year” he says. “Demand is crazy. We now sell more of these than snowboards.” When asked what the appeal is, he replies, “Everybody can do it no matter their age or ability. And it's fun

on flat lakes or fast-moving rivers.”

Andrea and Chris Ryman, owners of Endless Adventure in the Slocan Valley, offer both calm and whitewater SUP lessons. “I developed a SUP fitness program called SUPness,” Andrea says, “which incorporates cardio while learning new techniques with focus on balance and core strength.” And for the more adventurous, she recommends Trail's Rock Island location, which “is an awesome spot to surf in the spring and fall, with metre-high standing waves that attract kayakers, surfers and SUP paddlers alike.”

The couple have also organized three SUP races, with the help of Nelson retail store ROAM, and Andrea says they've had excellent turnouts for all the events. “SUP offers so much variety that it appeals to people from all walks of life,” she explains. “For some, SUP is a new passion replacing other sports while others are using it

as a way to get on the water in the off season.”

Kootenay enthusiasts are going beyond just sales, instruction and participation. Kathy Verigin of Castlegar just launched *standup-paddleboardingguide.com* (see page 121 for more details) which showcases gear, disciplines, news and events from around the globe. Nelson-based inventor Kaj Gyr has sold a few of his designs to global manufacturers, including a pod that affixes to a SUP and allows you to sit on it easily. And designer Steve Kerr of Kerr Boards, also in Nelson, has been making high-end cedar-strip SUPs since 2012 and is expanding into foam construction this year.

So is SUP here for the long haul? Those interviewed for this article believe so. “It definitely has staying power,” says Eric Lange. “It'll be like canoeing – everyone will have one eventually.”