

SUP Safety

Where you can paddle board - waterway access to SUP.

Where you can paddle board still confuses some riders. Inland SUP locations can be subject to bylaws and the inability to launch. Coastal spots can also come under private governance, even though on paper you may think not. There's also a SUP safety element as well. This article aims to shed more light on where you can paddle board, from a legal standpoint, but also a SUP safety point of view. Hopefully go some way to helping you get afloat hassle free.

In this article topics covered are as follows -

- SUP safety and where to paddle board.
- Things to look out for at paddle boarding spots.
- Legal access rights and paddle boarding.
- Ongoing access disagreements.
- Paddle boarding on lakes and reservoirs.
- Paddling on contested water.
- The Paddler's Code.
- Recap.
- Further reading.

SUP safety and where you can paddle board.

The SUP safety drum will keep being banged as the message needs to cut through to all. But especially those coming in paddle boarding without prior experience.

Choosing the correct location, devoid of as many hazards as possible, is a wise move. Weather, rides (at coastal venues) and strong flow (typical of rivers) will cause problems if you're not aware. Therefore, you need to learn what to look out for. Going with an experienced SUP guide or coach will help massively. You can see the Aqua Marina recommended provider list here which will help when choosing a SUP coach.

Hazards to look out for at paddle boarding spots.

With the above in mind here's a list of what to watch out for when choosing a suitable paddle boarding location.

Coastal put ins -

- Offshore wind - wind blowing off the beach out to sea.
- Strong tide - knowing tide times is key. Also be aware that your chosen spot may disappear at high water.
- Hazards such as rocks that may be submerged.
- Big waves - certain types of waves (ground swell) may rear up on singly calm days.
- Watching and taking note of the water movement before you launch is therefore a wise move.
- Speaking to experienced locals can yield good info if the source is reputable.

Inland put ins -

- Spotting strong river flow is essential. If the water looks particularly smooth ask yourself why.
- Being aware of downstream hazards like weirs that may need to be portaged.
- Upstream activity, such a heavy rainfall that can suddenly increase water flow should also be kept in mind. Know what the forecast is doing in this instance.
- Other potential hazards should ideally be recce'd prior to launching.

Legal access rights and paddle boarding.

Coastal venues -

Coastal locations such as beaches are generally open to all in the UK, even though the majority of UK beaches are owned. Some that sit on private land and are available to launch from at the owner's discretion whilst others are private. It's always worth having a check online about land ownership and whether there could be any access restrictions before you head off to paddle. At certain times of the year privately owned beaches may be shut off. At the very least you'll be expected to pay parking fees.

Other coastal areas that could come under the jurisdiction of private entities can often be found in harbours and inlets. Sailing clubs, marinas, boatyards and shipping docks will all be restricted in terms of access. Some organisations may offer the option to launch for a fee. Others may require you to join (such as sailing clubs) whilst a large proportion may ban public access altogether (docks and boat yards for instance).

Beaches are owned, although almost all beaches allow public access, often because of the practical impossibility of preventing it. However, there is no right to cross private land to gain access to a beach. If a beach is closed to the public there should be a sign saying so or a fence to prevent all access.
- **source: Naturenet.net**

Inland venues.

Inland paddle boarding venues are arguably tricky to determine whether the public has access or not. The law states the following with regard to rivers -

The right of navigation exists as a right of way in all tidal waters including rivers and at common law the public have the right of passage in boats - source: nabo.org.uk

Issues arise when paddlers want to access the water from land. Many inland rivers, at some point, flow through private land. Therefore, access here is generally prohibited. That said some rivers can be accessed after purchasing a licence. These

would have to be purchased directly via the relevant navigation authority. Routes that require a licence to paddle are described as Statutory Navigations. A parliamentary act grants a clear right of navigation with these waterways. Although they only make up 6.4% of the UK's total inland waters and just 4% of UK rivers in general.

Ongoing paddling access disagreements (rivers).

Access right arguments have been ongoing for decades. There's a split between those who believe rivers, for instance, are private whereas others maintain all bodies of water should be accessible. British Canoeing maintains there's evidence to suggest there's always been a public right to have access to waterways and therefore the resource should be fairly shared by all. Not everyone agrees though.

In the case of pathways, bridleways and rights of network on foot boundaries are clear. Unfortunately, when it comes to water it's not as clear cut. As we suggested above it's worth finding out who controls your chosen spot and digging out the necessary info.

What about paddle boarding on lakes and reservoirs?

Where you can paddle board on lakes and reservoirs can also be a tad confusing. As with other bodies of inland water access is controlled. In many cases more tightly. And this control and access can vary from spot to spot.

Inner county bylaws can differ between just a few miles. That means two lakes in the same area might not have the same access rights. With reservoirs it's usually down to water authorities and how they manage their estate. Some do allow paddlers to launch whilst others don't. Again, checking before heading for a session is worth it to save a wasted trip in the event of being told no.

What if I paddle board on contested water?

British Canoeing believes you can paddle on any body of water. But you may be challenged from time to time if you do SUP on contested water. In this instance it's key to diffuse the situation as calmly and politely as possible.

Respecting the outdoors, landowners and following the Paddler's Code (see below) is how to keep a harmonious relationship with all interested parties. In rare cases you may face a trespass accusation. The British Canoeing Trespass Briefing note has more details which you can view here -

<https://www.britishcanoeing.org.uk/uploads/documents/BC-Trespass-Briefing-Note-FINAL.pdf>

The Paddler's Code.

The Paddler's Code has been devised with three key areas in mind -

- Respect.
- Protect.
- Enjoy.

Under each of these headings you'll find additional drill down info to help make your paddling experiences all the more fun. To read the full Paddler's Code breakdown click the following link -

<https://paddlerscode.info/#respect>

Where you can paddle board recap.

Summing up where you can paddle board in the UK is twofold. On one hand you have a SUP safety element where it's down to the paddler or paddlers to assess their environment and make sure it's not hazardous. Choosing somewhere you can easily identify as safe is the best course of action. Unless paddling with an experienced guide or coach who can show you all that's needed about the location.

The second element to this article focuses on access rights and where you can legally put in and paddle. As you'll no doubt have gleaned it's not always clear cut. Researching your chosen location is important. Then it's down to being respectful and following The Paddler's Code. In the event of any confusion, we'd suggest sticking to tried and tested routes that you're familiar with. Ultimately paddle boarding and outdoor recreation in general is about fun. Keeping it so is key to a long and fulfilling 'career' in SUP, watersports and the outdoors.

Further reading.

[British Canoeing access to water.](#)

[Navigation law and access to water - naturenet.net](#)

[River Access For All.](#)

[Surfrider Foundation beach access policy.](#)

[The Crown Estate.](#)