

'SUP, MOAB?

Lovingly penned for Wild West Voyages by Swirlin' Eddy

I'm Swirlin' Eddy and I am the river. Today I'm here to tell ya I've noticed a growing crowd among my riffles recently. A very peculiar kind of folk. No oars, no motors, no tubes with these yahoos. Just a simple board with a fin, a PFD (of course) and a paddle. From below the surface I hear mirth. I see the rhythmic movement of a paddle blade moving downstream up, downstream up. Occasionally one of 'em comes dipping down into the water, squirming and laughing, and disappears back up onto that board. Sometimes I see no paddling at all and I can tell those slackers are just lollygaggin', lying back on that thing and soaking up the sun and scenery. Downriver they go with or without the effort.

A Wild West Voyages guide told me this phenomenon is called Stand Up Paddling. "SUP," they call it for short, as if they're all best friends and what-not. Turns out those boards are inflatable and come in several shapes and sizes, just like the folks who paddle 'em. Turns out, you can get a lesson or rent one of them things, take it to a lake or a calmer stretch or river and have a grand ol' time.

Here's what your buddy Swirlin' Eddy has also ascertained about this SUP craze. There's a method to that madness. Here's a few pointers on how to handle the thing:

- 1) Plan to get wet. That's part of it! Why come to the river if you don't want to be in the river? Duh. The is a close-up and personal form of interaction with me, your ol' pal Swirlin' Eddy.
- 2) Stand in the middle, straddle the handle, and that's your center of balance. Loosen up and absorb the movement of the water. Easier said than done!
- 3) Play around with the board. Go for a stroll up and down its length, try to jump up and down.
- 4) Play other balance games. Try a headstand, a crazy pose, chasing games. I can't wait to see this.
- 5) When you fall off (you WILL fall off, I will see to it) think, Ah, that water feels nice. Then rather than climbing back on the board, get alongside of it and give a good dolphin kick while pulling the board underneath your belly.
- 6) Don't be mad when I, your favorite river feature, surprise you by pulling on that fin and dumping you when you least expect it. Or maybe I will just swirl you in a circle or mess with you some other way. Be creative with your paddle strokes. Work with me. Interact with me. I am mischievous. Thanks for playing!
- 7) Always always always wear a securely fitted PFD (for those who used to call it a life vest, get with the program, it is now called your PERSONAL FLOTATION DEVICE)!

8) Folks in the know recommend a quick-release leash belt while SUPping on the river. *Don't wear an ankle leash, they can actually be hazardous if you get caught down current from your board.* You need a belt you can reach and release quickly if you get in trouble.

9) One last word (ok, bunch of words): always inform yourself about what stretch of river you will be exploring. Make a wise choice for your skill level or the adventure you seek. Be responsible for your safety and the safety of those who accompany you. Nothing and no one can take the place of your own good judgment.

10) Git' some gear and git' out here! I'll be waiting!

Wild West Voyages offers top-of-the-line HALA stand up paddle boards and gear for rent and for sale. You can even reserve a guided SUP tour on the river. Fun fact: if you rent a board then buy one within two weeks, you can apply your \$49 demo fee toward your purchase. Check out our SUP shop at 446 S. Main Street in Moab (across from City Market) or give them a call at 435-355-0776. Read more Swirlin' Eddy commentary at www.wildwestvoyages.com.