

Paddleboarding: Hawaiian export lures gorge followers

Story and photos by Deston Nokes
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Rhythmic paddling on thick, wide boards – while standing up – works every muscle



Fitness instructor Nikki Gregg, who paddles with her dog, Nui, says paddleboarding works every muscle.

Weaving between surface-shooting windsurfers and twirling kiteboarders are Hood River's stand-up paddleboarders, rhythmically riding the Columbia with slow, steady strokes.

Paddleboarding, which recently migrated from Hawaii, requires boards that are similar to surfboards except they're wider, longer, thicker and more buoyant. Riders use a long paddle to propel themselves, and it's wise to have an ankle leash attached to the board so you don't have to chase after your board if you fall in. In the Columbia River, we also use life vests.

Those looking to own a paddleboard can figure on forking over \$900 to \$1,700. In the summer season, rentals are available and run \$25 for two hours.

Getting up the first time is surprisingly easy, but it's important to choose the right water for your ability. Hood River's Nichols boat pond next to the Event Site is a small, protected channel that provides perfect beginner conditions.

Since I had some experience, we put in at "the Hook," which is a couple of miles west of Hood River's Event Site. I pushed off in shallow water with both knees about midway on the board. In a smooth, one-two-three motion, I went from one knee to a crouch and stood up with feet shoulder-width apart, paddle in hand.

I immediately began paddling and looked forward. Looking down threw off my balance, and I fell into the river a couple of times. But by using continuous, long strokes on either side of the board, we paddled along with the Columbia's current back to Nichols boat pond, making for a fun and swift ride.

At one point, we held our paddles up to the wind like sails and let them carry us.

More info

Big Winds, Hood River:
www.bigwinds.com

Nikki Gregg:
www.nikkigregg.com

Hood River Chamber of
Commerce:
www.hoodriver.org

"It's like a bicycle for the water," said fitness instructor Nikki Gregg. "As long as you keep moving, it's pretty easy; but when you're still, it's difficult to balance."

Gregg has become such an advocate for the sport, she's integrated paddleboarding into her fitness boot camps.

"It works every muscle from the neck to the feet," she said.

Daryl Morrissey, manager of Big Winds in Hood River, said paddleboarding can be done by just about anyone. The shop pushed this summer to get more women involved in the activity, and its Tuesday night specials attracted as many as 50 women at a time.



How it all started

Stand-up paddleboarding is the latest "must-try sport" in Hawaii, especially when people learn they can do it after one 15-minute lesson. Plus, they don't have to fight pounding surf or be in stellar shape to participate.

Modern stand-up paddleboard-riding got its start back in the early 1960s, when the late Bobby Ah Choy and the beach boys of Waikiki were known for standing on tandem boards and paddling out with a camera to take pictures of tourists taking surfing lessons. In the early 2000s, a handful of professional Hawaiian surfers began stand-up paddleboarding for training when there were no waves.

Reflecting the sport's growing popularity, greater numbers of hotels and surfing instructors are offering rentals and lessons.

Resources for stand-up paddleboarding on Oahu include:

Errol Kane Jr., Hilton Hawaiian Village, 808-949-4321

Nancy Emerson School of Surfing, 808-294-5544, www.surfclinics.com

Reid Inouye, Paddle Core Fitness, paddlecorefitness.com