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## **Stand Up Paddleboarding Comes to Canada**

**WHEN LEGENDARY** big wave surfer Laird Hamilton declared that stand up paddleboarding (SUP) would be “bigger than surfing,” the sport that he helped popularize took another wet and wild step towards mass popularity. Board prices began to decrease, and paddleboarders across North America started creeping into surf lineups, flat water lakes, and whitewater rivers. Now, the summer of 2010 sees the sport on the cusp of going from next big thing to plain old big thing.

“Word is spreading rapidly,” says Mike Sandusky, a Toronto-based paddleboarder who operates Surf Ontario and has been offering SUP lessons since 2008. “People I speak with who have recently been on vacation have seen people paddling and surfing SUPs so there is definitely an increase in awareness. This will be the summer of the SUP.”

The sport, which originated in Hawaii in the 1940s, involves using a large board - usually in the nine to eleven foot range - and a long paddle. Boarders stand up on a rubber foot pad atop the board, and, well, paddle. It is as simple as that. The popularity is in the ease of use, as well as the way SUP adapts to a wide variety of conditions including surf, whitewater, flatwater lakes and meandering rivers.

“You can enjoy a leisurely paddle on a flat calm lake, stroke down a class 4 river, surf waves big to small and run multiday expeditions on them,” says Rob, co-owner of Mountain Surf Adventures out of British Columbia. “The sport will explode in Canada as we have the most freshwater in the world; we are surrounded by oceans, and live in an environment where water has defined us. SUP has a huge demographic and has allowed everyone to enjoy the energy of water and to have fun.”

SUP holds many advantages over other water-based sports, the chief of which might be the ease of entry into the sport for beginners.

“It’s a very natural position to be in,” says Lee Brittain, a custom standup board builder from Wasaga Beach, Ontario. “Humans are meant to stand upright, not sit down as you do in a kayak or canoe. And paddling is much more exciting from a standing position.”

But the sport is no cake walk. Jen Segger, one of Canada’s foremost endurance athletes and co-owner of Mountain Surf Adventures, paddles year round and says it offers amazing conditioning for other sports.

“It’s an awesome core workout and with the right clothing on, it doesn’t matter if it’s sunny or snowing,” she says. “I had a good wipe out in an ice cold river the other day when my fin hit a rock and sent me flying into the water.”

Although SUP has been slow to move into the Ontario market dominated by canoes and kayaks, there is movement afoot. At a recent outdoor trade show in Toronto, SUP was the talk of the event, and CBC star Rick Mercer even gave the sport a whirl for an upcoming episode of his TV program.

“Conditions in Ontario are fantastic for many different types of paddling,” says Brittain, who cites the Nottawasaga River as one of his favourite spots. “It is easy to surf on any of the Great Lakes because you can ride a wave that’s as small as knee high. But 90 per cent or more stand up paddlers will never even try it in the waves. Rivers, lakes, and ponds everywhere make great paddling locations.”

Sandusky agrees, saying Ontario is a “gold mine” for SUP enthusiasts.

“For some it might be a peaceful paddle down the Humber River in Etobicoke, for others it might be surfing the waves in Kincardine on Lake Huron,” says Sandusky. “Personally, the most ideal conditions are surfing on Lake Ontario before sunrise and watching the sun come out of the water. The sport is growing exponentially. You have not seen anything yet.”



## **Paddling Lake Ontario for charity**

Stand up paddleboarder Mike Sandusky is putting his new found love to good use this summer. He is intent on paddling across Lake Ontario to raise money and awareness for Multiple Sclerosis. “Just recently, my sister was diagnosed with MS,” says Sandusky. “She is an active, energetic teacher who is an inspiration to many young minds and we can’t let this disease get in her way.” Sandusky, is a 31-year-old Thornhill resident who has been surfing for a decade in addition to stand-up paddleboarding. He plans on paddling on August 6th to 9th from Burlington Beach to Ashbridges Bay in Toronto, approximately 67 kilometres, over 12 to 16 hours. It was Sandusky’s sister that prompted him to take up surfing. “She helped me book a flight to Hawaii for the winter, and learning to surf was life changing,” says Sandusky.

Go to [www.surfontario.com](http://www.surfontario.com) for donation information.



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