



SUP IN THE CITY

STAND-UP PADDLEBOARDING IS MAKING WAVES AROUND THE WORLD. TWO LOCAL LADS PUT A PAIR OF BOARDS THROUGH A GAUNTLET OF URBAN WATERWAYS TO SHOW THAT THEY CAN GO JUST ABOUT ANYWHERE (THOUGH YOU MIGHT WANT TO START AT THE BEACH)

BY SEAN FRAENKEL

PHOTOGRAPHS: SEAN FRAENKEL



I got the idea to try stand-up paddling (SUP) through Cape Town's waterways from an initiative called Peninsula Paddle (peninsulapaddle.wordpress.com), a yearly pilgrimage that aims to highlight the pollution in the city's water systems. Every year since 2010 a small flotilla of canoes, kayaks and basically anything else that floats has been setting off from Muizenberg and paddling through a network of vleis, rivers and canals (with a few portage sections thrown into the mix) before finishing in Milnerton Lagoon.

Our mission was to start in leafy Constantia, pass through some well-known trouble spots on the Cape Flats, and (hopefully) finally hit open water in Zandvlei to end off in Muizenberg. Our boards of choice for this mini-expedition were two inflatable SUPs from Red Paddle SA.

Being an all-or-nothing kind of guy I had all the gear but none of the experience, so I have to admit I found it easier to paddle kneeling once we hit the murkier, bouncier streams. In my defence the water was really shallow and the board's fins continually scraped and caught on rocks (and other disturbing obstacles), so it was a bit tricky to maintain my balance.

The paddle started in an idyllic serpentine stream with muddy banks. Branches, rocks, debris and low water made for some tough decisions between paddling, kneeling and carrying. One or two sections, though, felt miles from civilisation: thick foliage, dark green plants and tall trees overhead gave the sense of an Amazon adventure. These sections were

short-lived, however - twice my paddling partner and I had to jump fences, and our tropical jungle quickly gave way to chest-high bridges, plastic waste and manicured suburbia.

Once we hit the concrete canals (which are around three metres wide and two metres high), paddling and carrying became easier. Colourful splashes of graffiti, some well done,

broke the monotonous, grimy walls.

As I started to gain some semblance of coordination on the SUP we set off a perimeter alarm while gliding through a section of canal that shared the back yard of a private property. We quickly scarpered lest a trigger-happy security man arrive, then slowed down to our natural pace, out of breath and giggling like school kids.

The highlight of the day was when we came across a community who had set up their shacks on the bank opposite a large plastic factory. A handful of kids followed us for a few hundred metres. We gave each of our three little followers a quick shot on the boards; their carefree laughter and smiles made the whole trip worth the effort.

On the outskirts of Retreat, as we paddled closer to our final destination, we were warned about possible dangers ahead by a concerned elderly lady. She was adamant that gangs in the area would pose a threat to our safety. In truth, we now stood out like two cats in a dog kennel and felt just as nervous. Finding sanctuary in front of a café, we called our mate for a rescue. Braving rush-hour traffic, Kevin was there in a flash.

While it was all over in a blur, we have a memory that will last a lifetime.

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