

# Paul Kirtley's Blog

Wilderness Bushcraft • Survival Skills • Outdoor Life

Paul: This is the Paul Kirtley podcast, episode five.

Voice Over: The Paul Kirtley podcast. Wilderness bushcraft, survival skills, and outdoor life.

Paul: Hello and welcome to episode five of my podcast. In previous episodes, we've had an interesting range of guests: Tristan Gooley, Kevin Callan, Ray Goodwin, and Dr. Sarita Robison. If you're new to my podcast or you've missed any of those episodes, please do go back and take a listen. There's lots of great information and insight there and most of it isn't time dependent, it's as useful now as it was when those podcasts were recorded. So I would urge you go back and listen if you haven't done already.

In terms of the subjects I discussed with those guests, I have a good knowledge of natural navigation. I have made wilderness canoe trips and I understand the mentality you need to employ in wild and remote environments. I've also studied survival psychology texts and papers, and I have instructed and supervised students on exercises where they have to live off the land with very little equipment, as well as having undergone similar exercises myself.

By contrast, many of the exploits and adventures of today's guest are well outside of my experience and sadly outside of my comfort zone. My guest today is award-winning adventure film-maker, Justine Curgenvin. She's an expedition sea kayaker who has made some truly challenging journeys and whose films have aired on National Geographic channel, Channel 4, Channel 5, and the BBC. Her films have won over a dozen prestigious prizes including best adventure film at both the Banff and Kendal Mountain Film Festivals. In particular, we're going to talk about the incredible journey she made along the Aleutian Islands chain which link Eastern Russia with Alaska then along the Alaskan peninsular itself. Her companion on this 1500 mile odyssey through dangerous and unpredictable waters, tracking a

wild, remote, and largely unpopulated coastline was Sarah Outen who is currently making a human powered round the world journey. As you might expect of somebody with Justine's adventure film making pedigree, she's made a film about her and Sarah's Aleutian adventure. This unprecedented 1500 mile paddle and I caught up with Justine as she prepared to launch the film itself.

I would like to welcome Justine Curgenvén to my podcast. Hi, Justine. How are you today?

Justine: I'm good thanks and I'm impressed that you pronounced my name correctly without asking me beforehand.

Paul: Where is it from originally, Justine?

Justine: It's actually Cornish.

Paul: Is it right?

Justine: Curgenvén, yeah.

Paul: Okay.

Justine: Someone made it up. They were bored of their name about a few hundred years ago and thought they'd name it vaguely after a small Hamlet in Cornwall.

Paul: Right. So you can't find any record of it before then. It's just off a [inaudible 00:03:09].

Justine: Somebody once emailed me and told me they were the world experts on the name Curgenvén and they sent me this big history of it. So that was very nice.

Paul: Oh right. Fantastic. So is he doing a family tree?

Justine: Exactly.

Paul: Fantastic. I wanted to talk to you about some of your recent adventures, Justine, and one in particular. The trips that you did with Sarah in the Aleutian Islands. May I know a little bit about how you got involved in that, but could you give the listeners a bit of background please, Justine?

Justine: Sure. While I was merrily going along with my life one day and I got an email from someone saying from foot loop to foot loop. And it was from Sarah who basically said at this stage, "I've just rode across the Indian Ocean and that was great and amazing. Here is a link to a video. And now I've got my sights set on the world. I want to travel around the world under human power. But I haven't done much kayaking. So I'm wondering whether you would give me a bit of training for the kayaking legs." I was a bit taken aback with this very bold young woman, I guess, who was just claiming she's going to go around the world. I don't get lots of emails but I get some emails from people saying they are going to do this and that and can I help with something or rather. A lot of them don't come to anything, so I was a little bit skeptical. But in the end, when Sarah and I met and she persuaded me to do some training with her and on the course of that it became clear that she actually wanted me to join her on the kayaking legs but she wanted to make sure that she liked me and I wasn't a nutter before she said that. So I got asked to join her to kayak from London to France and from Russia to Japan. Then that was exciting enough. I don't know of anyone that's kayaked from Russia to Japan.

Paul: None.

Justine: So a 40-mile paddling day in there as well. But then that was it. Sarah had cycled across Europe and Asia and between those two. Then she set off in her rowing boat to row to Canada from Japan. And from there, she was due to cycle across the American continent and then row the Atlantic back home. But the first time she tried to cross the Atlantic, she got hit by a tropical storm which is very unusual for that time of year. Her boat got damaged and she had to be rescued. So the following year, undeterred despite 20 capsizes and everyone taking a little bit longer, she decided to go back and have another go. And this year, she didn't get botched by a massive storm, but she didn't make very good progress towards Canada. She got blown North and back. She spent a whole month going round in massive circles.

Paul: So this is the Pacific, not the Atlantic.

Justine: Sorry, if I said the Atlantic.

Paul: You said Atlantic but that's fine.

Justine: Yeah, the Pacific.

Paul: Yeah.

Justine: So she ended up after four months, not even half way to Vancouver. And with the prospect of being hit by another massive storm as the winter approached if she carried on in that direction. But the Aleutian Islands were only around 500 nautical miles away to the north. And so she decided that that was the most safe option to turn left if you like and head up to the Aleutian Islands. So I got a phone call from the middle of the Pacific saying, "Justine, will you join me to kayak the Aleutian Islands to the nearest road?" And Sarah already knew the Aleutian Islands is somewhere that I really wanted to go. It's wild, it's remote, it's beautiful. There's strong tidal currents which for some strange reason attracts me [inaudible 00:06:39] has been there. I love places like that. But going with, say my partner Barry, and going with Sarah who's really very inexperienced in the sea kayak are two totally different things.

So I was excited at the possibility because Barry doesn't like the cold and didn't much want to go. But also a bit daunted at the prospect of this very, very challenging stretch of water with somebody that hadn't tested and had a reliable row and really needed me to make all the decisions really about reading the water etcetera, etcetera. So I agreed to go knowing that Sarah has got an amazing personality. She's so determined. She's so courageous and she won't give up. I can rely on her for that. And knowing that we had the opportunity to train for six months because she was going to come back to Wales or back to the UK in between rowing getting to the Aleutian Islands and then I setting off kayaking again the following spring.

Paul: So the decision to do it or rather the plan was hatched literally when she was still in her rowing boat.

Justine: Absolutely.

Paul: Right.

Justine: If I had said no, I think she probably would have done the same thing anyway because there were many other options. She could continue to Vancouver and get there in the winter maybe or go for somewhere like Midway Island which

is further away and a very, very small target. So really she probably would have done that anyway but rowing boat is very cumbersome and slow and very susceptible to the wind so it would have been dangerous for her to try to continue along the chain in her rowing boat. So a kayak really was the best craft for her to do that. Anyway, I did say yes so she didn't have to worry about trying to persuade somebody else. I think it would have been unwise for her to do it by herself.

Paul: Yeah. Did you say yes straight away or did you think about it for a little longer?

Justine: I thought about it for a little while. She remembers my words which is something like, "I'm not saying no but it will be the most challenging trip that either of us have ever done." So I didn't want to be negative. I didn't want to sort of dismiss it but I did need to do a little bit of research. Get on Google Earth and have a look at how big the distances were. Just doing a little bit of research. But I said yes and just hoped that we'd get lots of training done over the winter and that we'd be all right.

Paul: Yes. At that stage, did you already have an estimate in your mind about how long it would take? I guess if somebody phoned you up and said, "Do you fancy coming and paddling the Aleutian Islands?," people have got other things going on in their lives. It was a good while that you ended up being away wasn't it? Did you at that stage realize that it would take the amount of time that you did?

Justine: I guess I thought it might take about three months. I think initially I didn't appreciate that once you paddle to the length well the bit of the Aleutian Islands that we did about 700 miles along the Aleutian Islands chain, that actually I just thought, "Well, we are on the Alaskan peninsular now. There will be a road and Sarah can jump on a bike and carry on." But actually when you to the Alaskan peninsular, there's another 700 nautical miles of land before you get to a road. So we were only half way when we reached the peninsular.

Paul: So incredible.

Justine: I didn't really appreciate that I think initially when I said I would do it, but it's fine. It was very, very beautiful and it was just slightly a different character, the peninsular. That was great. Barry and I paddled around South Island of New

Zealand and that's a similar distance and that took us 67 days. So I thought, "Well, okay. Sarah and I are going to take a bit longer." Not just because she's not as experienced or as quick, but also because also because of all the crossings that we had to do. Every time we have a crossing in open water, it's rougher and it's more committing. There are at least five hours, the crossing probably more, the longer ones anyway. So we needed a good weather forecast for that day, whereas if we were paddling along a coastline then some directions of wind we might be a bit sheltered or you can just paddle for a few hours and then collapse on the beach tired whereas obviously on the crossings, once you set off you've got to keep going until you reach your target or until you turn around and come back again.

Paul: Yeah, you're committed.

Justine: Yeah, absolutely. So we knew that we would need to wait for the right weather. That was going to be key. Patience was going to be the key and accepting that it might take us a long time was going to be important. That was what was going to keep us safe. So we spent a bit of time working on how we could survive if we ended up weather bound for a long time. So we did a bit of a foraging course, a bit of a survival course, not with you, sorry.

Paul: That's all right.

Justine: Then when we were in the Aleutian Islands, we also went out with some locals and they showed us what we could eat. So we had one section of 250 miles where we had six long crossings, five of them over 15 miles. And so we knew that we might have to wait a week, more than once, for decent weather. We had food for a month but it could take us longer than that. It seemed ashamed to have to say, "Well, we failed. We need a rescue because we'd run out of food."

Paul: Yes. That would be sad, wouldn't it?

Justine: Yeah.

Paul: I've seen the film as you know and that section when you were with the Aleut community, that was really nice with them taking you down to the sea shore and you trying various things that you clearly not tried before. One of the things I remember was the sea urchin. Was there anything else that you tried when you were down there?

Justine: We tried what we call chiton over here.

Paul: Chiton, yeah.

Justine: Yeah, by darky. Or they've got a local word that I can't pronounce as well. Oh, gumboot is the other thing they call it and I didn't much like that. So you see Sarah eating the gooey bit out of the middle of that which was the nicest bit.

Paul: That was the bit that she said looked like strawberry jam.

Justine: Yeah, she was trying to persuade herself just think of it as ice cream. That was okay actually. That was edible. I found the chiton very tough and didn't taste anything but definitely could have eaten it if we ended up stuck somewhere without anything else to eat. And we tried a few different sea weeds and we tried beach greens as well which we had a lot of when were on the trip. We used them a lot in food and occasionally we put in different bits of sea weeds into our food as well. What else did we try? I don't think we tried much out there on that particular day. They have another plant that they call [inaudible 00:13:33], I forgot what they call it anyway. That was quite nice as well. So we had that a few times. That was not quite as easy to find. It wasn't hard to find but the beach greens were just there. Every time we landed on the beach, there were lots of them so we had lots of that.

Paul: Okay. Was that something you planned on adding to your food as you went or was that just an added bonus that once they'd shown you when you were at that community early on in the trip?

Justine: We wanted to do it as a safety precaution. We didn't want to have to give up the trip because we had run out of food. That was I guess the main thing but it was also nice to supplement our diet with some fresh things because I do always carry some vegetables on a trip even if I'm going for a month at a time worth of kit. But obviously you don't have that much so things like the beach greens, it was nice to have something fresh and we did put in bits of sea weed into our meal a few times and we caught fish a few times as well.

Paul: Okay right.

Justine: It was easy to catch fish, so that was great. We would have done it more if we'd been delayed more but actually that 250-mile section that we were really

worried about, I think we did it in five years paddling perhaps, maybe more, I've forgotten. The actual crossing bit, I think we did in five days paddling, but we had nine days off. So not too bad. It's like almost two days off, one day paddle on average when you look at it but it could have been a lot worse so it actually only took us just over three weeks to get to the next community. So we didn't have to kind of go into emergency, "Oh my God, we're going to run out of food. We better start upping our efforts to go [inaudible 00:15:22] and things like that." Again similarly we seem to be always under a bit of time pressure to make sure we made the entire distance in time before it got too late. So we didn't always fish but sometimes we did.

Paul: And you were fishing off the beach or fishing from your kayaks?

Justine: Oh fishing [inaudible 00:15:41] have hand lines. So we would chuck them in off the kayak just at the end of the day. We'd usually catch a fish really quickly. I caught four. I caught four at once on the line straight away. They call them black bars. I don't think they are a bars but I put two back and we cooked up one that night. We ended up eating two nights of that particular piece. So we had one the first night and one the next night. They were delicious. It was really nice to have fresh fish, we cooked in open fire.

Paul: Oh fantastic.

Justine: Yeah. So that took time though. It wasn't just catching the fish it was skinning it and gutting it, setting up the fire and cooking on it. If were in a rush which we were sometimes, it wasn't really... Sarah would have done it every night. I was more the whip cracker. I was more, "Come on, we've got to get up early. We've got to go, come on. You can cook a fish but we need to get up at this time which means we need to be in bed at this time." So sometimes you would do it anyway and other times we would be sensible and we would go to bed because we needed to make some miles.

Paul: Yes and at the time of the year that you did it, what was the day lengths like? What latitude you were at?

Justine: It was really good. I only know when it got dark because we landed in the dark a few times. Well more of that anyway.



Paul: Yeah. One of those on the film, I've really felt sort of involved with that when you weren't making the progress that you wanted to and yes it was quite touch and go stuff at times it seemed.

Justine: Oh definitely. These waters like the longest crossing was 37 nautical miles of open water. And when you've gone from one campsite to another, it ended up being 47 or 49, I can't remember. Not far off 50 nautical miles out of the day. And the currents in these passes. There's no real information about them. The pilot says the current can be up to four knots. But it doesn't tell you when it's going in which direction. So obviously you can't paddle at four knots. If the current is taking you away from the Island, perpendicular to the Island at four knots, you're pretty much in trouble. We did have an indication in that the current tends to go north between the Islands, when the tide is rising and it tends to go south when the tide is dropping, when it's ebbing. So that was a general guide and on some of the passes that seemed to actually work. We have the high and low water time so we could say, "Okay, the current is probably going to be going north until about 2 o'clock and then is probably going to be going south after that."

But unlike the UK where it changes roughly every six hours but there because the Pacific Ocean is doing one thing and the Bering Sea is doing another and that seems to interact differently depending on whether it's spring tides or not. Sometimes it can be going north for ten or eleven hours. So you can't just go, "Okay, it's going to take us eight hours so we will plan it so that the current takes us north for four hours and brings us south for four hours." That would be one quite nice way of being able to plan it. To some extent, we could do that a bit but these were only rough guides, it might be two hours out or it might not do that at all. And on our longest crossing, it didn't do anything like we expected. It actually did the opposite. So when we expected it to go north, it was going south. And when we expected it to go south, it was going north and paddling trying to choose what bearing to paddle on based on what's going on at the moment and what you expect to go on for the next 12 hours. And you don't know what's going to go on. So it's a guessing game, really. I guess I am trying to use the years of experience I've got in sea kayaking and reading the conditions the whole time trying to make a judgment on what bearing is going to get us there. I actually find that quite exciting, but it's scary as well at times. And there were a few times when we were being washed past the Island very, very quickly. And then you've got to have faith it's going to be

an eddie once you get across this massive flow and you will ultimately be able to make land but it just might take you a very, very, very long time.

Paul: Were there any moments where you thought you were really stuffed in terms of getting to where you wanted to get to? I know there was one where you ended up going southwest and then you ended going back the other way but taking you northwest and you thought you were going to miss the Island again. Were there any times when you really thought...

Justine: Yeah. That was pretty scary and that day, the current did more or less what we expected but not in the direction we expected. I guess looking at the map now, it's easy to see perhaps why it was going slightly in that direction. Because we were crossing basically we were going from west to east. We were heading east to the next Island, but the shape of the Island it actually faces kind of southwest. So the current through the passes tends to go right angles to the Island but it basically was coming along that Island along the coast and just hitting us and pushing straight away from the Island. We expected, we knew that low water was at about 4 O'clock. Well half past three we weren't quite sure. So we hoped at about half past three the current would swing around and it would help us but 5 O'clock came and it hadn't happened. And so in my head, I'm thinking it can be two hours late, it can be two hours late. In all likelihood at some point, the current will swing round and will be either helpful or at least not unhelpful anymore. But when it's two hours late and we were going at five knots in the wrong direction for quite a while.

Paul: Oh my goodness yeah.

Justine: We were just flying in the wrong way. So I'm trying to guess the best direction to paddle in to minimize the damage and Sarah is slower than me so I'm getting frustrated and I'm leaving her so she's getting frustrated and it was not the best situation really but I suppose in the back of my mind, I did that have that thought that well at some point, it should be changing and it should be soon and eventually it did. It was about two, two and a half hours late. Then I thought then we'll get these five knots will be helping us. We have five knots with us and we'll fly there. Unfortunately that didn't turn out to be the case. The current didn't seem only a knot, maybe a knot and a half. Then a really strong headwind came up, so

our progress was still really slow and we were doing under two knots towards the end there to get to land even with the current. So yeah, it was a tough day.

Paul: Yes. It sounds tough. I am not a sea kayaker but I have friends who you know who are experienced sea kayakers and I do get some sense of what is like to be out there and I certainly got a much greater sense of some of the isolation and the commitment from watching your film. So with somebody who's relatively inexperienced like Sarah and with relatively scant knowledge of local detail in terms of the currents, how do you go about planning a journey like that at all? How do you go about preparing yourself and your companion for a journey like that?

Justine: Well in terms of getting as much knowledge as you can, in America, they actually print the coastal pilot for the whole of America online for free which you can download. They also have copies of the lower charts of the entire coastline which you can download for free. So that was brilliant. And a friend Kev actually printed off all the maps for Sarah and I. He works at a company that's got a massive printer so he printed us about 40 maps each of the coastline. And we went through the pilot and we put what information there was from the pilot onto the maps and we spoke to not many people have kayaked there but a few people have kayaked bits of it. Kieran Tastak [SP] from Isle of Man, he's been there. I met up with him and he brought his maps and he talked through where he'd come to any information that he had. We talked to local paddlers, we talked to local skippers, we found people that captained boats in the area and we just got as much information as we can. I just wrote it all on my chart so that when I needed it was there. Yeah read the pilot from cover to cover. I looked up some technical papers about tidal stream flow along the Aleutian chain and tried to make sense of that and all I know is it's just really complicated.

Just as much research as I possibly could do just to be as well informed as we could. And as we went along, we would ask locals. For example, on that crossing where we ended up being swept away to the southwest, we had a sat phone so were hoping to reach a community on that Island and this was right at the end of our 250 miles with nobody. We phoned the guy who lives there and said, "Oh can you tell us anything the pass, we're about to cross it?" And he just said, "Oh, ignore the figures, they just threw some numbers at it, it doesn't mean anything." So even the guy that lives there, they rarely venture out onto that particular pass in the open

water there and that little skift [SP]. But he has been out there to where we went on this skift. Yeah, you can get so much help but at the end of the day, nobody really goes there, very few people go there and they 're not in kayaks, they are not having to worry as much about what the tides are doing because they can travel faster than the currents, we cant. So we really have to worry about it.

Then in terms of other things, we found out where communities were so we had a little Google map and we put on where the communities and we got a contact in every community and we arranged to ship some supplies to every community. Not quite most of them certainly along the Aleutian chain because they're 250 miles apart. So we knew we would be running low on food and while every little place had a store, we weren't sure what they'd have so we bought a lot of food ahead of time in Anchorage and a kind person who we stayed with in Anchorage stored a little for us and a couple of weeks before we got there, he would post it out for us and if we needed anything else putting in there, we'd left a spare stove and spare bits and pieces with him and we would say, "Oh can you add a dry bag or can you add whatever?" So he would do that and then he would ship that box off to us. For example, when we got to Dutch Harbor on Alaska, we knew we were going to be coming into territory where there were bears quite soon. And on Dutch Harbor itself, there were no bears. So they wouldn't have pepper spray. So we had to buy pepper spray in Anchorage and fly it into on Alaska.

So things like that. Just trying to be organized finding out what you need and what you need to sort of shape ahead of time. So that took up quite a bit of time. Then it was just skills training for Sarah and unfortunately she was suffering with a lot of allergies so the first couple of months when she was back she wasn't really able to do any training. Then after that, we spent a week every month doing training with her. Just trying to get her skills up, get her experience of raffle water up so that when we got out there in the Aleutian and she found herself in rough water, she wasn't sort of suddenly thinking, "Oh my God, I've never been in water like this before," on top of everything else. At least she kind of knew what to expect a bit. So we did a few circuits through the tidal races, picking our way through, and things like that. She got her row on one side but just really an improvement like that. So we did as much as we could. It was yeah, it was quite a lot to planning a remote trip like that but it's quite actually enjoyable. At times, it's not but I quite enjoyed this part of the process if you like.

Paul: Yeah, I think it's part of the process for any trip large or small, you have to get your teeth into it isn't it? And you have to enjoy ultimately because it is part of making the trip successful.

Justine: Yeah. And as I said I used Google Earth a bit as well just for some of the places where there wasn't much information about where you can land. Because of course the pilots is written for boats and they don't tend to publish all every night. So I looked on Google Earth just to try to find what looked like it might a beach and I marked some of those on the map in the areas. The Aleutian Islands are very rocky and barren, there aren't a lot of beaches so it's quite handy to know where there be might be one and sometimes you couldn't tell from the map. The shape of the coastline sort of looks like there might well be a beach there but it's kind of handy if you've seen it on Google Earth with your own eyes as well.

Paul: Yeah and it's all black volcanic sun mainly there it seemed where it was sandy and then the rest of it looked quite rocky was it?

Justine: Yeah, it was pretty much like that, and as we got further east it changed a bit and the sun got slightly lighter and I remember when we saw our first kind of almost yellow sand beach, it was like, "Wow look! There's yellow sand! That's amazing!"

Paul: Yeah and it's very sparsely populated now isn't it? A lot of people don't know much about the history of that area but there was a big fur rush particularly the Russians and the Alaskans going for the furs several hundred years ago, and that's amazing ultimately, the local population. So I guess maybe if you were travelling a few hundred years ago you might have had more local communities to call in on. It seems like there's very few places you can call in now. What do you think about the chances of some of those communities surviving, there's one of them in particular was very small I think it was 17 people over there?

Justine: Yeah, Nikolski. It's 17 people. It's really hard to know because I think there's the actual financial support to support that community these days actually. Because I think that the government and organizations, there's a lot of kind of feeling that it would be a real shame if it didn't continue because so many have been lost and Nikolski are on that island and on that island there used to be hundreds of villages. Actually that area the Nikolski area, it's the place in the world

where, that has been continuously habited by man for the longest. There's an archaeological record of people there which goes back 8000 years. So it's been continuously inhabited longer than anywhere else on earth as far as we know. It's quite important area. They're the last remaining community. They've actually got a massive lodge that's been built that's really quite luxurious which would be a great place for people to go and stay to go surfing, or hiking or bird watching, or hunting. They go there and hunt the reindeer that are on the island.

There's only 17 people there and it's basically only two families now. The two families just intermarried so now it's officially just one big family. If no young people want to live there, then it's going to die, unfortunately. Maybe younger people will come in there. For example in Atka, the place where we had the sea urchins, there's a community of 70 people there. Some people have recently come back from Anchorage. They go to Anchorage and they find it's violent and noisy and there's things they don't like about it. There are some young-ish families that are making the move back out to the islands, which is encouraging. I just wonder if Nikolski is just too few people to have a critical mass. Their school is shut down, I think you need 11 kids for the school to keep running and well they don't have any anymore. Whereas Atka's got a school, Adak's got a school; most of the other small communities have a school. We saw kids in every other community so we've got hope for those. Nikolski, I hope it lasts. The people that are there love it, and are lovely people, but we'll see. It will only happen if some younger people decide they want to go and live there.

Paul: Yes, indeed. Some of the places you visited in the film at least it seemed that there was a real strong push to preserve or even resurrect the native culture, the native skills. It made me laugh when there was a girl and she was doing some weaving or was it bead work and you said, "Oh, is this fun? Do you like it?" She looked thoroughly not impressed with it at all.

Justine: Yeah, I guess.

Paul: Yes.

Justine: Yeah, I think that was quite good though because I think some kids love it and others just do it really because they're told to. Maybe she'll have grown in appreciation of it in later life, who knows. No definitely, and I think there is a

definite push for the Aleuts to sort of hold on to their culture, because it was a very rich culture and they survived incredibly well in a really harsh environment for well thousands of years. They were very adaptable and they made baskets out of grass, the finest baskets in the world. They made homes that they lived in under the ground and of course they hunted in kayaks for sea lions and whales and seals and otters. Hunting from kayaks was a major part of how they survived. They're an incredible people. All the Aleuts that we met were incredibly kind and lovely. They've lost some things like they are having to relearn things in some cases. I'm glad they're doing it, it's great. Hopefully they'll pass on that, pass that love of it and that importance down to their kids. It was certainly nice when we were eating the sea urchins and the kelp, that Crystal, who took us out there, brought it back and gave some to her kids and they loved it. To them it's normal. We had sea lion soup with them and they were just like "Yum, yum, yum! Give me more, give me more!"

Paul: Those little ones really seemed to be lapping that up there. It seemed really...

Justine: Yeah, and that's the key I guess. Get the kids to think it's normal and grow up with it. It's great. Well, I'm Facebook friends now with some of the people in these communities. Which is really nice because instead of seeing pictures of what people are eating for lunch or where they're going paddling, every now and again, I'll see pictures of them braiding a seal intestine ready to eat things like that. I put a comment on that one saying "Oh, I'm really glad you didn't offer me that when I'm there. I'm a bit squeamish but good luck. Good on it, good on it. Enjoy it!"

Paul: That's just fascinating. You mentioned that culture historically being dependent, and to a certain extent thriving on being able to live off the marine life there. What wildlife encounters did you have when you were there? I mean some of them were in the film clearly and I won't spoil all of them for everyone, but one in particular I absolutely loved was when the sea otter was swimming alongside you and hadn't seen you, and then you just sort of almost does a double take and then disappears. That was absolutely fantastic.

Justine: Yeah I know. It was amazing. I've never seen as much wildlife as on that trip actually. It really was incredible. We saw loads of sea lions. We had sea lions come sleep in our beach with us in the middle of the night. We saw lots of seals,

lots of otters, especially as we got along the chain a bit. We saw otters every day. We saw loads of bald eagles. We saw orcas one day which I didn't get on film. We saw quite a lot of whales, again I didn't really get any good footage of them but they were around quite a lot, humpbacks and some other ones, I didn't know what they were. Once we got in onto the peninsula we saw bears as well. We had quite a lot of bear encounters, including one coming up to Sarah while she was having a naked wash in the stream, which I did get on film.

Paul: Yes, there is a teaser for the film. You got Sarah naked running away from a bear. It did seem in terms of that stage of the trip, and as you said it was 700 miles still to go at that point when you started encountering bears. That must have been a constant concern for you was it? Because the ones at least you caught on film, didn't seem particularly pestered by your presence.

Justine: No not at all. They just looked at us. We ended up spending a couple of days, I think I cut it out of the shorter film if that's what you saw. I can't remember it's certainly in the long film. We ended up going to Hallo Bay Bear Camp, which is a remote bear viewing camp. People normally fly in there from Homer, but we kayaked in there, and we spent a couple of days there going out with a guide looking at the bears. That was amazing, cause we got to see them catching fish 30 meters away from us, totally un-bothered by us. That was incredible. We were chatting to the guides there and they were saying this, a lot of the bears that saw might never have seen people before, because very few people go along that stretch of coast. People do, but infrequently. It's very possible that the bears we saw, we were the first people they'd seen. They didn't really know what we were, what to do. They didn't know to be frightened, they were just kind of curious. They were kind of looking at us sort of, not running away but not coming towards us, just sort of keeping a same sort of distance away from us and walking past us or whatever. That might be the case or maybe they just weren't very frightened, I don't know. Because I've always been taught before when you see a bear you need to frighten it away but apparently these particular bears, you don't necessarily have to do that. We did anyway, we tried to but we were a bit scared. No they were just trying to get on and have a nice time and there were these humans jumping up and down and screaming at them poor things.



Paul: I guess you pose some very interesting smells for them as well, in terms of them picking up your scent and the scent of your food I guess perhaps as well.

Justine: Yeah. I guess. I think it probably is a wise idea to discourage them from coming to investigate us.

Paul: Yes.

Justine: That's good because if they did come and investigate camp and they did find something to eat, then that would be it really. Then every time they would see a human they'd do it again and the poor bear would probably end up having to be killed. Or someone else would come along because it's a remote stretch of coast and no one would know they were there, and that might be the end of the person. It wouldn't end well if the bear had come and had a sniff around camp. It's good that they didn't.

Paul: No, and it would be pretty disruptive if one of them got into your food as well I guess. You wouldn't, in terms of completing the journey.

Justine: Yeah, well we actually, after a while we bought a bear fence, an electric fence which we picked up in one of the villages. We put that around the tent. We actually then have to take the kayaks and the food and the tent inside the fence. Which was a dilemma what'd you do because do you put the foods in the kayaks a long way away from the tent? Do you take the food out of the kayaks and put it somewhere else? Because of all these concerns. Because clearly it's not just the food you're trying to... you don't want a bear to smash your kayak to get at the food because then you're really stuck if it's smashed. Equally if they get your food, because it's not in the kayak and they can smell it and get to it more easily, then you're stuffed not quite as quickly but you're still in trouble. Lots of people have strong opinions about this and told us all sorts of different things, but we decided that we would put the kayaks with the food in and the tent all inside the bear fence. Then hopefully if a bear came they get a shock and run away. If that didn't happen well at least we'd hear and we'd be able to shout and scream and get our flares and get our pepper spray and you know.

Paul: Try and fend them off a bit. What was your favorite campsite? What was your most memorable campsite from the trip?

Justine: I think probably one of the Islands that we went to which was kind of alongside the peninsula. Normally we would go for landing where it was sheltered. We would go out, get out of the weather and go for a beach out of the wind. We were planning to do so on this particular island but as we came up, there was a beach there that was kind of in the wind a bit. Sort of in a side wind and it was a kind of ragged kind of cobbled beach and there was a shipwreck on there and there were sea lions on the point and they had an amazing view of the actual peninsula and Sarah was like, "Oh can we land there, can we land there?" And I was about to go, "No, we should go around the corner to the nice, calm, collected, the sandy beach." And looked it and thought, "Yeah, got them. Let's go there. That looks amazing." So it was a beautiful campsite, amazing views. It was a little bit on the weather but we could go and look at the shipwreck, we could sit with dinner and watch the sea lions. Yeah It was really, really beautiful really great. There were lots of beautiful camp spots. I talked about the challenges of the trip but it was an incredibly beautiful area. Really stunning. Amazing to be in the wilderness for such a long time. It was 1011 days the trip.

Paul: Hundred and one days, yeah.

Justine: We were in communities every now and again but the vast majority of the time we were totally out there by ourselves. It was an incredible experience.

Paul: No. I mentioned incredible experience is watching the film, so you only get an inkling I think of what it must have been like to do but it's great that you've shared that in a film. How many days of paddling was it? You mentioned that you had a deadline to meet or at least you had a date that you wanted to get back for and there was sort of various information about the weather being bad and then it wasn't bad. So you had to sit there for a while, how many days did you paddle doing those?

Justine: I forget exactly, 101 days. I think we might actually have had 37 days off, around about that. Maybe thirty something days off. Over 30% yeah. Some of that was in communities. We spent five days in at least one community and I think four in a couple and that was partly because it was hard to drag Sarah away when she was in a place of safety. [inaudible 00:42:21] thing to say, "Come on, we're going back out there and we're going to be frightened again." She was quite attached to

her bed and all that. Also partly to start with at least we did typically have head winds when we were in communities which was quite nice and sometimes we'd actually push hard to get there before the bad weather came and then we resting out the bad weather.

Paul: I guess at the beginning as well you had serious load in those boats as well.

Justine: Yeah, they were heavy yeah.

Paul: When Sarah first got in hers there was hardly any sort of freeboard at all. She was almost in the water it was quite incredible. It was amazing thing to watch. You're just at the beginning of promoting the film now where can people see it?

Justine: Well my website is Cackle TV, as in the laugh which is named after my laugh and there's all the information about the film on there. There is a page about the DVD it's going to be on DVD. It's also going to be on downloads. It's released on Valentine's Day and yeah, it's DVD or download and I'm hoping at some point to also have a streaming option where you can hire the film for 24 hours or 48 hours as well. Although I'm not sure that will be available to start with. The trailer is on there, two minute trailer which introduces the film so you can have a look at that. Yeah, that's it really I suppose. I have got a Facebook page. I've got CackleTV Facebook page and I've got CackleTV on Twitter. I've a YouTube channel, the trailer is on the YouTube so if you want to subscribe to that you can. There's trailers of all the other films that I've made. Done lots of sea kayaking adventures and even a canoeing film as well. There's canoeing.

Paul: Well that's actually how I first heard of you Justine actually because as you know I'm good friends with Ray Goodwin and I know Kevin Callan as well so I was interested to see that from that I've discovered all these amazing things that you've done as well so definitely got you a bigger audience because you went into the open boat market there as well and got a lot of interest in what you're doing from that as well.

Justine: Well yeah that was good. It was fun, it was nice to do something different. I was a bit bored of that stage of doing kayaking films I needed a break. I fancied going to middle of the country instead of round the outside of it for a change. So the trip I did up in the Mountain River I was really excited about that. Yeah.

Paul: Yeah. So I'll put links to all of those for the listeners on my blog. I'll put links to all of those social media profiles on your website and YouTube channels. I'll put links to that underneath the podcast so people can get to them easy as well. Are doing any talks anytime, Justine? I know you did one recently in London at the Adventure Travel Show. Are you doing any others?

Justine: There is a link from the Kayaking The Illusions page. On my page, there is a thing which has about our DVDs. If you go to that and hover over it, there'll be a Kayaking The Illusions tab you can click and from there there's a link to tour. I'm going to America and Canada quite soon. I'm going to Germany to a film festival. I'm going to Adventure Travel Film Festival Event near London in August and things will be added. I hope to do more in the UK although I haven't got a lot happening in the UK yet. So yeah they'll be links on there. If something is happening, I'll put it up on Facebook, on Twitter on my blog so yeah.

Paul: Fantastic. Well thank you very much, Justine. Hopefully that generates some good interest in your film and I do have listeners in the states, in Canada, around Europe as well, hopefully some of them can make some of your talks.

Justine: Great.

Paul: Thank you very, very much. We will look forward to watching the film in full.

Justine: Great. All right. Thank you very much.

Paul: Take care Justine and enjoy your day. I know you're going out paddling now.

Justine: Yeah.

Paul: So enjoy your paddling.

Justine: Thanks.

Yeah. Take care, cheers, Justine. Bye!

Justine: Bye.

Paul: Thanks again to Justine for joining me and talking about what must have been a hugely rich wilderness experience and one that I'm sure will stay with them

forever. I would absolutely urge you to watch the film. I have been lucky enough to have the opportunity to watch it already and it was gripping. I watched it from start to finish. It was quite late at night, it was past my bed time but I watched it from start to finish, having intended only just to start watching and I have to say my heart was in mouth at times as well. It really was a true adventure.

All the relevant links and details will be under the podcast on my blog. Also if you've got a comment, if you'd like to leave a message about this podcast, please go over to my blog at [paulkirtley.co.uk](http://paulkirtley.co.uk), that's [paulkirtley.co.uk](http://paulkirtley.co.uk) and leave a message in the comments section. It's always good to hear from people.

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