

Paul Kirtley's Blog

Wilderness Bushcraft • Survival Skills • Outdoor Life

Paul: This is the Paul Kirtley Podcast, episode seven.

Voice Over: The Paul Kirtley Podcast. Wilderness bush craft, survival skills and outdoor life.

Paul: I do like that acoustic guitar intro. I let it run there a little bit longer than normal. But I suppose I should get on with the podcast. I have a special guest with me today in the form of Professor Jules Pretty. He's the author of a book which I read recently. It was published last year. I read it recently, earlier this year, and I have to say it was very, very interesting. A compelling read. The book contains accounts from twelve environments and cultures, accounts of people around the world living close to the land – from deserts, to snow-bound environments, high in the mountains, on grassy plains, beside the coasts, on farms in different places.

And using these examples Professor Pretty, demonstrates that there are many different ways to live in cooperation with nature. And as I say, I found it a fascinating and a compelling read. It is very thought-provoking, it contains some powerful messages and so I thought it would be worthwhile having Jules as a guest on my podcast to talk about his book, his messages and his work in general. And I'm very glad to say that he'll be joining us shortly.

First, a little bit more about his background. Professor Pretty is Professor of Environment and Society at the University of Essex, where he's also Deputy Vice-Chancellor. He received an O.B.E. in 2006 for services to sustainable agriculture. Professor Pretty is an environmental scientist. He's an academic of world renown. He's the author of 18 books. And his academic work has focused largely on sustainable agriculture and the relationship between people and the land. And this very much comes to the fore in "The Edge Of Extinction," the book I mentioned a little while ago.

And it was with this in mind that I thought, particularly in the context of my interest in people's relationships with nature through bush craft and wilderness travel as well as everyday experiences in the countryside with nature, that I thought it would be worthwhile having Jules on the show and for him to talk about his work. So with this in mind, I'm very excited to welcome Professor Pretty to my podcast. Hi, Jules. How are you today?

Jules: Very well. Thank you, Paul. Lovely to be on.

Paul: Yeah, thank you for joining us. It's a real pleasure to have you. I think maybe first for those that don't know you, maybe you could explain a little about your areas of interest and the work that you do.

Jules: Yeah. I've always been interested in this space, this intersection between nature, the wild, the urban green, and society, us people, and the way that we've lived in the past, evolving from hunter gatherers, to farmers, to kind of modern man, and the benefits that brings but also the disbenefits as well. So it's that intersection of the ecological and the social, of the human and the wild that interest me. And I think actually these are places that have formed us as humans and the way we think and the way we see each other. And one of my worries is that some of those relationships with nature, with wild places, with just green, as it were, are under threat in some sort of way in the modern, affluent world, parts of the world. And as a result, we should probably do something about it and that's a little bit what the book is about.

Paul: Yes. You mentioned your book, which I read recently. And I have to say I thoroughly enjoyed and I would encourage anybody listening to this to go out and grab a copy and read it. It's very enjoyable on various levels and also very informative on various levels. Can you tell us a little bit more about the concept, what brought you to write this book?

Jules: Yeah. The scene is set in terms of something we now know, that in the modern, industrialized, or indeed, let's call them affluent countries. The recent growth in G.D.P., which essentially means that each of us has more stuff and we can buy more stuff, G.D.P. per capita has gone up in Britain by four-fold in the last 50 years, in the United States by four-fold. This is per person. In Japan by seven-fold. And yet when you look at average life satisfaction across the whole of those

populations, in other words, how happy are people, it hasn't changed for 50 years. About the same number of people within a population have the same levels of life satisfaction. So there's a mismatch between a myth perhaps that we believe in that by seeking more economic growth, the best will always bring good things. I wanted to kind of work hard on that.

And that, in a sense, sets the scene. "The Edge of Extinction" frames this in the context of there's things we know that are under threat, like lots of species at the edge of extinction, half the world's language is. We know a stable climate is at the edge of extinction. But there are other things as well, like the extinction of experience, just the time that we are able to spend outdoors in nature. Whether it's nearby nature, your local garden or a local park, or whether it's a distant dramatic place or a farm, or a field, or a mountain, whatever. All of these things are levels experience that are important to us and we're losing those and particularly younger generation are losing those. Children, in particular, roam less far than they did a generation ago. And I think this has some significance for us.

So that sets the scene. And then the book is about different places. I start in the Pacific and I go to a number of different places New Zealand, Australia, China, Siberia, Finland, Labrador, and some parts of Britain, Ohio with Amish farmers, the swamps of the deep south in Louisiana, and finish at the deserts of the American South West. So it's a set of stories that travel from east to west, following lines of longitudes, as it were, around the world.

Paul: How did you choose those places, Jules? I very much liked that kind of progression from west to east, if you like, as you went through the book. But did you have a particular list of places you wanted to visit to start off? Or did you want to choose a range of different environments? Or did they just kind of fall into place in that way almost naturally?

Jules: It's emerging, actually. It wasn't designed like that. It emerged over a period of time. I suppose all of these journeys took place, including in a number of them going back again several times, that you get a sense of the rhythms and patterns in particular places, in different seasons. They emerged over a number of years, and the patterning of the book was something that happened quite late on in the writing of the book. So just a little device to, in a sense, to kind of follow the world.

But it was based on the notion that a day in the life of the planet and with lots of different cultures. And all but one of the chapters are in richer affluent countries. So I deliberately wanted to explore the other ways that people are living in richer countries. And China is one of them and I include China now as one of those countries. So within affluent countries, there are ways of living, ways of engaging with the land that are interesting, I hope, and certainly instructive.

Paul: Yeah, certainly. Well, you mentioned China. I think you'd mentioned that you'd been to China in the past and now going back again, that there's huge differences in terms of the way people dress, people smiling more, people being less different to our society, in a way, in terms of... You have that nice story about the magic show and how contrived that was, in a way. And again, that's one of the things I enjoyed about going through the whole book though, sort of personal moments, if you like. But yeah, there's a very stark contrast though, isn't it, with China, how things have changed and are continuing to change there?

Jules: There is, indeed, yeah. When I first went there in 1981, just a few months after the Gang of Four who had worked with Mao before he died and in control of China, just after their trials. So that was a time when people were just struggling out of the cultural revolution where land reform hadn't happened, economic reforms hadn't yet happened. And the changes in China have just been quite dramatic over a period of time that it's barely a blink of a geological eye.

And the case in China was about reclaiming of the land because it's about the Huangshan mountains in Anhui where the shan shui style of landscape painting came from. The mountains, and the mist, and the rivers, and clouds, and the distortion of perspective and space. And this style of painting is now iconic and it began 1,500 years ago. But the landscape was kept for the emperors over all of that time. Ordinary people couldn't go there.

Then in 1949, when the Red leaders took over, they also kept it for themselves and didn't allow anybody in. And ordinary people, as it were, were not allowed onto the Huangshan mountains until 1991. So very recently. And the place is packed. There are 10,000 to 30,000 people on the mountains everyday. My analogy is it's China's Kinder Scout, the invasion of Kinder Scout in the 1930s by the people of Northern England from Manchester, from Leeds, Sheffield came onto the mountain and

reclaimed it for themselves because they were told that they were not allowed to go on it.

And in a sense, this is something similar that's happened with China. They're walking the landscape because they can. And that's something that's very reaffirming and something to celebrate as well. Some people are a bit sniffy about the Huangshan mountains. They say, "Don't go there. There are too many people." Actually, it's the number of people that is really the interesting thing.

Paul: You're right. It's interesting, isn't it, that almost when people aren't allowed into a wild environment, that they sort of force... I don't know if force is the right word. But they push for access once it's removed from them. Do you think there's almost a latent connection that we have with natural places that we almost take for granted, and then when it's almost perceived to be taken away from us, we push to take it back?

Jules: I'd like to think so. I think there's a decent chance that these things are pretty well hardwired into us because of the nature, the way that we evolved. For example, neuroscience tells us through experimental work that walking, which is something about moving forward into the landscape and was done by hunters and gatherers, you move forward to find animals, you move forward to find plants and food. Walking turns short-term memories into long-term memories.

You can imagine quite easily why that's the case because evolution, it would benefit you if you can remember stuff, where things are. So moving into the landscape is a way of firming up memories, giving you a sense of place. You remember a walk but you probably don't remember what was on last night's television. That's exactly why it happens, because of the nature of the physical movement.

So when we lose these things, we lose not just the experience, but we lose the memories. And that's something very important about how memories are laid down, and how important they are to us through our lives as guides, as shapers of behavior, but also as rocks of meaning that define who we are a little bit. And unless people have those experiences, I'm particularly interested in how you romance our children these days to be outdoors more, when there are lots of other very attractive things to do that are not outdoors.

How do you make that happen? And it's not just because it's nice out there, and it's not just because green places improve well-being, they do. We know that. They improve mood, self-esteem. Just being in nature does a whole range of those things, but also because you need to lay down those memories which are going to be important later in life. And when you haven't got them, you can't make them up. They don't get formed in just the same way you can watch stuff on television, you can read books about it. It's not quite the same.

Paul: No. That direct experience of, as you said, walking through nature, that's something that's very close to my heart. I've done a lot of walking over the years. It's interesting to hear you say that. I can very clearly remember routes I've walked, particular campsites and weather conditions on certain days. Yeah, the very vivid memories compared to, as you say, going shopping or walking down the high street or something, which you don't necessarily relate in the same way. And certainly, once it comes to television programs, that they're almost just disposable memories, in a sense in that way. Yeah, it would be very sad to get later on in life and only have a few of those memories. Do you think that also helps define us culturally as well if we collectively have similar experiences of that type?

Jules: Yes. And they will be divergent in different places because places are different. They differ in distance, and ecologies, and temperatures, and some are hot, and some are cold, and there are different plants and animals, and the light is different. My view is that if you're closely linked to the land in that way, you will get divergent cultures. That's why we have lots of different languages in the world – 7,000 languages – because people have found different ways of describing a particular context in places and telling stories. Because another part of the memory thing they experienced then is the capacity to then tell meaningful stories about places, stories themselves that then shape our norms, and behaviors, and give us meaning, and create myths about individuals and places.

I think another challenge that we face at a global level is people's lifestyles are converging on those in affluent industrialized countries. We're becoming more similar rather than celebrating difference. And what we're going to need is not convergence but divergence, that people do things differently and say, that's fine. Celebrate it. And be different. Don't follow the same set of propositions that progresses always linear, that the future is always better, that the past and the poor

are always worse. The notion of secularity of time rather than the linearity of time is something very common amongst many people who live close to the land who say we don't have this notion of a myth of progress. They just say, now is the best time. And actually, that's a very good way of living.

Paul: Yeah. I guess it's a way of that thinking isn't necessarily familiar for a lot of modern people that we've become obsessed as a society with progress, in particular technological progress, that that contentedness that, well, if you're living close to nature, you have all the things that you need, you have I guess an economy, if you like, and a set of tools, and a set of skills, and knowledge that allow you to live close to the land, and you don't need more than that.

Jules: I think the interesting thing is actually, I would say, that should be the rock, the basis is those sets of relationships with your particular places and engagements with the ecology and the people of those places. But people also want mobile phones and the Yurts in Tuva in southern Siberia, Russian Republic, just the north of Mongolia, all have solar panels on so that people can charge their mobile phones and run a T.V. for the kids so that they're happy. When I was talking to a group of shamans in Kyzyl in Tuva, the shamans who had to remain hidden from view for decades under the Soviet rule and couldn't really become apparent until the Soviet Union stepped back in 1992 after the Berlin Wall fell.

I was talking with a group of shamans, traditional dressed in braids, and skulls, and colors, and snake skins on the wall, and bear skins, and the surprise heads of oxes, and shamans' drums and the whole works. I'm chatting to them and chirp, chirp, somebody's phone goes off. And one of the female shamans says, "Just excuse me a moment," she just pops out and nobody Nokia mobile. And the head shaman leaned forward to me and said, "We are a modern people. We use the internet and social media as well as being shamans."

I think that actually what people want is the best of both worlds. And I think the key question then comes on whose terms are those decisions made? So people who are living in different places in different kinds of ways are able to make those choices. They will want modern healthcare, they will want modern communications, but they will also want their way of living as well. And I think there's a sort of both-end argument that one can make rather than and either-all-or-

one, where you have to be either be traditional or modern. Actually, no. What we want is to take the best of the traditional and put that in the context of modern living here in Britain, for example. Can we do that? Yeah, sure. And equally, vice versa.

Paul: That's interesting. And that also is something I've had experience of travelling in Tanzania, for example. I met with some really quite traditional Maasai herdsmen who still lived in mud huts, still had multiple wives, still had the corral with the animals. But the chief has Timberland boots and a mobile phone under his rope.

Jules: Lovely.

Paul: Yeah. So he's managed to kind of integrate the best of both worlds.

Jules: Yeah exactly, yes. And I think that's good, a recognition of that is good as well as it being good in itself because that does challenge these notions that are kind of easy to fall into that those of us in industrialized, affluent countries have got it better because we're at a more advanced stage of economies, we're got more stuff, we've got more resources so it must better. But as I was saying earlier, actually the evidence shows we're not happier because of it.

And so just rethinking what a greener economy, a more pro-social economy looks like would take us down a different route, that wouldn't lead to destructive climate change, for example. So that's part of the narrative here as well, how do we find a way, of diverging away from what appears to be almost inevitable destructive climate change? It's a pretty big and important imperative to think about it. And again, that's kind of the scene setting for the book as well.

Paul: I'm a little bit cynical about governments getting involved in climate change. I always get the impression that governments are only interested in climate change when there's a very clear economic downside to climate change. Clearly some countries are bothered by rising sea levels because they've got very low-lying land. But a lot of those countries are also relatively poor by western standards. But I'm very cynical of western governments getting involved. Partly, I think it's political, and partly, I think it's when their motivation is still economic, and I think there's still another evolution of thinking that needs to go on amongst people who are in a

position to pull the levers of power, as it were, that it's on their agenda for the right reasons. And I don't get the impression that it is yet.

Jules: I think that's absolutely true. It's not. Otherwise, we would have done something about it. The challenge is partly to find a form of words, a form of narrative, a story even, that will allow self-interested governments to find a way to do something. And part of that of that story is to use an economic language that implies instrumentality of that nature, and wildness, and the environmental services that we get from natural capital, if you will. But if one stops at that point, that would be only a tiny part of what really needs to be told, which is how we need to think differently, how this can happen without... Meaning, it's the end of everything. It's just a way of involving our thinking to create ways of living that actually would make people more contented and happy.

Is it possible? Well, it might sound a little bit like cuckoo land, but actually this notion of what a greened, if I can use that phrase, a greened economy might look like, whether it would be more pro-social, it would be better for the planet. We have lots of hints as to how to do things, whether it's agricultural, energy or transport in a way that is actually quite environmentally sustainable. The question is, how do we scour that up from previous small stuff at the moment to becoming big stuff? And we're a long way off doing that, I think. And that's, in a sense, where the challenge is. So there are roles to play in all of these. But a healthy dose of cynicism about the reasons for talking about the importance of these things or indeed ignoring them is certainly a good place to be.

Paul: Do you think, having traveled and visited the various societies that you talk about in the book and you write about in the book, and comparing that to the modern western societies, and as you say, a lot of those societies you visit are within the smaller encapsulations within, for example, the Amish within the United States. Do you think one of the issues that we have as western society, as a whole, is that it's very decentralized, that all of these communities that still live close to nature are relatively small communities. And yet, as being British, or American, or Canadian, or Japanese, that society is so large as a whole that's it's very, very difficult to maintain that connection as a society with the local environment?

Jules: Yeah. It is. If your culture celebrated or does something that makes it an inevitable part of daily life, such as the Amish farmers of Ohio, who actually are expanding in numbers and buying more land because they have a successful model of farming. That model of farming is based on horses and rotational grazing for livestock and it's very sensitive and has a light touch on the land. So in one sense, that's quite an interesting model but it's not going to be adopted by all of farming and the rest of the U.S. So getting from those small examples to the big is really a challenge.

But we do have lots more people who are members of environmental and wildlife societies and N.G.O.s than in the past. There are many people still going out on the land. Gardening is extremely popular. And there are lots of things that people do that regularly brings them in contact with nature. So it's not all despair. But how do you elevate those activities into a context whereby they really make a difference for big stuff like, as we say, the finite planet and from climate change? There's a big gap there.

I think all one can do is just keep worrying away at the stories and just saying, look, just think differently. The way we live is not the only way to live and the way other people live it's okay. It's just different. And let's go to the Amish, for example, again. They are generally looked at as being a little bit odd and quirky because they wear unusual clothes, and the women don't cut their hair, and the men don't wear buttons, and their beards are different to the rest of society, and have a strong religious context. And yet, divorce is unknown, families stay together, multi-generations, and families live in the same house. And the agriculture is very sustainable.

When the credit crunch happened in the U.S. in 2008, and just completely decimated large parts of the rust belt where Cleveland, for example, was one place where 35,000 houses were abandoned because people had taken out toxic loans and just couldn't maintain them and were forced out of their homes. It was a modern disaster of the worst sort. Well, just a couple of a hundred miles away in Ohio, the credit crunch just walked straight past the Amish and they never noticed it because they take loans.

So there are lessons that one can learn by saying, well, let's have a look at just a clear-eyed look at how people live in different sorts of ways, and not jump to hasty conclusions that just because people are different, they must be worse or just haven't got the right answer, or it's about time they started living like us. All I want to do is just really get us thinking a little bit about other places and other people than just recognizing that it's good that they're there, and they're not all like us, at it were. Although, I wouldn't like to suggest that even the modern and the affluent are not a monolith, anyway. People are different and in lots of ways and places. And that's always a good thing to celebrate.

Paul: Indeed, indeed. Just flipping the question on its head a little bit and looking at it from the perspective of those societies, those peoples you visited. Was there a common theme that came out as to why they still live traditionally closer to the land than perhaps the societies that they sit within and wider modern society? What is it that's kept them closer to the land that maybe hasn't kept or has been absent from other places where they haven't remained so close?

Jules: That's a very good question. I think it is when the land and activities on the land are a meaningful part of people's livelihoods, their ways of living. So it hasn't just become a place to visit but it's become a place to be. So therefore, it's something of cultural relevance. So I think it's not just land, it's also a place and place has significance to us because things happen in places, and stories happen, and engagements between people happen. And then they get locked into memories, as we were talking about earlier on.

So if you've got those celebrated or have a sense of the importance of those, then your attachment to a place is important. Take a particular tribe of people in Southern Louisiana, in the marshlands of the south, the Houma Nation, have not been granted a reservation by federal authorities because they have a break in their records of one year in 1809. So they're technically just seen as a group of individuals rather than a nation. If they're seen as a nation, they could have a reservation which is a sovereign place. You then can take control of it completely. So it's about the politics of land actually, in other words, that The Bureau of Indian Affairs doesn't reply to them because they know that the existing landowners would resist this very strongly. So the state and national politics make it very difficult.

But yeah, in the same state in Louisiana, the only Indian tribe, and they do call themselves Indians happily, that has a reservation, the Chitimacha who live a little bit further north on the edge of the Atchafalaya Basin, they were given a small reservation in 1917 when they were only six families surviving. And on that reservation, they recently built a casino as many American Indian groups have done. And that casino is now a source of great income for them.

It's a troubling place to visit. You go in and you see people spending money. The house always wins. They're trying to buy a dream by going into casinos. That's why people go to places like Las Vegas. The house wins. But in this case, the house belongs to the Chitimacha and the profits are all spread evenly amongst all the families on the reservation and all the people who are Chitimacha. The conclusion of which is lots of people are trying to join.

You are defined as a Chitimacha if you're a 16th, so that's back four generations. But they now receive thousands of letters every year from people across the United States saying, "I claim that I am a part Chitimacha. Therefore, I should receive money from you." So now people want to be Indian. Which is a kind of interesting twist. They spend so long trying to fight them and say they're the baddies. Suddenly they appear to be the goodies because they've got money, and lots of other kind of difficulties around casinos, and identity, and this sort of thing. But I think it is about once you've got a place that feels like homeland, then you kind of invest in it, and you look after it, and you invest your human capital and identity in it in ways that's different when it's not of your own.

So I think that can happen within our landscapes. I look out on a part of the Suffolk-Essex border called the Stour Valley, which is a lovely mosaic landscape because of the diverse soils of all sorts of different crops. A real mixed landscape. A little bit further down the valley is where Constable painted Dedham Vale up the valley. Buzzards flying around above us, they've come in the last 10 years to this part of the land. People feel a strong sense of identity for this place. So I think when you tease those questions out of people about their home places, they also feel that sense of importance. In other words, it can be nearby around the corner, as well as apparently, in eastern and remote places at the Arctic, or the jungles, or the deserts, or the forests.

Paul: Yes. I think it's very much the case. You mentioned before about people getting more involved in environmental organizations or just local wildlife, what have you. And I know quite a few people who will volunteer at certain small areas of woodland or certain wildlife reserves and people having that connection, even with a relatively small part of the countryside, really gives them a sense of purpose, a sense of place, a sense of satisfaction. And they get great pleasure from the small details of that landscape. And I think it's that connection that we need to encourage really, isn't it, on a local level?

Jules: I completely agree. And on the back of that, other things happen as well. I talked earlier about the non-link between G.D.P. progress, economic growth and contentedness and happiness. If we take the well-being argument a little bit, it is now known that people who volunteer for others or volunteer in those context for wildlife organizations live, on average, two years longer than those who don't. We know that the first five minutes in nature, and we coined a phrase from some research that we did on this, we called a dose of nature. Your first five minutes dose gives you an improvement of self-esteem, and mood, and a whole range of other hormonal changes.

We know that if you're physically active, you will push back the onset of dementia by 10 years. And if you have dementia, you can actually push them right away by being very physically active. It's generalization that doesn't work for everybody. But it's the reason to make. We know that loneliness is equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day, that's the health effect it has on you. So if you can put people together in green places, actually you're achieving a whole range of other things, not just knowledge about nature and a sense of its value and importance, but you're also creating well-being amongst people.

Paul: And just in terms of them valuing the environment, I noticed in one of the reviews of your book, there was something that resonated with me when I read the book about one of the greatest dangers being people not valuing the landscape around them. I think it was, as a society, that we've reached a point where we don't think the planet is worth preserving at all, something along those lines. It was interesting because I had a conversation on my podcast a few episodes ago with Kevin Callan who's written multiple books on canoe race in Canada, and he related a conversation he'd had with Bill Mason, one of the doyens of paddling in Canada.

And he said had said pretty much exactly the same to Kevin because Kevin had come under criticism for writing guide books from people saying, well, you're encouraging people to go into the wilderness and they'll damage it. He had a conversation with Bill Mason about this which, Bill basically said, well, if you don't encourage people to go, they won't value it, they won't have any idea of what's there and they won't value it. It was very interesting that that was also something that came out of your work, and also something that was picked up, I think, it was in the "New Scientist: review of your book that that was picked out as one of the themes there as well. So it's a common theme, it seems.

Jules: Exactly and I think that's a really interesting thing. Because I think there's a real kind of meanness of spirit of people saying, you shouldn't write guide books about places because you might encourage people to go there. And crikey, that's exactly what we want. We want, but to be responsible, sure. Will it mean they fly? Well, at the moment it does mean that flying has some sort of impact on the climate, but we'll find a way to fly without burning fossil fuels in due course. It's more important that we create value, and understanding, and a kind of sense of worth about different places and different people. I think there's a kind of much, much bigger win here rather than to be mean and say actually, actually you should just stay at home and let nobody go there, or perhaps even worse, let only a few people go there. The only ones who know about it.

That's what the emperors were doing in the Huangshan mountains. They wanted to keep the people out, the hoi polloi, keep out the poor people because they wanted to keep it for themselves. I think that's a kind of pretty horrible thought. And we want to encourage maximum engagement by all sorts of people, by every type of people with their environments, creating an understanding of other places as well. That would be even better. And sure, tell people about it. Write about it. Inspire them. Get them to want to go.

Not everyone will, but their understanding of different places might make them talk about it and say, have a sense of, yeah, I have to stand somewhere differently and that's changed me a bit by what I do. So I think one can and should actually seek to inspire by writing, or filming, or doing a podcast as you're doing, or just gathering all those stories, and making sure that people understand there's a big

win in all of these. We shouldn't be discouraging people from going out. There are enough things doing that already.

Paul: Yes.

Jules: It's difficult to walk, it's difficult to cycle in rural areas in England, particularly for children, because it's so dangerous.

Paul: Dangerous on the roads.

Jules: Because there are all cars on the road. It's difficult to walk because in certain places, it's too dangerous. That wasn't the case when I was growing up in the same county of Suffolk. It was much safer. So things have changed. We just need to be doing everything we can to get people outside there, in one way or another.

Paul: Indeed, indeed. I've been criticized for some of the articles that I've written, you know, showing people how to light camp fires, for example. I would rather show somebody how to do it well and do it efficiently, and leave very little trace after them, than somebody just go and make a botched job, and try and burn green logs or cutting down material that's still living, and leaving horribly scarred areas in the ground and half-burning logs, which you often see. If you see inexperienced people in the outdoors, they tend, not necessarily through any malice, but they tend to do things slightly ineffectually and therefore use more and make more of a mess than they would otherwise do. And if you can teach people to do things in a smaller way, in a tidy way and be respectful of other people and respectful of nature, then I think that's a valuable thing for people to do.

But it's very interesting. I had a conversation with somebody who looks after a piece of woodland. It was in the comments in one of my articles, and he was criticizing the use of certain materials. And one of the things I said to him was, well, it was filmed on a large estate in Sussex where there's shooting, there's forestry, there's farming, there's all sorts of activities that go on. Burning a few dead birch twigs, which is largely what we were discussing, in the context of everything that goes on in that land, is minor. And if somebody does that rather than creating a forest fire or making a great big mess, then surely that's a much better thing. But yeah, some people seem to have this fear of people being in the

woods and being in the fields just in case they cause some damage and I find it really peculiar.

Jules: Yeah. I think sometimes it's actually worse than that. Sometimes, it's framed as a kind of proxy for actually we just don't want those sorts of people out in our kinds of places. It's a kind of exclusionary argument to say, well, they're going to damage resources. Those people are going to create considerable damage. Yeah, I completely agree with you. It's mean and unhelpful and you should just carry on doing and others should as well because the bigger win is the inspiration of large numbers of people to feel this connection, to take advantage of it. Not everyone will be able to all the time. They may make one visit and may not make another one for six months, but it's better to make one visit than none.

So I think this is an important project to recreate those connections that I think have been eroded and lost in many places, and are being so in many other parts of the world as lifestyles converge, as I was saying earlier on. And we've got to find a form of language and storytelling and inspiration that allows people to feel that they should be doing things differently from other places. The common thing is this connection stuff, is this connection to nature.

Paul: Well, it's defined our relationship. As a species, to me, we haven't spent most of our existence since whenever we came out of Africa or even before that, we haven't lived separate from the rest of nature. We've been completely integrated with it and our interaction with it has been on a daily and continuous basis. And we've been using resources in a way that hasn't exhausted them. We've been using resources in a way that is a small-scale use of resources, and that's defined our relationship with nature for millions of years. And to me, it seems that that's kind of what we've lost since maybe even just the industrial revolution, really.

Jules: Yeah, absolutely, yes. Those changes, again, are now being repeated. It's thousands of generations as hunter gatherers. It's a few hundred generations since the beginning of farming, since agriculture was invented. It's four to six generations since the industrial revolution. That sort of territory. That's the kind of place of change in all of this.

I think there are some potential big wins for translating those individual experiences that we've been talking about, how you've got to encourage 7 billion

individuals to understand that's there's some value to them, personally, of living in a particular way on this small green planet. But the structures of economies and societies need a similar effort to make us think about, let's use this phrase, a greened economy, a more pro-social economy. This is not some conspiracy to take things away from the rich. It's a route to save the rich. You know what? There's a way of living that would be better for you and there's a way of living that you will enjoy more.

You can still have stuff, that's all right. Stuff is okay. We're not saying, wear a hare shirt. Trying to create a language around greenness and greener economies and greener thinking that doesn't sound like you've got to go through real pain in order to save the planet. That sort of argument doesn't work. And actually, we don't need to make it anyway. That there are different ways to put together the rationale for thinking about these sorts of transitions. And really, I'd go back again to the book and say, look at different places. Just be attentive, be extraordinarily attentive to places, and things will happen.

In the previous book to "The Edge of Extinction," I described walking 400 miles around the coast of East Anglia, of Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk over the course of a year, and it's layered stories and interactions. In one particular day, I walked 16 miles around the Shotley Peninsula, which is between Essex and Suffolk. And it was closed and I didn't see a single person all day. It snowed, it rained, it was windy, it was hot, it was cold, it was every season. And the night before, I'd been reading a very famous essay by the American writer, Annie Dillard, who's a fierce writer, wonderful writer. And she'd been writing about looking a weasel in the eye and what happened when she engaged with this kind of small predator.

And this had been ticking along in my mind all day. And because I was by myself, I was walking quietly. And I was walking along the seawall, and running towards me came two weasels, and straight at me and perched up on their hind legs about a meter away from me, and I was able to get down on the ground and lay down, and they looked at me and I looked at them for about a minute, and then they gambled off into the grass. They call them a gang of weasels, if there's more than one .

So that kind of experience, that doesn't happen very often in life. It has a significance to one, personally. It comes from a kind of attentiveness, from a

contemplative space that, actually, I think is good for all of us. And there's a sense throughout this book, "The Edge Of Extinction," that there's a lot of people living in a quieter, contemplative way with their environments. They're quite calm and relaxed, not in a hurry. They're willing to take things as they come. All of that has something instructive, I think, for all of us.

Paul: Indeed. I couldn't agree more. So thank you, Jules. That's very interesting conversation. And as I said at the beginning of this podcast, I would very much recommend getting ahold of a copy of Jules's book, "The Edge Of Extinction," and having a read of that. It's very enjoyable and informative on multiple different levels. Can people follow your work in other ways, Jules? Social media or website or anything?

Jules: Yeah, they can, on my website which is JulesPretty.com. There is a whole lot of material on there, on Twitter and Facebook, although the link is through the Twitter feed. And there's a social media campaign I'm running for the 100 Hearts and Habits, which is about posting ideas on how we should live, and the small things that we can do to make a difference, and trying to get a sense that this is all possible. So yes, indeed. Do follow up through website and Twitter and so forth. And it's been a pleasure.

Paul: Yes. Mine, too. And I'll put links to all of those things below this podcast, on my blog as well. So thank you very much, Jules. Well, we're already at the, 50-minute mark, 50-plus minute mark. That seemed to fly by. What a fascinating conversation. Very interesting man to talk to, Professor Jules Pretty. And as I've already said multiple times, I think you'll get the message here, do grab hold of a copy of his book, "The Edge of Extinction." It's very interesting read and some very thought-provoking sections in that book. All the links to the book, Professor Jules Pretty's profile, his Twitter profile, his website will be under this podcast, on my blog at PaulKirtley.co.uk.

If you've enjoyed this podcast, please pop over there, leave a comment underneath the podcast or tweet me, or indeed, Jules. You can tweet me @PKirt that's @P-K-I-R-T and let me know what you think about this podcast. And please share it with your friends. If you think people will enjoy this that you know, please share it with them. Please share it on social media Twitter, Facebook, Google+, all those sorts of

things. And also, I say this every time, but it does help, if you could leave us a review or comment or a rating on iTunes or Stitcher, that helps very much in terms of making this podcast visible for other people to find. So other people who may enjoy this type of content will find it more easily. So if you could do your little bit to help by leaving a rating, a comment, that would be much appreciated. Thank you very much.

So I think we'll just have a little bit more of that acoustic guitar music to finish off rather than just finishing abruptly. Before I go, I should say next podcast, I've got Chris Townsend, renowned long distance walker, author of "The Backpacker's Handbook" and year editor for "The Great Outdoors" magazine. It will be an absolute pleasure to speak with him. So until the next time. Thank you very much for listening and take care.