

Paul Kirtley's Blog

Wilderness Bushcraft • Survival Skills • Outdoor Life

Paul: This is the Paul Kirtley Podcast, episode 8. The Paul Kirtley Podcast Wilderness Bushcraft Survival Skills and Outdoor Life.

Hello, and welcome to episode 8 of my podcast. In this episode, I have a guest who is something of a hero of mine. He's a long distance backpacking legend and someone whose work I look to for advice and information when I was first undertaking multi-day walking trips and hiking trips over 20 years ago. And I followed his work and exploits ever since. I'm talking about none other than Chris Townsend, author of *The Backpacker's Handbook*, as well as nearly 20 other books, largely illustrated with his own photography. He's a passionate enthusiast and advocate for wilderness, and has spent much of his life exploring wild places near and far, mostly on foot.

Having undertaken various UK and European long walks, he threw hike to the Pacific Crest Trail in 1982 when most outdoor people had never even heard of it. Since then, Chris has completed many other long walks, and to my mind, has become one of the preeminent authorities on backpacking and long distance trail walking. He's also the longstanding gear tester and gear editor at the *Great Outdoors* magazine, as well as having recently been appointed the British Mountaineering Council's ambassador for hill walking. Chris' advice and views are grounded in his own real world experience, and I very much like his practical and pragmatic approach. So it was a real delight for me to spend the day walking in the Cairngorms with Chris, talking about all things outdoors, particularly our mutual love of wild places, of making journeys, and of photography.

We took the opportunity to sit down on a couple of occasions throughout the day and record our conversations to put in this podcast to share with you. And our conversations covered a lot of ground. Chris told me about some of his grueling times on the trail, his experiences, the times he learned from, mistakes he made, and maybe where he pushed too far. There is loads of useful information packed into this podcast, whether you're somebody who's just getting into backpacking and walking and overnight camping, or whether you're a seasoned trail hiker. There is a ton of information in this. And without further adieu, we're going to jump in, where Chris and I sit down, part way through the day to chat. So I'm out in the Cairngorms with Chris Townsend. Hi, Chris.

Chris: Hi!

Paul: Welcome to my podcast.

Chris: Thank you.

Paul: So we've been having a nice walk today, unseasonably warm. I think, first off, maybe for people who don't know you, you are the author of *The Backpacker's Handbook*, which is how I first was introduced to your work, and also in terms of the long distance walks you've done. I think maybe we'll talk about those more shortly, but also, I think in the context of where we are, you're the ambassador for the hill walking for the BMC. Maybe you can tell us a little bit about that first off, because that's quite a new role, isn't it?

Chris: A very new role. I'm the first ever. I always think ambassador sounds a bit grand, really. But the only idea is to have someone who can be, if you like, a figure head for hill walking in the BMC, and can promote the hill walking side of the BMC, which I think is all we needed. Frankly, although the BMC has always said it's for climbers and walkers, the climbing has always seemed to be the dominant side of things. But really, it's a climbing organization, it does a bit for walkers. Whilst I think the BMC is always the more for walkers than people have realized, with the access work, other stuff and conservation, it never promoted it as for walkers.

But a couple of years ago, for the first time ever, they appointed a hill walking officer, Carey Davis. They never had one before, so that was a start. But obviously, the hill walking officer suggested, "We've got these ambassadors, they're all climbers. We should have a hill walking ambassador." Carey Davis, being someone who I know quite well, he suggested me. And as I do think the BMC should be doing more to actually promote its work for hill walkers, I agreed.

Paul: So far, what does the role involve and how are you taking that forward and encouraging . . .

Chris: It's changing all the time, because obviously, it's a new role. Carey's role as hill walking officer is a new role, so neither of us knew exactly what it was going to mean and what we were going to do. But it has been a variety of things. It's been promoting the BMC whenever they've got stories of interest to walkers on social media, which I do a lot of anyway. So it's Twitter, Facebook, on my blog, and so on. I've also done a couple of short film clips about hill walking using trekking poles, clothing layers, things like that, for the BMC, a couple of other interviews. I've got some talks coming up which won't be

directly just about the BMC but which will be part of it. I've written couple of pieces for a summit, the BMC magazine. What may come up in the future, we'll see. We're developing it all the time.

Paul: And for hill walkers, for people who are primarily hill walkers, what's the - if you can sum it up in a nutshell - the benefit for them of joining the BMC?

Chris: I think there's a number. I think the access is a key one, because the access position in England and Wales, despite the legislation, is still problematic in a number of areas. The legislation, in my view, is better than nothing, but nowhere near ideal. There's still access conflicts in places. There's a big one on Dartmoor. And that affects workers just as much as climbers. And the BMC is one of the leading bodies doing access work, so I think that's important. Conservation is important. Again, workers and climbers both want a beautiful mountain landscape to go into, and that can't be taken for granted.

There are always threats. The BMC has a conservation officer that does an awful lot of work on conserving the mountain landscape. So I think those two are critical. Of course, there's all the BMC benefits: insurance, discounts, all the rest of it. But what there is now, which is fairly new, is a growing number of publications, leaflets, DVDs and so on, and hill walkers giving advice and information. So there's actually a lot of stuff there for hill walkers. And hopefully, this is going to grow in the near future.

Paul: Am I right in thinking they've worked with various organizations to develop some training for hill walkers, as well?

Chris: Yes, there's a scrambling course that's going on for that middle ground between hill walking and climbing, various other courses, navigation courses which applies to climbers, as well, but obviously, it's a key thing for hill walkers. Some of the winter skill stuff as well, basic winter mountaineering courses. Again, they're relevant if your aim is to climb desperate routes on NorthFaces, or whether it's to go up Hill Valley when it's covered in snow. The basic winter skills are the same, walkers and climbers, again, both need those.

Paul: Just to take a little step back, again, for people that maybe don't know your background or maybe don't know all of your background, how did you get to that point? I mean, you had a big long career, if you like, of doing long distance walks. You were telling me a little while ago that that's how you became first published as an author, rather than, I guess, a contributor to a magazine. Can you tell us a little about some of the walks that you did and how you got started? I know a lot of people aspire to do longer backpacking trips.

Chris: I was inspired, oddly enough, by reading other writers. I was interested in backpacking and hill walking, but I basically initially saw backpacking as something you did on a weekend so you could camp in the hills and go and climb summits in the Lake District towards Nardonia. But I wanted to do something longer, I wasn't sure what. I read a, probably by most people, a long forgotten book now by John Hillaby called Journey Through Britain. And he walked from Land's End to John O'Groats off road. I mean, as now, there were loads of people doing it as a charity walk or cycle ride on roads. They heeded it, staying off roads. And that was sometime in the 1970s, so a long time ago now. But I read his book and thought, "I could do that."

That was the first book I read where I thought, "I could really like the idea of moving on everyday, doing a long walk." And the first walk longer than a weekend I did, was the Phenom Way, which is the first in a long distance walk for many people, and that convinced me that I really liked this. It took two weeks. And at the end of two weeks, I thought, "I've barely got going. That's disappointing. I don't want to stop." I then did Land's End to John O'Groats, which took 10 weeks, which was great. What I discovered from that, though, was at the time, I didn't know the Scottish Highlands. I've been here a couple of times for short day walks, that was it. But obviously, Land's End and John O'Groats, you got to go right through the highlands. And the highlands were the wildest place I'd ever been, the most remote place, and that was the best walk I'd enjoyed most.

So as well as learning that I liked multi-week walks, I also learned that I like the wildest places you can get to, as well. At the time, I was working in an outdoor shop. I was writing the occasional article for magazines. Most of what I did was still hill walking, still weekends or days out in the lakes and the dales, and so on.

Then someone lent me a book, an old book comes into this, called Thousand-Miles Summer by a guy called Colin Fletcher, who, again, hardly anyone in Britain would have heard of. He was a Brit, but he moved to California, spent most of his life there. Sadly, he died a few years ago. But he had walked the length of California back in 1958, through the deserts and mountains, not on roads. I just read that and thought, "Wow, I really want to do something like this." Now, this is long before the internet. Getting information was really difficult. I had no idea where you've got maps, how would you plan something like this? How would you find out where could you buy food, what equipment did you need, etc? But in a book shop, I discovered a trail guide, a two-volume trail guide, the Pacific Crest Trail. I never heard of it before, I doubt many people in Britain had.

This was Mexico to Canada, through the deserts and mountains. I thought, "I want to do that, definitely. That really sounds fantastic." It's 2,700 miles, and I did that in 1982. It took five and a half months. That, if you like, was the key walk of all the long distance walks I've done, because that was the first one that was in wilderness most of the time. That was much more remote, pristine wilderness as well, if you like, which we don't really have anywhere in Britain. It's the first long distance walk I'd done outside of Britain, as well. It was all I can think, "I have to do more of these." Oddly enough, that was in 1982. Last year, my book on that walk was published, which is a long time afterwards. But luckily, I always keep detailed journals of the walks; I couldn't have written it otherwise.

I wouldn't have remembered enough. In fact, that's the reason my journals are interesting, because there were things in there, I thought, "I don't remember this, but it must have happened because I've written it down," thirty odd years later. On the Pacific Crest Trail, that was the key walk. Following on from that, I did the Continental Divide Trail, which is 3,100 miles. It's still the longest walk I've done. It took five and a half months. And that goes from Canada to Mexico through the Rocky Mountains, basically. But I then did the length of the Canadian Rockies, which had never been done before. I found that in a book which said, "It's surprising no one has ever attempted to walk the length of the Canadian Rockies." I was on a ski tour in the Canadian Rockies at the time, but I read that and thought, "What? Great, I'm off."

Paul: A challenge for you.

Chris: To continue that, I did a walk the length of the Yukon Territory, which had probably been done before but I've never found a record of it. So I don't know...

Paul: Where did that start and finish?

Chris: I started in southeast Alaska in Skagway, on the coast, went over the Chilkoot Pass, which is where the Klondike would be miners went, then headed north all the way through, following the Yukon River at times. I did go through the Klondike area and finished in the richest of mountains, well north of the Arctic Circle. That was a fantastic walk. And these walks, again, were before the internet, very little information, no trails - certainly in the northern Canadian Rockies and the Yukon - basic maps. So it was really - if you like exciting, adventurous stuff - quite challenging, still not the most challenging walks I've ever done, however. They were in Scotland, oddly enough. I did the length of Scandinavia walk, which was great; it was too much rain, from my point of view. You know, that happens in Norway and Sweden. A book I'd written much

earlier, Hamish's Mountain Walk, which I still think is the best British backpacking book.

Hamish Brown was the first person who did all the Munros in one continuous walk in 1974, which at the time, was quite an achievement. Because there's only been one attempt before, and that had failed, so he really was pioneering. Could it be done? Could he do it? He succeeded and wrote a great book about it. That had been my inspiration in the early '80s. I'd done a series of long walks, couple of 500-mile walks, couple of shorter coast to coast walks, and done all the Munros, some of them on short trips, as well. I'd done the Munros once. I then put that aside, but then in the early '90s, I was thinking, "I really ought to do a walk." But I didn't want to do Hamish's walk as he did it. Then again, I read in the book, where someone pointed out that no one had ever done the Munros and the subsidiary tops in one walk. Again, I thought, "Right, that's a challenge. That will make it different." Because with the subsidiary tops, you have then 517 summits, not 284. Now, the subsidiary tops may seem like an afterthought. Because what Munro did, he had the Munros, separate mountains over 3,000 feet high, which all in metric is 914.4 meters.

It's always amused me when you think no one would ever think or compile a list of all the hills over 914.4 meters high, but that's what they are in metric. He divided the mountains into separate mountains from what he called subsidiary tops. However, he didn't say how he made that distinction or what the differences were. And in all honesty, there are some Munros which are closer to and have less of an elevation drop to the next Munros than some subsidiary tops do. Subsidiary tops are also often right out on [inaudible 00:17:31], on long ridges that you would not otherwise bother going up. So adding them to the Munros made for a very different walk. There's very little published information on the tops. There's a list of them in Munros tables, but there's no guide books to them. Most of the Munros books don't mention them. It was a bit more adventurous for planning the route. But what made that, at that point, the most challenging walk I've ever done, was 517 points. The whole idea of the walk, was linking all of them.

Paul: Yes, right.

Chris: If I missed any of them, I hadn't done the walk. Now, all the walks I had done previous to that, were A to B walks. Inside that A and B, the only rule was I'll walk the whole way. I could vary it if the weather's lousy; I'll take this lower valley route. It was still, if you like, valid. But with the 517 summits, no, you've got to do all 517 or you haven't done the walk. So whatever the weather, so I fought through loads of storms on that walk. Some of it was rough enough that I was thinking, "What am I doing? Why am I up here? This is madness." There

were a few storms when it was so bad that I retreated, because I thought "Do I want to crawl to the next summit? No, I think this is getting a bit stupid." I'd go back down and have to wait. Even though that was in Scotland and I was never anything like far away from places that I'd been on all the long American walks, because of the weather and the number of summits, it was even more challenging. After that, I thought, "I'm going back to the easy walks in real wilderness. Leave these little Scottish hills alone. They're too tough."

Paul: How long did that take you in the end, Chris?

Chris: It took me about four and a half months.

Paul: Right.

Chris: I think it was about 1,600 miles. But I forget the figure.

Paul: Lots of [inaudible 00:19:30].

Chris: But the amount of ascent was phenomenal compared with any other walk. That's the significance, it's the distance to some extent. Oddly enough, when I've worked it out, regardless of the terrain or anything else, the average distance per day on any long distance walk is 15 to 16 miles. This was never planned or intended, but somehow, that's obviously a comfortable amount for me to do. I say average because there would be days where I did, for whatever reason, five miles, and days when I did 25 miles, or even 30. But the average always comes down to that.

It's always the same. But going back to America, I then did the Arizona Trail, which runs from border to border, Mexico to Utah. I got 800 miles through Arizona. And I suspect - I mean, I can't quite remember now - after the very wet and windy Monroe's walk, I wanted to go somewhere where it was guaranteed to be hot and sunny almost all the time. And on the Arizona Trail, I slept under the stars almost every night. The next one I did was the Pacific Northwest Trail, which is an interesting one because most American long trails run north-south, but this one runs east-west. It starts on the eastern edge of the Rockies Glacier National Park and finishes at the Pacific Ocean in Olympic National Park. And it's just south of the Canadian border. And I like the idea of that because it crosses both Pacific Crest Trail and the Continental Divide Trail at the northern end, so it links the two. And I did that. Well, I was planning to set off on that five years ago. That was a fairly recent one.

But then 2 years ago...and that was also inspired, in fact, by book and by the author who was twitching my arm and going, "Chris, you really ought to do the

Pacific Northwest Trail." He'd been telling me that for about 15 years before I said, "Okay, I gave up. I'll go and do it." I read a book called "Ribbon of Wilderness," by Peter Wright, about 4 years ago. And in it, he describes the Scottish watershed. Now, obviously, I knew Scotland had a watershed. I mean, everywhere's got watersheds. There's watersheds all over the place. And I had read an earlier book by Dave Hewitt, called "Walking Watershed," which is a good book, but it's a personal account of what it was like to do a long distance walk in the highlands. I'd enjoyed it, but I hadn't got any real feel of what the watershed itself was like. So I wasn't inspired to go and do the same walk, especially because, of course, I'd done all the Monroes in a long walk, quite a few of which were in this book.

But Peter Wright, he did the watershed in a series of walks, but his book was more about watershed itself, what it was, where it was. I mean, the title of his book, "Ribbon of Wilderness," there's this fairly remote, fairly high level, almost wilderness walk right through Scotland from the English border to Duncan's Behead [SP] beyond Joanna Grouts. And hardly anyone knows anything about it. Only a few people have ever done it. I thought, "That sounds exciting. I'll go and do that." I did that two years ago, and it was incredibly tough.

Paul: I remember reading some of the entries on your blog about that, actually, and you saying how tough it was.

Chris: For two reasons. The terrain, there was very few paths along the watershed. They cross it one side to the other. They don't go along it.

Paul: Yes.

Chris: So you've got some very rough terrain, boggy sections, tussocks. Some quite difficult navigation in places where it's quietly obvious where the watershed is, because you've got broad mossy areas. And you're picking away through the middle of them, following roughly where the watershed might go because the water appears to be shooting off in every direction. Oddly enough, the easiest sections are on popular hills in the highlands of Monroe's, where you're on the standard path to the summit. Like on Ben Lomond where you go up the main path. Once you join that, the walking's easy, of course. However, you didn't go off the north, which nobody does, so suddenly it gets tough near in [inaudible 00:24:16] again. But the other big factor is the weather.

Of course, the watershed is the most continuous line of high ground, all linked together. So you're always on the highest continuous high ground. So you're always getting the full force of the weather. So like the Monroe's walk, there

was some pretty fierce storms along it. And a logistics problem, which it hadn't occurred to me - it doesn't occur even particularly in a Monroe's walk - but the watershed was diversely nowhere on or near it. There's one Combonald, a new town is actually built on the watershed. It's the only town on the watershed. There's a couple of pubs, hotels, that's it. So it's resupply. You've got to drop down, sometimes a fair distance. So you have to think logistics carefully, to where you can resupply. It's much more remote even in the central belt. It's more remote than you imagine it could be.

But the other thing I got from it, it gave me a completely different perspective on Scotland in that because of the Monroe's walk, I'd seen, certainly, the highlands, which is most of Scotland, as a series of summits. A series of groups of mountains together but all disconnected, but you could link them by climbing the summits. The watershed, of course, is a continuous line. And the summit is only matic if they're on the watershed. And sometimes a major summit can be just off the watershed. The example is Craig Maggie.

The watershed actually crosses the Craig Maggie ridge to the east of the summit. So you're going along the ridge. The summit is way ahead. I mean, you're still a few miles way. But suddenly, when you come out the watershed, it actually goes down this spur, from a point that doesn't even have a name. And you think, "This can't be right. There's a big [inaudible 00:26:19]." But the difference is, of course, this spur links to high ground which goes on to the hills beyond. If you've got Craig Maggie, there's a much bigger drop, so you're not in the watershed. And that's true throughout. It twists and turns, sometimes it's further east than you expect it to be. But that gave me, I say, a whole new perspective, which was fascinating. I was fascinated in the highlands, which I thought I knew really well after doing all the Monroe's. There was still a new approach that had never occurred to me before.

Paul: Well, that's interesting. That's interesting. How do you go about preparing for a walk like that? Do you do any sort of physical preparation? Or do you just walk often enough that it's part of your physical conditioning generally?

Chris: Walk often enough, yes. Because I live in the countryside, I can go for short walks from home every day. Ironically enough, though, for a really long walk where I'm going to be away for two months or more, there's always an awful lot of preparation in advance. It's getting written work done from magazines in advance, the setting of all the logistics and everything else. Generally, the six to eight weeks before a long walk, I get less exercise than I normally do, because there's so much else to do. I always think, "I've got to be building up. I need to be going out. I need to be doing more. I've got start pushing myself." And I don't think I've succeeded once.

But I also, now, I learned from my first long walks, two things. I was very naive at the beginning. I thought long walk, you set off, you walk 20 miles a day, you do that for three months and you've got to the end. I didn't make allowances for "you're going to be fitter at the end than at the beginning." And I didn't make allowances for "you might actually want to have the whole day off or a half day off." And you need time to resupply and do other things. But I learned fairly quickly that it was best to start off relatively gently, knowing that you'll get fitter. And by the end, you'll be much fitter. And I have found, even when I'm doing a lot normally, I've never been as fit as I usually am in the second half of a long distance walk.

Because when you're walking 6 to 10 hours every with single day with a pack, you only have one day off every 7 to 10 days, sometimes not for two weeks, you get very fit. And even being involved in the outdoors and writing about it and so on, I don't have the time to that all the time, or I would never get the work done with the writing and so on. So I mean, an example is the Pacific Crest Trail, the first section of which when you're mostly in relatively easy terrain. There's some steep climbs, there's lot of desert, semi-desert walking, there's a bit of snow, nothing serious. I have reached about 15 miles a day through the high sierra for about 400 miles when it was snow bound and was really a winter expedition rather than a walk, you know, snowshoes and crampons on nearly all the time. I traveled with some Americans, then, for safety.

We averaged 12 miles a day. So by the end of that section, I was way behind schedule. However, the last two months of the walk, I was doing 25 miles a day, without feeling there was any extra effort, without having to push myself to do it, because I was so much fitter. So since then, I tend to feel it doesn't matter how fit I am at the beginning, I will get fitter during the walk.

Paul: Yes. [inaudible 00:30:28] as you go? Interesting. And then, in terms of resupply, do you have a rule of thumb of a maximum number of days you'll carry food for? Or do you just have to go with what's possible in terms . . .

Chris: I now have a maximum of two weeks, preferably less. I learnt what my limits were by going beyond them as you do. High Sierra section, there was a long section. I did not want to break that section and go down and resupply. And I worked out it was going to take around 23 days, because the places that when the snow's gone are open to resupply, were closed. And there was no chance of the snow disappearing while we were there. So I had 23 days' food, and because it was going to be a winter trip, I'd now got crampons, snow shoes, ice axe, extra clothing, as well. Plus in those days, I was using a petrol white

gas stove, all the fuel for that period of time. I could not actually lift my rucksack off the ground. To put it on, I had to sit down, put my own shoes and shoulder straps, go onto all fours and stand up wobbling.

Also, this is before - I mean, this sounds like madness now - no one used trekking poles in those days, and it hadn't even occurred to me that with snow shoes, ski poles might be useful. So I had no poles. So I was going to carry this and shuffle along and climb steep passes with crampons and ice axe with this load. I don't know what it weighed. I didn't weigh it. I know, however, it weighed over 100 pounds. Because when we got to Mammoth Lakes at the end of the 23 days' section, the next section, there was still going to be snow, there was going to be river crossings. But I thought, "get rid of the crampons, get rid of the snow shoes, get rid of some of the clothing, and the next section's going to be 17 days. So that's 17 days with food and fuel." Weighed the pack, and it was, I think, 92 pounds.

Paul: Wow. Okay.

Chris: And it was a lot less than the one I had just carried. And I thought, "Oh, my God. That pack was over 100 pounds. No wonder I couldn't pick it up." Now, going through the Sierra with that huge load, yes, I don't remember how much my shoulders and hips ached now. It was fantastic, and I'm glad I didn't drop down and resupply, and break the journey. Two of my companions did. They had already cached food at the Valley Head. But while they went down, I just sat and looked after the tent. And they brought up a few extra bits for me, which was nice. So I didn't have to go and get them. But although I really enjoyed it, I just thought, "Never again. That was too much winter gear in 23 days. Forget it."

Paul: And how much did you weigh at that point? Because you're not a huge guy. I mean, there are people who don't know you. I mean, you're not like some 6-foot-6, Marine built. I mean, you're a quite compact fellow.

Chris: Yeah. I'm 5 foot 8. I can't remember what I weighed at the start of that walk, but by the time we reached the Sierra, I had walked 500 miles. I had lost weight already. When we came out of the Sierra, when we got to Echo Lake, which was at the end of the 17 day section, so we now basically had 40 days through the Sierra, all with really heavy load, credibly tough place. The local paper then, the late Tahoe Bonanza, reporter came out and took a picture of me and Larry, which I've still got. It's in my book on the BCT. This was 1982. I looked older than I look now, because I've got sunken cheeks and my clothes are hanging off me. I weighed then, I think, about nine and a half stone. I did weigh myself. I usually weigh, when I'm sort of fit, about 11 stone. If I get to 12

stone, it's time to lose a bit of weight. But nine and a half stone, I definitely need to put on weight. When we get to Mammoth Lakes after the 23 day section, I must admit, the last two days of that, all I could think about was food.

We hitched hiked into Mammoth Lakes. They said, "Do you want to go to the camp grounds, or a restaurant?" First, we said restaurant. So we went to this restaurant, 23 days in the same clothes, no showers, no chance of washing clothes, we were in snow all the time. We went to the restaurant. We had a full three course meal, American three course meal, huge portions with every side dish you could imagine. We went to the camp ground, we pitched the tents, had a shower, sorted out the gear, went back to the restaurant about two hours later and did the same again. I remember the waitress just couldn't believe it. And we were in Mammoth Lakes for two days while we recovered and resupplied. And all I remember doing was eating, just eating. I don't think I put on any weight, but I needed to. [inaudible 00:36:04] got 17 days coming up. And by the end of the Pacific Crest Trail, I weighed about 10 and a half stone. So I actually managed to put on a stone during the last three months of the walk.

Paul: And do you think it's gotten a little easier now, as kits got lighter? Or do you think it is not? Because, I mean, food weighs a lot, doesn't it? Food doesn't get any lighter but the kit's got a bit lighter over the years.

Chris: Yes, I think. I did a piece for the great outdoors, which is on my blog, I think, or on their website.

Paul: We'll put a link to that.

Chris: About the gear I used on the PCT, what I'd probably take now, and on the differences. And yes, gear's got lighter. Partly design, but a lot of it's materials. A lot of the gear, we take for granted, you know, really durable packed materials like Dyneema. Well, they didn't exist back then. Nylons that light would have fallen apart, so packs had to be much heavier. Silicon nylons for tents didn't exist, so tents were going to be much heavier. Microfibers for clothing didn't exist. Fleece didn't exist. It's a whole host of things. Titanium for stoves and pots and pans didn't exist. I took, I know, the lightest ice axe I could find, which was a long-gone make called Simond, and it was designed for walking only. And it had a fiberglass shaft and a steel head, and it weighed 787 grams. That is incredibly heavy. Even for a standard-weight axe these days that I would think of as heavy, weighs 500 to 600 grams.

That was the lightest you could get at the time. I'd take an axe now weighing sort of like the Camp Neve, 250 grams. I'd save over 500 grams just on the ice axe. And there's a whole host of things. Stoves, as well. I mean, I took a petrol

stove that I think weighed about 500 grams. I'd take much lighter stoves. So you could trim off a lot. So yes, that 100-pound pack. I'm aware I'm jumping from metric to imperial and back again. It's partly because at the time, we weren't metric with anything, so all these things. And of course, the Americans, I met Americans who told me that metrication was a comedy plot. And I really believed it. But that 100-pound pack, well, half of it was food and fuel. That wouldn't be any lighter. But the 50 pounds that wasn't, would probably be 30 to 40 pound - more like 30 pounds now - that 20 pounds would have made a big difference, especially when the weight started going down.

Paul: Yes, you're saving 10 kilos now.

Chris: I'd have worn lighter foot wear. I mean, that was a trip from which I discovered lightweight foot wear, in that I set off in the 5-pound leather boot, semi-stiff leather boots that you'd wear with standard then for hill walking in Britain. In the desert, in the heat, after two days, my feet were swollen, sore, blistered, throbbing, too hot, and I was thinking "I can't go on like this." I had taken some very light running shoes for camp and town wear. That was all. I ended up walking in those in the desert sections, and I realized the boots were far more comfortable on my back than on my feet. But in the mountains when it was snowy, I wore the boots. So right through the High Sierra, I wore those boots. I'd take lightweight boots that would be closer to the running shoes in weight now, than I did then. So for the section when I had the heaviest pack, I'd also save on foot wear.

Paul: I remember when I used to do a lot of mountain biking, if you wanted to do an upgrade to your bike significantly in terms of speed, if you got lighter wheels, yeah, it made a big difference. Because not only did you get light in the bike, you're lightening the weight of what you're moving but also that's the bit that's moving all the time, and the inertia, and the momentum of it. I think it's the same with footwear, isn't it? If you've got lighter footwear, it's not just the fact that you've saved half a pound or a pound on your foot in terms of the absolute weight, it's the fact that you're moving it continuously, as well, that it makes a big difference.

Chris: Oh, very much, yes. If you think about it, you're swinging that weight on your foot backwards and forwards all the time. I think the odd adage, which I've seen various sources for, I'm not sure where it even came from or where it was said, an extra pound on your foot, that's a pound in your pack, five pounds on your feet. You don't want extra weight on your feet, if there's a choice in your pack. As I found with those boots, they weigh five pounds. The shoes weighed about a pound. I was putting four pounds extra weight on my back, and that was much more comfortable than having it on my feet.

Paul: Yes.

Chris: So I think yeah. Most people, when they think of "I want to go lighter," think, "So I'll get a lighter tent. I'll get a lighter sleeping bag." And I always think, "No, start with your feet. Get lighter footwear because that's much more important than what you're carrying on your back."

Paul: What about ankle support? I think people worry about ankle support if they go down to light-weight shoes. [inaudible 00:41:59] shoes or [inaudible 00:42:01] shoes, people worry about getting that support.

Chris: I think, first of all, ankle support with a lot of boots is a mess. What a high ankle gives you, is protection against knocks. So yes, if you're going through a boulder field, you've got a bit protection against getting your bruised ankle. But one of the things you can do to see this, is try standing on the outer edge of a boot, and see how much support your ankle's got. With a light-weight soft fabric boot, as many people wear these days, the answer is very little. If you do it with a stiffer leather boot, with a more reinforce ankle, you'll feel there's a bit of support there that's holding your ankle a bit. If you do it with a plastic climbing boot or a ski boot, yeah, you've got a solid piece on your ankle holding it. But most boots, you haven't got that much support. And if you wear just the heavier boots that give you support all the time, you're effectively splinting your ankles. It won't get any stronger.

Oddly enough, I think people who do very little walking, except on flat surfaced pavements in towns or in parks, never on rough ground, up and down, never where their ankle is flexing, turning side to side and everything else, if they're suddenly going to go walking, their ankles may not be strong enough for light-weight footwear. And they might be better off in a traditional club hopping boot. For anyone who goes out regularly on any sort of rough ground, you're building up ankle support, ankle strength rather, and you don't need a boot to support it. So I mean, my favorite walking footwear, the last two long walks that I've done, I've done in lightweight trail shoes, without any problems. The 500 mile walk I did in the High Sierras, 10 or so years ago, which was really quite hot, I did the whole walk in sandals.

I think another myth people say is, "Yeah, as long as you've got an ultra light load, you can get wherever you like in footwear. But as your load gets heavier, your footwear needs to get heavier, as well." Well, I haven't found it so. In some of these walks, the amount of food, which as you said, food hasn't got any lighter over the years - there may be a greater variety of dehydrated food and it may taste better - but I find on a long walk, a kilo of food a day. Again, you can

go out for a weekend and eat virtually nothing. You're not going to starve to death. And you know that on Sunday night, you'll be in the restaurant with a huge pizza or whatever is in front of you.

I found on a long walk, after about two weeks, my appetite was nearly going through the roof. And that's probably because you've burnt off fat reserves, you now need to replace all of the energy you put out, with intake. And on my walks, I'm usually eating an average of 5,000 calories a day, and I'm going to end that walk lighter than I started. So I'm certainly not overeating. And that, to me, works out at about a kilo. I know people vary. Some people will be able to carry. That's roughly a kilo a day. So if I'm carrying two weeks food, I've got 14 kilos in my pack before anything else, so I'm not going to have a light load.

But when I did the Arizona Trail, which I did a mixture of light-weight footwear and sandals, I was sometimes carrying three gallons of water, so I had very heavy loads. But light-weight footwear was still fine. So it isn't, "I've got a heavier pack, I must have a bigger, heavier, stiffer footwear to support it."

Paul: That's interesting. How carefully do you plan your menus? Do you just go on calories? Do you try and balance fats, carbs, and proteins? Or do you just eat what you feel like you want to eat in those circumstances? Do you let your body make the choice?

Chris: A mixture; let my body make the choice and see what's available. I prefer to resupply as I go along, where possible. Partly, I think, you're going through all these communities, you spend a bit of money while you're there. Honestly, many of them have a small grocery store. You may not have much choice; you pick what you think will work, roughly buy enough. Sometimes you get a bit hungry and then you wish I bought a bit more of that. This wasn't as filling as I thought, sometimes not. But generally, [inaudible 00:46:53] if I have some sort of cereal, usually a granola or something for breakfast, and if you have something like, 125 grams of that with dried milk, that's a breakfast. And the calorie content, brand to brand, isn't that different. I wouldn't look at that and a certain number. I tend not to stop for lunch.

I snack regularly during the day. So a bag of trail mix and a series of different grain bars, chocolate, and other things during the day. And in the evening, a meal with packaged soups and some sort of dried meal, perhaps with cheese, dried milk, whatever, added. And that works quite well. I only send food parcels, which means I can select my food in advance. I have a great choice if there's nowhere I can buy stuff for a section and I don't want to carry three week's food. In fact, on the last two long distance walks, the Pacific Northwest Trail and the Scottish Watershed, I sent one food parcel on each one. Because

in each case, that's split a three weeks section. And after the High Sierra, no, three week's food, no. If I can avoid it, I will. But generally, I don't send food parcels. I'm very dependent on what's available locally.

Paul: In terms of fuel, do you literally just try and find that locally, or do you have to be a bit more organized? Because again, people worry about travelling to different territories, whether or not they can get the fuel that they need, and those types of things, those types of concerns.

Chris: I do research that, yes. When I did the Pacific Crest Trail, the only place I had been outside of Britain was the [inaudible 00:48:43]. Ninety nine percent at that point, my backpacking had been here. I only used two types of stoves: Trangia [SP] mess stove, and a gas canister stove. The information I could get about the Pacific Crest Trail, which wasn't a lot, basically said, "You won't find [inaudible 00:49:06] along the way. The only fuel you'll find is white gas, fuel petrol, unleaded petrol." So I got a petrol stove. And the information I got was right.

Everyone else I met, whether they were trying to do the Pacific Crest Trail or just out for the weekend, everyone had a petrol stove. I think I only saw gas canisters in two places the whole way. Mostly, I could get coleman fuel, occasionally, you got petrol from the gas station. It really fun with a high pressure hose trying to fill a half liter bottle, but it can be done. And I used the same stove in the Continental Divide Trail, for the same reason. However, a big change that's happened in the states, was the development of ultra-light mess stoves, or alcohol stoves, as they called them there. Drilled camp stoves, basically.

Paul: [inaudible 00:50:01].

Chris: Yeah. Made out of those, which there was a rush of them which could be solved on the internet. Because you suddenly got a way to market without having to go through stores.

What people found was [inaudible 00:50:13] I was told where you can't buy anything like that along the way, you can't walk into a store and say, "I want some methylated spirits," because they don't have anything into that name. The people quickly found there were various versions of alcohol that you could buy for various reasons. You could get rubbing alcohol. You could get cleaning alcohol in hardware stores. And you could get this de-icer for car engines called "Heat," which was actually a form of alcohol. So we're at the Pacific Northwest Trail, where again, you won't find gas cartridges along the way. You will find

petrol. That's a heavy stove. You've got to be careful with petrol stoves. They can flare a lot. They're the most dangerous stoves to use.

Paul: And they're not great in [inaudible 00:51:02].

Chris: Yes, exactly, But I can take an alcohol stove. And the great thing with this is I took a little alcohol stove called [inaudible 00:51:10], which has got titanium. The cone itself is titanium and the pan flips in the top, so it's wind proof, self-contained. And I took an insert with it called the inferno, which is an inverted cone with a grater at the bottom. And you can burn wood in it, which I was doing a lot. I was forest camping, I could actually cook up over a mini camp fire. So I could carry less alcohol, because I didn't need it all the time. Because I now knew what the alcohol was called, I could get alcohol everywhere. And when I did the Watershed walk, I took the same stove. Only being in Scotland, it being a lot wetter than the Pacific Northwest Trail, and a lot less trees, I think I only actually used it twice cooking over wood.

Paul: It shielded it enough. Because one of the other issues with alcohol stoves or mess stoves, is that wind really affects it, doesn't it?

Chris: That's the thing, you've got this cone made of titanium, which has got air holes around the bottom and a few at the top. The burner sits on a sheet of aluminum effectively on the ground, at the bottom of the cone. The pan fits in the top. Each cone fits a specific size of pan; you can't put different pans in it. So the pan blocks off any air entry at the top. It's wind proof. You just have to be careful if the winds are strong, because it's ultra light. If you haven't got a pan full of water in it, it can easily blow away. It works really well, so I've used it on two long distance works now. Probably there are other stoves, as well. I happen to think that's the best of the alcohol stoves.

Paul: That's interesting. Do you ever actually cook on campfires? Or have you done in the past?

Chris: Yes. The Northern Canadian Rockies, I say the northern, the southern half of the Canadian Rockies was mostly in National Parks, where you've got a lot of restrictions about campfires, where you can camp, and so on. Northern Canadian Rockies is untouched wilderness, where there isn't anybody to bother what you're doing and so on. And then the Yukon walk, which is all like that. From both of those, I did lots of cooking over campfires.

Enough in fact, that at some point on the Canadian Rockies walk, I actually bought a light-weight folding grill, because I was cooking over campfire so much, I thought, "Instead of keep trying to balance the top on stones, and

occasionally have it tipped over, and 'Damn, I just lost all the water again,' I'd actually have a grilled put stop." Because not having plans to do that, I didn't have a pot with a bale [SP] on so you could hang it over the fire. If I'd been planning in advance, that's what I would have taken. But I had a pot with fold out handles that came out of the side, which you could only grip with a bandana or something because they got hot.

So I got a grill and it was successfully enough that I took it on the Yukon walk. I don't often have campfires here, because I'm mostly camped above the trees anyway. And the other thing with fires, is I think if you have a campfire, you either have it at a regular place where people always have campfires, so there's already a fire ring. You're not going to add to the harm by having a fire. Or you should only do it where you can clear it afterwards and no one will know there's been a campfire. Sadly, there's too many people liking campfires, who don't know how to do that, who light it on turf and burn blackened holes in the vegetation. You see a ring of cracked blackened rocks around this charcoal mess, with foils sticking out of it and so on.

Paul: People tend to have fires way too big, as well, don't they? They're much bigger than you need, particularly for cooking.

Chris: Yeah, you often see half burned logs and branches sticking out of the fire. Well, I suspect there's a lot of people who don't think of them for cooking. They're a social thing to sit around, and they've got a stove to do the cooking on.

Paul: Yeah, that's true. In Scotland, in particular, I always tried to say how fires down by a stream, where there's a pebble beach or something, and it's not going to leave a scar. And I think particularly, as well, when the [inaudible 00:55:40] get dry, you need to be very careful in Scotland, don't you? You just got a bunch of tinder sitting there, that'll go off.

Chris: Oh, very much, yes. In Scotland, probably the places where I've mostly had fires has been, say, on pebbles banks, but particularly on the coast, on the west coast, on beaches, where you're below the high tide mark. It'll all wash away. There's drift wood to burn. Because that's the other thing, is not damaging trees including snags [SP]. Standing snags, fallen branches, and so on, are important for the wild life.

Paul: Yes.

Chris: So you shouldn't strip an area of every bit of dead wood, let alone start breaking living branches off of trees.

Paul: Yes, a habitat for all sorts of insects, and that supports birds and so forth. Yeah, interesting. One other aspect of that, we talked a little bit about food, a bit about cooking, what about water? Do you have particular processes that you stick to religiously? Or do you vary what you do, depending on where you go, in terms of making sure your water is safe to drink?

Chris: I vary them, I suppose. Overall, I don't do anything with water unless I feel I have to. That's how I originally learned. I first went to the hills on school trips to the lake district, to the peak district. And we always just drank out of streams. I'm quite sure on school trips now, the teacher probably being caught letting the kids drink out in the stream with untreated water. But nobody thought there was any reason not to. I just sort of continued that. Obviously, though, I'm careful in the sense that there's places below buffers, really popular camp sites, in the hills, I wouldn't drink out of the water that's running out of them.

There's only a few places like that, lowland water. If you're in farmland and other areas, yeah, it's different. But then I'd be more inclined to want to find a tap in a town, because whilst you can get rid of any bugs that are in the water, it's hard to get rid of chemicals and other stuff. I'd be as worried about that. Some places, though, I've used different filters over the years. One I've used recently is the little Soya filter, because it's light weight, quite easy to use. I don't generally like pump filters.

Paul: That's the in-lined filter you're talking about? You attach it to a bladder to use it. Is that the one you're talking about?

Chris: Yeah. You attach it to a bladder, and then you can squeeze the bladder and put the water into a mug or a water bottle. Pump filters, I find it too fiddly, and there's too many bits of them that can get dirty anyway, which rather defeats the object. I was once on a [inaudible 00:58:41] in the Colorado Rockies, and we were going up the highest peak. No, in the Utah Rockies, because we were on King's Peak, the highest peak in Utah. And we stopped at this stream running down the mountain. And I filled my water bottle from the stream and drank half of it. And the two guys with me were absolutely horrified. They just thought I was going to drop dead instantly.

They got their filter out, and I watched them with the end of the hose in the dirt on the path, neither of them washed their hands before handling the filter or the stove. The hose, they pumped it, and I watched them. I thought, "If they offer me water, I'm going to say no. I'll take the clean water out the stream, thanks." But on the long walks, I always carry some sort of filter, because it can always

be used somewhere. In the Pacific Northwest Trail, there's a few areas where it goes through cattle areas. Water, basically, with Cow packs floating in it, and green water and so on. It's disgusting stuff but it's all there is. I certainly filter that. On that one, I have one of the UV light filters, which work fine.

Paul: Is that that battery operated one, or [Inaudible 00:59:59]?

Chris: Battery operated one, yeah, which work okay. On other walks, I've had iodine. I used that. Aquamira [SP] on one walk, but only if I feel I have to. If the water seems to be okay. And touch wood, I've never had a serious stomach illness on a long distance walk.

Paul: At this point, we'd been sitting for nearly an hour, chatting away. And Chris and I decided to continue our walk, taking in a local peak on the way. And as we walked, I asked Chris to consider what his top advice would be, first, for the beginner backpackers, but also for the more experienced who might be considering longer trails such as the Pacific Crest Trail or the Appalachian Trail. As we dropped down on the hill side, we entered a lovely area forest. And we found a couple of rocks not far from a stream that we can sit. I got the recording equipment out again, and we continued our conversation, including Chris' top tips for both beginners and more experienced backpackers.

So Chris, we've walked on a little bit, and we stop again in a nice spot of woodland, here in the afternoon sunshine. A little bit earlier, I asked you to ponder on some top tips for people who maybe never done any backpacking, some multi-day camping walk trips. What tips would you give somebody looking to start that style of travel?

Chris: Well, for a complete novice, some who've never done it before.

Paul: Maybe they've walked a little bit, but they've not really done more than day walks.

Chris: Yes. I would certainly say you need to take it easy when you begin. For most people, to set off on even a two-week walk as their first ever backpacking trip, let alone something like the Pacific Crest Trail, it's not a good idea. A few people might make that and enjoy it. But overall, I'd say no, you break yourself in easily. Ideally, you can do a course, because then you can learn some techniques, sleep out in a tent, have some instruction, and you haven't committed yourself to spending a lot of money buying gear that you might use and all of a sudden you think, "This isn't for me after all." However, if you don't want to do that and you want to just start off, I'd be very careful in selecting the gear. It's easy to buy gear and a year later, think, "I've got the wrong tent," or

"I've got the wrong sleeping bag," or "I've got to replace them all." So it's better, I would say, to look for a budget gear, second-hand gear. If you've got friends you've got something to use, even it's not ideal, it doesn't matter.

The other thing, of course, is to know your equipment, especially, I'd say, if you're a beginner, the tent or shelter. There's a lot of different shapes. It's impossible now to give instructions as to how to pitch a tent. What kind of tent are you talking about? Tunnel tent? Ridge tent? Dome tent? GDC tent? You need to know how the tent you're using goes up. You don't want to discover that you can't figure it out on your first-ever camping in the rain in the dark. So I'd certainly say with the tent, pitch it at home or in the local park, or somewhere where you can get familiar with it. If there's any problems, you can work out, "This doesn't look right. Why doesn't that pole fit properly," and do something about it. That's the main bit of gear. The other thing is to practice packing a rucksack so it feels comfortable. Even today, when rucksacks are a lot better than they were 20 odd years ago, you still see a lot of people suffering under badly packed rucksacks, with all the weight at the back, at the bottom, pulling them over and so on. You do want to think about that.

But the other thing is just don't try and do too much, allow plenty of time, pick somewhere reasonably accessible, where camping wild is fine and you're not going to get thrown off because it's not allowed. Check that, especially in England and Wales. Scotland, it's a bit different. You can camp in most places that aren't cultivated and so on. I'd go for a fairly easy walk, five miles or so, so you can spend hours setting up the camp, getting used to being there. If you find yourself sitting there every evening thinking, "Oh, I'm a bit bored now. That was too easy," fine, walk ten miles the next day or twenty. But initially, it's better to do that, than to finish the day thinking, "I'm completely exhausted. I don't know if I've got strength to put the tent up. I ache all over. This is horrible. I'm never doing it again." It's better to be a bit bored and think "I could have done a bit more."

Paul: Yes. And for somebody who's done some multi-day walks, they've camped wild, maybe they've done a shorter long distance trail - if you like, if I can phrase it that way - in Britain, something like West Highland Way or even maybe the Pennine Way. But they're aspiring to do, I guess the classic North American long distance routes like Abolition Trail or the Pacific Crest Trail. What advice would you give somebody wanting to make that jump, if you like?

Chris: First of all, I'd say if you've done the Pennine Way and enjoyed it, then you're certainly capable of doing a much longer trail. Because really, a long distance trail is a series of shorter trails put together. You don't go out and walk for four months and carry all your foods and everything else. You walk for a

week or ten days, and carry everything you need for that time. And then you do it again, and again. The Pennine Way is 270 miles. The Pacific Crest Trail is 2,700 miles. So that's the Pennine Way ten times. If you can do the Pennine way once, then you can do it twice, etc, etc.

So you think of it like that. However, the other thing, especially with a long distance trail abroad, is you do need to consider the different environments you'll be going through. And this is where, let's say, the Pacific Crest Trail or the Continental Divide Trail, is very different to the Pennine way, because of the distance, climatically, it changes from south to north completely. But also, you've got everything from deserts, which you tend not to find on the Pennine Way, and Alpine [SP] Mountains up to 14,000 feet, which you also don't find on the Pennine Way. You've got to allow for both of those. Which I must admit, I didn't do in either case, but I still did it.

I still made the very British assumption that it can't possibly be hot in early April, even when you're at the Mexican border in a desert. And I was completely wrong; it was very hot. I got badly blistered feet. I didn't carry enough water. But I learned very quickly. And with the High Sierra, I wasn't really seriously thinking that in May, you'd have continuous snow for 300, 400 miles, but you did. So I had to treat that, suddenly, as a winter trip. But the other thing is these days, it's very easy to find information. You can go online, read people's trip reports in the previous year, read people's advice, read what the snow levels are for the year you go.

You can build a lot of a picture to age your preparation. But I'd say the other thing is if you've done the Pennine Way, then there's no physical problem in doing a walk ten times as long. Any problems are mental. Are you going to be happy, being out that length of time? You can't prepare yourself for that, you can only go and do it. However, if you got to the end of the Pennine Way and thought, "Thank goodness that's over," and you spent the last three days just wanting to get to the end, maybe a much longer trip isn't a good idea. Because maybe you have a limit and two weeks is as long as you actually want to be away. But if you got to the end thinking, "Oh, shame. Pity that's over. I wish it was twice as long," definitely go and do something longer because you'll get an awful lot out of it.

Paul: Super. And I guess people might be wondering how you manage to find the time. I mean, I guess you have flexible jobs. Some people might be thinking, "Doing the two weeks on the Pennine Way, yeah, I can take two weeks off work." Do you have any tips in terms of managing life or work? Or do you think you've just been quite lucky in having work that allows you to take the longer trips?

Chris: I'm partly lucky, but also, if you like, once I knew I liked doing the longer trips, which [inaudible 01:09:33] the first one for which, because I was working in an outdoor shop, they happy to give me three months on paid leave to go and do it. So I knew I had a job to come back to. But because I knew I wanted to do more walks like that, I also thought, "So to some extent, I have to make it my way of life." And it did in the sense that doing the Pacific Crest Trail, which initially, I came back from with no money and no job, but that gave me the credibility for the writing and the books.

Another thing, because I had done something that was big enough. I would not have had that credibility or found anything like it easy to go into that field, if I was saying, "Well, I've done the Pennine Way and I've been to the Lake District a lot." Because so have thousands of other people. For example, the Pacific Crest Trail, it is still true that more people have climbed Everest than have hiked the Pacific Crest Trail. So I managed to think that if I'm going to make writing about back-packing and about doing long distance walks what I do for a living, then I have to do the long distance walks.

Because that's the material I'm writing about, so it feeds into each other. The other thing, though, of course, with the work I do, is it's not time dependent. It's not, "As long as I turn up in the office for 40 hours a week, I'll get paid." I get paid for the work I do. The people I work for, do not care how long I spend, as long as the work is the standard they want. Nobody ever assesses me when I supply an article to a magazine, "How long does it take you to write this?" They don't care whether it took me an hour or a month. If it's the quality they want and they like it, that's fine. It's up to me how long I spend. And that does mean for some long walks, if I know what work I'm going to be doing in advance, I can write a whole back trip pieces and send them to the editor. And say, "Look, I'm going to be away for three months. Here's three month's work."

As long as I can find the time to do that, which is one of the reasons why before a long distance walk, I usually have less exercise than I've had for ages [inaudible 01:11:59]. But the other difference these days, of course, is the internet makes a huge difference on both the Pacific Northwest Trail and the Scottish Watershed. I sent reports to the Great Outdoors Magazine during the walk. And they were published during the walk, with photographs from my phone, which wouldn't make a double page spread, but weren't small to go with a single page article. It was fine. So I can actually do work whilst I'm on the walk.

And of course, it was all photographs, which can be used for years afterwards. So I have managed to blend, if you like, long distance walking with my work.

And I realized most people, that's not so easy to do. Most people who really long distance walk, you're talking about taking a sabbatical.

Paul: I was about to say that. Because that's effectively what you did initially, isn't it? When you worked in the outdoor shop, you said, "Please, can I have three months unpaid leave?" You were effectively taking a sabbatical there. And that is an option that's open to a lot more people.

Chris: And you do find as well, I mean, I don't know the figures, certainly the things like Pacific Northwest Trail and the Appalachian Trail, from what I read, the two largest group of people doing it, the biggest one of all is young people just before or after college. So they haven't got a career started. They can say, "Well, before I start my job [inaudible 01:13:36], I'm going to spend six months doing a long trail." On the other end, I don't think quite as many, but still a sizable number compared with in between, you've got people who are retired, where they've now got plenty of time. Their family's have grown up. Because that's the other factor, of course. Do you have a family? Are they happy for you to go away for that length of time? Do you want to go away from them for that length of time? So you've got those two options. But even whether you said, [inaudible 01:14:06].

Because I was working in an outdoors shop, this was long before the internet, this will sound incredibly primitive. I can see young people going, "Boy, it was really different." It's ancient times, isn't it? They put up a map in the shop window with my route walks on it. They had a map of Britain and a list of all the equipment I was taking. Because obviously, they were thinking, "People might be interested in buying. We can use this as a selling thing." I sent them postcards, and they moved a colored pin up my route. Each time they got a postcard, they'd pin it on the board. And the pin would move a bit further to show where I got to. That was modern technology back then.

But that in itself started to give me outdoor identity to people I was doing this. And in those days, there weren't many people doing off road long distance walks. All the equipment was mine at the time. I bought it. Yes, some of it I got discounts from the outdoor shop, but it was my equipment. I wasn't in a position to get sponsorship because no ones has it. But when I got back, I sent detailed reports to every single company whose gear I had used, telling them what I had done with it, what weather conditions were like, what I thought of it, how did it perform, suggestions for improvement, everything.

And that was valuable, because what I did in my next walk, I'd written a bit by then, I could go to the same companies and they knew they would get a report they could use afterwards. The one thing I didn't have, because I was not a

photographer in those days, was photographs. And I learned very quickly that magazines, publishers, and companies will say, "If you've got a picture of yourself with our pack," and I hadn't. But the next long distance walk, I had. I learned from that.

Paul: That was something I was going to ask you about, actually. One thing I noticed from your backpacking book, Backpacker's Handbook, but also in particularly the pull out that you wrote for TGO, many years ago when it was still known as the great outdoors of backpacking.

Chris: It's the great outdoors again now.

Paul: Yes. I always noticed you had a camera on the hip belt of your rucksack or the old blue CCX cases. It always seemed to me that photography was part impassive of what you did as a means of recording what you did. I got the impression as a pleasure in itself, as well as something you enjoyed. You seemed to take particular care and attention about what equipment you had. You took a lot of photos while you were traveling.

Chris: Yes, it's interesting. So I wasn't a photographer. [inaudible 01:17:24] I had a cheap compact while I set off. I think [inaudible 01:17:28] by Bristle. I didn't bother replacing it.

Paul: Right.

Chris: I learned quickly publishers were saying, "We need photos." I was going to have to produce usable photos [inaudible 01:17:40]. Learned how to use it. Although, initially, I really hated photography. Because I've got to think about this camera and how to adjust it. It was all manual in those days. You couldn't just point and shoot and get usable results. Well, I just wanted to enjoy the walk. But I also knew that if I wanted to sell articles and keep people happy, I had to have not just pictures but usable, publishable pictures. So I did learn how to do it. Because the Pacific Crest Trail, I knew I would probably never do it again, so I really did want a record of that. It was really important to take good photographs.

After a while of taking photographs, before I did the PCT, once I got the hang of the mechanics, the technical side of it, I started to enjoy photography because I felt actually taking photographs was making me look more closely at things. Because I was thinking in terms of photographs, so I was looking at this closely and I was wondering, "Oh, I wonder what it looks like down here. It might make a good photograph." Walking over and comparing things, leaving the path and walking across and looking at something, climbing up onto a rock and

looking over. I thought, "I wouldn't have done that without photography." So it was an addict to the walk, which I felt ever since. Doing the Pacific Crest Trail book was interesting. I went through all my old cotocrone [SP] slides back then.

Paul: [inaudible 01:19:15] couple of years ago.

Chris: Yes, the pictures in it are scans from 30 old year old slides. The book's called "Rattlesnakes and Bald Eagles."

Paul: We'll put a link to that underneath the podcast, on the blog.

Chris: And I realized how digital has changed my photography. Because in the days of film, in film, you can't see the results. So you tend to bracket. And it was always slid film. First of all, publishers preferred slide film to print. Also, the other thing I was doing, which I still do some of, is slide shows. Even digital people still call them slide shows. Most slides involved, but go and give the slide show of the walk. But film had to be rationed. First of all, it was relatively heavy. A roll of film weighed, I think, 30 grams. So 10 rolls of film weighs 300 grams. You're talking about sizable weight and bulk here, had to be sent away, special delivery, an expensive post because the last thing you want to do is lose it. I used to send them in small batches.

One might get lost, but the whole lot couldn't. And you had to think about how to resupply with it, which wasn't always possible everywhere. So film was rationed in a way that digital isn't. You've got memory card where you could put 300 photos on it. You can carry ten of those, it weighs less than the roll of film. What I found, I found it very frustrating looking through my photos. Because unsurprisingly, on the Pacific Crest Trail, I concentrated on landscapes and our camp site. I didn't bother with towns, people, signs, etc, because I was rationed with film. I used a digital camera much more as a notebook, because I can take as many pictures as I want. So anything interesting, take a picture of it. If I forget to note it down, it doesn't matter. There's the picture. And in my PCT journals, there's pages where I laboriously copied an interesting sign word by word, lot by lot. Because otherwise, I'd forget it and I wasn't going to waste a slide on it. Digital has made a difference.

But I've always taken lots of pictures and copied on where I read it, was sent to me. I know one of the first things I learned was you don't take many pictures with a camera on the rock side. So I've always, right back to the PCT, probably earlier, carry the camera, not on the hip belt in fact, but bound to this across the body. I've tried it on the hip belt, I think I probably destroyed a lot of cameras that way. Because I forget to take the pack off, dump it down. The camera is smashed against the rock. If you have it here, you have to consciously take it

off. This is the camera, don't drop it. So I don't put it on the hip belt. It's always, unless it's torrential rain and clearly taking a picture is going to be impossible anyway, there. Sometimes two cameras, one each side. If it looks like there's going to be a lot of photographs, I have two cameras with different lens on each.

Paul: Yes. And could you imagine yourself doing a trip now without a camera, without taking photographs?

Chris: No.

Paul: No? Come a real integral part of...

Chris: Yes. Again, professional photographers tend to not take me seriously because I don't carry anything like the weight of the equipment they regard as the minimum essential. Amateur photographers, backpacker-like may think, "Why do I carry camera care?" I keep away as much as possible. But now, I can't do a long distance walk without thinking, "What am I going to do with the material afterwards." Without thinking about magazines, or articles, books, etcetera, slideshows. So I'm consciously the same way. PCT, I wrote the journal for myself. I'd never had a book published then. I mean, it was another five years before my first book came out. Now when I write the journal, I'm also thinking of publication. And it's the same as the photographs. PCT, the photographs were for me. And it's turned out they've now appeared in the book all these years later. I have done some slideshows. There's a slideshow on it this year.

Paul: Right.

Chris: Using those old slides. But now, I'm always thinking, "This is my work material. It's important that I get the pictures."

Paul: Yes.

Chris: You mentioned earlier the Backpacker's Handbook, which is in its 4th edition. It came out in 1991, and it's still around. All the pictures in every edition are mine, but initially, they were just pictures I had taken of camping and being out. There was no order to them. I thought about them. I happened to have enough pictures from over the years. But ever since then, of course, is always thinking more, "There will probably be another edition. I'll need to update photos." I'm consciously taking pictures of techniques, of equipment, especially if it's something that wasn't around from the last editions so it would be in the new one. And I'm thinking, "This will do." And when I file them, they

can be filed. I've got a file. Just call back and assemble, and that photos that could go in any future edition.

Paul: Yes. Interesting. So we've talked about your books, and we'll definitely put links to those underneath the podcast on my site. Where can people find you online? I know you've got a blog. And what's the address for that?

Chris: Yes. Well, the blog is www.christownsendoutdoors.com.

Paul: Okay. That's it.

Chris: Easy enough to find. And they can also find me on Twitter and Facebook.

Paul: Okay.

Chris: If I can mention to do one other thing.

Paul: Yes, absolutely.

Chris: A new stage in my career, just the last couple of years, has been the films, with Carrie Apron [SP]. I'd only ever before done very short bits of other people's TV programs, you know, a five-minute interview, or comment on this. So during the [inaudible 01:25:54] in winter, a full length feature film with me as the only presenter was quite a challenge. I felt like I didn't know if I could do it. Terry had never done a full length film, so he didn't know either. We were both to learn a lot through that. And that's obviously a film, if you're interested in the [inaudible 01:26:11] in winter. Terry's scenic photography is superb anyway, even if you're not interested in hearing me wittering on. But last summer, we did a backpacking in the Lake District video.

Paul: Okay.

Chris: And to go back to your earlier question, that would be the ideal for someone who is thinking of starting backpacking. As an introduction to what does it mean to go backpacking somewhere accessible like the Lake District in summer weather.

Paul: Yes. So we'll definitely link to that. Is that produced by the same company as the . . . is that available from the same website as the [inaudible 01:26:53] in winter?

Chris: Yes. Striding Edge and Terry's other films on there, as well.

Paul: So we'll link to all of those, as well. So people can find that. If people are listening to this, not on my blog, if you go to my blog at paulkirtley.co.uk., there will be links underneath the podcast to all of these things that we're talking about. The books, the video, and Chris's website, as well, his blog, and his social media accounts, Twitter and Facebook, as well. So I can just say thank you for your time today, Chris. It's been an absolute pleasure to come out for a walk with you. It's been very enjoyable. It's been a fantastic day with being blessed with the weather, I think, today. So thank you very much for your time, I really appreciate it. I'm sure the listeners will, as well. Thank you.

Chris: Well, thank you. It's been very interesting.

Paul: Thank you. Thanks. Cheers!

Well, thanks again to Chris Townsend there, for being so giving with his time and all of his expertise and experiences. I think we could have sat there talking for several days, actually. And we probably could have a whole series of podcasts based on Chris's knowledge, his experience, and his enthusiasm for taking those journeys and visiting those wild places. So thank you very much, Chris. Please do Tweet Chris and let him know in his Facebook page, as well, if you like. The links to his social media profiles are on my blog at paulkirtley.co.uk. There will be a page dedicated to this particular podcast, with links to Chris's books, other links that we talked about, articles, and related information is all going to be there, plus a couple of photos from the day we had him around. Please do let me know what you think, as well.

Leave comments on my blog. It's always great to see people over on my blog. And you can Tweet me, as well, @pkirt. That's at P-K-I-R-T. Let me know what you think of this podcast. And as ever, if you can see your way to leaving a review or even a rating on iTunes, it does help. It helps make this podcast more visible to other people who are interested in the outdoors, outdoor life and information that will help them with their outdoor life. So even a little bit of a rating or a comment will help make that go a long way. And also, if you could share it, Twitter, Facebook, Google plus, all those things, that all helps as well. And the more the merrier, there's some good information here, and the more we can share it, the more people will benefit. So thanks again for listening. Thanks for your support, it's appreciated. Thanks for all the nice emails and comments that come in. I appreciate. I can't always reply to all of them, but they are appreciated. I do read them all and it's great to hear from you, listeners. And I look forward to speaking to you on the next podcast before too long. Take care now! Goodbye!