Announcer: This is the Paul Kirtley Podcast Episode 14. The Paul Kirtley Podcast, Wilderness Bushcraft, Survival Skills and Outdoor Life.

Paul: Welcome. Welcome to Episode 14 of my podcast. Great to have you along listening today. Before I introduce my guest, can I just ask a couple of favors? First off, whichever platform you're listening to this on, if you're listening through Stitcher on Android, if you are listening to this via iTunes or through the Apple podcasting app or some other podcasting platform, if you could leave a rating or a review as applicable on that platform, that would be super helpful in raising the visibility of this podcast.

And it's not only helpful to me, of course, it's helpful to all of the guests who I've had on this podcast so far and the guests who I will have on this pod cast, because it just raises the profile of everyone and helps people find out about all the interesting guests that we have on this podcast. So that's the first thing. Also, if you're listening via my blog or you go to my blog, if you could share this podcast or your favorite podcast on a platform where you are active.

So maybe you're on a Facebook group that is related to bushcraft or survival or outdoor life or camping skills. If you share your favorite podcast there, the link for my blog, that will be super, super helpful as well, because more people find out about this, and that means that more people download it via my blog or via the platforms that we've already talked about. And again, that helps raise the visibility of the podcast and helps get the message of the guests that I have out there as well. So that would be super, super helpful for everyone.

And also, if you're regular listener to this podcast, the more popular my podcast is, the more great guests that I can attract to being on the podcast. It's a self-fulfilling thing. If it's seen as a really popular podcast to do, with bushcraft survival, outdoor life and all the related things that we talk about on this podcast, and people want to be on it because it gives them exposure, then I get more great guests and you get more great podcasts all for free. So if you could do me that favor, that would be much appreciated, so thank you, thank you.

So on to today's special guest, and we have an adventurer extraordinaire today, Mark Kalch. And if you don't know of Mark Kalch, you should do. He's done

some amazing journeys already, he's set to do some more amazing journeys going forward. And these journeys are really quite inspirational. As many people who love the outdoors do, Mark started off working as an outdoor guide. He's worked in guiding people on river trips in Africa, he's worked as a guide, a sea kayak guide in Australia, he's worked guiding people up Kilimanjaro.

And there are many people who work in the outdoors who guide and teach and instruct people in the outdoors, but at some point, Mark shifted gear. He shifted up into a completely different gear and started making some really incredible journeys, not the least of which was paddling the entire length of the Amazon from its source in the mountains of Peru down to the sea. And then what followed is a project to paddle the longest river on each of the seven continents, a project which is still ongoing, and which has many adventures and many lessons that Mark is going to share some of today on this podcast.

We also take a dive into Mark's training regime, how he keeps himself fit and in good shape for these trips, what he eats on the trips, and how he prepares, what equipment he favors, how he approaches this both mentally and physically. And then he also shares some of the lessons, both things that have gone well and things that have not gone so well from these trips, and gives a real insight into the psychology that he employs to successfully complete these trips, and it also gives you an insight into the determination that he has to complete some of these trips.

Also, not least in terms of some of the adventures he's done, as well as doing some incredible paddling adventures, he also walked the entire length of Iran solo, because it was something that he wanted to do. And there are some of interesting stories that come out of our discussion about that as well, but I will let the conversation between Mark and I do the talking. Without further ado, I'll welcome Mark to my podcast. So I'd like to welcome Mark Kalch to the podcast. Hi Mark, how are you doing today?

Mark: Good day, Paul. I'm well. How are you?

Paul: Yeah, brilliant, really good. Well, actually as we were just talking before we started recording, I didn't have a great night sleep last night, because a lot of people say, "First night in the woods, I don't sleep very well." I'm kind of the opposite. I've been outdoors for a while, and I was back home last night, didn't have a great night sleep at home. Too stuffy, too warm in the house. So yeah, I'm doing all right other than that, thank you, Mark. I'm good, I'm good.

Mark: That's good. Yeah, I'm well adjusted back to a comfy bed now, so I'm all good.

Paul: Good, good. And you're staying down with relatives at the moment?

Mark: Yeah, I'm with the outlaws in Oxfordshire. Is that how you say it, Oxfordshire?

Paul: Yeah.

Mark: Oxfordshire.

Paul: Yeah. So, I guess from your accent and your lack of knowledge of the pronunciation of Oxfordshire, people listening will realize you're not from these parts. Can you tell us a little bit about where you're from Mark, please?

Mark: I was born and grew up in Australia, obviously. But I haven't lived there for a while, probably for the last I guess 10 years. I was traveling around a fair bit for work, for guiding and things like that, but somehow I ended up back in the UK for now. But that's only for a fairly short period in itself, and then we're off again on a new family adventure to a whole new continent, so we'll see how that goes.

Paul: Do you know where you're going yet?

Mark: Yeah, we're going to Africa. I used to live and work in South Africa, and I've also lived in Ethiopia and Tunisia as well for quite long periods of time. So it's exciting to go back to Africa and get into some more adventures there, but this time with some small kids in tow, so it should be a little bit different.

Paul: Yeah, yeah, I guess. Whereabouts in Africa are you going, which country? Do you know?

Mark: To Malawi.

Paul: Okay.

Mark: Yeah, so I've not been there before, but I've heard really good things about the country. It's known as the warm heart of Africa, so really friendly place. Unfortunately, it is one of the least developed and one of the poorest countries in the world, which is a real shame, but in spite of that, the people are really friendly and really welcoming, so should be a fun time for sure.

Paul: I think that surprises a lot of people about many countries in Africa, doesn't it, how actually friendly people are.

Mark: For sure. They're up against a lot more obstacles, barriers and hardship than we are, but in spite of that, I've also worked a lot in Tanzania. I used to take people up Kilimanjaro, and the guys I work with on the mountain and the people that you meet in the villages and things, the attitude that they seem to take, or at least outwardly project to you, the visitors, is just amazing, just so friendly and so welcoming. And I think as everyone knows, it seems that us here in the maybe more developed regions of the world could probably take some tips from them on how to approach life.

Paul: Keeping a positive outlook. Despite all of our privileges, we seem to have a lot of grumpy, selfish, negative people in the First World. I don't know whether that's a correlation or whether it's just an accident, but yeah, either way we could definitely take some tips I think on...

Mark: I think so. I think so.

Paul: Staying happy and sunny and just friendly, yeah.

So I know you recently, relatively recently, you've been in South America, though, haven't you, with the kids? So this is not going to be a completely new thing, is it, being in a foreign country with the kids.

Mark: No, it's not. We just did three years in Argentina. We did live in the Buenos Aires in the capital, which is one of this huge megacities. But we are a different culture, different language, different lifestyle than certainly in the UK. We were really fortunate to do quite a bit of traveling there. Probably the thing that sticks out most, which we did with the kids, was we spent a month camping down in Patagonia. And at the time, my youngest one, she was only, oh gosh, she was five months old. So to travel around Patagonia and load the family into a big tent each night, and cooking outside and things, was just fantastic.

You're beside these mountain, lakes, and I had my stand-up potable there. I can't even emphasize enough how excited the kids were, let alone the adults, myself and my girlfriend. So hopefully we can continue that on when we go to Africa as well, because I know it's definitely become more and more popular or more and more in the media these days, the positive effects of getting kids outdoors. And to have a whole month of living in a tent with these young kids was just phenomenal. They loved it.

Paul: It's interesting, though because, yes, it is more in the press about the positive effects of outdoor life and nature and travel for kids. But a lot of people, I guess maybe slightly older generation, are still quite skeptical. A

friend of mine took his very young son and his wife, they drove down to Morocco for three months a couple of winters ago. Drove down through France and Spain, across to North Africa. Three months traveling around Morocco, camping. Had a roof tent on the Jeep, on the truck that he had, and he'd done it all up before he went.

They had a great time just traveling around and meeting people in the country. Again, everybody is very very friendly, and they had a fantastic time. Met up with some of the westerners who were traveling as well at the times, and just traveled with them a bit. He's had a real adventure, and his little boy loved it as well, and no ill effect.

Mark: No, exactly. I think that's also a big step as well. I guess people might be hesitant, certainly doing something like that, sort of a cross-country big adventure like that. I guess people might be a bit hesitant, particularly with young children. But yeah, it's not all doom and gloom, despite what the current affairs might suggest. Much more often than not, it's just a fantastic experience, not just for the kids, but for the adults as well.

Paul: Absolutely, absolutely, and a great way to bond with your kids as well. A lot of time with them, yeah?

Mark: Yeah, for sure.

Paul: Fantastic. So more adventures to come. I'll look forward to hearing about those in due course.

I'd like to kind of rewind a little bit. You've mentioned a little about you worked in South Africa a bit, you worked in Tanzania a bit, you worked in other places in Africa. What we really want to talk about today is your rivers project that you're doing, these longest rivers that you're doing, the seven rivers in seven continents.

But just to backtrack a bit before we do that to how you got to that point. You're clearly doing a lot of...Adventure and outdoor life is part of your life, but how did you get to that point? You grew up in Australia?

Mark: Yeah.

Paul: Then what happened?

Mark: I grew up in Aus, and I went to university there, and a pretty standard sort of direction, I suppose. In Australia, I guess it's still the case now, but, and

in New Zealand as well there was...and I guess in the UK you guys call it a gap year. But we in Australia, we head off overseas. I guess it was primarily to the UK, because we could work there, and then it made a good base to travel around Europe and things like that.

So that was a pretty standard route that I took, and that was one of my first introductions to traveling and things, which was pretty sedate. Mostly a fair bit of partying and things like that.

But I think the best thing that came about that was that en route to the UK I had a friend who managed a river operation in South Africa. It wasn't a real hairy river like the Zambezi or the White Nile or anything like that, it was just taking people down a river in canoes, with tiny little bit of whitewater enough to make it exciting. But it was more about the camping and the wilderness of the whole thing. So I was able to hang out with him for a few weeks and work on the river. And then I did head over to the UK, but that really got my interest.

Part of it was the paddling, but I think a lot of it was just the being outside and the lifestyle. It was really, really hard to beat. So I headed back to South Africa, and that's where I started doing a lot more guiding on some different rivers. And yeah, up on the border with Namibia, on the Orange River, we'd take clients out for four-day trips. And you camped on these rocks, and you look up in the sky, and you can imagine there's pretty much zero light pollution from cities or towns, because there's just no cities or towns out there. And the number of stars is, I've never seen that many stars in my life.

It really was something that, for me at least, really, really pulled me, and I've sort of been attracted to that lifestyle ever since. The guiding just grew from there. Then I was in back Aus for a while and I did sea kayak guiding, which was a bit of a different animal, or a different experience. Taking people out for week-long trips out on the islands near the Great Barrier Reef there. It was the same thing, it basically felt like a week of hanging out with your mates, because unless the client was particularly unfriendly or not my type of person, then a couple of days in, it really is just a case of hanging out with friends and getting paid to do it.

I think for anyone, they could probably see the attraction from there, and yeah, I love it. I still do them. I haven't been guiding for a while, because I've obviously taken this different direction into doing my own trips, my own expeditions, but that was also a little bit down to being away in Argentina and Buenos Aires, and then back in London, it's a bit hard to get back into the guiding. But I think given the right situation, I definitely would.

Paul: I think when we actually met through a mutual contact, I think Richard from African Environments, we were both speaking to him. I think that's how we both met.

Mark: Yeah, yeah, exactly.

Paul: You were doing some guiding in Africa, but that was the Kili stuff, wasn't it, you were doing at that point?

Mark: That's right, yeah. Gosh, that was a few years ago now. I was still guiding them on Kili, and even though that wasn't rivers, it was exactly, like I said, it wasn't just about the paddling, it was the environment that you're in. So camping on the side. Even though Kili is a pretty busy mountain at times, you're still camping on the side of a mountain. The last camp at 4,700 meters on the side of a mountain, and it's cold, maybe sometimes it's snowing, and it's really fun.

Paul: I can understand that. Some people might not understand that, though.

Mark: No, exactly.

Paul: So, at what stage did you transition to wanting to do these big river trips or planning them? Was there something that sparked that in your mind at some point, that you said, "Right, I want to go and do something much bigger in terms of personal trips"?

Mark: Yeah, well it did. I guess the spark for it initially was while I was out working in South Africa. We'd have clients come, and then they'd disappear. Because we were about an eight-hour drive from Cape Town, where we were based, which is a fantastic city, but it didn't make sense a lot of the time to go back all the way to the big city in between having these groups come out.

So a lot of the guides, we'd stay out there at the guide house there, which didn't have electricity or anything, and just hang out. Sometimes we'd have a week, a week and a half between groups. And that meant that we could go off and do some sort of trips of our own.

We could do sections of the river where maybe the features or the rapids were a bit more serious, and a bit places that we didn't take the clients down. That was sort of I guess micro-expeditions, mini little adventures I suppose that spread out from that. And they got more and more difficult. And then actually the first really big serious expedition that I was thrown into was a source-to-sea descent of paddling descent of the Amazon.

That came about from a good mate of mine, Nathan Welsh. It was his idea. He actually read a book, "Running the Amazon" by Joe Kane. And he was a journalist on the First Descent in '84 or '85 of the Amazon.

And that really got nice interest, and it just sort of came from there. It took a lot of planning on his part before he came to me, and then it took a lot of preparation from both of us to make it happen. I guess all my expeditions, whether it's been on river or walking across Iran, has really come from that big descent.

Paul: So the Amazon was the first. That came before walking across Iran?

Mark: Yes, yes, so the Amazon, that was the first expedition that we approached from I guess a professional standpoint. It's sending out emails to sponsors and things like that. I remember when we first were trying to get sponsors, we'd send out...We had a, I can't remember what it was, 20 or 30 page proposal, which is just ridiculous, with graphs and things like this on, which marketing managers could care less. If they can't see it in the first paragraph, then they don't care. If they can't see the return on investment, then they don't care.

Paul: No, no they're busy. Like anybody, they're busy. They don't want to read 30 pages of stuff.

Mark: Exactly, but I do remember when, if you go to a potential sponsor, and they don't want to be the first to jump. They want to know that other companies might be involved. But I do remember that at the top of these, we weren't even sending emails then, when we had attachments, which were like a letter. "Dear Sir, Madam" type things. But we were able to put at the top of these things a couple of logos, and the first logo that were able to put was for ARK Inflatables, which was the raft that we were using. And it just happened that Nate, he was the Australian distributor for that raft. So we were sort of in with them, so we could put that logo.

Then I had a friend who actually had just started an adventure travel company called The Southern Terrain, which he still runs now very successfully, and I put his logo up. They were initially doing a fair bit of work in South America, so I thought, "This is a bit of a link there." He wasn't a sponsor or anything, but it was a good-looking logo, so we put that on. And then I'd just done a technical mountaineering course for New Zealand with a guy who had a company called Rock and Ice. And obviously I learned a lot of good skills from that, rope skills

and things, which were I guess transferable to the river. So I put that logo on there.

So I think these companies seeing at least a few logos or a few companies that were onboard, that really helped to gather that initial momentum. And then from there, yeah, we were pretty much sorted for sponsorship. Only in terms of equipment, not financial, which still to this day is a very difficult prospect for anyone, I think. Well, at least for me.

Paul: So you end up funding the plane tickets and the time in country, that food and all that sort of stuff, yourself?

Mark: Exactly, exactly.

Paul: And when was the Amazon trip, Mark? How far back...

Mark: That was in 2007. We got to Peru in September, or we started, sorry, in September, 2007. So next year it'll come up 10 years since we started that thing. So it's a fair time ago now.

Paul: Tell us about that trip, because for some people that just boggles the mind, paddling from source to sea of the Amazon.

Mark: It was, I guess barely [inaudible 00:23:53]. I'm not much of a sentimental bloke, but looking back on the Amazon, it was such a big trip and a huge adventure for us that it really was a life changer for me. Starting up in the Andes of Peru up at 5,000 or 5,000 meters plus up in these mountains, and then finishing on the other side of the continent at sea level was a big deal, because in between those two points a lot went on. Obviously the river up in the mountains there is pretty tough whitewater, to say the least.

We had no support. For the most part, on the water there, it was a 14-foot raft, all our gear and then just three of us, Nath, myself and a good mate from South Africa, Phil. There's no safety at the bottom of these rapids, there's no one in coax, there's no one waiting to fish you out when you get out of the boat sort of thing. So you're on your own at the bottom of some of the world's deepest canyons. So, to put your body and your mind through that for extended periods, I guess the whitewater was, oh, gosh, a month and a half of pretty serious whitewater day in, day out.

It does something to your mind and to your body, and at the time sometimes it doesn't feel like the most positive thing. I got some really good photos of...We take photos of each other, our faces, and there's a particular photo of mine after

we've been through some really tough days, and I really like it. It's not the best looking photo of me in the world. I look pretty rough. But I think it's more in my eyes that they're just...there's a bit of I guess shell shock. I don't know what it is.

I was in a state where I could still function, but yeah, every day was just a case of, "Is today going to be the day where it's all over?" We'd get down to features on this river where 90% of the river, say river right, was, and again, I don't want to overstate, because I really hate when people talk out their expeditions. But it was pretty much a case of if you go to that 90% on the right, then it's all over pretty much almost certainly. And you've got one small shoot that you have to go to. Obviously we call it Must Make Move.

And when you're faced with multiple of these every day, then geez, it starts to really wear on you. But I think it was good in a way, because it put me in a state. I remember reading about some guys who fought in the Vietnam war, and certainly we weren't getting, well, we were getting shot at, to be fair, but not in a military sense. But this guy said actually the best situation for him to be in was where he was in this state of a bit of shell shock where he could still function but he was a little bit scared. And he was really switched on, and it really allowed him to focus, and I think that's what happened to me at least.

Paul: I think that's the key thing with any difficult situation in life, whether we're talking outdoors or otherwise. It's being scared enough to be alert and switched on and focused, but not so scared that you don't function properly at all.

Mark: That's right, that's right.

Paul: I think that place is different for different people, but I think for people like you who have made the choice to go on adventure, you've probably decided that you can cope with a lot of the stresses of being outdoors. And I think that's probably put you in a good place to start off with.

Mark: Yeah, definitely, definitely. I think so.

Paul: So did you stay with the same craft the whole river? Were you paddling this raft the whole way down?

Mark: We did, which was a funny one. We made that choice I guess from a logistical angle. So we were on foot initially, because the river, it does, it just comes off the side of a mountain, and that's a little marshy area, and then it slowly gets bigger. So we were on foot for a couple of weeks, and then we put

in with this, as I said, 14-foot inflatable raft, whitewater raft, as good as they come, this ARK inflatable.

By the end of the trip it probably had 40 punctures from various things, but to this day it functions exactly as it would when it come out of the factory sort of thing, so it was a really good boat to use. But obviously after this whitewater finishes, the Amazon becomes what I guess people imagine the Amazon to be, which is just a big wide flat river, and sometimes with no flow or no apparent flow. And if you picture a whitewater raft, and it's not the most hydrodynamic watercraft available. It's very wide and it's very flat.

So through the white waters, it was perfect. It was exactly what we wanted. Once we'd cleared that white water into I guess the flooded forest, initially is what it was, then you tend to slide down a little bit. But for us logistically and cost wise it just made sense. There were three of us. This river gets really wide, so what it meant was that we ended up living on this raft. So I think probably the longest time that we didn't touch land, or at least the mainland, was probably 10 days.

Paul: Wow.

Mark: So that gives you an idea I suppose of how big this river was. And that meant that at the end of a day's paddling, or we didn't have to go to the side, and that was good, because often the side was 10, 15 miles on one side and 10, 15 miles the other. So, it just meant that we could continue on. Unfortunately, just after the white water, and a little bit of waves into the flat water, Phil got sick, and they couldn't really diagnose it. It wasn't malaria, but it was something pretty bad, and so he had to go home, and it ended up being just Nathan and myself for the last three months and for a majority of the white water.

After Phil left us, which was in Iquitos in Peru, we were on the paddles and also on the oars 24 hours a day. So we did six hours on, six hours off, which again, for a few months at a time, it's...It was good, because it just became your life. It wasn't like, "Oh, I've got to get this over with." It was just life, you know?

Paul: Yes.

Mark: Which I guess is a pretty privileged thing to say, that living on a raft in the middle of the Amazon jungle is your life. I think that's a definite privilege and privileged thing to be able to do. But that was how simple it became, and yeah, at times it was really tough, but certainly in hindsight now looking back eight years, nine years ago, it was great.

Paul: Well, I think there's something so quite liberating about that sort of simplicity, isn't there, where you just kind of put away all the unnecessary things, and you're just existing.

Mark: Yeah.

Paul: Not just existing in a negative way, but it's just like, "Yeah, this is it. We're just doing this, we've got nothing else to worry about, we're just..." Yeah, I can see that, and you get into a rhythm and a routine. So you were sleeping on the boat while somebody else was paddling, is that basically what you are doing?

Mark: Yeah, exactly. Nathan had spent a lot of time coming up with I guess a hybrid oar frame for the boat, and that meant that we had a cover, or I guess it was a roof on the boat. And it became this funny little house, and looking at pictures now, it was a sort of a junk boat. I don't know. Clothes hanging off and things like that, but yeah, it was really good.

He'd set it up really well, and there were...They weren't hammocks, they weren't beds, but they're sort of a cross between the two, and there was certainly enough room for all our gear, which we stored in barrels mostly once we reached the flatwater, mostly in barrels, and dry bags as well.

But we had a big oil sort of...We'd lost our fancy top of the range outdoor cooker, and so in some small town we picked up a cheap joint gas bottle, single burner cooker in some random town in Peru. So that.

I'd just sit on the floor of the raft, and we had a little kitchen prep area, so while one person was rowing or paddling away, the other person was preparing dinner and doing all the chores around the boat to keep it relatively tidy. And then when that six hours for that person was up then you'd swap, and it was your turn. As you can imagine, after three months, it really became a really efficient system of getting things done. So it was great. Even talking about it now, I would like to go back.

Paul: I can see the sort of enthusiasm, can hear it in your voice. You guys must have been ripped as well doing that.

Mark: Yeah.

Paul: Paddling 50% of the time for three months.

Mark: That was the funny thing. On trips, I've had a few different sort of...My body's had a different reaction to putting it under I guess great physical stress and limited nutrition. I'm not sure. But it was funny, by the end of the Amazon, my body...Well, initially it started to break down my muscles and things, because I had come from a relatively comfortable life, I suppose, but then by the end, my body...

I definitely think in a strange way my body, at least [inaudible 00:35:23], whereas on other trips it hasn't been that. For the whole trip I've just sort of lost weight and lost muscle. So the Amazon was a real one. I'm not sure why.

Paul: Were you not getting enough food, because I haven't asked you about food yet. Were you sourcing food locally when you stopped, were you? Is that what you were doing?

Mark: On the Amazon, yeah, we were. We'd source food when we'd stop at these villages. What made it also strange that I stopped losing weight and started building up a lot was the lack of protein. Protein worldwide is one of the more expensive food products that you can get. So, most of what our diet consisted of was carbohydrates: pasta, rice, plantains.

We had a lot of plantains, sweet potato, things like that. We didn't often, certainly not fresh meat or anything. I think possibly on occasion we were able to get ahold of some fresh meat in a town, but of course storage for that is pretty limited. And then the other option is canned goods like fish, tuna. But again, the cost of that meant that we very rarely bought that sort of food, and so it was just all pasta, rice, plantains and sweet potato, and it seemed to do the job.

Paul: Keep you going, keep you fueled at least.

Mark: Yeah, exactly. So in the sense of a fuel, then it was the perfect fuel, but in the sense of maintaining muscle mass or anything like that, it didn't seem to be the right one. Yeah, your body does just adjust, and I think also in a mental sense. I do remember down in Belém, which is the last big city on the Amazon, yeah, there's still a fair way to go. But I remember, as I said, we were moving 24 hours a day, so we'd go past these villages, and we were offshore by, gosh, I don't know. 200 meters offshore, and this is the Amazon. There's mangroves, and it's proper Amazon. But the wind would come up for some reason, whatever, at one 1:00 in the morning.

And by this, I would think nothing of putting my sandals on and jumping off the side of the boat, and I would be up to my neck in the Amazon and I would be pulling the raft along. I could feel I was stepping on, I don't know what, but I

think back now, and I think if you're thrown into that environment without any preparation or things, you go, "I'm not going to jump in up to my neck in the Amazon river. I know what's in there. There's not altogether pleasant things in there."

But by that stage, after 100 plus days, then you're just mentally, like I said, it's your life, so it didn't really concern me. And I think I that's great. I really enjoyed that part of it as well.

Paul: Did you have much interaction with locals? Were they interested in your boat, or other people, other river users, did they come and check you out?

Mark: Yeah, for sure. The Amazon, a big part of the Amazon, what happened for me was, as I said, it was life changing. And one of those things was the people. When we first set out on the Amazon, it was just adventure. I was stoic to have a Tavas [SP] sticker on my helmet and these fancy sponsor logos, and that was it. I was Mr. Adventure, but that was the depth of that adventure. It wasn't for anything else. It was for adrenaline rush, and that was it.

But certainly from the get-go we started meeting people in the mountains, in the Andes, and then all the way down. And they were just, as we mentioned before, the welcome and the [inaudible 00:40:00] extended past these, to them British westerners, was unbelievable. On the Amazon, the upper Amazon, we actually lost our boat for 48 hours.

Paul: Really? What happened?

Mark: Yeah. We knew that we were coming towards the end of the rapids. We had very good maps and things like that, Topware maps, so we could tell that we were coming to the end. I think we'd spent the whole day without encountering any serious rapids at all, and we were on this little wave train. To scout, all we'd do is stand up in the raft and see, "Oh, yeah, we'll go river left, river right," and the river's still pretty narrow at this point.

But I do distinctly remember going there in a pretty sedate wave train, and Nate's standing up, and it was confusing to the eyes, because the river was, I don't know, I guess it was maybe 30, 40 meters wide, pretty wide across, so the water could make its way down relatively easy. But it was confusing to the eye, because we stood up, and the river seemed to get constricted through a gap just a little bit wider than now than our boat.

We just couldn't get our head around it, but yeah, sure enough, that's what had happened. We didn't know if it was from rock fall or what, but by the time we

realized it, it was too late. We tried to back-paddle and get to the other side of the river, but it wasn't happening. I still remember trying to grip onto this cliff face with my bare hands, and again, it wasn't happening.

So we got sucked down. It was this two-drop sort of waterfall, and we made the first drop, and then the second, that was it. We were out.

And all three of us had the longest downtime that any of us have had, and for me personally have had since. That means time spent underwater, just to that point where you think, "Well, this is it" sort of thing. But eventually it releases you, and we all got popped up on different sides of the river. And Nath was near the boat and he tried to hold onto it, but he couldn't, and off it went down the river.

I was on the other side and I tried to chase it, but I couldn't. So eventually we all met up on one side. I'd lost one of my shoes, which made it hard going. We searched downstream for about an hour, hour and a half, and eventually we could see it high. We were up on a high cliff, and the boat was upside down actually in the middle of the river and on a rock shelf. And either side of it was like these I guess class four, class five rapids.

That was really bad. We did manage to get across there. I swam across the river above it, and that night we spent in a cave. We found a little cave on the side of the river. There was a big storm, and every time the lighting struck we could see our boat.

Paul: You could see it was still there.

Mark: Yeah, and it was still there, which was kind of good, but of course the storm passed, and then, again, in the bottom of a canyon in the middle of the Peruvian Andes there's no light, so it was pitch black. And we had nothing, just the gear that we were wearing, helmets, PFDs, wet suits, dry tops. And yeah, we almost called it quits right there, because we just couldn't access the boat. But then we came across some fishermen, and they were catching fish, and then they'd dry them on the rocks. They'd spend a few days there and then they'd take them to the closest town.

And these guys, they more or less saved us. They fed us sweet potato and this dried fish. They took us to a little house that they had with their family. And this house didn't even have a roof. There was kids there, and they had a little fire in the corner, and you're just like, "What?"

So they looked after us, and we were going to walk out with them the next day. They said there was a town a few days walk which had a telephone and that was it basically. These guys went and had a look at the boat, and they thought they could get it. We knew they couldn't, there's zero chance, but it might have aided us to at least have another go at getting it.

So the next day we did, and yeah, we managed to get the boat back. And we hadn't really lost anything, I think one video camera had water. But it was from there when these people looked after us for the rest of the trip. People didn't seem very surprised to see us, but they were just so happy almost in a way to see us, and anything that they had or anything that they could provide, whether it was tools or anything like that, they provided it. From the Amazon onwards, all the way up to now, it changed my view, it changed my focus on these journeys.

I really love the adventure side, the adrenaline rush. That's a huge part of it, but it's the people, which is equally as important for me now, just sitting down and listening to a story, whether it's in a language you can't understand. It makes it so much more significant for me than just getting a shot of adrenaline through your veins.

Paul: And really it gets you into understanding the culture of the place as well as just the landscape and the water.

Mark: Yeah, exactly. Because otherwise you could be anywhere. You could be. And I know for some people that's enough, and that's cool. I love watching, we call it clay poling [SP], which is people running hard rapids. I love that, I dig it. But I think if you can combine the two, then it's, as I said, for me personally it's so much more significant.

Paul: That makes sense. That's cool, that's cool. So did the Iran hike, because I think we need to mention that as well, because I know we're primarily talking about the paddling, but that's something in itself that is a significant journey, hiking across Iran. You did that solo as well.

Mark: Exactly, yeah. So I've got this weird, again, really memorable and really important trip to me that wasn't paddling. And that did stem from exactly what I was just talking about, the people. Iran, for years, basically since the Islamic Revolution in 1979, it's been on less than great terms with the West.

I'd grown up in Australia. It was all just on the news of burning U.S. flags, and effigies of various presidents and things like that and people yelling. It wasn't a good picture. But I've always had a big interest in the whole region there, and

so I tried to look for a place that I could go, and I did a lot of research, read a lot of books, and yeah, it becomes clear very quickly that the image that you're fed by the media is 100%, well not 100%, but not true at all.

Paul: It's a very distorted view, isn't it?

Mark: For sure. They need news. They need pitches, they need news, so they want this. It's a really really irritating sort of thing. Obviously any country that you go and do an expedition and you become attached to, so for me, Iran, I've got a really close affinity to Iran now. It's one of my favorite countries in the world.

The people there were amazing. And that was a big part of the reason that I went there. It wasn't just to walk from the...So I walked from the Northern border, so on the Caspian Sea, and I went more or less straight down the middle, and I ended up in the Persian Gulf. That was about 1,300 miles, and it took me 60 plus days, some really big long days. But again, it was unbelievable the geography that I crossed.

You start up on the shores of the Caspian, and there's this forest, but it's not pine forest or anything like that. It's definitely not rainforest, but it's...You probably have a better idea than me. It's sort of a mix between the two. It's fairly temperate.

Then immediately after leaving that, you hit the Alborz Mountains, which is this really long mountain range of these snow-covered mountains. And walking through those, I walked through in winter. That was exciting as well to go through that area. Just fantastic. You've got these villages, these really basic villages clinging onto the sides of these mountains there.

And just being hauled into houses and fed, and I found a place to stay and things like that. It was really from the start that the welcome accelerated, but then on the other side of the Alborz Mountains immediately is Tehran, this massive megacity, which is just bustling and just crazy, but again, even it was a surprising place. And Southern Tehran is a poorer area, a more traditional area, but then you go into the north of the city and there's Ferraris and Porsche and [inaudible 00:50:25] you find in the most expensive parts of London. That wasn't something that I really expected there, so yeah, Iran was a real eye-opener and just an amazing journey, for sure, and nothing to do with paddling.

Paul: No, and again, people were friendly to you.

Mark: Oh, unbelievable. I know it's such a big part in the whole of the Middle East, is welcoming strangers. You definitely realize that it is part of their culture, but it went beyond that sort of thing. A lot of people say, and I guess it's true, often they are obligated to look after strangers or travelers or visitors and things.

But it went beyond that. They didn't have to look after me, just some random person. But the amount of times that I was invited in. More often than not, I had to turn down invitations to come and eat with people or stay with them, because my visa would have run out. I wouldn't haven't made it to the Persian Gulf

Paul: You needed to keep moving.

Mark: Yeah, I had to keep moving. You can't cover that great a distance on foot, unfortunately. If I was on a pushbike, maybe, but on foot you're pretty limited to the distance that you cover, even in a long day.

Paul: So how long did the total journey take you then, would you say?

Mark: In terms of walking days, it was I think 63. But I was pretty lucky. I had a 30-day visa, which I was able to extend twice by 30 days each. And I've been pretty lucky with visas. My host, I actually had a host in Iran. A lot of the way that people get visas in Iran, more back then certainly, was you could get an invitation from a travel company or for something like that, but I was really lucky in that my host or my, the people who invited me was the Alpine Club of Iran.

I made friends with some people, and they put me in touch with these guys. That was how I got my visa, and then certainly when I was there I got lucky again in that the Alpine Club provided me with a letter in Farsi, in Persian, detailing what I'm doing. I had their letterhead at the top, this explanation letter. And it just happened that the president of the Alpine Club of Iran, which is not a, it's nothing to do with the government, because the government has their own mountaineering association, but they are highly regarded in the country. But it just happened that the president of the Alpine Club had a friend who worked for the Iranian Government in one of the ministries, quite high. I think it was the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, and they also provided me with a letter.

Paul: You were well covered.

Mark: Yeah, so wherever I got anywhere I could produce both these letters. And one of them has the flag of Iran, and it was a government letter, so to speak. When you get to a checkpoint and there's some police officers there who

are living a pretty basic life in the mountains there and you pull out a letter which has their government seal on it, then things happen. So that was really really handy to have. And actually I spoke to my friend Mohammed when I was up north still, and I'd actually put a little blog post I remember on my website saying how good the underground there was, their tube, so to speak. And it was, it was really clean, and I actually remember writing in my thing that it was better than the London underground.

I spoke to my friend Mohammed, and he said, "Yeah, the guys from the ministry saw what you wrote, and they're very happy." Then I thought, "Oh God, I've become an instrument of propaganda for the regime," but I was pretty happy I wrote that in the end, because maybe it did help, I don't know. I certainly had no real contact with any ministry or anything, but when I did have to extend my visa, both times that I did it was in towns where tourists don't really go, certainly western tourists don't really go. So when I extended once I was in a town called Yasuj, which is down south in the Zagros Mountains.

And the guys from the Alpine Club said, "Yeah, you've got to meet these guys from the ministry or something. They're going to help you extend your visa, and you've got to meet him at this corner." So I'm standing in this town in this square and a big Land Cruiser four-drive pulls up with...and for some reason, I don't know if it's a Middle East thing, but they love blacked-out windows, but they also have little curtains on the windows. And so this Land Cruiser pulls up and the door opens and the guy says, "Mark!" And I'm like, "Yeah?" "Get in!" So I was like, "Yeah, okay." So I jumped in and they took me to the...and these were just funny little guys.

They're funny guys. They asked me a lot about women in the West and all sorts of things, I don't know. But they took me to the police station and we spoke to the chief of police there and he said, "Yeah, come back tomorrow." So the same thing happened, and when we got back the next day actually there was two other guys waiting there in plain clothes, one young guy and one old guy. And all of a sudden, I noticed that the guy who I had been with the last couple of days from one of these ministries, he stiffened up sort of pretty immediately. And I knew straight away something was up. And they had a bit of a chat and they said to me, "Mark, these guys are from the local newspaper. They want to ask you some questions."

I remember the young guy, he spoke pretty much perfect English. He sat down and out of his briefcase he pulled out a single A4 blank piece of paper and a pencil. And then the old guy, he went and proceeded to sit down behind the chief of police desk and start looking through my passport and my papers and stuff. I was like, "Yeah, you're possibly not from the local newspaper."

Paul: Probably not journalists, no.

Mark: No. So I just let them do their thing. They asked me a lot of questions, like what are your...Actually, the most telling one was they, because I had not initially intended to go through Yasuj, I was going to go further to the East through Shiraz. And that's what I detailed on my website. And they actually said to me, "How come, what made you change your route? What made you change your direction?"

Paul: Really?

Mark: Yeah, clearly these guys know what I've been up to. But they were really friendly, and gave me my visa, extended my visa, and then I was off. But I was really really annoyed, because they put on this really fake show of friendliness, whereas everyone else to that point had been super friendly.

And I probably made a mistake after that, and then for the...I was so angry, though. I went and got my gear and I went up into the mountains. And so for the next week or 10 days I didn't come down from the mountains.

I didn't go down into villages. I would just look down on the villages, because I was so angry that these guys had sort of, I don't know, tricked me or whatever. And I regret that now, because it was a week of not meeting people, so to speak. I just stayed up in the mountains and was a bit more isolated. But there was no harm done. It was just made for a better story.

Paul: That's interesting. And I was going to ask you about physical preparation later on, but it's probably a good juncture. Do you do much physical training before, and the reason I talk about it in the context of the walk is that having spoken to other people who've done long-distance hikes, whether it's routes of their own making or whether they're covering Pacific Crest Trail or Appalachian trail or whatever it is, a lot of people say they just basically walk themselves fit. You can't get fit walking other than by walking, if you see what I mean. So, is it the same with paddling? Do you just keep yourself in reasonably good shape and then just use the beginning of the trip to get you up to expedition fitness, or do you do any other preparation?

Mark: Exactly, I don't do specifics, I don't think I'm doing a Volga descent now or Missouri-Mississippi descent, I'm going to prepare and I'm going to have a 10-week prep or something like that. I enjoy keeping fit and keeping strong anyway, so it's just part of my life. So I think my body's, I keep myself up to a certain level, and as you mentioned, with these other people, it's the first two

weeks on a journey that you become expedition fit. Now, if you were doing a speed descent or if you were looking for some sort of record, which I don't, that's not my thing. You can't meet many people when you're cruising down a river at top speed.

But if I were to do something like a speed descent or a record, then certainly I would implement a specific training regime. But otherwise, for me, in terms of physical preparation or staying fit, I do...I used to do a lot of weights. That was pretty much my life. I was some sort of gym rat, which is the most boring thing I can think of now. But instead, I use cattle bells, which I find brilliant, because they're very compact, obviously. You don't have to have a huge area.

I can do it in the spare room or on the balcony or whatever, and I do some really hard training. So it's mostly cattle bells. I do Brazilian jiu-jitsu as well. I've been training that for quite a few years now, and having some guy try and strangle you for an hour and a half a few times a week is pretty good preparation. And then on top of that is paddling in itself, but not really in a structured regime.

So having those three together and then using the first two weeks to get expedition fit, as you mentioned, is about as scientific as I get. And it seems to work. It seems to work.

Paul: Well, I think if it works, it works, doesn't it?

Mark: Exactly.

Paul: In 2008 you did the Amazon?

Mark: Yeah.

Paul: At 150-...I've got it written here, 153 days, 4,130 miles.

Mark: Yes.

Paul: Was the next one, the Missouri-Mississippi?

Mark: The Missouri-Mississippi, exactly, yes. That was in 2012. That's slightly, well, it's 3,800 miles more or less, and that was 117 days. That was by myself and that was in a touring kayak, a 17-foot plastic boat, so a pretty decent flow the whole way. The lower Mississippi not so much, but certainly on the Missouri very good flow.

So you make pretty good time. That was 117 days, I think, and I think at least 25 of those days I was off river.

I remember being in Great Falls, Montana, and I was just about to enter an area where there's not much around for five or six days. And the day before I was about to head back out it was going to be 4th of July.
It was my first visit to the U.S. in 2012, so I was in Great Falls, Montana. Great Falls is not a big town, and it's in Montana, and it's about as American as you can get, so again, I thought I could spend a day paddling or I could stay here and experience a really genuine, or so to speak, 4th of July.

And I'm so glad that I did. I got to see the parade, and they've got these giant, what do they call it, pickup trucks, and harvesters, and paper mache fighter jets. You can imagine the vibe. It was really great. It was better than heading off into the wild. I lost a few days, but I gained so much more I guess.

Paul: Well, again, going back to what you said before about having the cultural experience as well as the experience, the landscape, it makes complete sense. Was there a conscious decision there to do that trip solo when you'd done, so clearly you'd walked Iran on your own. But in terms of the paddling, the Amazon trip you'd done with friends or colleagues. Was there a conscious decision to do the next one solo, or was it just you couldn't find anybody crazy enough to go with you?

Mark: Well, there were a few factors, I suppose. One is that not everyone can disappear from real life for five months at a time. It can be a tough thing, and for me certainly, with family now and things like that, it does become increasingly difficult. I'm lucky, though. I have an extremely understanding and forgiving girlfriend and that I can disappear for long periods of time.

But it's not just that. I think that a big part of it, well, the two other factors are, one is that I could do it solo. I certainly wouldn't have had a crack at the Amazon solo, because when things go wrong, that's it, game over sort of thing, whereas on the Missouri-Mississippi there was much less chance of something like that happening.

There's still a chance, but much much decreased chance. I guess number one, I suppose, or the last factor, is logistics. It's just easier by yourself. You don't have to worry about the logistics of getting gear, this place and that, or portaging or decision-making. It's all just down to you.

I'm not a massive fan of solo stuff, but the fact is that you are by yourself, and you're your own master, so to speak. You don't have to worry about anyone

else's feelings, and it just makes things much easier. I guess there is one other factor, and that is, it really came to bear on the Volga.

When you're just this random one person, you come around the bend in a river, and there's some people at the front of their house or their thatch [SP] or their camping or whatever, and it's just one random Australian crazy guy in the middle of Russia, then they are so excited, so interested that to take in and look after or welcome one person is much more likely than two, than three people. It's less intimidating. It's just an easier thing. I know for me...It's a bit different maybe for you or me or people who are involved in this sort of thing, that I know if I was sitting at my house and some guys paddled past, and unfortunately for them, I'd kidnap them [inaudible 01:07:12].

Paul: Interrogate them.

Mark: Exactly, but looking at it from a lay person's point of view, if I was in my house and with my kids or whatever and just a random scruffy group of guys went past, I'm much less likely to...I'd make sure they're okay, but I'm probably much less likely to bring them into my house. And that happens as well. Even just now when I was in Australia, I'd turn up to these farms, and I could see that these guys had families, they had young kids. And so if I had those [inaudible 01:07:51] they would not put me in there or certainly they'd let me camp on their land, but there wasn't an invite coming to bring me into the house to sleep.

And I can understand that. I would not be inviting some random, smelly, bearded person into my house if I had kids either. So, it just really depends on the situation, but certainly being by yourself does help. It's much less intimidating for anyone.

Paul: I think that's true generally for traveling, isn't it? You have a lot more interaction with people, whether they are locals or the people who are traveling, when you're on your own than if you're, even just a couple. Even if you're with your girlfriend or your wife, you don't have as much interaction with other people, because you are kind of a unit and people don't approach you as a unit, whereas as an individual you're much more approachable in that sense.

Mark: Exactly.

Paul: It's interesting. So Missouri-Mississippi in 2012, and then Volga in 2014. And again, I think Russia is one of those places that a lot of people in the West have, a little bit like Iran, or maybe not so much as Iran, but a little bit like Iran. People kind of wonder, how do you go about doing something in Russia in

terms of a trip? Tell us a bit about the Volga, because personally I don't have a picture of what sort of river that is.

Mark: I'm pretty passionate about all my trips, but the Volga is just, yeah, by the end of it...I mentioned about being in Iran being a propaganda tool for the regime there. By the end of this Russian trip I was so, certainly not pro-Russian government or anything like that, but in terms of pro-Russian. And when I say pro-Russian, I don't mean...I support all their activities in Crimea. Not at all.

Pro-Russia, as in the river was unbelievably beautiful, amazing to paddle. The people were unbelievably welcoming and hospitable and beautiful, the Russian women. And the cities, when you go past a city that's on the side of the river, and they've written on a concrete embankment that it was founded in the year 789 A.D., you think, "Yeah, that's some history there," the historical aspect of it. So every part of that paddle was fantastic. I think the single negative thing that happened on that trip was I remember in Volgograd I was looking...I pulled up on this beach or river beach right out in front of the city, and this guy who was one, maybe five minutes away from falling over and passing out drunk, he kept telling me that I couldn't put my kayak there.

And that was the only negative interaction that I...He was that drunk that he didn't know what he was talking about. That was the only negative interaction that I had the entire trip, and as a result of that I moved my kayak to this floating café that was being built by a group of Armenians, and I spent a night with them. I had one of the most fantastic nights on the river. So as a result of this drunk guy, it resulted in one of the most amazing nights I had on the river. But the Volga was amazing. I didn't have much of an idea of what the Volga was exactly going to be like either. I did picture this highly polluted river, huge Russian cities with these apartment, these classic Soviet apartment blocks falling down.

Paul: Sort of brutalist kind of concrete blocks.

Mark: Yeah, and a really cold people and cold environment. Literally each day I would smile to myself, thinking, "This is not what this was supposed to be like," because it just wasn't that at all. I still read now that the Volga is highly polluted. A lot of tributaries that flow into the Volga have factories on them who are apparently quite notorious for contaminating those tributaries, which then flow into the Volga. But certainly from a visual standpoint, so from visual pollution then, it just wasn't apparent.

Not all the time, but a lot of the time, it had less visual pollution, I'm talking rubbish and things like that, than the Missouri-Mississippi, which again was

super surprising. It is a really big river. There's nine hydroelectric dams on it, which does I guess spread the water out and slow the water down. It changes. The junk free changes right up at the start. North of Moscow it's pine forests and short, perfect sort of grassy campsites. And then you go all the way down south to where it's going to enter to the Caspian Sea, and it's almost a desert-like environment on the steps there, and everything in between.

I get out of hand when I start talking about the Volga, which is slightly embarrassing.

Paul: No, it's all right.

Mark: But it was fantastic. And when people ask me about paddling in terms of I guess a technical standpoint, then it probably was no harder than say paddling the Missouri river, but I think the difference would be the language and cultural differences. So a lot of people do turn up to the Missouri and haven't done much paddling at all, and they manage to paddle the Missouri. It's relatively straightforward. It's got three huge lakes, which can present some problems, but if you can get past those lakes slowly, slowly and very carefully, then you can make it to St. Louis, if you do the just the Missouri and you don't continue to the Gulf of Mexico.

The Volga is a similar length, so certainly if someone has done something like the Missouri or they've done something like the Mississippi, then I would 100% recommend that they go and paddle the Volga. But if you haven't done a long distance paddling journey, then jumping straight into the Volga I think is a bit of a mistake, because if you've done the Mississippi or the Missouri or something like that, then things like putting up your tent each night, cooking, resupply, dealing with equipment issues, getting used to doing 10-hour paddling days, you're used to that. That becomes almost second nature, so when you go then you go to the Volga, that side of the journey is more or less taken care of. That becomes more automatic, and then you can devote a lot of your mental energy to the differences in language and culture and things like that, which makes it much more doable. But if you turn up to the Volga and you're stressing about gear, you're stressing about your tent, your cooker and things, on top of language and cultural issues, then you could be in for a pretty tough time for sure. So, I would recommend if someone was going to do the Volga that they'd have experience on another long paddling journey first, just to make it a little bit more straightforward, I think.

Paul: That makes sense. And the Volga you did in a kayak again, did you, like the Missouri-Mississippi?

Mark: Yeah, I did it in the exact same type of kayak that I used on the Missouri-Mississippi. And for those rivers, it was spot on. It's a rotomolded plastic boat, so you can abuse it pretty well, drag it over concrete, and pull it up on riverbanks, and it's going to do the job. It was relatively faster in the water as well, so for both those journeys it was the perfect craft, I think.

Paul: Interesting, interesting, and we tried to, well, we did speak back in January just before you went to Australia, and then that was your most recent river.

Mark: Yes.

Paul: Can you tell us, because again, it's what's pictured in people's minds versus the reality. People don't associate Australia with having much water in it, other than at the coast.

Mark: And that would be bloody right, I can tell you that now. That'd be bloody right.

Paul: So tell us about this Australian trip.

Mark: So in January I headed out to Australia, and I was going to go and paddle the Murray-Darling, which is again similar length to the Missouri by itself or the Mississippi by itself, and the Volga. It's about 3,700 kilometers, so I think 2,300, 2,400 miles. It's the Murray-Darling, which is a funny name. It's the Murray-Darling river system. But when people think of the longest river in Australia or probably one of the most famous is the Murray River. The Murray River is pretty popular to be paddled. Quite a few people paddle it each year. Except for the start, it's got plenty of water to paddle.

Paul: And where is the Murray? Is that down there, is it Victoria, is it?

Mark: Victoria, yeah. It starts in Victoria and finishes in South Australia. But in terms of river systems, and when you're looking at the longest distance from source to sea, then it's not the Murray. It's actually this, again, Murray-Darling is a bit of a silly name, because it's not that at all. It actually starts up in Queensland, I guess in the southeast corner of Queensland on the border with New South Wales. And at that point it's called the Condamine River. The Condamine turns into a couple of different rivers, but then more or less into the Darling River, and then the Darling river flows through west in Queensland, and then it starts to head a bit south or southwest into New South Wales.

And then it will meet up with the Murray with only 800 kilometers to go, and then it will go into South Australia and empty into the ocean down there. But for this trip I was on a stand-up paddle board, inflatable stand-up paddle board, which again, it was the perfect thing to paddle, because as you mentioned about water, there is no water. Australia. We're not really known for big-volume rivers or rivers which have a great deal of water in them, and certainly this Murray-Darling river system, it's constantly in the news. It's a really big issue in Australia, this lack of water. To start with, these rivers don't have much water in them, but fortunately there's been a huge amount of mismanagement as to where this water goes that is in the river, or tries to go into the river after a big rainfall sort of thing.

So I started off in Queensland, and for the first three days I was on foot, because it's just trickle. There's no water to paddle. But then after three days I was able to start paddling with all my gear. So again, there was many many days where I'd spend the majority of a 10 or 11-hour day dragging my stand-up paddle board.

Paul: I saw some photos you posted either on Facebook or Instagram or possibly both, and in places it just looks like a muddy little creek.

Mark: And it was, and it was just a frustrating thing because you're just like, is it going to get better? Is it not going to get better? And it's such a crazy river in that for a day or two it would get better, and then it would get worse. I was there for 50 days. I was 50 days on the river. I made it.

I paddled and dragged 1,400 kilometers. This one didn't end how I wanted it to end, unfortunately. And so I ended up, I was out in Western New South Wales, out in Bourke, and we had one of the hottest summers on record there. I think probably some people are probably thinking, why the heck would you go to Australia and to the outback and try and paddle in the middle of summer? As I said, this river's a pretty strange river, and the fact is that in December, January, and February, where this river system gets most of its water from is in the Darling Downs, which was back in Queensland. And the greatest likelihood for having a major rain event is in those three months, so December, January, February. So if there was going to be any water, it was going to be around that time.

Unfortunately, that also coincides with the hottest weather. So I took a gamble that we might get some decent rain. Occasionally it did help. There was actually a couple of sections for five or six days at a time where they would have local rain, which would go into the river and then cause it to come up by a meter or so, and I could paddle, but then it just disappears really quickly. Anyway, I

ended up in Western New South Wales, and I'd be going hard for a while, and certainly I was pretty well spent.

I thought it was just a case of heat exhaustion. There's nothing around. You're sort of at the bottom of this river which doesn't flow. There's a few trees at the top, and then if you go up the top of the river bank, there's nothing there, wild pigs.

I saw a lot of dingoes, a lot emus, a lot of kangaroos, thousands of kangaroos, occasionally some cattle, some sheep. But to me certainly, I grew up in Australia on the coast, and it's all happy days there. But out west it's pretty harsh country and it's pretty bleak country. I'd been going pretty hard for I think five or six days, and I was really spent, so I called it a few days short and sort of put up my tent. I was shivering in the middle of the day and things, which is not a good sign.

Paul: No.

Mark: So I thought, "Well, I might try and get off river for a few days since I'm near Bourke, and then I'll come back on." I was at a campsite, and it was the first trip ever that I've actually carried a personal locator beacon. So I had a SPOT, which I'm sure possibly a lot of your listeners know about, a SPOT, a bit like an Epub. So each night I would check in, and it would come up all good with my exact coordinates. So I did that every night.

Your second, well, your most extreme option with a SPOT is to press the S.O.S. button, which comes to Cavalry. It goes through to a private organization who then coordinate with the local emergency services, and they come and rescue you. But it's only for life-threatening situations. Your in-between, I guess, choice is this pickup button.

I had a pretty determined email message which says, "Need pickup, non life threatening." So that just went to my mom and to my brother. I was in a pretty bad way, but I didn't want to call out the emergency services. In a hindsight, I don't know if that was...I possibly could have sort of a thing, but I guess you don't want to bother anyone. You don't want to use that.

Paul: I know what you're talking about.

Mark: I remember one morning after spending the whole night really bad headache and sort of cramping up and just feeling...and dry. You're throwing up sort of, but nothing coming up. I thought, "I'm going to organize some pickup." So I press this pickup button, and what I did was over the course of an hour, I

pressed it three times. And I must have read the instructions on this SPOT, because I just thought that had sent three emails to my brother, and maybe they could organize to get in touch with someone in Bourke. They know who owns the property, and then someone could come pick me up.

What happened was my brother and my mom, they got 41 emails over the course of a couple of hours, because, going back afterwards, when you press that pickup button, every five minutes or every few minutes it sends an email to the designated people. So what happened was that my brother and my mom had thought, "He's lost it, he's lost it in a bad way if he sent through 41 of these messages." I'd only sent three. So my brother, he actually contacted the SES. In Australia it's the State Emergency Services, a volunteer organization which get involved in search and rescue.

But they only coordinate with the police, so they wouldn't do anything. And then my brother, he wasn't keen to come back to the police either, because I think he knew I wouldn't want the police involved at that point. But of course, mothers are a bit different.

Paul: I always say to people, even on basic survival courses, I say one of the best pieces of survival advice I can give to people is tell somebody where you're going and make sure that person is trustworthy. And I actually use, I say, "I normally tell my mom where I am. Even if I'm on the other side of the world, it's like, when did she expect to hear from me? Because I know that if she doesn't hear from me, she'll do something about it."

Mark: Exactly, exactly. I think my mom, she was probably pretty excited. When I'm off on the other side of the world, she couldn't be less involved, I guess, so to speak. But she could be, so she did contact the police. And it just happened that that day I hadn't charged my Goal Zero battery pack for a few days, and it was a really overcast day. And my phone had run out of battery, and on top of that there was almost zero reception.

So I did manage to get through to her at midday, and all I heard her say was that they called the police. And I can remember yelling into the phone, "Don't call the...I don't want the police." But then my phone cut out, and that was it.

So I made the decision to paddle on, and I knew I could reach a bit where a dirt road actually went near to the river. So I thought with another six hours paddling I could reach that. I was in a pretty bad way, and I knew that if I spent another night on the side of the river in that state that probably I would be pressing the S.O.S. police rescue button.

So I set off and I made a few hours, and I paddled for a while sitting down. It wasn't a real good situation. Then I heard someone yell out, and there was a guy up on the riverbank on his motorbike, and he said, "Wait there!" So I said, "Yeah, definitely. I'm up for waiting there."

So I pulled over, and then about half an hour later he turned up in his four-wheel drive. He was the property owner. He said they'd heard about me, so he'd come out looking. I said, "Oh, good." I said, "I'm hoping it's just you." And he said, "No, no, no."

Next thing, the emergency volunteer guys they turned up in their four-drive with the boat, hauling a tinny or a boat on the back. And then the police turned up as well, just two policemen in a four-drive. I was a bit embarrassed, but through no fault of my own the emergency services had come out. And I definitely did need to get off the river at that point. They actually told me that two weeks previous a woman had gone missing on a property and they found her body eight days later.

So they were pretty happy to come across me, and I wasn't too bad, but the next day they convinced me to go to the emergency at the hospital. And they did blood tests and things, and they diagnosed there just heat exhaustion, actually the onset of kidney failure, and also my muscles were starting to sort of cannibalize themselves. So the doctor said, "Yeah, a week or 10 days off river."

I didn't really want to hang out in Bourke for 10 days, so what I did is I headed back to the coast, to my mom's house, and the very day that we got back it got worse. I became really sensitive to light, my head really felt like it was exploding. So I went to emergency at the local hospital there, and they kept me in for most of the nights and hooked me up with morphine and things and took some more blood tests, but they did let me go home. But then probably four hours later I came back, because it got worse again. So by then they knew something was up, and they ended up taking some fluid from my spine.

They put the big needle into your spine and take this fluid out. They came back, and they were pretty certain that it was, in Australia we call it Leptospirosis meningitis, which here you guys call it I think [inaudible 01:31:04] disease.

Paul: Weils Disease, yeah. People are starting to refer to it as Leptospirosis as well, so you hear both terms. But yeah, classically it was, particularly in the context of it being transmitted by rats a lot of the time isn't it, in water?

Mark: Exactly, yeah.

Paul: Weils Disease, yeah.

Mark: Looking back on that river, the amount of wild pigs mostly that were down by the river, the amount of cattle and things. And this river wasn't really moving, so it was a pretty stagnant, murky, heavily silted river. So, I had a lot of cuts on my legs. Obviously I swam in the river a lot, I washed my dishes in the river. I didn't get my drinking water from the river, because I just hadn't had the occasion to, but certainly there was many opportunities to.

So I was two nights more or less in emergency. Then they transferred me to their infectious diseases ward for four nights.

Paul: That's always reassuring, isn't it?

Mark: Yeah. So every time the nurses came in, they had to put on a face mask, gloves and a special apron sort of thing just to deal with me. I thought, "Geez, this is a bit full on." They monitored me for a while, they booted me out with a whole bunch of antibiotics via intravenous method. Then they put me on tablets. So I was I allowed to leave after four days. But then I was very fatigued.

I didn't feel great, and I had to make a...It was a really tough decision. It was really tough, because I can't stand not achieving a goal or reaching the sea. It was really tough [inaudible 01:32:57] in a comfortable environment, and one [inaudible 01:33:04] doesn't want to. One part of your brain thinks, "Why do I want to go back into hardship, out into the bush where it's really hard, and put myself through this again?"

And knowing this river's going to dry up again, most certainly. And why do I want to do that? And you have to rationalize that, that that's the weak, well, the way I look at it is the weak part of your body or your brain telling you that. So I have to take that out of the equation, but the fact is I had no idea how long it would take for me to recover. Recovery might have been say two weeks back to normal, but recovery back to where you're doing 12-hour days in 40-degree heat for another 2,300 Ks might take a little longer.

So on top of that, as I said, I've got small kids. I have three children under the age of, my son's almost six, I suppose. We have a little girl who's four, and my littlest one's a year and a half, and on top of that my girlfriend is due with our fourth baby in a month. That was a big thing weighing on my mind.

As I said, my partner, she's, I can't even imagine. I get to leave her seven months pregnant with three small children and disappear to the other side of the

world. So for me to then sit in Australia and recover for a month, relaxing more or less on the sunshine coast, and going down to the beach and eating nice food and things.

Despite the fact that a big part of my life is this expedition paddling, it's not my whole life. I'm also a dad, I'm also a partner as well. I have to factor that in, so in the end it was a tough decision, but I thought, "Well, I'll come home." And most of that was down to I guess the family side of things. So I'm pretty bummed, but it's a crazy river.

I just put up a link last week a farmer 800 kilometers further down from where I stopped, so 800 kilometers further, he made a video of him riding his motorbike down the river, and it was dry. It's 100% dry, there's no water in it, and he said, "We're not in drought," and they're not in a drought state. And as I said, it goes back to this mismanagement.

Paul: So is that water being taken out of the river further up?

Mark: It is. It's being taken out. And I met a lot of cotton farmers on the way. I'm not some hardcore environmentalist or anything like that, but I met these cotton farmers, and they're really good guys. They take a lot of water from this river, but certainly I don't blame them, because they have licenses to take this water.

And it's not just the fact that people are taking water from the river, it's this huge mismanagement. It's the fact that it's not a big...It's not like it's the Missouri or the Volga where it's a huge volume river that people are taking water from. It's a creek. At the bottom of the in-laws' house here there's a, it's called Gaggle Brook. And I'm pretty sure the brook is like a tiny, tiny river.

Paul: Yeah, it's like a creek, yeah, like a small creek.

Mark: I can almost see it now when I was about 100 meters away. That thing has got more water in it than sections of this river that I paddled sort of thing. So it's just this crazy river. So while I'm disappointed that I didn't get all the way to the sea, and hopefully being as crook as I was is a bit of an excuse. I don't know, in a way it's such a crazy sort of river system that I think in the end when I do go back, and I'm hoping to get back actually next year and have another crack at getting to the ocean, that it just adds to the story, I suppose, and just the strangeness of that river. So it's disappointing, but what can you do?

Paul: I can completely understand that it's disappointing. But at least, as you say, you live to fight another day.

Mark: Exactly.

Paul: It's in that heat. It's not a benign environment anyway, and then if you're a crook who's well on top of that, then who knows what could have happened?

Mark: Yeah, that's right. And there's one thing being stubborn and stoic and the tough guy, but it's a pretty fine line. On one side of that line you are the tough guy and you are determined and you're not giving up, and on the other side of that line you're dead. So, she's a pretty fine line.

I think looking back to the last night that I was on the river there, I would get up to try and go to the bathroom, and it was really hard to stand up, and then I'd urinate, and then I'd go back to my tent and I would fall into it. And I remember spending several hours of that night half in and half out of the tent, and it's that sort of environment, with the amount of big ant, biting ants, and let alone snakes that like to move around at nighttime. It's certainly not something that I would have done had I had the energy or strength to haul myself inside the tent and zip it up, because, yeah, it was...

Funnily enough, what got me obviously was a tiny bacteria, but the main concern on that trip certainly was poisonous snakes. There's a lot of them out there, and my only defense was three compression bandages and that SPOT device. And not even sure if that would buy you enough time if you got a decent bite and a decent sort of injection of venom, so I'm probably lucky it wasn't a snake in the end.

Paul: Yeah, you have some very poisonous snakes there, some of the...

Mark: Yeah, definitely.

Paul: Some of the world's most poisonous snakes, so yeah, having been to Australia. My partner's Australian, so, yeah, it's just a different, it's something that here you just don't have to think about at all where you've got like one poisonous snake. You've got udders [SP], and you don't see them that much and they are not particularly aggressive and they're not big and it's difficult for them to bite fully grown people. It's typically kids or dogs that get bitten by them. They're nothing like one of your brown snakes or something.

Mark: Eastern Browns. That was by far my biggest fear on that whole river was these snakes. But, yeah it's like [inaudible 01:40:37].

Paul: As soon as you are there on the ground in Queensland or somewhere, you're thinking, "Yeah, what is..." I remember going for a hike up in the Daintree up near Cape Tribulation, and I wasn't being paranoid. It was just like, "Is that a tree or is it a snake? Is that a tree or is that a snake?"

And I remember doing that for about three hours. We're hiking up this trail, and then eventually one of them was a snake. "Is that a tree or a snake? Oh, actually it is a snake all across the trail."

Mark: Well, it definitely pays to be conscious of the fact that they are [inaudible 01:41:12]. Actually yeah, just while I was out on the river, I had a little radio. I can't remember if I heard it on the radio, but there was a town fairly close to where I was, to Bourke, Wolga [SP], just a small town. Five-year-old girl playing on the property, got bitten by a Brown. They flew her by air I think to Sydney, Sydney Children's Hospital, and she just kept deteriorating.

In the end they, I think, and this is all within a matter of less than 24 hours, they flew her back to Wolga, which is a tiny town with a tiny hospital. And the reason they flew her back there is because there was nothing, and she died. So obviously being a small five-year-old kid, it doesn't help matters, but yeah, it's quick acting. And in that case, there wasn't anything they could do about it even being in probably one of the best hospitals in the world, and you just think, "Wow, that's pretty crazy."

Paul: And you're well set up for snake bits there as well in terms of the medical profession knowing how to deal with them and anti-venoms where they're available and all that kind of stuff.

Mark: Pretty scary.

Paul: Yeah, it is, it is, it is. So one of the things I was going to ask you, and I guess it's probably one of the last things now. You talked a lot about the paddling, but a lot of the time you're camping. Have you have had any other, because again, it's one of the things that people ask me all the time. People that don't go on these wilderness trips or maybe just aspire to go on some wilderness trips or places where they're camping wild, people worry about snakes and insects and wolves and bears and other stuff. To me, I think maybe with the exception of snakes in Australia, those things don't really factor.

You have a kind of routine. Maybe if you're in bear country you have a routine to what you do with your food and where you wash up and all those sorts of things. But you're much more likely to come a cropper on the river or in other ways than from the animals.

Mark: Yeah, for sure. I think, as you said, it comes down to systems and it comes down to what part of the world you're in. When I was in Montana, obviously deep in bear country there, I carried in my hand the whole time my bear spray. I just made sure that I followed the advice that's given by obviously national parks and by people and by friends who have spent long periods of time in that country. And so if you follow to a T that advice and you're in that territory, then there's not much more you can do.

The only other thing that you can do to keep yourself safe is not be there. And that's not necessary, because people are there. People are in bear country constantly hiking, camping, those sort of things.

But if you take the sensible precautions, and as I said, given to you obviously by national parks and by people who spend a lot of time, then you'll be fine. It's the same in Australia with snakes, and you can mitigate as much of the risk that you can. And of course, there is always going to be some risk involved. I mean it sounds trite, but there's risk involved in waking up everyday sort of thing.

Paul: Absolutely. I was going to say that when you said the only other thing to do to mitigate the risk is to stay at hone. I think a lot of people see that as a zero risk option, whereas it isn't. Driving to work, crossing the road, doing things at home, there's all sorts of accidents and things happen in that environment all the time, and yet we don't shy away from that.

Mark: No. As I mentioned to you earlier, I drove to Devon yesterday. Three and a half hours there and three and a half hours back. And some people on these motorways, they treat it like a racetrack. They come up right behind you or they pull in right in front of you, and you think, "We're going at 70 or 80 miles an hour here, and in this giant metal machines, and you're going to pull in a meter in front of me or you're going to put on brakes, and it's raining?" And you think, "You..."

I don't know, my girlfriend's father, he said it's because people don't have a good enough imagination, because if they did, they could picture the end result of doing that sort of thing. And to me that is the most, it's so dangerous.

You go camping, particularly in a more I guess benign environment, so some are camping somewhere in the UK. Different story obviously, winter camping in Scotland. But some are camping in a nice part of England. My gosh, I couldn't think of anything nicer and anything more safe, so to speak. You're away from people, you're away from the cars, you're away from the city, you're safe. You're fine sort of thing.

I guess it's an education thing. It's convincing people that the great outdoors is not such a wild place, so to speak, and you safely be outside and nothing's going to go wrong.

Paul: Well I think it's about putting risk in perspective at the end of the day, isn't it?

Mark: Yes.

Paul: And like you were saying about how friendly people are around the world. I think, again, in the media, in the mainstream media, wilderness is something to be fought or feared, or man versus nature and all that kind of crap. And then you also have this picture of Russia or Iran or Africa or parts of South America as being no-go zones, and then you go there and you get a completely different picture. So yeah, there's a lot of fears out there about all these things.

Mark: Yes, and it doesn't help when a big, powerful...As you said, media is a big, powerful sort of instrument that they spread this doom and gloom, whereas it's more or less the exact opposite. But I don't know, I'm not sure of the audience of your podcast, but maybe your podcast can help a little bit in that way.

Paul: I think so. I think one of the things we're seeing these days is people are moving away from getting their media from the established journals. And we go and find our own maybe more niche interest perhaps, but we can find it now. Years ago if I wanted to do an interview like this and put it out to people I would have had to be part of a radio station or something.

Mark: Exactly. That's amazing isn't it?

Paul: Whereas now I can record it. You can be on your laptop at home, I'm on my computer here at home. I record it, I do the production myself. I know some people have...you know, companies do the production, but I do the production myself. It's not that difficult. And I can publish it to the world, and then people can get that without some intermediary with some sort of agenda, and the agenda is just selling adverts or whatever it is, but there's always an agenda there for a third party putting out some sort of article or media.

And we don't have to go through that pipeline now. We can put it straight. You and I can have this conversation, and then people who are interested in adventures such as yours can listen to it directly, and there doesn't need to be anything else going on there at all.

Mark: That's great, isn't it? I think it's brilliant.

Paul: No it is, it is. It's really good. So to finish off, Mark, I know it's a bit of trite question, but do you have any sort of top camping tips or anything that you do that's maybe a little bit unusual that makes your life a lot more comfortable, whether it's a little routine, or anything that you found on all of your trips or even one of your trips that you go, "I do that, and it made my life a lot more comfortable?" I don't know, it's an open-ended question. But any tips for people that you've learned through experience on all these trips?

Mark: I think for me it's, I'm not an ultra-lightweight guy. I wish I was, but I'm not an ultra-lightweight traveler, I suppose. But one thing I have learned over the course of all these years guiding and things is if you can minimize your gear without compromising safety, then it's the way to go.

Just for example, ever since, I'd say it was on the Missouri-Mississippi I used a...My stove system is a single, I think it's a one and a half liter of pot with a tiny stove and a spoon, and that's my cooking gear. And the gas canister fits in the pot, as does the stove, and the spoon fits there if it's in there. And I put that into a small dry bag and also with my lighter and my scrubber brush for cleaning.

It's a pretty tiny sort of system, I think, and I think it's great. I love using it every time sort of thing. And okay, sometimes you might wish you had certain other implements or a little coffee machine or whatever, and there are situations where you can take that, where maybe you're camping closer to home or you don't have to carry as much gear or whatever, and sure, definitely. But for me, on these long trips, if I can double up on usage of things, I will, and that just means you've got less to carry, and for me it means less to portage.

I think sometimes that takes time to realize, because as I said, you don't want to be caught short on your gear and realize that now you've compromised safety or anything like that. So it might take a couple of trips to sort out what you need and what you don't need. But once you can get that down pat, then life's easier, life's simpler, which is part of the reason of being out there, I guess.

Paul: That's I think again going back to your talk quite a while ago now earlier in the podcast about living on that raft on the Amazon. It's the simplicity, which is part of the beauty of it. It's the simple life, and it's honing it down to its bare minimum. And then having all of that freedom as a result of that.

Mark: Definitely. It's a good thing. We keep going back to simplicity, and for whatever motivation that people have of getting outdoors, I think for everyone it's simplicity which is a big part of that. You don't have to worry about real life for a while, which I think is a good thing.

Paul: Agreed, agreed. So Mark, I really, really appreciate you taking all of this time.

Mark: My pleasure.

Paul: It's been really nice to go on a bit of a deep dive into all of that, and I think that's another great thing about the Longform Podcast format. We can do that here. I know a lot of people listen to these podcasts when they're traveling on public transport or in their cars, and it's just a nice thing for people to be able to listen to over their time. So I'm sure listeners will really appreciate the length of time you've spent with us today. Where can people find you online, Mark, a website, Twitter?

Mark: I'm mostly...I spend probably too much time on Twitter, and it's just my name Mark Kalch, K-A-L-C-H, just for this trip now.

I remember a few years ago I swore I'd never use Instagram. Instagram to me was for selfies and this sort of thing, and I swore I'd never use it, but I've come around. Mostly it probably helps that I finally got a phone that can function with Instagram. Funnily enough, it works for Instagram, but it doesn't actually make phone calls. But I've been using Instagram a lot more now, and I think it's pretty useful as well.

And then Facebook, same sort of thing. I'm MarkKalchPaddler. It just means I can put longer things up, and I share. I try and definitely stay on topics. I'm never tweeting about the current political situation or what I had for breakfast. I keep it paddling [inaudible 01:55:07] and I try and keep it interesting for people in my site that want to follow with the sort of stuff that I do.

Paul: No, I certainly found it interesting. To the extent that I was online in January and February, I was following what you were doing down there in Australia, and that was interesting. That was interesting.

Mark: It was good, it was good fun.

Paul: Cool, and do you still write your blog? Do you still blog, or it it more social that you post on now?

Mark: You know what happened? My website got hacked.

Paul: Oh, really?

Mark: By probably some 13-year-old kid from one of the Gulf States. I didn't know how to unhack it with my technical skills, so it went down. So now I just...I do have two websites. I have 7rivers7continents.com, where people can look back on all the rivers I've done, the Amazon, the Missouri-Mississippi and the Volga, and then also a bit of this Australian one, and there's a lot of stories a lot of photos on there, so that's probably my main one.

My vanity website, MarkKalch.com, I occasionally put things up on there. I sort of sometimes think about getting back into a bit of blogging, but we'll see. At the moment I'm having a fair bit of fun with just Instagram.

And what I like about Instagram as well is there is possibly a word limit, but I've written some fairly long sort of, a few paragraphs at least explaining the image that I've put on there. And I felt, at least for the last few months, that's worked really well, because you can put a few words to a nice image, and it gives people a good idea. So for the moment that seems to be working.

Paul: That makes sense, that little micro [inaudible 01:57:13]. Another previous podcast guest, actually Leon McCarron, he's just walked down through Jordan, and he's been...

Mark: Yeah, I've been following him.

Paul: You follow him as well, yeah?

Mark: Yes.

Paul: He posts quite regularly on Instagram, and that seems to be working nicely for him as well, just doing these photo and quite a long description. They're just nice to...You can follow on what he's doing, it's educational, it gives you an insight into where he is. It's great.

Mark: It seems to be working well for him as well. He's got a bit of "Humans of New York." Certainly that "Humans of New York" proved very popular. I've enjoyed following his photos, and certainly the descriptions add a lot to it.

Paul: So I'll put links to all your social profiles.

Mark: Lovely.

Paul: I'll put them in the show notes on the podcast at PaulKirtley.co.uk, so listeners can find them there and hit you up and say hi and also look back on the previous seven-rivers trips and hopefully future seven-river trips as well and keep in touch with what you're doing. I certainly will be. I find it fascinating. Just keep doing it, because it's inspirational. So thank you very much for sharing it all, Mark, it's much appreciated.

Mark: Cheers. Thanks Paul, thanks for having me on.

Paul: My pleasure, my pleasure. And thanks again to Mark for spending so much time today sharing all of those stories and all of those insights with us. Much appreciated, and I hope you enjoyed that conversation as much as I did.

Please do check out Mark's website, and hit him up on Twitter or follow him on Instagram. You'll find a link to his profile via the show notes at PaulKirtley.co.uk under the podcast episode 14. You can find that easily on my blog. And if you don't already subscribe to this podcast, please do subscribe via your favorite podcasting app, or you can subscribe directly via my blog. You can subscribe to the RSS feed there for this podcast or you can sign up for email notifications where I will send you notifications when there are new posts on my blog.

So whichever way you want to keep in touch with this podcast, you can do. And again, just to remind you, as I mentioned at the beginning of this podcast, if you could share your favorite episode with people on a social platform that would also appreciate this podcast, then that would be much appreciated. It will help me and it will help the guests who I've had on so far and the guest that I have on in the future. And also, please, please, please leave a rating and/or a review on one of the podcasting platforms that you use, if you do so, in particular, iTunes or the Apple podcasting app or Stitcher. It really does help raise the profile of this podcast, and that in turn helps me attract more guests, which is good for you.

So it's a virtuous circle in that respect, and it builds and builds and builds, and I really do want to focus on getting more great guests onto my podcast now and into your ears so that you can enjoy all of those insights and learn from it. That's all about sharing information, sharing experiences. That's one of the things I really love about this podcast. So thank you for listening. It's been quite a long one today, but very very interesting, and I will speak to you on Episode 15 before too long. Take care. Bye-bye.