

#AskPaulKirtley Episode 94 Transcript

[00:00:00,000]Hello and welcome to episode 94 of Ask Paul Kirtley. It's been a while and the main thing I've been working on in recent months is completing the final work on my second book, which is now finalized. It will be going to print before too long and it will be available later this year. If you want to pre-order a copy, there's a link below where you can pre-order a signed copy that will come directly from me. So you can do that via the link below, if you're interested. And let's get on with today. Today we are going to be talking about bushcraft camping outfits and tweaking them for different seasons. What can be learned from the woodcraft pioneers, traveling with expensive gear and woodland envy, and how to gain access to your own woodland? And advice for bushcraft careers. Slightly different question to perhaps the one we've had in the past. We've had a few questions along those lines in the past, but let's get into it.

[00:01:29,080]Welcome, welcome, and it's a beautiful early spring day here in the south of England. It's good to be back with another in this series, and thank you for the questions coming. And this one, the first one we're going to cover, is actually a response to one of my newsletter emails. And if you're not on my email distribution, you can do so. Again, I'll put a link below, a couple of links there for you to have a look at today, but I'll put a link below. You can get onto my email distribution. That's a bunch of curated emails that come out over time in a sensible order of all of my best material off my website. At paulkirtley.co.

[00:02:10,356]Juk and this one is about a bushcraft camping outfit and Matt's replying to the email that went out and he said,

[00:02:19,110]Thanks for the valuable information. So I was just thinking, is this all season gear or would it be tweaked for different seasons? And yeah, Matt. The straightforward, quick answer is yes. It would be tweaked for different seasons.

[00:02:36,800]That bushcraft camping outfit that's linked in that email that is one of the I guess sort of most popular articles on my site. Um, that is really three-season, temperate woodland outfitting that's really what that's meant to be. Which is what a lot of people are going to be doing. They're not necessarily going to be out in the winter. They're going to be out from the spring through the summer into the autumn or fall.

[00:03:05,580]And they don't want to be taking too much gear with them. But they want to take a useful outfit with them that's going to be good for camping out in the woodland. and also having tools and equipment for doing bushcraft that's really what that bushcraft camping outfit is about, and it's by no means meant to be— you know, prescriptive like you must have these particular items, you know, particular brand items, particular models. It's more about general principles of what's going to work in that time of year. Now, tweaks really then come about due to the changing seasons, so that's the more useful answer to you. Right, so what are the tweaks? It's all well and good knowing that there are some

tweaks, but you want to know what those tweaks are.

[00:03:48,730] So, bearing in mind that that is a three-season outfit, and it's really designed to be able to cover at least the shoulder seasons when they're not too cold. So, the sort of early spring and the late autumn when it's not too cold. A good quality three-season sleeping bag in there, but if you're out really really early in the season or really late in the season, and you're starting to get some really cold nights, or you're having some really cold nights still at the end of the winter, the beginning of the spring, you're probably going to want a four-season sleeping bag in that kit rather than the three-season sleeping bag. So that's one thing that's going to need to change.

[00:04:23,130] And certainly, if you're out in the winter, you're going to need a winter sleeping bag that is suitable for the winter that you're going to have where you are. The interesting thing is you can be in the northern temperate in the UK and Western Europe, and you'd be fine with a four-season bag that would do you in the shoulder seasons as well if it's cold. The temperate, particularly the north end of the temperate in North America, you're probably going to need something warmer than that, because you get that continental cold, whereas where over in Western Europe here in the UK and obviously onto Western continental Europe, you've got the benefit of the Gulf Stream, you've got warm water coming up from the Gulf of Mexico, you've got warm air coming up from the Gulf of Mexico and coming across the North Atlantic.

[00:05:07,200] It's a lot warmer for the same latitude here than it is over in North America. For example, we were running a northwards winter experience out in Ontario in January and we had temperatures down to -35 overnight. Now you're not going to cope with that in a four-season UK or Western European sleeping bag. You're going to need a so-called five-season bag or an Arctic bag that's rated down to those conditions. But that's kind of getting out of the remit of that particular outfit, because there's a lot of other things that would need to change there as well for a truly sort of Arctic temperature. condition trip— not that we were in the Arctic in Ontario, in fact, we were further south than where I am in the UK, right now— but because you get that continental cold and this year, um, we had this collapsing polar which brought a lot of cold air down further south than perhaps it normally is.

[00:06:04,800] We had minus 35 nights rather than minus 20 nights, but even a bag that would be good for winter in the UK is not going to be warm enough for that situation. So you're always going to have to tweak your sleeping kit. And we've talked about sleep. Bags in previous asphalt are curtly, so I'm not going to go into that in any more great depth here. Because you can go back and look at some of the previous asphalt curtly, I'll link here in the cards on YouTube, I'll link below to that previous episode, because I know we had a question about sleeping bags— not that many episodes back in ASP or Curtly. So I'll leave you to it to investigate that a bit further. That's a route you want to go down.

[00:06:42,190] But in terms of that kit maintaining its functionality for the geography, that's

really designed for a sleeping bag, is something that you're going to have to tweak for the winter and possibly for the summer, because maybe that three-season bag that does you in early March and late October is going to be too warm in the summer. You can probably downgrade to a lightweight summer sleeping bag, you know, a two-season bag in the summer months as well. and that would be something— maybe you wanted to do— so that you could reduce the weight of your pack in the summer, and that maybe it would allow you then to carry a bit more water for the same weight, which could be good in the warmer months of the year.

[00:07:16,400] So that's something that you could tweak as well. And then the other main thing that you're going to need to tweak, as well as water capacity potentially in the summer, is the ability to keep yourself warm in terms of clothes. Again, same sort of argument as with the sleeping bag in the um in the winter months— you're probably going to need more layers. You're going to start thinking about putting some wool long johns on as well as maybe a wool base layer on your upper body. You're going to need a thicker jacket. You may be going to need an overcoat or a mother'ship jacket for when you're stationary um in really cold conditions. And that, combined with a larger sleeping bag for winter conditions, even in the northern temperate, means that you're probably going to need to upgrade to a larger rucksack.

[00:08:02,170] Because in that article was a Sabre 45, so it's a 45 liters. But then there's also side pockets on there, which are 10–12 liters each. So it's really closer to a 65-liter rucksack. It's just some of the equipment's in the side pocket. So, if you're going for a winter trip where you've got a much bulkier sleeping bag, you've got more warm layers in there, and you're probably going to want to take a bit more food as well, then you're going to need a larger sleeping um—sorry, larger rucksack— so that you can get all that sleeping kit and clothing. and food in there as well, um, maybe more the sort of thing that I've used for ski touring in Norway and would be a good starting point.

[00:08:47,300] So one of those sort of Berghaus Crusader style, um, rucksacks, maybe without the side pockets, depending on what you're doing, but you know, still larger main compartment that can get that sleeping bag in, can get those bulkier extra layers in. Those are the main things I would say that you need to you need to tweak based off that three season kit.

[00:09:09,830] Alrighty, next question. What can be learned from the woodcraft pioneers and this is a question via Twitter from Eelke and he says, Dear Paul, what can we learn from classic woodcraft pioneers like Seaton Beard and Baden Powell? Do you see a connection to modern bushcraft?

[00:09:30,670] Absolutely, there's a connection to modern bushcraft. There's kind of a direct line through some of those guys, and there was a linkage between some of those guys as well, particularly Ernest Thompson Scott and Baden-Powell.

[00:09:46,200]The early scouting movement on both sides of the Atlantic, there are connections there, there are threads that run through that. There are influences that run across from the Woodcraft movement, which was set on and others in North America, and Baden Powell over in the UK, and of course there was an influence from the Boer War with Baden-Powell and the scouting was military scouting that he did and he wrote. A book on military scouting, but then he also wrote a book called 'Scouting for Boys' which was aimed at a younger audience, and he was influenced by other scouts who had come across from North America as well, like Frederick Russell Burnham. And that influence came through Baden Powell as well. And then, in terms of it coming through into the sort of more modern bushcraft movement, absolutely.

[00:10:40,060]There's a lineage in North America through the woodcraft movement into the sort of wilderness living skills movement, and certainly there's a lineage through from scouting into into modern bushcraft. Lisa Fenton has expanded on this a lot in some of her work. In her PhD, you should go and read her PhD thesis if you are interested in this stuff. Also, the podcast that I did with quite a few years ago now I can link to those as well for those that want to explore those in more detail. But about how all of this feeds through along with other influences— so indigenous skills, etc feeding through into what we now call bushcraft. Don't forget there is, you know, an expedition warfare element to the influence onto modern.

[00:11:28,750]Bushcraft as well, which partly comes through Baden-Powell and not really through Seton, but certainly through Baden-Powell. So yeah, there are through lines and interconnections of that web, so to speak, you know, late 19th century, early. early 20th century, into you know, modern scouting into modern bushcraft and right the way through. So yeah, absolutely. And so what can we learn from them? Well, I think keeping things simple. I think there's a tendency to focus a lot on equipment. I mean, we talk about equipment. We just had a question about equipment. But really, it's about the skills. Knowledge of nature is about keeping things simple. They didn't have all the modern materials back then that we have now, and some of those are useful to us, some of them are not necessarily necessary.

[00:12:18,410]Some of the traditional materials for equipment are still just as useful now as they were in the past, and things will last longer. But then we've also got the benefit of modern materials. Clearly, the skills are the same now as they were a hundred years ago. You know, the woodcraft skills, the ability to identify trees. If you look through Seton's woodcraft, book which is fantastic, there's a large section of that book about identifying trees. I think that's one of the things that we forget about. That people get fixated on knives and axes and you know, cooking steaks on fires and that's all nice and pleasant, but really the deeper knowledge is in in the knowledge of nature. And that's certainly very much there in the works of people like Ernest Thomson Seton.

[00:13:05,280]So I think we can look back at that work and realize that. That's actually the core of what we should be trying to study. Studying animal tracks, tracking, you know,

those scouting skills are very much part of. The wider bushcraft skill set, and actually, once you get past the the basics of bushcraft, really, you want to be spending time on the things that actually take a long time to learn well and that's things like tracking, tree and plant identification, wild foods, etc etc raising the standard of your craft work beyond the real rudimentary basics which a lot of people don't really move beyond. If you look at those early woodcraft and scouting woodcraft and camping books, that's all there in those books. And so those standards still apply right now.

[00:13:53,870]Nature is the same. OK, some things have been depleted and damaged. There's been ecological damage done in the last hundred years, but fundamentally, the species are the same, nature is the same, and the skill set is the same. I think modern bushcraft and survival people tend to focus a little bit too much on equipment sometimes. And I would encourage people to delve into the knowledge of nature as much as possible. And certainly, once you start looking at those older books, that really is the emphasis there. Yeah, good question, Elke. Thank you. And I'll link to those other resources below, as I mentioned. All right, next one. This is via the Speakpipe voicemail system on my website, which is one of the best ways of leaving a question. Twitter with hashtag.

[00:14:42,860]Ask Paul Kirtley, like Eelke did, or this way.

[00:14:48,840]Good morning, Paul. I have a question regarding, my name is André, I'm from Canada, and I have a question regarding when you're traveling. I know you have a pretty expensive knife, and we all do have expensive equipment. What do you do when you travel abroad, like when you come to Canada or you go to Sweden or Finland or Norway? Do you put them, did you check them in? Do you have any issue because it's either an axe or a knife? I would just like to know if ever I travel what to do when I leave. Really love to bring my own stuff. Thank you.

[00:15:26,850]Yeah, that's a good question. I was just looking up there. There's a greater spotted woodpecker up there calling, which is nice.

[00:15:34,350]So, question from Andre about kits. So, fundamentally, yeah, there's no issue— sort of legally or with airlines— if you put things like knives and axes into hold luggage. That's where they should be. They certainly shouldn't be in your cabin luggage. They should be in your hold luggage. Indeed, people will travel with firearms, you know, internationally in hold luggage. Um, you know, if they're doing hunting trips, for example, so knives and axes are fine. You want to make sure they're packed properly so they don't damage your other equipment, your clothing, that don't damage the bag. So you might want to wrap them in something. Um, yeah, you know, you're an adult, you'll understand that. But yeah, there's no legal issue with with taking those things.

[00:16:20,870]Um, and yeah, you might want to make sure that you have sufficient insurance to cover the value of what you have. And it isn't just about an expensive knife, but if you just think about, you know, what your clothing might add up to for a trip,

you know, good waterproof, some good warm layers, you know, various other things. Um, you know, your equipment might add up to a pretty sum, even before you start thinking about custom knives or anything like that. So make sure you have enough insurance on your travel insurance to cover the luggage that you're taking. That's always sensible. I would make sure that your luggage is well tagged as well. Make sure that it's got at least two tags on it. So it doesn't get lost.

[00:17:07,190]Make sure that when you put the luggage tags on from the airline, you don't just put the big, long strip tag on. You also take one of the little barcodes off and stick that on the luggage. Because then, if the main tag comes off, you've still got the barcode on your luggage. These days are also putting things like Apple AirTags into their luggage so they can track them and there are other tracking um devices that you can buy as well that you can put into luggage for for tracking so that help you keep keep track of where your luggage is so even if the airline loses it or they say they've lost it, you know where it is

[00:17:42,920]and so all of those things are good precautionary measures and but fundamentally there's no issue with traveling with with the tools and then the other thing you really want to consider is where you're going so you know there are some places in the world where there's absolutely no issue with people going through your luggage and stealing equipment and, Whereas other parts Of the world, there are. So, if you're traveling to North America, so if you're traveling to Canada or the USA, for me, I don't worry about things going missing. If I'm traveling to Western Europe or Scandinavia, I'm not worrying about things going missing. If I travel to Africa, then I'm a bit more concerned about stuff going missing. So I might then be taking a Mora knife rather than you know an expensive custom knife.

[00:18:34,260]Because places like Johannesburg, for example, have a reputation for people going through your luggage. Particularly if it's obvious, you know, they're not going to go through everything, but if they open it and they see something there and it's easily stealable and tucked away, it might disappear. So I'm very wary about taking expensive stuff to Africa. And you know, going back to the previous conversation about woodcraft skills and the previous conversation about gear. Uh, at the end of the day, for a lot of trips, all you need is a Mora and a Barco Laplander anyway. So, you know, particularly on those those destinations where things might be a little more corrupt, let's put it that way, or a little less policed in terms of the security around them. Those things, I would be thinking about leaving out irreplaceable items and making sure it's a cheaper, certainly more replaceable item that's in there that might be easily stolen. So those are my considerations for traveling with expensive gear.

[00:19:49,900]Um okay, another voicemail question. This one's from Dawn. Welcome back, Dawn.

[00:19:59,440]Hi Paul, I'm Dawn. I live in a big city. I have a garden, which is great, which means I can practice a few things in my garden, but what I really want is to get access to

a book. Woodland so I do get a bit of woodland envy when I see your videos and I have approached local woodland owners and they have invariably said no, that they don't want me to use it. So the nearest woodlands to me are about 25 minutes away. Forestry Commission is a non-starter because that's about an hour and a half away. It's the nearest Forestry Commission woodlands. That's not going to happen. So I wondered if you've got any advice or suggestions on how to go about negotiating getting access to private woodland and working with the landowners' comfort zones, really. So anything you've got to offer on that would be really, really helpful. Thank you.

[00:21:00,910]Okay. That's a fairly common question, Dawn. I'm sorry, these sessions give you woodland envy, and these aren't my woods. These are woods that I pay for the use of. We run our courses here in the south of England, a lot of the frontier bushcraft. The core courses that we run are run from here. It's a large estate in the south of England, and we have a commercial relationship with them. You don't necessarily have to pay for woodland, but I think it highlights right from the start that there needs to be some sort of mutual benefit.

[00:21:35,250]Um, for these things to work, sometimes or at least, a landowner to give you the time of day or to consider it. It's like people who manage woodlands, people who own woodland landowners. They've got a lot of things to think about. We've all got lots of things to think about. It's not just landowners, but you know, in particular, they've got all the stuff the rest of us have got to think about. And then they've got woodland management, keeping fences up to date, you know, whatever it is, whatever the size of the land. There's things to think about and there's things to do. Then you turning up saying, 'I don't know me, I'm a stranger, but can I start wandering around your land and doing things that you don't quite understand?' That's just another thing for them to think about.

[00:22:20,500]And it's very very easy to go. I don't have time or bandwidth to think about that. No, because that's easier than trying to contemplate what you're asking sometimes, particularly when they're busy. So, you know, that's just part. of the human condition right it's not necessarily specific to to landowners you have to kind of cut through and really quite quickly explain what's it for them and if you don't know what's in it for them you need to have a think about what's in it for them so for me it was quite straightforward you know in terms of me having access to this land the the value proposition for them is quite straightforward i have a bushcraft school i would like to run courses this is what we do um we'll pay you and this is what we need in return so there is a there's a value exchange there okay um but equally it doesn't that doesn't have to be the value exchange the value exchange can be

[00:23:16,170]i'll help you um pick up litter i'll be a set of eyes on the ground i see that you you know i can see that people are coming over your fence here and camping in your woods and you know i can be eyes on the ground or you know i'll help you and If you're doing rhododendron clearance, I'll help you with that, you know, a few weekends a year. or Um, Those tree protectors all need cleaning up that make the woods look a mess. I can

spend a couple of weekends cleaning those up for you and stacking them where you can take them away or where you'd like them, if you like. Those are just some ideas.

[00:23:51,110]Equally, if you don't know what the landowner needs, you could say, 'Do you need some help in doing, you know, I'm happy to volunteer to help.' You know, whatever it is, and in return, maybe I could spend a couple of weekends just camping. The other thing I think I've heard a lot of people do is build a relationship first, rather than going in with fires, axes, knives, cutting, chopping, building, shelters. Because that sounds quite destructive. And if there's one word that worries landowners, it's fire. Particularly if they're a woodland landowner, they don't want their wood burned down they don't want fire damage etc etc and you understand that i'm sure dawn so what you might do is go in and say i'm interested in photographing wildflowers I'm interested in learning more birdsong and I'd just like to camp in the woods and listen to the birdsong, record the birdsong.

[00:24:53,600]I'm interested in nature. Watching. I'd like to take pictures of badgers. Whatever it is, it's less invasive and sounds less destructive. Then, when you get reputation as being a trustworthy person, just say, 'Look.' You know, I'm camping in there a couple of weekends a year. Um, I've brought out two, you know, bin bags full of old coke cans that I found down there, and beer cans that I found down there from 20 years ago. They've been there for 20 years. Um, I'll keep doing that for you. I was just wondering, is it okay if I just have a little campfire when I'm camping? You know, obviously, you know, I'll make sure that everything's safe. And by the way, I've done this. You know, bushcraft course. You know, I can.

[00:25:33,336]If you want, you can come up to the woods at a time that's you know suitable to you, and I'll show you what I do. How I clear the ground. How I have a small fire. How I make it safe afterwards. How I make sure that the ground's damp and cold. So that I'm not risking setting fire to anything, and certainly, when I leave, there's nothing there left that's going to cause any issues after I've gone. If you build a relationship like that over time, I think you might have more success than sort of knocking on the door saying, 'Hi, can I come into your woods and do all these things that you don't know anything about or maybe have some suspicion about or concerns about.' Especially if it's not a good time for them.

[00:26:18,160]So I would say think about what the value exchange could be and start with a small ask that seems quite inobtrusive, non-destructive to them, and then you can probably build a relationship from there. I did write an article quite a few years ago about how to gain access. There are a few ideas in there. I've probably covered most of them in this um off the top of my head answer, but I'll link to that as well so you can have a look at that. Dawn but hopefully that's helpful and let me know how you get on. Okay. Advice for bushcraft careers. And this is from Simon. By the way, a couple of people commented on the fact that I'm always on my phone during these sessions.

[00:27:01,830]It's like the questions are on my phone. Like, where do you think the

recordings are? I'm in the woods. I'm listening to the recording. To remind myself of the question. Thank you. Thank you. I know I often put the audio on over the top of the video when I edit this on my computer, but I have got the questions on my phone, which is why I have my phone in my hand.

[00:27:25,750]Hi Paul, Simon from Northern Ireland here. I've recently started listening to the podcast again after not doing so for a few years. really is a way of winding away the mind-numbingly boring hours of my job, which requires a lot of driving about the country. Um, I'm really not enjoying my current job, but I've always had an interest in the sort of thing you do— leading expeditions and teaching bushcraft, teaching wilderness skills. My question is: if you've got any advice for someone looking to get into that sort of thing. I've got no formal qualifications. I've never been on a bushcraft or or any sort of course— whether a course aimed at teaching you to be an instructor or just aimed at anyone. But I do have — sort of a baseline of skills from many years of doing bushcraft and mountaineering. Rock climbing, a bit of first aid, so, you know, there's something to work on there. Do you have any advice on ways I can get qualifications, what I need to get qualified in? And even just if it's worth doing, if there's availability or interest or opportunities there for that sort of work. And any other advice you might have. Thanks. Cool. Thank you, Simon.

[00:28:51,540]We've had questions like that in the past, not necessarily exactly the same as Simon's just asked, and it's a while since we've had a question like that. We've had questions in the past about setting up bushcraft schools, questions about changing careers and things in the past, but not for quite some time. So I think it's worth revisiting that because that could be on a number of people's minds. I'm just going to have a sip of coffee, by the way. My mouth's getting a bit dry. And you can support these sessions with the buy me a coffee link below, which is always appreciated. Um. So yeah, there's a number of different levels to what you're asking there, Simon. So let's start off with qualifications for teaching bushcraft— you don't need any.

[00:29:42,620]There's no national governing body for bushcraft, there are no regulatory requirements from, say, the health and safety executive or any other body that require you to have any. Qualifications in teaching bushcraft, so you know teaching somewhere like this in the woods in England or Northern Ireland or wherever you're based, there's no requirement for you to have a qualification in terms of legal requirements for you to gain insurance from an insurance company. They might ask to see what your qualifications are and they may grant or deny insurance. Based on whether they think you're a liability or not. And that could come down to whether or not you've got suitable qualifications and/ or experience. That's at their discretion, of course, and not something that I can.

[00:30:34,540]Comment on meaningfully any further than I've done already, and also if you're working for somebody else, so, for example, you wanted to try and gain freelance work with a company, they might ask, what qualifications do you have, what experience do you have. Equally, if you wanted to work with kids, as well as the usual background checks

that you would need for working with young people, a local authority or a school may ask to see what your qualifications are or they may ask what your experience is. They're more likely to ask for qualifications and insurance and references at that point. If you're if you're dealing with local authorities, mental health organizations or schools, for example. And then, so in terms, there are qualifications.

[00:31:26,210] So even though there's no requirement for qualifications, there are some certifications and there's a difference between certification and qualification. There are a number of different certifications that give you some sort of piece of paper that says that you have a certain level of competency. So there are things like the IOL Basic Bushcraft Competency Award. There are schemes run by people like John Ryder so they're courses but they have been set against an external framework. It's normally the NCFE, the Northern County Further Education organization, who will set them against a set of parameters and give them a level. Those levels carry across, so in terms of the amount of hours that you need to put in, the amount of study, the level of academic thinking or the academic level that they're pitched at, and they're normally level two, level three, level four.

[00:32:28,650] You can look into those in more detail. I'll link to John's stuff, and John was the pioneer of that in the UK of making outdoor bushcraft awards. Linked to the NCFE framework. Other people have copied him since, but John was the pioneer and I would say John is still the best person to go to for those. So I'll link to those. So if you need a qualification, you might want to look at those. Experience can be gained more broadly, of course, and I would suggest that the most valuable experience would be working for somebody else. So, doing some sort of apprenticeship with an existing bushcraft provider, so that you understand not just the bushcraft side of things, but also understand the logistical side of things.

[00:33:22,090] You understand how things work, but equally, if you went to a bushcraft school and said, 'Please can I come and work for you? So I can learn everything from you and go and set up on my own most people wouldn't give you a job based on that. um because that again a little bit like the question before about land ownership and gaining access it's about a value exchange you know you also want to be able to express what you can offer someone else and it isn't you know particularly if you're looking for paid employment um an employer wants to know what you're going to deliver what you're going to be able to give rather than just what you're interested in taking as well as being paid and that's not the way value exchanges work generally isn't about what you can take plus take a wage it's about what you can give you know enthusiasm bring your existing experience to bear etc etc.

[00:34:21,870] Um, When it comes to leading expeditions, and most people involved in bushcraft education do not lead expeditions, myself and a few other people in the industry that have been in the industry for a long while do lead expeditions. Um, or they work with people who have the requisite experience and qualifications to lead expeditions. You need to have the right qualifications, and often there is a legal requirement. So, with mountain

walking and mountain expeditions, there are requisite mountaineering or mountain walking leadership qualifications that you are required to have legally. And particularly with things like canoeing, you also need to have canoe leadership and potentially canoe coaching qualifications, depending on what level people are when they come to you and what you're doing with them. And again, those are legal requirements.

[00:35:30,230]And certainly when you go to your insurance company and say, 'We are going to do these trips,' they are going to want copies of your certifications. They're going to want all of that stuff— they might need references from people, etc., etc. So there is all of that. When you are taking people into wild country, you have a higher duty of care than if you are just there on your own or if you are there with other people. And you are legally on the hook if things happen. happen. Despite what North Americans do when they make you sign waivers and things there is still a duty of care from the leader to the party. The leader has more experience both in terms of the activity as well as the leadership and the decision-making, and they have brought that to bear.

[00:36:19,420]They should have qualifications that prove that they can do that before they start taking anybody out. So I've got a raft of leadership qualifications that are relevant to what I do. And I also work with other people who have a raft of leadership qualifications that are relevant to what we do. We didn't just wake up. Up one morning and decide that we fancied running some expeditions in Canada, for example, there's a whole lifetime of experience that has to come to the fore. And more generally, you know, if you If you want to teach something, you've actually got to have something to teach in the first place. And so, you know, without trying to sound negative, it's like.

[00:37:05,370]Just start with teaching what you know and then you have to develop your own skills and knowledge either by working on your own, working under a mentor, or working for someone else you're a part of an organization like I say. For example, I did a bunch of bushcraft courses to start off with as well as having a lot of my own experience in the hills, mountain biking, hiking overseas, backpacking trips before I even got into bushcraft. Then I did a bunch of courses with Ray Mears and the people that work for Ray Mears. I started assisting and being a camp assistant for Ray Mears and Juha Rankinen and some of the other people who work for Woodlaw. Then I worked my way up.

[00:37:48,320]I became an instructor at Woodlaw, I became course director at Woodlaw, and I had a full-time job. And then, after doing that for a number of years, I left and I started up Frontier Bushcraft. I started Frontier Bushcraft 15 years ago. And then, during my time at Frontier Bushcraft, I've also worked a lot with people. Who have qualifications in other areas, some of which I've been working on at the time. So for example, working with Ray Goodwin, one of the preeminent canoe coaches in the UK, I was working all my canoe qualifications while I was initially working with Ray. Goodwin. I brought my qualifications up to a level where I could run things as well, but we're still running things jointly. And Ray only recently retired from our overseas trips because he's in his 70s now.

[00:38:30,740] We still work together on the river space trips. I've also worked with with very experienced first aid trainers, worked with very experienced people in terms of what we did on the forest hunter course, in terms of firearms training, deer stalking certification, and evaluation— all of those things brought that experience in externally and worked and collaborated with people who have the experience, the lure of the north, and collaboration the northwards winter experience we're bringing. Dave and Kai Marone's experience in, and my experience of winter travel in, and running a winter program in Canada that relies on both of our joint experience there, and again, when I speak to my insurance company, they want to know. If lure of the north, have got insurance, what their background is. I've got to write all of this down.

[00:39:22,550] I've got to share risk assessments. I've got to share my experience. Writers will then make a decision about whether or not they insure us. And then, I mean, clearly they do, but then also what we're going to pay. So it isn't just as simple. It might seem like it when I'm sat here saying we do this, we do that, we do that. I've been involved in bushcraft education for nearly 25 years and that's on top of a lot of experience I had already. But that doesn't mean to say that's where you have to start. You can grow into it. But I would say don't teach beyond your knowledge level. and try and find a good mentor or a good organization that you can be part of, that you can push your enthusiasm into and you can gain experience from working for them so it's mutually beneficial.

[00:40:14,280] I would say that's the best way to start, rather than if you've got very little experience, you've got no qualifications. It's very difficult to start out on your own because one of the strengths of the bushcraft world but also one of the weaknesses is that you don't need any qualifications. So if you, if you start up on your own, as Simon's Bushcraft next week, you're competing with me. You're competing with other people who are established in Northern Ireland. You're competing with other people in the UK. You're competing for attention with people internationally. You know, you've got to think about. Do you need a social media presence? Do you need a YouTube presence? How do people find out about you? You've got to do all that on top of delivering on skills.

[00:40:55,710] You've got to build a reputation and it takes time, like any starting business, takes time. There's this old adage that says, 'You need enough cash to last three years.' Most businesses fail within three years. That's probably true. Partly because they run out of cash, but it can take longer. Going into the financial side, the last part of your question, about what are the opportunities at the moment, I would say the opportunities are probably a little bit lower than they were in the past. Because, um, Bushcraft's become quite diffuse. You know, back in the day when I started, there was Ray Mears on television, and that actually fed down very strongly into his business, into his course business, and also other course businesses in the UK.

[00:41:42,510] Because the Woodlaw course business was full, so other people like Wood Smoke and other schools that were around at the time got business, partly because some people didn't want To travel to where Woodlaw was based in the south of England, but also

a lot of the courses were full as well. There's a lot more schools around now. There's less top line stuff on television than there used to be. There's a lot of survival attainment. But there isn't the bushcraft education content on television anymore. There's lots of bushcraft education content on YouTube. But for a lot of people, that's enough. Combined with going out and doing their own. Camping the bushcraft content on that's available for free on YouTube is often enough, and so they don't pay for education, they don't pay for courses, they don't want to do that, and then there's also

[00:42:31,870] these days of whether or not people can afford to go and do courses, because unlike the mid-2000s when I was working with Ray Mears, and the courses were full, and there was an 18 months, etc before the financial crisis in 2000, 2008, when there was quite a big drop off in business after that, and then we were going quite nicely towards the end of the 2010s, and you know, 2018, 2019, it was quite steady, there was good demand. But then you had COVID, and a lot of people changed their habits about what they like doing. People picked up new hobbies. And then, after COVID, lots of people wanted to go outside. But then, you know, we saw big.

[00:43:11,250] a sort of hump of demand after COVID, but then it dropped off again because interest rates went up, inflation went up, and the cost of living went up. Interest rates went up, and demand so certainly for sort of discretionary spend for the likes of bushcraft courses went down, and our costs went up at the same time. Yeah, it's been quite a topsy-turvy few years since about 2019, and then, of course, at the moment, as I record, you know, we have this war in the middle east and pushing oil prices up, fuel prices are going up, stock markets are going down, people's wealth— the wealth effect— for people who've got investments, you know, they feel less wealthy because the cost of things are going up, the value of things going down,

[00:43:58,420] and then they're talking about putting interest rates up again, and mortgage rates have already gone up, because mortgage rates are priced off the the interest rate market, not what the Bank of England does, so or not— not solely on what the Bank of England does, it's more the expectations of what the Bank of England are going to do, so yeah, it's quite a difficult time. It's quite difficult— it would be quite a tricky time— just to launch into running your own business in this field, and like any outdoor education. It doesn't necessarily pay that well. You've got to do it because you love it. Um, you know, and I'm not just talking about bushcraft here. I'm talking about you know, mountaineering, mountain guiding, rock climbing, you know, mountain biking, climbing, mountain biking, climbing.

[00:44:43,010] What's that? That sounds fun. Mountain biking, leadership, all those sorts of things where you know, people have spent time and effort to get experience, get qualifications, and be able to take people out and train them and give them experiences. None of this stuff, whether it's freelance, or you work for an outdoor center, or you work for yourself. None of this stuff pays particularly well, even if you get it right. You know, I'm not trying to be negative—I just want you to think about this in in the round, all the different

considerations and anybody else that's listening to this. I hope it's useful and also understand where we're at at the moment in the current landscape.

[00:45:21,980] I would say it's quite tricky for newcomers at the moment because of the economic backdrop, the fact that you've got some strong established players, and people's discretionary income isn't fantastic at the moment. So I would suggest, if you really want to, maybe if you could get at least a part-time role. Even if it's volunteering with an established provider, just to get a taste of what it's like to get your foot in the door, and then and then go from there. Um, bearing in mind all the different considerations that that I am that I have outlined in this answer. So hopefully that's useful. And um, yeah, that brings us to the end of this session, five questions. As I say, my new book, Core Bushcraft, as I record this in late March 2026, my new book, Core Bushcraft, we've just signed off on the design.

[00:46:21,250] Going to the printers in the next few months, and then it will be distributed out to where it needs to be and before it is published, so we're looking at late summer early autumn for the publication date. It might be a slightly different date in different regions, just because of the physical logistics of getting quantities of books. Places before they're available and in the stores, and it will be available in all good bookstores. It'll be available on Amazon and I earn a small amount if you buy it from a bookstore or Amazon because they make the retail margin and I get a royalty from the publisher based on the publisher's profit that from selling it. Whereas I also buy the books at trade and I can sell them at retail.

[00:47:08,020] So if you want a signed copy directly from me, I will make the full retail margin on that and that actually pays me a lot more than what I got paid to write the book. So my success with the book is nice to have the book out there, but you know, being honest about the economics of it. Um, you can support me and my work most by ordering a signed copy directly from me. Now, I will ask you to pay the postage for that, depending on where you are, the website works out. Um, what the postage will be based on the level of shipping that you want— whether it's tracked or not— where you are in the world.

[00:47:44,740] Um, but then that means that I can make some money on the book, having spent several years writing it and taking the photographs and putting it together. So I always say books are a bargain. The amount of work that goes into them, you know, people like John Ryder, that I know as well, who've put out some fantastic books on tracking in recent years, and there's a lot a lot of work that goes into these things. You're paying, you know, 20 or 30 pounds, euros, dollars, whatever you're paying for them. Um, it's a really inexpensive way of getting a very you know, distilled, concise knowledge set in a tangible form, and you can refer to whenever you want. So, um, on behalf of myself and other people who write. Books in the outdoor field, particularly when it's quite niche and you know practical stuff. Um, we always appreciate you buying direct from us if we're selling direct. So, link below. You can pre-order now, and I will ship those out as soon as I get books later in the year. And yeah, appreciate your attention. Appreciate your support. And I look forward to seeing you on another Ask Paul Kirtley before too long. Take care. Cheers.

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