

#AskPaulKirtley Episode 88 Transcript

[00:00:00] In this episode of Ask Paul Kirtley, we are going to look at adze use in bushcraft, a couple of bow drill questions, how to get ready for a Canadian canoe expedition, and what skills do I want to learn about.

[00:00:41] Welcome, welcome to episode 88 of Ask Paul Kirtley and it's great to be back with another Ask Paul Kirtley and it's great to be having questions coming in again that I can answer, so thank you for the questions. If you want to support this, remember there's a link below you can buy me a coffee-I always like to sit here having a coffee while I answer these questions, and You can support these sessions with the link below for a really small amount, and any support is really, really appreciated. Alright, let's get into the questions for today. This one is via Twitter. And the question is: 'Hi, Paul, many thanks for your excellent content. I have a short question. Is there a use case for an adze in bushcrafting?

[00:01:33] Best regards Johannes.' So, for those of you that are not familiar with what an adze is, an adze is somewhat like an axe, but an axe has the blade, the cutting edge in line with the axis of the handle, and an adze on the other hand has the cutting edge at right angles to the handle and it's often a little bit curved as well. Used for um smaller ads is used for making bowls and trugs and things. Larger ads is maybe even making dugout canoes, for example, large woodworking projects. So, um the question then from Johannes is: is there a use case for that in bushcraft? Well, I mean, there's a couple of ways you could approach that one. One is, what's your definition of bushcraft for starters?

[00:02:17] Um, might you need at some point in the bush to be using that tool to end up with something that you want to make, possibly, possibly especially in the context of building a cabin, for example. If you consider that within the realms of bushcraft, then there's probably some aspects of Building a cabin that an adze would be useful for, and certainly some of the contents of a cabin that you might want in terms of um, you know, bowls and utensils and things. Um, I would say it certainly fits within green woodworking, it sits within woodcraft, it sits within um outdoor woodworking, and so it depends really how you cast your net. Now if the question is should you always be carrying an adze with you just in case, the answer to that is probably no.

[00:03:07] I have a couple of adzes we use them on the Frontier Bushcraft Woodcrafter course, in particular, and for some of the woodcraft projects on that course, and more generally. i use it for for making items when i'm out in the woods but it's always when i'm in a kind of fixed camp i've taken a carving axe i've taken some additional carving tools and i'm making things i'm not journeying i'm tending to be in a spot deposited myself in the woods where the resources are that I want so that I can make stuff but I still consider that as part of my broader certainly it's part of my outdoor life but it's probably part of

[00:03:43] my broader bushcraft life as well so I think that's the way that I would look at it I mean at the end of the day if you want to make things out in the woods that would benefit from using an ad then there's A hundred percent use case for it right, and whether you call it bushcraft or not, it's up to you really. All right. This is a question that was messaged to me a while ago. And just to remind you, the best way to send me a question is either send it via Twitter, X as it's called now, with hashtag ask Paul Kirtley. That still works. Hashtags on Instagram don't really work now. They've kind of broken a lot of the functionality of Instagram that used to be useful for people like me.

[00:04:29] Posting something on Instagram now with #askPaulKirtley hashtag #askpaulkirtley um you can still do that but it's very difficult for me to find it um you can't follow hashtags on instagram anymore and it's even quite difficult to search on hashtags it doesn't show you all the recent posts so that's useless for me now um get lost Meta you've messed that up completely some of the useful stuff about um instagram that used to be very useful so but but um x still works with a hashtag #askPaulKurtley and of course that's what the show's called hashtag ask Paul Kirtley and um that's a public post not a DM on Twitter and then the other way is just on the page on my website leave a

[00:05:12] nice little voicemail using the speak pipe so just a reminder of how to do that now those are the two ways this message was sent to me a little while ago so i'm going to include it but please don't dm me on whatsapp on you know instagram i mean i it's really difficult for me to find those things again efficiently later on um but this is a question that david fallows sent me a couple of times a while ago and his question was how many times can a half board half board he means um be used before uh having to make a new one and he's talking about the baseboard of a bow drill set i i clarified with him i said did you mean bow drill and he was like yes i do mean bow drill so he's asking how long will that last well kind of depends um

[00:06:05] i think we need to put it In terms of how many times can we use it, because the more we use it, the shorter the length of time it's going to last. Right? Um, and typically you might be, you know what we do on courses; we make a half board, half board that's about you know 40 centimeters long, maybe, and that's so that students can drill multiple times into that and still have space for that, for their foot, on one end, and then they can turn it around put their foot on the other end where they've already drilled and a few more drills. So you could probably get about five or six sets of drilling into that, depending on how well spaced they are and the exact Side of the size of the board, remember the diameter of your drill and you want your hearth board about that thickness and they're going to wear together quite evenly if you make it out of the same material.

[00:06:55] And you're going to get a couple of embers if you're reasonably good at birdwell, you're going to get a couple of embers out of each hole typically before you start running out of space. And also, you get start to get sidewall friction as as the hole gets deeper, you get more friction around the side of the bottom of the drill rather than all the friction being at the bottom. So after a couple of decent embers i'll tend to drill. A new hole on most sets,

and so if you can get five or six drills on a board then you've maybe got maximum 10 or 12 embers and if that's every fire you're lighting one in the morning one in the evening that's kind of just under a week's worth of fires.

[00:07:35] Then you may wear through it quicker than that, you will probably wear through your drill sooner than you wear through the boards though. And you might probably need to use two drills on that one board if you're particularly if the wood's relatively hard um you're going to wear the drill down quite quickly so you're probably going to need to make a new drill before the board and I. Would you say if you make that kind of typical sort of flat floorboard 40 centimeters, you know, foot and a bit wide, um, long board, drill into it five or six times, you're probably going to get 10 or 12 fires out of that if you're proficient; if you're still learning, you might wear through a hole without getting ember at all.

[00:08:20] And that's why on our courses like our elementary course Frontier Bushcraft Elementary Course we have students make those boards so that they can drill multiple times over the course of the week while they're learning, and by the end of the week, they'll get an ember. If I was just going out to make a fire right now, I'm not going to make a lovely, nice flat board. I'm just going to make sure the bottom is flat enough that it sits on the ground. I'm going to reduce the thickness at one end. um enough so that i can drill into it and i'm going to drill and they're going to get my ember and i'm going

[00:08:50] to light my fire if i was in a kind of emergency i don't need to make a lovely nice board and but for practicing and if you want to take the board with you and use it multiple times then i would flatten it out and make a board that you can drill in multiple times and it's going to last you as long as possible so i hope that helps david And the more proficient you get anyway the quicker you're going to make a set the less of an issue it is making a new set. I think a lot of people worry about oh i'm going to go to all this effort of making a set and then is it going to last very long? It doesn't matter. It's all about learning process.

[00:09:23] And at the end of the day you should be able to go into the woods find the materials make a set reasonably quickly That's what your aim is. And you can't do that to start off with. It takes time. It takes practice. Every part takes practice. The material selection takes practice. Putting it all together carving it takes practice. Getting the bow drill method, the mechanism of movement, and the body position, and everything takes a bit and the coordination takes a bit of practice but once you get it, it's relatively straightforward and you can get much, much quicker at it, and but yeah, still maximize the use of what you make absolutely um okay. There was another bow drill question here somewhere, age of seasoned wood, and this is via the speak pipe uh system; this is from Paul.

[00:10:11] Hello, Paul. I was hoping you could shine some light on a question that's been bothering me lately, and that it comes to fire by friction and seasoned wood. So there's some cracking videos out there. I know you did one with TA Outdoors, Mike, and you're talking about elder on Ivy. And you were saying it's better to find the ivy, perhaps a blown over birch tree with ivy on there. So yeah, so seasoning. I mean, what is the sort of sweet

spot with how long a piece of wood needs to season from the moment it's cut green to when it's best for making friction? Because I would imagine if given too much time, the wood would turn punky. Am I right? I'm a novice.

[00:11:02] So yeah, if you could shine any light on sort of the length of time for. Seasoned wood to create fire by friction that would be an interesting response, so yeah, love the podcast and keep it up top man, okay. Thank you, so there's a couple of points to make here. I think there may be a little bit of confusion-what? First off, if you find a piece of dead wood in the woods, you don't know how long it's been dead for. And so you're not going to judge it on the basis of how long it's been there for. But I think you might also be asking about cutting green wood and seasoning it so you can use it later. And if that is part of the question, I would recommend you just don't bother doing that for two reasons.

[00:11:54] One is If you do cut wood green and dry it, say in your shed or your garage, it's going to dry super hard and it's not going to be the right consistency. It's not going to be soft enough; it doesn't want to be super soft when you're bow drilling or hand drilling, and that question was a bit more related to hand drill, but it applies equally to to bow drill. You want that fingernail test to work, a thumbnail test, where you can make an impression with your thumbnail. It's soft enough to make an impression with your thumbnail, but not so soft as you say it's punky and it's just going to be disintegrating as you try and make an impression on it, or as you drill it will just be disintegrating and falling apart.

[00:12:32] It needs to be firm enough that you can grind the friction parts together so that you get a good pile of hot dust and create your ember, but equally not so hard that it's just really really difficult to get enough friction. And what tends to happen when you cut material green, particularly ivy you mentioned ivy. If you go and cut ivy green and then put it in your shed or your greenhouse or your your garage and wait for it to season, it will just be too hard to use for hand drill or anything else. So you need to find it in the woods where yes it's dead, yes it's it's it has maybe gone down green but it's not just drying out, it's also starting to degrade a little bit with the natural elements and that's What gets into the right consistency,

[00:13:15] how long that takes is a little bit like how long's a piece of string-it depends on the conditions, depends on the weather, it depends on how much sunlight it's getting, how much rain, how much is it in shade. Is it not? You know there's lots of con, there's lots of um factors, um even just within a local ecosystem and and you can't tell how long it's been there anyway. You come across a tree blown over with a piece of ivy on it-it's like unless you go there every day and you see it fall over and then sometime later you go back to it and you know exactly when it went over, you're not going

[00:13:45] to know how long it's Been there, and even so, how long it takes to get in the right condition will vary; it might be in the right condition in one part of the stem, it might not be in the right condition in another part of the stem, just depending on how it dries out and how it dies off, and so, it's the same with a tree; um, top part of a tree you know, dead

standing can be rotten partly because it's more exposed to the elements. Bottom part can still contain a bit of moisture after the tree's died off. If a tree's standing up and it dies, it doesn't just go from green, living, juicy, with sap, to dead, dry, useful for fire.

[00:14:21] There's a process that occurs over time that gets it from a condition that's not suitable to a condition that is suitable. And it might be that the tops got too rotten by the time the middle of the trunk is good and the bottom might still hold some moisture because that was the last part of the trunk to be able to get some moisture up into it before that whole process failed same reason you get fat wood towards the bottom of some of the coniferous species right because you get all of that sap just sort of sitting in that bottom part of the of the trunk so it can vary even within the same um the same tree the same trunk or the same stem and the same vine um and so you have to suck it and see and test it see if it's the right condition you know shave a bit of the outer material off look at the inner can you make that

[00:15:13] thumbnail impression not too easily not too you know if you're really bending your thumbnail to make an impression it's too hard if your thumbnail just goes straight in like a soft piece of balsa it's probably too soft somewhere in between is what you're looking for and that's what i would suggest you judge it on um rather than some sort of academic measurement of time and or and definitely don't cut stuff green take it home and the other reason you don't want to cut stuff green and Take it home is because that's just not really. The whole point of these skills, particularly bow drill, is that you can go to the woods, find the materials, make fire now, just with a shoelace or a piece of paracord.

[00:15:53] Piece of rawhide or what have you, or even some natural cordage if you're good at making natural cordage, and the point isn't that you sort of curate these materials in your garage for six months before you make a set. By all means take stuff home and practice with it. By all means practice in the backyard, practice in the garage. But the point is that you should be able to go and get materials from the woods and so you've got to build that judgment up of finding the materials in the right condition and making those work whether you make it work there and then in the woods or whether you make it there and then or a little bit later in the day or the next day at the weekend or whatever, in at home after you've taken the materials home when you found them on a hike for example.

[00:16:30] So I hope that helps.

All right, next question: Hey there Paul, delighted to hear you're starting the Ask Paul Kirtley series again. My question is, I have a bucket list goal to do a Canadian canoe trip with Frontier Bushcraft. I have a Canadian canoe and I participated in the Liffey Descent race here in Dublin for many years at a proficient level. At this stage, though, I would be just a fair-weather canoeist, only getting out once or twice a year, busy with work and family and schedule, and all that kind of stuff. So to work towards the goal of the Canadian wilderness canoe trip, what would you recommend in terms of fitness level and training in order to be fit enough to make the most out of such a trip, so it would be enjoyable?

[00:17:17] And always enjoy your content, keep up the great work, and look forward to hearing your answer. Thank you, okay, and that question is from Alan Doyle, um yeah, good question. I'll try and give you some specific answers and also just give a sort of more general answer that would be useful to people more generally. So yeah, we run a range of different canoe trips in Canada and we kind of rotate through different trips. Some of them are more remote than others; they're all quite remote, but some of them are much more remote than others. Some require a float plane in, and some require a float plane out. Some are a long road transfer in, on you know, on a forest track, say the Missiniabi for example.

[00:18:02] And they are all quite remote, quite self-sufficient trips where you're committed really into the trip, yes. We do have emergency plans if people need to get out due to injury and whatnot, but yes, absolutely you want to be well prepared, particularly in terms of fitness also in terms of mentality. Um, I think if you're if you're up for the adventure then you can put up with a bit of discomfort. And the first thing I would say is that, fit you are, you're probably going to be a little bit uncomfortable to start off with because you aren't paddling all day every day normally none of us are typically even Ray Goodwin, who has done many trips with us in Canada, his main source of income is coaching people, taking people out canoeing, teaching people to canoe.

[00:18:58] He spends a lot of time in canoes and canoeing. However, much time you spend kneeling or sitting in canoes, you do a canoe trip where you are paddling from morning to late afternoon. Each day, every day, you're going to feel a bit, you know, a bit achy maybe a bit sore after the first few days as you as you ease into it partly because your canoe is heaviest at the beginning of the trip, you've got the maximum amount of food that you're going to have on a trip and so you've got the maximum load. And so, you're kind of going to get into it, and we do try and ease into it a little bit. But there's a bit, you know, maybe three or four days in where you're like, 'I feel a bit tired,' you know, and we do have a rest day, you know, particularly on a two-week canoe trip, we will have a rest day somewhere along the way in the middle.

[00:19:47] Um, where we can, you know, recoup, we can have a spend a bit more time maybe uh, eating a bit more at lunchtime, you know, we can wash clothing, you know, we can rest a bit, etc etc., um, and then we're good for the second half. And generally, the second half, then you're feeling pretty good because you've dropped the weight of some of the food, you've got fitter in the first part, you're already building muscle, your body's recruiting muscle, you're, you're getting into the swing of things. And then, the second part you're probably feeling like things are going quite smoothly, but to get to the point where you're not going to really suffer on the first part of a trip, I would say do a bit of canoeing, of course, and just get out and do a bit of paddling

[00:20:31] um, you know, even if it's just a bit on a weekend in the run-up to a trip, you know, maybe for like a month or so, if you can get out every weekend, just do a little bit,

and that will help. Um, failing that, um, get on a rowing machine, for example, in the gym, that, that kind of it's not exactly the same, but it does use some of the same muscles in the back of the shoulders and stuff and that. could that will help for sure and just doing some shoulder exercises that get the delts the deltoids and you know your triceps and your biceps working a few a few free weights just you know dumbbells kettlebells that type of thing shoulder presses you know particularly for carrying boats if you do a few shoulder presses

[00:21:13] um you know that could be that could be with a bar it can be with um i tend to do with kettlebells because you've got this sort of stabilization as well that you benefit from that um you can use dumbbells to do um to do presses and you can combine that with doing um like squats just like you can do goblet squats As well, because of course we are going to be um portaging so you need just walking fitness is fine for portaging and yes you might have a backpack on but you're going to be carrying it for 500 meters, a kilometer at most, the longest portage on our Missinaibi trip is just

[00:21:51] over a kilometer, and so if you're carrying your portage pack and if you pack reasonably lightly um so you've got your camping gear, your spare clothing, and whatnot, your camp clothes, your tent, your sleeping bag etc it's not going to be horrendous, it's going to be lighter probably than a backpack on a backpacking trip where you've got food in there for sure because You're not going to have food in your personal portage pack, and you might double load with your daypack which has got your waterproof and your water bottle and stuff in there. But that's not going to be much heavier. You might have a few more spare clothes because it's a canoe trip; it's not going to be much heavier than a backpacking load.

[00:22:23] And you're not carrying it all day; you're not doing 25 kilometers, you're doing 500 meters kilometer, um. So it's not like you need to even be backpacking fit really, um. If you're just walking fit if you're day-walking fit, you're good; you're good. And then just a bit of upper-body strength for the Paddling, you know, carrying canoes whether that's carrying them on your own or carry them carrying them, um, with another, your paddling partner in the tandem canoe, and as I say, just a bit of a grip strength, biceps, triceps, shoulders, you know, deltoids in particular, and just being able to do some sort of overhead press is is useful because when you get in the canoes up and down that I find that useful, and a bit of leg strength is always useful, so as I say, if you can combine a bit of walking with doing some do some split squats, do some lunges, maybe weighted lunges again, you can just use dumbbells and do some weighted Lunges

[00:23:22] You can do asymmetrically weighted lunges with quite a heavy kettlebell if you wanted to. That helps the stabilization on rough ground. That's the type of thing I do just in the weeks running up to a canoe trip. Just get everything moving, get a bit of strength into some of the main muscle groups, more than you might get just from day-to-day activities, and you'll be good. And if you can do some paddling, that helps as well. So hopefully that helps. Okay, last question for today. This is from Jay in Canada. Hey Paul, it's Jay from

Alberta here. I'm wondering what's on your list of skills that you know you know a little bit about, but for which you want to really unpack and get into the details.

[00:24:09] I have a running list of things that I know how to do, but for which I wish I had a deeper knowledge and understanding. As an example, I've been playing a lot more with wild fibers. And sure, I can make some simple rope out of pretty much everything. But I've been playing with how to refine them and actually understand much more about the strengths and weaknesses of each method and how they were used historically. Have you got a sample or an example of that? Good question, Jay. Good question. Yeah, I mean, there's always more to learn, isn't there? I mean, that's one of the great things about bushcraft and wilderness living skills and nature-based knowledge. There's always more to learn.

[00:24:51] And like you, I've had a list of things over the years, and some of them are kind of quite specific things I want to go and do. At the Global Bushcraft Symposium in 2022, which I co-organized, we did a Q &A, Lisa Fenton and I, the two co-chairs, we did a Q &A one day and someone asked me what skills I wanted to work on going forwards or specifically it was like what training that I wanted to do going forward because everyone was kind of inspired to go and do things from that symposium. There were a lot of speakers there, there were a lot of workshops, and there was a lot of people going away inspired to learn from other people who were there, and what I said then was, 'I wanted to go and do a course with Cody Lundeen in Arizona and I subsequently did that in September 2023.

[00:25:50] And I also wanted to get more into the cyber tracker um tracking side of things, so I i've been interested in tracking, track, and sign, and trailing, and following tracks for a long time, and I did the first tracking formal tracking course I did was over 20 years ago, and I have done a lot of tracking courses over the years, and I've trained with Ray Mears, I've trained with David Scott Donlon, I've trained with Penkari Training, and I've trained with some other people. I have run a lot of tracking courses both for civilian, for police, for military um, but I had never been really exposed to the cyber tracker side of things. And so John Ryder, who I've known for many years, is a senior tracker in the Cyber Tracker system in the UK.

[00:26:40] And one of the things I said I wanted to do was to go and do some more training with him. I've done that. I've done several track and sign evaluations. I've done a trailing course with him. I'm also going to go to South Africa and do a Cyber Tracker track and sign course there in the not too distant future. Kind of where I was at a few years ago, and I'm working through those things and those are areas that I already you know particularly the tracking I knew some but I wanted to really uh really really work on getting a lot better at those things and um you know I I you know I think I'm I'm doing that um but where am I where am I at now in terms of things that may be particularly skills and you mentioned fiber craft that I want to kind of unpack um I would say things like basket making.

[00:27:33] I can make containers. I can make bark containers. I can weave things. I can

make a container. But there's stuff out there that's kind of more artisanal. And I'd really like to get into different types of basket making, different types of container making. Because I think the more you get into moving away from relying on materials that you take with you, the more containers, especially if you think about long-term living skills and harvesting foods and storing them, whether they're processed or dried or what have you, or even just transporting things you need baskets, you need containers; you need some to be pretty much airtight or waterproof, some more open – you know, everything from sort of dilly bags to woven baskets to shallow winnowing baskets to different bark containers.

[00:28:29] I know bits and pieces in that realm, but I certainly don't have a complete knowledge, and some areas I would not do a very good job of trying to make a very fine example. And so I really would like to get that a little bit more filled in – um, there's there's a significant number of gaps there, in to my mind, that I would like to fill in, so that's one area; um, and I guess that's something I'll just have to chip away at over the years and find people or find examples I can copy, find people that I can learn from, and just work on that. And I've collected some books. As well, recently, some second-hand books that, um, you know, bark craft, fiber craft, leaf weaving, lots of different things, um, uh, you know, reed craft, lots of different types, that you know, I'd like to unpack and delve more deeply into.

[00:29:21] And then the other one, um, I probably mentioned this before, but you know, I've done a bit of flint knapping; I've done a bit of basic making discoidal knives and things just with, um, any old sort of, you know, riverbed rock or what have you. But, um, I'd like to spend more time with proficient people working on that end of skill. So really at the kind of primitive technology, the lithic kind of end of the skill set, I would say that's certainly not an area I would teach. I would think I was competent to teach and I'd certainly want to, you know, I've got some proficiency to make a few things for myself if I need to, but I'd like to really get into learning from some people to get more proficiency in that.

[00:30:07] More primitive technology, lithic skills area, as well I think. Um, when that will happen, I don't know, but those are a couple of things that are on my list that spring to mind at the moment, Jay okay, and I think that was everything for today. I feel like I kind of rambled through that. I haven't sat and done one of these for a while, maybe not as fluid as some of the older ones got but I will get back into this; it's been a while since I've done these. Don't forget that you can support these by uh buying me a coffee so to speak with the buy me a coffee link, that's below I'll put it on the screen here as well so that you've got it um, I think it's just BuyMeACoffee.

[00:30:47] Com forward slash Paul Kirtley, I think that's the link off the top of my head, and for those of you that are listening, um, on audio but on the uh the show notes page on my on my website where this is um embedded as a video and an audio with links as well if there are relevant links and links to other relevant resources I'll put the link there as well for you um so yeah thanks again and I'll see you on the next one before too long, take care cheers.

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