

#AskPaulKirtley Episode 90 Transcript

[00:00:00] In this episode of Ask Paul Kirtley we are going to be looking at where I would go for a canoe trip for leisure rather than work, compass versus external cues for orientation, what are my most beautiful moments in nature, learning more about predicting the weather and how useful that can be and feather stick hand action. Welcome, welcome to episode 90 of Ask Paul Kirtley and it is good to be back.

[00:00:49] Thank you so much for all the lovely comments under the last few episodes when I've reintroduced the series regularly and it's good to be back doing these regularly. Thanks also for the support. Remember you can support these sessions with buying me a coffee and as is tradition I've got my coffee with me. Some of you have asked about the mug. It's a Snow Peak titanium mug. and it fits on the bottom of my nalgene water bottle so it's it's portable it's handy it's good for travel it's lightweight it's tough it can be put on the fire or near the fire and it holds plenty of coffee and if you would like to buy me a coffee it's just [buymeacoffee.com forward slash paul kirtley](http://buymeacoffee.com/forward-slash-paul-kirtley) so thank you for any support going forward it's all appreciated

[00:01:31] all right without further ado let's get into this episode because we've got some uh interesting topics to discuss and quite varied and we'll see where we go with these so first question this is from twitter

[00:01:47] if you were to go on a canoe trip for yourself not work just for a few days camping and canoeing where would you head for and would it be a river or lake stroke lock hashtag ask paul kirtley

[00:02:04] And that's from mart. Yeah so i'm assuming you're asking about the uk mart um there's lots of great places to go in the uk it's easier to get river access and often lake access and certainly land access in scotland than it is in england and wales just because of the difference in access laws in those places and particularly the laws around wild camping and so i and also there's lots of bodies of water and good rivers in Scotland and so I would probably look to Scotland first not to say there aren't other places to go you know people do nice trips on the Wye people do some nice day trips in many parts of England and Wales particularly Wales where there's there's good rivers and lots of potential for paddling but if I was doing a few days and I was camping as well I would certainly be looking to Scotland as you might well know we run trips on the Spey every year and even though we run commercial trips on the Spey we take customers down the Spey and we wild camp along the way I still think it's a great journey so the Spey would be up there on my list particularly since i know it well so if i wanted to get away and just do a quick river trip i mean my colleague ray at the right water level managed to paddle the whole river in

a day and starting in the dark and finishing pretty much at sunset and that was a very long day for him and his tandem paddling partner that did that and I would probably go for something more relaxed than that certainly if I was going for some leisure but equally I could get down that river faster and more efficiently than taking a group down where you're having to manage and stop and look after people and you need a bit more time in camp to get things organized and you're catering for people etc etc so um i would consider the space for a couple of days for me um as a nice trip that i could that i could do and i would feel like i'd really accomplish something still even though I know that river very well i think that's what that would be one of the attractions that it's it's familiar it's going to a place i know um there's still lots of excitement with various rapids and whatnot and i'd be quite happy to paddle that solo at my level so you know just going on my own that would be somewhere where i would go if that's what you're asking um as opposed to you know advice as to where you should go um obviously i can't really give that advice cleanly if i don't know what level you're at in terms of paddling abilities and um experience and whatnot but the Spey is not super difficult for many people if they've got a little bit of paddling experience but there are still things that can go wrong particularly at the top end when you come out of Loch Inch into that section um down to Aviemore there's it's quite narrow in places there's a few tree hazards typically there's some long-standing tree hazards but every year something changes part of the bank collapses another birch tree falls in the river or something there's always something to keep an eye out for and you have to have your wits about you and things can come up pretty fast depending on the water level and

[00:05:30] Then the the other section really other than just sort of dunking in big bouncy rapids like the washing machine or something the other place to really look out for is if you go beyond Fochabers down to Spey Bay that section there it changes dramatically over time and over relatively short periods of time you know what from one year to the next particularly if there's a quite a large volume of water going down at any particular time you get whole banks changing whole areas of of rubble moving the the path of the river can change you get lots of stuff being dumped there as a matter of course it's kind of an outwash plane so any trees that have been taken from further up they tend to get dumped either in the river on the edge of the river further down towards uh Spey Bay and there are also some quite tight corners that you come around and you can't easily see what's around them so that's an area where you really need to be careful of as well if if you're taking my advice as to as to where to go so um but the the Spey is a relatively straightforward river to paddle it's grade two maximum in its um there's no portaging, maybe a bit of lining and depending on the levels and hazards and whatnot um so but the Spey would still be high up on my list.

[00:06:54] The tay is another one that i enjoy um i've done the tay from high up in the water pretty much at the watershed up near Ciranlarich down to Perth i've never done the tidal section um and i've done sections of the tay as well just as day trips so you could easily concoct a couple of days on the Tay you wouldn't necessarily have to do the whole thing that would be quite pleasant as well, particularly for a small group. I wouldn't be taking

larger groups down there as a matter of course, simply because camping is quite tricky in places.

[00:07:24] But for myself or just as a small group, like I did, I made a video back in 2017 when I went down with one other person. You could do a couple of days on that river and have a really good little adventure as well. And then I would also then look at some of the lochs. Loch Maree is a classic lovely area to go. It's quite far north but it's absolutely beautiful and so if you wanted some flat water paddling with some camping, some woodland. that would be that would be a really nice area to go to as well and you always need to be careful with flat water as well a lot of people think flat water is safer than you know the moving water but you know moving water is generally moving because it's constricted and if you fall out your canoe you can typically get to the side and notwithstanding tree hazards strainers all those sorts of things but typically rapids you fall out You might be separated from your boat, but you're going to get to the side. you fall out in the middle of a big loch when the wind gets up and you get some waves you're in serious trouble unless you can get back into your boat and getting back into your boat on your own in choppy conditions is really quite tricky particularly a loaded boat so you always want to be wary of what might seem like benign conditions particularly if you set out and the weather's quite nice you set out quite early but then the sun gets on the land the wind gets up and you're starting to get some waves coming in and on big bodies of water where you've got some fetch that can be an issue and you see that at the end of Loch Ness for example.

[00:09:10] So speaking of Loch Ness, another good trip for a couple of days potentially would be the Great Glen. That would be another good one all the way through the Great Glen. So depending on which way the wind's blowing, that would determine which way I would go. And as I say, if the wind's strong, you want to be careful about Loch Ness in particular because of the fetch, the amount of distance you've got wind over water. By the time you get to the end of the Loch, you can have some really quite big waves, but a great trip nonetheless. So those would be ones that I would be looking at personally, just off the top of my mind. There's lots of other things that you could construct in Scotland as well. But those are some that spring to mind immediately. And if you're looking for ideas, I would say those would be ones that you could go away and look at as well for yourself.

[00:10:01] If you want to ask me a question via Twitter, all you need to do is message me. Not in the DMs, but just a tweet. It's actually at pkurt is my tag on Twitter. And put the hashtag. ask paul kirtley into the tweet as well and i'll be able to find it because i can just search on the tags when i'm coming to compile the questions for these sessions okay next question and i think all of these are now voicemail type questions using the speak pipe facility on my on my website I'll link to how to do that below but you basically just go to the ask paul kirtley link on my website and just record a voice message so here's the first one

[00:10:47] hi good morning paul first i'd like to say thank you for continuing the ask paul kirtley so you've been a wonderful palate cleanser during my commute my question is what

goes on in your head while you're navigating and following a route

[00:11:01] I tend to cast a compass on the ground, which follows me around and stays fixed to north, whereas my wife has to use multiple landmarks as we move. Do you create something in your mind's eye, or do you rely on external features, or something different altogether? I hope the question makes sense. Cheers.

[00:11:17] And that's from Ollie. That's a good question, Ollie, and kind of gets to the heart of a number of different core concepts in navigation, actually, and not just with respect to map and compass but also just how we orient ourselves generally how we find our way around and how people have found their way around historically and there are a couple of different models that work and they're not mutually exclusive and this is the first thing to say you can do more than one thing at the same time and sometimes one model might work better than others I do I don't cast a compass needle onto the ground as such um although I can I can see what you're you're you're meaning there and but what I do do is I'm wandering around and it can be wandering around the woods or it can be wandering around a town particularly a town that I'm not familiar with you know could be on vacation you know weekend break in Europe somewhere you know Spain or Italy or somewhere going around a you know an old medieval town or something and exploring and just trying to keep track of your cardinal directions is really super useful and the primary one of course is you know just using the sun and so having some sense of what time of day is it and where's the sun going to be in the sky at this time of day and that can then help you know it's normally very easy to figure out where the sun is particularly once you get away from the cloudy Britain and you know if you're in if you're in southern Europe for example.

[00:13:03] But in many places and you know in the northern hemisphere we've got the sun rising in the east it moves around towards the south and then it moves around towards the west and it's over our meridian so it's on our north-south line if you like at local noon and so if it's in the morning it's going to be southeast if it's in the afternoon it's going to be southwest if it's near to the middle of the day it's going to be pretty much south and if it's early in the morning it's going to be pretty much in the eastern part of the sky if it's in the afternoon it's going to be in the western part of the sky and I know it can rise quite a lot north of east and set north of west and also rise you know different times of the year rise south of east and set the south of west but broadly speaking yeah and and so just using that really really helps just kind of not get completely turned around 180 you get a good sense and the more you do that the easier it is to use where you can come unstuck though is if you go to the southern hemisphere you've got to remember that the the sun is still going to rise in the um east but then it's going to move around towards the north um but especially always if you're south of the of the tropics and so it's going to go the opposite way through the sky so you know if you see the if you see the sun it's not only going to be in the other kind of quadrant of the sky if you like it's going to be in the northern part of the sky rather than the southern part of the sky it's also going to be moving right to left as opposed to left to right so that's just something to be aware of but once you've done that enough and I've been to Australia and southern Africa enough that I can make the mental

switch now I used to find it quite tricky.

[00:14:55] I remember when I first went to Australia I made a few mistakes, nothing major but just like what we're talking about what directions what and in terms of what time of day it was and where the sun would be my brain was telling me it was going one way and in fact it was going the other way but that's you know something you'll get past relatively quickly so the sun is the main one that i use during the day just for kind of a quick running check of where i am and i use that even on wilderness expeditions as well you know if you're canoeing you know through um know a river system and you know it might be a number of channels and um i'm just thinking of a couple examples you know it's like the blood vein river for example where you might have multiple channels and there'll be somewhere where you have to cut through and just paddling along just keeping the sun say on your right for this whole stretch knowing that when you get to this particular bend you're going to have the sun in front of you or behind you and that's the point where you need to using it like that as well you're not having to constantly use your compass etc etc um it can be useful things like that so that's one thing that i use i use the sun quite a lot um and then equally if i'm out for a walk and it gets dark then i'll switch to using stars and i won't necessarily use um them for cardinal direction although you can particularly for using things like orion um you can use orion you know where it rises where it sets etc but it's more a case of and you can use planets for this as well you know particularly things like venus and um and jupiter and saturn when they're bright you know if you just if you broadly know the direction you're going in but you don't want to start walking in circles just keeping that bright object again you know in front of you on your right on your left which you know whichever wherever it was when you started in the right direction just go yep it's still there it's still there yeah and if you're starting to veer away from that oh no no i'm veering off just using that as a beacon is useful equally you can use landmarks. W

[00:17:06] hen i'm in open country you know say i'm hiking in scotland i'm walking in a large expanse and you know i don't want to be checking my map and compass the whole time it's like i know i need to get up to the top of this glen and as long as i keep that peak there on this side here as i'm walking up i know i'm not getting turned around you know you can use landmarks in the distance like that as as well and that's not necessarily again finding cardinal directions it's just making sure that you're staying on course And then the other thing, if I am exploring an area, I also want to use a kind of root memory, if you like.

[00:17:44] So I'm not now looking to some sort of external reference point so that I'm constantly keeping in touch with where the sun is or a mountain peak is or where a star or planet is. I'm also then building a memory of what I'm seeing along the way and making sure that I can find my way back again so for example I'm in quite dense woodland here it's quite a cloudy overcast day I can't see any external landmarks I can't see a church steeple in the background there's certainly no peaks you know mountains in this part of England but you know I can't see through to see a church steeple in the in the distance or um a cell tower or um whatever it is i can't see anything um through the woods it's um summer the foliage is is is up there's lots of bracken all the leaves are on the trees i can

probably see uh i can hardly even see my tarp over there where i'm sleeping which is you know about 100 meters away um And if this were new to me, this area, I wouldn't be able to use those external cues. And the sun, I can kind of tell the sun's there at the moment because that's about the brightest part of the sky. But it's tricky to tell. And it is very overcast today. And so it would be hard to keep track exactly with even using the sun today.

[00:19:22] But irrespective of that, even if the sun was shining today, I would also, as I explore this area, you know, I followed a little trail, maybe I followed a deer trail, maybe I followed a little footpath I found. I would want to make sure that I was keeping track of things along the way. Am I going downhill a bit? Am I going uphill? Was there an easily discernible distinctive tree or tree stump or hole in the ground or whatever it is? I want to keep track of things as I go. And I want to keep a mental record of that. And I'm going to make intentional use of that because I'm probably going to have to find my way back again. You know, when we find ourselves in an area and we don't know it, what we tend to do and what works very well is you go out and back, out and back, out and back, out and back, out and back. And you want means of finding your way back. So you want to turn around and see what things look like the other way, particularly where you make a decision. Do I go left or right here? Turn around and look back the way you came and make sure that when you come back to that point, you can find your way along the route where you made the decision about whether to go right or left, you know, forks and trails, those sorts of things. that way you start to build up a mental map of the area so you have this home-based system so rather than having an external framework you've now switched to this home-based system where you're basically keeping a thread back to where you know where you are so that's your camp and you go you explore out that way you explore out that way you explore out that way this is something that i use say on canoe trips you know you're you know exactly where you are on the river you come up to you know particularly wilderness canoe trips um you come up to a place where you want to camp you Come into the woods.

[00:21:10] You don't know the woods at all. You haven't been navigating through the woods You haven't found your way to that point by working your way through the woods. It's a complete new area to you and you know particularly in some of the places where i've been in canada you don't have to go far back from the bank of the lake or the river to get into really quite dense woodland that all looks the same and yes you could probably walk in the direction of the river and you know and handrail back to your camp but even so you want to keep track of where you are so you can find your way back to your camp and so i use this quite regularly when i you know you don't have to be parachuted into an area of woodland to have to use this it's like okay i don't know this area i want to make sure i can find my way out i can find my way back and maybe just find my way back again you might be just establishing a latrine site where you want to go out find your you know find a place where you want a latrine find your way back then go and show the group where the latrine is and have some markers to be able to show them you go past this tree stump there's this really big patch of lichen drop down over this little um what you know little water feature and then back over here whatever it is just things that you can show other people so that

they can find their way there and back as well and of course if you're if you're good at tracking and particularly trailing so being able to follow sign then you can often track yourself back again if you do come unstuck but generally what i'm trying to do is keep little way markers along the way that i can recognize on the way back and then after time when you've been in an area and you've done this out and back home-based system back and forward back and forwards then what you can do is you start to you you'll build a mental map that kind of connects in your brain if you normally go from a to b and back again and then a to c and back again at some point you'll know the area well enough that you can go from b to c without having to come back to a but it's quite dangerous to try and do that initially until you've got a good mental map of the area that's when you start to need an external framework so because you don't have any if you've gone out on a trail and back even if it's a route you've created yourself, and then you've gone out on a trail and back to, to C trying to go from B to C when you've got no means of knowing how to get to C, um, can be quite tricky. And that's when people get lost trying to do those sorts of things. So, yeah, I do, um, I do a number of different things. I don't know if that answers your question, Ollie. Um, but I think it explains quite well what I do. And those are, you know, overarching frameworks that regardless of whether I'm using a map and a compass, whether I'm using a GPS, whatever I'm using as well, I'm still thinking about these things all the time when I'm finding my way around. Even when I'm relatively relaxed, as I say, when I'm on vacation, I'm still thinking about this stuff. It's hard to switch it off once you've got these modes of operating. What have we got next? Learning more about predicting the weather.

[00:24:20] Hey, Paul, this is Carl Sineath from Michigan in the northern part of the U.S. I'm here with my family. First off, thank you so much for your work on the online elementary bushcraft course. Your teachings just wouldn't be available to us without this online content. So thank you for that. Right now we're working through your natural navigation materials, and the attention to detail is just fantastic. In terms of my question, we've always done these kind of journeys together, and our understanding of the weather has been an essential part of making decisions while we're on these journeys, particularly when you're doing them with kids. In our area, we often don't have cell service, so there's really a practical necessity to developing this understanding of the weather. So to try to improve my understanding, I've been wearing a watch barometer for about 18 months and trying to observe the relationship among the pressure, the temperature and the wind. It's been really helpful, but I'd like to refine this skill a bit further, including methods for understanding the weather without the barometer. Where would you suggest I begin in trying to better understand and predict weather with minimal to no technology? I kind of really wish I could chat with the fauna in my area who seem to have already developed this skill. So thanks, Paul.

[00:25:44] That's a really good question, Carl. And for those of you listening to that that don't know what Carl was talking about, he was talking about my online elementary wilderness bushcraft course. It's a very comprehensive, elementary probably makes it sound too simple. It's a very comprehensive cornerstone bushcraft course with 12 very extensive modules covering all the major areas that you need to understand. Everything

from tool use, fire, trapping, fishing, natural navigation, making cordage, knots, etc, etc. I'll link to it below. You can check that out there. There isn't a module on weather though but weather forecasting is important, understanding the weather is important.

[00:26:35] I already mentioned it in one of the earlier questions about the context of being out on a big lake or loch in a canoe. If the weather changes you can get into some trouble if the conditions, if the wind gets up in particular but if the waves get up which they often come together of course winds and waves that that can cause you some issues but there's lots of other situations you know particularly in the hills if you're in mountainous conditions you want to keep an eye on the weather weather can change rapidly you know and it's an interplay between airflow and the terrain and that often you know means that mountains have more weather than other flatter areas um as a general thing i would say um if you're talking about a local area or an area that you go to try and have an understanding of um what the prevailing wind is you know what's the prevailing weather direction in that part of the world and what does that bring with it typically you know so in a lot of places it's a westerly wind um in the northern hemisphere it's not not everywhere but you know in the uk we've typically got you know the prevailing wind is westerly it can be northwesterly southwesterly you know westerly and it can switch around and it's more of a northeasterly today um which is a little bit unusual uh but we've had more of that this year than than some other years and it brings with it a different type of weather potentially um that would be one thing to just just what's the base case for where you're operating that's always useful to try and find out what's the prevailing and that that can be helpful with navigation as well because it will set trees in certain directions you know you can tell the direction from the way that all the trees are blown over you know towards the east for example because you've got a strong prevailing westerly wind a lot of the time so even on a dead calm day you can use that to you know help find directions so going back to the previous question but in terms of the weather yeah knowing what the prevailing weather is what the prevailing wind is and what type of weather that brings and also does it have a tendency to switch um sometimes and what does that do to the weather does that bring with it fog does it bring with it rain etc etc doing a little bit of research you know just so you've got some idea of okay we've got the prevailing wind that tends to be this okay it's switched the opposite direction that tends to do this that's that's useful and that's a very general generalized um Comment then also season some parts of the world Weather is extremely seasonal so you get dry periods and you get wet periods and so just Understanding whether you've got monsoon rains or whether you're in the dry winter period or whatever it is Just understanding where you are in the year and what the typical weather is, you know, what's the rainfall? for this time of year etc just doing that bit of research if you're going way out of your you know normal area of operation you know if you're traveling and that's useful to know so for example i was recently in south africa and it's winter in in the southern hemisphere you know recording this in in august uh 25 i was in um south africa late july early august and it's winter um but it's still quite warm during the day the sun's still quite warm and mornings are quite cold but it's quite dry it's not the time of year that it rains a lot um whereas in the winter in the uk we are more likely to get precipitation than you know at other times of the year um not to say we won't get precipitation in august

we often do get some heavy rains in august particularly if you get thunderstorms as we're more likely to do in the summer um so it also depends on where you are you know so what's the season what weather does that normally bring with it just having that base understanding you know do you get thunderstorms in july and august for example you know so some of the places we do winter to do summer canoe trips um we get uh potentially uh thunderstorms um you know particularly if we go um you know a time when it's still quite warm for you know late august early september you can still get some thunderstorms coming through so just understanding that um is is is useful um so that's just sort of data gathering really and you can do that you know particularly with the internet you can do that you know from wherever you can get online and go okay what's the typical weather what's the direction you know is it wet at this time of year what's the average precipitation for this this place you know what's normal what's the baseline.

[00:31:42] And then in terms of knowing what it's going to do from day to day, I would say a really, really useful skill set to understand is frontal systems. Understand what a warm front looks like when it's coming in and what a cold front looks like when it's coming in and what happens between warm air and cold air. and what type of clouds you get because you typically don't just get clear skies and then weather arrives it will come in some sort of gradient and you'll get high clouds often giving you some indication as to what's coming and that could be a day or two out you know if you start to get high cirrus clouds it starts to indicate that something's changing you know if you look at the sun or even the moon and is there a halo around it you know high ice crystals those type of things that will give you some indication that the weather's changing and maybe bad weather's coming in and so starting to understand you know just just google warm front and you'll find some pictures of the cloud types that come in as a warm front comes in understand what that feels like does it feel warm does it feel cold you're going to get wind blowing towards you all those sorts of things and you'll start to understand and you can transpose that to different parts of the world because it's the same kind of principles occur and then also understanding you know what high pressure systems do what a stable high pressure system feels like looks like you're going to have days of good weather but then also understand what does that look like when it starts to start to change understand that you know particularly in the northern hemisphere which i know you're in carl what happens with high pressure systems versus low pressure systems with the circulation of air around them and then as those things pass over you know so for example if you notice that you've got winds going one way and then you get a calm period and then winds are going the other way you've got a sense of these pressure systems going over you you know and you've got this wind circling around air circling around as it comes over you're going to feel a wind going one way you're going to get a calm spot in the middle potentially and then you're going to feel a wind going the other way as it passes and what weather is that going to bring for where you are where's it where's the wind is it is it is it coming over water is that going to bring rain um is it coming over dry land is that going to bring um is that going to bring you know dry air just understanding how that works and applying it to your geography is is super useful as well um and then understanding how you know moisture late you know it's fairly it's fairly straightforward but you know if you've got you know sort of saturated moisture laid in laden

air coming off you know a sea hitting a mountain range you're going to get rain right and just understanding some basic functionality of weather like that as well super useful.

[00:34:50] So i'm trying to give you some very broad brush um ideas here of what to um what to look into but definitely look into how high pressure systems function low pressure systems function what direction do they rotate in um think about warm fronts think about cold fronts learn to recognize the different types of clouds associated with those definitely learn to recognize um thunder storms building up and um yeah go from there hopefully that's useful the other thing to say about you know you mentioned you mentioned cell service and apps as well remember that you can get very localized weather and the apps are never going to tell you that you know you you can get you know if i just think about parts of the uk you can get rain in one valley and no rain in the other whereas the overall forecast for the areas somewhere in between um you know telling you that i've got telling us that we've got 40 chance of rain today isn't super useful really you know does that mean we're going to have rain or we're not going to have rain so the more you can tell you know look at the local um indicators and get some sense of what's going on on the ground the better you know I think we've become a little bit over reliant on on apps you know they're good for a broad brush and they're certainly good for day-to-day life to know whether or not to you know pack a pack a rain jacket in a bag when we go to work or whatever but I think from an outdoors perspective, I think the question you're asking is the right one. Learn more about being able to predict the weather a day, two, out. Understand how that's going to affect. where you are on the ground and that you know that varies so much and how that will affect your journey do you need to hunker down for the day just have a you know nice day reading in the tent or do you need to you know do you need to push on late today because tomorrow is going to be bad so should we cover the you know today's good let's go while the going's good You know, is it going to get windy in the afternoon? Do we want to get up at five in the morning and paddle until three? We're going to stop then. You know, that starts to inform how you make your journeys as well. And you can do that better looking at what's going on around you than you can ever do with an app anyway. All right.

[00:37:25] Next one.

[00:37:29] Hi, Paul. This is Alban from France. We spoke together for my podcast some 12 years ago. I've been following your work ever since, and I want to thank you for that because it's really rigorous and pedagogical. It's really an inspiration for me. I wanted to speak about something more personal, I should say. It's not about gear, it's not about skills. I wanted to ask you, what was your most beautiful moment into nature? The memories that you cherish the most? I feel like in bushcraft, we often speak about risk assessment and dangers. Maybe we can also convey that sense of joy that we experience into nature. Well, hope it

[00:38:27] rings something into you thanks again bye well nice to hear from you alban

[00:38:35] I can't believe that was 12 years ago already that we spoke for your podcast

that's incredible um time time does indeed fly um so that's a difficult question because i've i've had lots of joy in the outdoors and i enjoy every time i come outdoors i'm enjoying just being out these couple of days making some videos camping out on my own and just having a bit of quiet time to myself and then making these videos during the day and you know you're always experiencing different things every time you're out and I think you know I found earlier where we had you know I'm in an area that I teach and teach the woodcraft of course here And there's a couple of areas where we have some quite large cooking fires for this course because we build big cooking rigs and we're cooking with cast iron ovens and doing some quite elaborate cooking because we can process the firewood, because we're making these big cooking rigs. It's part of the camp craft that we do on these courses. We start off small and make more elaborate and so we make more elaborate meals. But there's an area on the edge of where one of the fire areas is over there where I can see a pheasant has created a sort of dust bath area. And just seeing little things like that, even in areas that you're quite familiar with, coming back, haven't been here for a little while, seeing what's been going on. There's badger activity over there. I talked in the previous Ask Paul Kirtley about some of the experiences I'd had with close encounters with um wildlife and and that badger encounter that i had that i shared the photos of was just the other side of this this area that i'm in at the moment you know not not that far away from here the other side of the valley really and so i've had some really quite remarkable experiences with nature here just staying in the woods for a couple of nights you know there were deer walking around last night there was i could hear a badger running around i didn't see it it was dark but just hear them trotting around. So that always brings a lot of joy to me, just being out and just hearing the nature around me, waking up this morning and starting to hear the birds singing. There's not as much bird song now as there is in the spring, of course, but just that baseline, being out in nature is always quite joyful, really.

[00:41:13] But in terms of really memorable moments, I think beyond just the enjoyment of every little detail of nature that I come across, I think some of it's linked to landscape. I remember once I was doing a hike in the Pyrenees, on the Spanish side of the Pyrenees, and we were going up quite high over the space of a number of days. And we camped sort of at the top of this. It wasn't quite in a col, but we were kind of getting quite high up. And we had a real view of the, you know, of the valley that we'd come up from with some sort of alpine meadows in it. A hillside on the other side. It was summer. I think it was June, maybe early July. I think it was June. And so long days, but the sun was going down. and just the light was just that lovely sort of golden hour of light and there was a deer on the far side i don't know if it was what species it was but just barking sort of bellowing in the distance and just echoing around this massive landscape that was just kind of epic you know and everything from kind of trees up to kind of bare rock you know on it was just just sitting there there's just myself and an old college friend um sitting outside of our tents on this summer evening having had a camping meal just taking this in just enjoying the light hearing the sounds that was something that sticks in my memory and that was when would that have been 30 years ago nearly.

[00:43:10] Then there's things like the Berens River trip, the solo trip that I did that I made

some YouTube videos of. And a lot of that was about maybe practicalities of me making the journey and what I was cooking for dinner and the sort of things that people like to see on YouTube videos.

[00:43:32] But I remember the first night that I got into Owl Lake. I think it's our lake the first lake that I camped on there and just sitting there again sun's going down it's been a bit windy during the day but the wind started to die down as the sun dropped you get this convective effect I mentioned actually in one of the earlier questions and so it's just you know that warming of the land diminishes as the sun drops, the wind drops, you start to hear sounds from further afield. And I was just sitting there again after having cooked on an open fire, just sitting there on the rock, just looking out, just taking in the vista, the rest of the lake, listening to the birdsong, hearing a loon, starting to hear the falls that were further down the river. Because the wind had dropped the wind and the trees noise on the far side of the lake diminished and I could start to hear more um just that just that awareness of those changes and how it affects what you can perceive as well I think is is really enjoyable it really connects you with the landscape and that's um I enjoy I enjoy that aspect of landscape as well um And then, you know, there's been so many encounters with, you know, small creatures. And they're always joyful.

[00:45:18] Again, I mentioned I was in South Africa recently and we were, I was doing a number of things there. I was consulting on a bushcraft program that a friend and colleague of mine is developing down there. And I was giving him input on his program that he's developing. So that was part of my work there. And then I was then, we were then flipping roles and he was training me in tracking and just, and tracking, track and sign identification of the South African wildlife in particular. And I've had an interest in that for many years. It's the first time I went to Southern Africa. It was Namibia in 2003. So that's 22 years ago. And some of the activities that we did then involved looking at animal track and sign. And I was already interested in tracking here in the UK. So going to Africa and looking at the tracks of the animals there was always fascinating to me. And it's continued to be fascinating to me, going to East Africa, going to Tanzania, going to South Africa multiple times. And I wanted to sort of focus that into something more concrete. I've been doing the Cybertracker evaluations here in the UK. And so I decided I'd do a Cybertracker evaluation in Africa. And so my friend James was running me through a lot of the animal tracks and sign down there, preparing me for this evaluation. And that was a joyful experience as well. I know it's technical, but just really delving into you know the different aspects of understanding nature and you start to be able to picture the animals moving along you know you see multiple elephant tracks going down a dirt track and you can kind of picture them walking along you know you see a mongoose track you can kind of imagine him bounding along you know you just you start to get that that that view um

[00:47:21] But within that um the point I'm coming to is that we were out one day um and there were there were two of the people doing the training with me and James leading it and we were just out looking at a variety of tracks it was just sort of an area sort of a dirt pan if you like that was great for tracks there was uh there were rhino tracks in there there

were kudu tracks there were loads of impala tracks scrub hair tracks various other tracks in there as well um some mongoose tracks and things and this as we're looking at all that we're looking at these rhino tracks and this scrub hair just kind of pootled out behind us not really caring that we were there um really really pretty hair just sort of went into the bush then it kind of came out then it went about its own business not very far away and then we moved on to another area of this of this you know dirt pan that we were looking at sort of more into the middle of it And this hare came, literally herring, shooting out of the bushes it had been in, that we'd been near to a little bit before, went zooming past us.

[00:48:32] So it was just great to see it. Literally, how did it leave its tracks moving fast? And we were just sort of chuckling about that. You know, couldn't want for a fresher example. And then maybe a minute or so later, it came running back out of the bushes again. And it just stopped right in front of us. Literally as far as I am away from the camera now. Looked up at us. Almost like it was like, wanted to tell us something. I wanted to ask us something. What are you doing? It just looked at us. And then just ran off back into the bushes again. It was just phenomenal. I can't explain what it was doing. Why it decided to do that. whether it decided to come back and have a look at us after running back past it i've no idea what was going through its mind you know we'll never know what's going through its mind but it was just beautiful little moment of this lovely hair sat in front of us just looking at us like oh what are you what are you up to and then back again i mean there's so many nice examples like that if i started to rack my brain but i think some of the ones that really seared in my brain are the the ones around landscape you know where you just at the end particularly the end of a day you know you've and there's a beautiful sunset and you're just content you're a little bit tired and you just but you're so satisfied that you're there taking it all in the small details and the big details you know and just the I think it's that joy of like I have made the effort to get here I'm a bit tired I'm a bit achy and I'm surrounded by this beauty and yeah there's so those are the ones that i think like i say you know when i've made journeys and it's just that end of day feeling of just have been surrounded by this amazing nature those are some of the most joyful um moments i think for me right what have we got left one more

[00:50:47] Feather stick hand action.

[00:50:49] Hi, Paul. This is Ben. I was wondering how much you use your left hand when making feather sticks to pull in the opposite direction of your knife and your right hand pushing down on the feather stick. So do you pull with the stick in your left hand while pushing with your right hand that's holding the knife?

[00:51:15] thank you for your time bye

[00:51:16] That's a nice question Ben, sort of a little bit more of a technical bushcraft question at the end though um yeah so you've you've really got two let me just have a slurp of coffee as well because my mouth's getting a little bit dry remember that buy me a coffee link um i really appreciate people who've who've who've bought me coffees in the in recent

weeks and it is very much appreciated it helps pay for you know like the fuel to drive out to come and do these things you know for example you know it does help um so feather sticks right i would say as a general rule you want to be moving either your knife hand or the stick hand but not both as a general rule particularly when you're learning you want some points of stability and one degree of movement you don't want multiple degrees of movement and no points of stability you'll find it harder to make feather sticks that way it's not impossible so two very distinct cases One is where you are, say, working on a stump like I'm sitting on at the moment. You've got your split stick and you've got the stick with the end mounted onto the stump or the log or whatever you're working onto. And you're holding that with your non-dominant hand at the top with your fingers clear. And then you are running a knife down that stick. to create the shavings okay so then the wood is fixed and the knife is moving so the knife hand is moving so you asked about right hand yet i am right-handed so that's my dominant hand i am holding the feather stick with my non-dominant hand and i am moving the knife with my dominant hand and shape making the shavings on the stick okay so i'm not moving the wood i'm moving the knife the other major way of making feather sticks is to not have some sort of platform to work onto. And there are some circumstances where this occurs. You might be in a heated tent, for example, where you are on a compacted area of snow.

[00:53:46] So you've got a floor there, but there's nothing really to work onto. And it might be easier just to sit there on a Wannigan or what have you and just work in a different way and the way the way that you work then is basically you lock the knife and there's a couple of different ways of doing it so let's just talk in general terms without getting too technical but you lock your hand to your leg somehow that's holding the knife and then you're going to pull the wood across the blade okay So again, you've got one degree of freedom there, which is the wood moving and you're locking the blade and the angle of the blade and then you are pulling the wood against it. Okay.

[00:54:39] Those are the two main ways of doing it. There are variations on that. Now what I see students doing that makes their life difficult is they adopt the second method and they're sort of where they're pulling but then they start to push with the hand at the same time they disconnect the hand from being locked to the knee whether it's here or here sometimes people like to do it on the inside here sometimes people like to do it on the outside but fundamentally the the most solid way of doing it is locking the hand and moving the wood but then they start to be doing both and that's where it all goes to pieces it really doesn't work very well people find that really difficult they really find it really difficult to maintain the angle they find it really difficult to maintain the right sort of pressure and depth into the wood and and it's just too much to potentially move around you know and and they don't judge the force correctly and they'll cut the curls etc etc

[00:55:42] So I would suggest, particularly if you're learning with feather sticks, and even if you're well practiced, I would say that most people will do it one or the other. Some people have a strong preference for one or the other. I would suggest that you try and get good at both. So propping the wood, shaving down, and then propping the knife on your leg and

pulling the wood to shave it that way. And don't try and blend the two. generally is my advice there so I hope that's helpful to you Ben

[00:56:17]Remember if you want to ask questions that you can leave me a message via the speak pipe system that's embedded on my website at paulkirtley.co.uk just go and click on ask paulkirtley at the top go down the page press the orange button record a message or you can tweet me at pkirt and put hashtag ask paul kirtley into the question there that's the two ways of getting questions to me these days

[00:56:45]don't forget to support these sessions with buymeacoffee.com forward slash paul kirtley

[00:56:50]and also if you'd like to learn more from me um even more from me than you get from the ask paul kirtley sessions then i have put together a curated sequence series um It's quite an epic sequence, really, of curated content that I can email straight to your inbox, okay? And I've been creating articles, in-depth articles, how-tos, videos, podcasts with absolute expert, world-class leading expert guests, Ask Paul Kirtley's, some of which have become, like, really, you know, the more popular episodes. of um of material in an order that makes absolute logical sense that i can email to you um over time and the way that you get that and it's completely free the way that you get that is you go to paulkirtley.co.uk forward slash emails okay paulkirtley.co.uk forward slash emails just pop your name first name email address in there and those emails will start coming to you almost immediately so hope that you can take advantage of that as well there is a ton of stuff buried on my website at paulkirtley.co.uk as i say that site's been running since 2010 and what i want to do is bring to the surface the best material that i can send to you and for it to come in an order that now having that 15 years worth of material makes sense in a logical order and builds over time rather than you just having to dig into it at random or maybe just miss stuff altogether um so hopefully that helps and there will be some special offers and other things in there as well of course smattered in there you'll be the first to know about various things and like new books as well that sort of thing um coming up um of course i will let you know about that kind of thing as well if you're on my email list so hopefully see you there

[00:58:57]Thanks for listening, thanks for your attention and keep the questions coming and i look forward to seeing you on the next session before long take care cheers

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