

# #AskPaulKirtley Episode 91 Transcript

[ 00:00:00 ] In this episode of Ask Paul Kirtley, we are going to talk about me teaching in the USA, lighting fire dogs, students are they different now from 15 or 20 years ago, what makes a good traveling companion for wilderness trips and outdoor expeditions, and what are my top five knots.

[ 00:00:44 ] Welcome, welcome to episode 91 of Ask Paul Kirtley, and it's good to be back with another round of great questions. Keep the questions coming in.

[ 00:00:54 ] I'll link below to where you can ask them by leaving a voicemail. Most people are leaving voicemails now. You can also send me a tweet at pkirt, put the hashtag #AskPaulKirtley in the question, ask me the question on Twitter. X whatever you want to call it these days, but it seems like most people are liking the voicemails and actually I do like hearing from you and I think the other listeners like hearing the voices of the question askers as well. It goes across really well on the audio podcast version of this as well, if you're not watching on YouTube. So yeah, these are all voicemail questions, uh, via the speak pipe function on my website. That's probably the way to go for most people now. Don't forget you can support these sessions by buying me a coffee: buymeacoffee. Com forward slash Paul Kirtley, thank you for all the support recently and always. It's much appreciated. Thank you, all right.

[ 00:01:56 ] Good. Um, let's go in no particular order. Um, top five knots. This is the actual question.

[ 00:02:08 ] *Oh, hi, this is Mark in Harlem, one of your students from a couple of years ago on the canoeing course, which was fantastic. I would recommend anybody to do it. I'd like to ask you a question for anybody new to bushcraft. What would be Paul Kirtley's top five knots that would take somebody a long way that they should get hardwired in their heads? So, yeah, top five knots from Paul Kirtley. And as a segue to your. Great video about luminosity and getting things brightened up so you don't lose them. I use neon fluorescent cordage for guy lines and for ridge tarps. It stops me— less chance of me garrotting myself or tripping up on one of the guy lines. Okay. All the best, Paul. Thank you. Bye-bye.*

[ 00:02:58 ] Good stuff. Well. Good question there and um yeah, good tip on the guy lines as well um yeah, it can be useful for them to be well signaled um particularly for other people but as you say, mark um can be uh can be good for not garrotting yourself as well um one of the worst injuries i ever got from a guy line it was just like two mil cordage uh guy line on one of my tarps and i had the tarp set up quite high and i walked into it at face level and kind of gave myself a rope burn across the top of my nose there so yeah it

happens to the best of us um whether that would have happened or not if it was bright fluorescent yellow or not i don't know i was kind of in a little world of my own at that point um moving around an area i was used to being in and i'd put a tarp in it and yeah anyway funny right um top five knots for people now i'm going to ignore the tarp knots um because you know if we if we're going to talk

[ 00:04:08 ] about tarps we're going to talk about a venk hitch taut tarp hitch adjustable guy line hitch and some prussics you'll kind of four into the knots and Frankly, while they're good to know, and I would recommend people go and learn those, and I can link to them before I've got videos and all of those, so people can go and learn those. But they are specific to putting tarps up, and I think your question was broader than that, like what are some really good knots to know that stand you in good stead for lots of different things in the outdoors, and so, um, I had a little think about it, it didn't take me long, um, the difficulty was once I got past like number three or number four, which one to put in at number five, and there are some good ones that I would have liked to have had, but um, I've had to Exclude I'm going to cheat a little bit towards the end though. Um, so overhand knot to start off with, super simple. If you ask anybody to tie a knot, that the first knot that they can think of, even if they're like, 'I'm, I'm a fear of knots, I'm afraid of knots, I can't tie knots, I don't know how to tie knots.' If you give someone a piece of paracord or a piece of rope and say, 'just tie something in it 99 times out of 100 they'll tie an overhand knot.

[ 00:05:25 ] Um, and it's an intuitive knot but it's also actually a very useful knot. It does have some limitations in terms of putting it under a lot of attention and then being able to untie it. But fundamentally, it's extremely useful because it's a building block as well for many other things. So, if we then include it, we can use it as a stopper knot, of course, we can use it.

[ 00:05:47 ] Doubling a piece of rope over we can form a fixed loop but then if we create a slipped version we can then start tying things like truckers hitches as well and because that's a basically it's a slipped overhand knot that we create to bring the rope back and through to create a trucker's hitch so you should know how to tie an overhand knot and you should know how to tie the slipped version and you should know how to tie it in the bite as well to create a fixed loop and for starters jam knot is the next one now jam knot is basically a stacked series of overhand knots you start with something that is equivalent to the arbor knot which again requires a couple of overhand knots and then you build on top of that to build the full jam knot and it is all just reliant on being able to tie overhand knots but it is a knot in its own right and it has so many uses particularly in bushcraft these days we are bushcraft survival outdoors in general we use paracord we use utility cord we use modern cordage and the jam knot works extremely well with those types of cordage it doesn't work very well with natural

[ 00:06:54 ] cordage it doesn't work well with you know traditional uh cordage that you might buy that is natural cordage so sisal and jute and things like that but with paracord or similar it works extremely well and is very efficient you can create very strong lashings very

good lashings with minimal uses of cordage so jam knot is definitely on my list and then also in the same family as the overhand knot and and therefore the jam knot is the figure eight knot so it doesn't take much of a stretch to go from knowing how to tie an overhand knot to tying a figure eight knot and that is also useful as a stopper knot it's easier to untie than An overhand knot when it's been under tension, you double the rope over, you create a bite, you tie a figure of eight, you've got a good fixed loop that's also easier to untie than an overhand. You can do a threaded figure of eight that's what we use when we're climbing indoors. It's certainly what I was taught when I learned to climb indoors. A re-threaded figure of eight through our, through our climbing harness, with a double thumb knot on the end to make sure we've had enough tail and lots and lots of uses of the figure eight.

[ 00:08:02 ] You can do a re-threaded figure of eight to tie the the painter onto your canoe. Some people use a bowline. But a re-threaded figure of eight works just as well, so lots and lots of uses for a re-threaded figure of eight. It's hard to get wrong— you've got a visual check that it's right. It's got a nice figure of eight shape, and so this is one of my cheats. The event hitch is actually just a slippery figure of eight with a quick release. So tying, you know, people like are the event kits. You're going to learn that for my for my tarp. Yes, absolutely, it's a clever way of tying a particular type of figure of eight knot. But the fundamental knot you're tying there is a figure eight. So you should know how to tie figure eight and you should recognize that. Figure eight shape, um, what else have I got here? Round turn and two half hitches. This is probably the first proper knot that I learned. My uncle was in the merchant marine the merchant navy, and he um he could tie all sorts of great knots. He could tie monkey's fists, he could tie all sorts of stuff, but he taught me a few knots when I was a young lad, about seven or eight years old. Round turn and round turning two half hitches was was one of them.

[ 00:09:06 ] We actually— he bought us some rope, um, me and my cousin, and he cut it in three ways. Um, for his two kids and one section for me when they came to visit us when we lived in North Wales. I remember getting this. Section of the rope— it was a static rope. It was a little bit like a kind of abseil-type rope, although it was a bit softer than that. We actually did like a body abseil down one of the banks and you know, that would be in the garden behind our house. We had quite a big garden, and it was quite a bit. It went up to a forestry commission forest directly behind and there were some quite steep banks there. So we actually did this sort of body, like a body belay, but a body abseil down this bank, which was fun as a, you know, as a seven or eight-year-old lad. And but we tied it off to a big sturdy tree at the top with a round turn and two half hitches. He taught me how to tie the round turn and two half hitches. It's great. It's super easy to tie, and it's super easy to untie. You can still use it for putting tarps up, particularly big tarps.

[ 00:10:07 ] You can use it for putting your personal tarp up as well. Rather than tying an event hitch at the beginning— round turn, two half hitches— and you can even make the second half hitch quick release as well to it and make the untying even quicker. So round turning two half hitches should absolutely be in your repertoire. You can use it for when you tie your canoe off, where at the end of the day, all those sorts of jobs. I use it all the

time without thinking. About it, definitely should be in your repertoire, and in some ways, it's a bit of a cheat. Um, if you think about the the two half hitches around the standing part, you're actually tying a clove hitch. Okay. But a clove hitch should definitely be in your repertoire. So, number five: I sort of prevaricated over this. I thought, do I cheat and kind of say, 'clove hitch and then cheat you know, slip in the round turning two half hitches a lot. Most people don't realize when they're tying around turning two half hitches, the two half hitches form a clove hitch around the standing part. But you are actually just tying a clove hitch. So it's One way of tying a clove hitch there are a number of ways of tying a clove hitch, but you should know how to tie a clove hitch and you should know the different ways of tying a clove hitch.

[ 00:11:10 ] So, if you've got access to the end of the rope and you're going around a bar or a spar or a fixed point or another piece of rope, um you should be able to tie it that way. You should also be able to tie it when you don't have access to the end of the rope, but have access to the end of, say, a spar. By making a couple of bunny ears and putting it over, there's a there's a couple of other ways of tying it as well. But you should certainly be able to tie it when you've got access to the end of the rope and when you don't have access to the end of the rope. The clove hitch is super super useful—I use it a lot in camp craft for fixing things. You use at the beginning of tying more complex things like square lashings. You use it when you're panassing a salmon over a fire— that classic bushcraft way of roasting a salmon over the fire that comes from Hillary Stewart's Indian Fishing Techniques book. Um, when you've split your stick and you put the fish in the middle of the split stick and you put it back together again, what works really well at the top of that clove hitch or two. Top and so, definitely, you should know how to tie a clove hitch and it's not much of a leap then to learn how to say tie a constrictor hitch.

[ 00:12:11 ] It's not much of a leap to learn how to tie an Italian hitch. So I would say one of the core building blocks then is the uh, the clove hitch and understand how it links with your round turning, two half hitches. As well, is an added bonus. So that's it for my top five overhand knots, including tying it in the bite and the slipped version. Jam knot, of course. Classic props to Morse Kahansky for popularizing that one figure of eight in the bite. Re-threaded for sure. Round turning two half hitches and the Clove hitch and learn how to tie it when you've got access to the end of the rope and you don't have access to the end of the rope. There you go. Once you've got those under your belt, you can do a lot in the outdoors. Of course, there's more specific knots you can learn for particular jobs, but I would say those five are going to stand you in really good stead. If you want to learn more about knots, I have a big knot course. It's not that big—I don't want to frighten people. There's about 50 lessons in it, five zero, and it's got all of those knots that I mentioned and all of the other knots that I ever use outdoors for all the different things.

[ 00:13:21 ] That I do outdoors in my knot knowledge course and that's available today. I'll link to it below. Definitely worthwhile jumping into, and you'll get lifelong access to that. So you can use it as a library to refer to. I don't just teach you how to tie the knots; I also explain what they're for, what the pros and cons are in different uses, and use cases. That's

what we need to know outdoors. I think one of the problems with knot books in general, and I've got plenty of them, and I— no disrespect to the authors— also understand what it's like writing books and how it can be difficult to fit all the information into books that you want. To. But it doesn't always explain all the different use cases. And if you are writing a knots book, you've got to make it— you know, useful to everyone who picks that up. And rather than just niching down, say, into bushcraft, survival, outdoor life. And that's what my knot knowledge course does, really. It's for people that enjoy, say, the Asprey Kirtley series, my other material on the YouTube.

[ 00:14:21 ] If you go camping, doing bushcraft, if you're interested in survival skills, if you want to do canoe trips, even in the mountains, there's some useful knots there for you. And I hope you have a look at that. Link below. And it's called Knot Knowledge. And yeah, knots are kind of one of my other areas of nerdism. If you like plants, natural navigation, knots, tracking, just yeah. I love all the attention to detail stuff. Um okay. Next question: this is from Joey.

[ 00:14:58 ] *Hello Paul, I hope you're well. Um, my question is to do with making journeys as a part of a group and more specifically, what I can do to bring some additional value to my my sort of place in the group. I'm becoming a little bit more confident now in my fundamental skills. I think I'm in a good place to start making some more extended journeys. And I just wondered what your thoughts were regarding what makes a good traveling companion in addition to the sort of basics of being able to carry your own weight and being confident in your own sort of fundamental skills. Also, I just wanted to say thanks again for the effort you put into the Paul Kirtley episodes. It's been a really good, detailed, vast library of uh, of knowledge I can get into and it's really helped me um, improve some of the skills I have alongside all the other online content and the and the field courses so thanks again for that Paul all right cheers bye nice one Joey*

um, if I look distracted a little bit there, as the as the question was playing um, a buzzard just swooped down and flew across about 10 metres, ôl y camera, felly roedd hynny'n dda iawn i'w weld. Ond roeddwn i'n gwranddo, Joey, ac mae hynny'n gwestiwn dda iawn a byddaf yn mynd i mewn i hynny. Roeddwn i eisiau dweud yn gyntaf, mae wedi bod yn dda iawn gweld eich diwrnod personol o ran lle rydych chi eisiau mynd i mewn. Mae Joey wedi gwneud rhai cwrsau gyda fi gyda Frontier. Roedd yn gwneud y cwrs ysgol ysbrydoliadau ysbrydoliadau gyda fi yn y flwyddyn diwethaf. Mae wedi gwneud ein cwrs oeddiol. Mae ganddyn nhw gael mynediad i'n and it's been really nice to see your personal journey with your skills both with us at Frontier but also with what you've been doing with Woodcraft School and John Ryder's program there and what you're doing now with Canoe Trails.

[ 00:17:04 ] It's really nice to see that progression and yeah, good for you. It shows that with determination you can go a long way. So well done to you and you're coming on the Spey with us later this year as well. It's a pertinent question from that perspective. Um, I'll try not to be too selfish. A cup of tea at seven o'clock in the morning makes a good traveling companion. Um, as far as Ray Goodwin's concerned, it does. Um, but I'll try not to be too

selfish in my answer. I'll give you a good general answer from the perspective of having made a lot of journeys with other people, some of whom have paid me to lead them, and some of whom have just— you know— we've done them as peers, as friends, or maybe I'm the more experienced friend and they've wanted me to come along to give them some— you know— backstop skills or whatever. Done a lot of trips, hiking, snowshoeing, canoeing, ski touring, etc.

[ 00:18:06 ] etc. Um, so what makes a good traveling companion? Um, some. I would say someone who just accepts what is going on in terms of the weather, the conditions, etc. Someone who can be a bit stoic in the face of shitty conditions. I think that's, you know, if you can find the funny side of things when things are a bit tough, and that's— they always make those types of people always make good um traveling companions. You don't want people who just add to the suck when the situation's already a bit challenging. Um, and so that, I think, if you can put a positive spin and a smiley face, even if it's type 2 fun, that's useful just as a general mindset for you undertaking trips. And it's also useful for the rest of the group if you are positive, even in the face of challenges.

[ 00:19:14 ] I would say that's useful.

[ 00:19:18 ] I would also say someone who's self-aware. We all get tired. We all get grumpy.

[ 00:19:25 ] Those things. Just be aware when you're starting to feel a little bit hangry or...

[ 00:19:30 ] Be aware of the fact that you're getting dehydrated, etc and don't be afraid to say, actually, you know, I need to stop and eat something, I need to drink something, because other people in the group probably will as well. So don't be afraid, don't be, don't be afraid don't be don't don't grumble but equally don't be afraid to express a need. Um, because that can be a good barometer for the group as well. Um, not not to say that the leader shouldn't be trying to keep an eye on you and you shouldn't be putting in suitable breaks for drinks and food and rest and things, but it's still useful if there is a bit of a feedback loop there for even for a competent leader, because everyone's different. Right. And you get to know a group over the course of a trip. Um, then I would say someone who's just willing to help with what, you know, if you're talking about being a group member with a leader, what's always useful is if you're just willing to help.

[ 00:20:32 ] So once you start to, you know, at the beginning of a trip, you might not know what the routine is. So you might be, you know, looking for direction, and that's absolutely fine. And a good leader will give you direction. It's like, we need some people to get firewood. We need some people to set this tarp up. We need some people to establish this fireplace or whatever it is. You know, we need some people to do the washing up. You know, can you go and, you know, get this stuff out of the barrels? You know, can you unpack the food bag? Can you hydrate this food? Whatever it is, you know, whatever the routine is for that trip. We need someone to go and get the water filter running, et cetera, and be shown how to do that. But once you know the camp routine after a few days, it's useful. If

you use a bit of initiative, and it really takes the strain off, and it's also useful if you just offer to do things. I'll just you know, Paul is there. Anything that needs doing right now? That's that's always really really useful. Rather than the leader having to always uh kick people into action, the flip side of that is someone who you get into camp.

[ 00:21:37 ] They go and set their own stuff up. They come into the group, camp, they've got their folding chair, they open their folding chair, and they sit down. I'm—I that— that is— that kind of chap. Me a little bit. Um, there's no kind of cons you know, you. With my trips, you know, and I'm talking about the context of my trips, you're not on some kind of five-star safari. You know, it is us as a group making a journey. OK, myself and someone like Ray Goodwin or Dave or Kai Marone from Lure of the North. We are the leaders and we are there to keep you safe and we are there to give the trip direction and shape. But we need the participants to participate. You know, it's not just about getting up in the morning and paddling from A to B or getting up in the morning and snowshoeing from A to B. You also need to help put the tent up. You need to help get the firewood in. You need to help cook dinner. You need to help wash up. You need to help put the boats away at the end of the day. You need to help take the barrels out into the woods, you know, so that they're away from camp in bear country. You know, if everyone just kind of sits in camp, waits to be catered to, and goes to bed, then there's a lot of jobs.

[ 00:22:44 ] Not done there, so it's it's picking up those jobs. You know, asking what needs to be done, and then seeing what needs to be done, and um, doing the job fully, if you're doing it, rather than just half arsing it as well. You know, if if if you're tasked with getting firewood, get plenty of firewood, don't just kind of go and get a little bit and then sit down and carry on drinking a cup of tea, because then someone else has got to do it, so there's enough firewood to cook the dinner. And I find where the metal really meets the road, the rubber really meets the road, if you like, is when the weather's bad at the end of a difficult day. The people who have the right attitude on trips are the ones who are going out into the rain, getting firewood, you know, quickly getting some, helping get some food ready, helping the leader get some food ready or, you know, or. Um, saying okay. Me and Dave, we'll get that. You know what's for dinner? We'll get it sorted. Um, or, you know, getting— getting you know, knowing that the routine is to get a bunch of hot water on to start off with, because we need cups of tea, we need to fill flasks, we need to rehydrate food.

[ 00:23:49 ] It's just like right. I've gone and got the water already. As soon as the fire's on, we can get the water on. Just having that kind of usefulness is is is the thing that makes a difference. I've got the water filter on. You showed me how to do it yesterday. I've got that up and running. You know those sorts of things are super useful. Looking for things to do, not trying to do everything, not taking over, not being a busybody, but just being helpful, rather than just sitting back and expecting someone else to do it. That's actually really really useful, as a traveling companion, as part of a group, you know, speaking from the leader's. Perspective going back to sort of a more sort of broad brush. Um, someone who's also just aligned with enjoying being out in nature. Enjoy for me, I like the journey as much as a destination. Right. So there are some people I've traveled with who they just want to

get to camp at the end of the day. You know, they, they, they, they want that. They wanted to have a physical challenge, they want to do it hard and fast and tough and they want to get to camp or they're stressed about some of the things that we've got to negotiate during the day and they just want to get it done.

[ 00:24:58 ] They want to get it ticked off. I'm the same. I want to get to camp. I want to I want to get there safely, I want to get there in good time, so that we've got time and camp. But equally, I want to you know if there are if there are otters to watch. I want to stop and watch them, you know. I want to be quiet so that we can see wildlife, you know. I want people that are looking for a harmonious experience in nature, rather than just being loud and hard and fast. Um, because that doesn't really it doesn't really gel with the way that I like to travel through nature, so um, yeah. For me, those are all things, you know. And that's not true of everyone, but that's you know, speaking from my personal experience. Um, yeah, just you. Know bring a bit of humor, uh, stay positive when things are tough. Look for what needs to be done, be helpful.

[ 00:26:00 ] If you find yourself sitting around and other people are doing stuff, maybe ask what needs to be done. And sometimes there doesn't need to be things done. What I don't want, if I've got eight people on a trip with me and another leader, I don't want everyone busy every night or every morning with no time to themselves. I would rather a few people do dinner and a few people have some downtime to write their journal one evening and then... The next evening, maybe we swap around so that some other people can have a bit of downtime and other people are busy rather than everyone trying to do a little bit. But just ask is always helpful. Offer your services, offer your help. That's always, always useful. And, you know, if there isn't anything to do, go chill because that's valuable as well as, you know, in terms of the group dynamic as a whole, the more tired. Um, people get and the less time they feel like they've got to themselves, the more warm they get over the course of a journey.

[ 00:27:00 ] So, um, yeah, I think that's that's all I've got to think about at the moment. And hopefully, that's useful to you all. Right. Next question: Teaching in the USA.

[ 00:27:11 ] *Hey, Paul. My name is Ed. I'm up in Northeast Illinois, just south of the Wisconsin border by Lake Michigan. And I'm wondering what you would need or what you would require, if anything, to come to the States and teach some classes here. I'm sure there are several people in North America that would love to come to your classes but can't make the trip to England or to Canada. Please let us know what you need and we'll see if we can help you out. All the best. Thanks for everything you do.*

[ 00:27:45 ] Thank you, Ed.

[ 00:27:47 ] That's a nice offer.

[ 00:27:49 ] Careful what you wish for.



[ 00:27:52 ] Seriously, though, yeah, I mean, I do go to other countries to teach and I run canoe trips in Canada and I work in conjunction with Lure of the North in Canada to offer winter trips. I also travel to Australia to run courses there under the hospitality if you like hosted by bushcraft survival australia, which is owned and run by my friend Gordon Deadman, who you may know from he's in the online course a little bit talking about some of the um Australian specific aspects of collecting water. He's also been on my podcast and Gordon has also done courses with me in the UK and I've been out to visit him a few times. And yeah, I run courses there and so, um, it depends— it depends what you wanted me to do. Ed, what type of course—um, but I'm assuming you mean a kind of general bushcraft course, you know, the type of things that I run in England.

[ 00:28:54 ] You mentioned you know people not being able to come to England, um, and you also mentioned Canada though. So, it's like, what I do in Canada is more journey-based, although the first phase of the winter trip is winter bushcraft. If you wanted me to come to Michigan and do winter bushcraft, I could do that. If you wanted me to come to um, or Lake Michigan, you didn't say you were in Michigan, you Lake Michigan yet, but I know the part of the world it's cold enough where you are to do some winter bushcraft. Um, but I'm assuming that you mean more the type of courses that I would run from sort of April through October in the UK, which is like elementary wilderness bushcraft, woodcraft, outdoor emergency preparedness, intermediate, all those sorts of courses that we run here.

[ 00:29:45 ] I would need a venue. I need a wooded area with a variety of resources.

[ 00:29:51 ] It doesn't have to be all broadleaf. It doesn't have to be all, you know, coniferous needle species. A mixture would be great, but either would be fine. I could adapt to that.

[ 00:30:06 ] You know, it's not too different there to what it is here in terms of it being kind of northern temperate climate.

[ 00:30:15 ] Plants, trees, that wouldn't be a problem for me. And then it's a case of having enough space that we've got enough resources that we can use. We need permission to take those resources and use them as we want to. We'd need permission to have a camp. We would need at least some sort of base camp. If it was a teaching course, we'd need a base camp. We would need, say, like a parachute area. We'd need some benches, a place to have a fire.

[ 00:30:45 ] We need to be able to establish a you know a bush latrine and you know have a kitchen area so it would need to be accessible enough for people to get there and for you know to get the camp equipment in. But it would need to be you know wooded enough you know in the backwoods enough that it had the right feel and the resources. So in terms of venue, you know, so you know the places that we use down in the south of England, typically you have to drive in using a you know four by four vehicle to get the equipment in. And it gets us far enough off the road and into the woods that we've got the right situ and

the right resources that we need. Of course, it's a question of the basic camping camp infrastructure. In terms of like, we need enough large cooking pots to cook for a group or small cooking pots that people can cook in small groups. Would we be supplying knives? Are we supplying saws? Do we need people to bring their own cutting tools? Are we supplying them?

[ 00:31:45 ] So my axe course, we have a whole massive load of axes that people use.

[ 00:31:52 ] That we lend to them and they don't have to bring their own axes. They bring their own belts, knife, and saw. On my elementary course, I give people a belt knife, I give people a ferro rod, and I lend them a saw. Are we lending people tarps or are they bringing their own? So there's a certain amount of baseline equipment that might be needed to facilitate the course, depending on the level. While an intermediate course, people are pretty much bringing their own equipment and we're just supplying some of the food stuff. And then we're sourcing everything else from nature. So it depends on the type of program. Obviously, I'm very limited in what I can bring with me if I'm flying in to run a course. So some of that stuff needs to be sourced locally. And even with the winter course that I run with Lure of the North, they are providing the base camp venue. and the base camp infrastructure and they're providing snowshoes, toboggans, snow trekker tents, etc. as well as the lure of the north anoraks and some and tingly over boots and moccasins for the students to use, so that they don't necessarily have to get that specialist equipment— even some of the specialist clothing— and then they can turn up with some basic cold weather clothing and add to it with

[ 00:33:11 ] some of the specialist kit from the north, if they haven't chosen to buy their own. It's really then just a case of gauging where we want to pitch it: whether the people have their own gear, whether we need to ask people to purchase their own gear, or whether we want to supply some of the gear. Of course, even if we were supplying some of the gear, it wouldn't be that difficult to source certain. Things in the USA and then, of course, I would need a visa to get in. Um, for working. I've been to the USA a few times over the years as a tourist. I've never had any issue getting into the USA before. I'm sure, as a specialist in my field, it wouldn't be difficult for me to get a temporary working visa, but that would also be something I would need to get, of course. And I would probably need someone to... I don't know whether 'sponsor' is the right word, but I'd need someone to say 'yes.' Paul is the only person that we can get to come and do this, and there's nobody local that can do this for us. Um, I guess unless they're impersonating me, there isn't anybody that can do it. Um, and that would be that would be some paperwork that would need doing as well.

[ 00:34:19 ] Um, and then then it would need to be reliable. We would need enough people as well. I wouldn't want to commit to coming and, you know, purchasing flights and going through the paperwork for a visa, and then for me to turn up, and nobody's there. So you'd also need, generally, on my courses, I run with 12 people. I don't like running with much more than that, because it starts to really dilute the teaching experience. I can't give people the attention that they need, which I believe they should be getting as a one-on-one, you

know, in-person teaching experience. So I would tend to cap it at 12. So we'd have to price it appropriately so that.

[ 00:34:59 ] It pays for my time and it pays for my travel and it pays for any of the costs on the ground, including I don't know your time or the time you know. Materials, equipment, landowner, whatever it would—this would all need to be costed. It's it's perfectly doable, but it's not just a okay. I'm going to jump on a flight next week and we'll go to the woods and do stuff. There might be a little bit more organization required than that, but um, yeah. Drop me an email. Um, I think you've got my email, Ed. Drop me an email if you want to follow up on that. Um, yeah. Hopefully that answer is useful to other people as well who are looking to do things around the world.

[ 00:35:44 ] That's kind of what it takes generally. And as I say, what works with Bushcraft Australia, Bushcraft Survival Australia, is that they've already got their base camp, they've already got the equipment, they're already running courses. And so I can slot into that quite easily. Similarly with Lure the North, they have their equipment, they have their base camp, they have their routines for preparing food, et cetera, et cetera. And so I can slot into that and bring what I bring to those trips. and uh, including I, actually bring all of the clients to those trips as well. Um, yeah, so we can talk further if you wish. Ed, yeah, but thank you for the question and thank you for being keen to have me over. That would be fun to do. Um, okay, lighting fire dogs.

[ 00:36:35 ] *My name is Dawn. Um, I'm hoping you're going to be able to help me out with lighting fire dogs from the night before or from a few days before, from a campfire. I've been trying to do it a few times as we uh, over the last few weeks, and um, I've noticed that I can get the wood to take a spark, but I can't get it to hold a spark. So the spark will inevitably go out within a few seconds. I've tried it with different types of wood. Admittedly, this is wood that's been outside, so I don't know if there's still a lot of residual dampness in the wood because we've had such a wet winter, or if there's something about my technique that I'm just not doing. What I have been doing, though, is scraping the fire steel first to get lots of little pieces of the ferro rod on the log before I then do a bigger strike to light them. So I can get a part of the fire dog to light, get a little tiny little ember, but then it invariably goes out in a few seconds. So if you could give me any advice on how I can practice this and get better at it. That would be great, right? Thanks for your help. Cool.*

[ 00:38:00 ] Good question. Dawn, um, it is kind of the first thing I would say is every piece of wood's different, and so it is sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. I think that's there isn't any particular technique that I'm aware of that makes it always work, because it's very dependent upon the piece of wood, what conditions it's in. You mentioned atmospheric moisture as well. Um, but one thing I would say is— you're much more likely to get it to work with a fire dog from the night before than from several days. I think several days is pushing it a little bit. Um, I think if you're not having a fire for Several days and then coming back and having a fire, you just have to generally I would just suggest that you start lighting a fire in the same way as you normally do. You can introduce those fire dogs into, you know,

a new young fire with small sticks and they will take quite nicely from that and more easily than logs of that size that have had no exposure to fire.

[ 00:39:09 ] So it's not all lost. In terms of dropping a spark onto it, I think your best chances are when it's from the night before it's gone out, hasn't been rained on, and then you can uh, you can light it again the next morning. Some species of wood work better than others. Um, where it Works best is when you get that really fine um there's a kind of core black char and then you get that really fine kind of white ash on top of a dog sometimes that's usually the best place to try first and get a spark onto that. What you suggested of scraping some of the ferro rod material off first and dropping a spark into that is actually a very good thing to try. And it's good that you're already doing that. And it's good that you're getting it to take and last a few seconds. What you then need to do is you need to introduce some oxygen after that.

[ 00:40:15 ] You need to introduce some more fuel. What won't happen is you drop a spark onto a fire dog. It. It. The spark takes you start to get that little orange glow and then it just spread and increase that. What you need to do is once you get the spark onto it, is and you've got a little area that's glowing. Is then blow just like you're blowing an ember to flame. Probably even a little bit. Um, yeah. About the same as if you're blowing an ember to flame. Just not so hard that you're going to you're going to expunge the fire. Just blow on it to introduce oxygen steadily. Hopefully that will then start to increase the area that is glowing. And you want to keep it. It'll increase and it'll get bigger. and bigger. Just be a little bit careful about sparks jumping off and landing on your clothing and burning a hole in them because that will start to happen, particularly if there's residual bits of ferro rod in there that spark off.

[ 00:41:17 ] And then what you want to do is get another fire dog, preferably the kind of thin end of one, and bring it into that area. That is glowing. So you say you get an area that's, you know, maybe an inch or so in diameter that's glowing, you're blowing it, it's increasing, bring the end in and touch that and then blow that to get that going. And then the two pieces of fuel together are what you need. And that should then eventually start to produce some flame off that. Once you start to get a little bit of flame, you won't get flame when you're blowing, you'll just get a lot of orange glow and a noise you'll you'll start getting them both going they'll start increasing as you stop blowing and let it settle that's when you'll see a little flame pop so um and if you don't just keep blowing once you start to see a little it'll just be a little wisp like some of the gas is burning off that's good then you can get it down to where you're having your fire to keep them touching blow again and then try and bring a third piece in so you've got like a a starfire if you

[ 00:42:25 ] like three pieces feeding in keep keep blowing some oxygen until you get a little flame coming out and then once you've got that you can put your um put some small sticks on the top or whatever you whatever you need from from there that that's the way that i do it um i'm trying to think if there's any video footage of me doing that anywhere might be on one of kevin callan's videos from us on the spay i remember the reason i

remember that is because i'd shown justine kirk even how to light fire using lichen the night before So in the morning, going back to Joey's question, Justine is a great traveling companion. She's a fantastic expeditioner, but she's also a great, you know, traveling companion. You know, she went off to find lichen to get the fire going in the morning. Meanwhile, I dropped a spark on the dogs from the night before and blew it. And she came back and had this kind of fake strop about.

[ 00:43:24 ] Wasting her time collecting lichen. That's in one of Kevin's videos. I'll try and link it below.

[ 00:43:32 ] It's one of the series that Kevin did about us paddling the River Spey together. When we did it with Justine, Ray Goodwin, Justine Corgenven, Kevin Callan and myself quite a few years ago. But that was a fun trip. And that was in November. It was quite cold in the mornings and damp. And it was working then— the fire dog technique for sure. So it should work cold and damp, if it's been rained on directly, it won't work. If it's just atmospheric moisture, a bit of dew, um— you know, I, we tend to put a tarp over the fire, um, just to have that warm space, particularly at that time of year. You know, it's damp down by, you know, you're camping next to a river, a few meters above the level of the river, it's always going to be a bit damp, particularly at that time of year. Warmer during the day, colder at night. There's definitely a lot of moisture around at night, and you can still get it to go in those conditions, but it is very dependent upon the species of wood. I'm not going to give a list of ones that do and don't work.

[ 00:44:35 ] Because I've had variable success with ones that I even know that generally do work quite well. So I don't want people to get too wedded to that.

[ 00:44:49 ] You just have to experiment. If it's in your fire, what I've shared with you is the best chances of it working. If it doesn't work, it doesn't work.

[ 00:45:03 ] But it won't ever work just dropping a spark on it and then it growing from there. You need to add quite a lot of oxygen into it quite quickly once you get that ember caught. We've done that one. We've done that one. We've done the knots. We've done this one. So this is the last one.

[ 00:45:17 ] *Hey Paul, it's Jay here in Alberta. Got a question for you about your students that you've seen and the changes in students over, say, the past 20 or 25 years. I feel like the students or learners that I have exposure to now generally have a much lower level of knowledge, practical knowledge, and hands-on skills than they did, say, 15 or even 20 years ago. In other words, people know a lot about a topic, but they don't. have the basic hand-eye coordination to actually do the things that they think they know how to do. A great example is a hammer and a drill. I taught a course recently in leather making and I had to show some people how to use a hammer delicately and how to use a hand drill. They simply had never done it. Have you seen that same phenomenon change in the past few years?*

[ 00:46:21 ] Okay. I feel like I might be opening a can of worms here, but I can blame it on you, Jay. You asked the question.

[ 00:46:32 ] There's a number of different aspects I can think of to this. Yes, things have changed over the last 15 or 20 years. And I don't think it's just because I'm getting older and my perspective is changing. Of course, we always need to consider that.

[ 00:46:49 ] When I started teaching bushcraft, I was 30 and now I'm 52.

[ 00:47:01 ] So there's a lot of life experience there— both in teaching bushcraft and doing expeditions, and just life in general, relating to people, understanding people better. That you get, you think you know a lot when you're 30, but you realize you're still quite young when you're 30. When you get to 50, um, and then of course, I was student on courses before that, and you know, doing stuff in the hills, backpacking, and doing trips with friends, and you know, I've been involved in outdoor activities since I was in my teens.

[ 00:47:44 ] So what have I noticed that's changed?

[ 00:47:47 ] I would say that, in terms of bushcraft courses, let's just say that people turn up with more awareness. I wouldn't even say knowledge— turn up with more awareness of different aspects of a course now than say 20 years ago. I remember when I went to do a bushcraft course, the first bushcraft course I ever did, I'd never seen anybody do bow drill before.

[ 00:48:26 ] I might have seen Ray Mears do it on one of the TV shows, but I'm not even sure I'd seen him do it on the TV shows because all he'd done was tracks and World of Survival at that point.

[ 00:48:41 ] And so I might not have even seen Mears do it. And of course, this was pre-YouTube, pre-smartphones.

[ 00:48:52 ] And I had a few books on bushcraft and survival. I was aware of it as a potential, but I'd never really seen it or understood it. Whereas now, you get a lot of people turning up to courses who have seen lots of different people do it, at least on video.

[ 00:49:11 ] And I think that's true of a lot of things. People who are interested in bushcraft will have found bushcraft YouTube channels like mine. Might be why they're on a course with me, but they're probably found, you know, TA Outdoors, Dave Canterbury, Coal Cracker Bushcraft.

[ 00:49:32 ] I don't watch a lot of bushcraft channels, I have to say.

[ 00:49:37 ] But, you know, those channels.

[ 00:49:41 ] Maybe Joe Robinette, you know, they've kind of come into it through one of those kind of routes, and um, they've seen lots and lots of bits and pieces from different people.

[ 00:49:57 ] And so they're aware of a lot of things. It might be why they're on the course, because they want to learn more about those things. And that's, you know, that's great. They actually want to have hands-on experience. That's why they've come on a physical course. So I'm not going to— I'm not going to criticize a student for coming on a course who hasn't already got hands-on experience, because that's why they're on the course. Right. That's what I'm there to help them with.

[ 00:50:23 ] The thing is, though, because they've got lots of different perspectives on things, some of them out of context, and that's not necessarily the fault of the videographer. It's just they've watched a bit of a video or the students remembered a bit of a video. You sometimes have to sort of unpick some pseudo understanding of certain things. That we didn't have to do 20 years ago, people kind of came more as a blank canvas, perhaps, and you could just build them from the ground up. Um, they were still keen to learn, they were still keen to get hands-on experience, but you weren't having to kind of navigate some preconceptions, perhaps, that we now have to sometimes. That's that's part of what's changed. Um, I think what's changed with, particularly, the and again, this isn't me being old versus younger people. I just mean the people who have grown up with smartphones and Google searches, just being there from day one, as opposed to those of us who remember the world when we used to have to dial a phone with a round thing that went and we didn't have the internet and we had two channels of TV.

[ 00:51:41 ] Um, information is so immediate and attention spans are definitely shorter, and trying to hold people's attention, um, is more difficult, particularly with younger people and or even with some older people, to be honest with you, that are fully Down the rabbit hole of you know, Instagram and YouTube Shorts and whatnot, and then the other thing as well is that people don't have as much patience if they've been exposed to clicking on something and getting an answer. I think that's only going to get worse as we've got these AI chat engines and whatnot that give us an instant answer on things— whether it's at the top of Google, whether it's, um, Chat GPT or the others that are coming online. Um.

[ 00:52:40 ] And it's not so much frustration with you as an instructor when they ask a question, because I can give them an answer, you know, quickly and authoritatively. It's more frustration with themselves. If they haven't done a lot of physical skill training or they haven't done a lot of physical skill training lately, so you see this even with, you know, 14- and 50-year-old adults, never mind teenagers and people in their 20s.

[ 00:53:09 ] They struggle to find the patience to get over the difficulties of learning some skills, whether it's feather sticks and they don't quite get the knife skills. It takes some time. It takes some time. It doesn't mean it's not worthwhile. I always say it's like learning to ride

a bike. Bow drill, feather sticks, a number of other things. It's like learning to ride a bike. It's not necessarily that easy to learn. You're going to wobble around. You feel like you're never going to get it, you fall off, you bruise your knee, you scrape your knee, you go over the curb, you land in a hedge, you know, whatever. We've all had these things that we've done as kids when we were learning to ride bikes.

[ 00:53:52 ] But once you can learn, once you can ride a bike, it just seems really straightforward and— and it's the same with other things. It's just that people have forgotten what it's like to learn, or they've never done much learning of physical skills, like I used to. I used to run a Jiu-Jitsu club— not Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, I used to run a traditional Jiu-Jitsu club. I used to train in Jiu-Jitsu for many years. I used to train in Wing Chun Kung Fu for many years.

[ 00:54:20 ] There's something that you get from just practicing physical skills all the time that translates across to learning to canoe, learning to ski, learning to do bow drill, learning to play guitar, which is something that I picked up during COVID when I couldn't go out and teach in the woods.

[ 00:54:41 ] There's just a certain discipline and patience required. You understand that it's going to be hard work now. And it will be frustrating and you'll get annoyed and you need to walk away and you need to have a word with yourself. But you come back to it and eventually you'll get it. And I find that a lot of people don't have that circle of understanding under their belt with anything. And that then I'm then helping them with that circle of understanding as well as helping them with the skill that we're learning at the time.

[ 00:55:14 ] and that's something that I think has changed. You know, people used to be a little bit more practical, and I think that goes into your um question. Um, you know, people used to do more practical stuff for themselves on the whole— not everyone, but even back in the 60s and 70s, I think people were still doing more fixing things themselves. People, my dad used to do his own oil change like in his car, like there was rare you know other than going taking the vehicle in for its mot like the roadworthy test that needed to go in for every year. Pretty much everything else, my dad used to do on his own car because the vehicles were simpler. You could fix stuff. Um, you was you know, you can't do that with a lot of modern vehicles yourself now. You know, there's so many electronics and they need to be plugged into a computer when they're going for a service, etc. or that need to be diagnosed, or you can't just tweak, you know, how the engine, You know, the engine timing, mechanically, you can't do any of that anymore.

[ 00:56:18 ] And I think that's also, things have become more complex, and we've kind of rescinded some ability to do things because the things we have, you know, computers, home. You know, entertainment systems, heating systems, air conditioners, vehicles, everything's become more complex, and we can't fix it ourselves as easily as we used to be able to fix mechanical and analog things. I think that's part of it. I think also people don't have as much time for hobbies, maybe as they used to. People having to work more, both



parents have to work. You know, there's less— you know, there's less time spent doing craft work and hobbies and things, unless people really make an effort to do it. It's not a sort of natural part of a lot of people's lives, even kids. You know, the kids kids are under so much pressure to do tests and achieve academically.

[ 00:57:26 ] Yeah, OK, they're doing sports and that's good. A lot of schools. But I don't get the sense that a lot of kids are finding a lot of time for just kind of creative hobbies and spending time on things other than being pressured to pass exams and whatnot. So and that's that's a kind of slightly old-farts view. But I think there's a number of things. I think that's why I'm trying to draw on a number of threads there. I don't think there's one main thread.

[ 00:57:56 ] But so, yeah, I think there's more awareness. There's not necessarily any more understanding. And in fact, sometimes there's confusion based on that kind of potted awareness. There's a lack of experience of learning how to do hard things or learning how to do physical things.

[ 00:58:18 ] But equally, I'm relatively patient with that because the reason people are on a course. is because they know they need help with those things, like they don't come on a course because they well mostly you occasionally get people who come on courses who think they know everything already, but generally people who come on courses are there because they want your help and they want to get better and they want you to help them through things, but yes, sometimes people are surprised at physically how difficult even just carving a knife with a knife is using an axe, canoeing for you know three hours in the morning, three hours in the afternoon, people are surprised at how physical that is because a lot of people don't do much that's physical, and I think that's one of the things that I see as well as well as the other aspects which are a lot of which Are mental knowledge, based resilience, determination, patience, all those sorts of things. It's just yes— people go to the gym, some people go to the gym, yes, people have done sports, but there's something else that you need for a lot of outdoor activities, which isn't necessarily you.

[ 00:59:29 ] You don't get from going to the gym for 50 minutes. And certainly some people just don't have the hand and arm strength. I find the people who really take well to the woodcraft, axe skills, knife skills are people who have some sort of other physical handicraft skill and that's often professional. So they could be a carpenter, a plumber. They've worked on rigs. They've built fences. They operate machinery on a farm or on a construction site. They build houses. They build walls. There's something that they do with their hands that requires some strength and coordination. They tend to be— up the ladder with feather sticks, bow drill, carving with an axe, etc quicker than people who have just been in an office using computers all day.

[ 01:00:37 ] So yeah, there's lots of factors, and there's some pros, there's some cons. But fundamentally, I'm very happy when someone comes to a course and wants to learn. That's my job, and I have to just accept the fact that some things have changed. We need to

change the emphasis in certain parts, and some things we need to spend more time on. I find I need to spend less time introducing certain topics because people are already kind of familiar with them. But we need to spend more time doing the practical bit, which isn't the end of the world, but sometimes it's hard when you've got a group, say, of 12 people are, you know, more physically coordinated and capable and patient than others, who are further down that learning curve. As well, those who are further down that learning curve, as well, but that's that's your job as a leader. That's why you also have you know, assistant instructors. you know, go and spend some time with that person, go and give this person, I can go and give this person some extra things to do because they've already finished that. Let's spend some time with this person so that they can um catch up or get the core skill nailed um that's what we do for a living, but yeah, there are there are different things, and then the other thing, the other thing, which I I would say is a big difference, is not not everyone, but I would say,

[ 01:01:54 ] as a as a as a as a generalization, people in general are much more obsessed, that's probably too strong a word, but certainly more focused on equipment and kit and clothing. In the bushcraft sphere, than they were 20 years ago.

[ 01:02:20 ] When I went and did a bushcraft course, I had some old hiking trousers, which were actually secondhand German military trousers. They would have been green originally, they had been dyed black. I'd spent \$10, like about £7. 50, from a military surplus store. I had my hiking boots. They're the only pair of boots I had. They were the boots that I used to use for hiking in Scotland and backpacking and stuff. I had a fleece that I got free with my Kona Explosive mountain bike. It was like a thin fleece, about the thickness of this fleece, but it had some Pertex sewn in. It was bright purple. I had a cagoule that I used to use for cycling. I had a flat cap that I used for hiking.

[ 01:03:06 ] I had probably the tent that I used for backpacking. and a few of the bits and pieces that I already had, and that's what I took to my bushcraft course when I went to do my bushcraft course, and other people on that course were similar. They, you know, that I think it specifically said, 'don't wear jeans.' Um, but other than that, people were just turning up in you know old army you know anorak um old fleeces, woolly, you know woolen jumpers, you know nothing particularly bushcrafty. Whereas now I get people turning up dripping in Fujairaven Swazi, um, you know highly expensive technical outdoor clothing to do a camp-based course in the woods in the south of England in the summer, um, you know 400 pound rucksacks, um, like they're going to hike you know the across Europe or something and it's just like, It's just not necessary.

[ 01:04:06 ] And, you know, the influencers and the outdoor equipment manufacturers have done a great job of, you know, making people, again, it's about awareness and it's about online, making people aware of all that stuff. But you don't need it. You know, and again, people turn up with really nice custom knives to a basic bushcraft course, and they don't really know how to do anything with them. Um and I'm giving people a Mora Companion HD, and I'm using a Mora Companion HD on those courses, um because they work and

you can practice sharpening, and they do everything you need them to do. Um, you can you know we're doing, you know, butchering rabbits, fish, you know, wood carving, you know, feather sticks, everything with a you know, less than 20 pound, less you know, 20 knife. Um, and you don't need a lot of this stuff. And so this is the other thing I've noticed. People are turning up, sort of, better clothed and equipped than some of the people who work for me.

[ 01:05:12 ] And that's great. But if that's how people want to spend their money and they feel comfortable to come to the woods to learn the skills, then I'm not going to complain about that. But my concern is that some people feel like they can't come and learn. The practical skills until they've got all of that material, good stuff squared away, which costs thousands of pounds, thousands of dollars, and that's a misconception. Like I would hate for people not to come, it's not about spending money with me, rather than spending money with Fjallraven. It's not that at all; it's that people not being able to come and access good instruction, whether it's with me or with anybody else that offers good instruction. Because they feel like there's this hurdle of equipment that they have to jump over before they can get there, and that they can't afford it, or that they feel like when they do turn up with their second-hand trousers, their old hiking boots, their Dad's waterproof jacket, and, you know, military surplus

[ 01:06:18 ] rucksack, there's somehow less than the guy or girl who's got all the swanky, you know, G1000 and whatnot gear on.

[ 01:06:29 ] That's not what it's about. You know, bushcraft at the heart of bushcraft is a knowledge of nature that's what bushcraft is about. Yes, of course we need to be able to be out in the rain, so we do— and not get hypothermic, etc. etc. We need some basic warm layers. We need a waterproof jacket. We need a tarp or a tent. Um, but we know we lend people tarps and bivvy bags on our courses. All you need to do is turn up with a basic sleeping mat and a sleeping bag and a waterproof jacket and some outdoor, you know, some, you know, some cargo pants and some, you know, fleece or woolly jumpers and you're good right. You are good to go. And you can get most of that from a thrift store or a military surplus store. So that's the other thing that I've really noticed. Like back in the day, people just turned up with Whatever and they got on with the course now more and more people turn up looking like they've just walked out of a bushcrafters um emporium um you know with you know wax canvas backpacks you know dripping in you know g1000 and swazi stuff and you know

[ 01:07:32 ] custom knives and it it's nice if people have got the money to spend but equally it's not at all necessary to learn the skills and that's my concern that it puts some people off um so yeah that's the other thing I've noticed and I think that was the last question that didn't quite end up as a rant did it I haven't done a rant I think I've got a bit more chilled I don't think I rant As much as I used to, um. Now, that's it. That brings us to the end. Don't forget, you can support these sessions with [buymeacoffee. com forward slash Paul Kirtley](https://buymeacoffee.com/forward). Also, if you would like to get a curated series of, like, the best of Paul

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[ 01:08:43 ] uk / emails, and get those emails and they'll start coming to your inbox straight away. Also, you'll get some um, basically, early notifications of new books or online courses in particular when they're coming out and special offers there. And I look forward to having you in that email tribe there. I'll also link to that below. I'll link it in the cards for those people who can see the cards. And I'll put something on the screen here that says, 'What that link is again.' But it's paulkirtley.co.uk / emails. Love to have you on there as well. And you can learn even more from me that way. Look forward to seeing you on the next Ask Paul Kirtley. Take care. Cheers.

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