Paul: This is the Paul Kirtley Podcast, episode 11.

Man: The Paul Kirtley Podcast: wilderness bushcraft, survival skills, and outdoor life.

Paul: Hello, hello, and welcome to episode 11 of my podcast. I'm Paul Kirtley, and what I aim to do in this podcast is look at the many different aspects of what falls under the umbrella of wilderness bushcraft and survival skills, and all the other outdoor life skills which go along with that, and there are many. And my guest today is Andy Chadderton. He's a professional deerstalker and firearms instructor based in a relatively remote part of Scotland where he lives in a low-key and relatively self-sufficient manner. Some would say off grid.

And Andy started shooting when he was a boy and he's been pistol and rifle instructing for decades, he's also a qualified range conducting officer. And he has a real passion, he really loves to help people shoot to their best ability, and he holds the deerstalking certificate level one and two, and he's also an approved witness for others wishing to undertake their DSC2 He's part of a small but highly experienced team at the Stalking School, which is based in the Northeast of Scotland. I've known Andy for a number of years and I always like to visit him at least once a year, normally in October after our River Spey canoe trips.

So it was that I caught up with Andy recently and we sat down while I was staying with him for a number of days, we sat down to record this podcast. I was keen for him to explain what his work entails, and particularly for listeners who may be not so familiar with deerstalking or deer hunting in the U.K., what that's all about, how it works, how it's regulated, and maybe dispel a few myths and shed some light on it as we went. So enter Andy.

Well I'd like to welcome Andy Chadderton to my podcast. Hi, Andy.

Andy: How do you do?

Paul: Yeah, very good, thanks, and thank you very much for your hospitality. I'm sat here in Andy's kitchen with him in his cottage in the middle of nowhere in Scotland, which is fantastic. I'm very envious of the peace and quiet here,

and we've got the stove going, it's nice and cozy and warm in here. And you've got two dogs.

Andy: I thought you were tempting fate saying peace and quiet.

Paul: Peace and quiet, yeah. Your two dogs are at the other end of the house, but we might hear a bit of barking, but otherwise I think we should be left to our own devices. So Andy, when people ask you what you do for a living, what do you say? What's the answer? How do you describe what you do?

Andy: It sounds like an awful fudge, but it's probably the most accurate: I say I'm an outdoor instructor, so I do a variety of things. But reality, the main plank is that I'm a deerstalker, I'm a deer manager. There's some instruction in that but ultimately it all hangs off that one common thread.

Paul: Okay. So how does that comprise? How do you divide your time of how much time you spend stalking, how much time you spend instructing?

Andy: The deerstalking is probably realistically say, 60% of what I do. But it's a bit of a misnomer because the other percentages are then either training other deerstalkers or preparing stuff relative to deerstalking, or on the retail side, doing things that is deerstalking equipment. So it's all about stalking really but what people would think of as a deerstalker is probably 50% to 60%, say, at a time.

Paul: In terms of the time that you spend on the ground.

Andy: In terms of time on the ground, the admin for it, and all the rest, but actual boot in the dirt, it's over half my time. But when you say time, no stalker, I think, has ever heard of a 40-hour week, or a 37 and a half hour week, because it's constant, unfortunate and unfortunate. And my shop floor is right out the front door of the house, so I'm on the ground all the time, so there never is really an on-off switch, which is good in many ways, honestly.

Paul: No, no, I understand that. I understand that about there not been an off switch, but also it not necessarily being an issue, because presumably you enjoy what you do, you enjoy the line of work.

Andy: You can tell from the accent. I'm not Scottish, I'm not an islander; born and bred in Manchester, at quite literal, the foot of a cotton mill. There weren't many deer about, but always interested in deer. The funny hair on the back of your neck moment for me is I remember being in an Accrington brick house reading I'm sure...was it the Observer's books we used to be able to get? The

little small ones of wildlife of Great Britain, and looking at, it wasn't even pictures, it was plates of pine marten, red deer, roe. And I'd see pine marten every other day, people would have blue tits raid their milk, we'd have pine martens take anything on the front doorstep. And it's nice, and I still remember being in that terraced Accrington brick house reading that book about these animals that were a million, million miles away, but I get to work with them every day, and that's good. And no one becomes a deerstalker for the affluent lifestyle, the jet set, it's just you've got to want to do it. Everybody's got different reasons, but you've got to do it out of a passion.

Paul: So how did you make that transition from Accrington house to a little cottage in the Scottish Highlands?

Andy: Tortuously. Always interested. There's a risk becoming careers advice, and I'm probably the last person to give it. I went away. You can imagine being in a Manchester school saying, "I'm interested in stalking." There wasn't really a lot of career support for that.

Paul: And were you interested right back then?

Andy: Way back. Something about deer in particular appealed. I ended up going a very circuitous route between training to be a geologist, and business studies, working for the D.T.I., being a debt collector. Basically doing finance for years, but all the time as a hobbyist, a recreational, being interested in stalking, going to places where deer were, and then slowly the hobby developed then into the career.

It's not something you can decide on a Monday, I'm now going to be a stalker. Well you can decide that but it's a pretty lonely existence and not particularly effective; it takes a long time to get there. There was no formal training route in those days. I dropped very lucky; I saw an advert for a deer management course, and I was supposed to be swatting for my A levels, it was 1984, and I went on a weeklong course, and it was just spellbinding. Every single thing, just utterly captivated, loved it, but it was 20 years before I really got a chance to do anything about it, but that interest never, ever left.

So it was a long journey. I ended up with a Volvo company car, the laptop, a gut, ulcers, private pension, and then I got the offer of a lifetime to grow the business and move way down south, or part with the business and stay in Scotland, and it was a really easy choice. I was already doing stalking work part-time. I'd like to paint myself as much better than I really am, but it wouldn't be effective. I would've been too much of a coward to do it any other way, but I was in the fortunate position of being left with no choice. I just absolutely knew

there's no way I wanted to leave Scotland, and the only way to stay was to build on the skills I had, so that's how it came about. Not really a structured career plan, more of a lurch left, right, and center.

Paul: Yeah, well I think that resonates with me a little bit as well, that you don't always end up where you want to end up in a structured way. You just find your way there eventually.

Andy: It's quite bizarre: if I've had actually had a career as teacher that knew what a stalker was, and had advised me, I don't think it would have worked. I actually self-trained in not a very organized way, but a perfect way, as it turned out, looking back on it. So it's just one of those things it worked out in the end.

Paul: So did you find places to stalk? Did you find other stalkers to go stalking with?

Andy: The stalkers aren't the most gregarious of people, for lots of reasons, so I was a hobby stalker, so I would go out on paid stalks. Occasionally you'd meet people, because I was interested in developing my skill, you do work. So you go to an estate as a paid stalker, but as you get to know them, they would say, "Well, we've got a cull to achieve, it's in December, there's really bad weather, no one wants to pay to stalk in December. Would you like to come up and help?" And so it slowly develops from there, but it doesn't happen overnight; it's 10 years in the making.

Paul: Yeah, so you build those relationships slowly over time.

Andy: That's it. And the same with here, I dropped lucky. We found this cottage, I had the cottage, always working towards moving in here, and through having the cottage, got to know the local stalker here. Initially as a client of his, and then taking people out for him, and then eventually being an integral part of the business and actively managing the deer day-to-day in this area.

Paul: So the reason I asked that is that I think there are people out there who have misconceptions about deer stalking, and I think there are a number of misconceptions that I've come across over the years, knowing people like you and game keepers and stalkers, and then also hearing what people's thoughts about those things are. People who are interested in doing it I think a lot of them have the impression that it's quite difficult to get into, it's quite hard to find somewhere to go, or because of the firearms laws it's difficult, or because you have to take a long time to build relationships that it's actually quite hard to break into.

Andy: It's strange: it's probably easier now than it's ever been. Now this risks sounding like a marketing speak, but you've got the deer stalking certificate; that course back in the ‘80s was a pre-runner of that. They were talking about it. And the intention way back then was it would be a way in, a way to open the door for people that lived in Accrington brick houses that would have no idea otherwise. And that still there and it's still the intention, so there's somewhere you can just Google it and you will find courses on offer, you can go on that course, you'll make contacts from it, you'll end up with a nationally recognized qualification, and that opens other doors.

Some of the shooting organizations have discounted stalking available if you've got your level one certificate, so there’re ways in. Most leases in places that you would want to take on stalking yourself require you to have that qualification. It's, by no means, enshrined in law and I'm very much pro it being voluntary, but police forces will accept the DSC1 as proof that you're bona fide, that you are interested in it, that you've had safety training, that you're not someone that just wants a big gun. So the ways in are actually easier than they used to be. Pay by the day stalking is advertised all over the place, and whilst there's this image that it's lords, ladies, if you like.

Paul: Well that's one of the misconceptions that I was going to come to. That I think a lot of people think it's a lot of Hooray Henries running around shooting stuff.

Andy: There's a broad pew. I often say, I don't think it's broadcastable, but a prat is a prat regardless of their social standing. But we have far more plumbers than peers, way more bakers than barons that go stalk it. The typical clients that go out with us are everything from truck drivers, plumbers, factory workers; they're not the high-end earners. Okay, it's easier if you're a multimillionaire, because money buys an awful lot, but there's a huge range. You want to go and shoot a big stag on a prestigious West Coast estate; there's a long waiting list, you're probably not going to have much to change out of £1,000 for the one animal.

But equally there's cull stalking, there's other estates, there's places you get to know that you can start out stalking at £50 a day. Which might sound a lot, but particularly if it's an area where you get to keep your animal, this is an animal that if you go to Tesco's, is £17 a kilo. You go and stalk it yourself for 50 quid and you can end up with 30 pounds of venison. Yeah, 30 pounds weight of venison.

Paul: So 15 kilos, 30 pounds, yeah.

Andy: This sounds like an argument you'd give to your wife to justify all the stuff, but it's never going to pay for itself, but it's all of a sudden against the old cliché of going to the pub two nights a week, or even eating out one night a week. It's no more expensive than a lot of things, and a lot less expensive than people would think it actually is, and it's by no means exclusive. Yes, there's a lot of peers shoot that because of landed gentry thing because...

Paul: They've got the land.

Andy: ...they've got the land, but a lot of that land is by no means quite so exclusive as you would think. The very same land that they stalk is probably available for fairly reasonable money to actually buy an outing for a morning, and evening, or a day. As I say, people at the B.A.S.C, they have ground that they've acquired, and if you're a member and you have your level one, you can go on their stalking schemes, and they are considerably cheaper than taking up golf. Not to pick on golfers.

Paul: Yeah, well golf clubs are expensive, golf club memberships are expensive.

Andy: Because part of what we do is, we're training, and we get an awful lot of inquiries. Probably more inquiries now from people interested in starting, than in existing stalkers looking to get their qualifications. And a large element of that, there're two bits: either they're interested in shooting on the outdoors, and there is a definite pause between that, and particularly over the last three or four years, the food side of it. A lot of people have looked into venison and the benefits of it, a lot of people are not very happy with where food comes from that you get from the shops.

Paul: Intensively farmed.

Andy: That's it. Or just where has this been? How has it been treated? If you stalk, you see it all the way from field to your plate, you know exactly how the animal's been treated, what happened to it, how it's been processed, and that appeals to a huge number of people. But one of the courses we do is a butchery course, and as part of it they get to keep their carcass. And a huge number of people that go on that actually say, "I never thought I would, but now having done this, I'm maybe going to come back next year and take it one step further down the chain and actually go and get the deer myself. And I really didn't think I would do that." But having seen how it's used and what's happened to it, and not when they go back and actually taste it, so then once you taste something like that, you realize what you've been pawned off with for all the years before.

Paul: Indeed, indeed. Very true, very true. So you do training: is that just DSC1 training, or do you do other training?

Andy: Right the way across the board. DSC1 is a main plank: we do intro courses, we do all the elements of it. It's like many things; stalking can be as straightforward or as complicated as you want to make it, and don't let anybody tell you it has to be X, Y, Z way. We basically just offer what do you need, so some people come to us for specific shooting tuition, it might be tracking. It might be very simple things like the witchcraft of how to get your knife sharp? Which all the elements we will put together and give the training as it's required.

Level one of the D.S.C. is a theory test, just like the driving test, really. Level two is the practical application of it, and it's for the person to get to the standard and then demonstrate that. So all the elements of that people can learn from experience or they might come to us and say, "I'm pretty good at X, Y, Z, but I just want to polish up this bit. Can you help?" So we'll do whatever it is that the customer requires. We've tried: we got very excited, we had a website, we didn't understand the website but we had a website, and we had this huge, great list of courses breaking everything down, and one size really doesn't fit anybody, let alone all. So people were getting confused, so we found it is far easier to say, "Here's a standard DSC1 Tell us what you want and we'll put together the rest." And that works far better for most people.

Paul: Okay, okay. And so, again, some people don't have any idea about this but they may be interested in getting involved in stalking. Do they need to have their own rifle? What is the lap work?

Andy: I think one of the biggest impediments to people interested in stalking, more than the class image, is the firearms, because particularly in the United Kingdom firearms are somewhat demonized in the press. They are strictly controlled and there's a strong argument that controls are quite sensible and sane and should be there. The degree of them is arguable, but you can't just go and buy a rifle. By law, and for humane purposes, the rifle you use to stalk to shoot a deer has to meet minimum power requirements.

And when I use the word minimum, it's with a capital M because it's a very powerful tool, the bullet you use has to meet minimum requirements. So you're basically out with a very powerful tool with a reach that can be a mile, a mile and a half, so there's an argument that that does need some kind of control, but this is where the demonization comes in. As a layperson, so long as you're of an appropriate age, so you need to be at least 17, so long as you're not otherwise

prohibited from access to a firearm, and that could be some kind of criminal conviction, mental health issues, all the normal stuff, intemperate habits, I think, is some of the wording in the act, when you can go to an estate where the rifle is held on an appropriate certificate, and you can use that rifle whilst being closely supervised by an employee of that estate, subject to the terms of their certificate.

So long as you meet some basic criteria, you can go and shoot without having to apply for a firearms certificate, and you can go and stalk; it's just known as the estate rifle's provision. And a lot of people never progressed beyond that, they'll go and try it, and even if they're interested, they'll just keep going back and using an estate rifle. You've maybe found from your visits and times out, shooting a rifle on a range is okay, but it's very different when you then actually go into the field. And although it's a precision instrument, it's a tool, nothing beats using your own tool. You won't find a carpenter really wishing to share his saw or a chisel with anybody else. And be able to use it effectively in the field is a confidence thing, and nothing beats the confidence of having your rifle as you want it to be.

Paul: Yeah, and being fairly familiar with it.

Andy: That's it. So many people, they'll either do the DSC1 or they'll go for a couple of stalks, and then they'll aspire that the next step is to then put in for their own rifle once they've got a feel for it. We get quite a few calls or emails about introductory courses: we do and lots of other people do them, and we tend to steer people away from them because, I'll issue this as a warning, you don't tend to just be a little bit interested. If you think you're interested, then you've probably already been infected by the bug.

We've never had anybody come on an intro course and say, "Oh. Oh no, actually it's nothing like I thought it was going to be, I don't want anything ever to do with this." Once you're on that track, usually you just get deeper and deeper into it, and so I often say to people, "There are intro courses up and down the country, but if you think you're interested, chances are you might as well go and do your DSC1 first of last because it's a nationally recognized qualification. And it then gives you your own set of tools to measure against other people."

So if you go to an estate and you're just following them around, there's the good, the bad, and the ugly as there is in every industry, whereas if you've got that theory under your belt, it gives you something to measure it by and think, oh, this doesn't actually seem right, or yeah, this is good. And you can pick and choose with a far more informed decision, if you like.

Paul: So what does the DSC1 comprise of? Yeah, it's a theory test, but what areas does it cover? Does it cover firearms or it just cover deer? What does it cover?

Andy: The DSC1 on theory side ultimately lead to an assessment, and it's the five elements to the assessment: there's a shooting test, there's a safety walk-through, there's deer identification, there's a meat and game hygiene, and then there's a general question paper. But within there you're covering firearms law basic ballistics. This isn't Nerdsville, Arizona; it's the basic stuff you need to be able to understand what's happening. Deer ecology: a large amount you've got to be able to understand the deer to be able to effectively manage them. And I use the management word not as a euphemism for kill them, but literally to manage.

No deerstalker worthy of the name would consider themselves a deer killer. We're not out there to eradicate the deer, we're not out there to slaughter them; we're out there to provide a management, a balancing.

Paul: Well that was something I was going to come back to, but let's come back to that now. Now clearly in some parts of the country there are Chinese water deer, there are muntjac; they are non-native, particularly the muntjac, quite invasive species and quite a difficult to control. Here you've got roe and red, which are definitely, as far as we know, native species of the U.K. Why do they need managing if they're native species? And I'm playing devil's advocate a little bit, and I know what the answer is but it's worth enunciating it between us.

Andy: It's all the old clichés. One, there's an awful lot of people in the United Kingdom, and this isn't being political, it's just a fact, more and more people. People take up room, people travel on roads, deer and cars don't mix. The number of deer and car collisions in a year is in the tens of thousands, the number of people deaths from deer collisions is in the dozens, and the deer suffer from that as well. We looked around the United Kingdom, we're here in the middle of a forest; it's not a natural forest, it's been planted.

Ultimately somebody pays to plant those trees, and for the most part those trees are actually a crop, and the crop needs to be harvested at the end of the day. Deer eat a vegetable matter, and sometimes that vegetable matter is trees, they also inflict damage on trees. There's quite a few [inaudible 00:25:44], particularly in Scotland, where the ground is owned by organizations that are looking for natural regeneration or to protect certain fauna or flora, and sometimes the deer is at odds with that.

Paul: So that might be everybody from the RSP.

Andy: RSPB.

Paul: The national trust.

Andy: Woodland Trust, John Muir Trust. Now that's slightly contentious at the moment with some of the cull plans, but the South of England, a lot of the Bluebell woods are being decimated by the muntjac. It's not doing it deliberately, it's just being a muntjac, but there comes a point where there's an incompatibility. If you do nothing, a lot of people that don't like field sports or whether they're anti-field sports, they have a view. They're concerned about the animals, and they'll turn round and say, "Well, if no one shoots any, there will be a natural balance." And they're absolutely right, but it's whether the natural balance is actually acceptable to us. So the natural balance would be any species, but we're talking about deer, they will eat of themselves out of house and home.

Once they get to that stage, they will starve, and then they will die. A deer that starves and dies, you can say it's an entirely natural process, but it's not a particularly attractive process. It's certainly far more drawn out than a high velocity rifle bullet. The other element is, if you eat meat, venison is a very, very good quality meat, the deer represent a resource. They present a sustainable resource. Why not utilize that? So we've also got the issue that a lot of the apex predators are gone. Again, debates rage about whether we should reintroduce bears, wolves, lynx, etc., into the U.K. It'd be very nice to see in some ways, but on a practical basis, I think there would be a lot of very unhappy people. It's very difficult to communicate with bears and wolves as to exactly what prey species they're supposed to eat to fit in with some government...

Paul: Management plan.

Andy: ...management plan. If they turn round and found sheep and small ponies and people's dogs are easier to eat than the deer, then we've got a bit of a problem, so there's a balance there. So when we say management, it's not a euphemism for, oh, we just want to kill deer. Bizarrely, I'm really going off tangent, but I remember doing an English essay, so it would be I'm about 13 years old, and the sentence I wrote was: "I like shooting, comma, wildlife and..." I can't remember what the rest of the sentence was, and my English teachers cussed out the comma and put, "Inappropriate use of punctuation," so it came out as, "I like shooting wildlife."

And I absolutely was quite offended by that because it was...I shot long before I would have ever thought about taking a life or hunting, and I was interested in deer, and the two, it will sound very silly, were distinct. There was no overlap. And it was only as I learned more about deer that the role of shooting in promoting and managing deer actually presented itself. I've shot since the age of about 6, I was in my early 20s before I shot a deer, so the two don't necessarily go hand in hand. And there's a lot of people interested in deer that don't wish to shoot them, but acknowledge that some form of control.

It's very strange; if you really want to see an irate anti, nobody is more anti than a deerstalker who has it suggested that we should drop contraceptive feed blocks onto the hills to reduce deer populations naturally. I can understand why on Facebook it seems, "Hey, great idea. No more guns," but we're effectively meddling with nature. Now that my sound daft from someone who goes and shoots a deer, which is the ultimate meddling, but what happens if we've got the dosage wrong? What happens if we've not fully understood the interaction of that contraceptive in the environment? One bullet, one deer is eminently controllable and...

Paul: Yeah, you can change your policy.

Andy: You select which deer you're going to take. We effectively introduce chemical control into a wild population, I don't believe anybody with a hand on heart honesty can really say, "We guarantee it will work and there won't be any problems."

Paul: And then that's without the effects on the wider environment as well.

Andy: That's it.

Paul: There's other species eating it or all those hormones getting into the water environment.

Andy: We're sounding very pretentious but a true stalker is basically trying to emulate an apex predator. So we don't just go out and blast any deer that we see; we're looking for the seasons, but we're also looking for an age selection. So there's a structure to the deer, and it basically emulates what an apex predator would do, so any sick, weak, or injured animals were a priority. Then you take a percentage of your middle-aged and old, so you maintain a structure, regardless of what species it is.

We managed an estate locally that was quite close to an urban center, and we have to be very careful. There's lots of walkers in the area and lots of dog

walkers, and when we were speaking to people they would say, "Well, I'd love to see 40 roe in a field." And it's very difficult in a sound bite to explain that it's not natural for there to be 40 roe in a field.

Paul: Because roe, in particular, are territorial, aren't they?

Andy: Territorial and fairly solitary, and when we were actually doing the cull, animals that should weigh, say, 12 kilos, weighed 6. The parasite burdens were massive. We analyzed that part and parcel they usually look at the health of the animal, partly because you've got a legal obligation before it goes into the food chain, but also as part of the management. So you look at how much of fat is on the kidneys; something that might not be immediately apparent just observing an animal, and these animals have no fat on the kidneys in June where the kidney should have been invisible.

So they were not healthy animals, they were stressed; the parasite burden was telling you they were stressed. So they were pretty to look at, but it wasn't actually in the best interest of the animals. Four years on, there are not 40 deer in a field, but there may be 2 or 3 really healthy strong animals that are not suffering the environmental stress, nor are they damaging the agricultural interests that are there.

Paul: Yeah, and it's quite interesting, I did mathematics at university and one of the things we studied as part of one of our modules was to look at simple predator/prey models, and it's quite dramatic how...the classic one is things like lynxes and Arctic hares, but there are many other models, that how dramatic the fluctuations can be in terms of the species, it'll reproduce a great rate until, as you say, they run out of food resources and then it dies off.

And that's even with a predator present. And I think a lot of people don't realize the rate at which deer can reproduce. You were talking some of the numbers about the red deer around here, and you can expect an increase of about a third every year in the population, something like that.

Andy: That's without control, so very rapidly. And what you tend to get is boom and bust, and unfortunately what happens, while we've been walking around the woods we found several bones and things out there. Starvation takes place quietly so no one notices. I've stalked on estates when we had the really bad winter, was it 2010? Something like that. And on south facing slopes where they were desperately trying to get the heat, you'd find a pile of 30 or 40 bones, carcasses, where the animals had got stuck in the snow, were too weak from hunger, and died.

Yes, it's natural and you shouldn't humanize it, but you can still feel for the loss, both emotionally and logically thinking, well a percentage of those could have entered the food chain and served a purpose, and also what a way to go, ultimately. It's not nice to see and it's a waste, but it took place out of the public eye. So I've seen these arguments that say, "Oh well, you shoot them for fun." That's the usual one that always comes up: "How could you? How could you do that? You do it for fun," and I'm not that erudite. The best way I've ever thought to describe it is the whole process is 100%.

As a mathematician that makes sense, there is always 100. Preparation, learning the field craft, so it's about everything. When you're stalking, it's the ultimate expression of being out because you have to fit in, otherwise you're not going to see any deer. All the way up to finding the animal, getting in position, putting the crosshair on it, pressing the trigger, and the bullet going where you want it to go, and it brings about a rapid and as humane demise as you can achieve, 150%. Standing over what is an arguably beautiful, beautiful animal and seeing that it's no longer alive, minus 50. So the whole thing equals 100%.

I know nobody that is a stalker, by the proper definition, that actually enjoys the kill. They enjoy doing the job properly, but the kill aspect will always be a tug. A lot of the continentals, when they approach their animal, they will take a tuft of heather or grass and put it in the mouth as a last meal, and it's a bit symbolic and it is a bit showy, but it's a nice...I do it myself because it's just a nice pause and a reminder to say, "Thank you. I've taken your life, and I apologize for that but I've done it hopefully for the right reasons."

Paul: And you're doing it respectfully.

Andy: That's it.

Paul: So what happens once you've shot the animal? Again, there's quite a lot of misconceptions there, and I know some people think you just leave them to rot away on the side. Clearly your comments about animals dying of weakness and hypothermia on the side of a hillside suggests that that's not what happens.

Andy: There's a lot of people think it's shooting for “sport,” and it's really dented the definition of sport on that bit. But every deer that is shot, unless there is something wrong with it, ultimately should be entering the food chain. And that's not happened with some of the large scale culls that have gone on, but that's a distinct thing from stalking. For your typical stalker, he's going out, the animal he shoots: as soon as the animal is expired, by law it's entered the human food chain, and it should be treated just the same as if it was an animal

at an abattoir, or any other food product that's going to end up at the supermarket.

By law, if that carcass is to enter the food chain it must be inspected by a trained hunter; the DSC1 is one of the routes to get that. So you're looking at how the animal acted while it was alive, you inspect the outside of the animal, you then, as you do the gralloch, all herbivores are great methane producers. All herbivores, not just deer, live in an environment where E. coli is prevalent, so the first thing you must do is you want to cool the carcass off and you want to remove the methane factory from them as soon as possible.

Paul: Because that keeps going.

Andy: That's it. So you perform what's called the gralloch, and that basically takes the digestive tract and the stomach out of the carcass. So that's the one that you traditionally see done on the hill. Training-wise, it has to be done in a certain way so you don't contaminate the carcass; while you're doing that you're inspecting the inside of the animal. Not to a vet standard, but to quite high standard, to identify diseases and anything abnormal.

Paul: So what might you be looking for there?

Andy: We look at the lymph node change, which is the body's filter system, so we look at specific lymph nodes. Again, by law, we have to. They would identify diseases like T.B., foot-and-mouth, things like that. You're looking at the overall health of the animal, so you'll frequently find things like tapeworm, cysts, or liver fluke. No impact on human health, but you're noting it. Any carcass that was at all suspect would not enter the human food chain and gets reported to the divisional veterinary health authority.

The whole thing has to be treated as if it's a food product, so gone are the days where you grab it by an ear, drag it through a field of cow pats, across the bog, sling it in the back of the car next to the dog, between the cans of petrol. The whole carcass has to be transported in a hygienic manner, it's got to be lardered properly, which is then taking the head, legs, thoracic viscera, so the heart and lungs coming out. It might then be used by the person who stalked it, it might be sold into more quantities by the stalker, or more often than not, it then goes to a registered game dealer, and it gets inspected again. And from there it then goes into the human food chain.

Paul: And I'm writing it, "If you put that into the food chain, if it goes to a game dealer, it has to be tagged..."

Andy: It has to be tagged. So this traceability, the position is, every tray of minced venison that you might, say, go to Tesco's for, they should be able to trace back to find who shot it, where it was shot. It gets a tag on the carcass and that tag then follows all the product that comes off that carcass.

Paul: Yeah, that's very interesting. We probably can't say that for a lot of the stuff that we buy at the meat counter. I think the providence of food has become more important, hasn't it? You've seen it in restaurants a lot, and even pubs now will say...they'll give you an essay or at least a paragraph on where the hens' eggs come from, and the name of the farm, and where the pork sausages came from.

Andy: The hens get driven on the [inaudible 00:41:20] at least twice a day [inaudible 00:41:22].

Paul: But it's become increasingly important to people, hasn't it, to know what their food comes from? And going back to one of the points you made earlier but I think it's a general thing, and I think it's still unknown to a lot of people that you can trace venison right back to exactly where it was shot and who shot it.

Andy: And it's the law that any deer that's not been taken by a legal method cannot enter the food chain: so roadkill, things that have been poached, taken with crossbows or longbows or whatever. Yes, it does happen, but it's not legal.

Paul: And it's not just not legal to put it into the food chain, it's just not legal to take the deer...

Andy: That's it.

Paul: ...in that way in the first place.

Andy: Deer are quite unusual in that they belong to nobody. You can legally hold the right to take deer; so on a piece of land you very often will have a landowner, and quite separate he may have leased out the rights to take deer. A deer only becomes property once it actually dies, so deer that you see at the side of the road are technically the property of the local council. If we were close to the boundary here and we shot a deer, and it ran 20 meters on and fell on the next estate, it would actually strictly belong to that estate and we'd have to account to them for it. Here we have quite a few, thankfully not many, but there's a quiet road over the hill, two or three times a year I'll get a knock on the door, "I've hit a deer, it's damaged my car." Occasionally it's nice to see people who are upset that there's a deer staggered off into the trees, in which case

Scooby comes into his own role and just scrounging bacon sandwiches off you in the morning.

Paul: That crazy hound.

Andy: We'll go and put it out of its misery. But it's then either followed up or they open with, "I've damaged my car. Who's going to pay?" Well at the moment of impact, the deer was nobody's deer. It's hopefully they're fully comprehensively insured, but there's nobody responsible for that. And that often comes as quite a surprise to a driver, as does the amount of damage that hitting 20 kilos of roe deer at 40 miles an hour can actually do to an average vehicle.

Paul: Yeah, it's quite surprising. Going back to the roadkill point, again, this is one that's it's been a bit of a vogue thing: "Roadkill Chef" and all that kind of stuff. If somebody finds a roadkill deer, is that find...it's not legal to put it into the food chain, but is that just the legality or are there other actually hygiene issues with that?

Andy: There is the legal that it's not their property. The other element is, you don't really know anything about that deer. Certain deer, certain animals may have been given medication with the intention that they would never go into the food chain, so when you see animals, usually in zoos or parks that are darted, if an animal is treated with Immobilon, for example, the law is that animal must never enter the food chain. Now in theory you've got a park deer, it will have an ear tag or something; deer are fantastic at shaking ear tags off. That animal could have been darted the previous day, shaken its ear tag off, managed to scan the wall or go through an open gate.

You try and eat a deer that had an Immobilon in it 24 hours beforehand and you're going to get, at best, very, very ill. So there's that element. You'd be pretty unlucky to be honest, but your other element is, when a vehicle hits a deer, imagine basically the deer slamming into a brick wall at 20 miles an hour. If you bang your knee on the corner of a settee, you get one heck of a bruise. Imagine the bruise that's going on on an animal, and a bruise is ruptured blood vessels. When the animal dies, blood is the first component that starts to deteriorate and it starts within minutes, so if it's massively bruised, quite possibly all over its entire body, that's a contagion at that stage that is decaying very rapidly.

You may have seen it happen, so you're on to it quite quickly but chances are you'll actually see the animal by the side of the road. That digestive process is still going on, so it's beginning to fill with methane, the methane creates

pressure and it forces the stomach contents, under pressure, back up the digestive tract. If the stomach's been ruptured or the digestive tract's ruptured, it'll force it out of there...

Paul: And into the meat.

Andy: ...into the meat.

Paul: Into the body cavity, yeah.

Andy: That stomach content is undoubtedly rich in E. coli. If it touches the meat, you can try wiping it but what you tend to do is you actually push bacteria, you can't see the bacteria, your chances are you're wiping it into the meat. If you try and wash it, the water is pushing it into the meat. Now it may have lain there for an hour or more, stewing in this E. coli mix.

Maybe the deer was hit because it has a disease and it wasn't...I know this sounds a bit namby-pamby, but it wasn't feeling very well, which is the reason why it wandered into the path of a car. If you don't know the signs to look for for disease, that may not be particularly obvious, look at it this way, if you went to...I keep picking on Tesco's, I can't think of another name.

Paul: Waitrose, let's say.

Andy: Yeah, or Waitrose also, or all the supermarkets, and picked up...

Paul: Walmart for our North American listeners.

Andy: You pick up a package of meat and it's got to on it, "We're not sure how it died. Maybe disease, but we're sure it's all right because we gave it a quick wash under a tap. And don't eat any stomach contents that are stuck in here that you might find," you're probably not going to be inclined to put that in your shopping trolley. So why would you do it because you found it free by the side of the road?

Paul: Because it's free, I think it is the answer, isn't it?

Andy: I had a guy, really nice guy, he clipped a deer, he put it out of its misery, that's fine, but he wanted to keep it and he phoned to ask what he should do, and I said, "Throw it away, really." "No, no, no, I want it." He brought it to me that afternoon and having it been in the back of his van for the day, and it looked okay, so we took the skin off and there was not an area of pink flesh visible: it was black and blue. Not only over the side where the van hit, but the

van then knocked it onto the road, so it was bruised on both sides, and so then I pulled the shoulder skin back to show him and then opened the stomach cavity up, and just let him sniff.

Paul: And that's pretty ripe, I'd imagine.

Andy: I said, "Do you want me to continue?" "Oh, no, no, it's okay," so that got a shallow grave.

Paul: Yeah, yeah, that's interesting, that's interesting.

Andy: I fully understand that the foraging instinct, and particularly venison is expensive to buy normally.

Paul: It is expensive. Do you think it's too expensive or is it one of those things that people think is exclusive and therefore supermarkets get away with charging more for it?

Andy: There's an element of it, but I suspect it's actually free market at work. It makes no sense whatsoever, but as far as I know, about 70% of the venison that is taken in the U.K., is exported.

Paul: Right, really?

Andy: Germany can't get enough and some of the other European countries, but I think the actual percentage, if I'm wrong, I'll declare on it, but...

Paul: But we do import a significant amount.

Andy: That's it.

Paul: Export, rather. Sorry.

Andy: Export, and we also import; there's a lot of New Zealand venison comes in, so it's a bizarre set up that some of the finest venison in the world with a provable and trackable history is being exported. And particularly I have a face for podcasts, ladies and gentlemen. I'm never accused of anorexia. Particularly with the concerns of the cholesterol and saturated fats, venison is zero: zero cholesterol, zero saturated fat, it tastes fantastic, it's the dream everybody's looking for.

And now there's a recent newspaper report about E. coli, it was found in venison product, and that's a case of the meat was minced up, so if there's E.

coli on the outside of the cut of meat, if you minced it, it...so that was just basic practice, but I think one newspaper I saw said, "E. coli is prevalent in deer," which isn't wrong, but there was a bit more to that sentence, which is, all herbivores will have a prevalence of E. coli...

Paul: In their digestive systems...

Andy: Exactly.

Paul: ...not in the meat.

Andy: Yeah, it's part and parcel of it, and standard, cook it properly and wash your hands. There's nothing high-tech about it.

Paul: No, no, interesting. Going back to, you mentioned damage on trees. That's something we've seen in the last few days while I've been here and we've been out. Now some of that is clearly they do take to the bark of the main trunk sometimes, and clearly that's an issue. The saplings, I guess, may be nibbled and that we've seen a lot of other damaging, brashing. So tell us and it's a bit about, I think the behavior of the deer is quite interesting, why they do these different things. Clearly some of it's just feeding, but what else are they doing?

Andy: Deer don't just eat the trees; as a preference, trees form a very small part of their diet, realistically, and it'll only be fresh buds and shoots and things. There's much more they'd rather eat. We've been in an area this morning where the groundcover was noticeably shorter than the rest of it, and yet dotted throughout there were juicy, young, new trees coming up completely untouched. They will eat trees: so say there was a bad winter and the snow was on the ground, they will dig through, or if just the tops of the trees are showing, they're going to eat them. So they will eat trees, but it's not prime choice of menu.

Every year a male deer sheds its antlers, regrows antlers; it grows antlers under a covering called velvet. When the antlers matured, the velvet will itch like you don't know what, which forces the deer then to get rid of the velvet and convenient small trees are just perfect for the job, so they will what we call brash, and they will run their head backwards and forwards against the tree, scraping off the velvet. A deer antler is actually more or less white, but when you see them they're shades of brown and tan, and it's actually the resin that they've collected off the tree has then aged and dirt stuck to it, and that's why you get brown antlers. So the more they've done that the darker the antlers go.

Then some of the ones we've seen today, antlers are all about pulling chicks. It's all, look at me, girls, I'm so powerful, I can grow this headgear. Not every deer gets a chance to breed, so if some of the males are wandering around with a major attitude problem...through how do we call it? A stiff gait, because the bigger boys have excluded them. So the third element that trees cop for is, they'll pick a tree as their sparring partner and take out their frustration on the tree, all of which causes damage. At certain stages in a forest life, it can really impact the commercial crop. Here, the trees are so tall, they're not going to do very much damage at all even if they nibble a bit of bark.

Hinds and the males may damage a tree; if it's a hard winter, hinds will eat bark of fallen trees and some of the upright ones, but they will very rarely eat it to the extent that they've ringed the tree. It's unsightly rather than anything else, but potential is there. The biggest issue for foresters is when they've got a new plantation in all the same age growth: if a deer comes along and just nibbles the new growth off the top of each tree, they can inhibit the growth to the extent that a 30-year-old tree which should be 60 feet high barely makes 10 feet, so they massively retard the growth. Rarely will they actually kill the tree, but they can massively retard the growth, which has a major financial impact for the foresters.

There are other elements, and this is the hot topic really at the moment amongst deer, is they will eat plants, so we've got the muntjac eating the Bluebell wood. There's a lot of feeling, particularly in Scotland, there's a lot of areas of ground where the policies for regeneration of Caledonian Woodland or whatever, or even just some of the low-lying shrub life, and deer are seen as public enemy number one in terms of eating that vegetation. So there are numerous areas where many of the conservation bodies land, where out of season licenses have been granted, night shooting licenses, and there is basically a shoot on sight policy where the numbers of deer being shot go far beyond the sustaining a balanced herd, and they're actually, I'll use the word "advisedly," heading towards an eradication policy. The deer numbers will reach such a level that they're not self-sustainable, to protect the environment. And that's largely because fencing is unsightly, can cause damage to other animals...

Paul: Can cause problems with...that's birds, isn't it?

Andy: Yeah, birds flying into them, and it's a massively expensive cost. So rather than exclude deer, eradication is the preferred policy, and that's being argued against. If I'm being honest, I don't think anybody knows what the full true answer is, so they're caught in this dogma of we're right, you're wrong; both being said from both sides of the fence. And all that actually happens is, deer ultimately suffer. If I'm going to deliver any surprise, it might be that the

people most upset by that are deerstalkers. And not because we want all the deer to shoot ourselves, but because most stalkers actually care about the deer and they don't think the right thing is being done by them. And sporting estates have been guilty of sustaining unnaturally high densities of deer for sporting purposes, that's just as wrong, but it's this dogma of excluding the happy middle ground. There's an area of truth that no one's really looking hard enough to find.

Paul: And that's interesting, that's interesting. So in those places there are special licenses being granted, but generally there are seasons where deer, particular sexes or particular species, can be shot, and other times when they can't. Can you explain a little bit about that? Again, I think people don't realize. I think people think you just go out and shoot whatever you...

Andy: That's it. It's basically possible in Scotland to shoot a deer 365 days a year, but there are seasons so it's not the same deer all the time. At the moment, red stags are in season and roe bucks.

Paul: What's the date? We're recording this on the 20th of October.

Andy: Tomorrow everything changes; the season ends, and the females for both roe does and red hinds come into season. Red hinds run through to 15th of February, day after Valentine's Day, easy to remember, roe does go through till 31st of March. Roe bucks then start on 1st of April, and red stags start on the 1st of July, so there's not an exact match up. And there're two elements come into the seasons: one, it's to protect the animals, and two, there's an amount of tradition.

So particularly some of the Scottish seasons actually reflect the sitting time of Parliament, because parliamentarians were the main deerstalkers at the time, so there's that carryover. South of the border, the red stags stay in seasons right the way through into end of winter in the new year, and the difference is, or the reason for the stag season up here, is the rut is just about coming to an end, or it will do within a few weeks. Varies year to year.

Red stags don't eat during the rut; they're expending huge amounts of energy, and so they're in relatively poor condition, and they've spent the summer growing this great set of headgear, which is actually coming off their body weight and the skeleton. They've only got a very short period of time before winter hits, so it's to make sure that the males are left in peace to take on as much food as they can to survive through the winter. The female season is to allow them to give birth without any disturbance or interruption, and to bring the young on to a point in time where, as realistically as possible, a young, if the mother was taken out, could possibly survive.

Though again, this is part of the role you play as a stalker, you don't want to leave young orphaned and unable to take care of themselves or suffer, so you make a decision on that. Immediately people leap in and go, "Well, you shouldn't shoot the mothers with young at all," but because of the way that the deer breed and give birth, you have a choice. You either take them at a certain stage where they have a young that might be okay, but you can possibly kill the young as well if required, or you shoot them when they're very heavily pregnant. And so it's which is the least repugnant decision to make?

Muntjac are rather different, because they're basically Southeast Asian and they prey species, they will breed continuously all year around, so with muntjac, and this might sound a bit defensive on first hearing, you would choose to shoot a heavily pregnant muntjac. And the reason for that is, you could then be sure that its previous young was of an age that it would be able to survive on its own, because the chances are you wouldn't see the two together. If you shot a muntjac that wasn't heavily pregnant, you might then discover that she was in milk and actually had a young somewhere. So there's no neatly packaged answer, but you're trying to do the best you can, as humanely as you can.

Paul: Minimize the suffering.

Andy: That's it. So hence, the reasons the seasons are there. There was a change on the recent legislation appear that's regardless of out of season licenses, then females can't be touched between, I'll check my facts, but April and August, should we say. And that's so that when they are actually giving birth, no one should be pursuing them under any circumstances.

Paul: Okay, that's interesting, that's interesting. I've heard from people who are quite closely connected with the countryside and estates, but also I've seen it written more widely in the press, that the deer population in the U.K. thought to have increased over recent years. Is that just down to newer species like muntjac increasing in numbers and spreading in their geographic dispersion, or is there a wider increase in deer numbers?

Andy: It's wider. It's a little bit strange at the moment: generally the deer population's gone up. And certainly I think it was maybe 5, 10 years ago, there was this oft quoted, "There's more deer in the U.K. now than they were at the time of Robin Hood." And yet less land available for them to be on, far more people and roads, but there are more deer. So Chinese water deer, muntjac, certainly their populations have made a difference, but also roe is expanding. Very strange given the rural make-up of it, there are relatively few deer in Wales, and that's only slowly changing now.

So roe are starting to migrate and go across into Wales, so there's still areas for them to colonize. What very few people realize is that every single county in the United Kingdom, and I mean every single county, has at least two species of deer prevalent, and you can take that down to quite bizarre levels and include in there Aberdeen City. And a lot of people don't realize that places like Aberdeen, the council has a professional deerstalker and that deer are managed with a rifle in Aberdeen City. Very few people even know he exists. And obviously we're not talking 10:30 on a Saturday morning on Union Street, he's rather discreet about it, but the deer are at the stage that they have to be controlled like that.

Central London: okay, you'd expect it in Richmond, but deer will turn up in very strange places that people don't expect.

Paul: Yeah, well I think even in Richmond Park, people are surprised. Again, there's an urban population that are very surprised that there are really still wild animals. They are not to be approached and messed with, particularly around certain times of the year, and secondly that they're culled, they're shot at all. People just think they're just happily...

Andy: That they're just maintaining a balance. Which is, in some ways it's a credit to the professionalism of the people that did it. That course I went on in 1984, one of the guys on that course was actually the chief deer manager for Richmond Park, so that's way back and he'd been in the job an awfully long time even then. But also part of the problem is we've been so discrete as to be invisible, that people don't actually realize the job that's being done, and so it's very easy if an alternative view is put that maybe is not entirely correct, but it's the only view, people take that at face value.

Paul: Yeah, and I think it's surprising to a lot of people. And I think even to me, before I became more involved professionally with working on particular pieces of ground on an ongoing basis in terms of running bushcraft courses and wilderness skills training, you're often sharing that ground with other people who are undertaking other activities, whether it's forestry or coppicing. And pretty much every single piece of ground I've ever worked on has some sort of deer management in place, whether it's a stalking [inaudible 01:06:03], or whether it's the gamekeeper of that particular estate, or whether it's some third-party professional stalker, or somebody is shooting deer on that land.

And I think that's surprising to a lot of people that we're a country, the U.K. as a whole is crisscrossed with tracks and trails and public footpaths and bridleways, and yet in amongst that people are shooting deer and going unnoticed.

Andy: Exactly. And it's good and bad. It's bad for the lack of PR we get; we're not looking for the limelight, but it would be nice if people realized what went on, because it removes an awful lot of perhaps their anxiety and fears they have. By definition, to control a deer you're using a high-powered rifle. Now if you did a questionnaire on the High Street and stopped 100 people and said, "Do you think it's good that people wander around with a high-powered rifle?" That's a loaded question; there's not many are going to agree that it was a really good idea.

I don't know exact numbers, but certainly the number of people that hold DSC1 passed the 20,000 mark the year before last, so we're probably up to about 22,000 people, and not every stalker has DSC1 yet. It's not over-arguing to say it is tens of thousands will be shooting with high-powered rifles. Other than the very, very, very rare incident, no one hears of that. I want to say incident; it tends to be a stalker or a fox shooter accidentally shot himself. You don't hear of walkers being hit by ricochets, or cows being bowled over by shot through.

Paul: No, it just doesn't happen, does it?

Andy: That's it. All ground, or all stalkers, are very conscious of before you ever pull the trigger, what are you pointing at, and where will your bullet end up? The bullet will very often go straight through a deer, so you don't rely on the deer to stop the bullet. You're looking for soft, rising ground, you're very conscious of ricochets. Again, I'm not making it up, someone told me, is the best I can underpin it, that far more people are kicked to death by donkeys in a year than are injured by sporting firearms in a decade. And I don't know many people who go around really worried about whether a donkey is going to kick them to death today. Because people are very conscious and conscientious of what they do, but you simply don't know they're there.

Paul: No, and we're not a country where people are obliged to wear orange and run around and make their presence known, because it's the way that it's managed and the way it's, I guess, the firearms themselves are controlled, and the way that the landowners control who can do that.

Andy: It's good to an extent that it's not felt necessary to wear blaze orange because it has been so safe, there's no imperative on it. And as a breed, the deerstalkers are more like truckers. I don't mean the truckers that drive lorries, I'm talking [inaudible 01:09:27] truckers. We only come out at night, and if it was bright lights, we'd disappear. Very often people...and I've had it. I've had people walk past me and say, "Good morning," completely and utterly failing to realize I'm carrying a rifle and what I'm out there to do, because I'm not dressed like Rambo. I'm discreetly dressed, I'm not waving the rifle around and I'm not

out to frighten them, but they don't actually realize that they've passed a stalker in the middle of working, and that's good in some ways. You see, the downside is, people think there's a problem or could be a problem, which demonstrably isn't there.

Paul: Yeah. No, that's interesting. So for the benefit of people who might be interested in the technical details, you say you're using a high-powered rifle. Can you us a bit more about the equipment you use for stalking?

Andy: By law, and it's different in England and Wales and Scotland, just to make life awkward, though us Scots, and you can tell I'm [inaudible 01:10:31], us Scots are quite proud that we have slightly higher energy requirements, because our deer are tougher than the namby-pamby English deer. Basically it varies slightly but it' all to achieve the same goal: that the bullet you use must have sufficient power to bring about humane demise of the deer. So sometimes they word it as a caliber restriction, so it must be a minimum caliber: .240 of an inch for all species of deer south of the border.

Up here, .22 centerfire can be used on roe, and you start to get bogged down in it, but the intent is the same. Up here we mostly rely on, it must be of a minimum bullet weight, a minimum muzzle velocity, and a minimum muzzle energy. And all it's really going for is to ensure that when the bullet hits deer at a realistic range, it has enough oomph, technically speaking, to do the job. So in Scotland you've got to be at least 1,750 foot-pounds if you really want the figures, and 2,450 feet per second. For all species of deer, it must be a bullet of 100 grains or greater on those muzzle energies. If you want to shoot roe only, you can use a .22 centerfire, minimum weight 50 grains, minimum muzzle energy 1,000 foot-pounds, and then it's slightly different south of the border.

Basically any commercial deer caliber with a commercial round is likely to meet the criteria. One of the things where we've had this discussion is, stalking, like every other past time, has its gadget freaks, and some people get really hung up in the gear, and some people get really hung up in the ethos of the hunting and all that. And it's whatever rings your bell, absolutely fine, but ultimately the deer don't read any of the magazines, they rarely watch YouTube, there's probably some not even listening to this podcast, so they tend to be largely oblivious to whether you've got the latest go faster, illuminated scope.

And nothing beats just good, common field craft and a bit of common sense. Firearms, the other element: if you're going to go for your own firearm, the police need to be satisfied you can use it safely, and it's not just a case of you as a person or a responsible person, intemperate habits or whatever, they need to

know that you're aware of the power of this tool that you're using. So you've got to be able to demonstrate a certain knowledge of ballistics, but not to the nth degree. It really comes down to whenever you press the trigger, where is the bullet going to end up?

Now, I know certainly south of the border there are some areas of ground where people have certificates that say, "You may use this rifle, but only if you are facing southeast to southwest so many degrees, and between the hours of, and you can only do it so many degrees above the horizontal or below that." And ultimately then that never works. We've got a large area of ground here; you could fire, quite safely, a medium antitank weapon here, and no one would ever be impinged by it. You could have a .177 air rifle, use it irresponsibly and cause all kinds of mayhem, and again it comes down to this: the police being satisfied that the person out there is responsible enough and knowledgeable enough to use a tool. I think I've already let slip the word "weapon." We tend to hate the word "weapon," it's very military, and it has connotations. Really it's a tool. No stalker looks on his rifle as a weapon, he looks on it just the same as the stalking knife, his hand saw, whatever it might be. They're not of the mindset that it's a weapon. We then have to go and use military ranges where everything has to be called a weapon.

Paul: Yeah, interesting, interesting. So you're using a rifle you've used for years. So for example, you're not, even though things have maybe changed, you still...

Andy: The stick in the mud, is what you'll come with, yeah. I use a Sako, and it's not the current model, it's a Sako 75, it's got to be pushing 20 years old, I would have thought, in 308 caliber, had many thousands of rounds through it. It even makes your shooting look good, so it's real easy to use, and I just like the rifle. It's stainless and it's synthetic because I go out when I need to go out. So it could be throwing it down, it could be snow, it could be brilliant sunshine, so it's fairly weather resistant. The scope I use is a 6 by 42 Swarovski, no longer made, and I have made my displeasure known to Swarovski, because it does everything I want it to do. There's a current fad, really it's the only way the U.K. firearms industry keeps going, that people chop and change for a better gadget. And scopes in particular have got bigger, heavier, and more complicated.

So I have plans now turned up with scopes with massive objective lenses, sufficient zoom to look at craters on the moon, parallax adjustment, illuminated reticles, ballistic compensating turrets. Great on the range, great for some military applications, but when a deer pops out of the trees 50 yards away, you want to be able to just see it, shoot it, rather than have to fiddle with half a dozen knobs and wait for your flux capacitor to charge, and all the rest of it. But

that's just a triumph of marketing over anything else. It is quite sad: people look my scope, and it's steel and it's blue, and it's that old, but it does everything you could possibly want it to do. And it's been decided that's [inaudible 01:17:12] if we no longer need to make it.

Are you listening Swarovski? And very few manufacturers even make that specification anymore because things have moved on.

Paul: That's a shame, that's a shame. It might be worth, for the benefit particularly of listeners further afield, we're funny in U.K.; firearms are a lot more restrictive than say, they are in North America, but then there are some items that we have access to, like moderators here which North Americans find really odd that we've got such easy access.

Andy: But they call it suppresses, probably. It's a little bizarre. Strictly, and I have American friends and colleagues, there are more firearms laws in America than there are over here, but that's a bit disingenuous because it's allowing for state-to-state variations. Moderators, silencers, suppressors, the terminology changes, but they're all the same thing, and the immediate action of most laypeople is, "Well, that's what assassins use, and the only reason you'd want to be quiet is if you're up to something nefarious." And they've been around decades; there was effective suppressors pre-World War II. Commercial suppressors for Fullbore rifles have been around for decades; they were very slow to be taken up here because of the way our firearms laws are. If a moderator is going to be fitted to a Section 1 firearm, it becomes a licensable component in its own right. But it becomes that, so on its own, technically it isn't.

Paul: So if you just owned the moderator, you could own a rifle.

Andy: You might intend to put it on an air rifle or just use it as a paperweight. Technically it's not subject to control, but if it's going to be fitted, and these things just screw on and off, then it needs to be listed separately on your firearms certificate. And for a long while when people applied, and this is not police bashing, genuinely greatest respect for the police, but I still have copy letters along the lines of, "You've applied for a moderator: you can't have one because only people with nefarious intent would want to silence their weapon. And you can't have one because they don't work anyway." In the same paragraph.

What then happened was that a number of people in the U.K. use firearms as part of their job, so specifically the likes of a forest enterprise rangers. Forest enterprise rangers are Crown servants; their firearms are government property

so they don't need firearm certificates. Just the same as a soldier or an armed policeman. They're a tool of their trade. Health and Safety at Work Regulations, there are Noise at Work limits. A Fullbore rifle is a very noisy tool, and it far exceeds the permissible Noise at Work Regulations. You can wear ear defenders, but if you're in a forest where there are people, you need to be able to hear.

You can get electronic ear defenders that filter out loud noises, but if you try wearing them for a day, you'd go mental. It's just sweaty, and you hear every brush, creek, and it's impractical. So they tried suppressors, moderators, and found that moderators could reduce the rifle's blast to below the requirements for Health and Safety at Work, and that was the dam burst. So we're now, say, 10 years on from very difficult to get a moderator, that if you now apply for a deer rifle and don't apply for a moderator, it's usually actually queried by the police as to why don't you want one? And it is just common sense. You shot moderator on the range yesterday, were you aware that a rifle was going off?

Paul: Yes.

Andy: Yeah, it's not like "Man from U.N.C.L.E." when he goes…

Paul: No.

Paul: You're still putting a high velocity bullet out, it's going faster than the speed of sound, so basic physics means it will create a sonic boom, and a loud one, but it's not happening two feet away from your ear. And it also reduces recoil. So there's no mystery, there's nothing sinister about it: it's one, helping you keep a lower profile, it's minimizing disturbance both to wildlife on the ground and other people that are using the ground, and not least, it's protecting the hearing of the person that's actually doing the shooting.

Paul: And improving the accuracy, and therefore the humane nature of the shooting I guess.

Andy: Exactly. You found yesterday, you used a 308 rifle. In the past when we were teaching, we'd start people with a .22 rimfire and build them up; nowadays we hand them a 308 rifle. The moderator takes the blast away, which helps reduce flinching, it reduces the recoil through various mechanisms, and we've had petite ladies pick up the 308 and produce half-inch groups dead center of the target, with the first rounds they've ever fired in their life. And ultimately accuracy isn't about boasting or tight groups; the purpose in a deer rifle is to put the bullet into the deer exactly the way you want it, and anything that achieves that is only for the good.

Paul: Indeed, indeed. Good. So it's interesting, I'll finish up quite soon, but it's interesting, you're getting all sorts of different people. I know you've said you've got an increase in women who are interested in stalking, you said you've even had some, without mentioning names and betraying people's confidence, we've had several vegans who are interested, and that to me is quite interesting in itself.

Andy: It is, and it's not to take any kind of anti-stance or criticizing. If someone was vegan, I fully respect it's their decision; it was just interesting to have someone that had been at that stance and their reason was animal welfare.

Paul: Their reason for being a vegan.

Andy: A vegan, yeah. That when they actually looked into it, it wasn't they were missing meat, they looked into it and decided, well, not all meat is the same. There are certain meats that there is actually an ethical argument, and everybody it has their own point of view on it, but it was just interesting to hear that. That they looked around and then the further they looked into it, came to the conclusion that venison from a professionally stalked deer or a deer they stalked themselves, i.e., they knew the full route of that meat, was actually perfectly within their moral code, and yes, they wish to do this. And actually took it a step further, that once they got fully involved in looking at the process, felt that they were actually benefiting the species as part and parcel of that process. That sounds like a twee answer but that's the way they related it.

Paul: That's interesting, that's interesting. Good, so your doors are open to anybody who is interested [inaudible 01:24:58].

Andy: Doors are open to anybody.

Paul: Excellent. And then where can people find out more about you and what you do, or contact you?

Andy: If you Google DRC1 Scotland, our website will come up.

Paul: What is your website?

Andy: www.stalkingschool.co.uk. It's a little bit staid; we're deerstalkers, not IT experts, so apologies for that. It's underway and working, but basic information is on there.

Paul: You're going through a bit of a revamp, you said, on that.

Andy: We're going through a revamp. It says it on the website, and you've experienced this, I genuinely, we're in a remote cottage that we are off grid, I have satellite broadband and I have a mobile that occasionally picks up a signal.

Paul: And your electricity's off a generator and a wind turbine.

Andy: And wind turbine, so all that. So if you have any queries, if you do wish to get in touch, please email, because I'm more often on the email and more able to respond on email than I am by phone. And apologies in advance to anybody who has phoned and is still waiting for call back, because sometimes being four or five days before I'm back in signal.

Paul: No, that makes sense, that makes sense. And you've dabbled with social media, any place people can find you?

Andy: We have a Facebook page. This is making me sound like a [inaudible 01:26:30], I believe we had a Facebook page called The Deer Stalking School. Slightly slow because I'm reliant upon my 18-year-old stepson to actually access it because I can't work out...it's witchcraft as far as I'm concerned.

Paul: Oh, that's probably best that you keep it at arms-length. So stalkingschool.co.uk, the main place. I'll put a link to that in the show notes as well on my blog so people can find you and contact you if they want to come and do a course. And we've got an interesting project that we're working on as well.

Andy: Looking forward to that.

Paul: And so we'll put more details out about that as in when, but yeah, looking forward to that. And thank you very much, Andy, for your openness in discussing this and your thoughts. And as I say, I think just going back to the beginning, it's somewhat not quite nebulous but it's something that people should see in the shadows a little bit, and I think it's been really useful to bring it out into the open for people who might not be familiar with it. And I think the other thing for me, just to finish off, that we didn't talk about was, it's interesting having traveled to different parts of the world, Scandinavia we were talking about yesterday, that shooting's part of people's outdoor life in general. In the U.K. it's quite...

Andy: It's compartmentalized.

Paul: ...is compartmentalized. Whereas you go to a small shop in a small town in Norway and they've got cross-country skis, rollerblades, running gear, thermals and outdoor camping equipment, and tents and backpacks. And then they've got all the shotguns and rifles and hunting equipment all in the same shop, because it's the same people doing the same things. And I think sometimes we can compartmentalize things a bit too much, can't we? And it's the same in the States and Canada; you go into the big outdoor stores and it's everything from fishing rods, to rifles, to mountain bikes, to kayaks.

Andy: It would be nice to say outdoor interest is outdoor interest. It doesn't have to be a group hug, we might not agree, but it would be just nice to see a bit more picking out the commonality rather than what divides people.

Paul: What divides people, yeah, absolutely, and I'm the same. The past two weeks I've been canoeing on the Spey, and we've been camping, and having fires, and paddling. And this week we're out in the forest and we're looking for deer, and we're shooting, so you don't have to be completely separate people to enjoy all these things. So it's something that's worth looking into if you're at all interested; it's not as difficult to get into as people might think. So thanks, Andy, much appreciated.

Andy: Thank you very much for the opportunity.

Paul: No, you're welcome. Cheers, anytime.

Thanks again to Andy for taking the time to have that lengthy and in-depth discussion about his profession and the professionalism which it requires. I hope you found that interesting, I hope you found it illuminating. Let me know what you think, let Andy know what you think in the comments below the podcast on my blog, or tweet me, @PKirt, to let me know what you think. Also, just to let you know before we go, those of you that listen to the "Ask Paul Kirtley Show," which is primarily a video show, but I also now produce as a podcast, it's a question and answer show, it's on YouTube, it's on my blog, it's also now available on iTunes.

So if you're interested in the "Ask Paul Kirtley Show" on iTunes, go over there, search for "Ask Paul Kirtley," or go to my blog and there is a link through to iTunes there. So please subscribe; it'll be good to have you on both this podcast and the "Ask Paul Kirtley Podcast" as a listener. And if you're already a listener of "Ask Paul Kirtley" through different means, when you sign up for iTunes, if you could see your way just to give us a little rating or a little review, that would be most appreciated because that will bump the podcast up the rankings and that will mean it will get in front of more people, which means that more

people will get the benefit, more people like you will be part of that community, and also, if they ask good questions, you'll get the benefit of my answers to their good questions as well, so everyone's a winner there.

So thanks again for listening today, thanks again for supporting what I'm doing in terms of getting good, quality information out to you. It's much appreciated, thanks for your time, and I will speak to you soon on the next podcast. Take care, bye-bye.