

Lee Pooley 00:15

Hi everybody my name is Lee Pooley and I'm the Director of Coaching and Qualifications at British Canoeing and this is The Coaching Podcast, this is slightly a slightly different we're going to do a miniseries and the miniseries is all about what's in your Buoyancy Aid and what's in your boat. It's where we're going to chat with experienced coaches and guides to find out what they carry and why so I'm really delighted to have Georgina Maxwell with us again because you just did it podcast around decision making so welcome to Georgina.

Georgina Maxwell 00:48

Hi Lee. You alright. Yeah, very well. Thank you very much.

Lee Pooley 00:53

Good. What I'd like to do just in case someone hasn't listened to the decision making which I'll be very disappointed about if they haven't but if someone hasn't listened to the decision making podcast that we did with Dan Wilkinson is could you just give people a bit of an overview about yourself?

Georgina Maxwell 01:09

Hi, I'm Georgina Maxwell. I live up in the north of Scotland. I've Been up here 13 years now originally from the Yorkshire Dales Swaledale and i've had a whole career in the outdoors. So i'll be turning 40 next year and I started paddling at 16, but I also entered the outdoors at 16 through college which progressed onto university and then it progressed on to a career in the outdoors, so it was trainee in the Lake District to working full-time in a school in Scotland and for the past for ages it feels now i've been freelance run my own course courses. I work on a lot of British Canoeing Awards and yeah, I'm also a mountaineer aswell so I do ice climbing and skiing and all sorts. So yeah pretty exciting life.

Lee Pooley 02:03

It sounds very exciting. Youve got a whole breadth of experience of Adventure Sport really. So, what we're going to focus on today that is the paddling side of your career Georgina. And what we want to do is then we're gonna focus on Whitewater paddling aren't we for this particular particular area. So could you describe your white water background and what you're probably gonna draw on from your experience.

Georgina Maxwell 02:29

Yeah, okay, so, my white water background actually started at the old Tees Barrage and as sort of in playboating so very closed environment there. And then as I went further through University and stuff it progressed onto the rivers and then the rivers abroad in the Alps and I haven't done any big volume stuff over in Nepal. That's not what i've focused on. I've been all over the Alps from corsicus, Slovenia, French Pyrenees and Spanish Pyrenees to Norway and basically all the popular venues in the outside paddled. Yeah. And...

Lee Pooley 03:07

Brilliant

Georgina Maxwell 03:08

It's Scotland as well. So that's predominantly where I work is Scotland. So I'm coming from a bit of a leader point of view, but also from a personal paddling point of view as well.

Lee Pooley 03:19

Alright. So let's dig into your buoyancy Aid then. So what do you carry in your buoyancy Aid?

Georgina Maxwell 03:26

Yeah, so I'll tell you a list of things I've got but I've also things that were always there. So probably I'll just start with the things that are always there. Which would you like an explanation of each one or should I just list what I've got for now and then you can pick me up on that.

Lee Pooley 03:43

If you don't tell us why we will be asking so you.

Georgina Maxwell 03:48

Yeah, and I'll start right at the top. I carry a tape and karabiner. So you've probably seen these big long tapes that you can buy from various retailers and paddle Sport retailers. And then there's a karabiner on the end and that gets all nicely rolled up and popped away in my buoyancy Aid. I do a lot of advanced paddling so grade fours grade five environment. So that's handy for a lot of things from lowering a boat down. Just a little steep bit to taking it round, I don't know just nipping it around something in the water still and of course you can use it in some rescues, too.

So, tape and karabiner, in there also is a knife and I think if you're using ropes and things or in the paddle paddling anyway, you've got chances of snags. So, a knife is a pretty crucial piece of kit that knife really should be able to be open with one hand. I don't want to do any horror stories on this but I do know somebody capsizing caught her hair in some barbed wire and had to cut her hair off. So having that one hand opening knife is a good idea. In there as well, I've got a whistle. So that's pretty integral to any rescue. Some people use it for communicating on the river personally I don't but yeah it's for a rescue in there. I've got a phone. Always bring my phone even if I don't have signal I've got my phone in there because on my phone is my mapping software and mapping, a lot of people go if I just have a grid reference I can tell you where I am. I'm very passionate about being able to make decisions about where you are rather than just tell people about where you are. So on there is mapping and if it's abroad, I don't have access to that type of map it'll have some sort of river and some sort of real physical map either in my boat or on me.

They're the things that I've always got with me in my buoyancy aid are the things I've listed there. Things that hang around in there because I had a good dig in my buoyancy aid today. This is the odd sweet wrapper. No, there's a spare bung plug, I always carry that in there because you never know when you might need it and then instead of ratching around in the back of the boat it's quite accessible. It's so small it just sits in there. Then there's sun cream perhaps that's one of them things that might come and go out of there but really small compact one is pretty handy or some lypstyl at

certain times of the year. I have a snack in there as well depending on what I'm doing. It's a quick blast I might not but some sort of emergency food for myself that's in there.

And then there's my ear plugs that might come on depending on what I'm doing. So if I'm a bit more play boating orientated and know that I'm going to be surfing waves a lot. There'll be with me but sometimes I struggle to hear through them. So, they're on and off all the time. So, they're back inside my buoyancy aid and then we're up to a notepad that's in there, sometimes just stuff behind that's if I'm assessing that down and then the van keys might be in there but generally if anyone knows my van and they're with my van. And then finally I've gone through a little bit of an evolution with having a closed dyneema sling stuffed up my buoyancy aid and that's a really quick deployed, if I need to move a boat across the water instead of getting the big long one out and having to tie a knot in the end that might be a contentious point it might be of course for conversation. I don't actually carry the moment. But if I'm working with certain groups I might do.

So that's inside my buoyancy aid. I hope you either wrote them down or you had a chance to think about some of them and

Lee Pooley 07:35

I think I've got a couple of questions if you don't mind, so you talk about a dyneema sling and a length of tape and what length are they?

Georgina Maxwell 07:43

Yes. Think five metres is the red one and the dyneema one. I'm rubbish with length of them, it's the big long one. So it means that you basically the perfect distance away from that boat. If you're gonna tow it over your shoulder as a releaseable way of towing. But I don't always take that one. Sometimes I do, instead compact is dyneema it's really good for that sort of thing and it's good for that. Whereas the big fat tape is difficult to get away sometimes and work with yeah.

Lee Pooley 08:15

Yeah. So, in terms of your buoyancy aid then a lot of the stuff that you saying the snacks just for me, there's one else is just in case I need it. So, are you suggesting that that's how you would always pack it. You wouldn't change anything around if you had you talk about the sling underneath don't you around the dyneema sling. But in terms of your content of your point, would you be changing anything if depending on groups?

Georgina Maxwell 08:39

Yeah, okay, so, very quickly again just to recap things that are always there the tape and crab the knife the phone and the mapping and the whistle they're always there and the rest of things will change around a bit. So, for instance if it's really really sunny, I'm going to be taking the sun cream and if I'm in charge of people, let's have a quick think of what changes in the buoyancy aid itself. Not a lot because I'd probably say to my group make sure they have their own snack inside their buoyancy aid so I don't think there's anything additionally in there that I have to put in the buoyancy aid, the other stuff changes the boat and the group kit, but for inside my buoyancy aid I don't think an awful lot changes. Yeah.

Lee Pooley 09:20

Yeah. And then just a bit of an insight, you said, you delved into the buoyancy aid today and found a wrapper. How often do you take all the stuff out and you know...

Georgina Maxwell 09:31

I actually do dry the sling and crab out and the knife and i've got a lovely wood burner up here in the north of Scotland and they'll come out and they'll sit on the side next to that and I think it's important to dry that sort of kit out otherwise, it can get a bit moldy or full of grit or whatever, especially with the karabiners as well, They need looking after because I have run a few safety courses and people have brought their karabiners out that guy there must have been from the 1920s or something. Some of them don't do up or some of them brought these rusty maillons and all sorts. So, yeah, looking after your hardware Your knives because they can get a wee bit Rusty in there. So yeah look after that.

So there's one more thing that sometimes goes into my buoyancy aid, but not always and that's a mini folding saw. And sometimes that can go in there or sometimes it's in the back of the boat depending on what's what's going on. Probably if I think I'm going to a very tree-lined bit of water, I have pruned a few trees just to get a good view on something. Its not obviously it's not a recommended thing to do, but it's just to clear a little sort of really wild area and definitely not something you would do when you're paddling near someone's back Garden.

Lee Pooley 10:51

Really nice insight to your buoyancy aid and that's great. Probably the one that you sort of alude to then is the kit inside your boat will probably change depending on the type of environment and the group you paddling with. So could you give us an insight into what you carry in your white water kayak?

Georgina Maxwell 11:11

Yeah, of course. Yes, so inside my boat because i've actually put three lists down here with the questions you've given me, inside my BA inside my boat and i've actually made a third list to separate a little bit of group kit. So, i'll come to group kit in a second because some of them things may be in my boat if I'm not in charge of a group or if i've got the kit and my friend doesn't say. So inside my boat, I have a throw line and airbags and They're the things that are always there. And then of course, i've got something to drink so that might be a hot or cold drink depending on what type of conditions I'm paddling in a pin kit, and a head torch a repair kit that's got a multi-tool and some cord. It'll have some really strong cable ties. Really that strong Gorilla duct tape stuff. And then I also carry in my boat an emergency layer of clothing. And i'll chat about that in a second. And then the saw that could be in my boat or in my BA. So theyre the things that are in my boat. And should I just tell you the group kit as well Just so we can discuss it all.

Lee Pooley 12:23

Why not?

Georgina Maxwell 12:24

So in the group kit slash leader kit because this is the kit that if you are in charge of people and you're looking after their safety, you want to make sure you definitely got it with you you covered that. So, group shelter, I think is a pretty crucial piece of kit. And actually I wouldn't advocate a minimum less than six people because if you've ever tried to get into a group shelter of four with all of your kit on it's really not very easy. Yeah, so six man group shelter and that what couples up with that quite nicely is a blizzard bag. So if you haven't come across a blizzard bag, it's not just your foil blanket It's two pieces of foil blanket with corrugated iron on a roof. It's got that sort of structure inside. So it traps a layer of air and once a person's in that or in the group shelter, they'll be very toasty. With that blizzard bag as well, you can get it in two so you can get it in two sizes so you can get a jacket shape or you can get a sleeping bag shape and probably say get the sleeping bag shape because then you can actually wrap it around or you can cut it down or whatever you can do. It's a bit more versatile than.

Another thing that i've actually started taking and people might think they're pretty useless but hand warmers that you can buy in the shop for quid, they were pretty crucial in a part of a rescue that I was involved with not that long ago and we basically stuffed it all over that person in their clothing so actually heated up their core rather than just thinking it's a hand warmer. So yeah these and you can get them for your shoes as well can't you so that's sort of handwarmer that you can buy in the entrance to the supermarket this time of year. I think that was quite a few amongst a group when we had this individual who was very very cold and I think it was counted around 15 fell out the jacket when they got to hospital so, they could have been a pretty crucial part of getting that person warmed up again. So yeah the hand warmers, pogies as well this time of year or some sort of Shield over there over the hands or big mittens or something if you have stopped and you need to warm somebody up and then there's sort of things like energy gel that go inside the first aid kit. And then it's an adequate first aid kit as well. So it's not just your little thing that you would take away just for you your personal first aid kit or what pills you're on that day. It's something that's going to be able to solve situations in a very wet environment.

So yeah adequate first aid kit that has the gel inside and also inside mine or inside the bag, I actually carry a resuss mask and and that's to penetrate bubbles if somebody's actually and taking in a lot of water they'll actually start producing all these bubbles that are coming out and the way to save them is to just go straight through that and you wouldn't fancy putting your mouth on that. So yeah, it's a resuss mask for that and what else is on there. Yeah, and the first aid kit side of things it's always checking it and drying it because I have seen again on assessments people bring out the first to take it and It's terribly moldy and out of date and stuff. So making sure that that's all up today and nice and tidy and then I think yes split paddles as well. So that yeah.

The other thing I also take is a PLB. So it's a Personal Location Beacon and it's very very common for sea paddlers to take it a lot less common for Inland people on the water to take it. But it's part of what I have now in my kit if I'm out with friends if I'm out with work and in the north of Scotland, you don't always have phone signal and if it's a serious incident that's occurred you press the button and it's hopefully helicopter comes on its way to you. So yeah, that's registered to me commercially and recreationally, so that's something that I do always take now. And there we go. That's I think I covered everything. Yeah.

Lee Pooley 16:29

I mean, can I just go back and you talk about a pin kit? What's your pin kit consist of?

Georgina Maxwell 16:36

Yeah, so pin kit, so if somebody we actually came across a group that had pinned a canoe the other week and fortunately, I was running an advanced Safety course. So I had a load of people that had done all of that the day before on the dry land and it was a great scenario for them to unpin this canoe and canoers is often take a lot more stuff with them as well as rafters, but for White Water a very basic pin kit would consist of a pulley and two prussics and a couple of karabiners and that should solve the job, together if everyone's got a karabiner in their jacket as well and that sort of thing so that should cover most grounds.

You can go really excessive with it and you can get really fancy with it. You can buy even pre-made pin kits or crevice rescue kits, which is pretty much the same thing. But yeah, keep it quite basic but also what I would recommend is buying the type of karabiners and slings and things that you need and from a paddle shop retailer and that's actually a paddle brand because they're all strength tested they're all safety tested. You don't wanna be buying them off ebay or coming from China or something that hasn't had all the tests that they've been put through because there's a hell of a lot of forces involved when you start especially trying to get that canoe out. So yeah.

Lee Pooley 18:04

So just I'm really intrigued in this. Maybe it's a sort of selfish miniseries that i've put together, but I'm really intrigued to some whereabouts in the boat do you place these things? Is it almost some religious thing that on the right hand side, you've got this on the left-hand side you got that, do you do use any space in the front of the boat? Those type of questions.

Georgina Maxwell 18:27

Yeah, absolutely. That's a really good question to ask and that to me is going to change quite a lot. I don't i'm not gonna carry all this kit i've just explained to you because really I can't carry all of that group kit in the back of my boat and still perform on grade four five water. And so I am gonna very much make sure that there's a bit of a shared responsibility with some of that kit. But also I'm going to keep hold of that really crucial kit. Sometimes I'm less likely to be the one that's bobbing around in the water and the boat's gone. So, yeah, there is some kit that I will keep hold of myself back to something like the pin kit as well like making sure it's protected from the grit and form the you know, I have just put it in the back of my boat.

Just all tied together a little bundle and it won't last that long doing that. So having it it's sort of stashed in a way that's gonna be protecting that kit for its longevity but that's the sort of thing like a pin kit would be in my boat. Split paddles, I'm not gonna take that on every river I do if I'm on something like that that's got a road alongside of it or if i've got something that's got a really long walk out, but it's a fairly accessible bit of water and I might choose not to take it. There's lots of decisions there in what you do and what you don't take and I think I really think gone of the days where you start going all I can't take that because it's too heavy. Yeah, I remember my first times in the mountains going, we haven't got room for a group shelter. I think gone are the days of that. I think what you need you need to take it and there's a very sort of small chances or if I'm on a artificial White Water course, I'm gonna take all that kit. And so yeah, it's very much jumps around

but answer to your question, where do I put it all and there is certain things that I need to know where they are. But also the group might need to know where it is as well. I'm very much into the start of the session or start of the day or even with friends. It's right who's got what today and you make a mental note in your head. Okay, well they've got the first aid kit or they've got that okay, or we've got everything. That's great. Because if something does happen, then you want to be able to access all this kit easily and quickly and so yeah, it's very much having that open atmosphere being able to find out who's got what and somebody had a really really good method of storing their split paddles. You can buy these paddle floats for training or learning to roll or whatever and they stored their split paddles inside a paddle float. So then the airbag still worked. I thought that's quite a cool tip and...

Lee Pooley 21:05

Yeah, that's good.

Georgina Maxwell 17:07

Yep, but I have it's almost like a handbag. And it's a little bag that opens up a bit. It's a bit difficult to open up. So if I'm working with people for the first time, I might show them how to open that because that'll have my PLB and it'll have my first aid kit and it's a really obvious position in the boat. It's literally in the back of the boat. They'll see that it's like a bag that once you've brought that out. You've pretty much got everything out of my boat. Or whatever's left on me. And so yeah, it's all kind of stowed quite sweetly inside there and very organized and also the very conscious thinking about what's in there as well. So that it doesn't become too big and too bulky. Yeah.

Lee Pooley 21:48

Georgina, I think that was a real great glance insight into the way that you operate as a coach a guide but also in your personal paddling as well because you definitely give us that insight of but what was really evident from all of this and please please correct me if I'm incorrect. Is that this is based you are making conscious decisions all the time about what to carry. Where you're paddling, the people you're paddling with, the environment the conditions the weather all of that came quite strongly. Is that right?

Georgina Maxwell 22:25

That's absolutely right, and you can look through the books and go what should I be carrying? But if you've got no knowledge of the kit that you're carrying then it's useless but also then you could end up carrying way too much and so it's very dynamic approach into what comes in and out of that boat. But I do say there was a lot of core things that stay in the buoyancy aid but the rest of it it moves around quite a lot and it might be that I'm not carrying a certain thing one day, but my friend is and I must say as a leader I do end up carrying a bit more than some of the clients depending on who the clients are and then even if I'm running an advanced assessment, I will never just assume they've got the right kit with them. So I'll always be carrying my backups as well within my boat. Yeah.

Lee Pooley 23:16

Brilliant. So, as always with this Georgina and thanks very much for talking, going through all of your kit because answering those questions that it's quite a personal thing, isn't it you know what you carry? And where you carry is quite personal, but actually it's a huge amount of learning for everyone, and even from peer to peer having those conversations and sometimes they're not conversations. You just see how people are operating and you get cut really nice way a bit like this the splits example that you gave us.

So, a couple of random questions if you don't mind just as we bring this podcast to a close. You are obviously a very active and renowned, provider of British Canoeing Awarding Body courses. So on an assessment and don't need to name any names. What's the most wackiest bit of equipment you've ever seen someone bring on an assessment?

Georgina Maxwell 24:09

Man, probably the most disappointing piece of Kit was and i've waited, often i'll wait further Downstream just if there's a nice little low if we end up having lunch I'm like, right, let's have a look at the quality of your kit. And there's this one individual but as what's in the bag he's like, it's just spare clothes. Well let's have a look, and he pulls it out and it's a pair of boxers and a t-shirt that was his first clothes, i'm like who's that for and for me. All right, okay. It just didn't make any sense and it was just the spare boxers together. We're not paddling that hard. Yeah, that's probably the wackiest actually I can't think of anything that really misplaced. There's been a lot of very poor kit that has been and split paddles that they've borrowed and they don't know how to put apart or a first aid kit. I gave the example earlier of this absolutely mold it was horrible, you wouldn't want to put that on any wound. It was just completely moldy this first aid kit. So yeah there was that as well. Yeah.

Lee Pooley 25:20

Yeah, and then just all picking up on some of those things you said. Obviously regular checks, to go through your kit to make sure it's still functional it's the right thing that to be carrying. They talk about splits you know, what would you be recommending do You think should you have a go paddling with splits to see if they're actually, appropriate for the environment that we're operating in.

Georgina Maxwell 25:41

Yeah, okay a great question again, I think I would encourage everybody who's listening to this podcast to go away and think I'm carrying that, why am I carrying that but also what situation might be the reason why I'm carrying that, so for instance something like your splits. If they are really poor set a splits that are really I don't know just really heavy or clunky or something that you just don't think you can perform with and you're in a pretty advanced environment and you've got to get yourself out of that river. I would be recommending there that they're paddles that you've actually paddled with you can make the moves with and if you're in a leadership position, you can actually look after people with. So I'd be recommending trying not to put any names to any kit I recommend tonight, but I would recommend something that's lightweight but also pretty robust very similar to some of the other paddles that you can actually buy that aren't splits. And a four piece split as well so that you can really get it in the smaller boats or slidy boats. So yeah.

Lee Pooley 26:47

Brilliant, and so What this is very personal by the way, so if it offends anyone we apologize right now, so what's the best River in the best white water river in the UK?

Georgina Maxwell 27:01

This was a debate on Facebook the other, not that long ago actually and I think all the north Waliens were saying the Mawddach which actually I haven't paddled and I'm a Swaledalian, so I'm gonna have to say the Swale.

Lee Pooley 27:20

Okay.

Georgina Maxwell 27:21

And there's some incredible adventures in Scotland though. Honestly, there's so much and when you've got a dam release of the Moriston every week through the summer, it's only just finished as well. So, we're in October no we're in November now. So yeah, it's something like I think the Moriston is pretty good because there's always a vibe there as well. So I suppose it's probably a local isn't it? Anybody will say their local

Lee Pooley 27:45

You know, I can't hold you cause I didn't actually say one I just so you gave several there. Just hopefully it please a variety.

Georgina Maxwell 27:56

Yeah, I'm not a politician.

Lee Pooley 27:53

You're only allowed one on this question then.

Georgina Maxwell 27:56

Okay.

Lee Pooley 27:57

What would you say is the best white water river in Europe?

Georgina Maxwell 28:02

How can I only have one instantly your mind when you're at... yeah when a question my God.

Lee Pooley 28:09

For some reason. There's only one river that you can save. And you could only ever paddle that ever again.

Georgina Maxwell 28:17

Oh man. That is so difficult what all the other ones just totally go.

Lee Pooley 28:22

Yeah.

Georgina Maxwell 28:24

It's impossible that it's absolutely what's got the most variety on it? And I know I'm gonna be into listing loads. I can't answer that question.

Yeah, when you ask that sort of question your mind instantly goes to the last trip you were on I was in Italy earlier this year and I was on the Egua and i've only ever paddled the Egua sort of like a mediocre Lowey type, and when we were there there was constant thunderstorms every afternoon and the rivers were quite High and the Egua with water in it. It's insanely good. Yeah, but there's so many rivers in the I don't know from yeah.

Lee Pooley 29:07

Probably an unfair question. I apologize.

Georgina Maxwell 29:08

Very, very bad question that yeah.

Lee Pooley 29:15

Georgina, Thanks very much for your time on the podcast really really appreciate it and give us an insight into your buoyancy aid and your boat. So, thanks very much and take care.

Georgina Maxwell 29:25

Thank you.