

00:00:14 Lee Pooley

Hi everyone and welcome to British Canoeing Coaching Podcast. My name is Lee Pooley, I'm the Director of Coaching and Qualifications here at British Canoeing and British Canoeing Awarding Body. I am delighted to be joined on online today by Pia, so hi Pia.

00:00:31 Pia Philbey

Hi Lee, how are you doing?

00:00:32 Lee Pooley

Yeah, yeah. Good. Thank you. We were just chatting just beforehand, before we started recording that hadn't seen you for a while. And last time we we were working together was at the Lee Valley on the slalom championships, which was lovely to see you and work with you. But I think rather than me talk about talk about our sort of our working to two listeners and would it be right if you give a little bit of a background to who you are and and a bit about your paddling?

00:01:01 Pia Philbey

Yeah. So as we gone through I'm Pia, I didn't paddling for around 20 odd years now and coaching for the most part of that as well. Quite a long time. I started out in PGL and did at zero to hero a three week paddle school course many, many moons ago and left that and developed in the coaching world and now run my own business.

So I run a lake in Beckenham in London and we have around 50 odd staff of which I think there's 13 qualified paddle sports instructor now. My favorite choice of craft is a canoe. Just because you can take them anywhere, you can take the kitchen sink with you.

00:01:43 Lee Pooley

So. So canoes your favorite craft and what's your what's your second? What's your second in your arsenal?

00:01:48 Pia Philbey

SUP. Yeah, I've always had trouble with the kayak since I had my little one. As many mums will attest that having babies changes your body shape and everything. My bum and a kayak don't quite get along so much anymore.

00:02:02 Lee Pooley

Okay. So your back? Yeah. So majority of your paddling is now in a canoe or sup? And, and what sort of what sorts of waters do you tend to paddle on?

00:02:12 Pia Philbey

Mostly the river Medway down in Kent. Nice, slow moving river. It's got the infamous canoe slides and canoe passes though, which make it good, interesting fun as well as the lake at Beckenham. I do like to go and about. I've done a variety of rivers, including like the conch in northern France, which is mostly touring. It's got one grade three rapid on it, which you kind of just bypass at the Canoe Club.

And I've done Semois in Belgium as well, which was a really good, that 89 and a half K over two and a half days. So it was a really, really good touring one.

00:02:46 Lee Pooley

Yeah, lovely.

And Pia, you're also you're part of the British Canoeing touring technical group.

00:02:51 Pia Philbey

Yes. I was trying to remember this morning how many years I've been doing that now because it must be at least three years I've been on that team. And it's been nice to watch it change and evolve over time and be part of building the syllabuses and like the BCAB as well, especially when the paddle sport touring leader came in.

00:03:10 Lee Pooley

Yeah, yeah, and yeah. Thanks to everyone on the technical group for being able to contribute and shape that to the qualification it is now. And yeah, very popular. Which is which is fantastic. So Pia, what we what we're going to be focusing on today is around touring and going into the sort of the winter period, although people will probably curse me.

But you know, going into winter period, maybe our, our thoughts change slightly. So in terms of when you go paddling and when you're paddling in in the winter, what sort of clothing and what's sort of items do you think about when you are going to be paddling throughout winter period?

00:03:49 Pia Philbey

It depends what kind of journey I'm doing. So if I'm doing a journey where I know I'm going back to the car at the end of the day and it's relatively with touring and stuff, flat water stuff I've paddled before, like the Medway where I know I'm heavily not likely to go in. I might stick with sort of like my base layer suit.

So I've got a suit I sort of I sort of team up with I tend to lean towards wearing Rab baselayers because they suit my body type but equally I've got friends and stuff that wear all the different outdoor brands because at the end of the day you've got to choose what suits you and what fits correctly, because the last thing you want to do when you're paddling is do that reach forward and your back layer comes up. You're like, Ooh, that breeze is cold. And then maybe a pair of salopettes and a jacket at that point. But if I was out and things like Bala Lake or the Menai Strait or paddling a little bit more exposed, I probably opt more for my dry suit with a base layer.

With wearing stuff under dry suits, being out touring, I mentioned this to a friend last week because she was doing some help on courses and stuff and knew she'd be on the water all day. And I said, try wearing a gilet like an insulated gilet underneath your dry suit over a base layer. And I said, it massively helps because it's not too warm, but then you don't get cold.

Whereas we wear a whole insulated jacket you tend to find you get a little bit sweaty, which is the last thing we want to end up being.

00:05:13 Lee Pooley

Yeah, absolutely. And what about hats? The hands, feet and head. Is there any top tips you give that?

00:05:20 Pia Philbey

Hats are always good fun. I'm going to say again, I've got the hat that goes with my under dry suit, but that's great. Underneath the wooly hat and like a house you lose 70% of your heat out your head. So do make sure your head's covered with a helmet or a hat, depending on what water you're paddling, what you're doing.

And equally you can do things like buffs around your neck. So a buff always works well, even if you've got a dry suit and you can chuck a buff on and always quite a lot of the paddlers I think, used them as COVID masks during COVID as well. So they always double up for everything else. And gloves wise, it's entirely dependent.

I've got two sets of gloves that I use. I've got my neoprene gloves if I know my hands are getting wet. But equally I've got a pair of insulated mittens because where your fingers are together, you hold the heat in better than when you use individual fingertips, insulation wise, but insulated mittens work really well when paddling, if you know you're keeping dry hands.

00:06:17 Lee Pooley

Yeah, I mean, yeah, it's really great, really great advice there. And yeah, just sort of, you know, thinking about, you know, my type of clothing for winter and it's not much different. And you know, that layering approach and I'm glad you mentioned about the the heat loss out of your head and in terms of when you're planning and preparing for a winter trip, you know, what sort of things are you considering?

You know, right. Right. From the very sort point that you want to go to paddle somewhere, how do you start to plan and prepare yourself for a particular winter trip.

00:06:53 Pia Philbey

It would be more looking at, so where am I going? So am I paddling open water, am I paddling a river, what the weather's doing, what the weather's been doing, especially when it comes in regards to water levels because we look at rivers long time at this time of year I think was couple of years. It must be a couple of years back my husband went off to do his 5 star white water stuff we leave that

over there that white water and so basically I think a lot of the white water rivers were too low to paddle, but all the touring rivers were in operation. So it's always making sure you're checking your water levels, wind, the weather, especially if you're in open water a couple of notes that I made for paddling and sort of like open water and over winter is always looking at the weather. Do you need to go paddling today? Can it wait for another day?

And it's knowing when to make them. A lot of paddlers have a big trouble making that call because we all want to go paddling. But actually some days the wind's worse for it. With 45 mile an hour gusts, it might be better. Let's saving that bit of CPD for another day. Well, saving that journey for another day and going somewhere else. Always have a backup location. If you are going out.

00:08:03 Lee Pooley

Yeah. So that's that's location and conditions. Is there anything else that you might you start to prepare yourself before you, before you set off on your winter trip.

00:08:13 Pia Philbey

Kit, making sure I've got enough spare kit as well. It's always a big one. I always get told off for the amount of kit that I carry. I don't know if you remember at Lee Valley and my huge dry bag that came everywhere with me, this kit for every shade under the sun. So I suffer with something called Hashimoto's disease, which is a thyroid condition, which means I can get extremely cold, extremely quickly, and I tend to feel the cold a bit more.

So I tend to come with like my wardrobe packed for every eventuality because you don't know what the weather's doing and I like being able to pick. It's always better to be able to delay than not have enough layers. Basically on a journey, you want to pick a lot of things that are light, so you're not making your boat too heavy.

But equally, you want to have lots of options there that you can pick from and make sure you've got enough. Because of the weather I've been through paddling where it's been sunny one minute snowed the next, rained a ton and then go back to being sunny and you're like, well, where are we again? What's going on?

Because the weather, just especially if you paddling further out regions around mountains and stuff, the weather changes so quickly around there and you don't always see it coming because you've got mountains in the way.

00:09:27 Lee Pooley

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. So you're talking a lot of clothing options and take take more than you think you need. That's what I hear, Pia. And what other kit might you take?

00:09:40 Pia Philbey

I always generally if I'm doing long touring stuff is poles. Poles come in extremely good handy because you can reason for polling if you're in a river that's suddenly too shallow, but you can also

use them for sailing. So like when we said about the weather we're looking at, do you need to go out that day?

Well, actually, if the wind's going in the right direction, then why not crack a sail out and go for a wee sail in your canoe? Yeah, because you can if you've got a solo sail you can sail upwind as well as downwind. And a really good book is Beyond the Paddle. And so if you want to pick up a book that's all about skills beyond just being in your boat, it covers kayaking as well as canoeing.

And I believe they're now developing bits for sup then to be able to take poles and do solo sails on sups as well. But as we know with sup, it's a developing sport because it hasn't been around as long as kayaking and canoeing. But sailing is always good fun, that or you can do tracking, you can track if you've got a good bank side, I know Bala is not always the best for it, but if you're at Llyn Padarn another place up that way. And trying to think in the Lake District. If you're at Ennerdale or Windermere, as we all know, Windermere is good for its wind. They've got quite good bankside in places that you can do a bit of tracking along if it saves you paddling and paddling head on into the wind.

00:11:03 Lee Pooley

Yeah. So just for the listeners what is tracking?

00:11:06 Pia Philbey

Tracking where you use the painters on your boats. The touring boats especially canoes are always generally set up with what we call a painter and a half. So it's normally the length of your canoe like you have for white water. But then you do a half again for things like lining and tracking. You don't generally line too much, but tracking so you put a weight in the back of your boat and you can use it to track up wind along the bank, walking along the bank, pulling your boat along. It saves you portaging as such, and trying to carry a heavy canoe full of your kitchen sink.

00:11:35 Lee Pooley

Yeah. So a much more efficient way of actually moving rather than actually picking it up and, lifting the heavy, empty canoe around.

00:11:44 Pia Philbey

Saves your shoulders, saves your back.

00:11:46 Lee Pooley

Yeah. And then in terms of, you know, you're out for the day in winter conditions, you know, having a paddle. And what's your food of choice? Would you take a flask? Would you take food? What would you take?

00:11:59 Pia Philbey

Oh, this is where I get told off for being naughty. So I've generally always got cucumber sticks in winter. Don't ask me why, but they stay nice and cold and they're always nice when they're colder than when you take them out in the summer and they go warm and sticky. But I can be quite notorious for taking day old pizza with me or using my jet boil now.

I've got a little stove jetboil with me because you need emergency hot water cup of tea if you're too cold and but they're also very good at making hot dogs in and having a wee hot dog on the side. I can always get looked at funny when I crank out my boil and my hot dogs.

00:12:36 Lee Pooley

Yeah. And pizza and cucumber is an interesting combination Pia. But know from all of that, it's about you being able to provide something a warm drink, isn't it? And also enough substance to you on a on a particular winter trip because, you know, as everyone probably knows, you use up a lot more energy paddling in winter than in other areas.

And you talked about you talked about sailing earlier and want to sort of delve into that a little bit, see what your what your tips for paddling in open water in wind because, you know, sails all well and good, but some people don't carry sails or sail their craft. So what would you say? Your top tips for paddling in open water environment with wind.

00:13:23 Pia Philbey

So you've got your tracking option if you've got good bankside. But if you are in the middle and suddenly the wind does pick up and you're trying to go into the wind, so you're trying to get upwind effectively the best way is, is to contour. And it works the same as when you go mountain walking, basically you do zigzags.

So rather than trying to paddle directly, head on into wind you almost zigzag on like 45 degree angles, it would take a wee bit longer and you'll get more paddling miles under your belt from that zigzagging. But it is an easier and more efficient way to beat up wind in sailing. They do refer to it as beating.

You can do it in a solo canoe, but you won't be able to do it if you are group canoe sailing. So if you're canoeing as a canoe raft and sailing they only go downwind. Whereas we do the solo ones. If people are carrying the group sailing kits, you won't be able to sail up wind.

00:14:17 Lee Pooley

And you know, would that be the similar to you know you talked about canoe would you say that would be is just as beneficial for someone in a kayak or a SUP to to zigzag the way up.

00:14:28 Pia Philbey

Yeah. So any paddle craft any even sailors when they do it in sailing boats, any kind of craft try to move upwind. The best way is to, as Michael Jackson says, just beat it. It's an easy way to remember. It is quite a fun rhythm that when people work with music in their head, an easy way to remember is Michael Jackson's just beat it.

As you go Zig zags upwind but yeah was sup is a definitely recommend if they are doing it to sit down just because then they get less windage on their body standing up and they're not creating such a big sail themselves.

00:14:58 Lee Pooley

Yeah. And you know, what I've noticed over the years is that people struggle when the wind hits the front of their canoe and it just whips around. What tips would you be given for that?

00:15:11 Pia Philbey

You can move forward in your boat. So looking at the trim, okay, so we talk about trim in coaching quite a lot and how you trim your craft and they'll talk about it on white water when you're going down, moving rivers equally, when you're in open water, you want to make sure your canoes or your kayak. Even so, you've got the back hatches of your touring and all your kits in the back.

You want to try and make sure you're nicely balanced in your craft. So with sup, if you kit's all at the back under that because some sups now have got the bungees that's the technical word bungees at the back as well as the front when they've got the longer sups. It's just making sure your kits in an appropriate place to where you're going.

If you can't move your kit so like a kayak with a back hatch and can you move your weight forwards, can you lean forward into it a bit more, get some more weight over the front to get the nose down. Canoes and SUPS you can just generally move all your kits to the front and that will weight it down. Some people carry a spare dry bag.

It's an old and old, old trick, spare dry bag full of water and stick it in the front adds extra weight. Don't know if you know about that one.

00:16:12 Lee Pooley

No, I mean, I've heard of it within sea kayaking. Plastic squash bottles filled with water and shoved up to the front of you of your sea kayak that brings it brings the nose slightly down. And that's really helped us out in the past, but I've not heard of it with the canoes. So yeah, really interesting stuff.

And in terms of some good top tips there. In the area that you're paddling now within touring, you get a lot of different craft, you know, lots of different craft. And I think that's what are the sort of attractions of touring is that you can use many varied craft, but there are all different shapes and sizes and abilities are different.

How do you how do you work to keep those craft together when on a trip. Because I can imagine that we, they could easily spread out quite quickly.

00:16:58 Pia Philbey

Yeah. So in an open water environment, you kind of generally want to you want to give them boundaries of you doing it from a leadership perspective, you know about giving your boundaries on what you would stay together. Always stay this distance from me. But if you're social peer paddling. Just ask everyone to keep an eye out for each other. If you can't see someone, you can't help them.

It's a big one I use when coaching, if I can't see you, I can't help you. I don't know you've gone over that then I can't do anything to avert it as such. But just saying together, the beginning of like a pair paddle, social paddle, any kind of paddle, let's stay together as a group, keep an eye out for another.

We'll do regular head counts, if anyone's struggling at all, feel free to pair up with them. It's always good to be social and chat. That's why we all do paddlesports, isn't it? Because we're all very social people. We all like chatting lots and but it's also accepting to a certain point. Double blades are always going to be a little bit faster, I think, than single blades.

They may be where you position your people with double blades compared to those with single blades. Not saying that canoeists and SUPers are slower than kayakers at all but they've got two ends to their paddle and they've only got one. So maybe positioning, looking at where you're positioning people around, but ultimately being social, staying together, chatting, keeping an eye out for each other.

00:18:23 Lee Pooley

Yeah, yeah. There's some really good tips there. And Pia, one of the things that, you know, I know you're extremely busy and you've got your own centre, etc., So just really appreciate the time that you've taken out to, to talk to us today. And I'm sure that you know, a lot of the stuff that you said today will be of real interest and value to to to anyone listening to this particular podcast.

So Pia, thank you very much for taking the time to speak to us and really appreciate it and maybe see you at Lee Valley again at the up and coming championships in June

00:18:59 Pia Philbey

Yes hopefully.

00:19:01 Lee Pooley

Thanks very much Pia and speak to you soon.

00:19:05 Pia Philbey

Thank you Lee, bye