



FRONTIER BUSHCRAFT  
Wilderness Skills & Adventure

# The River Spey Canoe Expedition



## Clothing and Equipment Packing Notes

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The River Spey is one of the UK's finest multi-day river journeys.

Between Aviemore and Grantown the river is flat and slow moving. After that it flows swiftly to the sea.

We run the Spey at the time of year we do because it is outside of the fishing season and we are more likely to have good water. The river feels much wilder.

*This is my favourite British expeditioning river. The scenery changes from day to day from the mountain backdrops at the start, to the flats beyond Aviemore and then, from Grantown onwards, the relentless onward flow to the sea through a spectacular valley. Over the years I have sampled wild camping in rugged tree covered islands and that is very much part of my Spey memories (along with a drop or two of single malt of course). The people I have paddled with and those that I have met along the way are very much part of this very special experience. Paddling the Spey is always one of the highlights of my year".* Ray Goodwin.

We must, however, equip and cloth ourselves appropriately for this terrain and the season in which we are visiting:

### **Weight – Keep things light and simple**

There is a common misconception that because you can put a lot of equipment into a 16ft canoe, that you should. While there are no portages on this trip, it makes sense to use this trip as an opportunity to refine your packing system.

In general, you should choose and pack your equipment with the expectation that you will have to hike with it on your back at some point. Also, remember that if you were making a more extended trip, your food will weigh a lot. This is another reason you should keep your personal clothing and equipment as simple and as light as possible.

That said, even on an extended trip, your kit, food and any other cargo will be in the boat the majority of the time.

So, on a canoeing trip, you can allow yourself a few more luxuries than on a long-distance back-packing trip, for example, where everything is on your back the majority of the time. Moreover, the physical exertion of paddling is different to walking. In a boat, you need to be wrapped up well on cold days.

We want you to be warm and comfortable in camp in the evenings, so please bring enough warm layers. See below for more details.

## **Weather**

We will be travelling on the Spey at the beginning of October. While early autumn can produce some stunning clear days, make no mistake, the weather in Scotland at this time of year can be cold. It can also be very wet.

You should therefore come prepared for – and expecting – a range of weather conditions.

Once on the Spey, we will need to do a good number of hours on the water each day.

See the kit-list below for more details of appropriate clothing and equipment but bear in mind when selecting your clothing and sleeping equipment, we could face anything from clear days and cold nights to pouring rain. Come prepared.

## **Insects**

There are no biting insects to worry about at this time of year.

## **Food**

Evening meals – in the Loch Insh Watersports Centre and on the river trip – will be provided. Breakfasts in the centre (Monday and Tuesday) and on the river are also included. Lunches on the river are included.

We ask that you bring your preferred food for packed lunches while working out of the centre as well as snacks (e.g. chocolate, cereal bars, nuts or trail-mix, etc., whatever your preference) for the whole.

While on the river trip we will cook meals communally and there will also be a communal kettle for hot drinks morning and evening.

We'll have tea, coffee, hot-chocolate, powdered milk and sugar but if you have your own particular favourite herbal tea or sweetener, please bring them.

## **Just Ask!**

We want you to have the best expedition possible.

If anything in these notes requires clarification, or if you have further questions, please do not hesitate to get in touch, either by phone or by email.

## Clothing

You need to be warm on and off the water so cotton trousers and shirts are not useful for the cold and/or wet conditions we can encounter.

Make sure you have enough warm layers that you can change and be warm and dry in camp in the evening, even after a day in the rain.

- **Baselayer:** Thin wool baselayer tops (e.g. Icebreaker 200): Good for cold mornings or damp/cold days; Bring a couple.
- **Light-weight warm layer:** eg Polartec 100 weight fleece or Ulfrottte 200gsm wool top or similar;
- **Medium-weight warm layer:** Medium-weight fleece or Buffalo-type shirt.
- **Heavier-weight warm layer:** Heavy pile fleece or duvet jacket (can be particularly welcome at lunch stops if cold).
- **Trousers:** Thermal long-johns or fleece trousers under a protective layer such as waterproof trousers.
- **Waterproof jacket:** It can rain heavily and we must be prepared for bad weather. A waterproof that will keep you dry while paddling all day in the rain is what you should be packing.
- **Waterproof trousers:**
- **Warm hat;**
- **Wide-brimmed hat:** for sun or rain, e.g. Tilley hat;
- **Sunglasses:** with UV protection; Polarising lenses can help you see fish;
- **Emergency dry clothing:** Spare set of trousers, underwear and base layer, medium warm layer, warm hat. This is a separate consideration to the above clothing and spares and should be kept separate. This set of clothing is in case you fall in the water;
- **River shoes** (closed toes), old trainers or wellies. Make sure there is room for socks. You'll likely need them.
- **Socks for river shoes:** Even though they'll get wet, they'll still provide some comfort and insulation;
- **Shore/camp shoes:** Some dry shoes/light boots (far better than trainers for shore use) for the end of the day, once you are off the river;
- **Dry socks:** Dry socks for your shore shoes. Seal-skin waterproof socks are good;
- **Spare underwear;**
- **Casual clothes** for wearing at the centre and travelling;

## Personal Equipment

### **Packing**

- **Canoe packs** – If you have your own, please bring it/them. Otherwise, suitable **waterproof canoe packs/barrels will be provided.**

- **Nylon stuff-sacks** or **plastic bags** to organise clothes, laundry and other items are very useful;
- **Daysack** – For easy access to day-to-day clothing and kit while canoeing and for on-shore excursions. It should be suitable for carrying warm layers, waterproofs, food and water. Strong and durable is good but not too large or heavy. 25-35 litres;
- **Dry bag** to line your daysack (e.g. Ortleib);

### Eating and Drinking

- **Water bottle(s)** or Camelback – you need to be able to carry what you need for the whole day on the water (1-2 litres capacity) .
- Cooking pots/kettles will be provided;
- **Metal vacuum flask**: A really good thing to have on cold days. This also allows you to heat water in the evening and store it so you have a hot drink/breakfast in the morning without having to re-kindle a fire.
- **Mug**;
- **Spoon** (at least);
- **Plate**;

### Tools, Utility and Navigation

- **Head-torch**: Essential for use in the evenings on the Spey. We will be getting off the water close to sunset (It gets dark early up there).
- **Pocket knife**: A small folding knife, preferably with a lock, can be useful;
- **Bushcraft knife**: A fixed blade knife that can also serve as a rescue knife is ideal. Make sure it stays in the sheath even when turned upside down;
- **'Laplander' folding saw**: A very useful item to have with you at all times;
- **Swedish Firesteel**: Reliable fire-lighter even when wet;
- **Whistle**;
- **Watch**;
- **Notebook** and pencils/pens for notes/trip diary;

### Personal Care and Hygiene

- **Personal first aid kit**: While we will have a group expedition first aid kit and we will always be happy to tend to you, we encourage you to take care of yourself for minor, day-to-day cuts, grazes, bites, etc. Therefore your personal kit should include at least the following:
  - Personal medication (if applicable);
  - Painkillers/Anti-inflammatory;
  - Anti-histamine (in case of insect bites);
  - Cuts kit;
  - Blister kit;
- **Wash kit** including biodegradable shampoo/soap;

- **Towel:** must be small and quick-drying;
- **Sunscreen;**
- **Lip Salve**
- **Sun Glasses**
- **Small packet of wet-wipes:** For personal hygiene;
- **Anti-bacterial hand-gel:** For personal hygiene;
- **Spectacles/reading glasses/spare contact lenses** (as necessary);

### **Group Equipment**

All group equipment is provided by Frontier Bushcraft, including group tarps, cooking pots, food barrels, water filtration system, washing-up items, camp shower, toilet rolls/latrines bag.

### **Sleeping Equipment**

- **Tent or Tarp.** It's your choice but remember that tents are warmer.
- **Sleeping bag:** Should be 4 seasons, good quality down or synthetic;
- **Waterproof stuffsac** for your sleeping bag: **This is really important.** Your sleeping bag will go into a canoe pack which is also a dry-bag but they have been known to let in water, particularly when submerged in rapids. Your sleeping bag must have its own dry bag and effectively be double-bagged. A bin bag isn't sufficient. If your sleeping bag gets wet on the trip, it will be impossible to dry it out.
- **Sleeping mattress:** Closed-cell foam or Thermarest-type inflatable mattress.

### **Canoeing Equipment**

- **Buoyancy aid:** While there are buoyancy aids available, included in the trip price, if you would like to bring your own, a model suited to wilderness travel with space in the pockets for emergency equipment is ideal (e.g. Delta 'Ranger' or Palm 'Hydro-adventure');
- **Helmet:** If you have your own helmet, please bring it. If you don't have one, please let us know your head size in good time before the trip so we can arrange one for you;
- **Paddles:** If you have your own paddles, please bring them. Otherwise they are available.

### **Optional Personal Items**

- Paperback book for flights and bedtime reading;
- Camera (if you bring a camera, make sure you have the means of keeping it completely waterproof when stowed e.g. Peli case);
- Spare batteries for cameras.

### **Further Resources:**

The following articles may also be of use to you in selecting and preparing your equipment:

<http://paulkirtley.co.uk/2010/essential-wilderness-equipment/>

<http://paulkirtley.co.uk/2011/personal-wilderness-first-aid-kit/>

<http://frontierbushcraft.com/2012/01/20/wilderness-canoe-trips-bushcraft-survival-equipment/>

<http://frontierbushcraft.com/2012/06/23/how-to-stow-your-kit-for-a-canoe-expedition/>