



FRONTIER BUSHCRAFT  
Wilderness Skills & Adventure

# The River Spey Canoe Expedition



## Clothing and Equipment Packing Notes

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## Clothing and Equipment Packing List

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

After a picturesque start from Loch Insh, the river starts small, taking on a couple of tributaries from the Cairngorm mountains before reaching Aviemore. Between Aviemore and Grantown the river is relative flat and slow moving as it crosses a post glacial plain. From Grantown onwards, the gradient steepens and the river flows swiftly to the sea.

The time of year we run our Spey trips is outside of the fishing plus early autumn also promises a greater likelihood of good water levels. And with fewer people around than in summer, 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.*

In preparing for a trip on this fantastic river, we must equip and cloth ourselves appropriately for the 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 personal gear and packing system for other trips where you might also have to carry your gear at times.

In general, you should choose and pack your equipment with the expectation you will have to hike with it on your back at some point, even if only for a few hundred metres. 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. You don't generate as much heat paddling downstream as you do walking.

We also 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. The difficulty with packing for this trip is you don't really know what conditions you will receive.

Even warm clear days can be followed by a clear, starry night and a frosty morning.

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

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

## **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.

The only food we ask you to bring are some of your favoured snacks for the week (e.g. chocolate, cereal bars, nuts or trail-mix, etc., whatever your preference) plus a packed lunch for Monday, when we will be working out of the centre but may eat lunch away from it.

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 sweetner, please bring them.

Everyone will be involved with collecting a bit of firewood each day plus learning how to process water for the group and other everyday campcraft tasks.

### **Just Ask!**

We want you to have the best expedition possible, so 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 top (e.g. Icebreaker 200): Good for cold mornings or damp/cold days;
- **Light-weight warm layer:** eg Polartec 100 weight fleece or Woolpower 200gsm wool top or similar;
- **Second warm layer:** fleece jacket or similar. More substantial than the lighter weight warm layer above.
- **Trousers:** In warmer conditions some good outdoor trousers such as Fjallravens will be fine. In colder/wetter conditions thermal long-johns or fleece trousers under your waterproof trousers is a good combo.
- **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. It will also serve well as a windproof if necessary.
- **Waterproof trousers:** Waterproof trousers are good for wet weather obviously but they also help keep your legs dry from splashes when going through rapids. If you have dry trousers designed for paddling, with integral feet, to keep your lower legs and feet dry when wading, we recommend you bring them and wear them while paddling. If you don't have any dry pants but want to invest in some paddling gear then money spent on dry pants is money very well spent. They will keep your feet and legs much warmer than any other clothing where your feet get wet. Good brands include Palm and Kokatat.
- **Warm hat:** Beanies are good and you should have at least one in your kit. The other hat that is great for cold and wet weather (although not at all stylish) is the Lowe Alpine Mountain cap. They are fleece lined with a breathable, waterproof outer. It's worth investing in one of these if you spend plenty of time outdoors in Autumn/Winter.
- **Wide-brimmed hat:** for sun or rain, e.g. Tilley hat;
- **Sunglasses:** with UV protection; Polarising lenses can help you see fish (and rocks!).
- **Dry clothing (ditch kit):** Spare set of trousers, underwear and base layer, medium warm layer, warm hat. This is a separate consideration to the above clothing. This is a set of clothing in case you fall in the water during the day. Basically, you should be able to fall into the water, get wet but then change into this gear and be warm and dry again. Personally I take a pair of long johns, a merino base top, a Buffalo Special 6 shirt and a woolly hat. I then change my base layers, put my dry pants back on and put on the Buffalo for warmth if I need it. You don't have to replicate my

system exactly but use it as a model, selecting items from clothing you already own if possible, to keep the cost down.

- **River shoes** (closed toes), old trainers or canyoneering shoes (e.g. by 5.10). Make sure there is room for warm socks. You'll likely need them. Also if you are wearing dry pants (see waterproof trousers above) you will need to make sure there is room for the feet of the pants too.
- **Socks for river shoes:** If you are not wearing dry pants (see waterproof trousers above), your feet will get wet when getting into and out of the canoe. Woolly socks will still provide some comfort and insulation, though.
- **Shore clothes.** Once off the river in the evening, I like to change out of my river gear into a pair of Fjallraven trousers and a fleece. Bring something similar.
- **Shore/camp shoes:** Some sturdy shoes or light boots for camp at the end of the day, once you are off the river. You will be in the woods, not on a prepared campsite.
- **Dry socks:** Dry socks for your shore shoes.
- **Underwear and spares;**
- **Casual clothes** for wearing at the centre and travelling; This does not have to be taken on the trip and can be left at the centre.

## **Personal Equipment**

### **Packing**

- **Canoe packs** – If you have your own, please bring it/them. Otherwise, suitable **waterproof canoe packs and barrels are available and will be provided.**
- **Nylon stuff-sacks** or **plastic bags** to organise clothes, laundry and other items are very useful but only submersible dry bags will keep your kit dry (such as those made by Ortleib or SealLine).
- **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 bags (e.g. Ortleib or SealLine)** – bring one to line your daysack and at least one for your spare clothes. For your sleeping bag – see sleeping kit below.
- **Nylon cord** – paracord or utility cord for tying your gear into your boat. Also good for making washing/drying lines if necessary.

### **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;

- **Vacuum flask:** Not an essential but a really good thing to have for a lunch stop on cold days. A flask also allows you to heat water in the evening and store it so you can have a hot drink and/or wash first thing in the morning. Do not bring a traditional Thermos-type glass vacuum flask. They are too easily broken. Bring an unbreakable metal version if you are going to bring one.
- **Mug.**
- **Spoon** (at least);
- Plates will be provided;

## Tools and Utility

- **Head-torch:** Essential for use in the evenings on the Spey. We will be getting off the water close to sunset most days (It gets dark early up there). **Bring spare batteries.**
- **Pocket knife:** A small folding knife can be useful.
- **Bushcraft knife:** A fixed blade belt knife can be useful around camp for making feathersticks for the fire and other campcraft. If you don't already own one and wish to bring one, a Mora Companion will suffice.
- **'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 at least toothpaste, toothbrush, biodegradable shampoo/soap;
- **Towel:** must be small and quick-drying. A shemagh or large bandanna is ideal.
- **Sunscreen:** A small tube, in case of sunny days (N.B. reflection from water.)
- **Lip Salve.** Wind, cold or sun can all contribute to dry cracked lips, which can be very painful.
- **Small packet of wet-wipes:** For personal hygiene;

- **Anti-bacterial hand-gel:** For personal hygiene;
- **Spectacles/reading glasses/spare contact lenses** (as necessary);

## 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 or barrel 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:** Bring something comfy to sleep on. The ground is cold! Old school Karrimat style mats are fine but they tend to take up more room in your kit than inflatable mats. If you can, bring a Thermarest, Exped or similar inflatable mat.

## 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. Palm 'Hydro-adventrue' or similar); If you don't have one, please let us know your chest size in good time\*
- **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\*
- **Paddles:** If you have your own paddles, please bring them. Otherwise they will be provided. If you don't have paddles, please let us know your height in good time\*
- **Knee protection:** kneeling directly onto the inner surface of the boat is hard on knees, even for seasoned paddlers. Bring a **kneeling mat** (part of an old closed cell sleeping mat works OK), **knee pads** (cheap floorers knee pads with elasticated straps from a DIY store are ideal), **or both**.

\*Please note that there are fields on your booking form online to include your sizing data. This can be edited later if you have decided to bring your own kit or you have decided not to. Please go to "Manage Booking" in the main menu navigation of frontierbushcraft.com, log in and edit your details as necessary, if you didn't enter it all at the time of booking. If you don't let us know you need a buoyancy aid, helmet or paddles, we may not have suitable sizes for you, as all equipment is brought up to the trip from our stores further south. **We need to know your requirements and sizing no less than two weeks before your trip.**



## **Optional Personal Items**

- Book for 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.

## **Group Equipment**

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

## **Further Resources:**

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

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

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