



BEHIND THE SCENES OF 'THIS IS THE SEA III'

JUSTINE CURGENVEN'S 'THIS IS THE SEA 3' HITS THE SHOPS THIS MONTH; FOLLOWING ON FROM THE HUGELY SUCCESSFUL 'THIS IS THE SEA' AND 'THIS IS THE SEA 2', 'TIT3', AS IT'S SURE TO BE KNOWN, WILL, I'M CERTAIN, BE A HIT. WE ASKED JUSTINE TO TELL US ABOUT THE MAKING OF THE FILM AND, FOR SOME MOVIE MAKING TIPS... LUCKILY FOR US, SHE AGREED...

We are five miles from land when the thunder storm starts. Lightning strikes the sea ahead of us and I nervously start to count. One, two ---- bang! Not even two seconds pass before the sky booms. I physically jolt forwards as if I've been hit in the back. My brain reluctantly processes the information and concludes the lightning is less than two kilometres away. We are definitely the highest objects in the vicinity. Panic starts to rear up from my stomach, but I control it; adrenaline won't help us now. All we can do is keep paddling and hope. We can turn back to Foula, or keep going. Either way we are at the mercy of the storm. It is five miles back to Foula (against half a knot of tide), or eight miles forwards. We have a ferry to catch tonight so we keep going, a bit more urgency in our paddle strokes. Alun tells me that he'll be OK with his wooden Greenland style blades, whereas my carbon fibre Lendal paddles will conduct the lightning. I've no idea if he's right, but I try not to think about it.

Subconsciously I change to a slightly lower paddling style...

I'm filming all of this with my waterproof pencil camera system. It's mounted on my deck, on top of a pole, which is attached to my kayak with a suction mount. It's a really flexible system because I can adjust the angle of the pole so it sticks up vertically or lies down horizontally, and the camera itself can spin around so it faces me as I'm paddling, or films the view in front or to the sides. A monitor allows me to see what I'm filming and a microphone records the booming thunder and my scared reactions. The pole means I don't have to use my hands to film, so I can capture shots in situations, like this one, where I need both hands on my paddle!

In a strange way, filming a frightening situation is comforting. I concentrate on framing a shot and making sure I have covered the action from as many different angles as possible, I'm distracted from the

danger. I remember once when I paddled around Wales with Fiona Whitehead that my wrists were really hurting. Fiona gave me little sympathy so I turned to my camera for some reassurance. I started to whinge into my monitor, complaining about my aches and as I was talking the pain completely disappeared. I still can't explain this, but I'm grateful!

On the journey back from Foula, my feelings alternated from blind fear to excitement; I was, after all, getting good material for "This is the Sea 3". This return journey was a stark contrast to the day before, when we crossed to Foula on a velvety sea without a hint of wind. We'd paddled eight miles around the island, craning our necks up at the highest vertical cliffs in Britain, admiring the seals and the gannet colony, beaming smiles etched on our faces. "This will be a great item in the video" I think, as the rain hammers into my face and bounces off the sea. Only five miles to go now...

"This is the Sea 3" is my third sea kayaking DVD. Continuing in the same vein as the previous two, it contains features about sea kayaking expeditions, great paddling locations, legendary paddlers and challenging moving water! Over the last 18 months, I've travelled to the Faroe Islands, Scotland and New Zealand and gathered a lot of great footage. I feel lucky to have spent two weeks with Paul Caffyn, who is one of the world's top expedition paddlers. He was the first person to circumnavigate New Zealand, Great Britain, Australia, Japan and Alaska, which you have to admit, is pretty impressive! Paul is normally very reclusive and doesn't like other people writing about him or filming him, so I was lucky that he allowed me to interview him and film a paddling trip that we made in the beautiful Marlborough Sounds in New Zealand. I also pestered the poor man ceaselessly until he copied me some footage of him paddling around Alaska and surfing on his home tidal race over Greymouth Bar! I hope I've done him justice in the piece I've edited about him as he's one of my paddling heroes.

Whilst in New Zealand I met Cheri Perry and Error! Reference source not found., two ladies, who are amongst the top Greenland-style rollers in the world. Cheri is a lovely American, who performed most of the 35 different types of roll with my waterproof camera set up on the front or back of her kayak. She started kayaking 15 years ago with her young son. When he got bored of paddling he would play on the beach and Cheri would play around with different rolls, finding being under the water very relaxing. From there she's gone on to compete in the Greenland style championships and developed a love and respect of Greenland kayaking culture. Freya has also competed in Greenland and respects the culture, but her focus is more on fun. As a former gymnast and body builder, Freya can do a very impressive headstand in her kayak as well as lots of other tricks; in tight black kayaking gear, with specially made black rolling kayaks, Freya is definitely making her mark on sea kayaking!

My partner, Alun and I, spent three weeks paddling in the stunning Faroe Islands last summer.

It's a fairytale archipelago with steep volcanic cliffs jutting 500metres out of the ocean. Strong currents and few places to land make it a challenging location and very few people kayak there, but it's one of my favourite trips so far. Our plan of paddling to the remotest islands paid off and we met some wonderful people who gave us a really warm welcome. On the westernmost island Mykines, the Jacobson family invited us to stay in 'the yellow house' and looked after us handsomely for two days. We also had the opportunity to go puffin hunting with one of the men, Karl. Birds and their eggs have traditionally been an important source of food for the Faroese and harvesting certain birds is still widespread. Puffin hunting is legal from six am to noon during the 'hunting' season, so we were up early to watch Karl catch the puffins in a long net, one at a time. It was sad to see him kill such a beautiful bird, but as Karl said, "Every time you eat something, someone has killed it".

The rest of the trip was equally eventful - on Stremoy Island our tent was hit by a force 11 gale, which finally snapped a pole after a 12 hour onslaught. It's sometimes tempting not to film these incidents as they happen, you need all your energy to fight the elements (and your partner might not think that filming is the best use of your time while the tent fabric is bent over your face). However, these are exactly the things that people want to see, so I braved Alun's wrath and tried to hold my camera steady with one hand while shouting at him to come and lean against the tent with me!

In October, just before the first UK storm gathering in Mull, I took advantage of a dozen or so top sea paddlers being in the right place at the right time and organised a days filming at the impressive "Falls of Lora" tidal race near Oban. I'm used to surfing at Welsh tidal races in big crashing waves, but I was apprehensive to see that the Falls of Lora are much more like a river. The big, crashing waves are there, but there are lots of nasty boils and whirlpools which grab at the kayak from all directions, making it hard to stay upright. Alun and Mike Webb (from Rockpool kayaks) were filming from the bridge and I

was filming with my waterproof camera on the water. I don't think anyone there had paddled on the Falls of Lora before, but sea kayakers looked natural on the front wave. Aled Williams and Nick Cunliffe had fun surfing the front wave, while the rest of us were played with on the waves behind! I'm really excited about the footage; it contains pop-outs, thrashings and a few swims!

The final 'big feature' in the DVD is a 40 minute documentary about three Australians paddling 800km down the Antarctic Peninsula. Unfortunately I didn't get to film it as the Aussies filmed it themselves, but I was particularly excited to edit; it's a really great story with beautiful scenery. Without giving too much away, they get separated in 50knot winds, get trapped by thick brash ice, suffer from near hypothermia, and are plagued by injuries. Despite this, the Aussie humour always shows through. When one team member has to face the fact that he might not be able to paddle the next day, his team mate thinks for a moment then replies "Well, this is as good a place as any to leave you".

As I write this, I've literally just finished editing "This is the Sea 3" (sorry the article is a bit late, Richard!! I've had a good excuse!) It's really satisfying to finally consolidate 18 months of work (and quite a bit of play!) into one DVD. I'm already planning shoots for the next one!

Sea kayaking movies – what you need to know...

Choice of camera

Doesn't really matter as content is the most important thing. If you want good quality, buy a 3-chip camera (as opposed to a single chip camera). Look for a camera with a good OPTICAL zoom – digital zoom is poor quality. Look for a camera that you can buy a waterproof housing for if you want to use it on the water. Consider the fairly new Sony HC3 – it's a single chip, very compact high definition camera. It's had good review and costs less than £800. Or look on www.bblist.co.uk They sell second hand broadcast equipment. You can sometimes pick up a good quality



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professional camcorder like the Sony PD150, PD170 or PD100 for a bargain price.

Use of waterproof housings

Electronics HATE water, especially salt water! I've already lost two cameras to the goddess of the sea. So it's very important to look after your camera if you're going to use it on the water. Housings can be splash bags, plastic cases or full on body armour. Many people have problems with the bags steaming up on the inside – make sure the bag is completely dry before you use it and put a few sachets of silica gel inside. If you get fogging then try pointing the housing to the sun for a while and it may clear. To prevent smudging on the outside, try something like Rainex. Submerging the housing completely in water or licking it (honest!) works quite well for a short period of time. Someone once recommended toothpaste to me, but I've never tried it!

Commentary

Hearing what people think at the time always makes things more interesting. Ask people questions and get them to answer. Get them to describe where you are

and what you are doing. You sometimes get a better response if you challenge them a little – can't you go any faster? Talking to the camera as you film the scenery can be interesting, but it's usually better to see someone's face as they are talking. Unless someone is doing a front loop on the beach, you can film the action or scenery afterwards.

Composition

Essentially the same as a still camera. Don't just start filming from wherever you happen to be standing (or floating). Position yourself so you film from different angles. Try to position something interesting in the foreground rather than having a lot of blank sea or sky in your shot. Apply the rule of thirds which means imagine your image is split into thirds horizontally and vertically. Position points of interest at the intersection of these lines, so a kayak on the sea is a third of the way up the picture, rather than in the middle. For video, let kayakers come into a shot and leave a shot again.

Trouble shooting

Bad sound – Sound quality is usually the worst

problem with people's filming. So many people stand at one end of a room and shout questions to someone else 10 metres away, or try to record an interview right besides a motorway. Move the camera close to the person talking and choose a quiet location. Even small waves on a beach are very, very loud on a camera, so if you have to do an interview on the shore then put your back to the waves, or take your victims up to the top of the beach, as far away as possible from the sea. Wind noise is another common problem. Again, get close to your speaker and put your back to the wind. If you use earphones then you'll be able to hear what you are recording and you can move location if the sound is bad. For not very much money, you can buy microphones that plug into the camera which will improve your sound immensely.

Pictures too dark or too bright – This usually happens when you are filming something of high contrasts, for example filming into the sun. Your camera can either expose the sun correctly and give you a silhouette shot, or expose the kayakers correctly and give you a very bright background. You can adjust the exposure manually so you

can decide which of these you want, but the only way to get an evenly exposed bright picture is to move position so the sun is behind you.

The picture keeps going in and out of focus – This usually happens in low light, or if you are moving the camera around a lot. It tends to be more of a problem with some cheaper cameras. With experience you can anticipate when this is likely to happen and switch the camera to manual focus. Try setting the focus to infinity and as long as you don't zoom in too much everything will be in focus. If you are filming a person who is staying about the same distance away from you, then you can zoom in to the person on automatic focus, let the camera focus on the person and then immediately switch to manual focus. The camera will be fixed at this focal distance, so even when you zoom out again, that person will always be in focus (unless they move further away or closer to you). I use this trick for interviews all the time.

I feel sick watching my filming! – I'm sure you've all seen (or maybe filmed) footage where the camera is pointing first at the sky, then the beach, then whipping around the sea, now walking along the beach filming

the sand for five minutes. When I first learnt to film I was told to use the video camera like a still camera. Compose shots as you would with a still camera, and don't start recording until you've got a nice shot set up. So walk down to the beach, look at where everyone is surfing, set the camera up so you can see the location and the surfers (a wide shot). Frame it so there isn't too much sky in the shot! Check the horizon line is straight and press record. Wait for 10 seconds, don't move the camera during that time – then stop recording. Now move down the beach towards the surfers; get as close as you can without endangering yourself, set up the camera for a close up of one surfer, or a mid-shot of several surfers and press record for 10 seconds. Stop recording and look around to see where-else you can film from to get a variety of angles. Maybe there is a headland you can walk up, or if you have a housing, you could get into the water, or attach the camera to a helmet or the front of a kayak. Be imaginative. Most importantly make sure you hold the camera still for 10 seconds, don't constantly move it. If you analyse TV, you'll be amazed how many shots there are where the camera doesn't move: the cameraman has set up a clever shot

where the action happens within the same frame.

I want to film moving shots better - If you want to film a pan (where the camera moves from one side to the other) then practice before you film. Don't try to turn more than 180 degrees unless you have very good balance. Compose a shot where you have an attractive starting and end picture, and hold the camera still for 10 seconds at each end. One trick to get a nice end shot is to position your body so that your feet are pointing towards your end shot. Twist your body round to film your beginning shot, then as you pan round you will naturally stop the camera at the right place. You should start the camera movement slowly, accelerate a bit, then decelerate so you stop gradually at your beautifully composed end shot!

Stick with it, be patient and good luck!

** This is the Sea 3 will be shown at 2.15 on Saturday the 17th March and 11.15 on Sunday 18th March at the Outdoors Show, NEC, Birmingham*

For more information on Justine and her fantastic movies see www.cackletv.com



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