



photo by Dave Silver

Wilderness First Aid

by Alex Matthews

When kayakers talk “safety,” we discuss rescue techniques, the importance of good seamanship, and the fine art of weather forecast interpretation. We consider the possibility of having to deal with a serious injury or illness, and its aftermath far less often.

To get an overview on First Aid, I contacted an expert. Brooks Hogya is the owner of Slipstream First Aid—a company that specializes in wilderness first aid instruction.

AM: *How did you get into the outdoor industry?*

Brooks H: My first job was as a councilor at a kid’s camp when I was 16. Then after I graduated from the outdoor program at Strathcona Park Lodge, I started guiding, and founded Slipstream by the time I was 19. We offered guided trips in the Stein Valley, Carmanah, Strathcona Park and on the West Coast Trail. I think I’ve guided the West Coast Trail about 28 and a half times now.

AM: *28 and a half?*

Brooks H: Hey, not every trip makes it to its intended destination!

AM: *I know that you have another job—what do you do when you aren’t running Slipstream?*

Brooks H: I’m a Primary Care Paramedic (PCP), so I’m one of the guys who arrive in the ambulance when you call 911. Oh, I’m also the safety director for the 7-day BC bike race from Victoria to Whistler.

AM: *So who needs Wilderness First Aid?*

Brooks H: Basically anyone who likes to play outside. If your primary strategy is: “nobody’s going to get hurt, therefore I don’t need First Aid knowledge,” then that’s just not good enough.

AM: *What’s the difference between Wilderness First Aid and other First Aid courses?*

Brooks H: Most First Aid courses, like OFA (Occupational First Aid), are designed for urban settings. The emphasis is on what to do for the first 10 to 15 minutes of a medical emergency. This represents the period of time that elapses between calling

911 and the arrival of the ambulance. That’s great in the city, but far less useful in more remote locations. Wilderness First Aid teaches you what to do in those first 15 minutes, and it also teaches you how to care for the patient in the following hours, or even days, while you’re waiting for evacuation or recovery.

Also, the way we teach it, the underlying current in our program is risk assessment and management: how to prevent injury and illness through good pre-trip preparation.

A lot of folks associate First Aid with the First Aid kit—with supplies and gear—but the best First Aid kit won’t help you if you don’t know how to use it. And the best outcome is one in which you never have to break out the kit at all because you made solid, common sense decisions to minimize risk at every stage of planning and playing.

AM: *So what are key components for a First Aid kit?*

Brooks H: It varies a lot with personal knowledge. Some things like splints and stretchers can be improvised in the field, but other items like sterile dressings, really good cutting tools, and medications are essential.

AM: *Medications?*

Brooks H: Right, we’re primarily talking about mandatory prescription medications that someone takes for a chronic condition like asthma or diabetes. If the medicine is important enough to be prescribed by a doctor and carried on the trip, then it needs to be backed up. This is achieved by “duplication” and “separation.” That is to say, double dosages should be carried: one by the user, and a second dosage by a different member of the team, just in case something happens to the first set.

Many guides also carry things like “Epipens” which are very useful in cases of severe allergic reactions to bee stings and such.

AM: *What Wilderness First Aid courses do you offer?*

Brooks H: We teach a 10-day course designed for outdoor professionals like guides and park wardens, and a 5-day course, which is perfect for anyone who just wants a good grounding so they can feel really well prepared.

The courses are divided into lecture segments, and we do a lot of very practical hands-on work too. I like to call them "First Aid skits" rather than scenarios, where we try to simulate many of the situations that you might encounter in a real backcountry First Aid situation. It's a great learning technique and lots of fun—the students love it!

We're also going to be launching our "online campus" which will allow students to access a ton of information through our Internet site. Everything will be organized in chapters so you can study the exact course information you want. It might be anything from hypothermia to altitude sickness or marine envenomation, or all three.

AM: *What's marine en-ven-o-mation?*

Brooks H: Jellyfish stings. And no, you don't pee on them, Alex.

AM: *Thanks, Brooks.*

Brooks H: Hey, thank you. Now play safe!

For more information, contact Slipstream First Aid at 1-800-760-3188 or www.wildernessfirstaid.ca.



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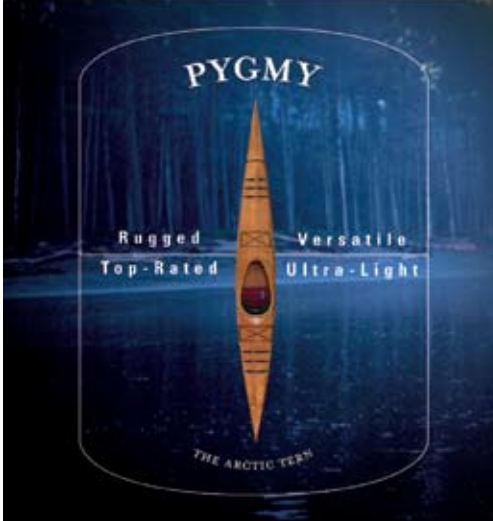
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