



## FIRST AID KITS



SIMON

For those involved, this is all too real. A kayaker is in the water and appears to be unconscious. It's an exercise, but the group don't know that for sure. It's the end of a long, tiring day on a training session with Gordon Brown.

They've all been in the water, some of them several times, and now they have to get an unconscious casualty, a big man, back in his kayak.



GORDON

*In a real emergency it's very easy to start making mistakes because you are under much more pressure than when you're training.*

SIMON

What seems easy in practice suddenly becomes very difficult when faced with the dead weight of a human body.

They only half manage to get the casualty into his kayak. They form a crude raft. Two kayakers tow the raft, very slowly, to the shore.

GORDON

*A good thing to do is go on an appropriate First Aid training course, something that lets you practice your skills in the outdoors and in the environment, as much as possible, that you will be performing in and probably dealing with any incident.*



SIMON

They're safely on land, but what should they do now?

No one takes charge of the situation.

There is a world of difference between classroom based First Aid courses and those which confront candidates with realistic scenarios.

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The casualty was in fact Rowland Woollven, a member of the teaching faculty of the Wilderness Emergency Medical Services Institute, WEMSI.

GORDON

*What we're not trying to do in this film is teach you First Aid. You'd have to go on an appropriate first aid course for that. What are trying to do is to make you think, and to show you a few techniques that you can use.*



ROWLAND

*Cos the last thing I want to do is close up a wound, however temporarily, when you've got bits of shell inside it or bits of dirty old seaweed or stuff that's off the beach.*

GORDON

*We'll also give you a tour of Rowland's many first aid kits. He is an expert, and don't think you have to carry that he carries. What you have to do is choose what works for you.*

SIMON

And we'll start with the small waterproof pouch that's kept on his person. He calls it the Ouch Pouch.

### OUCH POUCH

ROWLAND

In here are all the things I might need to sort out a problem quickly on the water.

First off, examination gloves, so if I need to protect myself against bodily fluids or blood then I can do so.

Secondly a CPR shield, it just forms a natural barrier across the mouth and nose - well if you're holding the nose shut and doing mouth-to-mouth through the mouth only. Then it's literally a plastic barrier with a one-way valve, so that I can breath in, I can allow the air to exhale, but if they throw up or they're leaking anyway from a head injury, then it doesn't come into contact with my mouth or hands.



Coming on down we have a first field dressing, also known as a shell dressing or ambulance dressing, which is basically a big absorbent pad with an integral bandage, again to sort out the big bleeders very quickly.



Absorbent dressing there which goes over the wound and then you literally - let me just demonstrate on my arm.

On the wound, and then you're in a position where you can bind tightly down with the bandages and really compress the dressing onto and into the wound to control bleeding.

And then to finish off I can either use tape, or a safety pin, or tuck it in or indeed, just tie it off.

We also have a little mini drugs pack within the Ouch Pouch and there are two parts to that. One is, effectively, drugs for general use such as paracetamol or ibuprofen for pain relief, headache relief.

The other half of the drugs pack is stuff that is specific to me. So in this case I'm carrying medications for a long-term condition. That half of your drugs pack would be specific to you

with about 4 or 5 days worth of drugs so that if you get stuck somewhere without your gear then at least you can keep that condition under control.

And then lastly in Ouch Pouch we have a roll of electrical tape which is very good for closing cuts and stopping blisters developing.

As soon as you start to get a hot spot, wrap it with electrical tape and the blister will do develop. And electrical tape is very good because it works even on damp skin because it binds to itself.



And it all fits into one small pouch on the back of my buoyancy aid so I can reach it when I'm on the water and address problems quickly.

### **SCENARIO 1 Demonstration only - not First Aid training**



#### **ROWLAND**

What happens quite a lot is you put your hand down and slide down barnacles or limpets and that's really quite sore. And in a salt-water, wet environment, that wound's not going to heal until you get it home and get it dried and sorted out.

But you of course can't paddle with a wound that is winking at you. Apart from anything else it makes you feel rather unpleasant and don't want to play.



So what we need to do first off is clean it off, so I'm going to take clean water out of a water bottle - if I can have your hand - and we're going to do the best we can.

And I'm going to get quite brutal with you, all right? I'm going to get right in amongst it and scrape it out, because the last thing I want to do is close up a wound, however temporarily, when you've got bits of shell inside it or bits of dirty old seaweed or stuff that's off the beach.

So once we've got the cut cleaned off we now need to dry it off as best we can. You do have to bear in mind that things like Steri-strips or plasters aren't going to work in the wet. But what does work extremely well is ordinary electrical tape.

So I'm going to take sections of this and I'm going to wrap them around, keeping the wound neatly closed. And the advantage of this stuff is two-fold in that, firstly it sticks to itself so it doesn't start to wander around once you've got it on.

And the other thing is the adhesive that they have on the underside doesn't attract all the grit and grot off the beach so putting stuff between the tape and your finger which will either lead to infection getting in, or could do, or at the very least starts putting grit underneath your

finger, between your finger and the paddle, ending up with blisters. It's not going to heal until you get it home and get it dry and get it sorted properly.

### DAY KIT



#### SIMON

Rowland's main first aid kit for day paddling contains items most people can use with basic first aid training. Other items in his bag require more advanced training appropriate for group leaders. We'll come onto those later.

#### ROWLAND

It's a little bit like emptying the Tardis.

#### ROWLAND

So this is the one I've put together. I have a different one for mountaineering and a slightly different one for ski-touring and things like that.

#### SIMON

He carries a notebook which also contains prompts that serve as reminders. There's the same personal protection gloves and CPR shield, plus a larger roll of electrical tape.



#### ROWLAND

The second group we've got here is to do with the control of bleeding. So for example we have another first field dressing or Ambulance dressing, or shell dressing for the major bleeds.

We've got a number of non-adherent dressings for minor ones together with triangular bandages, either to hold dressings on or to give support to arms and

that sort of thing, or dressing head wounds.

We've got some rolls of tape here and some Elastoplast on big sheets of it, but those don't really work unless the skin is dry. If you try to stick those on wet skin they'll peel off very, very quickly afterwards which is where either the electrical tape or things like duct-tape work extremely well.

The next is three things we might want to put on skin for various reasons.

First off I've got something called Waspeze here which, although it's primarily designed for wasp and bee stings, will also be helpful in the control of pain from things like jellyfish or, if you're really unlucky, sea urchins.



The next two are antiseptic creams and sprays. The dry spray is very good for promoting healing because if you get a cut, for example, very early on an expedition, that's not going to properly cure until it's home in a warm, dry environment. You may however wish to use an antiseptic cream to promote healing, and the one that I use is Germoline which has the local anesthetic in it. If for example someone has an inflammation or a rash, you can use that to not only cure the problem but also to prevent them getting so wound up by the itching that they end up scratching and clawing themselves and thus opening up the skin to make another route for infection.

The small drugs pack that I've got within my first aid kit consists of things again like ibuprofen and paracetamol to cure pain and to cure inflammation. I'm also carrying Migralve which is for the cure of migraines particularly because of an experience of a friend of mine. His party was totally debilitated by one person who could not move because of the sheer pain of a migraine attack.



If I was going to assist you and I'd sorted out that I knew that what I was carrying would be suitable for that complaint, and that I'd cleared you don't have any allergy to the whole thing, I could then for example say "This is.. whatever. It cures what you have. I would advise that you take it if you're happy with doing so. But you, as a voting grown-up, can take your decision, an education decision, about whether you're going to take that to address the complaint or whether you'd rather just put up with whatever it is you're having."



Moving on we've got items you would use to support injured or damaged areas. We have an elbow support here - the dreaded tennis elbow, or in our case, kayaker's elbow, exactly the same injury which is overuse and damage down here.

This is a neoprene wrist support for people who have got overuse injuries such as TSV or very sore wrists for whatever reason.

Very simple to use and because it's neoprene it's very nice to have on the water. It doesn't get in the way and doesn't get damaged when wet. And this enables me to have a good support on my wrist and to be able to paddle without interference.

Some of the more advanced supports have metal staves which go into the palm of the hand giving very good support, but of course that makes it very difficult to paddle at the same time. So this would be my on the water solution.

So this is a very good way of improvising a support, for example a forearm which needs dressing and holding in one position.



If I use this as it is now then it's very floppy and not at all rigid.

But if I put a channel in the splint it's then much stiffer and it enables me to support the arm without any great difficulty.

Put in a bit for the hand at the end, and lo and behold, I have a very good support for the forearm which can then be bound on with an elastic bandage or two and enable me to look after this arm without any great difficulty.



OK, this is just an ordinary common-or-garden plastic bag, which can be used for many things but the reason I carry it here is for, once I've dressed a burn on the hand for example, then you can put the hand into the plastic bag and tape it down, and you've got a nice environment, protected from the outside world, so that it's much more difficult for infection to get in.

It makes it much easier to care for the patient while you're getting them to definitive help.

Safety pins can be used for all sorts of things and actually quite a nice idea is to carry a big nappy pin with your kit, probably in your buoyancy aid, so if someone needs to have an arm immobilized on the water very quickly, instead of trying to put strapping around that on the water, literally just pin the cuff to the buoyancy aid and that will immobilize, for example, a dislocated shoulder while you get someone to a position where you can sort it out.

The next four items are various ways of getting small creepies, crawlies and beasties that have attached themselves to you, off you.

Primarily we're talking here about ticks and other things that need to come off the skin rather quickly. Or things that have gone into the skin such as small spines or splinters of whatever variety, perhaps sometimes even a rock fragment that has got in and has to be taken out.



And last, but by no means least, we have here a small piece of string and a paperclip. And these are probably the most useful items I carry in my first aid kit.

**SCENARIO 2 Demonstration only - not first aid training. Do not attempt with instruction.**



ROWLAND

So if you've got an injury to a finger, on which there is a ring or any other restriction really, for example, if you dislocated this joint here or this one, or you've got a severe cut or whatever, this (the ring) has to come off.

Because if the finger starts to swell you're going to end up with, effectively, cutting off all the blood supply to the rest of that finger. You could end up having the finger amputated if this doesn't come off in the wilderness as soon as possible.



So one of the ways we can do this, and you'll recall I said that the paperclip and piece of string were possibly the most important parts of my entire first aid kit, I was only slightly exaggerating. So we can use this to get down underneath, capture the string itself, and get it back underneath so you've then got one end of the string above and quite a lot of it underneath.

What I'm now going to do - and this is going to get quite painful for Gordon - is to wrap the string very tightly indeed around his finger. Compress the meat on his finger, hopefully making it such that, when I start to unravel the string from the other direction and pull down at the same time, I will then remove the ring.

We then take the end that's above the ring and start to pull down quite hard in the direction of the end of the finger whilst at the same time, and it does get a big jiggly.

SIMON

How does that feel?

GORDON

It's quite painful, but it is coming off.

ROWLAND

There we are, we've got it free. So now any injury on the finger can swell as much as it likes and we're not in a position where we might actually lose the finger as well as sorting out any other injuries at the same time.



### **EXTRA KIT**

Rowland's main first aid kit also contains items which can only be used with specialist knowledge such as straps to reduce a dislocated shoulder, digital thermometer, eye cream, needles and prescription medications such as epi-pens and an inhaler, plus a tourniquet. Finally for expeditions, there's this big beast.



ROWLAND

OK what we've got here is the medical pack for looking after people for a long time in the wilderness environment.

So there's all sorts of things for the care and maintenance of both long term casualties and patients and also those who have had more catastrophic injuries. This is not the sort of thing I would be carrying on your average day trip and it is the sort of thing that you need to get a lot of training for, a lot of practice and really make sure that you know your stuff before getting in and using the equipment in here.

**SCENARIO 3 Demonstration only - not first aid training.**



ROWLAND

There are three things on expeditions and times away in the wilderness which are quite dangerous for us. First off, we have camp fires because people manage to burn themselves quite a lot. Secondly we have sharp knives because people manage to cut themselves rather than what they're supposed to be cutting. And the third thing are these - fish hooks. This one is, I would suggest, slightly on the large size. So if you have one of these stuck in you, you really have had a bad day or someone has got it in for you.

What we're doing here is just to demonstrate it using the large size one so you're clearly able to see what's going on. And if I can introduce the melon, the reason that's here is because the composition of the melon skin and the fruit underneath is quite similar to human flesh. So the way the hook behaves in here is much the same as the way it behaves in you if you're unfortunate enough to get it stuck in you, or someone else in your group or whatever.



So what we're going to do now is introduce the hook into the poor old melon.

Now, if you had this in your skin, the traditional way in the past would be to push the thing the whole way through, come out through here, and then cut off the barb and then pull it back through the way it came.

Unfortunately, that means you've now got an entry wound and an exit wound and really quite a deep wound track so infection is pretty well bound to get in and you're going to create another problem by doing that. If you did the other thing and just rather brutally pulled it back out, you end up creating a very deep, very nasty, jagged edge exit wound and the same place as the entry wound. And you end up with infection getting in and life is not good.

So what I'm going to do is show you a way of removing a fish hook which is reasonably effective and minimises the damage to the human body.



So the fish hook itself has gone in, and is now sticking in the back of your hand for example, or in the palm of your hand if you're really unlucky. OK so we take the string again from our medical kit or first aid kit, and then pushing the eye on the hook down to skin level, gently push and pull, keeping the string down. And out it comes along the same wound track that it went in, thus giving us only one wound to keep clean and a much better chance of preventing infection getting down there.

#### SIMON

So now we know why Rowland made such a convincing casualty. It's a role he regularly plays on WEMSI training courses.

#### ROWLAND

I think everyone should get appropriate training for where they're likely to be going and the difficulties they may face. So if you're looking to be out of reach of help more than eight hours, which you can easily achieve on the west coast of Scotland for example, then you need to know more than your normal four-hour, or half a day first aid course. And having all the toys in your kayak does not necessarily mean that you can use them properly.



Once you've got past the eight hour, then moving on to a two day course in advanced first aiding and using that term loosely, you're looking then at something like the Wilderness First Responder courses or indeed a Wilderness Emergency Medical Technician course.

They cover much of the same ground but it's the location in which you'll find yourself using it varies considerably. Starting off the with First Responder, you might be looking after somebody twelve, fifteen hours for example, unsupported and being able to work in that way. If you're going on to the higher level such as the EMT courses then that gives you the skills and knowledge, and actually the confidence, to look after somebody for an extended period of time if you're going out on a major advanced expedition.