

A day from Nihon Nikki – Shiretoko Hanto, Hokkaido, 3/9/85. From Hamakoshimizu to Rusha.

From Abashiri to Shiretoko Hanto there was a 26 mile long stretch of sandy beach, interrupted only by the twin breakwaters of Shari Ko. After sunset on 2nd I had reached the very small village of Hamakoshimizu and we'd spent a pleasant night camped on the beach.

Overnight the surf had settled and in the soft grey light of dawn I made a clean exit through low breakers. It was a beautiful crisp morning with a cold offshore breeze blowing and chilly enough to me to wear the wetsuit and parka. At the first salmon net stretching out for a kilometre seawards I was pleased to find the tidal stream was with me. Instead of hanging vertically in the water the net streamed out to the east with the tide tugging at the floats on the surface. These salmon nets were useful as I could easily see the direction and strength of the tidal stream but they were also a nuisance. Every 500 metres, I would have to cross a thick taut cable or rope supporting a net and to avoid damaging the kayak's rudder I had to lift it clear of the sea each time.

The glowing sun rose golden over the mountains forming the backbone of Shiretoko Hanto. Inshore the coast was very similar to the west coast of the South Island of New Zealand, a clean sandy beach backed by a low dune ridge. The only thing missing was the massive Kiwi surf. At the base of Shiretoko Hanto the coast changed dramatically to a boulder beach backed by forest with the mountains rising to the skyline.

A flash from the signal mirror brought me in to land by two small fishing huts. Lesley thrust a carton of yogurt into my hand and said the local salmon fisherman had invited us out to watch the nets being emptied.

Two wooden boats were parked on the gravel beach. The fishermen waited until we climbed aboard then slid the boat into the sea on wooden runners. Long poles were used to push the boat into deep water. The outboard roared into life and we sped out to the first of four salmon nets which were to be emptied. The previous day the catch had been 900. Today the fishermen expected 500 salmon.

We stopped short of a box shaped salmon trap and the boat drifted up to the ropes and floats that supported the net. A pole with a hook



Like Paul, a fisherman unperturbed by a torrential downpour.

on the end was used to pull the boat into the centre of the box. I had paddled over innumerable nets but was never able to see exactly how the fish were trapped.

A long net, stretching out at right angles to the beach, directed salmon into a rectangular shaped net. The salmon were channelled into a tunnel like net which tapered to a small opening. Once through this opening the salmon were in a deep, completely enclosed, box net from which it was obviously difficult to escape since the small opening was just below the sea surface.

Two fishermen moved to the stern and a third to the bow. Starting from the net entrance side, they lifted the net to the surface, clawing it up to the gunwale hand over hand until there was only a small pocket of net left where the sea became alive with a flurry of frantic salmon trying to escape. With a final great heave the net pocket was emptied. The bottom of the boat disappeared under hundreds of thrashing salmon, scales and slime flying in all directions.

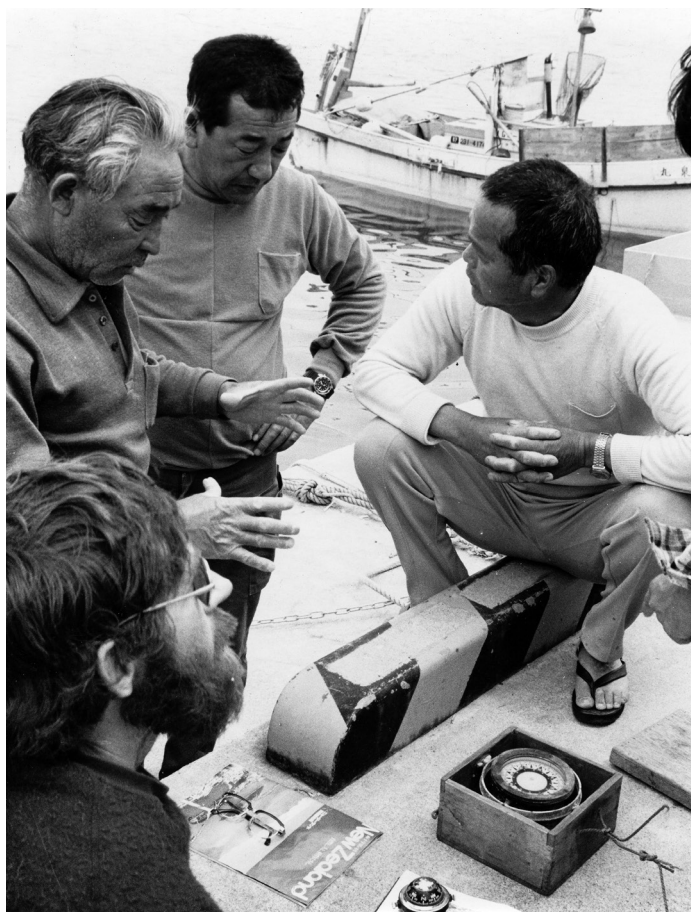
While the skipper motored to the next net, the fish were stunned by hitting them with a wooden mallet or by knocking their heads against the gunwale then thrown into boxes stacked along one side of the boat. The second and third nets contained smaller catches but the last was teeming with fish and I was roped in to help haul the net. I was wearing only a pair of shorts as we emptied the net into the boat. I was left standing barefoot and knee deep in writhing fish, much to the hearty amusement of the fishermen.

The boat was winched stern first up the beach and the boxed fish were loaded directly onto a truck to be taken to the market at Utoro. With a catch of 500 and an expected price of ¥600 per fish, there was good money in half an hour of work.

Lesley graciously accepted a present of one of the freshly caught salmon. In the blink of an eye she'd turned it into a very tasty sashimi. During lunch we looked at the map and decided to meet again at the end of the road on the western side of Shiretoko Hanto (peninsula).

By volcanic rock cliffs forming the first headland I picked up a strong northgoing tide and made excellent speed past Utoro Ko. It was so strong that passing between the plastic floats supporting the salmon nets was like running through a small rapid. North of Utoro Ko there was no road access until the small fishing settlement at Rusha where Lesley and I planned to meet.

The coastline was predominantly cliffs of volcanic rock rising sheer out of the sea then surmounted by thick green forest rising in an



Comparing the merits of binnacle compasses with local fishermen.