

unbroken swathe to the lofty mountain summits which formed the backbone of Shiretoko Hanto. Cascades of water tumbling down the rugged cliffs and scattered small coves made this the most spectacular stretch of coastline I had so far seen around Hokkaido. The sea was mirror calm, the tide was with me, salmon were jumping and the scenery was magnificent; what else could a paddler wish for, well, perhaps, apart from a mermaid?

The sun had set by the time I neared Rusha. I could see a road winding down through steep forest to rejoin the coast and a cluster of fishermen's sheds by the road end. I paddled in close by a blocky boulder shore with my ears cocked for the sound of traffic on the road but the only sounds were of tumbling streams and the sea surging amongst the boulders, no vehicles. I started to worry then and assumed the road was blocked by a rock fall. The rapid passage of Taifu (typhoon) number 13 up the east coast of Hokkaido had certainly brought heavy rain and strong winds on the night of the 1/9/85.

Two fishing boats were tying up and unloading by a short concrete wharf as I landed on a slippery slipway at Rusha. I quickly learned the road was closed not by a rockfall but by a locked gate. As all our camping equipment and food were in the car, if we had failed to meet up we hadn't even considered a rendezvous for next day on the east side of Shiretoko Hanto. After trying unsuccessfully to call Lesley on the radio I tried to work out the best plan of action. Should I paddle until dark and bivouac onshore or spend the night at Rusha? There was plenty of fresh water and I had sufficient warm clothes and emergency food.

There were two four wheel drive vehicles about to set out for Shari and I explained my problem to a lady passenger who could speak some English. I described Lesley and the Honda Shuttle and asked her to pass on a message that I would meet her at Rausu next day. Her friend from Shari was on good terms with the fishermen and asked if I could sleep in the ryoshi no banya (fishermen's quarters). I soon found myself seated



Paul chatting with an obasan.

fascinating, Lesley kept looking over her shoulder and listening for noises in the forest! It was the heart of heguma (brown bear) country and in the rucksack, wrapped in a newspaper, was dinner, a present from the fisherman, salmon and favourite heguma food but Lesley's love of fresh fish had overridden her worries of being mauled by a bear.

It was an old style ryoshi no banya with sleeping accommodation for the fishermen upstairs and the kitchen, living area and obasan's (old woman's) room on the ground level. A huge kettle that steamed over a wood stove added to the warmth and homeliness of the banya. The offer of an ofuro (hot bath) was gratefully accepted; the last one had been back on the west coast of Hokkaido and my hair was thick with accumulated salt. We were ushered outside through the chill night air to an outbuilding where steam seeped from under a door. Inside, the furoba floor consisted of concrete with a platform of wooden planks and, near one wall, a large terra cotta ofuro was set at floor level. It was large enough for Lesley and I to sit in comfort with steaming water up to our necks, the perfect remedy to ease tired paddler's arm and shoulder muscles.

By 9:00pm all was quiet. This was a pleasant aspect of staying with ryoshi, early to bed and early to rise. The obasans would be up at 3:00am to cook breakfast and I would leave at 4:00am with the fishermen. We inflated the air mattresses and spent a cosy night camped by the side of the wood stove.

The last day, 19/9/85 Crossing Tsugaru Kaikyo - Kitsunegoe Misaki to Oma Saki

The morning after an exhilarating finish to the Nihon Isshu trip at Hakodate I should have been feeling on top of the world. I had completed a really fast paddle around the northernmost Japanese island of Hokkaido, 1,191 miles in 29 days with just one day off for bad weather. My paddling day average was a staggering 41.1 miles per day but I still had unfinished business.

At dawn I should have been enjoying my first sleep in of the four month around Japan paddle but I was awake and pacing the floor of the minshuku (bed and breakfast), studying tidal and current information in the *Japan Pilot* and looking out the window at a grey overcast sky. I had one more stretch of open water to paddle before I would be satisfied, Tsugaru Kaikyo (strait).

My normal plan with a strait or channel was to cross at its narrowest section; for Tsugaru Kaikyo only 11 miles of open water lay between Shiokubi Misaki on Hokkaido and Oma Saki (point) on Honshu, the logical crossing or so I thought during the planning stages in New Zealand but Tsugaru Kaikyo is different from any strait I had previously crossed. With others I only had to worry about two factors, firstly wind strength and direction, secondly tidal stream strength and direction. My crossing of Tsugaru Kaikyo would have the additional factor of the incredibly powerful Tsushima Current. This flows northeast along the western coast of Honshu and, near the entrance to Tsugaru Kaikyo, the current divides with its stronger branch turning east to pass through the strait. In the confines of the strait its velocity cranks up to two or three knots.

The flood tidal stream sets east through the strait for six hours then the ebb tidal stream kicks in and flows west for six hours. The effect of the Tsushima Current on the tidal streams is to boost the eastgoing tidal stream flow up to 7 knots while decreasing the flow of the westgoing stream. For two miles north of Oma Saki the marine chart shows dangerous eddies and overfalls.



Round Oma Saki, the northeastern tip of Honshu.

For a paddler, a tide rip is like an easy river rapid; a tide race is like a difficult rapid while an overfall is akin to a dangerous rapid. River rapids are not affected by wind whereas tide races are more dangerous in windy conditions, especially when the wind meets the tide head on, termed a weather tide. Rapids are not affected by the phases of the moon whereas tidal streams are strongest during the full and new moon phases (spring tides) and weakest during the first and last quarter moon phases (neap tides).

It would take me three hours to cross that narrowest eleven miles of strait. However, with an eastgoing tidal stream running, say, an average of four knots, during each hour I would be carried to the east a distance of four nautical miles and, over three hours, a distance of 12 nautical miles.

After a very thorough study of the *Japan Pilot* and listening to the advice of the local fishermen in both Hokkaido and Honshu, I changed my usual strait crossing plan to a much longer distance of 25 miles. I decided to do a long crossing from Kitsunegoe Misaki on Hokkaido on a due easterly course for Oma Saki on the northern tip of Honshu. By choosing the right time I would have both the Tsushima Current and eastgoing tidal stream in my favour as long as there was no easterly headwind!