

Lesley and I waited all day on 18th September for a fresh easterly wind to die. I could only wait one more day to attempt the strait. We had a deadline to meet, our flights back to New Zealand. If the weather was bad on 19th September we would have to cross on the ferry. However, I would return to New Zealand bitterly disappointed. The log of the Nihon Isshu Kayak Expedition would not be complete without a crossing between Honshu and Hokkaido. At 7:00pm that evening I telephoned for the updated marine weather forecast.

After four months of listening to the various accents of fishermen around Japan I had no trouble understanding the weather forecast. Favourable winds next day but headwinds the following day. My last chance would be next morning!

We pitched the tent in light rain above a boulder beach at Kitasunegoe Misaki (Cape Northern Fox). I could hear the swell smashing in against the headland, not the nicest sound to lull me to sleep.

When the alarm beeped at 4:00am the very first thing I noticed was the sound of the surf on the headland; it was much louder than the night before. The swell had lifted, no doubt owing to the easterly wind. However, the wind direction had changed overnight. I could feel a light offshore northerly breeze blowing.

At 5:00am, with the first grey light of dawn, we carried *Haya Kaze* down the boulder beach to the surf's edge! Sets of large waves were breaking over a jagged rocky offshore reef then rolling in to smash against the boulder beach. I felt sick with worry. Occasional lulls between sets would give me barely enough time to reach the open sea. I would have to be quicker than a very quick thing.

Lesley and I said nothing as I climbed into the cockpit and pulled the neoprene sprayskirt over the cockpit coaming. One large set of waves broke and there appeared to be a brief lull. Lesley shoved the stern hard and the Nordkapp bounced down the boulders and into the sucky surge. I sprinted for a gap in the offshore reef and, with a dry mouth and pounding heart, reached the open sea unscathed.

Clearing the headland, I turned onto a southeasterly course and was pleased to find good visibility across the strait; both Tappi Saki and the hills above Oma Saki were in sight. I would stay on the southeast course until I had the feel of the wind and the tide, then would swing onto an east southeast course for a long ferry glide across to Oma Saki. If I went onto a due east course the tide and current would carry me way too far to the north of Oma Saki.

Less than 400 metres offshore I hit the first tide race. My speed through the water picked up noticeably with the help of the tide. I'd felt very tense at the start of this crossing. There had been banks of low cloud on the eastern horizon and, to make matters worse, it was a red sunrise. There is an old paddlers' saying 'Red sky at night, canoeist's delight, red sky at dawn, canoeists' warning.' At my usual pace, 25 miles would take me six hours of hard paddling. I was expecting however to cross in a much faster time with the help of both favourable tide and current.

A light northerly breeze pushed a low chop over a one metre easterly swell. I powered over the waves and was relieved to see how quickly the coast of Hokkaido was disappearing astern. After the first hour the wind hadn't lifted and I figured a good six miles of the crossing lay astern. In an attempt to relax I forced myself to sing during the next hour with only an occasional seagull to cope with the noise. It was a lovely love song about two lovers parted by Tsugaru Strait that I was trying to learn/remember, a favourite Japanese karaoke song and with a plaintive romantic melody.

Kitasunegoe Misaki appeared astern as a pale blue outline after two hours. I was already halfway across. To make sure I wasn't drifting too far to the north I had to make sure the Nordkapp was on an imaginary straight line between the misaki and Oma Saki. If the wind remained a northerly I would be across in four hours. I began to relax and felt a little misty eyed at the thought that this would be the last two hours of the Nihon Isshu expedition and perhaps the last of the big trips. The worst day of all my big trips had been the day after the finish; the dream had been realized and there was no more to enjoy!

It always happens when I begin feeling a little cocky and overconfident; the weather changed and the wind suddenly swung to the east and freshened, right on the nose, a mukai kaze and weather tide. I plugged into a low chop, maintaining the hard paddling, but was figuring where to head if the wind strengthened. I would change to a southeasterly course and make landfall somewhere to the south of Oma Saki.

The volume of shipping traffic in the strait was light, just the early morning ferries plying between Honshu and Hokkaido and two cargo vessels eastbound. I didn't need the extra worry of dodging ships.



*Lesley and Paul back in Tokyo.*

Fortunately, the easterly eased as I neared Oma Saki. By lining up a building on shore with a distant peak on the skyline I was able to check my drift. The tide was still carrying me to the northeast. About two miles from the ferry terminal and fishing harbour at Oma Saki I hit a back eddy and corrected my course for a southwest drift. I joined a queue of fastmoving fishing boats returning to the harbour and passed between the breakwaters at 8:45am. Only then did I start smiling.

I landed on a set of steps set into a concrete wharf and sadly lifted *Haya Kaze* out of the sea for the last time. My arrival seemed to go unnoticed until a cook from the ferry terminal restaurant walked over and invited me in for a coffee. He had seen a news item on the television of the Hokkaido Isshu finish at Hakodate. The waitresses had also seen the news and we talked about Miss Hakodate presenting me with a bouquet of flowers. Where was Miss Oma I asked but was the only one who laughed.

Lesley arrived on the cross ferry at 10:30am and slowly we unpacked *Haya Kaze* and loaded her onto the Honda Shuttle's roof rack for the long drive back to Tokyo. In a nice gesture, the cook invited us for a tasty feed of ramen. We gave the cooks and waitresses the last of our New Zealand stickers and Maori tikis and I was asked to autograph a place mat, which would join others stuck to the wall of the restaurant. I signed my name and wrote 'Round Japan Kayak Expedition, completed at Oma Saki 19-9-85.' It was only after writing the word 'completed' that the realization began to sink in that the trip was over. With a final lingering look across the ruffled waters of Tsugaru Kaikyo we set off on the long drive for Tokyo.



*Encountering shipping while crossing Tokyo Bay.*

Paul Caffyn & Lesley Hadley photographs