

## Quicksilver heads north

Sabah to Alaska

Mike & Hilde Gill

### *Awarded the RCC Challenge Cup*

When we left England in September 2010 in *Quicksilver*, we had two gleams in our eye. The first was to spend time in the South Pacific en route to New Zealand. The second was to return via Indonesia, the Philippines, Japan, and North America. So the end of this log has us successfully avoiding close contact with Kodiak bears in Alaska. It starts in October 2014 with an unsuccessful quest for pygmy elephants 40 miles up the Kinabatangan



River in Sabah. Instead we managed to see a surfeit of proboscis monkeys, a langur on a fast hand-over-hand rope through the jungle, and a stack of interesting bird life, usually up steamy creeks.

From there we headed slowly north to Kudat on the tip of Sabah, where there is a well-run, secure, and cheap marina. The airs were always light, and a strict curfew was in force: you are not allowed to sail at night (an attempt to reduce piracy and smuggling from the nearby Philippines).

From Kudat, the Smeeton (RCC) in 1964 headed up the east coast of



Up a steamy creek in Sabah, Malaysia

Palawan island, where they had a tough time beating against the northeast monsoon. Instead, we were tempted by the west coast of Palawan, despite the mass of coral off its lower half, the inadequate and inaccurate charting, and the limited cruising information. We left Kudat on 4 November, aiming to get as far as Subic Bay, just north of Manila by Christmas.

There are two convenient stopping points en route to Palawan: Pulau Balambangan and Clarendon Bay at the bottom of Balabac Island, which has a narrowish entrance, but a lovely, open feel once inside. Its attractive, heavily wooded mountainsides give way to palms, a beach and a few houses on stilts. We beat up the handsome Balabac coast, found bread and a SIM card, but no internet in Balabac town itself. We then spent a day snorkelling and doing jobs in the lee of nearby Candamaran Island. It was a great sail in calm water through the shoals off Patawan Island, and finally to the lee of Palawan itself. We anchored in Tagbita Bay, surrounded by hills and mountains and spent the evening in the company of a very chatty fishing boat that had anchored rather close.

***Philippines*** - Next day we motored to a delightful nook inside a reef off Bucid Island, just off southern Palawan, where a small fishing community live. The children presented us with a huge Triton shell. After sorting out an engine overheating problem we motored further up the stunning coast to a spot inside Sumurumsum Point, where next morning two fishermen wanted about £2 for two large spiny lobsters. We managed to sail half the way up to Nakoda Island, a protected spot and again with chatty fisherman anchoring close by. From here we went as close in to Quezon town as depths allowed, and after a long dinghy ride had a good shop. We skirted the

dangers of Treacherous Bay (murky water and much coral) and anchored in windless peace off Double Island, total population four. Throughout our Palawan time, and especially in this area, pilotage would have been much harder without the many Google Earth charts we had made in advance.

By 15 November we had reached Fish Bay, the closest point on the west coast to Puerto Princessa, the 'capital' of Palawan, on the east coast and the only place you can clear in and find an



ATM. We didn't fancy leaving the boat in such a potentially exposed open bay, however, so instead we walked on the beach and talked with one of the fishermen's leaders. He regaled us with horrid stories of local people being bamboozled into giving up their land by the sharp legal practices of wealthy outsiders. The sandflies, it later turned out, were similarly vicious and out to draw blood.

A little further north we found a delightful spot in Turtle Bay, off a very low key resort, built and owned by an Englishman who had won several eco-tourism awards. Negotiating long term relationships with the local people, however, had not been straightforward. The price of establishing a marine reserve off the resort had been the mysterious loss by fire of his finest building two years earlier.

Turtle Bay was the transition point from a very unvisited south Palawan to a rather less unvisited north Palawan. Round the corner lies Port Barton, a sleepy, if somewhat touristic village on the beach, and a rather roly anchorage. Then the heavens opened as we ate a protracted lunch ashore, so that evening we left what had become a very muddy bay for a quiet spot off a nearby island. Next day was a magical close reach through extensive pearl farms, across Imuran Bay, and into Malampaya Sound, where we beat up to a pleasant anchorage just south of Endeavour Point. The



Port Caltom

beautiful Bacuit Bay.

The anchorage in Corong-Corong is a short tricycle taxi (a sort of mini tuk-tuk) ride from El Nido, a laid back township with good restaurants, one or two good shops, but no ATM. The Bay itself has some splendid spots, many full of tourists during the day, but deserted by evening. We spent a few days there, and met our first yachts since leaving Sabah.

By the time we moved north to the Calamian Islands, the northeast monsoon was well established and we had some boisterous sailing off Palawan's northern tip. Before getting to Culion Island via Linapacan, we got news of tropical depression *Queenie*, so we made haste early next morning to a snug anchorage off Coron, behind Discovery Island. In the end it came to nothing, and we spent the next few days exploring this beautiful area.

We particularly enjoyed the town of Culion, with much old Spanish



Anchorage off Corong Corong

architecture, and the site of the Philippines' main leper colony since the 1920s and only recently free of leprosy: the residents had been so exposed to the false hopes of new, but usually painful and ineffective cures over the years that it was almost impossible to get them to try just one more, the effective multidrug regimes which appeared in the 1980s. Everybody there now has one if not two parents who had leprosy. They don't get many visitors and were pleased to see us!

In Dupuyoi Bay in southwest Busuanga, the largest of the Calamian Islands, there are three friendly resorts. One of them, the Puerto Del Sol, has strong moorings. We picked up one. This was just as well: super-typhoon *Ruby* began to loom, so we stayed put. We wreck-dived with the resort divers on several of the many WWII wrecks in the area. Preparations for the typhoon were impressively thorough, with all the local boats tucked into little holes. The resorts closed down, and the tiny number of tourists left the country in good time. In the event *Ruby* petered out well east of us, and by then we had stayed a week. It was a good rest. With expatriates acquiring land and building resorts, this attractive area is changing quickly. We were delighted to have seen it before it became further developed.

Pleasant sails up the east coast of Busuanga via Port Borac and Napiscud Island brought us to Port Caltom, where it rained and blew, but a friendly resort took us in. The landscapes were spectacular.

Rather than sail straight up to Subic Bay, on Luzon, the main island of the Philippines, we explored some of the coast of Mindoro island, finding a delightful anchorage off North Pandan Island, close to Sablayan. Here the monsoon really started to blast, and we had some much-reefed close-hauled passages up the coast. Our last stop before heading for Subic Bay was Tagbac Cove at the north end of the island of Lubang. It is very close to the continental shelf and for its size sports a large fishing fleet. They catch much tuna.

We left *Quicksilver* at Watercraft Ventures in Subic Bay for a six week visit to the UK, having organised a long list of jobs to be completed in our absence, and with the hope that the northeast monsoon might be blowing less hard by the time we got back. Each of the quarantine, immigration, and customs officials in Subic Bay require a \$50 'payment', though one of them backed down once we asked for a receipt.

We eventually got away from the noise and dust of our berth on 8 March, only to have to return rather slowly under sail the next day: the engine water pump had seized, carrying away much complicated alternator wiring as it did so. The 40 miles back took us almost 24 hours. Two days later we were off again, and this time got 80 miles up the coast when the repaired pump bearing broke down again, treating the rewired alternators to a spray of salt water. Without hesitation the Watercraft Ventures manager



Jared and engineer Ryan drove for four hours up the coast to collect the pump, got it properly repaired back in Subic, and two days later returned and fitted it – a wonderful demonstration of the service we'd had at that yard throughout our stay.

After they'd left us to go back to Subic we had one more drama with the pump that evening – a cam screw disintegrated, but fortunately we had a spare.

Over the next two weeks we beat our way up the coast of Luzon, finding some delightful stopping places to shelter from the monsoon. From one, Pinget Island, we caught a tricycle taxi (rather cramped for two for 45 minutes) to the historic city of Vigan. It is one of the few in the Philippines where the colonial architecture, Spanish with a Chinese twist, was not destroyed in WWII. At our next stop, Salomague, we managed to get customs clearance, though it involved the officer driving five hours up from the south (at no cost to us).

**Taiwan** - We finally left Dirique inlet on the northwest tip of Luzon on 27 March having waited several days for the monsoon to abate. Signs that it had, confirmed by an encouraging forecast, quickly proved spectacularly misleading. We were soon well reefed and unable to lay our course in a horrid steep sea. There was also an unwelcome westerly current, so Taiwan became the sensible destination. Next day we found our way into Hoibihu at the southern tip, having discovered some annoying new leaks. Our throttle cable chose the moment of entry into the marina to unlink from the engine, but the spontaneous show of hands to help nudge us past piles and pontoon ends set the tone for our brief visit. Everybody was friendly and helpful. We were cleared in, connected to the internet via a mobile phone hotspot, and lent a car, all within a short time of arriving, and all courtesy of our welcoming committee. Hilde achieved a miracle with washing and drying large amounts of salt-soaked bedding and laundry on the pontoon, while Mike tried to stop at least some of the offending leaks.

**Japan** - We were sorry not to have stayed longer in Taiwan, but a slant appeared for the 250 mile passage to Ishigaki, Japan's southernmost port of entry, so we left on 31 March – a lovely fast broad reach, assisted by a big shove from the Kuroshio current. In one six hour period we covered 55 miles.

Clearance into Japan requires visits from four separate authorities. Their officials tend to hunt not in pairs, but in fours. So for an hour after our arrival we had a large number of incredibly courteous people showering us with forms, smiles and questions in broken English. We met a version of this in most places, and (nearly) came to regard it as a cultural experience rather than a bureaucratic hassle.

Ishigaki is almost without architectural merit, but a pleasant introduction to small towns in Japan. Life was made especially easy by a

resident American cruiser, who went out of his way to help visitors like us. We would like to have explored more than we did, but it is almost 2000 miles to Hokkaido in the north, the season for cruising in the Aleutians and Alaska is quite short, and we wanted to see a bit of inland Japan as well. So we needed to make progress. In the 500 miles between Ishigaki and mainland Japan lie a stack of islands, many of them very beautiful, some seriously depopulated (the result of urban drift and low birth rate). We particularly enjoyed Amami-o-Shima, nearby Kakeroma (wonderful beaches), and Yaku-shima, with its giant and ancient cedars. We had our first *onsen* (warm public bath) there, outdoors among the coastal rocks with the waves crashing over them from seaward. The weather was mixed. We had much rain and only a few sunny days, but at least we had wind.

As we crawled our way up the west Kyushu coast, this changed. Many days were flat calm, and the motor was much relied upon. We had by now become familiar with Japanese generosity, and in Kasasa received an invitation from our neighbour on the pontoon that was clearly not to be refused: at six next morning we were to come to breakfast and eat much raw octopus with him and his crew. We went of course. It was as unusual but delicious a breakfast as any we'd had.

After a visit in fine weather to Hirado, where Anjin San (of James Clavell's Shogun fame) is buried, we left *Quicksilver* in great safety and at little cost on the island of Iki for a week's travel by ferry and the famous bullet train to Hiroshima, the Alps, and Tokyo, three very different and extraordinary places.

The trip further north was plagued with calms, or occasionally too much wind, and always with the Sea of Japan full of tough red seaweed, requiring several dives in increasingly cold water to free the propeller. Fixed nets were another hazard. These tended to be poorly marked, and extend several miles out to sea. We decided to sail only in daylight as a result. But it is an attractive coast, and there are many fascinating stops (rather more, we gathered, than on Japan's east coast, where the effects of the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami are still evident). Highlights were the city of Hagi, where some lovely old houses escaped being bombed in WWII, Taisha, a tiny fishing port, within a short walk from Izumotaisha, arguably the most important Shinto shrine in Japan.

We then took a short bus ride from Etomo to the city of Matsue, famed for its castle. We also left *Quicksilver* safely in Tottori for a short trip to Kyoto, and took her into Ine, with boathouses under dwellings reminiscent of Norway. Excellent Sake is brewed there, the only place where red rice is used. You can (with some difficulty) find a berth in Kanazawa, a historically important city, with museums, gardens, potteries and a great market.

A little further north are three pretty islands, helpfully a day sail

apart: Sadogashima, where in Ogi the plumber who gave us a lift was also an excellent cellist (we heard his chamber group one evening), Awashima, and tiny Tobishima, where the tsunami defences are astonishingly massive. In all three the wild flowers are exceptional.

By the time we got to Hakodate, our penultimate stop in Japan, on 27 May, temperatures had dropped significantly. It was hard to believe we were on the same latitude as



Izumotaisha

Oporto. Japanese hospitality was in full force: the local yacht club pays the Harbour Authority the fees that visitors such as ourselves would otherwise pay to tie up in the harbour. One of them, Mizuno, a local jeweller, with a shop right on the quay, went out of his way to look after us. Nothing was too much trouble, even spending a whole morning finding, providing transport to, and interpreting at the dentist for Mike. And of course the dentist refused to charge.



Kanazawa market

lakes, fields of flowers, snowcapped mountains and the last of the cherry blossom. On our way back we picked up a new antenna for our Satellite phone in Sapporo. Hokkaido is huge, underpopulated, and in parts very beautiful. It deserved much more time. The same is true of Japan as a whole. Cruising from south to north in less than 90 days, as seasonal conditions demand if you come from the Philippines, means you have to rush, particularly if you want to see something of this fascinating country beyond the harbours. The answer might be to spend a winter there. Safe winter berths exist. Instead we ended up motoring a great deal in order to cover the miles, often in calm weather, which, we gather, is not uncommon in early summer. Tough seaweed round the propeller therefore became a significant issue. We almost got used to having to tie up to often rough and dirty harbour walls, and not being able to anchor. But the encounters ashore made up for a great deal, as of course did the food. And we avoided typhoons.

**Aleutians** - It had already become clear that a record number of cruisers were sailing to the Aleutians from Japan this year, and in Kushiro, the





most easterly port of exit, five of us congregated, waiting for a weather window. Three others had just left. By 10 June it looked good, and off we all went. We knew this could be a foggy, cold, damp, and difficult passage. After a reasonable first two days, allowing us to get east of the Great Circle course to Attu to try and avoid the contrary Oya Shio current, it fell increasingly quiet. Despite using the spinnaker for a few hours on three days, our daily runs dropped to little over 100 miles, even with the occasional boost from a low revved engine. Raw pea-soup fog was a constant visitor. Everything down below was damp: *Quicksilver* is poorly insulated, and we experienced huge amounts of condensation as a result. Apart from one rather boisterous, well-reefed, night, at least the sea was flat. On day five we spotted our first Laysan albatross, from then on a constant companion.

Bird life generally began to increase. In the greyness we sometimes thought we could guess where the sun was, and sighed with relief that we no longer had to rely on astronavigation. Our satellite phone, perhaps too stimulated by its new antenna, delivered a last gasp signal, 'Phone failed. See supplier'! On day six we had picked up from our five boat radio net that one of them, *Monkey Fist*, was pretty close, but we were surprised to actually see her that evening. Extraordinarily this happened again on day ten despite a protracted intervening spell of withering fickle headwinds, requiring much tacking and more motoring. 1300 miles from Kushiro, we arrived in Casco Cove in Attu, the westernmost Aleutian island, within an hour of each other and eleven days out, during which we had had to have the engine on for almost four days. The others arrived the next day, having motored even more.

The cold and damp persisted during our five week Aleutian spell. We had seriously underestimated the importance of insulation, so lockers were soaking, wine boxes collapsed, shaving sticks became squidgy, and all this despite a very effective Webasto heater, which we began to use more



Steller sea lions, Chichagof

liberally: we knew we could soon replenish our diesel in Adak, 450 miles to the east.

But there were compensations. The wildlife was wonderful – birds everywhere, especially puffins, auklets, murrelets, and mutton birds on their annual Pacific circuit from the Bass Strait, and as we moved

east, many eagles, both white headed and golden. In Chichagof harbour, to which we sailed in a rare few hours of watery sun, displaying Attu's snowy mountains, there's a large Steller sea lion colony, one of many in the Aleutians. Sea otters, hunted almost to extinction by the Russians and then the Americans, are now protected, very shy, and hard to see until much further east.

The remoteness, the wilderness, and the wildflowers on Attu made a big impression, but so too did the many WWII relics, markers of fierce fighting between the Americans and the Japanese, and the tragic deaths of thousands of young men, both there and on Kiska, nearly 200 miles away. We had a cold, but fast, close reach there, arriving off Cape Sirius at its northern tip at dawn to find the sky thick and darkened with swarming auklets. We had never seen so many birds at one time. We took a brief look at Kiska harbour, but the forecast was for strong easterlies, to which it is open, so we pressed onto Gertrude Cove, a well-protected nook on the south coast. We spent the next day there mostly in thick mizzle in front of a wreck, while the front passed through.

It was a beat in light airs and grey, dismal, conditions next day to Little Sitkin Island. As we approached in a freshening breeze, the sun came out briefly, and the mountain momentarily cleared.

It blew hard again for twenty four hours, so we stayed firmly put, dancing around as the williwaws roared down from the mountain. Progress east, first to Tanager, then to Kanager, was slow in the light headwinds. The wild life more than made up for it: *Monkey Fist*, with whom we were sailing in loose company, took wonderful pictures of killer whales and murrelets on the way, and caught many cod and halibut once we were there, so it was a good dinner that night.

Nearby Adak's west coast has two gems, South Arm of Three Arm Bay, and the Bay of Islands, both of which we explored in a mixture of rain,

## Mike & Hilde Gill

fog or thick cloud, as we continued to eat like lords. Off Dora Island we eventually spied our first sea otters.

The passage round to Sweeper Cove took us past a high, majestic, north coast, spewing the expected williwaws, but parading a splendid



rainbow in front of the 'You are now entering and leaving the Adak National Forest' snowy slopes. Sweeper Cove itself is a strange place. Abandoned overnight by the US military in 1996, a township of previously 8000 souls now stands almost empty, save for the 180 or so civilians who still live there. To find a store where you can buy things and even a restaurant, felt wonderful a month since leaving Japan. Some locals very kindly let us use their washing machine, but to see decay and dereliction on such a scale, we found unsettling. There are no trees on the Aleutians, so to create a clump of twelve for Adak's national forest, must have taken some persistence.

*Quicksilver* was one of six yachts, all on passage from Japan, tied up to the jetty. This was more than the locals had ever seen at one time. A fisherman on a boat, also sheltering from the wretched weather we had there, presented us with much halibut, a gesture often repeated by fishermen further east.

Atka, the next island of any size east, sports a beautiful north coast, and we stopped in two of its many inlets, Bechevin Bay and Martin Harbour. Both provided good protection from the west. Halibut abounded in the latter. We sailed round to Nazan Bay on the east coast on a particularly grey day, so were over the moon when suddenly the clouds lifted, the sun came out, and thoughts turned briefly to dark glasses as mountains appeared and porpoises danced. It was a marvellous two hour break.

There is a small community of seventy five Aleuts in Nazan Bay. Many of them are related to those deported from Attu in WWII to camps in Japan, and who were resettled here after the war by the Americans. There's a safe anchorage behind the Bolshoi Islands, a shop (better than Adak's!) and free access to unlimited internet. We had not expected these last two. We were sad but not surprised to learn from the nurse that drug and alcohol abuse are the commonest health issues here.

Umnak island boasts more spectacular scenery, especially around Hot Springs Cove, our next stop, though cut short by a troublesome tooth of Mike's which made us press on for Dutch Harbour. En route we rode out a gale in Chernofsky Harbour, an excellent natural harbour, surrounded



Atka's east coast

by sea otters and with mustangs and roaming cattle on the hillsides. The holding turned out to be patchy: we dragged in the small hours (when else?), but managed to get dug in eventually in driving wind and rain.

It was a motor all the way to Dutch Harbour almost 70 miles away, an experience made less tedious by another stretch of magnificent coast, and a pod of many humpbacks showing off as we approached Dutch Harbour itself. There friendliness overwhelms you – from the harbour master, from the highly efficient Customs officer (who doubles up for immigration, and quarantine), and from everybody. It was not great weather, but we enjoyed our four days in this frontier town within its huge fishing fleet. We could get a new main halyard sheave fabricated, buy fresh vegetables and eat out in the company of the four other yachts there with us. Just above the dock where we were tied up was a hillside full of salmonberries. We picked many in the evening sunshine. Apparently successful antibiotic treatment beguiled the local dentist into leaving Mike's tooth intact. Within five days of leaving Dutch Harbour, it became clear that this was the wrong decision.

We had one more stop in the Aleutians, Hot Springs Bay on Akutan, a wide bay with high, green, mountains sloping down to it, before making our way on 26 July through Akun and Avatanak Straits towards Unimak Pass and the Alaskan peninsula. We had been warned that the combination of wind from the north, high mountains, and narrow parts of the peninsula can produce violent conditions. These we had off Unimak, where a clear blue sky, bright sun and a stunning set of high volcanic peaks only partially

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made up for far too much wind and a horrid wind-against-current sea. We were relieved to sneak into East Anchor Cove in the small hours of the next morning.

Our first mainland anchorage was Captain Harbour, beautifully landlocked, visited by bears, and with whales and a snowy mountain in the approach. The next stretch of coast has some striking shapes and backdrops, and though we had to



Hot Springs Bay, Akutan

do much motoring, the Shumigan Islands, Perryville (where Aleuts were resettled after the 1912 Katmai volcano erupted) and Chignik, a tiny but very active fishing community, were all delightful. On Unga in the Shumigans, we found many strawberries now growing wild around an abandoned settlement. In Perryville Mike could partially replenish his antibiotic supplies, and in Chignik we walked in wonderful surroundings, and could ride out a gale in the little harbour in the delightful company of two yachts last seen in Japan, and many friendly fisherman. Fishing in Alaska is a family affair: wives and children, sons and daughters, are often the crew. Perhaps that's why they seem so much more approachable than other, entirely male, fishing fleets.

We then made haste to Kodiak to see a dentist. It was a great sail overnight through Sitkinak Strait at the south end of Kodiak Island. Temperatures started to climb, and we spent the night in a delightful cove in Shearwater Bay, surrounded by hundreds of least auklets darting through the air like butterflies, leaping salmon and, for the first time since leaving Japan, real trees - lots of them. Within an hour of arriving next day at Kodiak Harbour, Mike was in the dentist's chair. Life soon started to improve, if a little edentulously. We had some of the best weather since leaving Japan while tied up in the harbour (typical!), and it was still only the first half of August. We wanted to cruise the area that we had rather rushed through to get to the dentist, so on the 11th off we set for a fascinating three weeks, exploring the highly indented coasts of Kodiak Island and the adjacent mainland.

We spent our first night in the peace of Long Island, only a few miles from Kodiak City, before beating up to Litnik, where sea otters played around us, a whale stood watch in the bay outside, and the sun shone. We shot through Afognak strait at ten knots the next day, beat down Kupreanof Strait, and carried sail almost all the way up East Uganik





Roundtop Mountain, Unimak

Passage, anchoring in grand surroundings at its southern end, again accompanied by a whale. We then had to motor all the way to Zachar Bay, up Uyak Bay, and found an old herring reduction plant, now a lodge, run by a family, who offered us raspberries, growing in profusion around their property. The next slit took us east of Amook island and to Brown's lagoon, where we'd expected to see bears. There was much evidence of recent visits, but no actual bears. At the bottom of the bay we found a wonderfully deserted spot to anchor for the night, south of Alf Island, with high snowy peaks well visible.

After a quick restock of fruit and veg. in the Cannery shop in Larsen Bay (a smelly, but vibrant spot, even on a Sunday), and a night inside Harvester Island at the head of Uyak Bay, we sped across Shelikof Strait on a broad reach, sadly in poor visibility, so were not treated to views of the reputedly magnificent peninsula coastline. We did, though, get into Geographic Harbour well before the next forecast blast of wind came through that night. It is a grand place, famous for its bears catching salmon at the river mouth and surrounded by mountains. We ogled at both, but next morning had to move out of the bay to an inlet close by to find sensible depths to anchor securely while the wind began to howl.

It soon passed and we saw more bears, but had to motor in glassy calm and welcome sun to Kukak Bay 30 miles up the coast. There we saw more bears, but were gale-bound again for a day, before making an unsuccessful attempt to get to Hallo Bay, reputedly with even more bears. It was flat calm for the first few miles, so we were unprepared for the viciousness

of the williwaws signalled ahead by the whitecaps off Cape Nukshak. It would have been a tough beat to the Bay, so we turned back to the peace of Kukak, having managed (just!) to rescue our upturned dinghy, which parted company when the painter's racking and seizing gave way. Next day we crossed the Shelikof Strait back to Kodiak Island, and though much further off, still experienced fierce gusts several miles off Hallo Bay.

We made for Bluefox Bay, a beautiful protected expanse on Alfognak Island, anchoring in sun and silence, apart from the bird song, south of Bear Island. We hiked a little next day and foraged for hedgehog mushrooms at the south end of the Bay, but as the wind increased again, it blasted round Devilspaw Mountain and we danced unrelaxingly to our anchor. With more strong northwest wind forecast we decided to wiggle our way up the west side of Bear Island to seek better shelter close in under the trees. In our keenness to avoid a submerged mid-channel rock, we grounded on a ledge extending far out from the shore on a falling tide. All was well in the end, and we found a calm spot in sensible depths, in the northwest corner. There we remained pinned for the next 36 hours, gawping at the spindrift a few yards from us.

A brief respite from the unseasonable weather was forecast for 28 August, so we braved the spume and disturbed seas at the entrance to Bluefox Bay, and soon had a following wind through Shuyak Strait. We timed our passage through Cape Current Narrows at its east end more or less right, squeezed through the gap very close to the northern shore (much safer than the 'mid-channel' passage, locals told us), and shot down to Seal Bay under a tiny headsail in a gathering gale. Seal Bay is rock-strewn, and not an ideal spot to shelter from wild weather, but we had been told of Alfognak Wilderness Lodge, just inside Duck Cape, the longest established lodge on Kodiak. They showed us where to go, took long lines, and the next day, our anchor, to the shore. We nestled in peace in the lee of high trees while it really blew. It had been a dry summer, so for the first time in history the temperate rain forest on Chiniak a little further south caught fire. The effect of 80 knot winds meant that the flames skipped over the trees, missing many, and burning only the tops of most. The sight of this from Kodiak City at night was apparently remarkable.

By now we were tumbling to the possibility that the sailing season might be drawing to a close, so after a memorable stop at a salmon hatchery in Kitoi Bay, where 2.5 million salmon are 'produced' each year, we were glad to come finally to a halt in Kodiak Harbour on 2 September after almost 130 anchorages in 11 months.

A cabinet maker crafted a one-off cradle in which *Quicksilver* now sits snugly for the long Alaskan winter, while back in UK we imagine, rather than plan, how to make the next sailing season as unpredictable and absorbing as this one has turned out to be.