

This was the expedition that (nearly) never was. For a start there was no Spring in Alaska this year, the ice staying late and the rivers remaining frozen solid later than for the previous ninety six years. Then crew member Richard had great trouble getting his American visa, and was seriously delayed. But at last we left Nome on 30 July to attempt to return west to east via the North West Passage, the shortest way back after our successful traverse east to west last year.

But this was a much more difficult year in the Arctic this year. There was 30-40 per cent more ice (Canadian Coastguard estimate), and the winds were consistently contrary, at least for us. All went well through the Bering Strait and up to Point Hope with one hiccup with the engine soon cured by Rich, but now we were receiving weather forecasts of strong winds from the north where we wanted to go. We had to wait nine days anchored off the south shore of Point Hope to let them pass – the Chukchi Sea is not the place to be hammering against strong contrary winds..

When the winds finally relented we were able to make our way north up this inhospitable coastline to Point Barrow, the first major key to the North West Passage. Rounding this we were at least in open water (the ice had recently receded) but the wind was from the east against us. The problem with the north Alaskan slope is there is nowhere to hide, and when this east wind threatened to become strong all we could do was go down south to seek possible shelter on the west side of Barter Island. We rode out the strong east winds at anchor here for two days and nights. Proceeding eastwards we took a more northerly loop round towards Tuktoyaktuk than last year in order to keep in relatively deeper water. The line of channel buoys leading into Tuk were difficult to follow in the dusky darkness as not many were lit. But at 0200 we anchored off the Town Quay, to leave sorting our lines to the shore till it was daylight.

Tuk proved difficult in that propane gas and ordinary engine oil were unobtainable, to our surprise. But the guest house were as friendly and welcoming as last year. Finally we set out for the long haul up to Cape Bathurst, the next key to a successful passage, where we encountered a long tongue of ice coming down from the north.

We hove-to off the ice for the rest of the night and then followed the ice south till we saw a narrow gap which led to open water and allowed us to go north again to the Snowgoose Passage between Bathurst and Baillie Island. There was sufficient depth by keeping to the centre to get through, but on the other side there was another big tongue of 2/10ths concentration of ice stretching south. We were able to weave and dodge through this and made our way south east to the excellent Summer Harbour on Booth Island.

In Coronation Gulf further east we set about videoing the seabed with the machine Stuart Anderson had left on board for the purpose. The Anderson Consultancy were keen to analyse what flora existed on the seabed in the North West Passage, which had not been done before, or hardly so. We did this again in the Dease Channel, but owing to the pressure of needing to make constant progress to try and complete the Passage in the one summer we felt we had not really done justice to the project.

Our stay in Cambridge Bay, in many ways the halfway point of the Passage, was all too short. I had heard that Victoria Strait was open and was anxious not to miss the opportunity of saving us many miles by taking it. We set out and made it through this passage on a calm sunny day, and continued north through the night to the Tasmanian Islands. We spent that night in Sophie Louise Bay, as we named it, a pleasant anchorage by a beach at the far end of the small cove on the western side of the Tasmanian Islands. We have submitted it and other pilotage information to the relevant bodies. We had some problems with ice floes being brought down and around us by the unpredictable tidal currents, but next day were able to make our way up to the fabled Bellot Strait, in spite of the fact the compass was going round in circles. Passing the infamous Magpie rock at the east end of the Bellot Strait I got the tides wrong, again, but this time it was due to the tidal chart on my C-Map chart plotter which we discovered later bore no relation to the actual tides. We shot through with the tide pushing us, fortunately, and rounded up by Fort Ross with *Polar Bound* and *Anna* already in residence.

In spite of being entertained royally to a fine supper by David Cowper and Jane on *Polar Bound* one night things were becoming critical. There was a lot of ice in Prince Regent Inlet, and the winds were strong and consistently from the north. Were we going to get iced in here for the winter, and what

then? A helicopter evacuation? And what would that cost? But at last after seven to eight days, the weather became calm and even sunny, and the ice chart showed a long dagger of ice stretching way down Prince Regent Inlet but which it might be possible to weave through to get to the east side where there was more open water. We motor sailed hard along the 72nd parallel, we weaved through 10 miles of 2/10ths ice, we put into Fitzgerald Bay on the other side in spite of its fiendish pilotage and rode out a gale for two days and nights. Putting out and making our way north we had a close shave with an ice floe when hove-to in the dark night, and the next day Karen weaved and dodged in masterful fashion through brash and growlers made threatening by a huge swell before we could break out. At the northern end in Lancaster Sound at last, I was alarmed when we had to push through fields of pancake ice, often the first sign of the sea freezing over for the winter. But easterly gales soon put paid to that. Meantime we had gone down to Arctic Bay, remarkably protected and calm whilst gales raged in Lancaster Sound to the north. Coming out we again rode out northerly gales by putting in to the north east corner of Tay Bay for two days and nights. Navy Board Inlet was a picture postcard scene when we eventually came out and sailed down it with the hills covered with fresh snow, down to sea level. Pond Inlet was the usual difficult open roadstead but the ever friendly and helpful hotel saw that our needs of dwindling resources were met. The gales in Baffin Bay had relented and we motored all the way down to Clyde River, passing big 'ice islands' which had originally broken off the huge Peterman glacier in the far north as ice shelves. It was just as well we did pick up fuel, again, at Clyde River, as we then had to motor all the way across Baffin Bay to Aasiaat in calm weather, which must be a record in itself.

It is possible looking back to be left with a slight sense of anti-climax: we had never after all got into any real crisis or immediate pressing danger. But a pleasing aspect of that must be that for once we happened to make the right calls. I cannot claim that it has always been so, and in places this year as the Duke of Wellington said of Waterloo 'it was a de'm close run thing' – Prince Regent Inlet had iced up soon after we were through, as had Admiralty Inlet soon after that, and we managed to duck out of the worst winds.

Only three yachts completed the west east traverse this year. Records? It is just possible *Dodo's Delight* might be able to claim to be the only GRP boat to have passed both ways through the North West Passage, and in consecutive years. Who knows, and come to that, who cares? We survived!

We also fulfilled our aim of submitting pilotage information for the new Arctic Pilot soon to be published by Imrays in conjunction with the Royal Cruising Club Pilotage Foundation