

Harsh Lesson

by Dana Graves

A Kodiak bear hunt I went on one spring
Became a harsh lesson on what nature can bring.
The wind from inland will hold the tide back;
But if the wind lets up, the high tide is exact.

A wind from offshore can flood the tide plain;
Then strand you in a gale-force wind with rain.
I emptied my pack to lighten the load,
Food and a hatchet left behind in the cold.

After crossing a stream, I hiked up Uyak Bay.
When I saw Hidden Basin, I decided to stay.
I'd found some bear sign, but low tide called me back.
Hunting brown bear alone could draw an attack.

As I rounded a bend, I saw thick alder smoke.
Three hunters were waiting for a bush plane on floats.
It was zero zero, no planes flew today.
They voiced their concern of a three-day delay.

With food running short and spirits running low,
I could tell when I left, they wished they could go.
I arrived at the cove and the freshwater stream,
The place where I'd cross, a warm cabin, sweet dream.

It didn't look right. Was it really low tide?
I attempted a crossing to the far side.
My rifle overhead, white caps in my face,
Sand moving underfoot and salt water to taste.

I had to turn back, common sense told me so,
From a tide that was high instead of a low.
Chilled to the bone, I had visions of bed;
I'll be sleeping over here on wet sand instead.

I feel the wind blow, it's cutting right through;
I must not panic, I have to stay cool.
I had flames dancing, no dry fuel to burn,
A time for decisions, a time for concern.

A few plastic items, when lit they would drip;
With fire-building a failure, this wind could be it.
A log structure built on the beach to warm up;
I dove in for cover; it was cozy enough.

I slept on the sand in my clothes with no fire,
My hatchet left behind a few hours prior.
So many sets of tracks up and down the beach,
That warmed me up for a fifteen-minute sleep.

All night until daylight, I repeated this stunt.
There's nothing to brag about this spring bear hunt.
In the morning the tracks in the sand told the tale,
Of surviving on a beach in a hundred-knot gale.

I crossed at daylight, not one minute late.
The North Country can get you, at times it's your fate.
I laid around all day soaking up the heat,
From a stove I made from an oil can on the beach;
And drying my clothes for the trip back home.
From this day on, I'll take care when I roam.

[*Groundwaters*, v9 n3 p13]