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KDM Magazine

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**A special
supplement
to the
Kodiak Daily
Mirror**

Summer Adventure



**Sail the Seven Seas with
Heide and Erich Wilts
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Erich Wilts and some crew members visit a small island during a trip aboard the Freydis.



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Around the world in 47 years

By JULIE HERRMANN
Mirror Writer

They've sailed the world together for decades, dealt with more than their share of challenges, and now they have an even bigger goal of sailing through the Northwest Passage.

Heide and Erich Wilts, Germans from Heidelberg, began sailing together in 1969.

From the time she was a little girl, Heide had wanted to sail, but it wasn't until after meeting Erich that she began for real.

As a boy, Erich lived on the waterfront of the North Sea, and while attending college in Hamburg he joined the sailing club and continued to sail afterward.

For their first 15 years together, they sailed during vacations, but at age 48 decided they'd had enough of their jobs.

Heide is a doctor and was working

as a radiologist. Erich was the CEO of a large company when they quit to take to the sea permanently aboard the 45-foot Freydis.

"We did not have much private life," Heide says. "We were working hard, we were tired when we came home, and we said, 'It must change.'"

"We had good jobs. We could always come back if it didn't work out," Erich said.

But they loved it and never went back.

They've sailed more than 300,000 miles, the equivalent of more than 14 times around the globe.

They've visited extremes from the freezing cold in Antarctica to the warmth of Polynesia.

About 50 percent of the time, they sail alone. Other times, they have crewmembers and paying guests.

Heide has written eight books about

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PHOTOS COURTESY ERICH AND HEIDE WILTS

Left: Heide Wilts wades with a dolphin in Australia. Photo courtesy Erich and Heide Wilts. **Above:** Erich and Heide Wilts, center, work on rebuilding the new Freydis after they lost their sail boat in the 2011 Japan tsunami. **Below:** The Freydis under way. **Cover photo:** The Freydis deck as seen from the mast.

FREYDIS

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their travels, all in German, while Erich takes photos, some of which have graced magazine covers.

In 1991, they arrived in Antarctica and sailed into the caldera of Deception Island, an island off the end of the Antarctic Peninsula with an almost completely enclosed harbor in the middle.

Although the caldera was completely clear and ice free in the evening, a blizzard arose in the night and froze the Freydis in place, covering the boat in ice and flooding it with seawater.

The Wilts left the boat and wound up spending the winter in Antarctica in a research hut repairing their vessel before leaving Deception in the spring.

They found coal from a former coal-

“All the sailors we met when sailing said, ‘There is nothing like Alaska.’”

ERICH WILTS

ing station to heat the hut and used what canned goods they had. Everything not in cans had been destroyed when the boat flooded. They also used food left over in the research hut.

Although the Freydis survived Antarctica, it couldn’t survive Fukushima.

The Wilts left the boat in Japan over the winter of 2011 in a marina just 20 miles from Fukushima while they headed back to Germany.

Most boats in the marina were destroyed in the tsunami, but the

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RUNNING

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pants estimate how long it will take to run one mile. The person whose guess is closest to the time it actually takes will win a trophy. This free event will be held at the Joe Floyd track in Baranof Park.

May 29

The Ididarock is not for the faint of heart. Participants will begin the day with a 41-mile road bike from Pasag-shak into Kodiak, followed by a 9-mile trail and road run up and down Pillar Mountain.

The big finish is a one-mile swim in the Kodiak Community Swimming Pool. The entry fee is \$30. Participants must register at the Kodiak Teen Center by Saturday, May 28.

The Crab Festival Marathon, sponsored by the City of Kodiak, begins at 9 a.m. Runners will take off from Kalsin Bay and run back into town. The event record was set in 2010 by Robert Onders, who completed the run in 2:43:29 in 2010. Sally Skimin remains the fastest woman to complete the run with a time of 3:24:27, a record she set in 2002. Registration for this year's marathon is

due at the Kodiak Teen Center by 6 p.m. on Saturday, May 28. The entry fee is \$20, and all participants receive a T-shirt.

This year marks the first Unofficial Kodiak Crab Festival Half Marathon, benefitting Kodiak Veterans Outreach. Registration begins at 9 a.m. near the starting line, or participants can pre-register by completing a form and returning it to Kayla Gordon at the Mill Bay Health Center. Runners will start at Mile 13 of Chiniak Highway and finish at the Kodiak stoplight. The event cost is \$30.

The annual Pillar Mountain Challenge is a 9.2 mile loop that starts

and ends at the Harbormaster building. As the name suggests, runners will summit Pillar Mountain. While walkers can begin the race at 11:30 a.m., runners will start at 12:30 p.m. Participants can register between 11 a.m. and 12 p.m. at the Harbormaster building on the day of the race. The entry fee is \$20 and all participants receive a T-shirt.

June

On a date still to be determined, the Kodiak Assembly of God will host its 5th annual Run for Rescue beginning at Monashka Bay Park. Runners can decide between a 5k, 10k or a

half marathon. Pricing details will be released at a later date. Proceeds benefit Project Rescue, a ministry providing support for victims of sexual slavery.

June 18

The annual KMXT Bear Crawl is a 1.25-mile obstacle course run held at the Kodiak Island Raceway. Those who have participated in previous years can still expect surprises, with new obstacle being added and old obstacles being moved or reworked, said KMXT director of development Pam Foreman. Spectators are also in for a treat, as more obstacles will be within easy

view of event seating. The first heat will begin at 9 a.m. Entry fees for participation in this year's event have yet to be determined.

August

This year will be the 20th anniversary of the Kodiak Bearfoot in the Foot Quintathlon, a fundraiser for the Kodiak High School cross-country team. This unique event features a 500-yard swim across Gertrude Lake, shooting, a 1.9-mile kayak race, a 2.5 mile run, and 19 miles on a bike. Further details, including the date, will be announced at a later date.

JOURNEY

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ing to ride it for 40,000 miles.

The former naval officer and Coast Guard engineer was set to leave soon on a cross-continental tour around North and South America, he said, in order to see with his own eyes the beauty that is the world and the people within it.

"I believe, in the visits I've made in the Navy and on vacation, that the world is full of good, purposeful and thriving people that are no different than we are," Carroll said. "Most things we hear about places are negative, I just don't believe it. ... One thing that I would like to do is share my knowledge first hand of the peoples and cultures that I encounter on a trip like this."

Carroll plans to make a loop of North and South America - from Virginia through Canada, Alaska and down to South America. He wants to go from the most northern tip of Alaska, the town of Deadhorse near the Arctic Ocean, to the southernmost point of South America - Ushuaia, Argentina. Carroll expects the trip to take

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FREYDIS

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Freydis floated out of the harbor and lodged against some cliffs nearby. Despite attempts at removing it, the vessel couldn't be retrieved and ultimately was cut into pieces to remove it. It is destined for a park to be a memorial to the lives lost in the disaster, as well as the friendship between Germany and Japan.

Not ready to quit sailing, the Wilts began building a new boat. Also named the Freydis after a female Viking who

headed an expedition to Newfoundland, the new Freydis is slightly longer at 50 feet and is made of aluminum rather than steel.

For the past five years, the Wilts have sailed her in Alaska around the gulf, along the Aleutian Chain and up the Bering Sea coast.

"All the sailors we met when sailing said, 'There is nothing like Alaska,'" Erich said. "So we said, 'We will have to see about that.'"

And Alaska lived up to the expectations.

"It's a mix of wild-life, adventure and loneliness. You're alone and

not disturbed," Heide said. "It's a region that's wild and unpredictable, with the wild animals and the weather. It's unpredictable how the boat will go. It's a great challenge."

They have hopes of taking on the Northwest Passage next year, sailing through the Bering Strait, over the top of Alaska and Canada and then pausing in Greenland and Iceland on the way back to Germany.

"It's much faster to go this way," Erich said.

They'll be extra cautious when going that route because they don't want to repeat their Antarctic experience in the Arctic.

If they make it through, they plan to set sail again from Germany. If not, they'll likely overwinter in Canada.

Where they'll go next, is unknown.

"We don't make plans," Erich said.

Julie Herrmann is a staff reporter at the Kodiak Daily Mirror. Contact her at 486-3227 ext. 627.

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