

Matt Braun's Reflection for Leg 2

My name is Matthew Braun. I am a student at the University of Southern Maine in Portland, Maine. I have been on the second leg of the Voyage of the Odyssey, 2010 covering West Palm Beach, Florida to Mobile, Alabama.

I was only onboard for half of this leg, but I still had some memorable experience that I wanted to write about. I stepped off the odyssey a few days after we docked in West Palm Beach so that I could be a part of my annual family reunion in Minnesota. I was a little sad to be leaving the boat, because I had grown accustomed to the crew, the ocean, and the sea-life. But I had also been sad that I was not going to be able to see all of my family because I would be doing this research through August. I was thrilled when I could so easily hop off the boat for 10 days, visit family, and then come right back.

Since the satellite was hooked up the day I left, I could now talk to the crew online during my absence. No more than a few days after I left, a myriad of problems arose. The waves were huge, our array was not working, one of the generators had failed, and no whales. I chose a good time to get off. However, I heard that the crew had begun to get really good at the extraordinary skill of spotting white caps. That skill would probably come in handy down the road. The whitecaps made things even more difficult due to the fact that the kind of whales that we were looking for at this time cannot be found with the acoustic equipment that we have. Thus, all we have are our eyes. Furthermore, there are only 15-20 of this type of whale in the entire Gulf of Mexico. They are called Bryde's whales (pronounced broodas). Fortunately, they are known to be along the 200 meter depth line from St. Petersburg, FL., to Pensacola, FL. But without flat, calm seas there was little hope of finding them.

The crew made an unexpected stop in St. Petersburg to wait out the tropical depressions that they had been sailing through. We have had a few of these tropical depressions so early in the journey. What happened to the flat, calm Gulf of Mexico that Captain Bob had told us about since day 1? Roger Payne, founder and president of Ocean Alliance, was on board with his brother in law since they were picked up in Key West. He and his brother in law got off in St. Pete. This is when I came back to the boat. But before I talk about this half of the leg that I was on for, let me talk a little bit about Minnesota.

I had been in the ocean on a sailboat for two weeks, so things were certainly going to be very different when all of the sudden I would be on a motor boat on a lake. For 2 weeks every August, my 6 cousins, my sister, and I spend as much time everyday on the water as we can wakeboarding and wakesurfing. To wakesurf, we put about 1000-2000 lbs of water in large sacks and place them in the boat. We put a majority of that on the port side so that it leans much more than the starboard. We get pulled up by the boat by a short line with a handle on the end. Once up, we pull ourselves into the 3 foot wave that nicely curls like an ocean wave a few feet behind the port side. Putting

ourselves in position in front of the wake, we can let go of the rope and surf it around the lake.

So after 10 days in Minnesota, I headed back to the life on a sailboat in the middle of the ocean. After wakesurfing almost every day while at the lake on boat generated waves, you can guess what I wanted to do more than anything when I saw real ocean waves, bigger and badder than any wave we could have made on the lake. I considered bringing back a surfboard and/or a wakeboard to the Odyssey. Since you need flat water to wakeboard, the days when the water was glass, we could have taken the dingy out and cruised around the ocean. And boy was the water glass some of the days; it was magnificently blue and calm. The rough days would have been good for wakesurfing. However, I did not see any waves that broke and gave the top a nice curl so that it would push me across the water. I told Captain Bob this, and he agreed that I should have brought them. During the 5 year voyage, he was the captain on board, and he said that the crew went kneeboarding in the Galapagos Islands, I think right off of the Odyssey. I am sure that this was an incredible experience to kneeboard from the boat and be around so much marine life. Without having a surfboard, I tried to pretend that the boat was a surfboard and that I was controlling it from the mid-level platform. It was not the real thing, but fun regardless.

This leg, Johnny and I are much more comfortable with everything on the boat now. We now have our sea legs, know how to do all the science stuff, and know a lot about the boat stuff, as well. This was crucial to know as we are going to be on board for the entire 6 months and everything needs to be second nature for us. Given this, we are able to teach the newcomers, as a few people switch on and off every leg. We had begun to feel like boat crew, as we tried to help out with the sails and other tasks that Bob had us do. When I left for Minnesota, I didn't realize it, but I had forced Johnny to take up the slack and take over all of the things that I had been in charge of; sorry Johnny. I think that he was glad to have me back on board to share the responsibilities with him once again.

With a lack of whales, there was a lot of boredom. We spent a lot of time playing cards and doing our hourly workout up in the mid-level platform. We did see a bunch of dolphins and it was really neat to see Ryan and Greer's reactions to them. However, I had seen so many dolphins on the first leg, that it really did not thrill me quite as much anymore. I was much more interested in finding whales. I am not troubled by seeing no whales or the rough seas. I have a good feeling that the next legs will get better.

Typically, these logs are about the experiences out at sea. Johnny and I are sort of anomalies, though. We count port days as any other day out at sea, since we generally have many things that we need to accomplish to get ready for the next leg. This leg's port days brought me a whole new perspective on the oil disaster. I have written about it and it is posted on the website under reactions to the oil crisis under my previous one, if you have not already read it. But in addition to this, we also got the opportunity to sit down with a local entrepreneur and franchise director of Quiznos on the boat. He and his son came by and donate \$20,000 dollars to our voyage from the Quiznos franchise.

Thank you very much Quiznos for your contribution. It was interesting to talk to them about the oil spill and how it had affected their local fisheries, too.

As we were about to head back out to sea from Mobile, Dr. Wise told us that we were going to have a big event with VIP's on the boat next time we came into port. Alexandra Cousteau and her team wanted to come and do a story with us. I looked forward to meeting her and swapping expedition stories. I will write about it in next leg's log. Until next time...wish us whales!