

Greer Chapman's Reflections for Leg 2



My name is Greer Chapman. I am a student at Bates College in Lewiston, Maine. I am also a summer undergraduate researcher in the Wise Laboratory 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.

My experience aboard the Odyssey was inspiring, yet challenging. There were calm days when we saw nothing more than a few flying fish. And then there were days when immense swells rocked the boat without mercy. During these days, we were in a constant battle with gravity to maintain our balance and to avoid crashing into each other.

During the second leg, we were not able to locate any whales. This misfortune was most likely due to the facts that we did not have a working array, and also that we were looking for Bryde's whales. There are supposedly a mere fifteen individuals of this species living in the Gulf. No one knows what they sound like, so our only method of location was to travel along the 200 meter line (the area they are known to inhabit) and scan the horizon for whale blows.

I soon learned that this scanning takes discipline. It is not easy to stand for two hours at a time, forbidding your eyes to stray from the horizon, and your mind from wandering to

other things besides whales. I grew accustomed to this constant scanning, and although we were never rewarded by the presence of whales, we did see many other interesting and exciting animals. We spotted sea turtles, jellyfish, flying fish, birds, sharks, and many more small and large fish. The most exciting events occurred when we spotted dolphins. On two separate occasions we were joined by at least forty dolphins, gracefully leaping through the waves towards the boat from all directions and crowding at the bow for a turn riding the current. I sat on the bow sprit and watched in awe as dozens of dolphins rode the bow mere feet below me and dozens more followed on the boat's wake.