

Day 26: August 11, 2010

It was a remarkable thing to wake up this morning to essentially calm. Very little boat rocking- maybe forgot where I was for a moment. I wandered out of my cabin about 9 am, ready to take on the challenges of the day.

I was a bit surprised to start with a rumor of a hurricane headed for us. I mean I am thinking we have a broken generator and a nonworking array; the auto pilot went out on the way into dock and now a hurricane! I would have thought I got up on the wrong side of the bed - except there is only 1 side of a bed to get out of on a boat. Turns out there was no hurricane, but rather tropical depression #5. It is headed for Louisiana where it will be a tropical storm most likely. Its way out in front of us and not a concern, though it likely was responsible for the rough seas we were in and even if all of our equipment was working- it alone would have forced us in now anyway.

The morning went by quickly. Iain had arranged with Scripps in San Diego to fix our array. They will also modify it so we can detect both Bryde's whales and sperm whales instead of just sperm whales. The population of Bryde's whales is thought to be only about 15 animals so it will help with finding that needle in a haystack. In the meantime, Scripps will send us their Bryde's array now to use while ours gets fixed.

Roger and Peter will be leaving us here in St Petersburg. Matt has decided he has had enough time at his family reunion and will be rejoining us on Friday. Seems he misses us and the boat. He has some nice pieces on our website- I would encourage you to read them. even one teasing be about my sea legs. Chris Gianios will also be joining us here in St. Petersburg. The array is so essential to our work that Chris's background will be invaluable in helping us to get them both working right.

We ended up docked next to a Greenpeace boat called the Arctic Sunrise. A large boat that sleeps 34 and is an ice breaker boat that can drive through glaciers. I decided one of my first goals upon rising was to arrange a tour for the students, which they gave us at 1 pm and all Odyssey hands joined in the tour. The boat was quite impressive and on its way to the Gulf. Interestingly, because of their hull design for ice breaking- they really get tossed around in the waves. In the Gulf, they will sample water, and have either an ROV (remotely operated vehicle) or maybe submarines to study coral. They will also use their helicopter to look for whales, though all they will do is look. Thus, we agreed to speak via phone each day and exchange whale sighting information.

I spoke some with them about the recent government reports. They told me that the FDA determined seafood was safe by simply smelling it. It smelled like fish not like oil so therefore it was safe. As I said no data to conclude seafood is safe. By the way, my comments about that yesterday had a typo in them, I meant to say the FDA declared seafood safe and I don't think they have the data. I incorrectly wrote they declared it "not safe" (thanks Lee). If the comments today are correct and all they did is smell the fish- clearly there is no data and who knows if it is safe.

Later in the day, I had arranged a tour for the students of the St Petersburg Coastal and Marine Science Center. Yes, I keep them busy. The work there is mostly geological, coral and hurricanes. We were given a tour by Dr. John Lisle (pronounce lyle) a microbial ecologist. We saw some cores taken from coral reefs and some ancient pieces of coral along with truly remarkable photos of places and before and after hurricanes- just amazing to see the devastation so clearly illustrated. Really a nice tour of work very different from what we do, but interesting nonetheless.

These activities took us into the evening. Roger and I had a nice dinner together and discussed the voyage and various details. Then Roger asked me what was next for the boat lab. Ah yes, we just became the first lab to grow whale cells at sea and now what's next? I guess the best answer for this question is that I am going to Disneyworld!!! But seriously, I have a few ideas, but I am going to leave you in suspense until the time comes. But I do know what's next! I just want to bask in the glow of what we have done and let Cathy do it a few more times before we go on to what's next.

I had a nice call from Nancy Beebe sending her support and in which we agreed that James and Johnny and I would not be able to be in the next show (you may recall I had been technical support in the last two and James and Johnny were in the last one). She too feels our work and mission here on this voyage are more important, but we will miss being in the show (I was supposed to perform in this one). We will at least attend! Nancy - please do feel free to share these emails with our friends in the show.

All in all, a very nice day and one that would have been forced on us anyway due to weather. Tomorrow the generator guy comes and we will see what that repair will take. Captain Bob fixed the auto pilot and the arrays will be on board Friday so my hope is that we leave Friday. I guess Roger and I have an interview with NBC in the morning.

I want to point you all again to our website www.usm.maine.edu/toxicology and click on the Gulf link in the middle of the top. That link will take you to our voyage pages. You should know that James Wise has built this part of the website and all of the pages underneath. I am really impressed at the work and how hard and diligently he works at it. He usually gets stuff up within minutes to an hour after I send it - rarely more than a day. He is not yet on the frontlines of the boat, but his work is every bit as important and valuable. Good job James!

The content is mostly student driven. The "logs" link will take you to some impressive writings from the students involved (James has a nice piece there that he wrote). There are videos and pictures the students are taking while on the boat (most of the wave pictures are mild days - but stay tuned!). There are track lines that Chris Gianios has made with help from Johnny and Matt on the boat. Really nice stuff and I hope you enjoy them. We post new student writings each day.

I continue to be impressed by the quality, tenacity and commitment of all of our students.

John