

Day 39: August 24, 2010

WOW! Today was crazy busy!

Like yesterday, I woke up about 8 am. I started to do some work in my cabin when "whales" was hollered down the hall. And there we were back with whales. Johnny was on the whale boom; Rick in the bowsprit; Bob on the helm; Juli was in the bow area, Rob was on the starboard side and Matt was way up in the crow's nest as he was the one who found the whale. Kyle went up. Matt came down and we all went to work. Within moments were alongside the whale and Johnny attempted a shot. It missed, which surprised us all, but something was clearly wrong as Johnny stared dumbfounded at his crossbow and failed to reload and try again. Fortunately, one plans for this possibility and our second biopsier, Rick, successfully collected the sample. Rob scooped up the arrow and Matt and I retreated to the lab, while the others continued to search. The cell culture part went well and I was satisfied with my processing of this one. By the way, it turned out that Johnny was dumbfounded because the arrow had come off his bow sideways (hence the miss), apparently a problem with the fletch. We do number the arrows so that one will be carefully examined and maybe retired.

Just as we finished processing that sample, another whale was spotted and we are again on deck. We were about to sample, when a lot of confusion came up about whether we had already sampled this particular whale and so in the confusion the biopsiers passed on the opportunity while we sorted it out. There were clearly mixed impressions. Kyle, up on the mast with possibly the best view; felt this whale was much smaller than the first whale. Johnny and Rick noted and absence of any marks from the earlier biopsy suggesting that this whale had not been sampled. Others, however, felt that it was the same whale based on photo comparisons. In the end, I decided to be conservative and we moved away from that whale.

As noon approached, I had settled the team back into their watch positions- this adjustment means that until just before then everyone had been on deck the whole time! Hot! Hot! Hot! No sooner had that happened than another whale was spotted and we were at it again. This time Johnny's arrow flew true and he had the sample. Rob scooped it up and Matt and I headed to the lab. This time, I told Matt it was his turn to process the sample and try his hand at culturing as I had done the last three. He was as excited as a kitten with a new found toy. I told him there was no rush, and he looked at me with a broad grin and said "I know, I am just so excited!" We walked through the procedure and he performed all of the steps with both care and skill. But he too, noted that indeed we did not give Cathy enough credit as this job is simply hard.

The procedure has two phases separated by a half an hour. Matt was just finishing the first phase when there was a knock on the lab door. There was Rob and we figured it was a call for whales. But, No! Rob had an arrow in his hand with a sample in it. Johnny had biopsied a second whale while we were still in the lab! So Matt started in on that one and about halfway through we heard the boat slow down. Matt's eyes got as big as saucers as we both knew there was only one reason why the boat would slow

down like that... more whales!!! Suddenly, it was clear that processing samples might get very busy!

As it turned out, there were more whales, but they dove before we could get close. There was a lot of that all day. One of my jobs is to make sure people eat, drink water and respond to the heat. By about 1:00, we had not seen whales for a bit and I started calling people in for lunch. The team is always so disappointed when I do that as they are eager to gather more samples, but generally they respond and eat. They also usually do not realize how much time has passed from the start. At that point Rick and Johnny had been in the direct sun for 5 hours. They are both stalwarts and ready to stay longer, but boy were they pleased to eat. So I started the process of getting everybody some rest and food. Johnny and Rick were about 2/3 through their lunch when..."whales". Down went the plates, up came the crossbows and lifejackets and we were at it again. This time Rick collected the sample from the whale boom and Matt and I went down into the lab. This time I did the initial processing and Matt finished up. By 3 pm, there were no further whale sightings and we resumed normal watch duties and went to find another whale neighborhood. We took no further samples, today, but we were very pleased with a day of 4 samples! Plus water samples, Matt and Juli and Johnny once again collected water samples.

Matt and I had a funny moment in the lab. We (Johnny, Matt and I) are finding that time is a bit distorted on the boat. Others may too, but we have only discussed it during our monkey fests at the end of the day on the bowsprit so we don't know what others think. At one point in the middle of the work, I asked Matt when we cultured the first whale. Was it yesterday? Or was it the day before that? Matt said yesterday and then thought about it and was sure it was the day before that. I agreed that was what I was remembering too. Then later I realized it was yesterday we were both wrong and yet so sure!

The day ended as yesterday did- beautiful red setting sun on starboard and rising moon on port and me in the bowsprit having a frozen banana with the other two monkeys. Only tonight, Rick and Rob joined our monkey brethren and enjoyed a banana with us! Captain Bob came out on the bowsprit as well to enjoy the water and some fun banter. But, he does not like frozen bananas so we could not entice him. But after a long hot day, those bananas were great!

The water was truly amazing - like molten glass with the only ripples coming from our boat. This smooth water helps immensely as both Rob and others are then able to help out on the midlevel platform giving us the flexibility in positioning we need. Rob even made it up the crow's nest a couple of times. Indeed, the water is so smooth that Matt and Johnny have done their 2 hour watch shifts from the crow's nest and consequently no one is troubled with any seasickness. It's amazing the difference between this leg and the last one. Of course it is ridiculously hot!

We end our day all exhausted after much hard work. Everyone did what needed to be done and more. Rob impressed me with the care he took of our biopsiers making sure

they had a constant supply of water and snacks. That sounds simple, but remember, Johnny is 30 feet out on the end of the whale boom. It is no simple task to get to him. The whale boom is a pole that sticks out of the boat. The pole is about the width of my foot and there are two rails one can hang onto. All as suspended by cables and ropes. Once you cross the halfway point, something odd happens and you clearly feel like the poles are getting farther apart creating a clear sensation that you just might slip off. I tried at one point to take him a banana. I got 2/3 of the way there and squished the banana so had to turn back unsuccessful. That Rob made it out there carrying a water bottle and piece of banana bread from him is a remarkable accomplishment. Given that I worry greatly about everyone in this heat, it was great to discover that Rob had taken on this task and taken care of the two guys who were most exposed to heat and unable to move.

I am sure we will all sleep well tonight!

John