

Day 40: August 25, 2010

I woke up at 7:30 and had a quick bite and looked out at the water. Something about it just said quiet to me and I told Rick- today will be a quiet day. It was. No whales. No dolphins. Nothing. There was an early morning feeding frenzy of tuna and sharks feeding on something I am told. A goldfinch joined our boat and hung out drinking water from a water bottle and eating bread, but beyond that nothing. Not even a whale click. We did see a huge mass of Sargasso seaweed. It was full of trash and we spent some time dragging up trash in the net. But it was generally very quiet.

I spent my day working on USM/Wise Lab business. The morning was spent administering a comprehensive exam to my doctoral student Carlyne. It shows you the wonder of technology that her 5 member committee was present- three in my office, me on SKYPE on the boat and another on SKYPE from Scotland. We grilled her with questions for three hours- in the end - she passed. Congrats Carlyne! You know I wonder- maybe the whales were hiding because Carlyne was taking her exam ;). She will join us on the next leg. The afternoon was spent on grant matters and research.

The students all diligently carried out their watches despite the absence of whales.

Iain called to discuss the weather and guess what- a storm is headed towards us for Saturday so we will head in to somewhere near Mobile arriving Friday night. There Scripps will begin collaborating with us and we will upgrade our acoustic ability.

By dinner the boat was really rolling as it does when the weather starts to pick up. I realized then that I had made a tactical mistake by leaving the cell cultures till later in the day. The cells needed to be fed and it was going to take two of us to do a normal 5 minute 1 person task. So Matt and I descended into the lab and did our utmost to keep from falling over and to keep the cells stable. I held a pipette (long straw if you will) with the nutritious solution they need to grow with all of the muscles in my body flexed to keep that pipette still and keep me from flying across the room. Matt then carefully moved the flask of cells onto the pipette with all of his muscles similarly flexed and I released the medium into the flask. He then sealed it and returned it to the incubator. I am sure everyone in my lab will be laughing at how hard this extremely simple task became. We had three flasks of cells and managed to get all three done without incident. But tomorrow there are 10 or more to do and the water will likely be rougher. Yikes!!!

The Gulf by the way is very different than the Atlantic. In the Atlantic we felt alone and away from the world. In the Gulf, there are oil rigs everywhere. We are rarely out of sight of a rig. So Deepwater horizon was just one of many rigs and one can quickly grasp both the economic impact of closing them all down and the massive devastation possible if another one or two blows.

We are "rolling along like the tumbling tumbleweed" - its going to be a sleepless night for sure.

John