

Day 54: September 8, 2010

Had great sleep last night as we headed up the Mississippi river to Venice, Louisiana to drop off Mario, Ethan and cameraman Ian. Ethan worked hard for us and with Chris's help got our array working and everything acoustic ship shape. He also proved the Odyssey can work very well for servicing the HARP buoys. Mario was a welcome and pleasant guest and we look forward to reading his article on the HARP work. Ian was a blast and a lot of fun to talk with. He has an interesting take on the world, partly as he sees it through a different lens and different places than me and of course partly because he is living in Montana (Ian- we will see if the sperm whales do indeed create the Amero and rule the world! :)). He truly was a soulful guy with a lot of interesting perspectives and an invaluable sense of humor... when he was not boomeranging around the boat.

I do have to tell one Ian story that most of you will not fully understand, but my little brother Franklin, and Cathy and James, and perhaps my oldest brother Mark and possible even my other older brother Michael (one of the family originators of wet willys) will fall off their chairs laughing and so please bear with me as I tell them the story. You may find it funny too, but I fear most will find it a bit odd. My mother will be shaking her head at me on this one. But this one is too good for them to pass up telling. Ian will cringe too I am sure.

Anyway, Johnny and Ian bunked together during Ian's time with us. Johnny was asleep this morning as Ian prepared to leave and I asked him if he had said goodbye to Johnny. He said no, but he was headed down to give him a wet-willy as a goodbye (a wet willy if you don't know is when someone sticks a wet finger in your ear). It is indeed gross, but it is something older brothers routinely do to torment younger ones (hence why my older brothers may laugh too). I cringed when I heard this plan because there has been this family tradition of wet-willy giving when the kids were younger that my little brother Franklin... well... "optimized"... the prank when my three children taught it to him (hence the reason Franklin is now laughing as he reads this note). The kids quickly picked up on this optimization such that I think the four of them (Franklin, James, Johnny & Cathy) may be more skilled at this simple prank than anyone in the world. So, I now feared the worst - that Johnny had delivered one of these Franklinesque wet-willys to Ian and now Ian was out for revenge (Franklin having read this note this far I assure you is rolling on the floor laughing). I mean can you imagine this prank, being played out now of all times... I was prepared to be sufficiently embarrassed and apologetic.

But no, (big sigh of relief), Ian said in fact Johnny had not done so and not even mentioned the family tradition to him. It was simply Ian's idea to play the prank on Johnny! Phew, I thought the kid really has grown up. Instantaneously, I found myself relieved and then amazed at the coincidence with Ian again as I must say few, few, few guests would have considered such a prank and commented on it as they prepared to depart. So... I told Ian to go ahead as I now figured he had earned the opportunity to learn of Johnny's odd skill (one usually retaliates with these) and allow Ian to then enjoy this tradition. But alas, he did not as I of course did not reveal the family tradition nor

that Johnny had Franklin's optimization of the prank and Ian was only going to push the fun so far. But it did make Sandy and I chuckle and eventually Ian will be initiated.

Sorry, I just had to digress there for a bit.

So 4 people got off and none on as this stop was just a simple drop off and reprovision. Sandy and Rick went for provisions and learned in town that there were no groceries for 30 or more miles (turned out to be about 50 miles). Some local guy working for the oil company told them to take his truck and off they went looking for supplies. They called me from the truck because they still had not found anything and the roads were quite desolate. I looked up a grocery on the iPhone and they still had a long way to go. But ultimately they found the store, got the food and came back. The guy told them anytime they needed to borrow it to just take it. There are elements of southern hospitality that are simply remarkable.

After reprovisioning, we spent some time working on the boat. In particular, we rearranged the salon (i.e. our living room) to better suit our needs. For one, we screwed the small bench to the floor- the one Greer and Johnny were sledding on in rough seas- so that it sits opposite the table (no more sledding). With the boat full, it just seemed like too much of a hazard to me. We also moved the long bench down and back to create more seats. Then we rearranged the stuff underneath it so that folks can sit at the workbench in the salon and use their computers with their legs underneath. I am there now. This work led to lots of rearranging and organization, but the salon has a much less congested feel to it.

So to reset we have Captain Bob, First Mate Ian, Engineer Rick, Cook Sandy (probably the only time I get away with that one), Johnny, Matt , Carolyne and me. That makes 5 monkeys, Sandy, Bob and Ian.

Tonight the boat is quiet and as relaxed as it has ever been. Certainly, part of it is the shift from 12 people on board to 8, part of it is the rearranged space, but I think part of it is also everyone's realization that its back to the serious work of understanding this Gulf crisis and what it means to the whales and to us and figuring out ways to prevent it from happening again.

John