

Day 64-70: September 18-24, 2010

Back to sea! Our port call in Biloxi lasted far too long. We were pinned in because of wind and waves- they were simply too rough to go out and work in, but now they are dying down so we are back at it again. Sorry, I did not write in port, but I had a lot of writing to do that occupied a lot of my time and attention. I did not mean to worry you and thanks to those who checked in to make sure we were okay.

Biloxi was a curious town. Lots of casinos, which most of us were not interested in. Not much else. It is a city that was hard hit by hurricane Katrina. In fact, the land side of the dock we were at was 35 feet underwater then. There were lots of places where there had been a house, but the owners could not afford to rebuild and have not returned. Many of them were simply depressions in the grass where a house had stood, marked by a lonely mailbox still standing. Weird to see the mailbox there but the house gone. Weird to see so many of these missing houses dotting the landscape. Makes you realize that for us in Maine, we really do not have a feel for how bad Katrina was.

We spent two days with the other USM (University of Southern Mississippi) at their Gulf Coast Marine Laboratory. Extremely friendly and nice group of people working there. All of them tied in some way with near shore Gulf research. They have a remarkably impressive marine aquaculture facility (aquaculture is the practice of 'farming' fish) as well as some nice aquatic toxicology facilities. They also have some boats for doing research at sea. We had lots of tours and I gave my first seminar on the Voyage itself. I felt like it went pretty well.

They, too, were hard hit by Katrina. A 35,000 square foot research facility was lost along with 50% of their toxicology building and several buildings along their docks. We found a lot of common ground and interest and I am hopeful to build some exchange programs with them. I also continue to push the concept of "marine health" as a key future field and an intersection of public health and marine science where one studies the health of the ocean and life in it and how that impacts people. With some of their current programs, we might be able to build a pilot program at our USM or perhaps jointly between the two.

We also added more research techniques. Southern Miss has a parasitologist who is very interested in marine bugs. So we will collect whatever parasites we find in worms and we will attempt to collect dolphin blows so he can see what bugs are in those too. They also have a good toxicologist working on oil and dispersants in fish and crabs and on nanotoxicology so lots for he and I to talk about.

But now we are back at sea and we have a full boat! This leg will focus on the Bryde's whales again and we will make a slow deliberate voyage between here and St. Petersburg, Florida. We expect to spend 10-12 days sailing what would take 3-4 days if we just went straight there, combing the waters for this small group of shy whales. The watches will be mostly visual, but some scientists at Scripps believe these whales do

vocalize in the high and low ranges so we will try acoustics too. We had a graduate student on from Scripps to help us work through the acoustic part.

So let me set the stage for this leg. On board we have: Myself, Captain Bob, First Mate Ian, Sandy, Johnny and Matt. You will remember all of us of course. Our new crew are: Bailey who replaces Rick as Ocean Alliance crew; Tania who is a graduate student in my laboratory focusing on sperm whales (she may stay on longer to see them); Dr. Bob Kuech who is a Professor with me at USM and his work focuses on teaching science teachers how to best teach science; Monique who is a USM undergraduate majoring in Environmental Science; Kait who is a graduate student at Scripps, and Steve who is a freelance environmental writer for the Chicago Tribune and whose stepmother is an English Professor at our USM.

There again is a nice chemistry in this group. All are eager to get to sea and get to work. All have an excellent sense of humor. Thus, I am expecting a great trip and hopeful for whales.

Hope all is well with you.

John