

Johnny Wise's Reflections for Leg 2

My name is John Wise, Jr. I am an undergraduate student in the Wise Laboratory at the University of Southern Maine in Portland, Maine.

This leg I found much more frustrating than the last –primarily because we didn't see any whales. I'm sure anyone can understand why that is frustrating. However, I think I learned more this leg than I did on the first leg –or I just became more aware of what I've learned. Since Matt and I are on the boat for the whole voyage, he and I must know how to work everything regarding the science research and enough about sailing to help out the crew whenever we can. I guess this wasn't as apparent on the first leg, because everyone was still new, so it seemed much more balanced.

When Kellie got off in West Palm, we didn't notice much of an increase in work. When Matt got off for a week's vacation –I noticed an increase in my responsibilities. I was now the only one who really knew how to take water and krill samples, the only one in charge of the GPS, and the only one that was guaranteed to be able to go up on the mid-level platform for watches (though this might have been the case before Matt left anyway). While we were still in West Palm, I taught Greer how to do the water sampling – she would be the one to work with me on water and krill samples. Cathy gained another task – recording all day on the bow camera and boat cameras, then moving the files onto an external hard drive (a task that I picked up after she left). When Cathy got off the boat, Matt and I had to learn everything she was doing (an equivalent load to what we had), so we noticed the increase in our work load more abruptly.

Matt and I have a lot of tasks, and are busy most of the day (including our 2h whale watch shifts). It is actually a pretty good feeling to be in charge of everything. We haven't encountered many problems (much thanks to Chris Gianios setting up a user-friendly data logging system), and the few problems that have arisen have provided us with puzzles to solve – usually as a team. It also feels really good to be know what needs to be done when we dock, and to be able to do it right without being told how or when to do it (I'm sure it's as good of a feeling for Dr. Wise as it is for Matt and I).

This last leg is also a reminder that there are more elements to the voyage than what come to mind when you're just starting out. In addition to understanding what your role is on the boat and how to work all the equipment, there's an unwritten physical and mental challenge. We are looking for whales at least 8 hours a day (standing up for most of it) in the middle of the open ocean underneath a hot sun with no shade. We take 2 hour shifts, during which we are constantly battling the rocking and rolling of the boat on the waves. After the two hour shifts a nap is usually needed – we typically only have an hour off in between, leaving little time to do anything other than nap and get ready for the next watch. This also gets into a mental challenge – working sunrise to sunset, and then some more time to take sound recordings, log data, upload photos, and download videos. Sunrise is 6:30am, and we usually finish everything else by 9pm – with not much of a break in between. The ocean also greatly challenges our patience.

We look for whales 8 hours a day, and can go for days without seeing whales (and dolphins, which are a good relief).

Despite the frustrations from the last leg, we are not in the least disheartened. While we were docked, we received two more hydrophones – a new array to replace our broken one, and another hydrophone that we will rig with a funnel to use as a directional hydrophone. We could not hear any whales on the last leg, which I would like to think is part of the reason we weren't able to see any – we didn't know where to look! Also, Matt has gotten better sea legs since (one of the things we had to purchase in port) – so he and I are much more confident with his ability to do watches when other people are too seasick to climb up the mast.

On a more personal note – I am saddened to see my kid sister depart our company. It was a truly amazing experience to share with her – in the trials and tribulations at sea. This will be something we both look back on and talk about when we're too old to do anything else. Whether it's watching the dolphins ride the bow, reflecting on how hardy we became, melting in the sun, laughing about our father's sea legs (imagine a bowling ball with legs), the sorrow and frustration of losing flasks, or the rejoice of seeing the cells growing – I'm sure we will fantasize our children and grandchildren with all our stories. She will return to Maine a stronger person – both physically and mentally. I made sure to challenge her every time she, Matt, and I did a work out on the boat. I understand that, despite the limited space on the boat, she returned to her soccer team in better fitness than anyone else on the team. Go Shorty! I only wish I was home to cheer for her from the sideline or brag to her about how many more goals I score on the men's team – this chapter will have to wait yet another year.

Johnny