

## Johnny Wise's Reflections for Leg 3

**Days 33-37 – Wednesday-Saturday, August 18-21, 2010 – Docked in Mobile, AL**

We docked in Mobile around 12:30am on Wednesday. After we finished docking, 6 of us set out to find a place to get some food and drinks – myself, Greer, Rick, Kyle, and Capt Bob. We were directed to a bar/pizza joint called Hop Jacks. Very large selection of beer, good pizza, and AMAZING fries!

Later on Wednesday Ryan, Cathy, and Greer parted our company and headed for home. Juli Martino, and Rob Leighton arrived a few hours later to take their place. With them, they brought us our crew voyage shirts! (and my school books...)

Thursday the local Fox news did a story on us, which Matt and I were featured. I described to them what happens when we find whales and how we biopsy them – Matt gave them a tour of the lab, and described how we grow the cells. Dr. Wise talked about the mission and the importance of the voyage. I have not seen the clip (I haven't seen any of them over the last few months), but it was described to me.

For dinner Matt, Dr. Wise, and I went to the Club Lounge at Dr. Wise's hotel. There were four other men talking and joking when we arrived. After serving ourselves and sitting down one of them (who happened to be from Cape Cod) spoke up, "Hey, you guys were on the news! How's your voyage going?" This started a 2 hour discussion about the voyage, the oil crisis, and where our nation is headed. Matt and I basked in our celebrity status briefly (it didn't take them long to start teasing us and joking with us). It was a very interesting experience – the club lounge has a high class feel to it, and the men we were talking to were obviously comfortably wealthy. But the men were also very interested in our voyage and our opinions (mostly Dr. Wise's) about the oil crisis and affected fisheries.

And again, later that evening Matt, Rob, and I went to Hop Jacks for some drinks and fries (Rick and Dr. Wise met us later) – all wearing our orange crew polos. While we were there, twice a few people asked us what we were doing (because it is rather unusual to see three guys wearing the same shirt). One of the guys we talked to said he was a crew member on a boat that was mapping where they were seeing sperm whales – with GPS coordinates and everything! At this moment, I was very glad that I had grabbed my business cards when I grabbed my wallet – you never know who you're going to talk to when discussing the voyage. I gladly gave him one of my business cards, I hope to hear from him soon with the website his boat is working on with the maps!

Friday morning, Quizno's came by to deliver a giant cardboard check for \$20,000 to our voyage. At the same time, a local newspaper reporter came by. We showed them the boat, the lab, and explained our mission and voyage. I must say I was very impressed by all the questions George (from Quizno's) had – and how appropriate they all were. At one point I asked him if he was a reporter in a previous life, because for every

answer to his question he would follow up with another couple of questions. The conversation went back and forth like this for almost an hour. At the end, we took a photo with the check and a Quizno's flag – then dug into the lunch Quizno's brought us. After lunch they drove Rick to the nearest West Marine to get some supplies. We were very thankful for their southern hospitality.

In the afternoon Capt Bob, Rick, Matt, and I busied ourselves with a list of tasks that needed to be taken care of on the boat; Kyle went grocery shopping; and Rob, and Juli toured Mobile. Dr. Wise was in his hotel room doing his USM job. Matt and I were beginning to wonder what happened to our anticipated relaxation while in port – we hadn't gotten much of it yet.

For the evening Matt, Dr. Wise and I went out to dinner with one of Dr. Wise's colleagues and his family. After giving them a tour of the boat we piled in their car and drove to a shack called "The Brick Pit." We were told it's the best BBQ in Alabama (and it was pretty good). Along the way back home, Matt and I kept remembering tasks that we had forgotten to do (e.g. secure the bottles in the fridge, buy another ascender...) and found ourselves again very busy upon returning to the boat – until 9:30pm. Matt was working on securing the flasks, and I had completed all that I could on my own – so I called Rob to get some drinks. To end the days of port on a relaxing note, we bought a 12pack of Yuengling and sat by the pool discussing old soccer days, the voyage, future plans, and other nonsense. I was very happy to be able to sit back and relax for a few hours with a good friend.

On Saturday Dr. Wise, Matt and I (you might notice a trend) got a cab to Radioshack to purchase some equipment for the hydrophones. On the way back, we were dropped off at a grocery store a mile from the boat. You see, it was brought up at our boat meeting that we had run out of fruit in the first 3 days of the last leg – so fruit was going to be rationed for this leg. We were all to have one banana and one apple each day. Kyle had purchased 25 bananas and 35 apples – so the three of us had to purchase a bunch more apples and bananas. Matt and I each carried 20lbs of fruit back to the boat to ensure that we would have our fruit for the voyage. We enjoyed teasing each other looking like monkeys carrying so much fruit. A few hours later we pushed off from the dock, and are headed back out to the ocean!

**I dub this day, Day 37 of our voyage, Sunday, August 22, 2010 officially "Long Barfing Day".**

It wasn't long before I realized that today was going to be the most difficult of the voyage thus far -- two of the three new students on board were leaning over the side, feeding the fishes their breakfast. The third was sea sick, and uncomfortable with heights, so she wouldn't be doing any watches from the mid-level platform anyway. Halfway through the day, Matt and I agreed we would do 2 hr shifts, relieving each other (Rob tried, but it was too much for the first day). After my first two hours, Matt was nowhere to

be found -- he had gotten up in the middle of the night with Dr. Wise to put out the array, so I assumed he had overslept. When I got down (how long, you will learn later), I learned he had overslept, but had also become too seasick to relieve me. I doubt I will ever forget this day...

### **Day 38 -- Monday, August 23, 2010 -- Relief Day**

I'm happy to report that no one got sick today. And for good reason -- we had some VERY calm water. In addition to that happy news, I'd also like to report that we biopsied two whales! Our first two sperm whales!

Here's how it went for me...I woke up wicker sore from my 5hrs in the mid-level platform, wishing I didn't have to return so soon. Not 5 min after I woke up, I was getting ready for my breakfast when someone came down to the galley and told me there were two whales in front of us (imagine my relief!). Rick was asleep -- I tried waking him up, but didn't have the energy yet, so I left it to Dr. Wise. Meanwhile, I prepped the crossbows and started for the whale boom. Our first take on the whale was no good -- the deer stand on the end of the whale boom was crooked, and I was having difficulty staying in it. On the second take, I accepted the discomfort and was ready for a perfect biopsy. (Note: the whale boom is a 30ft pole with handrails suspended above it, that sticks off the starboard bow). Being on the whale boom, I am able to get 30ft closer to the whale without the whale being discomforted. Thus, I was less than 20 ft from the whale when I took my biopsy, and about 3-4 ft above the water.

Barely an hour later, I was in the mid-level platform, reported a whale blow. By the time I was down, Rick was on the whale boom lining up for a biopsy. He had a successful biopsy before I could even pick up my crossbow as a backup. Dr. Wise had just emerged from finishing up processing the first sample in the lab, and returned shortly after with the second. I set out with Juli -- and Matt came back -- to collect water samples.

We resumed the watches, very hot. The other science team members were feeling uncomfortable about watches in the mid-level platform, leaving it to myself and Matt. We sorted it out, and agreed to do our 2 h watches from the crow's nest -- as it was incredibly calm. During the lunch hour, a rain shower arrived -- which I enjoyed thoroughly. The rest of the day was rather uneventful, lots of watches. We also recovered some odd items -- a red ball fender, some styrofoam lids, and an unused oil boom.

I must say, watching the sunset from the crow's nest on calm water that looks like glass -- is a VERY remarkable feeling. As I was sitting there, lounging with one foot dangling over the side, it occurred to me that one day I will be very sad to be leaving the boat -- but not today!! I felt very centered, like a Zen master, as I watched the sun set behind some clouds.

Today ended on a positive note for all of us -- those of us who've been on the whole time, it was a break in the last month of not seeing any whales. Those of us who just started, it was a great start!

### **Day 39 – Tuesday, August 24, 2010 – Hot Sun Day**

Up before dawn, at 4:45am to start taking some recordings on the hydrophone – Capt Bob is on the helm, and Rick is asleep at the aft table (where I work). I'm much too tired to work out, so I start the recording and lay back to admire the stars. Capt Bob joins me for a bit, and points out Jupiter shining brightly above us – I point out that it's also reflecting in the water below us. The water is still incredibly calm, and with the generator off, it's very very quiet. On top of getting up this early for recordings, I'm also first on watch – so I went from recordings to being in the crow's nest for the first two hours of daylight. At the end of my first watch, we pulled up to a tuna feeding frenzy with some sharks as special guests. Tuna jumping everywhere, and shark fins poking out every now and then (I believe the sharks and tuna were preying on the same thing). Halfway down, on the mid-level platform I met up with Matt. "Hey brown monkey, find me a whale," I said sleepily, "But let me nap first."

Matt held to his promise – ten minutes after I had dozed off, someone was yelling "Whales!" down the hall. So Rick and I got up – I went out on the boom, Rick on the bowsprit. Capt Bob made a perfect approach, I took my shot and was stunned at how funny my arrow had come off the crossbow and landed a few feet short of its mark. Thankfully Rick was also aiming, and backed me up with a perfect biopsy – while I was still trying to process what had gone wrong with my attempt. We retrieved the arrow, and Matt went to the lab with Dr. Wise to start processing the sample. An hour later, Dr. Wise told us to come down from our posts. I went back to bed, still tired from getting up so early.

This time I didn't get ten minutes of sleep – after rolling around for awhile trying to doze off, I again heard Dr. Wise yelling, "Johnny! Get up here quick!" Before he finished his sentence I was out of bed, standing next to him in the salon, putting on my life vest – Rick was walking up the deck to his post, handed me my crossbow, and I got in my seat on the whale boom with the whale less than 50 yards away! As we pulled up next to the whale, someone insisted it was the same whale we had just biopsied, so I Rick and I held our shots – we are supposed to do our best not to biopsy the same whale twice. If we do, no big deal – but we are supposed to give our best effort. This time Rick and I remained at our posts for the next 5 hours. We tracked whale after whale, pulling alongside the same one several times – until I was at last able to redeem myself for the frustrating miss earlier. Then we tracked more and more whales, sometimes not getting anywhere near them to take a biopsy. At one point, Dr. Wise and Matt had just finished processing a sample, when Rob brought them a freshly acquired sample. While they were processing this one, they heard they boat engine rev up as we sped off to another couple of whales – unfortunately (for us, maybe not them) we didn't reach them in time.

In the end, Rick and I biopsied two whales each, and we tracked at least 6 different whales – many times they would dive before we were anywhere near them.

I'd like to take a moment to point out that Rick and I were sitting in the hot, intense sun this entire time, with no shade around us. To relieve us, Rob dutifully brought us snacks and water throughout the 5 hours – in other words, he kept us alive. I swear he must've walked out on the whale boom at least a dozen times – bringing me a full water bottle, a snack, or new arrows. Dr. Wise tried once to bring me a banana, but halfway out decided he was too uncomfortable walking the entire way. When he returned to the boat, we reflected on the idea of eating a banana on the whale boom – didn't seem like a great idea. So, he sent Rob out with an apple for me. I was very grateful for Rob's determination to keep us freshly stocked as much as possible.

Sitting out on the whale boom is not any more comfortable than sitting on the bowsprit – and it feels less secure. But after sitting on it for 5 consecutive hours, I feel very much at ease sitting on it. I am able to get a lot closer to the whale than I would from the boat, giving me a better chance of a successful biopsy, and giving me a much closer look at the whale – sometimes a little too close for comfort. There was one time when we biopsied a pair of whales, and afterwards they both swam under me. When they were right under me, they decided to dive – at which point I was nervous I was about to get slapped with a tail. The whale boom only sits a few feet above the water, so this isn't entirely farfetched of an idea.

We ended the day much the same as yesterday – Dr. Wise, Matt, and I sitting on the bowsprit, each of us with a frozen banana in hand, enjoying the sunset on the starboard side and the moon rise on the port side. This has become known as our monkey brethren, and we constantly tease each other about it. Shortly after we got settled on the bowsprit, Rick and Rob joined us – with frozen bananas in their hands! I guess they recognized the value in watching the sunset with some good friends (and some good bananas), and decided there was only one way to join us.

#### **Day 40 – Wednesday, August 25, 2010 – Quiet Day**

Not much exciting today. We are past the Mississippi delta, so the water is returning to the beautiful blue color that we love! It's been an ugly green the last few days. The water is also not like glass anymore, making it slightly more difficult to find whales. When the water is like glass, we can easily see the whale's back, dorsal fin, and blow from a couple miles away – when it's not we can usually only see their blow. Matt and I continued our 2h watches in the crow's nest, but stuck with the mid-level platform towards the end of the day, because the water was getting rougher. No whales today.

The most exciting part of the day for me was the crossover between mine and Matt's last shifts of the day. We both agreed we had no chance of seeing anything (nothing had been heard on the array all day either), so we decided to have a little fun. We started by sitting on the railing, and swinging back and forth with the waves (kind of like on a swing). This we found to be a serious abs workout after awhile. Then we switched to standing on either side of the crossbeams, outside of the mid-level platform (similar to the scene in 'Pirate Radio' when they jump off the boat, or in 'Pirates of the Caribbean' when Jack Sparrow and Davy Jones are sword fighting above the sails. We challenged each other – first one to fall off buys the other a root beer float...the other then has to rescue the one who falls off. Neither of us fell, so we called it a draw. At one point, a good groove came on my iPod (which I was listening to this whole time) so I started dancing. Yep, I was getting my groove on while standing on the crossbeam. Matt seeing this, proceeded to standing on one foot, not wanting to be one-upped by me. We had a blast being monkeys.

#### **Day 41 – Thursday, August 26, 2010 – Rainbow Day**

Early shifts for me again. Rob and Juli were on the pilot house. My first shift was uneventful – except for the 6 or 7 rainbows that I saw. Including one that was a full circle – it arced high above the boat, and down about 5 or 10 ft off the port side. Doing some quick research about rainbows, I realize that the rainbow circle wasn't just my imagination – it is in fact possible. In order to see a rainbow, there has to be water droplets in the sky (which everyone knows) and the sun has to be behind you (or on the opposite side of the sky). Since there was rain and mist (being blown off the ocean by the wind), I was given the spectacular sight of my first rainbow circle. I was also noticing the importance of having the right angle between the sun and rain in order to see the rainbow – some rainbows seemed to land in the ocean a couple hundred yards in front of us, but as we got closer they would disappear. Now that I've done a little bit of research, I'll be keeping my eye out for my first moonbow and fogbow (which I also heard about from a crew member on the Arctic Sunrise).

During my second shift, Rob decided he wanted to give it a try, and did. I was delighted to have him join me, and impressed by how much he had improved since his first day (he was also constantly eating ginger, keeping himself hydrated, using sea bands, and chewable Dramamine). The weather was turning lousy on and off – cold wind and rain coming and going. By the time Rob got up, I was standing outside of the mid-level platform on the crossbeam (as Matt and I had done yesterday). Rob decided to give it a try, and took the spot where Matt did before. He quickly found himself enjoying it as much as I was. Then we took it an extra step further (pun intended), we stepped out to the end of the crossbeam and settled ourselves between the two cables that held the two crossbeams up – any further would be a jump off. We remained here for the rest of the time, until I heard on the radio, "Alright guys, everybody in. Weather's about to get worse." I relayed the message to Juli, who was on the pilot house (without a radio) and to Rob. Just as Rob and I were getting back in the mid-level platform and gathering our

stuff to climb down, someone turned the giant shower in the sky on super soak, and the rain picked up ten-fold. When we got back into the inside of the boat, we looked like we had fallen in – Juli got in looking like she was in a light sprinkle. Watches were cancelled for the rest of the day, and we were told we were headed to Bayou La Batre, AL to dock and wait out the storm. Matt and I groaned.

Johnny