

Beaufort Gyre Exploration Project: Dispatch 22: Twenty-Four II - Another Day in Paradise

Jeffrey Charters
October 6, 2010

Tuesday October 5, 2010

20:46: Temperature is currently sitting somewhere around -9°C and us daywatch scientists are doing our second rosette cast of the evening. The first was just a short jaunt to 1000m to collect some water to be analysed for an isotope of cesium in order to trace water mass movement through the Arctic Ocean. Our spool of wire is currently in the midst of unwinding about 3800m of wire to the bottom of the Canada Basin, travelling at about 60 m/min. This translates to 3.6 km/h (or 2.25 mph), taking just over an hour to the bottom and over another hour back up.

21:04: I've realized that when you're stuck on a vessel hundreds of miles from anywhere, you're never really alone. I'm writing this on an upper deck, in the shack where we store the rosette when not in use. In the middle of trying to write a bit, a few other scientists came along to pay a visit. As a result, I had to pull up my webcam and get a picture along with them and a deckhand we pulled away just for the occasion. Aside from one's own cabin, there is always somebody around, for better or for worse. Usually it's for the better – scientists, officers and crew, everyone on board is good people. Sometimes it's for the worst, as anyone getting the cold or flu on board can tell you.

Wednesday October 6, 2010

00:55: Sampling (most of) the last rosette went smoothly (before handing over the last bit to the night watch) and after having a meet-and-eat in the mess with some co-workers, I head back down on the main deck while the ship is lurching through the ice. I locked the dresser drawers to make sure I won't be awoken again by one of them sliding open and back shut if the ship happens to hit a big "marshmallow" in the middle of the night and go careening off course. Anyway, tonight it has been confirmed that tomorrow I get to head back out on the ice to help install an ice mass-balance buoy. Excitement! We get a lot of our information from a whiteboard outside the main lab on the ship, and it's telling me I need to be ready to be in the helicopter by 10 am, so I'll cut this short, go have a shower and be lolled to sleep by the jerking motion of the ship and the sound of tons of ice grinding against metal. I love icebreaking.

[Note: For the sake of journalistic integrity, it needs to be said that the ice ops for October 6, 2010 were postponed due to a lack of suitable ice floes. As a result, the day was occupied mainly with boring stuff like working on puzzles, entering data and eating ice cream from the bottomless freezer. So we'll skip this 24 hours in order to keep the duration of this entire posting to 24 hours, though the actually time elapsed will be much more. Sorry.]

Thursday October 7, 2010

11:20: During our morning science meeting, we could hear deckhands walking around above us, given away by the crunching of the snow beneath their feet. Being from a climate which occasionally experience frigid temperatures, I could tell that this was a "really cold" sounding crunch. This hunch was confirmed by Mike Dempsey, who said that earlier in the morning the temperature had fallen from -4°C to -18°C over the span of several hours as we proceeded north into an arctic air mass. The ship's helicopter was off on a reconnaissance mission to try to find an ice floe so we could at least get an ice-tethered profiler (ITP) out and working, while I sit in front of my computer playing with data and relaxing a bit.

12:30: Chief scientist Bill Williams enters the board room looking a little bit edgy. "Jeff, can you get ready and get to the helicopter hangar, this is the big one." My day has suddenly gone from warm and snug to frigid and epic with a single sentence. Awesome! Thankfully I've invested in some really warm gear, this should be a good test.

18:55: Well, we're back. So far as I can tell, the mission on the ice was a success. Mike and I set up an ice mass-balance buoy, the Woods Hole guys set up an ITP and a flux buoy and Peter and Carlton were finally able to launch their O-Buoy. The O-Buoy measures a number of atmospheric parameters, another dispatch deals with this in-depth. A number of other scientists went out on the ice to determine ice depths along transects, taking core samples along the way to determine various characteristics of that particular ice floe. The freezing temperatures threatened to frostbite fingers needed to work with small nuts and bolts, but warm gear and a few heat packs made sure nobody got colder than necessary. We're all back on board now, have had some warm food and are now looking forward to hearing whether all those instruments are transmitting data via satellite back to head offices way back down south.

20:40: A scientist's work seems to never really finish on board. A CTD cast was underway as we were flying back to the ship from the ice, and so I threw my Mustang floater suit on, grabbed a harness and a hot chocolate and head back to the upper deck to help out. Everything is in order, the rosette is on its way back to the surface and we've got some more sampling to do. So I'll sign off, look forward to some before-bed snacks and that constant grinding sound of the ship cracking through ice while we fall asleep.

Last updated: September 30, 2014

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Mail: Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, 266 Woods Hole Road, Woods Hole, MA 02543, USA.
E-Contact: info@whoi.edu; press relations: media@whoi.edu, tel. (508) 457-2000
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