

Beaufort Gyre Exploration Project: Dispatch 18: The In-Between Time...

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Yesterday we had our furthest-west achievement and recovered the last mooring along the Northwind Ridge (77°N, 170°W). Since then we've spent quite some time in transit on our way back into deep waters. During our last few days in the northwest corner of the Canada Basin we've experienced thicker and more continuous sea ice conditions, slowing our progress but giving some beautiful seascapes. It has been a nice change to see so much more ice and much less fog. We've also had some bear visitors to the ship! This morning a mother bear and her two cubs came within view of the ship around ~78°N, ~160°W. Then later this afternoon we saw a large bear, likely male, out on his own lumbering through the ridges (~78°N, ~155°W). It is amazing to think these bears can survive all the way out here.

A slower sailing pace through the thicker, more continuous sea ice has given both the scientists and crew a bit of extra downtime. To keep busy during these "in-between" periods, numerous strategies have been developed to keep things interesting on board. Ship-wide activities, such as the cribbage and darts tournaments, have been on-going throughout the last two weeks. The daily bingo draw is now in its 4th day and the first winner (with 4 corners) has claimed his prize. Another favorite activity is the one or more jigsaw puzzles on constant rotation in the science boardroom area. Passersby can spend a few minutes (or a few hours) contributing to the puzzle's completion. The extra time also allows for a chance to catch up on data entry/analyses, visit the ship's well equipped gym, or find a spot to relax with a good book. Once we get back into the deep basin our sampling schedule ramps up again, so it's nice to take advantage of this in-between downtime while it lasts.

Tomorrow night we will be sampling at our furthest north station (79°N), a milestone to commemorate with our annual styrofoam-cup-shrinking-cast! Many people have spent part of the day today drawing on styrofoam coffee cups that will be sent down, along with the CTD-Rosette, to 3825 m in the deep Canada Basin. At this depth, the pressure from the water above will compress the styrofoam cups, and all their elaborate decorations, down to almost thimble-size. More about this tomorrow...

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