

Beaufort Gyre Exploration Project: Dispatch 28: Wrapping Up

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August 29, 2013

As we approach the end of our cruise, we're also steaming through the heaviest ice pack yet. Last night, with all five engines running, we had to go off course to steer around impassable ridges. I woke a few times to the jostle and jolt of the ship as the ice tossed us back and forth. It feels nothing like the rhythmic rolling of waves in the ocean. Ice causes the ship to move unpredictably, in jerks and sways. It's marvelous. Sometimes we feel the bow ride up on a ridge and come to a stop. Then, slowly, we back up and come at the ice again. Usually the first pass weakens the ice enough that we crack through on the second pass. Sometimes not, and we find a different, thinner route.

Since completing our last ice station, we've entered the final phase of the cruise: compiling data, writing reports, dismounting instruments, packing, and preparing to go home. Some members of the science party are nearly packed and ready to go; others, namely those working with the CTD casts, will continue sampling up until Friday night, leaving just two days to wrap up and pack up.

While standing in the frigid cold yesterday morning for an xctd deployment, I asked Ogi if he would miss the Arctic. "I miss... Japanese rice," he said. Others look forward to returning to their families, running on solid ground, and sleeping without the sounds of ice crushing under the hull.

While there are plenty of things we do without on the ship, I'm still reluctant to leave. I've enjoyed the temporary freedom to focus intensely without the distractions of day-to-day life. For the last four weeks, we've had no commute, no daily news, limited email, no grocery shopping. In exchange, we've seen icescapes in misty mornings that look otherworldly, worked out on the frozen ocean where the only sound is from the wind, or the crunch of footsteps in snow, witnessed the dramatic change in sea ice after last year's record low extent, and shared the ship with a fantastic crew from the Canadian Coast Guard.

Last updated: October 19, 2015

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