

Irminger Sea; Oct 15 - Sidcot School

Questions from the students at Sidcot School

Hello again Dallas and all on board RV Knorr. Thank you for the answers to last week's questions, it was fascinating to hear about Ben's team's exploits and personally reassuring that he was not about to ascend on the end of one of the balloons!! The photographs have been particularly interesting and depict a vivid contrast to the hot sunny weather we have been having here in the UK. Our young virtual scientists here at Sidcot have remained somewhat fascinated by life on board and here are a few questions from different students (in bold, below).

Answers by Ben Harden

Thanks for your set of questions. We are all well board the Knorr, the winds have calmed for the day as we head north towards the Greenland coast, but as is becoming common we have news of a new storm that will come and shatter the peace on Friday- bad news for all but the radiosonde team; We're putting plans in place to up our activity!

Jade :- How bumpy is it at night and are you able to sleep?

Jade, in answer to your question, it can be very rough at any hour of the day, the largest waves we've seen were in excess of 10m meters, comparable to the height of the boat! When you're up and about in the boat, you will be walking extremely slantily to keep going in a straight line and you can't leave objects casually lying around as next time you look they are liable to be on the other side of the room. In the first storm, a large table in our lab even decided to go walkabouts. All scientific equipment is secured though, but we have had a few mug casualties! The rough weather makes sleeping a strange combination of slightly comical and extremely frustrating. During the rough periods I've found that I can only sleep on my back as in any other position I will be flipped over inadvertently by the rolls of the boat. Others I've heard put spare pillows under the mattress to sandwich themselves against the wall or sleep with a pillow for extra sleeping stability. Another nuisance is that there can be frequent loud noises as objects in the ship or indeed your room shift around. My clock flew off the wall and came skidding over towards my bed a few nights ago. It now lives in a drawer.

Marcus and Imogen both would like to know if everyone is getting on all right or have there been any disagreements?

Marcus and Imogen, everyone appears (at least on the surface) to be getting on well, but it's a long cruise so I don't know how things will become by the final week! There is a good, friendly group dynamic. Small disagreements are inevitable, but everyone is very courteous and aware that we have to spend a lot of time with one another so they are dealt with in a very decent manner. The good thing about the boat is that there is plenty of space to "escape" from other people if you need to. There's a lounge with a wide screen TV and a vast selection of films to watch; The library has plenty of books and is generally a quiet place to go and sit. There's even a gym if you're brave enough to try using the running machine! Almost everyone has their own cabin so if needs must you can always retreat there.

Back to the subject of food!!.... close to many youngsters hearts! Two students are curious as to whether you sit down to eat at set times or do you snack throughout the day?

In answer to your question about food, I understand entirely, it is a subject close to my heart too as I'm sure Mrs Harden can verify! There are set meal times: breakfast runs from 7:30 til 8:15, lunch from 11:30 til 12:15 and dinner between 5:00 and 5:45. Most people, if awake, attend these meals and they are generally a good time for everyone to socialise. As people are working around the clock there are also snacks provided between meals and overnight, often in the form of some baked goods, the ability of the ship's chef's to bake on the high seas continues to defy belief! You can also help yourself to bread, jam, ham, cheese and other sandwich ingredients along with coffee and a huge selection of teas. There is always something to munch on and this keeps everyone happy.

Alice is wondering how well the balloon crew are coping with the early morning starts? How many hours ahead or behind the UK are you?

Alice, we have four people launching balloons with each launch requiring two of us to be there. When we are at our maximum capacity (launching four times a day) we each attend to two launches. All the radiosonde team also work six hour shifts on a piece of equipment called the CTD. This measures vertical profiles of the ocean, like a reverse radiosonde, only with the CTD we can lower it on a long cable and return it to the surface so don't lose it every time! These shifts are timed to end in coincidence with a balloon launch so in general nobody has to get up especially for a launch. That said, poor Ian has to get up at 4:30am for the 6am launch just to go back to bed before the start of his CTD shift at 10am! My balloon launches are midday and 6pm, but I have to be awake at 4am for my CTD shift. It can be very difficult getting up and getting alert for this, but in general people are coping with the odd hours as well as can be expected. We are currently on GMT here which means we are currently 1 hour behind you, unless you have switched from BST (I'm sure that happens at some point in October) in which case we'll be in the same time band.

Just how big are the icebergs in the pictures? You said they were as big as office blocks....how many storeys high?

The icebergs that we saw a few days ago were truly massive. They ranged in size but many were easily the height of the ship (about 10meters) with some exceeding even this lofty height. I'd say as a rough estimate that the largest bergs we saw was about 20-30 meters tall. Have a think about how high this would be in reality, I guess about 10 storeys high!- it's incredible to think that even towering this high out of the water, most of it is still underwater!

How are the results from the experiments going to be analysed ? Does each university represented have access to all the data?

The data collected on the cruise is part of a larger body of data that has been gathered in this area by various means over the last few years. Last year they brought the UK's atmospheric research jet out here to make measurements, some of which involved flying some 50 feet above the sea! All contributing institutions will get access to the data for analysis. In addition, the data being collected by the radiosondes is being sent to the Icelandic Met Office which is distributing it to institutions that produce weather models. This is to help them improve their predictions- I find this particularly exciting!

Have those Northern Lights put in an appearance yet?

Unfortunately, I missed the one appearance of the northern lights, but [Dan Torres got a few photos](#). It appears that this part of the world is perpetually cloudy, but we remain hopeful for another clear night.

.....we don't have as many questions this week partly because you have told us so much on the daily journals and the other schools have covered some of the other topics. With our best wishes to you all -- Sally Harden and the students from Sidcot School UK

I hope that has answered your questions, I look forward to hearing from you again next week. Until then, thank you for following our exploits online and good luck thinking up some more questions!

Farewell from the sea.
Ben Harden

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