

Beaufort Gyre Exploration Project: Dispatch 29: Open Water

Chris Linder
August 29, 2005

I woke up to the screeching of my pager this morning. I fumbled for my watch: 3:45AM. Hmm... I had asked the bridge crew to notify me of any polar bear sightings; as we transit farther south and east, nearer to land, bears should be much more common. So at 3:45AM I found myself instantly awake, hoping that a trio of bears was frolicking in the midnight sun. In a few moments I was bundled up and tromping through a thin layer of sleety snow in the almost-darkness. Night science watchstanders Ryan North and Will Burt greeted me on the deck. "Nice sunrise, or set, but going fast." By the time I got to the helicopter landing deck, the hint of orange on the horizon was just being swallowed by a chilly fog. No bears, looks like it's back to bed.

When I ventured back on deck later that morning the fog had burned off and the sun was bright. The wind was the strongest we have experienced on the trip so far--it felt like I was sticking my head outside a car window driving down the highway--in winter. The wind shook the ice-covered lines above, causing finger-sized icicles to rain down on the decks below. Note to self: wear hard-hat when wandering around on deck today. After a quick spell admiring the sunlight on the ice, I popped into the wet lab to check on how the CTD crew was doing. About ten people filled the small room. The music was blasting, Mary Steel was somehow dancing and water sampling at the same time, and Nes Sutherland was melting glass bottles with a blowtorch. Obvious photo subject: Nes wielding the blowtorch.

Naturally, I was curious about what she was doing. Nes explained that she was sealing water samples into glass bottles called ampoules. This method prevents the samples from being contaminated by air on their way back to the lab at Institute of Ocean Sciences. She told me "while we primarily analyze the water samples for CFCs (read Dispatch 05 for more about CFCs) here at sea, we would like to explore the idea of bringing samples back home to analyze there. These samples will be a test case, to see if we can get the same results we are getting from our immediate at-sea analysis." The CTD team has been working around the clock to get water samples analyzed for our last few CTD stations. Then the onerous task of boxing up an entire laboratory will begin.

After lunch the fog made a reappearance, billowing across the decks. Determined nonetheless, I took some photos of the *Louis* breaking ice from the bow. The ice is getting more and more scarce as we enter the southern Beaufort Sea. We steam for ten, sometimes fifteen minutes without hitting any ice. Then, BOOM, we hit a big chunk of melting multi-year ice. Hugh Maclean spotted a lone piece of ice the size of a small house earlier today. The water is so clear that you can see the bottoms of the ice floes deep under water.

Since ice-watching conditions on deck weren't the best, I decided the bridge would be a better vantage point. The bridge, or pilothouse, is where the crew drives the ship. When I visited this evening, Dale Hiltz was steering the ship while Glen Watton was keeping a lookout for open water. First Mate Stephane Legault was choosing a course and setting the speed. The bridge has a huge array of windows, perfect for watching the Beaufort Sea go by while enjoying a hot cup of tea. Even though everyone on the *Louis* is ready to get back to our families back home, I'll never forget this view, of the ice gliding by, ghostlike in the fog.

Last updated: October 1, 2014



First-year ice crumples easily under the *Louis*' bow.



Nes Sutherland seals glass bottles of water samples with a propane torch.



Rick Krishfield programs the CABOS moored profiler for tomorrow's deployment.



Quartermaster Dale Hiltz navigates the *Louis* through the fog and ice.

All photos © Chris Linder, WHOI

Copyright ©2007 Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, All Rights Reserved.

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

Problems or questions about the site, please contact webdev@whoi.edu