

## Saturday, April 2, 2016 – Day 1 at Sea by Dr. Wise

I remain convinced that time at sea should be a regular requirement for people. There is something to being on a small boat with a small number of people trying to make a difference in the world. The sea relaxes you in a way that is hard to describe. You can feel the stresses and concerns of your daily world melt away as the only thing in front of you is a big blue expanse of water rocking you back and forth like a babe in a father's arms. At least that is how it feels to me.

I awoke early this morning as Johnny had sunrise watch and we share a bunk. The bed is big enough for both of us, but it does mean his alarm wakes me too. Besides, between his excitement to be back at sea and mine – there would be no sleeping in. We were treated to a beautiful ocean sunrise and the gentle rocking I mentioned. I gave him five minutes on watch and then radioed up asking what was taking so long to find whales. I'm sure we made an odd impression on the Captain, though I was vindicated in my comment when ten minutes after that Johnny has sighted our first two whales. See it always helps for a parent to nudge their child into success... Alas, those whales dove and we did not see them again. Johnny's watch ended without further sightings (and I did not harass him further). The next person on watch also spotted a whale, but again no luck getting near them.

The day settled into its routine. The weather was simply fantastic- sunny and warm with a cool breeze and calm seas – ideal whale sampling conditions. The team was cheery and engaged. Having travelled many miles and with much effort – it was enough on this first day to just be back at sea working.

Then in the afternoon whales were spotted again. Two fin whales cruising around and eating their prey. Fin whales are elegant whales. One of the fastest swimming great whales, they are also the second largest after the blue whales. However, from a behavioral standpoint, they are a challenge to biopsy. They are fast while our boat is slow. They also only show a very small percentage of their bodies above the water. We have biopsied them with some success before, but it takes patience and persistence and some luck. We set out after the whales in search of our first samples.

It wasn't too long before we settled into our approach. The whales would surface some distance from us. We head that way. The whales would dive before we even came

close. The whales would surface some distance from us and so on. It was clear they were paying us no mind, just searching for their food. Each time we would be a bit closer, but still a ways to go. After an hour we realized the whales were travelling in a slow giant circle. We started to head to where the next arc of the circle would be. Closer and closer we crept each time they surfaced for air until WOW! There they were right off our starboard side. Johnny aimed and released the arrow and the first attempt was true enough and after two hours of trying to catch-up, we had our first biopsy of the trip! The team was jubilant!

We would not see any more whales the rest of the day, though sunset was nearing by the time we were done with that first sample.

Nightfall brought us a spectacular starry sky and Mark, a constellation aficionado, treated us to stories and explanations of those we could see. Jupiter was in Leo and was stunningly bright. It was simply awesome.

I can feel my body releasing tension and sleep is pulling at my eyes even though it is still early for me. I can feel the waves gently rocking me and calling me to rest. I will stop here and write more tomorrow.

I have attached picture of the sunrise with the moon in the early morning sky, of the team at work as we near the whales, and of the remarkable coastline. We did not get a notable picture of the whales.

John







