

Day 54, Voyage 2, August 1, 2011

August already!

Captain Bob made an observation to me today. He thought you all would be interested to see a typical track line after a couple of days with whales and he suggested I write about it. Made sense to me as, while we are so used to it we don't think about it - it is an interesting observation.

Attached you will find a picture of 2 or 3 days of track lines for our recent efforts. The track lines are recorded automatically on our Northstar system. The solid red lines are our tracks. The black icon of a boat reflects our current position at anytime in a track. You might be wondering where it starts and where it ends and where it goes first. We don't know anymore, ourselves.

Our path looks like spaghetti and clearly shows that one does not simply drive straight to the whales or straight around the whales. It's more like random motion and spinning in circles. If one did not know any better, one might infer the crew are drunk and have no idea where we they are going. But, I assure you, we are a dry boat, no alcohol on board at all. I assure you that when we decided to go into port the crew drive straight as an arrow and fast (further proof we are a dry boat)! The track simply shows how you drive to find and sample whales.

The other aspect it may explain is why we are never sure exact dates for port arrival. The students coming on are always eager to know well ahead of time what date to come so they can try for cheap airfare. We never know with much accuracy far ahead for we never know where the whales will take us and how far the circles will go.

I remember one time last year I was scheduled to give a talk at a scientific meeting. I was aware of our inability to predict a schedule and had forewarned the organizers of my situation. Still, it was a talk I very much wanted to give and a meeting I very much wanted to attend. We worked diligently and carefully to stay within the hoped for schedule. The port I needed was east of us and we were on time. Then we caught up with some whales. We ended up following and sampling them for a couple of days and when we were done, we had ended up two days travel west of where we needed to be. I could not make that meeting and I had to send a video from deck with my apologies. It just goes to show, you never know what a bunch of whales will do.

I have attached a picture of Captain Bob at the helm in the pilothouse looking for whales. You can see the Northstar tracking system just in front on the console on the left near the wheel.

6 biopsies today. Makes the total 28 for this leg. Nice work team! There is also a remarkable picture of Johnny above a whale off the whale boom that shows you how much bigger these whales are. This whale was not particularly big either, but you get a sense of size, plus you can see Johnny's vantage point at his feet.

Picture of a very striking reds against blues sunset attached.

John

P.S. We are headed in to port towards Pensacola, Florida. Our current location is 29 degrees 37.4 minutes North and 87 degrees 17.5 minutes West, for those who want to track us as we go. For Google maps (not Google Earth - but maps) or Bing maps use (include letters and comma): 29.374 N, 87.175 W

For those of you who are new to this email diary - the previous days can be found at: <https://cms.usm.maine.edu/toxicology/dr-wises-voyage-leg-summaries-2011>







