

Day 24: August 9, 2010

The first two days of this leg the water was smooth and gentle. I think Greer and Ryan were beginning to question our mettle as it all seemed so easy. Well, day 3 has certainly opened their eyes. The day started out okay and we were excited to be in the Gulf finally. The water was a beautiful cobalt blue. But then about 10 am a lightning storm surrounded us. The seas picked up and Greer and Ryan learned just what seasickness is. Though uncomfortable, both are well. It's funny that so many view a trip so sea as "easy". Certainly there are those days of majestic sunsets and amazing wildlife. But there are days like these where the ride is just about as uncomfortable as you can get. To give you a sense of it, imagine you are sitting in an office chair that swivels and leans back. You are in it 24 hours a day every day. Now imagine that the chair swivels and rocks in a different random direction every second of that day and the next and the next. That covers the basic "toning" your body endures. Then imagine about once every 5 minutes the chair is jolted so hard you tossed around in it. That about covers a day like today. Except it occurs while you are sitting, standing, lying down and walking. There is no escaping the constant gyrations and jolting. It is enough to make you wonder sometimes why mankind every took to the sea.

Roger and I spent the day working on the array. It was interesting to see his acoustic experience at work as he quickly diagnosed a number of issues with the amplifier and was able to fashion a number of connectors to allow us to test the array. After spending the better part of the day working on it, we both reached the conclusion that sadly, the array only has one hydrophone working, which means we can use to hear the whales but not to find them. Moreover, the amplifier appears to have issues as well. This situation is problematic at best as sperm whales are quite hard to find just visually even though we did succeed once. Roger commented to me about visual tracking that the old whalers would sometimes leave for 4 years and only return with 2 whales. Obviously that level of success is not going to work for us.

We also learned that our starboard generator has failed. While not a particular problem as we have a redundant system with a port generator, we are now down to one generator and if that one fails we will no ability to communicate with shore. Being in the Gulf during hurricane season, this situation is also problematic.

Our satcom is also out. Not sure why and I have made calls on the Iridium phone to Chris to explore options. We also have a guest (not related to Wise Lab crew) who is quite ill with seasickness.

Day 24 has not been good to us.

The decision in front of us is obvious, and I promised USM I would be conservative in my decisions. Both Roger and I agree, we have to find a port to repair our generator, get a new array and allow our seasick companion to recover on shore. I called Iain on the Iridium phone and alerted him to our decision. Thus, we are headed for St.

Petersburg, FL where we will effect repairs, bring on a new array and try again. This weather is not suitable for work in anyway. Plus it is getting worse. We will not make St. Petersburg for 30 or so hours so we are in for a jostle and a trial as we try to get there.

We are disappointed and frustrated as there is work to do. But it will be better accomplished in gentler seas with all of our equipment working.

John