

Thursday, April 27 – Day 17 by Dr. Wise

Dear All,

Alright, enough with the wind already, we need a full day of calmer weather. Until we do, progress will be slow and rough. Riding the waves in my cabin, which is in the very bow of the boat, allows me to feel, be tossed and hear each and every wave. Oh, it turns out to be true, I can sleep through just about anything, but the stiff muscles in the morning and the regular adjustments of sleeping angles make it clear, rough seas take a toll on the body.

Rocking and rolling with the waves in the afternoon, found us battered and bruised, and only doing two knots and hour in the boat, when normally we do 6-8 easily. At this pace we were getting nowhere fast for our troubles, so Captain Fanch pulled us into a protected cove for the evening to wait out the worst of it. Right before sundown, we'd have a couple of hours to explore and then back at it, as we wanted to pass through the protected marine reserve at night, since we cannot sample there.

Excited at the prospects in this lovely point called, Punta Pulpito, Rick, Mark, Sean, and I headed ashore to explore. Very quickly, we realized each of the coves had a sandy beach, but each beach was basked in bright sun with little shade. Every day, we battle the sun on the boat, as while there are winds and rough seas, the bright, hot sun is a constant fixture, except at night, of course. All of us agreed to the beach right of center, where there was a sliver of shade, after, of course, we motored by an apparent sea cave Mark had read about.

Leaving the dinghy to walk it onto shore, we all remembered to shuffle our feet to scare off any stingrays that might be in our path. Man, the water felt fantastic, just the salve our tired bodies needed from days and days of hot sun. On the beach, after exploring a bit, there a lagoon with mangroves, and a rock too steep to climb in the hot sun and limited time, Mark and I decided to snorkel to try and find the cave, while Rick and Sean preferred to relax on the beach.

Right away as I was putting on my fin, I saw a stingray. Each of us were startled by the sight of each other as I fell over in the water, much to Mark's amusement. Of course, he, too, was a bit wobbly donning his gear, as the sea swells were pushy, and stepping on a stingray was an undesirable, but real possibility. Forward and then to the right was our plan, and we hoped then, we would discover the entrance to the sea cave.

You see, it didn't really matter if we found it, because the water was so fantastically refreshing, like a cool lake swim on a hot summer day. Oh, it felt so good to be in the water, our first swim in the Sea of Cortez on this trip. Usually, we swim regularly, but the sea, out deep has been as cold as the Atlantic off of Maine, in other words, numbingly cold.

And there it was, the entrance to the cave! Mark wanted to go first, because, well..., he is Mark. I let him, but he quickly waved for me to come in. It was a simply and somewhat shallow cave, with a huge rock in the middle. The water was not deep, about up to our knees. We marveled at how cool it was, both of us being cave-lovers, and all. We talked about Johnny and how we wished he could see it.

Then we swam around behind the giant rock. Mark wanted to go first, because, well..., he is Mark. I let him. As he was snorkeling around the rock, four beautiful Sally Lightfoot crabs rushed down the rock – apparently afraid of Mark. Why? Well...because, he is Mark – just kidding. These crabs are large, about the size of a fist, and quite colorful making them rather beautiful. Steinbeck described them as follows:

“Many people have spoken at length of the Sally Lightfoot. In fact, everyone who has seen them has been delighted with them. The very name they are called reflects the delight of the name... It is impossible to creep up on them. They are very beautiful, with clear brilliant colors, reds and blues and warm browns.” Mark and I were quite thrilled to see them after reading about them in Steinbeck’s book and again we thought about how much Johnny would have enjoyed them too.

I joined Mark behind the rock and we took in the remarkable cave and its nooks and crannies – a nice way to end the day. We decided to try and get a video of Sally Lightfoot and discovered that Steinbeck was exactly right – they are impossible to creep up on.

We snorkeled around outside the cave for a while and enjoyed the sight of many different sizes of colorful fish and of course the cool water. I reminded myself that snorkeling is for sure one of my preferred hobbies and I need to do more of it. If you’d never tried – I highly recommend it. It is peaceful, refreshing, fascinating and invigorating all at once.

61 whales in total with 1 sampled today. All is well with us in the Sea of Cortez. We will not anchor tonight as we head South.

You can see all the emails from Day 0 through today’s (Day 17) on www.WiseLaboratory.org.

Good night from here until tomorrow.

John













