

## Friday, April 14 – Day 4 by Johnny Wise

Today Captain Fench took me on an adventure.

About mid-morning we spotted three whales at the same time – a pair of humpbacks in one direction and a small lone fin whale in the opposite direction. For a moment there was a little bit of confusion about which whale(s) to start with, until pops decided we should put the dinghy in the boat and split our efforts. While the *R/V Martin Sheen* and the rest of the crew followed the lone fin whale, the captain and I loaded up the dinghy and took off after the two humpbacks. As we were loading up, Mark looked down at me and said the two humpbacks were now breaching because they were excited to see me. We skirted around the boat, with Rick's and Mark's envious eyes following after us and headed off in the direction of the breaching humpbacks – about a mile east of where the boat was. After about a half hour of searching, we decided the whales were gone and headed back to join the rest of the crew. They had not yet biopsied the fin whale – couldn't get close enough. Captain Fench decided we would pursue the fin whale as well, since we were faster and already launched.

The whale was spotted again, we took off after it...but it dove before we could get there. As we waited for it to resurface, the captain and I had some one-on-one time to chat. He's been a boat captain since his early twenties and has been sailing his whole life – a very interesting character with a unique French charm and a youthful look in his eyes, as though the world (the sea especially) never ceases to fascinate him – something which we both share. As we were waiting for the whale, he also remarked that he always smells shrimp in this area, and they encountered several blue whales here a few weeks ago – if only those whales were here now!!! As we tracked the whale, if became apparent that “she” (as the captain referred to it) was most likely feeding on these tasty shrimp – she appeared to be circling the bay and surfacing at regular intervals.

Finally a moment came when we were close enough to biopsy! Standing up in the dinghy at full speed (not something I would recommend without a harness), I took my aim and waited for the right moment...that moment when she would dive for another feeding and arch her back enough out of the water to give me the largest target possible. I wedged my feet into each side of the dinghy and threw my weight back against the harness for three points of stability, the captain stood behind me this time so he could watch (and presumably so my butt wasn't in his face). One's personal space shrinks remarkably while living on a boat with a bunch of other people. She arched, I released my arrow and watched it glance off her left flank – not an ideal biopsy, but a successful one nonetheless! “Good shot!” The captain said over my shoulder in his heavy French accent. We collected the arrow and returned to the boat. I have to admit I felt pretty badass. Using a crossbow in a dinghy and aiming at a distant, moving target is not easy!

Getting back on board the *Martin Sheen*, I realized just how much of an appetite I worked up while standing in the dinghy for so long, dancing with the waves to maintain my balance. I was famished!

Late in the afternoon we found another humpback whale and successfully biopsied it, bringing our current total to 7 whales biopsied in 4 days. I think we've successfully biopsied more than 80% of the whales we have attempted to, so we've had pretty good success so far!

Our day ended near Isla San Marcos, where we were able to pick up satellite and reconnect to family and friends, take care of work responsibilities and enjoy an incredible sunset that only the Sea of Cortez can provide. After the daylight faded, Mark brought all of our attention to the water again – we had dozens of polychaete worms giving off their bioluminescence in the water around us. The female worms of this species glow a few days after the full moon to attract males, and release a chemiluminescent signal to attract males, leaving a large trail of blue glowing light in the water (Mark actually mistook these for squid at first). Love is in the water!

Johnny















