

Expedition Log for IODP Expedition 325

Week 3

Great Barrier Reef Environmental Changes

2nd March 2010

Groundhog Day by Colin Graham

Hello. My name is Colin. My home, for now, is on the Great Ship Maya. My postal address is Bottom Bunk, Cabin 21, Boat Deck (starboard side), Great Ship Maya, Coral Sea – east of Queensland, Australia. I am one of the more than sixty people that live and work together onboard. OK – ‘work’ is perhaps not the right word in my case, but I like to think that I do useful stuff anyway.

Life on board is lived vertically. There are 10 decks on the Maya. Starting at the bottom of the ship: Tank Top, Tween Deck, Main Deck, Shelter Deck, Mezzanine Deck, Forecastle Deck, Boat Deck, Captain’s Deck, Bridge Deck and Top of Wheelhouse – got all that? My life revolves around the Boat Deck (home), Forecastle Deck (laundry), Shelter Deck (food), Main Deck (gym, changing and work) and Mezzanine Deck (the drill floor).



G_Lott@ECORD_IODP: View of the Mezzanine level drilling deck with ESO containers.

My ‘day’ starts early at about 10pm when I get woken up by my cabin mate, Dave (the electronics engineer), coming to bed after his shift. I am lying in my bottom bunk, with curtains closed across the entrance to the bunk, and am nice and cosy, and now, part way between waking and sleeping. Dave has the bunk above me. He is fairly well house-trained, so is good to share a small cabin with. I hope he says the same about me. It is not quite time to get up yet, so I enjoy being able to turn over and ‘snooze’ for another hour or so.

Suddenly the alarm is sounding loud in my ear at 11pm. I’ve fallen back into a deep sleep. I fumble to find the alarm to switch it off. The next few minutes are critical. If I do not open my eyes and sit up, I will fall back asleep. I consider this very tempting alternative for a few moments, groan (quietly), then open the curtains and haul myself out of the warm bunk, reluctantly. I do not want to disturb Dave, so I give my face a ‘cat’s-lick’ of a wash, put on my

T-shirt, shorts and floppy sandals and slip quietly (I hope) out the cabin with eyes half shut against the glare of the bright lights of the Boat-Deck corridor.

I stumble along to the stairway with my eyes adjusting to the light, then go down two decks to the Shelter Deck for breakfast in the mess, and to meet up with my workmates starting work at midnight. After eating, and feeling a bit more awake (but sometimes not), I go down another level to the Main Deck to change into working clothes in the locker room. Off with the T-shirt, on with the overalls, safety boots and hard hat. Check that I still have time to grab a tea in a paper cup. I'm ready to face the world.

I go outside, holding my paper cup, which is by now burning my fingers, and feel the heat and humidity of the outside air, and sometimes the wet of the rain or sea spray. I sway as I adjust to the heave and rolling motion of the ship, trying not to spill my tea. I zig-zag as I make my way to the aft end of the main deck along the route between the assorted diesel generators, compressors and pumps, that power the drill floor above on the mezzanine deck, and the associated containers, winches, metal supports and endless pipework. This home-to-work commute lasts about 1 minute and is the longest horizontal walk I make on the ship. As I pass by, the noise of the machinery is deafening, and the heat given off is tremendous, like passing by a row of hot air blowers.



M_Mowat@ECORD_IODP: The commute!

I reach my work container in the relative quiet at the stern of the ship, feeling the vibration of the stern thrusters coming through my boots. I pull hard to open the metal door against the resistance of the rubber seals that keep water out and the cool air-conditioned atmosphere inside. Sometimes it takes two or three yanks at the door, in my weakened, early-morning state, before it opens. Inside, Mary – my colleague on the opposite shift – is waiting for me to appear. She greets me with a smile. Is it because of the way I look first thing in the morning (that stunned, still half-asleep, dragged backwards through a hedge look), or because it is the end of her shift (so she can go and eat, relax and sleep for the next twelve hours)? Perhaps it's a bit of both. Working on opposite shifts, I say "good morning" while Mary says "good evening".



D_Wallis@ECORD_IODP: 'The Office'- Colin hard at work in the database container.

I get an update of what has happened in the past twelve hours, any problems, any fixes, anything outstanding that I need to work on. I'm ready. Mary says "good night", and then shoulders the door to open it against the resistance of the rubber seals. The door slams shut and I'm on my own, with my cup of tea cool enough to drink. I start to look at the computer screens and at the data and the systems information, turn on some music and focus on the work.

Five minutes before mid-day, there are a couple of tugs on the container door. It opens and Mary enters. I have a smile on my face. We have the good morning – good evening exchange in reverse. After the handover, I say "good night", shoulder the door to open it and make the zig-zag commute back to the accommodation. Something to eat, visit to the gym, shower, climb into my bunk, shut the curtains, read for a bit, fall asleep.

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This 'groundhog day' pattern of life repeats 7 days a week, for weeks on end. Everybody on the ship – the ship's crew, the drillers, the ESO staff and the scientists have their own work-rest patterns in each 24-hour period, and workmates on the opposite shift (or watch in the case of the ship's crew). Although we all work and live in a small space, you are not aware that there are over sixty people onboard. There are people you never see (except during fire and boat drills) because they are on different shifts, eat at different times, and have different commutes to and from their work places, and different jobs.

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