

TEAM BLOG June 24 – July 12

Chasing the stream

Written by OAR Crew

Saturday, 24 June 2006 13:27

Again, we're on the move away from England, going quick but losing our lead. The chase for the Gulf Stream continues, as we are now heading SE to try to catch the main (fast) part of the stream. The weather is beautiful and calm, which is supposed to stick around for a couple of days, so hopefully the current won't be disguised by difficult waves and weather.

Kicking around like this has been slightly frustrating, in that we aren't making the best progress toward Falmouth, but I guarantee you that one day shooting through with 2 knot current at our back will cure that immediately. Wish us good hunting, and remember: the more texts you send, the faster we row!

Starry starry night

Written by OAR Crew

Saturday, 24 June 2006 16:03

It had to be nearly a thousand miles offshore when one of my dreams finally came. I have spent all of my life close to some sort of ambient light. When camping there are city's and towns miles away and even on the water there always seemed to be a ship on the horizon. Last night we had no moon, no ships and only trace clouds on the horizon. We took a brief rest, shut down the neon of our instruments and I got to bask, for the first time with out any other light, among the stars. If I looked straight up to the night sky I almost felt like I was in space itself, floating.

J

Flying Lessons

Written by OAR Crew

Monday, 26 June 2006 08:55

In our seventeen short days at sea, the 'flying fish' has made few appearances. When it has done so, the characteristic torpedo-shaped blue body with clear fins and dorsal, takes flight and we catch just a short part of its out-of-water experience. Did you know that it can change its trajectory in mid-air, and it will flap its wings to continue flight? Incredible.

Today we saw a school of fresh graduates from the flying fish school of flight. These were young, lacking color, and traveled (flew, really) in a school of several hundred. All at once they leap from the surface like a bird leaving its nest for the first time, airborne for several seconds. Lucky for this bunch, the area was clear of hungry tuna and shearwater (an albatros, of sorts) to gobble them for lunch. Two long initial flights, and that was that.

Dry day on the water, otherwise. Slogging our way into the main branch of the gulf

stream. Take care.

Greg

Hot Hot Hot

Written by OAR Crew

Wednesday, 28 June 2006 18:51

We are very happy to be in the Gulf stream, don't get me wrong, However, it presents its own challenges. Its very hot out here. Over 86 degrees in our cabin and no shade, ice cubes, air conditioning, or gelato. Today it was a strange calm, clouds surrounded us but we were in the middle with no wind, fairly a ripple. There were dolphins today, hardly moving in the heat, it seemed like we were the only animals dumb enough to try any work out here. But for all this discomfort it made today's bath and the following night shifts that much more glorious. Rowing in next to nothing, under the stars in the perfect temperature, with a great big current behind you... Perfect.

J

Never easy

Written by OAR Crew

Thursday, 29 June 2006 05:02

Sorry about the delay in entries; our blog has been down, and there is only so much communication you can do from the middle of the ocean. Our shore support crew, namely Kyle Putnam and the Spooners, have been amazing in their dedication to bringing our word to you, as well as dealing with the millions of loose ends we left in Seattle. Special thanks goes as well to Bev Corwin of Enso Co., Ltd., who not only offered free web hosting, but upped our bandwidth last week and has ensured that our blog and newsletter problems are solved. As with every part of this project, nothing happening today would be real without the help of the amazing Northwest community and the people willing to commit their time and energy to help others live a dream.

One of the difficulties of living an adventure is coming to grips with the reality of the experience as opposed to prior perception. While on land, we knew there would be miserable times out here (i.e., Alberto). But we also envisioned 150 mile days surfing the Gulf Stream and 10 foot seas driven by 20 knot winds driving us directly toward Falmouth. The reality is that nothing out here is easy. The one time we have had the 3 + knot current, it was headed Southeast. We've had 10 days of beam seas and headwinds. Today, our first day of tailwinds since Day 2, we are now in section of backward current! When it's calm, it's hot enough to leave us begging for a tree to hide under while rowing.

Fortunately, there has not been a day without the positive as well. For every headwind, we have good current or comfortable temperatures. We are in such an intimate relationship with the ocean out here that there is always something amazing around us, so that even on the painful days we can watch the dolphins or turtles. All we can hope for is to not get too high or too low no matter the conditions. But, if you wanted to send a wish of fair winds our way, we could always use it!

Dylan

Strong Patriot

Written by OAR Crew

Thursday, 29 June 2006 13:16

Hello All, today we had an encounter with the VA based container ship, 'Strong Patriot'. They are headed for Azores delivering military supplies. We had a good chat with them and received confirmation that our Sea-Me beacon is working and that we did show up on their radar. The ship wished us God Speed and referred to us as 'Team America'. Would that make Jordan Capitan America?

We continue to ride out the GS and are putting ourselves in position to ride the North Atlantic current to the UK. Keep sending the texts as they give us an increase in boat speed and are a highlight of our evening.

ROOH
Brad V

Woodvale Scoring Error

Written by OAR Crew

Saturday, 01 July 2006 02:26

If you've been tracking our progress on the map during the last few weeks, you've no doubt seen our "lead" balloon up to well over 100 miles. Would you believe that as late as last week we were actually in third place?

We were excited to hear that Woodvale Events, organizer of the Shepherd Ocean Fours Rowing Race 2006 (this one!), finally realized their scoring error at their tracking website and have since corrected their error. One

- it's only fair to have each team's progress fairly represented; Two - now this is a REAL race.

Had the old scoring method been left as is, you would have seen our lead diminish dramatically as we neared the finish, while Yorkshire Warrior & Commando Joe would have appeared to make a substantial late push for glory.

While it would have made for a thrilling conclusion, best to give you a good show from the get-go.

---***The Boring Explanation If You Want It***---

When computing distance to go, the best way to do it is using a "Great Circle." Get a piece of string, hold it between two points on a globe, and figure your mileage. If you tried this straight-line approach on a map, you would actually have a LONGER course, because most maps don't figure in the curvature of the earth. If you transposed the Great Circle route on to a standard map, it would actually resemble a curved, arching line from point A to point B. The "fastest"(shortest) way to England from New York actually takes you all the way up the coast of USA, past Newfoundland, and on across the North

Atlantic to England.

One of our genius' back home figured that the way Woodvale was scoring the race before was to draw a straight line between New York and our current position, figure the total miles traveled between point A and B (excluding curves), and subtract it from the total race mileage. Using this method, we could have put our boat on a trailer to California and could be in the lead.

Greg

Thar she blows!

Written by OAR Crew

Saturday, 01 July 2006 10:55

First impressions of a large underwater denizen

Greg- Since leaving the Gulf Stream early yesterday morning, the amount of sea life visiting the boat has dipped off dramatically. Maybe it's the heat, maybe it's the cold water... who knows? In the midst of the hottest rowing shift thus far, we heard a whale breaching off the starboard side of the boat, not more than thirty yards away. Massive, brown, longer than our boat (and not even fully exposed!), and the smallest dorsal. Venturing from the deep for a breath of fresh air, it had to see us, hear the clank-clunk of the oars and the humming of the water maker. "What the heck is that thing?" -Wilbur Whale

Jordan-Its skin was dark, almost coal in color. An almost comical small curved dorsal fin back toward its tail. For whatever reason my first impression was that this was a sperm whale. My thoughts instantly went to Moby Dick and the black and white photographs of the New England whalers. This was a big whale, we did not see the whole of the animal but what we did see was between 30 and 45 feet, enough to make the distance between us much smaller than the forty yards separating us. She surfaced twice and each time we scrambled to get her on film. This was my most impressive experience since the stamped of dolphins earlier in the trip. I could not help my initial fear at the shear power of this animal surfacing so smoothly, but it was clear she was curious, attracted perhaps by the sound of our oars, a sound probably not heard out here in a long time.

Super heros

Written by OAR Crew

Sunday, 02 July 2006 15:00

We have received quite a response to the association with Team America and our Captain, Jordan Hanssen. We wish to clarify that we do not claim that Jordan Hanssen is THE Captain America. Due to preservation of secret super hero status and several pending legal matters, this would be a ridiculous claim to make, although Jordan does appreciate the association with his role model and mentor through many of his early years. However, we are proud to announce the identity of several OARNW super heroes!

In preparation for this journey, many super hero's made themselves available to assist with getting the boat ready for the North Atlantic. Included in this list are a great number of friends, family, sponsors and supporters we have met along the way. We are greatly indebted to these super supporters and several have attained hero status and may be profiled in upcoming blog entries.

For now, allow us to return to a Northwest row boat on the North Atlantic. The rowers of OARNW are met with a range of challenges on a daily basis and at times have to rely on the assistance of a team of secret identity super heroes. For you, our loyal supporters, we reveal the true identities of:

Chrono (meter) Man
The Handyman
Gabbermouth

and.....

Captain Momentum

Future entries will feature a profile of each super hero, which will include special skills, attributes, known plain clothes/spandex identities, arch rivals/villains and favorite foods. Who is this team of super heroes? What are they doing on the North Atlantic? Does this count as outside assistance? Do they live in the bow cabin? Is Jordan really Captain America? Stay tuned to find out!

to be continued....

Super Hero: The Handyman Oc

Written by OAR Crew

Monday, 03 July 2006 04:39

Super Hero: The Handyman

Ocean Rower Identity: Dylan LeValley

Height: Tall, but not that tall

Build: Often

Special Skills: The Handyman is there upon a moments notice to fix/repair/engineer any number of odd jobs that baffle the members of OARNW on a daily basis. He is armed with a special tool belt that contains every tool known to man, and some yet to be discovered. They are all made of unobtainium. Some would consider this the ultimate tool belt and Dylan as the ultimate tool man. Yet the guys of OARNW know him as the ultimate tool...

Partners in Repair: Duct Tape Duck, Thumb Tack Boy and, Paddy the Nail Gunner

Evil Nemesis: The Clutter Con and Dr. Destruction

Last seen: fixing a foot stretcher on the JRH somewhere between US and UK

stay tuned loyal readers, more profiles to come!

Happy Birthday United States of America

Written by OAR Crew

Tuesday, 04 July 2006 16:15

It has been the pleasure of our lives representing our families, hometowns, and the United States of America. In honor of our nation's birthday, I want to describe an American moment that Greg and I experienced at a barber shop in downtown Manhattan the week before the start of the race.

It had the candy cane swirl on the outside and a neon sign with the shop's name glowing behind the glass. Greg and I were in need of a trim, yet what intrigued us most was its advertisement for a real strait razor shave. Doesn't every man get a strait razor shave when he has the chance? True to the sign claiming that we would not have to wait more than fifteen minutes I was seated quickly in the barber chair by the no nonsense proprietress. Greg was shuffled a few chairs down with an older gentleman who had clearly been doing this for years. Both our respective barber spoke their English with a heavy but pleasant Italian rhythm. We were ordered to relax as they sharpened the razors. However, I think that relaxation only comes as a result of many a barber shop shave. Each stroke was deft and years of experience were evident as the razor found its way around my face.

When our shave was done and our faces better taken care of than they had been in years, Greg took the opportunity to practice his Italian. He asked the barber "di dove sei?" (where are you from?) The barber replied with a smile - "America!" Greg then asks "E prima d'America?" He replied to Greg assertively "I have been American since 1954." Finally Greg asks "prima?" (before that) to which he finally replied, Palermo.

It was not long after that our reason for being in New York came up. As the next few minutes unfolded over the usual question and answer session, I was struck with the fact that both the barbers and the ocean rowers were living an American dream. I love this project for that reason. We have had an opportunity to be a part of something that inspires so many different people (including us on an hourly basis). It is humbling to be a part of something that so many different Americans find common ground in.

Thank you for believing in us.

Phosphorescent Apparition

Written by OAR Crew

Wednesday, 05 July 2006 23:37

I didn't think we'd see anything like it again. Well, let me set the stage:

Dylan and I are at the oars for our second of two dark shifts. It's been raining so hard that you can't even hear the guy rowing next to you. The rain lets up momentarily, but the sky is still so dark that you cannot see anything around you. Rowing is by feel as waves can come through at any size, at any moment, at any speed.

Then the rain let up briefly and I looked off the starboard side, immediately alerted Dylan. A large swath of glowing water moved silently, slowly, bigger than our boat, toward us and underneath. It made the hair on our necks stand on end. It wasn't a shark this time, or a dolphin, but was big enough to be a whale. It only made us wonder just how many times we've gotten silent fly-by's in the middle of the day.

Greg

Notes on rain

Written by OAR Crew

Wednesday, 05 July 2006 14:34

Part One: Evening of the 4th or, it stung just like jelly rolls

Clouds converged last night eliminating our horizon. Rain began with a prelude of small drops and some lighting in the distance. Not epic Zeus like patterns but blinding brilliant flashes turning night into day. In ten minutes thick drops drove the waves into submission, smoothing white caps into a dull role. No stars this night yet the phosphorescence, not as strong as we have experienced but enough to occasionally give us the hope of clear sky's reflecting on the surface of the water. With a dull roar the rain increased once again. This time it stung, oppressive, overwhelming but you could taist it. No water maker tinge to it but sweet fresh water from the clouds. The lightning, now above head exploded a round us. Our eyes seared with an intake of the entire night sky and were then plummeted into darkness, only our glowing orange instrument panels remained visible for the next five seconds as our eyes readjusted to the dark.

Part Two: Good bye, rainy tuesday

The rain continued throughout today. I believe this is one of the most stunning experiences out here. What you don't see at night is the impact of the rain drops on the water. One drop, multiplied by the billions hitting the water not only serve to calm the sea but accent each wave with a gray haze. It approaches as a wall of water, a clear line in the distance between what is rain and what is not.

Requests for texts

Written by OAR Crew

Thursday, 06 July 2006 14:52

Ladies and Gentlemen, Boys and Girls,

We absolutely love to get texts from everybody back on land they make our day. They make us strong. They remind us why we are doing this and just how lucky we are. However, we have a request (besides more texts) to make. If you have a long message (over two texts in length) please send it to our land account info@oarnorthwest.com and it will be forwarded to us out here on the water. The problem with the super long texts is that we receive them inter spaced between individual messages. By sending your longer messages to the info account you will insure your message to us reaches us complete and unadulterated.

***NOTE

This does not apply to separate individual messages. You can text us all day long with those but please keep the longer ones to email.

Thank you for your love and support!

Your team, the ocean boys.

ADITL: Eating (& other news and pics)

Written by OAR Crew

Friday, 07 July 2006 10:49

Welcome to A Day in the Life (ADITL)! We'll post a few updates now and then to give you a look at what happens aboard our boat during our shifts away from the oars. Eating, sleeping, making water, communications, etc etc.

But first, a few items:

-- New pictures posted in this blog featuring a dolphin visit, Brad filming underwater, Greg above water, our fourth of July firework (singular) show, and our eating staple - Polenta!

-- Support Vessel Sula stopped by today to check in on things. The purpose of today's visit was to make sure we were still doing okay following our unusually slow progress over the last two days. The opposite flowing current caught us by surprise and has been a big thorn in our side. We should be out of it very soon and continuing on our way in normal fashion.

-- Sula's purpose for being out here in the first place is to provide on-water assistance in medical and boat emergencies, resupply of food and/or water if need be, keep shipping traffic aware of our location on the waterways, and just keep an eye on things. We don't hear from them often, but if we do, don't be alarmed as they're probably just checking in to say hello.

FOOD

Breakfast: Granola, Grapenuts, Oatmeal (varies by day). We spice them up by adding

powdered milk, cinnamon, sugar, or breakfast shake flavors. Generally packed with fig newtons or fruit chews.

Dinner: De la Estancia Polenta (the best! Pick some up if you see it and give it a try) is a swift cooking, high protein, and anything but "instant" meal for us. We mix in various seasonings, cheeses, salami, tuna, salmon, or clams. We eat well out here. The polenta alternates daily with mashed potatoes which receive similar doctoring. Every 7 days, GUMBO! Something to look forward to.

Snacks: Throughout the day we'll eat various cracker brands, salami, cheese, tuna, tortillas, jerkey, and the occasional candy bar. These prove quite worthy during the tiring midnight shifts.

--> You can generally prepare and eat your meal within 30 minutes of the end of the 2 hour rowing shift. As long as there's no blogging, email, reading, writing or maintenance to do, we can get about 80-85min of sleep.

'Til Next Time,
Greg

Chrono Man

Written by OAR Crew

Saturday, 08 July 2006 06:30

meanwhile, out on the North Atlantic... our group of 4 continue on toward England and feel the need to introduce:

Chrono Man

aka: The Chronometer

Ocean Rower Identity: Brad Vickers

Height: tall enough to stretch the full length of stern cabin...and somehow find a level of comfort in this..(probably 'cause it's dry)

Build: extended

Theme Song: Time is on My Side - Stones

Eyes: ocean blue

Sign: Capricorn

(sorry about the last 2, I got a bit carried away there...)

Abilities: The chrono possesses an amazing (and equally convenient) means of slowing time. Upon this time warp, a phenomenon known as Brraaaaaad - Time occurs. Deadlines are no longer...well, they're extended, urgency is in the eye of the beholder (Chrono) and everything may fall apart, but it's going to happen as soon as the Chrono is good and ready.

Allies: Papa Time, Sir Stop Watch and the guy that insists it's 5:00 somewhere...

Enemies: Hour Glass, Dr. Deadline and AM Alarm

on another note to our concerned readers: it is true that the last of the unobtainium was held in sector WD-40 on Planet Hex. The Handy Man built some sort of device to extract this Unobtainium. We'd reveal this to you, but it's part of what allows him to maintain status on the ultimate tool claim...

more to come...stay tuned to find out who the Gabber Mouth may be.

If the sun had eyes

Written by OAR Crew

Sunday, 09 July 2006 16:30

Perhaps what the Sun may have seen tonight was four young boys on a boat. All eyes locked to her gaze. Her greens, pinks, and gold's mesmerizing them in a symphony of color. Low cobalt rollers rushed softly toward their boat gently lifting and dipping the little boat. Like an aquatic yellow brick road her descending orb lit a glinting path to the craft, inviting her crew to watch her slip in to an evening gown of clouds as she disappeared beneath the blue.

j Midnight Questions

Written by OAR Crew

Monday, 10 July 2006 06:36

Hey Everyone, we thought we would share with you one of the ways we get through our 2 hr night shifts. These tend to be long shifts if you don't talk your way through them and there's always a chance of falling asleep at the oars if you zone out too much. (yes, we all have fallen asleep while rowing at some point during the crossing...) So, Dylan came up with this game where we ask an in-depth question on the first shift and then respond to it on the second. These questions tend to lead to further conversation and all of a sudden the 10 minuet call is being made to the 2 sleeping rowers in the stern cabin.

We'll give you a list of conversation questions we have come up with to date. For any UPS admin folks reading this blog, these may be potential college entrance essay questions. We have found a lot of insight into each other on the conversations that have come as a result of the following questions:

If you were to take a road trip across the US and could only travel E-W or W-E, what states would you travel through?

If you could no longer live in the US, what country would you live in and why?

If you could travel to 4 countries on 1 continent, which continent and what countries?

Describe your favorite teacher from Grade School, JR. High and High School

If you could be the CEO of any company, which company and what changes would you implement?

Describe the greatest baseball game ever...

Describe your dream home..

Favorite childhood memories...

Well, you guys get the idea. These conversations help us pull through the midnight shift and even after spending a year of living and working together on the project, we continue to come up with new topics of conversation. Not bad after 31 days on the NA. It's a good thing too, because we're getting tired of telling the same jokes over and over and over again...(there has been a call for a daily delivery of the 'Hart William's joke of the day...')

So, if you have any midnight conversation ideas, please text them to us. Take care everyone and here's to following seas, midnight conversations and racing to the UK.

Cheers,
Brad V and Crew

1/2 Way Party @ Seattle's Atlantic Crossing Pub

Written by OAR Crew

Wednesday, 12 July 2006 12:05

Hello All!

We're half way to England, and they're throwin' us a party!

If you are anywhere near Seattle on Thursday evening 7/13, make sure to visit The Atlantic Crossing, a pub on 65th & Roosevelt. There's a party going down to benefit OAR Northwest and the American Lung Association of Washington. Great people, great brew, and the debut of our new tees - specially designed by the creative gurus at Flying Spot Entertainment. They've received a high "badassitude" mark from our shore manager... How could you pass that up?

What: 1/2 way party

Where: Atlantic Crossing, 65th & Roosevelt

When: 6pm-close

I believe there will be a band playing that evening

If you can't make it Thursday, please donate your raffle \$\$ online at OARnorthwest.com, or drop a check in the mail. Details at the site. This isn't just 4 guys rowing across the Atlantic, it's a trip to inspire, challenge, and educate the public about asthma.

Have a great time -- We wish we were there with you all!

Greg

A tail of a whale or two or three or four..

Written by OAR Crew

Wednesday, 12 July 2006 11:24

Accosted by a pod of right whales today. Here are our impressions:

Jordan- My initial thought was that more dolphins were approaching. As they got closer

we could see the dorsal fin and color was quite different. Even their way of handling themselves, a few beats slower than the dolphins but with the same energy. They skirted around the boat before settling just off our bow to play, clearly seeing no threat from the four wide eyed crew on board our quiet vessel. Below us you could hear beeps, chirps, and moans as they frolicked around the hull. There were clearly many ages among the group. A few calves smaller than dolphins and some just longer than our boat. occasionally one of the smaller whales would poke its bulbous forehead out of the water and look toward us for a second before it continues playing. For a full fifteen minutes they swam around our boat. Once they had their fill of us they moved on, following the whales road north.

Brad - I was in the cabin and heard Jordan call for the camera. In no way do I want to downplay the amazing encounters we have had with dolphins, but the thought of 'great, more dolphins...' did enter my mind. Then I heard Greg mention that they were pretty big dolphins, if dolphins at all. The excitement of the crew became tangible and I was out on deck as we became engulfed by a pod of what we supposed to be right whales. They surrounded us for 15 minutes and provided the most intimate encounter I have ever experienced with animals in nature. It's a surreal feeling to be surrounded by creatures that are equal in size to our boat and at times no more than 5 feet away from us. The fact that we're about 1 foot off the water and have a top speed of 5kts in the best of conditions contributes to this intimacy and awe of nature that this journey has instilled in all of us. A truly amazing encounter.

Dylan - Today we had probably the most amazing wildlife experience of the trip. Greg and Jordan sighted some dolphin-like animals in the distance, but as they approached we realized they were much larger (up to 30 feet), had large, curved dorsal fins, and were flat-faced (right whales? that was our guess, but what do we know?). They proceeded to come up to the boat, around 40 of them, and played at the surface of water RIGHT NEXT to the boat for 15 minutes! We think they were mating, as they were swimming in pairs and threes right next to each other. They were close enough to sometimes maybe reach out and touch them (we didn't)- swimming around and under the boat, flapping their tails down on the water, clicking and whistling.

Greg - Right there, arms length, beautiful. I plunged the video camera in the water for a good 10 minutes, getting shots of the whales and their chit-chat. Why did they choose us? What made the JR Hanssen so interesting? We wouldn't have witnessed this without the miserable days rowing against relentless current. Worth every stroke.