

Day 2 - learning the ropes

- Posted by [Kristy](#) on August 13, 2008 at 10:30pm

Day 2 has been full and busy! Breakfast is at 6:00 a.m. so it's an early start. After breakfast I went up to the bridge where I was made to feel very welcome and Captain Hull (looking very much like a Captain, in full uniform - crew wear their uniforms when on duty, and "civvies" when off duty) and Jean-Christophe the ice observer, answered my many questions and spent time looking at the chart with me. I also met Officer Roger - there are a lot of crew to meet and learn the roles of! Roger welcomed me and made me feel right at home as well, volunteering a lot of useful information and patiently answering my questions. Right now we're in Coronation Gulf at the western point by Kugluktuk - Great Bear Lake is down to our southwest. We're still anchored just off Kugluktuk, and will likely start to steam sometime tonight (some repairs had to be made today).

After spending some time on the bridge, doing some research on ice (Jean Christophe showed me some animations which I hope to post when I get back), and getting my computer set up thanks to Shane, the technical crew member (he, like the nurse, only comes on the Arctic trips, due to the isolation and therefore the need to ensure communications function effectively), I was startled - well, actually I practically jumped out of my skin - when the alarm bells started to ring. We had a comprehensive tour of the Laurier last night and were told that there would be an emergency drill today....but I had forgot. After I crawled back into my skin, I followed procedure - grabbed my lifejacket from the locker in my cabin along with my winter coat, and raced up two decks to the officer's lounge which is my muster station. I was one of the first to arrive (never one to mess with an emergency!). Those of us who are new to the ship also had to try on survival suits - these weren't what I expected. They're basically like a bright orange wetsuit...you lay it on the floor and sit down on it, take off your shoes, and stick your legs in (it's like a baby's p.j.'s with the feet enclosed). The reason you sit down is because if you were in a situation where you needed a survival suit, the boat would likely be violently moving or heeling and you would fall over putting the suit on. Once your feet and legs are in, you stand up, finish getting the suit on and zip - but it's really tough to pull the zipper up. The suit fits extremely snugly...if it's on properly and the right size, it will maintain your core body temperature for 9 hours in Arctic waters. If any water leaks in though your survival time is drastically reduced - a litre will reduce your survival time by 30%. So cuffs around the wrists, neck and face have to be extremely tight, and the zipper pulled up as far as it will go, which is practically to your eyeballs. It was pretty funny to watch all of us newbies struggle in...we were really impressed when we were told by Roger that one crew member he knew once put the suit on in 33 seconds during a drill. We were also a bit sobered by the fact that this person had been on 3 sinking ships at various times (not icebreakers!) - hence his ability and incentive. I felt a bit claustrophobic in the suit it's so tight, and very hot. In an emergency situation though, you wouldn't put the suit on inside the ship, but take it out to the deck, because you wouldn't want to be trapped inside. This trip, the crew on the Laurier are testing out some new suits in the freezing cold Arctic Ocean, and if they perform well (the suits, that is), they may replace the old survival suits.

After our lessons in emergency protocol, we were given the opportunity to go in the soft-shell rubber zodiac to Kugluktuk. On went the lifejackets, and we went down a very steep sort of staircase called an "accomodation ladder" that had been lowered down the side of the ship...a bit scary, but not as scary as the boatride! The seaman (actually, seaWOMAN, Christina) was amazing....I thought we would inch our way over to Kugluktuk as the waves were significant, but she pointed the boat toward shore and FLEW! I didn't know whether to laugh or throw up, but it was definitely exciting. Passengers (there were 5 of us) sat on the edges of the boat and hung on to rope handles for dear life, but there was no question we were in very capable hands. It was kind of like a roller coaster ride -scary while it was happening, but when it's over you want to do it again. I had met Christina in the corridor last night and she had introduced herself as a Seaman...I'm curious now to find out what else a Seaman does!

Kugluktuk is in between seasons right now. I'm told that 3 weeks ago the roads would have been mud, now they're dirt. The snow will start to cover everything again probably in September, with ice moving in by October 1st. Today is grey, cold, and a bit rainy...there is a bleak look to the town huddled at the edge of the Arctic Ocean. Approximately 1300 people live in Kugluktuk – that's about how many students attend Oak Bay High School. It's very expensive to live here because everything has to be flown in...I went into the store and noticed a small box of cereal cost over \$9.00. Four litres of milk, which at home I can get for under \$5.00, cost almost \$15.00 here.

I was very excited to go into Jimmy Hikok Ilihakvik (which means "place of learning" but is often translated as "elementary school"). Jimmy Hikok was an elder, a carver, who died a few years ago of old age...his daughter is the secretary at the school. I met 3 teachers who are all very keen to be in touch with students at Lansdowne in the fall. Thanks to Andrew Wooldridge from Orca Publishing, I was able to leave a number of books at the school as gifts...when I asked Andrew if he could recommend some books by local authors that reflected the West Coast way of life, he showed up at my home and donated a box of 50 books. The teachers were delighted, and in one grade 3 class, they reciprocated by giving me a beautiful toque, hand made by the mother of one of the students. The children were energetic, bright and curious, and I'm looking forward to keeping in touch with them and introducing them to my students by means of technology, so we can learn more about each others lifestyles. For instance, students here came back to school last Friday...they start their summers in May, so that they can go "out on the land" with their families, to take advantage of the daylight to hunt and fish.

Back on board, it's been quieter this evening...I think everyone is tired, and the crew has settled into their 12 hour shifts. I know I'm tired, and even though it's daylight out at 11 p.m., I think I'll sleep well. I'll be interested to see if the ship is steaming when I wake up in the morning.

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