

Last week was marked by the optional programme carried out in the Drake Passage and to the west of it, which was both a necessity and an opportunity because we had to pick up the Polar4 until 27 March. Any time after that the RRS ERNEST SHACKLETON would no longer have been available. The depth soundings we got while arriving at the British station ROTHERA near the Biscoe Wharf confirmed our suspicion that the loading would hardly have been possible without the aid of the SHACKLETON.

This schedule change gave us the opportunity to spend a few extra days of science in the south-eastern Pacific. We are making use of this extra time by carrying out two additional ANDEEP stations and a CTD transect. As the stations in the Pacific are, strictly speaking, located outside the study area of ANDEEP, we now have an excellent opportunity to characterise the regional properties of the Weddell Sea even more accurately. Together with the first station in the Cape Basin and the series of stations between the Greenwich Meridian and the Antarctic Peninsula we have compiled a set of data and samples of truly exceptional informational content.

Many of the samples have not yet gone beyond the stage of mere preservation, and a lot of time and patience will still be required to gain a well-rounded picture of the deep-sea fauna, but the sheer amount of samples gives rise to most joyous expectations. We were blessed with exceptionally favourable weather and ice conditions. Although we had to live for a long time under grey skies and in grey seas, the weather conditions causing this were providing us with an ideal working environment, namely, a calm sea. Only very few days were so stormy that the deployment of gear was impaired, and only in the outermost northwest area of the Weddell Sea we were confronted with ice conditions that slowed down our progress.

In the night to Thursday the last ANDEEP station was completed, and we steamed alongside the South Shetland Islands to the Shackleton Fracture Zone. There we started the CTD transect toward the southern tip of South America. These additional stations are a welcome preparation for an upcoming POLARSTERN expedition scheduled for the next year during which, in the framework of a French programme, moorings shall be deployed here. Now the nearing end of the journey becomes more and more palpable. As far as possible, last samples are being worked up, but mostly it is packing, clearing up and cleaning that is our first priority. The labs have to be cleared, and the equipment has to be stowed again. Lists and forms have to be filled out and reports need to be written. A seminar is planned for presentations of scientific highlights, and finally we will have to say farewell in the Blue Saloon. The end of the station work does not bring more peace and quiet, but rather hectic activities because time is running out fast.

Nevertheless, our thoughts reach further ahead, and there is joy and expectation to finally embrace our loved ones at home after 74 days at sea,

but there is sadness too, as a family-like companionship has developed among us, fostered by shared interests, working and feasting together, in which we could feel cared for. Knowing that this will belong to the past before long can cause some nostalgia.

At the end of my weekly reports I would like to express once more how well aware we are of the privilege to work and live on this ship. We are also aware of the fact that, well beyond the excellent technical equipment, it is the crew who, with their exceptional professionalism, astounding involvement, willingness to help, and warmheartedness make our lives and our work so easy and enjoyable. For that I would like to extend my heartfelt and sincere thanks to Master Schwarze and his entire crew in the name of all expedition participants and bid him farewell, hopefully "until soon".

With best regards from all on board I also say good-bye to my readers.

Eberhard Fahrback