

Papua New Guinea, the land of the unexpected

Papua New Guinea (PNG) is often said to be the land of the unexpected because of the many surprises one encounters. Diverse cultures, bizarre animals and things not going as planned are but just a few examples. In this post, I will sum up the first week of the Marine Science Short Course (MSSC) with a look at two examples of what to expect in the land of the unexpected.

Our week started on October 12, in Port Moresby where I was responsible for moving 26 people including course participants, instructors, company personnel and cargo to Kavieng from Port Moresby. Oddly enough, we experienced no troubles picking everyone up and checking in for the flight, but I was worried because knowing PNG, something had to go wrong. If anything were to have gone wrong I would have preferred it to happen when we were still in Port Moresby, but there were no hiccups and with the plane ready to take us to Kavieng via at Tokua, Rabaul, we were off.

That being said, it was not until we were ready to depart Tokua airport for the final leg of the journey that an announcement was made. Due to certain limitations, 460kg of cargo was offloaded at Tokua airport and would be brought to Kavieng on the next available flight. That was completely unexpected! It was obvious that most of the offloaded cargo would be ours and among them would be 6 brand new notebooks that had just been purchased for the MSSC, malaria prevention including mosquito nets and insect repellents for the participants and our clothes. As you might have guessed, we spent the first night in Kavieng in the same sweat drenched clothes we had on when we boarded the plane in Port Moresby. Our cargo eventually arrived the next day.

The 2014 MSSC was opened on Monday morning by Nautilus Minerals' CEO, Mike Johnston. Mike spoke to the students about Nautilus' aim of holding the course, and expressed how great an opportunity they were being provided with to be the first in PNG to learn about miniROVs. The students were extremely grateful for the time the CEO had taken to travel to Kavieng to welcome them onto the program.



Nautilus Minerals CEO, Mike Johnston, with students of the program

The first week was dedicated to studying the structure, anatomy and function of marine invertebrates. Participants had the opportunity to collect samples and study the different organisms in class. With the exception of sample collections, everything else that was planned for the first week happened without much drama. Our instructor from Duke University had a great time with the participants and spoke very highly of how easy it was for her to work with this group. The participants enjoyed having her around and learnt a lot from her detailed lectures and practicals.



Students finding samples in the waters off Nago Island

It was at her farewell that we experienced another one of those unexpected treats of PNG. In the morning of her last day, the instructor checked out of the Nusa Island Resort and made her way to Nago Island like she had done all week, it was only when she arrived on Nago that she realised she had left her laptop behind and of all places, she had left her laptop in the restaurant. For someone who knows PNG well, the odds of getting her laptop back were very low. Even I wasn't sure if a trip back to Nusa was worth it but, I decided to just go check.

To our surprise, the laptop was right where she had left it – it hadn't moved an inch. This was an act rarely seen not only in PNG but I would say in many other public places too. Even the instructor was surprised and very thankful. The best part was that it was an unexpected occurrence in PNG, but one that showed us that not all unexpected occurrences are bad in the land of the unexpected.

As we said our goodbyes to our Duke University friend, we welcomed our next group of lecturers, who are also from America. The OpenROV team arrived on Sunday October 19 ready to lead the participants through the final two weeks of the program. If you would like to read more about the OpenROV team, visit this link <https://openexplorer.com/expedition/rov2png>

My next update will talk about how the students have learnt about building, operating and maintaining miniROVs.

William Saleu

PNG Environmental Advisor