



"None of it is important or all of it is": Steinbeck, Ricketts, Ecology, and Identity

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<AT>“None of it is important or all of it is”

<AST>Steinbeck, Ricketts, Ecology, and Identity

<A>Chris McGonigle

<AFF> Ulster University

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<abs>Abstract

Interdisciplinarity emerges as a strong theme from the *Log from the Sea of Cortez*, based on the shared experience of Steinbeck and Ricketts and their influence on one another’s thinking and writing. This article reflects on this and several other emerging lines of inquiry, based on personal experiences as a contemporary marine scientist. It discusses the role and importance of science outreach, in particular about the role of popularizers in connecting with audiences from diverse backgrounds and education levels. These concepts are explored in relation to an interdisciplinary reading group held as part of the Steinbeck Festival in Northern Ireland, designed to build common language and discourse between the arts and science, within which to understand the marine environment and our place within it. Issues of identity are explored, systems of classification, and ways of understanding complex systems: environmental, ecological, or personal as related to the sense of self. All these themes are explored in the *Log* to varying degrees and work in a complementary way. Technology and development are important and inextricably linked, from communications to methods of interrogation for the environment. As the technology improves, our ability to understand the environment changes but “common” resources are then subject to market demands. This article contrasts the speed and efficacy of contemporary marine science with the contemplative Darwinian pace of the *Western Flyer* that is presented in the *Log*, and suggest that there is value in both approaches. The industrial scale and pace of modern scientific expeditions can present obstacles to the intimacy of experience within the environment, and there is much value to the bucket and

spade approaches to build this rapport and affinity with the subject. This has an inherent value of its own and is worth conserving. The article concludes that for interdisciplinarity to succeed it is relationships between individuals that really gets things done, developing common language and mutual appreciation, spirit of cooperation and the value of a shared endeavor</abs>

<ky> Keywords: ecology; Steinbeck; Ricketts; citizen science; science communication; technology; identity; *Western Flyer*; pace; leisurely </ky>

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Like so many others in Northern Ireland, my introduction to John Steinbeck was at school, reading *Of Mice and Men* as a core text for English literature at age fifteen. While I remember enjoying the novel, I was keener to get out and do things than to succumb to a desk and read a book. It was a while before I would read any Steinbeck again. My own adolescence and young adulthood was a bit like something out of the pages of *Cannery Row*: drifting from job to job in a coastal town, frequenting pool halls and bars, taking on any temporary labor to try and scrape together enough cash to fund the next weekend's entertainments or delinquent escapades. This was a seaside community where the fishing industry had long since given way to tourism as the primary source of revenue. But a new marine science program was starting at the University of Ulster's nearby Coleraine campus, and my curiosity had got the better of me. I heard about the course not from a glossy prospectus or video, but in a pool competition in the bar of a shabby Victorian guesthouse overlooking the North Atlantic—very much a Palace Flophouse kind of place that I think Steinbeck would have appreciated.



Figure 1. Author at the working waterfront of Kilkeel – largest fishing harbour in Northern Ireland. Photographer Alan McCulla (ANIFPO), June 2021.

During my degree I worked part-time in the University bookshop, stocking shelves and picking returns for all the subjects routinely taught on campus. I can remember reading on a dust jacket something about Steinbeck’s link with marine biology and came away with the impression that he had worked as a biologist for part of his career. Something about this stuck with me, and Steinbeck’s connection with marine science was revealed again when I read the second edition of Richard and Gary Brusca’s classic *Invertebrates*, which included a striking epigraph and image on the title page of each chapter. Most memorable to me was the selection for chapter 20 on the phylum Mollusca, which begins with a lyrical passage from Steinbeck’s *Cannery Row*: “Orange and speckled and fluted nudibranchs slide gracefully over the rocks, their skirts waving like the dresses of Spanish dancers.” Another chapter

included a quote from Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. As a young adult returning to study after a few years out in the in the wild, I found these literary fragments helped make familiar a discipline that could be a little overwhelming in terms of language and terminology. It made me feel like I was welcome. This beloved volume, so important in my own journey and profession, has accompanied me to sea several times—and even has a faint whiff of formaldehyde from its frequent use in the lab.

John Gregg's recent contribution to the *Journal of the Southwest*, "An Explanation of Why I Can't Contribute to This Narrative," articulates something of my own feeling about the division between art and science that can make interdisciplinary work so difficult, but also so desirable. Gregg relates the current status of the Western Flyer Foundation's progress in putting that boat back into service. From my own perspective, in 2019 I was involved in an arts and sciences collaboration called Aerial/Sparks for Galway's European Capital of Culture 2022. As part of this initiative, I collaborated with Slovenian artist Robertina Šebjanič, whose work integrates mythologies and sciences, humans and nonhumans, to address challenges in the age of the Anthropocene. She is particularly interested in soundscapes and ambient noise in the ocean. Our research ship volunteered a berth on the fifteen-day cruise to allow Robertina access to the space and to stimulate conversation in a transdisciplinary manner. This was not without its challenges, in part because of the cultural and linguistic differences between the disciplines. But we worked with Robertina from a position of parity, and some of the conversations on board were astonishingly illuminating; we are still actively seeking opportunities to work together in future.

The challenges for transdisciplinary work such as this can be exacerbated by the siloed nature of education in UK and Ireland, where specialism starts very early on, and thus many science students might not read literature after the age of fifteen, and, similarly, many arts students might not study science after secondary school. The liberal arts model more

common in the United States, where students still have access to subjects outside of their core discipline, is rare on this side of the Atlantic. In an attempt to address this issue, Willa Murphy, a colleague from the School of English, and I created an interdisciplinary seminar on Steinbeck's *Log from the Sea of Cortez*. We were interested in trying to broaden students' access to ideas within the narrow strictures of the modular university system, and bring the multidisciplinary spirit of the *Log* to the classroom.

This article hopes to describe the continuing impact and cultural legacy of John Steinbeck and Ed Ricketts on my practice as an educator in marine sciences in Northern Ireland. The resonance of some of their conversations still affects my practice and thinking, and by extension are transmitted to the next generation of marine scientists coming through the ranks. It is some comfort to know that in this increasingly marginalized space, where higher education is degraded by marketization, the values and effervescence embodied in their writing can persist.



Figure 2. Underway with Meg (Bosanquet) – looking off the starboard side of *Family's Pride* at the north Antrim coast. Photographer: Adam Bradley. (May 2020).

<1>Science at Sea

The *Log from the Sea of Cortez* resonates with contemporary marine science on a number of levels for me—as a seagoing scientist, as an inhabitant of a coastal community, and also as a sailor of small traditional boats. In a professional capacity, I am frequently operating on large national research vessels that may be more than sixty meters in length, which can accommodate up to thirty-five personnel in total, with a science party of up to twenty-two. This is an industrial-scale operation, where everything is happening with a degree of precision and maximum accountability for time. Personal protective equipment, standard operating procedures, training and drills, fear of litigation, and corporate responsibility all produce different levels of complexity that require controls to be imposed on the space. All a far cry from the *Western Flyer* experience, but they are nonetheless linked by common themes. The sea is a dangerous place to work, and many of these interventions have made massive differences to the safety and well-being of those at sea. But an attempt to try to control the situation by imposing a system of order to make it safer can also change our perception. Other times we might be on a small vessel—two or three people on an open boat—and everything in between. For leisure, we would frequently be sailing in small open vessels powered under oar and sail. A moderate sea state looks very different from the bridge of a national research vessel than it does on a twenty-four-foot open boat with no engine. This sense of vulnerability to conditions and manipulation of the wind and tide links back to something much simpler, and it is highly likely that the perspective afforded by the latter (leisure) exerts a powerful influence on the former (profession). In a way, it is easier to do more with less, and the challenge of trying to develop technical solutions to problems without the crutch of technology can really heighten a sense of what is going on in the environment.

Certainly, it shows me that the experiential knowledge of practitioners—fishers, seafarers, and others who spend their lives on and around the water—has its own intrinsic value, and deserves to be recognized and valued comparably with other forms of learning. This is something fundamental to my teaching practice and personal outlook, and from conversations with a wider community who work on and around the water I think it is possibly less common than one might expect. Steinbeck is clearly of a similar mind, as is clear in the *Log*, most obviously when talking about Tony and steering a course (32) and later describing how “the point draws the waves” (46). Increasingly as I get older, the boundaries between these different personal perspectives become increasingly blurred, so that the human and social elements emerge as the thread underpinning the scientific perspective. On a personal note, I would identify as a scientist much farther down the list—more comfortable as an interested observer of systems, which sort of unites across the boundaries of the arts and sciences. Indeed, much of the time if someone would ask me what I am doing, I increasingly deflect to a position similar to that Steinbeck himself puts forward: “Finally a man said to him, ‘You can’t fool me, you’re doing it on a bet.’ And after that he used this explanation” (84). This resonates with the role of classification, systematics, compartmentalizing, and labeling that comes through in all things in the *Log*, perceptions intrinsic and extrinsic—whether applied to personal identity, animals in a dissection tray, or spatial and temporal components of littoral habitat.

For me, the opening chapter of the *Log* perfectly captures the feeling of leave-taking for a voyage into the unknown, which has aspects of the narrative arc described in Joseph Campbell’s *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, no doubt influenced by Ricketts’ time in Alaska in 1932 on board the *Grampus* with Campbell and Jack Calvin (Tamm). Indeed, so much of the text shows the interaction of ideas from multiple disciplines and the way these men influenced one another’s thinking. Familiar, too, is the description of the feeling on the day

before coming ashore—when people are tidying up, doing the laundry, and turning to thoughts of home and the impending reality at the end of an adventure.



Figure 3: Technology in offshore operations – view from inside the ROV control room on board RV Celtic Explorer as part of research expedition: Advanced Mapping of Complex Marine Structures (2021). Photographer: Chris McGonigle. (April 2021).

The main difference now of course is that communications are so improved that it is very difficult to create the sense of dislocation that comes with leaving for six weeks or longer without an easy means of communicating home. When a research vessel is far offshore, communications home are possible, but limited. Wireless internet can be provided, but typically there are limits on bandwidth. Email, reporting obligations to funders, and social media feeds for the project all follow you into this space, and you never really leave the world entirely behind. Considerable effort has gone into making this research space as productive as possible, and for much of the time it is possible to convince yourself that you are still in the office—until you hit a period of heavy weather, which is the great leveler and

often a welcome respite from the intensity of the scientific work. In fact, this year for the first time I was able to remote log into the hydrographic workstation on the national research vessel while it was offshore, so I could effectively run a survey from my house ashore without setting foot on a ship. This feat would have seemed like science fiction to me when I first started my undergraduate degree. Telepresence and remote access are now becoming commonplace, and, in a way, the shrinking of these boundaries and the connectivity that we are all afforded by technology has removed the sense of isolation and solitude that allow for a contemplative state of mind. But as a positive result, it has also reduced both the barriers presented that can affect mobility as well as the impact that going away for such a long time can have on domestic life for those left behind.

<1>Science for Non-Scientists

Some readers of the *Log* may feel alienated by the scientific level of detail or jarred by this diction from the author of *The Grapes of Wrath* (Tamm). It is true that getting your tongue around some of the taxonomic names can be difficult enough. But overall, this is an accessible text, and the scientific objective of the voyage is largely coincidental to the main body of the story. Frank Egerton includes Ricketts in his serialized “History of Ecological Sciences,” categorizing him as one of the great popularizers of science who inspired young people to become marine ecologists. Indeed, the *Log* celebrates popular science: “It is usually found that only the little stuffy men object to what is called ‘popularization,’ by which they mean writing with a clarity understandable to one not familiar with the tricks and codes of the cult. We have not known a single great scientist who could not discourse freely and interestingly with a child” (61).

As a popularizer of marine ecology and science more generally, the *Log* can be understood as a precursor to contemporary natural history documentaries, bringing to life the

excitement of the Gulf of California in a way that is still palpable eighty years after the fact. Underwater cameras were an emerging technology at the time, but we learn that even if Ricketts and Steinbeck had access to the technology they did not always have the time or personnel:

<ext>The camera equipment was more than adequate, for it was never used. It included a fine German reflex and an 8-mm. movie camera with tripod, light meters, and everything. But we had no camera-man. During low tides we all collected; there was no time to dry hands and photograph at the collecting scene. Later the anaesthetizing, killing, preserving, and labeling of specimens were so important that we still took no pictures. It was an error in personnel. There should be a camera-man who does nothing but take pictures. (11) </ext>

This scenario is often the case even now. When offshore space is limited, people are increasingly interested in sending camera crews to capture and generate content focused on science communication. The power of the imagery can do much to involve an audience. As testament to his prowess as a writer, Steinbeck managed to make do and create cinematic, visual effects with his mastery of words, imagery, and phrasing.



Figure 4: The Outer Shores, Alaska. Intertidal sampling at Ninilchik looking northwest across Kachemak Bay at Lake Clark Preserve and Wilderness. Photographer: Chris McGonigle (May 2017).

Looking ahead to what Jacques Cousteau would achieve with the advent of SCUBA and the development of the 35 mm underwater camera Calypso (1961) and Nikonos by Nikon (1963), these marine spaces would soon enter the public consciousness in a way that now seems commonplace. TV series such as the BBC's *Blue Planet* are inspiring young people to enroll in marine science courses today. It is increasingly incumbent on scientists in terms of outreach and access to funding to demonstrate this capacity. And through the rise of social media, we all have a role in science communication when drawing on public funding. Many university faculty also take on the role of popularizers of scientific interest.

Willa Murphy and I participated in a marine science outreach event in February 2020, run jointly as part of the Northern Ireland Science Festival and the Steinbeck Festival in Northern Ireland. Much this event was frustrated by the beginning of COVID-19 anxieties, as

we had the intention of running a field-based activity with readings and data collection that would bring together citizen science and students from our respective disciplines to encourage transdisciplinary thinking. Our idea ultimately became “Virtually Intertidal: Remote Exploration of Rocky Shores,” which took participants on a virtual field trip to a site of biodiversity interest on the northern Antrim coast (McGonigle). Here they explored the physical environmental processes that structure the communities of intertidal organisms, vertical zonation due to desiccation, exposure, and wave stress. There was a little education by stealth here, wherein I included some images and fragments along with some digital multimedia woven through with extracts from *Sea of Cortez* and *Cannery Row* to try and best approximate the sense of going to the shore for people stuck in their homes under lockdown.



Figure 5: World Oceans Day – schools outreach event in Northern Ireland with widening access: Our Lady of Lourdes and Ballymoney High School. Photographer: Nigel McDowell. (June 2019)

<1>Just Out of Reach

<ext>At last, under the reef, we saw a fleshy gorgonian, or sea-fan, waving gently in clear water, but it was deep and we could not reach it. One of us took off his clothes and dived for it, expecting at any moment to be attacked by one of those monsters we do not believe in. It was murky under the reef, and the colors of the sponges were more brilliant than in those exposed to the greater light. The diver did not stay long; he pulled the large sea fan free and came up again. And although he went down a number of times, this was the only one of this type of gorgonian he could find. Indeed, it was the only one taken on this trip. (65) </ext>

This passage is powerful as it captures the reality that all of the work that Ricketts and Steinbeck were focused on was restricted to those shores that could be accessed at low tide. Below the lowest tides, they could only glimpse the exoticism of what was beyond their reach. The idea that they were specifically focused on collecting stations that were exploring species occurrence and distribution as a function of the physical environment is a still key component of contemporary practice: “Throughout we attempted to work in stations in the same area which nevertheless contrasted conditions for living, such as wave-shock, bottom, rock formation, exposure, depth, and so forth” (76).

<1>The New Thing Creeping In

Technological developments in the last eighty years have revolutionized the way we can interact with and understand pattern and process in the marine environment. Four years after Ed Ricketts’s unfortunate passing in 1948, U.S. Major Christian J. Lambertsen patented a modification of his rebreather self-contained underwater breathing apparatus (SCUBA), at which point we really saw the democratization of access to the benthic sublittoral (water depths below the lowest of the low tides) to those that had access and means. Ricketts never got to see how this technology would reveal some of the secrets of that domain that is just out

of reach but hiding in plain sight. Interestingly, this technology introduces its own barriers to do with human physiology. The reality is that breathing compressed atmospheric air restricts the vast majority of no-decompression diving to water depths of eighteen meters, beyond which the time possible to be spent is quite short in duration. Access to this space, therefore, has been limited for a long time, but access has brought with it challenges related to exploitation and sustainable development, which is another discussion point explored between Steinbeck and Ricketts. Development and technology with discovery and exploitation are two sides of the same coin. Where technology can provide access to new opportunities, the market will soon follow, and this move is usually linked to some form of exploitation, be that in the sardine fisheries of Cannery Row or in contemporary issues such as access to deep seabed resources beyond national jurisdiction. The duality of these issues lies at the heart of the interaction between science, scientists, and commercial interest which often technology can facilitate or indeed benefit from. Many of these issues draw on environmental ethics, bioethics, and philosophy, which can be less apparent in applied scientific studies beyond human tissues and vertebrate animal testing. In contrast, there are comparable instances wherein technology is used for the remediation and conservation of marine ecosystems. This observation gets back to the point identified in Steinbeck's *Forgotten Village* and the anti-script prepared by Ricketts's "Thesis for a Script on Mexico: Part D. The New Thing Creeping In" (Rodger, *Breaking Through*). In all cases, the point is that technology itself is largely benign, but that human will imposed on its tools can be used for positive or negative ends. But even the presence of the technology, or the humans in the system, has the capacity to affect change therein: "By going there, we would bring a new factor to the Gulf. Let us consider that factor and not be betrayed by this myth of permanent objective reality. If it exists at all, it is only available in pickled tatters or in distorted flashes" (3).

<1>A Leisurely Stroll: Setting the Pace

The speed of the narrative presented in the *Log* reflects the movement of the vessel across the landscape. This provides room for breathing and was likely more focused around spatial coverage and accessibility than targeted site selection. This point is elucidated by Katharine Rodger, who recounts that the pace of *Grapes of Wrath* is similar—and consciously maintained by Steinbeck: “I want this one to be leisurely though.” Rodger continues, “In using the term ‘leisurely,’ a term he repeats throughout his journal, he references not only the manner in which he plans to compose the novel, but how he wants the structure and pace of it to be perceived by readers” (“John Steinbeck”). The pace of the Joad’s caravan overland is not dissimilar from the pace of the *Western Flyer* in *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*.



Figure 6: Crew of *Family’s Pride* taking a moment on journey to deliver consignment of locally brewed beer to the American Bar in Belfast (<http://www.americanbarbelfast.com/>).

Photographer: Adam Bradley (May 2022)

This gives rise to a Darwinian pace of voyage, which would have been conducted under sail. Moving through a landscape at a maximum speed of ten knots (about 11.5 mph) gives rise to a different way of seeing the landscape. This slow speed is about the same pace as cycling and is a good way to see one's surroundings changing gradually in a way that can be rationalized, rather than the immediacy of air travel, which can be very jarring. Something is familiar about the pace of the book—like a leisurely stroll, or a Sunday drive. This point is also mentioned in *Astro (Sea of Cortez)* and is a frequently observed theme running through Steinbeck's work:

<ext>Being more interested in distribution than in individuals, we saw dominant species and changing sizes, groups which thrive and those which recede under varying conditions. . . . We came to envy Darwin on his sailing ship. He had so much room and so much time. He had years instead of weeks, and he saw so many things. . . . When he went inland, he rode a horse or walked— the proper pace for a naturalist.

Faced with all the things he cannot hurry. Out of long, long consideration of the parts he emerged with a sense of the whole. . . . We can and do look at the measured, slow paced accumulation of sight and thought of Darwin with a nostalgic longing. (51–52). </ext>

This concept of the perception of time influencing perspective and focusing senses comes back into the narrative later in chapter 21, in which it is clear that the crew has gone feral. Moving farther south into the tropics, they had abandoned most of their clothing, giving the impression that they had gone a bit rogue: “One thing had impressed us deeply on this little voyage: the great world had dropped away very quickly. We lost the fear and fierceness and contagion of war and economic uncertainty. The matters of great importance we had left were not important. . . . Our pace had slowed greatly; the hundred thousand small reactions of our daily world were reduced to very few” (173).

These issues around technology and sense of scale, time, and place are directly related. Technology is inextricably linked to productivity and improved efficiencies—80 years since the expedition, it is possible that that a modern consultancy or government lab could have conducted this kind of survey with better resources and a higher precision in a lesser amount of time. This kind of approach could be a standard model for a baseline ecology survey as an environmental impact assessment ahead of a prospective development. But where would the fun be in that? I have read many of them and can assure the reader that there is not much scope for philosophical digressions.

Steinbeck himself attests in the *Log* that “it would be ridiculous to suggest that ours was anything other than a makeshift expedition.” (21) But this makeshift expedition is still providing new insights against which to judge future environmental change in the Gulf of California (Levy), thanks to the thorough and robust manner in which it was collected, which is a testament to all those who were involved. It is remarkable what was achieved in a six-week trip, not just by the lived experience of the activity, but also by the fact that it was recorded so meticulously. The records from the *Log*, the “Verbatim Transcription of the Notes of Gulf of California Trip, March–April 1940” (Rodger, *Breaking Through*), and the work that Steinbeck produced breathes narrative life and accessibility to a wider readership into what could otherwise be a list of invertebrates and information about collecting sites. Finding a home for all the conversations that they had over the time leading up to this point in their lives could logically be included here—but would be quite difficult to categorize into a genre. Perhaps John and Ed could have developed a morphological classification for fiction and may have determined where to put it themselves.



Figure 7: Group of 1st year undergraduate students on residential fieldwork at Ballintoy, Co. Antrim as part of their induction week. Photographer: Chris McGonigle (September, 2013)

Other topical issues around the same themes are emerging around issues of deep-sea mining and other areas beyond national jurisdiction—typically beyond variable distances to a maximum of two hundred nautical miles from a member state based on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Contemporary issues here relate to concern for marine biodiversity and the impact of overfishing on global fish stocks and ecosystem stability, marine genetic resources, benefit sharing using area-based management tools including marine protected areas, and various other mechanisms. Some of these things come back to issues raised in *Grapes of Wrath* around communal resources and the tragedy of the commons. Ricketts really made strong statements about these issues in his letter to the 1948 *Monterey Peninsula Herald* titled “Investigator Blames Industry, Nature for Shortage,” presented in Rodger (*Breaking Through*). Reading this work today, as someone actively involved in fisheries ecology research, natural resource management, and marine spatial

planning, reveals that this book could have been written today, if you were to redact the dates from the text.

<1>Winding Down

Richard Astro has pointed out that “a plethora of people—Steinbeck scholars, marine biologists, friends of Steinbeck and Ricketts, and the occasional layperson—have written about the journey of the *Western Flyer*. There’s no need to repeat what’s been said so well by so many.” (Sea of Cortez). There really is little to add here, other than these very personal reflections on the works of Steinbeck and Ricketts, and how these have impacted on my practice.

Looking ahead, I am increasingly hopeful to find new ways to keep bringing these strands of interest together and to draw in as many likeminded people as possible along the way. A couple of recent events require explanation of two voyages that happened in quick succession. One of these was during the COVID-19 pandemic in October 2020, on a trip through the Sound of Jura and Loch Sunart on the Northern Irish fisheries protection vessel *Queen of Ulster* to look at site occupancy and detection of the critically endangered flapper skate (*Dipturus batis*). A small crew of master, two able sailors, one technician, and I spent five days working out of Oban and Dunstaffnage in Scotland. The second trip, which was to deliver a consignment of locally brewed beer from a brewery in Portrush to a bar (The American) in Belfast, was a ten-hour journey on a decommissioned fishing vessel (*Family’s Pride*) converted to a liveaboard. Very different passages, but a common theme united both expeditions—a spirit of high adventure, camaraderie, and being open to the possibility of such activity. It is too easy to say no to these opportunities, and it is difficult to tell where they may lead. Much of the narrative in John Gregg’s piece is really talking about providing a shared space on the water for humanities and science to actively collaborate through

participatory activities, be that through dialogue or collecting animals in a bucket. We must fight to preserve and enhance this conceptual space for interaction, or else risk “dry-balling” our way into the future. For young people to develop breadth and depth in their thinking at university, they should be exposed to as wide a range of ideas and perspectives as possible and recognize that education and experience comes in all shapes and sizes—not just in the form of diplomas. The association here between individuals and between schools of thought can only really develop in an authentic way naturally, otherwise it becomes too contrived—like a sandpit event or a speed networking grant consortium. We need the space between the words to allow for some down time to reconnect with our own thoughts and remember what it was that motivated us to engage with our respective disciplines in the first place. Only then will we be able to generate authentic collaborations that are a real shared endeavor. There are many barriers to getting access to this blue space in a manner that can really benefit human health and well-being (White), and we need to make some associations between nature and health. Our recent experiences of COVID-19 lockdown have shown us all how valuable access to the natural environment is, and how far our sense of custodianship needs to develop to ensure its continuing survival and conservation.

There is much to be learned from one another, and the rudiments of our disciplines are shared in being driven by observation and deep consideration. From the time I have spent at sea, it is clear that a mutual respect and understanding for these different positions are the key to success—and further that it is in the interstices of space where the most interesting personal revelations can occur. On my most recent trip to the Malin-Hebrides Sea in 2021, I elected to take the night shift to manage the hydrographic data acquisition, with a handful of crew that were keeping the vessel running while everyone else was off watch. There is something particularly special about being one of a handful of skeleton staff on a vessel at night bringing in the dawn. One of the deck crew (Phillip Gunner) was also moonlighting in

the kitchen, frequently pulling together night feeds of john dory fillets and hake, dusted in flour and fried in butter to get us through the shift. Sitting there eating in the dull glow of a screen in the dry lab, eating freshly fried fish waiting for the sun to come up, is a precious memory that I remember more clearly even than the scientific objectives of the cruise.

Ultimately, it is the bonds of human relations that get things done at sea just as anywhere else, a shared vision—a vision still tangible from the pages of the *Sea of Cortez*.

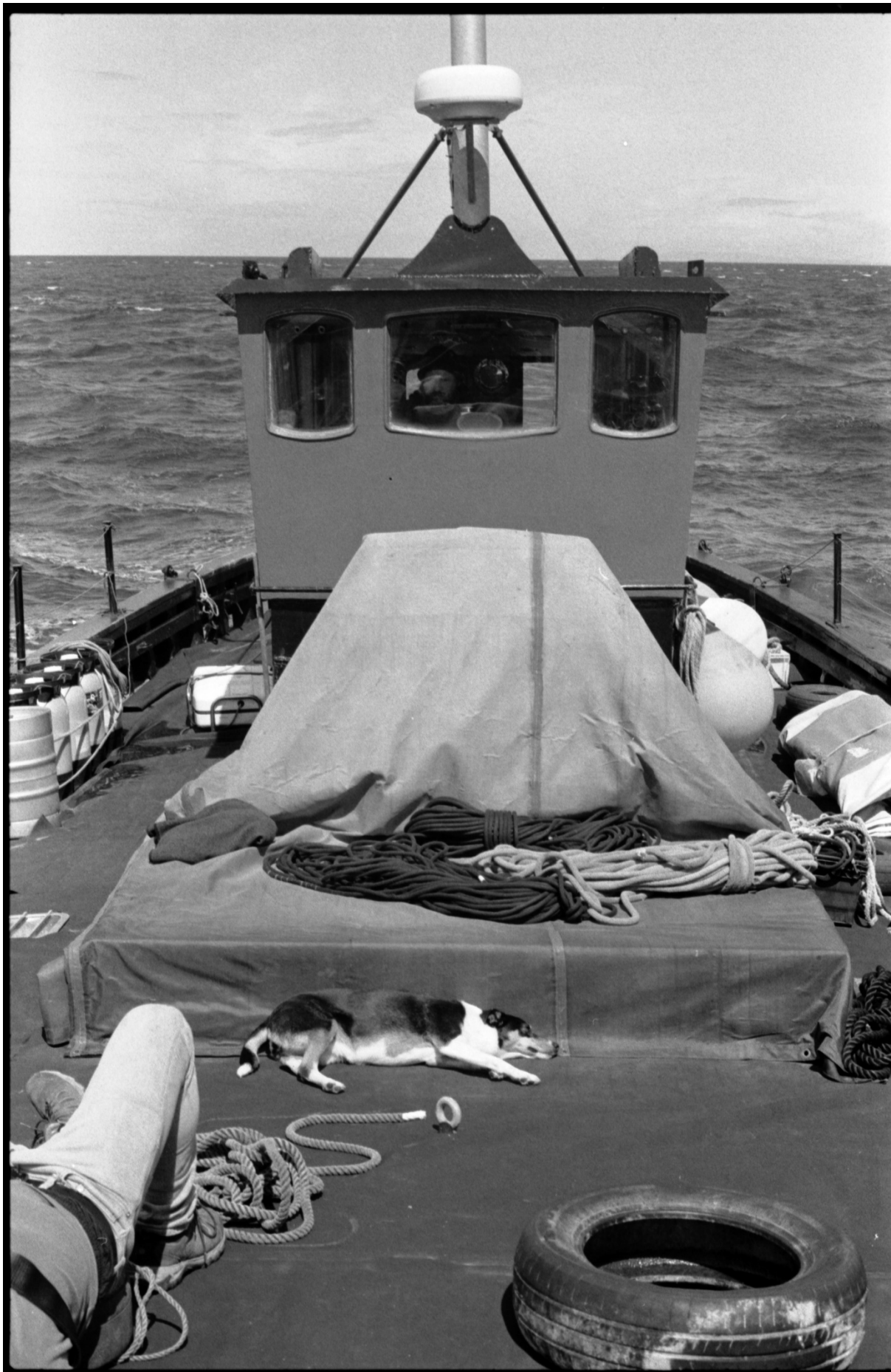


Figure 8: Heading south to Belfast on Family's Pride, Meg asleep on deck, Damien at the helm. Photographer: Adam Bradley (May 2022).

<bio>Chris McGonigle's interdisciplinary research interests are focused on understanding what is driving patterns of biodiversity in marine environments, and how we can use acoustic techniques to develop our ability to monitor and conserve these resources most effectively. Specific projects he is currently involved in include seafloor mapping, fisheries ecology, species distribution, and hydrodynamic modeling for benthic habitat mapping. This work is at the interface of marine ecology, acoustics, spatial analysis, and numerical modeling. Chris's research has societal relevance and impact with implications for sustainable development of marine resources and the conservation of marine biodiversity. </bio>

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