March 2018 Shipyard Update

Over the last few months, the shipwrights have been replacing (where needed) and repairing (when possible) the deck beams that frame the main deck. This phase challenged us with preserving as much of the original DNA of the Western Flyer as possible, while trying to rebuild her into a safe sea-going vessel. The aft deck accounts for almost fifty feet of the primary working platform used during the voyage and has great historical importance. The primary beam that frames the fish hold hatch, called the king beam, has the Coast Guard documentation number carved into its aft face. Unfortunately, due to years of the boat’s hard work and excessive deck leaks, the majority of the beam needs to be rebuilt. In the end, we made the choice to remove the outer two inches of the timber, preserving much of the

Building Bridges

Last month our Project Director Chris Chase and Western Flyer Foundation Director William Gilly sat down with the Monterey city manager Hans Uslar. The meeting was organized by Steve Scheiblauer, former Harbormaster for the Port of Monterey and one of our major supporters. The goal of the meeting was to share the Western Flyer Foundation’s commitment to being part of the Monterey
original vessel and the all-important documentation number. The shipwrights will incorporate the two-inch portion of the original wood into the new replacement, making a blend of old and new, durable and reliable for years to come.

In the coming weeks, the shipwrights will start focusing their attention on the stern, including the backbone and rudder post. The original wood used for that portion of the *Flyer* was Douglas Fir. Today, with a limited supply of quality Douglas Fir, the stern lifts, rudder post, and any additional backbone timbers will need to be replaced with Purple Heart. Northwest Shipyards has been incorporating Purple Heart wood into boat projects for nearly 30-years. The strong tropical hardwood imported from Central America is a durable replacement. Its distinctive bright purple color readily identifies it and supplies its name.

Chris Chase, Project Director

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Donate Now!

Please help the effort to restore the *Western Flyer* and influence young minds by teaching them the inspiring story of this boat and the Steinbeck-Ricketts Expedition.

We need help more than ever to move forward with this
The Collecting Success of Ed Ricketts & John Steinbeck on the 1940 Sea of Cortez Expedition

by Rick Brusca, Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum

In March of 1940, modern marine ecology in the Gulf of California (Sea of Cortez) was born with the pioneering expedition of Ed Ricketts and John Steinbeck aboard the Western Flyer. Although earlier biologists had visited the area, none had done so using an ecological or “holistic” approach, and none before them had attempted to undertake a faunal survey across all animal phyla. Have you ever wondered how many species that famous expedition captured? In their book, Sea of Cortez: A Leisurely Journal of Travel and Research, they reported collecting more than 550 different species, including 35 to 55 new undescribed/unnamed species. However, the book’s “Synoptic Catalogue” listed only 484 species. Presumably the “missing 66 species” comprised unidentified specimens that Ricketts had sent off to specialists for examination. In a letter from Ricketts to Steinbeck (22 August 1941) Ed wrote, “When complete data comes to hand, I think we shall have collected more than 600 species, of which 60 will have been undescribed at the time they were taken.”

I have compiled a complete list of the species collected during the expedition, using a combination of the book’s Phyletic Catalogue, Ricketts’s unpublished field notes, his correspondence with specialists, and publications by specialists since the appearance of the book. And, I’ve updated the species names to reflect taxonomic changes since 1940. I estimate ~567 species were collected, about 40 of which were new to science at the time and have since been named and described (and perhaps another dozen or so still remain undescribed).

Based on the numbers of species the expedition took at each of its 20 collection sites, the five most diverse areas sampled were: Punta Lobos on Isla Espíritu Santo (115 species; March 20), Puerto Escondido (95 species; March
25-27), Bahía de los Ángeles (94 species; April 1), Puerto Refugio on Isla Ángel de la Guarda (92 species; April 2), and Bahía Concepción (91 species; March 28-29). These numbers probably reflect a combination of collection effort, degree of low tide exposure at the time of collection, and actual local biodiversity.

The Macrofauna Golfo online database lists about 5,020 species of invertebrates so far recorded from the Sea of Cortez. Just under half of these (2219 species) occur in the Gulf’s intertidal zone. Thus, despite the rushed expedition, Steinbeck and Ricketts collected about 25% of the known littoral species during their expedition. Very impressive for just six weeks of fieldwork. The main taxa they missed were smaller forms (which are spread through all the phyla but are especially abundant among gastropods) and species whose uppermost occurrence is at or below the 0-tide level (especially echinoderms).

An 80-year retrospective volume is planned for publication in 2020, which will include details of the species Steinbeck and Ricketts collected, the collecting stations, and many aspects of their relationship to one another and to the Sea of Cortez.

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