

Seven days at sea: Marine Science seminar vs. Sea

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Seven weeks of an 8:35 class can do anyone in, right? Marine biology is great, but who is alive around here before ten in the morning anyway? Lectures on the Ekman's spiral and why ripples are really tidal waves, technically anyway, just are not meant for morning classes.

On some of those cold, snowy mornings Dr. Bryden would launch into reminiscences of a little private island, in a warm sub-tropical sea. Seahorse Key -- it sounded like Paradise. For many of us, it seemed a far-flung figment of our fearless leader's mind.

February 29, 12:30 p.m.: the seminar people meet Bryden's students. Uneasy glances, and thoughts of "Oh now, did I blow my break?" nervous faces flit around as we wait for the finishing touches to be put in the rented U-Haul. As pile-in time arrives some choose the van (unlucky devils, eight hours crammed in a shoe box with 14 other people makes for shatter-terred nerves) and some choose the cars.

Led by Dr. Bryden (an awesome power behind the wheel) and bearing the proud insignia of Guilford College, one van, three cars and a U-Haul trailer forge out of the confines of the campus, gung-ho for Florida. As Dr. Bryden simultaneously lights his pipe, makes his own lane, and hangs a right, Greens-

boro is left behind. I-85 to 220 south to 52 to I-95. We travel Tobacco Road, through a myriad of towns made up of shacks, rusted-out house trailers, and poor families eking a poor living from wasted soil. Most of us count shacks, the shacks turn into sheep, and soon, the sheep turn into sleep.

At 11 p.m. we arrive at the Holiday Inn of Point South, South Carolina. Dinner is served at the greasiest of greasy-spoon joints: a Mobil gas station with a 24-hour Snack Bar. The occupants of the car pulling the U-Haul cheated. They pulled off at 6:30 and had some of the Colonel's chicken.

After a brief sleep at the hotel, we are awakened by desk calls at 6:30 a.m. I answer "Point South Morgue -- You kill 'em, we chill 'em." I was wrong; it wasn't Dr. Bryden on the other end of the line.

On the road once more we make a stop at the Florida welcome station, where Dr. Bryden goes un-conservative (touristy) and dons his green-visored sun hat. Everyone guzzles fresh O.J. while the van lets off steam after overheating. Wonder who was driving the lead car? Let's not hear any excuses about cruise control. By the time everyone is tired of playing Frisbee the van has cooled, and we hit the road again.

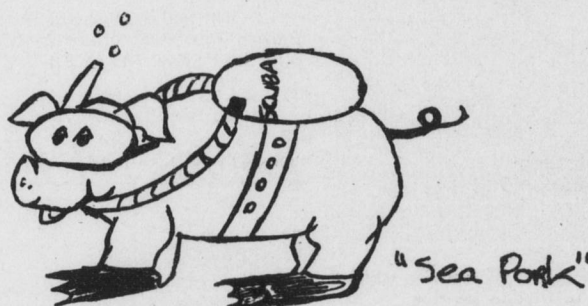
There is a last stop at Gainesville, where we tank up (literally), buy cheap sneakers (for playing in the mud), cheap

beer (for when we are done playing in the mud), and \$249 worth of food. From Gainesville to Cedar Key (furthest driving point to Seahorse Key), is technically an hour's drive, but a torrential rainstorm and murderous goat-path roads lengthen the trip a bit. When we finally reach Cedar Key somebody sneezes and we all miss Main Street.

We arrive at the dock, where a boat is waiting to take us out to Seahorse Key. Chuck Haven, our "captain" does not seem to be as excited as we are to get out to the island. It is still pouring rain out, but eight of us cram along the front railing of

We spend the afternoon identifying the specimens that we found. "Sea Pork" proves to be *Amarucium stellatum*, as well as the nickname of Dan Estrem, a Greensboro police officer and student in the class. We quickly find out that the scintillating nightlife on the island consists of card games, tobacco chewing, backgammoning, late-night marine maneuvers, and all manner of low-key, keep-it-down partying. At least for the first few nights.

The following morning we spend "collectively freezing" out on the mudflats. Most of us anyway; some decide to sleep instead. By noon the rays get



the boat for our first glimpse of Seahorse Key. On the way we toss miniature pretzels to some Laughing Gulls. Some people find out that there is more than one kind of seagull.

Coming into the small bay on the backside of the island, a combination Fantasy Island/Gitmo Bay panorama opens before us. A corrugated iron seawall fronts a dozen yards of spottily planked walk-way, which has an even mangier looking dock sprouting from it. We moor the boat to the dock and begin the tedious job of transferring all the gear and beer of 24 people from this place to that place.

That place proves to be two room swinging off of an abandoned lighthouse. Leading to the lighthouse is a narrow, steep sidewalk. To the left on the way up is a rectangular lab (where we will spend the next week identifying specimens) and a round water tank with a cone top.

The dock is equipped with a rowboat, a canoe, and a motorboat; and we all vie for them in the reverse order. Dinner is ready after a few hours, by the time we've explored the lighthouse and adjacent land.

The following morning the girls at the south end of the lighthouse wake up -- freezing in damp sleeping bags. The built-in Sears space-heater had spaced out sometime during the night, and the air temperature inside the room equalled that outside (40°). It was raining, windy, and colder than a witch's britches out on the mudflats, where we scurried around like starved sandpipers, in search of "specimens." (If it's alive and looks strange, grab it!) After about a half-hour it begins to snow, and we give up as the tide rolls in.

stronger and the sunworshippers betray themselves, and Pina Coladas and brew in hand, we begin to slip into the lazy ease of island life. Any more rum or drinks or any more sun, and some of us will slip off the porch for sure. While North Carolina is snowed under, we are here watching the heat waves rising from beneath the lemon tree.

We make a beer run to shore late in the afternoon even though it is only our second day on the island. Howard Luehrs crash lands the boat into the dock as we hit Cedar Key with a bang. Beer, toothbrushes, and pipe-cleaners for Dr. B (or rather, D.B. as we affectionately called him behind his back) are bought, and then we head seaward once more. Unfortunately, halfway home, we find ourselves enrouté to the wrong island. C'est la vie. . . or so it goes (right John).

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, Dr. B. has lead his entourage of students on a nature hike around the key. As we arrive home a touch (?) football game is choosing sides behind the lighthouse. By the time everyone is weary of the game, beaten and bruised all over, dinner is ready. (Superb barbequed chicken, courtesy of Howard and John.)

The morning sun finds us collecting again, i.e. playing in the mud, and later, dredging for specimens off of the big boat. The first live seahorse [*Hippocampus*] of the trip is found today. After the two dredging trips the rest of the day is spent in idolatry of the sun. The night is spent identifying specimens in the lab. However, while the other sleep. . .

Dr. Bryden is mysteriously toilet-papered snugly into his bottom bunk berth (when he woke up the next morning he

And the Key

*I beg your pardon, Doctor,
My mind was drifting off on
It's not that I'm not interested
Guilford College is just no p
I'll take that island in the mo
Sandy beaches drinking rum*

