



Postcard from Fak Fak

The Beaufort Explorer is a game old bird. Her close working and living environment has bred a close-knit crew who have had some good times over the last couple of years.

By Matt Eaton, Party Chief Beaufort Explorer



In October 2008, the CGG Laurentian limped into Bergen with a broken azimuth thruster and a bruised reputation. She had started life in 1983 as the supply vessel Seaway Labrador, before her transition to seismic as the Simon Labrador, then Labrador Horizon in the 1990s. CGG renamed her Laurentian.

When PGS purchased Arrow Seismic, Laurentian came with it and underwent a thorough refit and facelift, before preparing to start a new phase in her history.

What's in a Name

As the maritime crew removed the CGG decals from the ship's sides and peeled off the Laurentian sign, welders arrived with the new letters to be fixed to each side of the bow. Her new name was to be Beaufort Explorer. Some creative crew members were tempted to re-arrange the letters laid out on the quayside, and she nearly became the Euroflab Exporter.

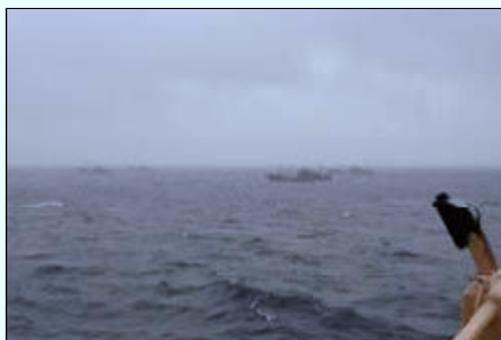


Rigged and ready, Beaufort Explorer 2008

GeoStreamer Champion

After about a month rigging the vessel, and a brief dry-docking to remove the broken thruster, mount PGS signs on the funnels and some other sundry tasks, she sailed for her first winter in the southern North Sea.

Almost 5,000km of 2D GeoStreamer® data was acquired between the end of November and the middle of January, proving unequivocally that GeoStreamer technology can master the mix of winter weather and seismic acquisition. After that it was time to set sail for Asia-Pacific, where the Beaufort Explorer would be used to demonstrate the advantages of GeoStreamer in a rather more exotic location.



Pair trawlers appear out of the mist

Since arriving in the region more than 50,000km of 2D GeoStreamer data has been shot, with a mixture of proprietary and MultiClient surveys in Indonesia, Australia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Timor Leste, Thailand and China. The idea was that by demonstrating the technology in this way 3D surveys would follow on. The plan worked. Now Ramform Explorer is busy with 3D GeoStreamer projects for months to come.

'Highlights' of the time with PGS include steering failure at 10 knots sailing along the channel into Den Helder for crewchange, followed by the rescue tug that blacked out and drifted away before they could get a line to us.

The Yellow Sea may well haunt those onboard for years to come, with seismic lines crossing busy shipping lanes whilst pair trawlers without radios appeared out of the fog in large groups.

Scouting for Streamer Killers

Working around the Arafura Sea has been a major part of the Beaufort Explorer's work over the years, both on the Australian and Indonesian side. Some of the areas are incredibly remote, nautical charts are a 100 years old.

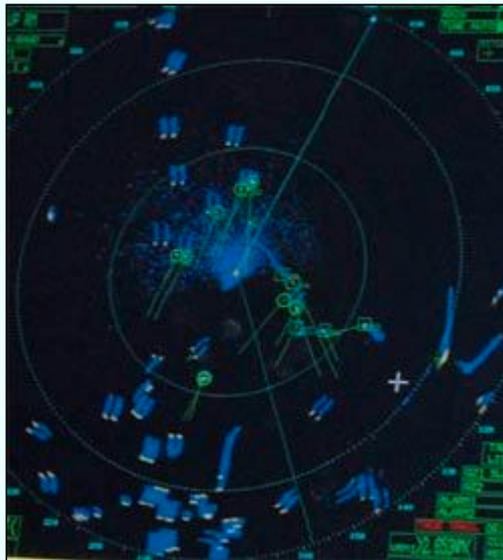
Local fishing equipment has provided some 'entertainment'. One technique used by locals is a fish aggregating device or FAD, locally known in Indonesia as a rumpon.

This is a mini eco-system consisting of a heavy anchor (typically a large block of concrete), with a rope or wire to the surface attached to a float. Below the float are strung palm fronds for fish to hide in, which then attract larger fish.

The rumpons can be tricky to spot. They are often placed in water depths of over 2000m, with a float consisting of a large metal cylinder that barely (if at all) breaks the surface.

Needless to say if you hit one of these with a large feather (where the streamer is 'pushed' off to the side of the vessel track by currents) then you are in trouble. Chase boats are used to scout for these streamer killers, but often it is like finding a needle in a haystack.

There could be one hiding waiting to snag the streamer in the middle of the night. Other contractors have destroyed whole streamers in this way, so if Beaufort Explorer survives her Asia-Pacific campaign without a major strike she



Attack of the pair trawlers!



Fishing lanes move across the bow and tail-bow as BEA chnges sail direction

certainly will have had luck on her side.

Life at sea brings with it sights that few get to see, including fantastic skies and desolate paradise beaches untouched by package holidays.

Old Fashioned Charm

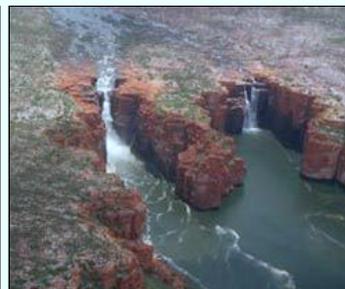
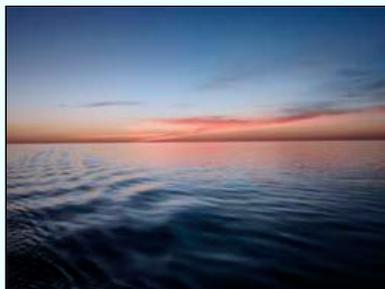
It looks like Beaufort Explorer's job is nearly done. Though she is fully functioning, at 28 years old, her age is against her. The untapped Indian GeoStreamer® market forbids vessels this old from working in Indian waters.



A high floating rampon doesn't look very dangerous, but 2000m beneath hides the concrete anchor

Her facilities are perhaps outdated, compared to the luxuries of modern seismic vessels. An estate agent might describe them as "cosy and intimate".

The small recreation room also serves as an internet room, a meeting room and a store room. In the messroom, people have to squeeze past each other to get to a seat. It was designed for the small crew of a supply boat. Ignoring adjectives and passing frustrations, the atmosphere onboard is good humored.



Camraderie & Christmas Fare

The trip over Christmas brought out the traditional food along with the usual great coffee, lovely bread and excellent soup. The soup itself produced one of the memorable moments of the trip.

One (nameless) crewmember was looking over the shoulder of another at something on a screen, whilst drinking a mug of soup. There was an unfortunate error in selection between trachea and oesophagus resulting in an epic explosion that redecorated the instrument room. As the dust (or rather pea soup) settled the only dry thing was a lone voice saying, "don't worry I was planning to shampoo my hair tonight anyway".

The challenges of the Beaufort have led to a close-knit crew who have had some good times over the last couple of years.

As the final curtain comes down we will be sad to see her go. But who knows what will happen, this old bird is a phoenix. Somehow it seems more likely that she will reappear in another guise, perhaps with another name, sometime in the future.

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