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Visit to Chandeleur Islands

May 12, 2010 · [1 Comment](#)

by Shannon Dosemagen (shannon@labucketbrigade.org)

On Sunday, May 9th, I went out on the Gulf with Stewart of [Grassroots Mapping](#), my co-worker Mariko, volunteer Branigan and Captain Jim of [Uptown Anglers](#). Jim was kind enough to invite us to come out with him as his interest was to take a look at the fishing grounds where he typically fishes during the summer months. We on the other hand, were intent upon releasing a helium balloon or a kite with a camera set to take pictures every 15 seconds, at least 1,000 feet above the Gulf. I've been to Venice a couple of times since the spill, but this was my first chance to head out on a boat. We took off about 10am and headed in the direction of the remaining land strip of Breton Sound. The ride was rough and after getting doused by multiple waves (the whole time wondering how much oil and dispersants were mixed in), we skirted the western side of Breton Sound and headed towards the western side of the Chandeleur Islands.



Trawler skimming oil

The Gulf of Mexico is home to a bizarre landscape of oil platforms and pipes that stick up at random intervals. It has been made even stranger by the multiple trawlers that typically are lined with nets, but instead now carry orange booms that are being used to skim the water with. Passing this diverse set of Gulf

features we hit the western side of Chandeleur, putting the boat in neutral about a mile off of shore. We stuck a depth stick in the water and upon discovering that the water was only about thigh high, Captain Jim mentioned that him and his friends many times (before the spill) would dock the boat and walk to the island. Watching the iridescent sheen of the oil and brown chunks of clay-type matter swirl around the boat that day, despite the heat of the sun, the idea was not in the least bit tempting.



Oil sheen in the waters on the western side of the Chandeleurs

The wind had died down so we were able to release the helium balloon (check out the [Grassroots Mapping](#) site for some of the days excellent images and a description of the project) and let the boat drift, hoping to get a good range of images from the camera hanging 1,000 feet above us. Sitting on deck, eating leftover Vietnamese bun, sandwiches and drinking Arizona iced tea, we all experienced a moment of shock and dismay as a dolphin surfaced five feet away from the boat in an area that was clearly marked by the sheen of the oil. Although I only saw three dolphins at a time, they continued to swim off the western coast of Chandeleur in an area that was clearly in the path of the spill. Captain Jim commented that typically, the water here was clear and you could see to the bottom with ease. He thought that the brownish nature of the water, throughout the course of our trip, might be a result of the mixture of oil and dispersants.

As we were packing up to head back, we heard a low flying helicopter coming in over Chandeleur. In disbelief, we watched as the helicopter came from the north and then circled around to make a landing from the south, upsetting a large colony of brown pelicans and other seabirds that were sitting on the outer edge of the island. The helicopter was picking up three people who were on the island and we all wondered, on such a big strip of land, what would have possessed the pilot to fly in an area that would send the already distressed pelicans who are nesting and should not be disturbed, flying out over the oil coated water?



We returned to Venice through the eerie landscape of the Gulf, with fewer boats and clean-up crews than I expected, and docked about 7pm. Captain Jim later commented to us that after we left it had taken him a good deal of time to scrub oil off of his boat.

Returning to the LABB office on Monday, we received a chemical sheet from the [Louisiana Environmental Action Network](#), that gave news on air quality in Venice. Both the Hydrogen Sulfide and Volatile Organic Chemical levels exceeded the Louisiana Ambient Air Standards. One of my co-workers commented that we should have been wearing, at the very least, respirators. Although I expected to see protective gear being worn by clean-up crews out on the Gulf, we didn't see a single person with a respirator or other protective gear. Are the environmental hazards of clean-up not properly being communicated to workers or is this a personal choice that they are making? From now on, Grassroots Mappers and LABB will be strongly recommending the use of protective gear to volunteer mappers going out on the Gulf.

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[relevart](#) // [May 14, 2010 at 7:26 am](#) | [Reply](#)

Please find out who these heartless idiots are so that such stupidity can be halted. Good people are finding it hard to sleep a wink while such tragic suffering looms. These fools must be getting a full 8 hours. How else can pure, calouse ignorance be demonstrated with such perfection? They should be heavily fined for each bird they sent out over that toxic water.

Lest we forget that in all the talk of 'how much \$ this is all costing big oil ', I am doubly sickened by the lack of media sentiment regarding the slow suffering destruction of that which is PRICELESS! – a 'God given' natural world teeming with life and beauty.

The next time anyone cares to focus on the 'price of gasoline', let's remember all the hidden fees. They will be (have been) higher than most care to fathom.

As for the political ‘big government’ scare speak is concerned, today is the alternative. Deregulated standards have reduced us to this. With our world dieing before us, we are addicts of oil. Our ‘enemies’ delight in the weekness of our addiction and yet, with every off shore rig that we build, we are just creating another dispensory to our sickness, instead of seeking a different frame of mind and saying “no more”. As it becomes increasingly clear that “Bad things happen when good people do nothing”, THANK YOU LABB and your affiliates for being good people who don’t just say “Oh well”, and actually would rather ‘do something!’.

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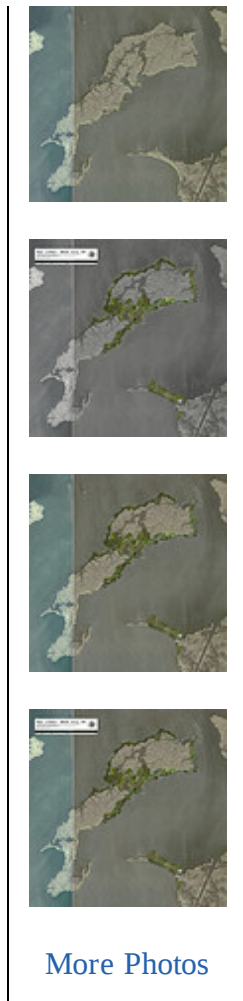


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