

Polywogs No More

28 October 2008

Dear Troop 27,

300 years ago in the Royal Navy, we would have been dragged through the ocean from a yardarm and nearly drowned.

Even today, in the United States Navy, we would have been obliged to drink and eat unspeakable concoctions in the service of Lord Neptune.

But we were not compelled to any of those fates.

Instead, we merely straddled the line.



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We straddled a special line, a unique line, the line at latitude 0 degrees.

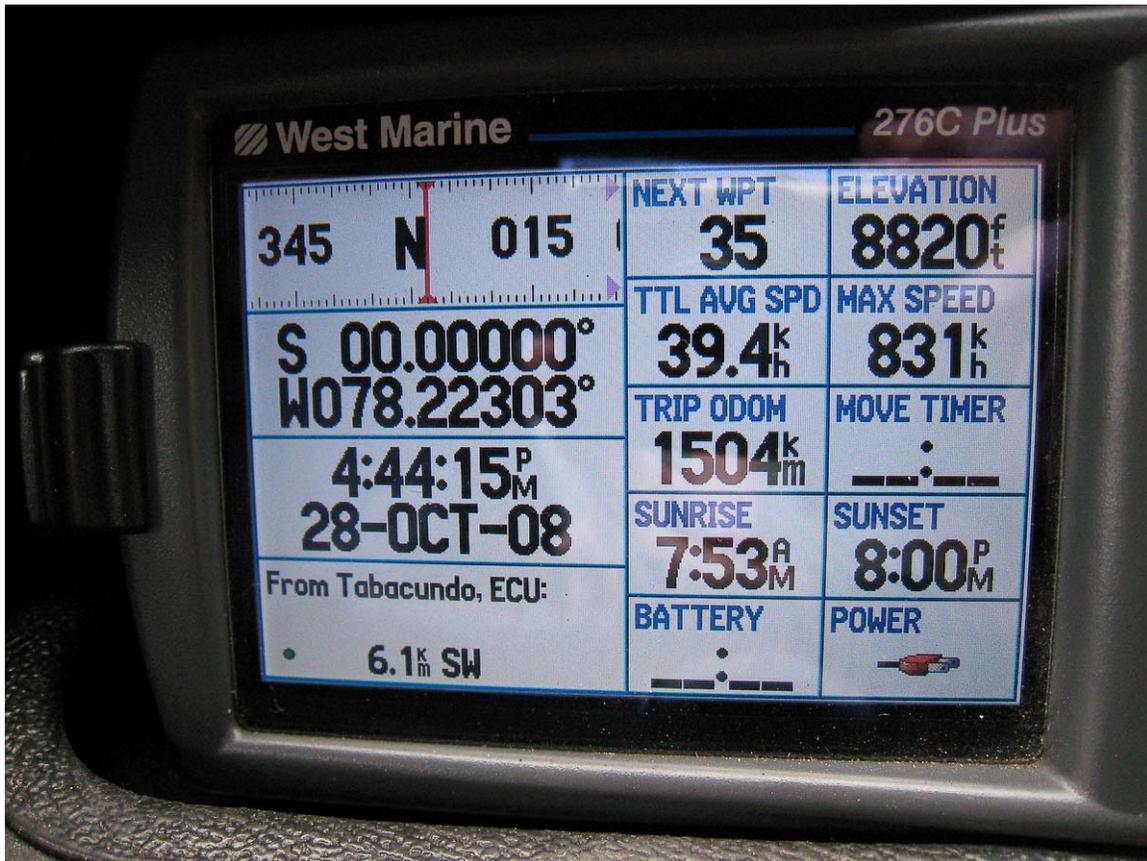


Photo by Stephanie Hackney

We straddled the equator, the middle of the world.



Photo by Stephanie Hackney

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While there, we learned a little bit about the equator in general and the unique things about the equator in the Andes.



Photo by Stephanie Hackney

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We also learned about the Tropic of Capricorn, which we crossed three months before.



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We learned that three imaginary lines around the earth, the Equator, the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn, were all identified by ancient civilizations and retain special significance today.



Photo by Stephanie Hackney

When we crossed the equator, we merely posed for pictures, gained some new information and were reminded of some things we learned in school.

We did not cross the equator on the ocean, where sailors who cross the line of the equator endure challenging initiations to transform from lowly polywogs to esteemed shellbacks.

We remain landlubbers, but honorary shellback landlubbers, nonetheless.

One of the members of Troop 27 also has the opportunity to become an honorary shellback.

To earn this honor, as well as a special prize which I will send, you need to answer the following questions on the spot, with no reference to any external source, e.g., friends, encyclopedias, textbooks or the internet:

1. What is the equator?
2. What is the significance of the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn?
3. In 1735 the French Geodesic Mission came to what is now Ecuador to conduct experiments, including measuring the curvature of the earth. What is unique about the equator in the Andes that led the mission to that location?

Best wishes from your global emissaries,
Douglas & Stephanie Hackney

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You can join Troop 27 in answering the three questions. Post your answers as comments on the blog entry here: <http://hackneys.com/blog/2008/10/28/polywogs-no-more/> .

To participate, you are held to the high standards of honesty, honor and integrity of the Boy Scouts. In other words: no cheating. And that includes Wikipedia.

First commenter with the (honest, no cheating) correct answers wins honorary shellback status and a special gift from me.

Troop 27 is a Boy Scout troop in Round Rock, Texas. Our nephew, Vance Hackney, is a member of the troop and my brother, Jeff Hackney, is one of the troop leaders. You can learn more about Troop 27 here: <http://www.bsatroop27.us/>

The hats we are wearing in the photos are the unique hats of Troop 27.

Unless otherwise credited, all photos by Douglas Hackney.



Photo by Jorge Valdes

Douglas and Stephanie Hackney, honorary shellback landlubbers, are on a two to three year global overland expedition.

You can learn more about their travels at: <http://www.hackneys.com/travel>