

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE OCEANOGRAPHY SOCIETY

Oceanography

CITATION

Kappel, E.S. 2009. Quarterdeck: Fortieth anniversaries. *Oceanography* 22(3):5,
doi:10.5670/oceanog.2009.84.

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Fortieth Anniversaries

On pages 226–235 of this issue, Peter Wadhams celebrates the fortieth anniversary of the launch of what is believed to be the first (and only) circumnavigation of the Americas, carried out by the Canadian oceanographic research vessel CSS *Hudson*. This historic expedition started in Halifax, Nova Scotia, on November 19, 1969, sailed south, and returned to Halifax on October 16, 1970 after navigating through the Northwest Passage. *Hudson* made measurements and took water samples in parts of the ocean that had never before been studied by oceanographers. Wadhams describes the voyage as “the last of the big multidisciplinary globe-spanning oceanographic expeditions that hacked out our basic knowledge of ocean structure, water masses, and currents during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.”

Of course, this year also marks the fortieth anniversary of a much more heralded “first”—the moon landing by the Apollo 11 crew. This technological feat and its anniversary unquestionably deserve vast acclaim. And, to be honest, there’s little chance that the public would have been more captivated by *Hudson* scientists’ first direct measurements of the Antarctic Circumpolar Current than by Neil Armstrong’s first step on the moon. No comparison between the two events was possible. “One small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind” was seen and heard in real time by audiences all over the globe. But, *Hudson*’s discoveries, no matter how much they had meant to a group of oceanographers, occurred in media silence, at a time predating live broadcasts from scientific vessels, or even emails from sea announcing significant accomplishments.

In 2009, oceanographers finally possess the same ability to disseminate their achievements in real time that the astronauts possessed four decades ago. The US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration launched *Okeanos Explorer*, dubbed “America’s ship for ocean exploration,” whose purpose is “to systematically explore our largely unknown ocean for the purpose of discovery and the advancement of knowledge” (see <http://oceanexplorer.noaa.gov/okeanos/welcome.html>). *Okeanos Explorer*’s mission is much the same as *Hudson*’s, but the modern ship will allow shore-based scientists to become part of the sea-going expedition through satellite and Internet-enabled technologies. These technologies also will permit the general public to participate, in real time, in the excitement of ocean exploration. Perhaps videos of the seafloor streamed from *Okeanos Explorer* and its dedicated remotely operated vehicle will capture the public’s imagination like close-up images of the moon did 40 years ago.


ELLEN S. KAPPEL, EDITOR