

Cousteau misses marine paradise, tells of experiences

By Kris Hansen

Jean-Michel Cousteau took Nebraska teachers on a South Sea adventure during their state convention.

Jean-Michel, the son of Jacques Cousteau, spoke about Project Ocean Search to about 800 members of the Nebraska State Education Association Thursday during its annual convention.

Project Ocean Search, co-sponsored by Cousteau and Pepperdine University of California, exposes students, teachers and the general public to the ocean world, Cousteau said. Groups go to remote areas and live for several months exploring the ocean as well as other lifestyles.

The 40-year-old Cousteau said Project Ocean Search was nearly impossible to understand without being there. He attempted to create the trip through slides of the island and a film of underwater scenes.

Friendly villagers

The most recent Project Ocean Search was on Wuvulu Island, just north of Australia. Cousteau showed the approach, stressing the remoteness of the spot, and described the four-mile long island.

The camp consists of three thatched dormitories and a large meeting hall. There were no cars on the island, he said, so everyone walked.

About 600 villagers live on the island. The villagers were very friendly and invited the crew to dinner once or twice a week.

Cousteau said the village children were more skillful than American children. The children are constructing musical instruments at age two and can easily handle a machete at age four, he said.

"Can you see our kids with a machete at four?" Cousteau asked. "That would be the end of dogs' tails and mothers' toes."

Going coconuts

Coconuts were the main staple of the village. The natives ate the coconut meat and milk and burned the husks for fuel, he said.

The project group met every morning for a lesson, then split up to study areas ranging from animal behavior and medical research to deep ocean exploring.

One girl planted some papaya seeds as a project and had 10- to 12-foot trees in 11 months.

"We had papaya fruit for the rest of the stay. It was a miracle," he said.

Cousteau gave extensive descriptions of the wildlife on the island. For example, a type of hermit crab grows too large to live in seashells, so it inhabits coconuts.

"You're walking blissfully on the beach and suddenly, a bunch of coconuts are moving all around you," Cousteau recalled. "That is weird."

Underwater cave

The group discovered an underwater cave 72 feet down during the last visit. A new species of fish was found while exploring it, which is under study at the Smithsonian Institution.

He said leaving was hard for both the students and the villagers.

"When it's time to go home, I see a lot of tears on both sides."

Exploration was not the only goal of the trip. "Our goal is to have a better understanding of our own generation, our own species, our own world—for, after all, it's good to live," he said.

Cousteau took his first dive at the age of seven when his parents pushed him overboard. The family took many expeditions along the French Riviera exploring the coastline while he grew up, he said.

Marine paradise lost

"I remember the beauty of the environment. I remember sensing the fragility of it."

The coastline is no longer the marine paradise Cousteau remembers. He said he felt great frustration that his 11-year-old son could not see the things he once did.

Cousteau stressed that what happens on one part of the earth affects the whole, land and water included. "After we have been fighting our environment for

thousands of years, we realize we have mastered this planet," he said. "We can even control it. We can blow it up tomorrow morning if we so elect."

"Then we have to put our guns aside and start to protect it, caress, cherish what's left of it, because, whether we like it or not, there is no escape," he said.



Jean-Jacques Cousteau, son of Jacques, spoke to teachers about Project Ocean Search during the Nebraska Education Association's annual meeting. Photo by Bob Pearson

Businesses, students to be at Ag Careers Day

UNL agriculture students and representatives from agriculture-related businesses will get a chance to discuss careers in agriculture at the second annual Ag Careers Day Nov. 1.

Sponsored by Alpha Zeta agricultural honorary fraternity, and the Ag Advisory Board, Ag Careers Day is an "informal exchange between interested students and several agriculture-related businesses," according to Calvin Goding, chancellor of Alpha Zeta.

Goding said Ag Careers Day gives students a chance to find out what is involved with each company and what perspective employers are looking for.

Goding said a few of the 37 businesses involved with this year's Ag Careers Day are: John Deere & Co., DeKalb Agricultural Research Inc., Dow Chemical Co., First

National Bank & Trust and Federal Landbank of Omaha.

All agriculture majors will be represented by at least one of the businesses involved with Ag Careers Day.

An 8 a.m. breakfast with College of Agriculture officials, department heads, company representatives and nine selected students will begin the day's events. The various businesses will set up booths in the East Union for the remainder of the day.

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