

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Elementary Students Visit National Historic Site For Marine Exploration Presentation

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ST. CROIX -- Students from the Pearl B. Larsen and Ricardo Richards elementary schools attended a live video call at the National Park Service's Christiansted National Historic Site on November 2 with crew members stationed on the Okeanos Explorer, a National Ocean Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) vessel currently exploring the waters of the Buck Island Reef National Monument, the Department of Education announced Friday.

According to the NOAA Ocean Explorer website, the Okeanos Explorer is the "only federal vessel dedicated to exploring our unknown ocean for the purpose of discovery and the advancement of knowledge about the deep ocean."

Pearl B. Larsen fifth grade teacher Alex Hewlett-Newton and Ricardo Richards' Zahra O'Rielly-Bates' classes were invited to participate in the learning activity. National Park Service Biologist Clayton Pollock helped students navigate the NOAA Ocean Explorer website, at which time students engaged Pollock in questions about marine and wild life.

"You guys are good," he said, adding, "You guys came prepared. You know your stuff."

The 30-minute video call featured Daniel Wagner, expedition coordinator in NOAA's Office of Ocean Exploration and Research, and Steve Auscavitch, expedition science co-lead, who provided students with an overview of their work in the world's oceans and later answered students' questions.

Wagner and Auscavitch's expedition involve mapping and exploring the deepest seafloors of the Buck Island waters in areas that had not been explored before. Their work includes the use of a Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV) that will help the scientists discover the natural habitats of corals and other marine life.

Wagner said the water is approximately 1,800 meters deep, which, he noted, is the same length of five Empire State buildings. He said the area is not the deepest seafloor in the U.S., in response to a student's question, adding, however, that it is one of the deepest seafloors of a national park.

The Okeanos Explorer has about 49 crew members, with many doing on-shore work as part of the Buck Island expedition, which began on October 30 and will conclude on November 20.

Students received information pamphlets and stickers at the end of the call.

For more information on the Okeanos Explorer Buck Island expedition, visit <https://oceanexplorer.noaa.gov/welcome.html>.