

20 years on
***RRS Discovery* visit to EXPO98 – Lisbon**

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Many thanks to ex-colleague Steve Hall for reminding us that it was 20 years ago this August that *RRS Discovery* became “O navio cheio de ciência” ... The ship full of science.

The ship’s visit to Portugal was arranged by NERC Research Vessel Services (RVS) to present a showcase for UK marine science and technology at EXPO98 in Lisbon: 1998 being designated the United Nations International Year of the Ocean.

I was then Head of External Affairs at Southampton Oceanography Centre (SOC) at the time and worked with NERC, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) & the British Council to plan SOC’s role in the event. Steve Hall (now CEO of the Society for Underwater Technology) was working part-time for External Affairs and, like myself, was there to meet and greet visitors, show them around the ship and host VIPs. Steve was also NERC Autosub Science Missions Thematic Programme manager.



RRS Discovery hosted on-board displays, receptions, and meetings manned by staff from across the UK marine community including: RVS, SOC, Centre for Coastal and Marine Sciences (CCMS), the University of Aberdeen, Met.Office, Environment Agency, ABP, Fugro Geos, IACMST, Marine Foresight/Office of Science and Technology, Challenger Society and the Society for Underwater Technology.

Professor John Krebs (then NERC Chief Executive) co-hosted the opening reception with the British Ambassador, Roger Westbrook, where 200 guests, mostly Portuguese scientists, attended an occasion, which like all the subsequent onboard events, was remembered for first class catering courtesy Roy Elliott and his team at RVS. We had planned for John Battle MP (then Minister for Science, Energy and Industry) to attend this reception but due to a last-minute change in his duties he cancelled. Other events included a UK/Portuguese science workshop hosted by the British Council with a focus on developing collaboration, especially via European Framework V proposals.

The EC funded 4 of the best postgraduate students from Southampton, Bangor, Newcastle and UEA as a training opportunity to experience working life on research ships. They sailed down on the *Discovery* from Southampton and attended a follow-up meeting 28-31st August in Lisbon as part of the EC's Atlantic-Mediterranean Cruises Project.



An impressive 11,000 visitors toured *Discovery* whilst on site at EXPO and that figure could have been doubled had we more time and space. We talked ourselves to a standstill over the continuous rounds of visits, meetings and receptions. Despite being hard work, we did relax in the evening after all the visitors had departed by learning some interesting dance moves during the Latin American big band concerts, and Steve's parachuting experience was invaluable in testing our mettle on the giant 'Skyride' attraction (*videos are available*). The Portuguese were wonderful hosts and exceptionally welcoming throughout our stay.



Many of the national pavilions were spectacular and technically sophisticated but the UK's was widely regarded as disappointing in comparison despite it including excellent examples of SOC and CCMS science. In contrast, we heard nothing but praise for *Discovery* and its exhibition from the many international visitors, the UK Embassy and British Council staff. The aft deck with its Autonomous Vehicle hangar made a wonderful visitor space, and of course the Portuguese summer ensured barbecue weather at all times.

There were too many people involved to credit them all at the time but Phil Williamson, NERC visit Coordinator, David Pugh and Peter Collar (IACMST), Chris Adams & Charlie Fay at RVS and Captain Keith Avery and his crew were all congratulated on a superb effort in bringing this ambitious programme together so successfully. As an international showcase for UK marine science EXPO 98 featured RRS Discovery in one of its finest ambassadorial roles.

As for its legacy ... my son visited Lisbon recently and the investment in reclamation and new transport links to this previously derelict industrial area on the outskirts of the city are still providing a spectacular backdrop for the sophisticated aquarium complex, the Oceanário de Lisboa. The Oceanarium was Expo's centrepiece and at the time Europe's largest aquarium, designed by an American architect responsible for the Baltimore and Osaka aquaria.



I recently asked a Lisbon resident (now working in Southampton) if he remembered EXPO98. Not only did he remember visiting as a child, but told me of the area's continuing educational legacy with its interactive Pavilhão do Conhecimento (Pavilion of Knowledge). The original pavilion was one of the most popular attractions during Expo98 and one year after the event it re-opened as a science centre and is still offering innovative hands-on activities for 'small scientists'.

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