



2012-02-03

Yesterday was Groundhog Day, and while the credibility of a weather forecast from a sleepy rodent is rather low among most practicing meteorologists with whom I am acquainted, this is still a topic of interest for many who are in the midst of winter (although this year, at least in the Northeast, is one of the warmest winters on record). According to his website, the groundhog “Punxsutawney Phil, the Seer of Seers, the Prognosticator of Prognosticators, was summoned from his burrow” (which probably means that he was rudely awakened from a restful sleep) yesterday morning and saw his shadow, which means that there will be six more weeks of winter. This has always been somewhat puzzling to me, as winter officially continues until spring arrives (on March 20 of this year), which is more than six weeks away. However, more to the point is that this forecast was ultimately based on the presence or absence of clouds, which is the main focus of MAGIC.

I don't plan on experiencing six more weeks of winter, as I fly to Long Beach next Wednesday to get on the Horizon Lines, Inc. cargo container ship Spirit to travel to Hawaii, along with two other MAGIC team members, Brad Orr of Argonne National Laboratory and Mike Reynolds of Remote Measurement & Research Company. During this evaluation cruise (dubbed “Leg0”), we plan to become familiar with the ship and its routines, characterize the ship motion (to aid in determining how to keep one of the radars and other instruments pointed vertically while the ship rolls), and launch a few weather balloons. Instead of the normal sensors attached to the balloons, we will use potatoes for ballast—we can find some that are nearly the same weight as the sensing package (about one pound), plus they're biodegradable. I love low-tech solutions like this. The ship leaves Long Beach early on Saturday, Feb. 11 and arrives in Honolulu late on Wednesday, Feb. 15. Lest you think this is a boondoggle to get a Hawaiian vacation, we will have only one day while the ship unloads before departing early on Friday, Feb. 17. We arrive back in Long Beach early on Thursday, Feb. 23. I will certainly keep a journal during the voyage, and I will get an update out from Hawaii.

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Please address any questions or comments to elewis@bnl.gov.

All updates and other MAGIC information can be found at <http://www.ecd.bnl.gov/MAGIC.html>.