

### „Message in a bottle“

150 days of confinement in simulated space shuttle have passed, still 370 days to go. Without any chance of having a quick look or stepping outside, there is at least the possibility of the crew to get in contact with their family and friends via email. The weekly progress report by IBMP have shown that until now 585 private messages have been sent to the outside from the to some extent bottle-shaped container, and 755 private messages were received by the inhabitants. At first glance, this seems to be a lot. But it means if you divide this number of “messages in a bottle” into persons and time that on average every crew member only sent a few more than 4 messages and received roughly 6 messages per week. Taking into consideration that these few messages must suffice to update all the loved ones regularly, these numbers did not seem large. If you think about the number of emails, SMS, calls etc. you receive and write on a normal day, it even seems to be small. What’s worse, due to their busy time schedule the crew cannot contact their loved ones spontaneously or if just something important comes into their minds. If you have ever been on a long journey separated from family and friends you’ll know what I’m talking about. And the Mars500 journey takes about 520 days!

The journey has been longer than 50,000 kilometers so far, therefore, the travel group only covered approximately one third of the distance from Earth to Mars. Another 93,000 kilometers are still to go to the red planet. Then, the expedition on the Martian surface will be carried out and afterwards the crew will go on its journey all the way back to Earth. So there is plenty of time to drop lots of lines and send them.

Beside writing messages and completing the mission, the crew has to fulfill lots of everyday and many exceptional activities during this long trip. The European candidates’ report about these activities on

<http://www.esa.int/SPECIALS/Mars500/index.html>, where also numbers of pictures and videos can be found, for example, hair cutting. To get their hair cut, the crew is dependent on their associate’s favour and their right touches. An electric shaver simplifies the procedure a bit, but also the hair cut! A vacuum cleaner is used at the same time to get rid of the old hair. But other exceptional activities need to be skilled as well. Two crew members are for example trained in dental treatments and are able to care for aching teeth, drill holes, fill them with amalgam or pull teeth. At least two participants are trained in more or less all imaginable incidents to ensure a healthy and successful return of the crew to Earth.

On the above-mentioned homepage you will also find many diary entries of the ESA candidates. There is also the possibility to ask the crew questions and to get a message from the bottle-inhabitants back, what I can really recommend if anyone is interested in something special beside the official mission description.

We really enjoyed the report of Romain, who wrote a very nice description about our experiment and that the crew seems to enjoy our experiment very much ([http://www.esa.int/SPECIALS/Mars500/SEMM94HONDG\\_0.html](http://www.esa.int/SPECIALS/Mars500/SEMM94HONDG_0.html)).

Our „brain-games“ appear to lead to an internal competition resulting in the motivation that everyone always tries to beat the others. That makes a scientist heart beats faster and raises our hopes for good results!