

Expedition MSM145 ALONGate3
Reykjavik – Reykjavik
Weekly Report No 1
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„ Starting is easy, persistence is an art.“*



* Citation (attributed, among others, to the painter Carl Moritz Cammerloher)

Figure 1:

Social media presence of the ALONGate project, prepared for the Senckenberg Instagram channel by Zhehao Hu (Master's student, University of Hamburg) and Katharina Kohlenbach (doctoral candidate, University of Hamburg/Alfred Wegener Institute for Polar Research).

After all expedition participants had landed in Iceland on July 26, 2026, everyone boarded the research vessel Maria Sybilla Merian on July 27. While still in the port of Reykjavik, the advance team—with the active support of the crew—had already managed to unpack the containers and stow the equipment in its designated locations. This allowed the evening reception hosted by Icelandic partners, the Ministry of Fisheries, and the German Embassy to proceed in a relaxed atmosphere on July 27. Overall, the event was a complete success. The Merian departed Reykjavik harbour at 10:00 a.m. local time on July 28 and, after 26 hours at sea, reached the first working area (WA1) around midday on July 29. Station operations began successfully with the CTD and rosette water sampler; however, during the second deployment—involving the Ocean Floor Observation System (OFOS)—we were challenged to demonstrate spontaneity, creativity, and flexibility in planning and execution due to camera control malfunctions. It was a case of great effort for a minor cause: after an extensive search using a process of elimination involving both the ship's crew and the scientific team, the problem turned out to be a trivial error inside OFOS that was easily resolved. Nevertheless, the resulting delay required some collaborative improvisation. Instead of the planned visual manoeuvre for deploying the artificial coral reefs—part of the restoration experiment within the EU project REDRESS—we devised an alternative deployment method. Ultimately, all 12 reefs were successfully deployed. Although locating the reefs again required a second attempt due to erroneous position data, six of the 12 reefs were successfully located and photographed during the second ROV dive once the Sonardyne pingers had been correctly adjusted. The first of three Benthic Lander Observatory Systems (BLOS) was positioned at a selected reef. Underwater Wi-Fi transmission worked flawlessly during camera alignment, allowing us to configure the BLOS for fully functional long-term recording. This "big moment"—following five years of preparation—brought a great sense of relief to everyone involved.

Once the fiber-optic cable and OFOS were finally fully operational, the remaining six reefs were also surveyed —"flown over"— and photographically documented during the first OFOS dive, allowing the work in the area to be successfully completed through the "art of persistence." On the evening of July 31, 2026, we began the transit to the second study area (WA2), arriving there on August 1, 2026, at 13:30 ship time. During the transit, a potential seamount was mapped as a waypoint for the SEAMAP project.



Figure 2:

One of the 12 artificial coral reefs from the Marine and Freshwater Research Institute (MFRI, Iceland) during the positioning of the BLOS, Foto by OFOS, Lilan Böhringer.

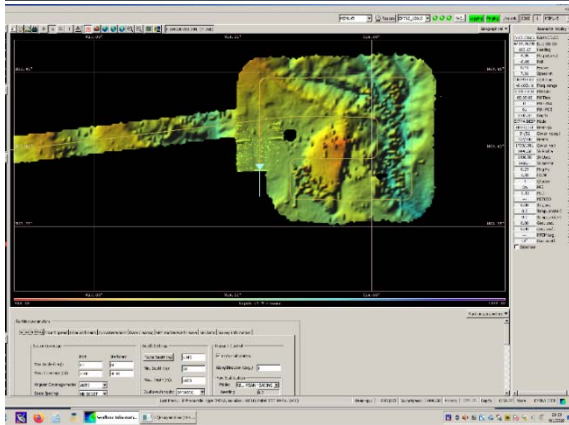


Figure 3:

Screenshot taken during the Seamount mapping with the EM712.



Figure 4:

Photograph by Solvin Zankl of a deep-sea isopod, *Munna* cf. *acanthifera* Hansen, 1916, on a piece of dead coral in the REDRESS restoration area, found in a Van Veen grab sample.

After the somewhat bumpy start to the expedition in WA1, station operations in WA2 are now proceeding as planned. The mood on board is excellent, and we look forward to further exciting dives and sampling operations.

Best regards,

August 2, 2026, RV M.S. Merian over Lonsdjúp (southeast of Iceland)

Saskia Brix
Senckenberg am Meer,
German Centre for Marine Biodiversity Research