

# A Perfect Landing

An expedition team investigating Pockmarks in the Congo Basin witnessed an unusual turn of events when a Vaisala Radiosonde RS80-15G faithfully returned to its senders.



*German research vessel  
FS Meteor.*

*The remains of the  
Vaisala Radiosonde  
RS80-15G after its  
unexpected homecoming.*



**T**he unexpected event happened during the M 56 METEOR Expedition, which commenced on 20 November 2002 in Cameroon at Douala and terminated at Capetown in South Africa on 28 December 2002. The scientific object of the Expedition, led by Prof. Dr. Volkard Spiess of the Department of Geosciences at the University of Bremen in Germany, was to investigate Pockmarks in the Congo Basin. Pockmarks are depressions on the prehistoric seabed of several hundred meters in diameter and several dozens of meters deep.

The quantification of the occurrence of gas hydrate in connection with an intensive upward surge of fluid material – in particular, methane gas – was the point of emphasis of the M 56 METEOR Expedition. Particularly unusual were the aerological upsurges which occurred on 21 December 2002.

### **Wherever the wind blows**

A Vaisala Radiosonde RS80-15G was launched at 09:00h UTC to reach an altitude of some 21,500 meters, which could well be described as a successful ascent. At

around 12:10h, the radiosonde landed onto the ship's deck, together with the remains of the balloon. It had commenced its flight to the East and then veered round to the West South West, until it had finally turned through 270° – after having put in an intermittent course to the North – and returned precisely to its point of departure by descending onto the deck. The ship FS Meteor had not moved from its morning position during the whole of the ascent and had remained precisely constant at 6.2°S, /10.4° E, as at the time of the launch of the radiosonde.

Overall, the radiosonde – looking to the West – had been some 7 kilometers distant.

The remains of the radiosonde stirred great interest amongst the crew. Everything was still there but in a considerably dilapidated state. It was apparent that the battery had been damaged; this was confirmed by the intensive odor of sulphuric acid, comparable to that of a stink bomb. It was necessary to wait a whole week for the radiosonde to “air” and the odor to dissipate before being able to salvage it from the deck. ●