

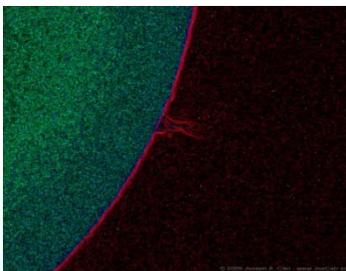
Christmas 2009

We decided to try taking the motor home out in cold weather to see what kind of experience that would bring. Our short mid-January trip to Chemainus and Nanaimo convinced us staying in a motor home in freezing weather was not for us. We went on further **adventures in the motor home** when the weather was more civilized: Stoltz Pool on the Cowichan River (early April); French Beach (late April and mid-July) and China Beach (mid-May) both located on the beautiful south west coast of Vancouver Island; Englishman River Falls & the superb beach at Parksville (mid-June); Mill Bay Nature Park and campground (end of July); and Gordon Bay on Cowichan Lake (mid-Sept). We also made several day trips to local beaches and parks in the motor home, usually having lunch or coffee and a snack, and spending a few hours exploring.

I traveled to **Costa Rica** in February, booking the same astronomy tour as last year to the ranch on the dry Pacific coast on the Gulf of Nicoya. We had near perfect weather, so all of us astronomers were fully satisfied with observing from the nice dark skies offered by this location only 10° above the equator. Observing in the middle of the night in shirt sleeves in February offered a nice contrast to winter observing in Canada! My astronomy photos taken from Costa Rica this year proved to be prize winners, and I also added to my collection of wildlife photos.



Friends and I stayed a second week in Costa Rica on our own after the organized tour ended. This year we traveled to Tamarindo, a wonderful beach location in the Guanacaste area of Costa Rica. We often got up before sunrise to walk the kilometre long beach looking for turtles, which this area is famous for. After our early morning walk, the hotel served wonderful banana pancakes with tropical fruit for breakfast – what a great start to a day in the tropics!



2009 has been a very busy year for my **astronomy** interests: a Messier Marathon March 25/26; observed and photographed a Supernova (2009dd) on April 15th; observed our Sun through my solar telescope several times this year, which yielded some wonderful views and photos of solar prominences (see photo). I took advantage of our first full year of operation for the Victoria Centre Observatory - observing and photographing from this superb site located so close to home. We had excellent weather for the Island Star Party held July 17-19, atop the Malahat. Staying in the motor home was a real treat! Helping my astronomy group promote International Year of Astronomy was also a big deal this year.

On August 9th, Kirk and I left Victoria on our **first major trip off Vancouver Island in the motor home, bound for Saskatchewan**, returning August 27th. We stayed in Hope, Castlegar, and Fort MacLeod on the way out, travelling Highway 3. We spent the next six nights camped at **Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park** in Saskatchewan. The main reason for the trip was to attend the Saskatchewan Summer Star Party and the Annual General Meeting of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada. Believe it or not, it was pouring rain for virtually the whole six days we were in Saskatchewan! Despite the star party being washed out, we were happy enough being cozy warm and dry in our motor home with power and water at our campsite.

On the return trip home, we detoured to **Drumheller** and experienced the awe-inspiring Royal Tyrrell dinosaur museum – a highlight of the trip. We drove the Trans Canada Highway along the Bow River valley, camping near Canmore; saw the spectacular area through Banff, Yoho and Glacier National Parks, and drove over the Rogers Pass to Revelstoke. Along the way we saw lots of glaciers, the Connaught spiral rail tunnel, and Craigellachie where the last spike was driven on the CPR. Lac La Jeune just outside of Kamloops was our last overnight camp before driving the Coquihalla Highway to the ferry and back home the following day.



We traveled a little over 3,000 kilometres on this trip. There was interesting country to see and people to meet for the whole trip. The folks who organized the star party were terrific – keeping us occupied despite the bad weather. Both Kirk and I had traveled most of this route before when we were younger, but camping in a motor home, traveling with each other, and having the pets along made it a new experience. I enjoyed the variety this part of our country constantly offered us. We both agree a more modest trip through southern BC next year is likely, but we will drive shorter distances each day and leave more time to stop along the way.



I left on Oct 13th (my birthday) for a ten day trip to **the Big Island of Hawaii**. I stayed at a Bed and Breakfast in Captain Cook which was a coffee farm located at the 2,000' level on the slopes of Mauna Kea for the first six nights. It was a thrill to dive to 100 feet below the ocean surface in the Atlantis submarine, and I visited Pu'uhonua o Honaunau, a Place of Refuge on the shoreline, which is always sublime and soothing.

I spent the last four days in Hilo, which I hadn't visited on my previous three trips to the Big Island. Hilo is handy to Volcanoes National Park, so I took advantage by capturing excellent photos and video of flowing lava at night - a highlight of this trip. Exploring Hilo Bay and the coast north of Hilo revealed the new tropical side the Big Island I had not experienced before.

Wishing everyone the best of the Season - from Joe & Kirk, Sheba & Tucker.