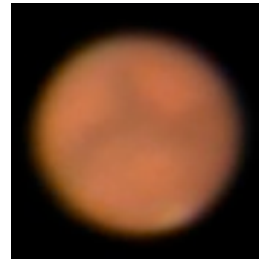


Christmas 2003

2003 has been an interesting year for astronomy. Mars= closest approach to Earth in 60,000 years rated headlines in the news in late August. I am a member of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada, and was front and centre to show this event to the public. The RASC setup two events for the public here in Victoria at Cattle Point, a local seaside park which offered us good views and dark skies. About 2,000 people showed up to see Mars - which set a record for RASC Victoria Centre public events. Later in the year, we also staged a very successful public event for the Lunar Eclipse in November. About 500 people showed up for that event, and were treated to a couple of hours of excellent views of the Moon being occulted by the Earth=s shadow. www.Victoria.RASC.ca



2003 was interesting for another reason as well. Kirk and I were in our local pet superstore=s adoption centre looking over all the cats and dogs which were being offered for adoption, when we spotted *Sheba*, a black three year old female longhair. She appealed to us, and appeared to be a nice quiet cat. Apparently she had been waiting to be adopted for many months. Kirk and I decided taking care of another cat would not be much more work, it would give Sylvester a companion, and we could rescue an otherwise unwanted cat.



Sheba is fitting into our little family quite well. Sylvester still hisses at her once in awhile, but otherwise Sheba is doing very well. She loves to crouch by the window facing my bird feeder, and talk to *her birds* - using a sort of cackling sound. Kirk and I try to *resist the urge to* referee between the three pets, and let them work things out for themselves.

www.joecarr.ca/photogallery/Pets/

Mum has lived at Hecate Lodge for a year and a half now. I am very happy to see that her health is so stable, and I am sure she is glad to be past the disruption of moving. Mum is happy with her new home, likes the meals and appreciates having everything done for her. The hairdresser has a shop right in Hecate Lodge, so Mum finds that very handy. I try to time my visits with her to coincide with alternate Sundays, so I can take Mum to church. Mum has developed some mild dementia over the last few years, so if you visit her, please keep in mind she has virtually no short term memory.

I have had some success this year taking photographs of Mars, the Moon, and many other objects in the night sky. As a friend of mine says, astrophotography is *extreme photography*, which means we push our equipment to their limits in order to achieve success.

I bumped into these limits this year using my Nikon Coolpix 4500, and decided it was time to purchase a more capable digital camera for my astrophotography. After much research, I selected the Canon 300D Digital Rebel SLR. The Rebel is a superb camera to use for astrophotography, it has a very low noise, high sensitivity sensor - allowing me to move to the next level.



Despite purchasing the Rebel just as our west coast weather closed in this Autumn, I have already had a measure of success. The Rebel is also a joy to use for daytime photography. The camera is very flexible, and produces superb images under all conditions. Tucker (our Jack Russell terrier), Kirk and I often go on little expeditions on the weekends. Tucker gets to run around in the bush, Kirk and I get some fresh air and exercise, and I also treat these as photo-taking opportunities. Using an SLR again is a welcome change, after so many years of using point-and-shoot cameras.

I had promised myself that I would travel back to Hawaii this year, but instead I decided to spend those funds on astronomical equipment. I purchased a binoviewer for my LX-90 telescope. This allows me to observe using both eyes, providing a wonderful new view through my telescope. The Moon is simply breathtaking when observed with two eyes. It gives the impression of cruising around the Moon in a lunar orbiter. Observing planets such as Mars, Jupiter and Saturn using a binoviewer provides a tremendous amount of additional comfort, which also means I can see more detail by observing each object longer. www.JoeCarr.ca/astro/

Since 2003 was not my year for traveling, I did a bit of *virtual traveling*. A couple from Oregon are sailing around the Pacific in the *SV Sequoia*, their 44' sailboat, and are emailing accounts of their voyage to anyone who subscribes to their email list. Since the South Pacific is one of my favorite areas to travel, I subscribed, and have found it very entertaining while I sit at home listening to the rain fall and the winds blow. I read regular accounts of Barbara and Craig's adventures in French Polynesia and other interesting places in the South Pacific. Many of the places they have visited are familiar to me...in fact they moored directly in front of the resort I stayed at in Tahiti some 25 years ago (see my 1978 photo above). Currently, they are moored in Opuia (Bay of Islands), New Zealand, sitting out the stormy season before proceeding further on their clockwise adventure around the Pacific. They fly home for Christmas, returning later in January. www.svsequoia.com



Unfortunately I can't say my work at the BC Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management has been pleasurable this past year. The Liberal government has not slowed down their agenda of staff layoffs. We have lost many good people from the Branch I work for. Each and every departure leaves behind a little more resentment and hurt to deal with. I am still involved in managing websites for a couple of ministries, so I'm thankful my job continues to challenge me.

Kirk has already setup a Christmas tree in the living room, and I see some early decorations in the house - *just to get us in the mood*. He always leads the way into the festive season, dragging me along as best he can! I will bring Mum down to Victoria for a few days over Christmas, so our little family will be together over the holidays.

***Here=s hoping you and your family have a wonderful Holiday Season.
Kirk, Joe, Tucker, Sylvester and Sheba.***