

## There's always Time for Astronomical Pleasures

The month of August this year required that I take an 11 day business trip to Honolulu, Hawaii, to review the progress of a number of construction projects under way for the company. My wife Lisa, who has never shown a great interest in my work, for some reason insisted she accompany me on this grueling trip. This trip I intended to spend a little more time in Hawaii than the last, which involved two days in San Francisco, three days in Honolulu, and ending with two days in LA. During that trip it was all work and no play. This visit I made a point of including some personal time of which astronomy would be part of the agenda.

The flight out included a stop and overnight stay with my brother-in-law in North Hollywood, CA. We arrived around noon, grabbed something to eat, and made our way up to Griffith Observatory. It sits atop one of the highest peaks within Griffith Park. The road winds up the sides of the Hollywood Mountain, and as you approach the bright white walls of the observatory and domed roofs can be seen perched high above. The Griffith Observatory is a beautiful structure with an Art Deco, Moderne, Greek Revival, Beaux influenced architecture. This year it is celebrating its 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and above its central entrance is a banner hung proudly announcing it. While they cannot boast the longevity of Skyscrapers, it appears they have done pretty well for themselves.



The observatory's large dome houses the Samuel Oschin Planetarium that regularly provides presentations throughout the day. This structure has a promenade walkway at the back that provides panoramic views of the LA basin below. Once inside we were treated to a wide array of astronomical displays. They ranged from astronomical history to solar, planetary, and deep space observations. The picture above (left) shows the center dome slit open, to allow the operation of the solar scope. A two-foot diameter live projection is displayed in the structure below. This room is completely dedicated to our sun with pictures and video clips in various filtering wavelengths.

The other small dome structure houses history related displays, including a replica of Galileo's telescope. It has working examples of focal length, glass diameter, and its effect on magnification, brightness and resolution. It also houses a scale model of the Palomar Observatory where visitors can operate the dome and scope rotation as well opening\closing the dome slit. This was just the start to the trip, Hawaii was next and I had plans for there as well.



The weather was fantastic our entire trip, I did have to work, but the early mornings and evenings were mine. Each morning before sunrise I was greeted by Orion to the west, Taurus a little higher and the Pleiades almost directly overhead. I had brought a small pair of binoculars and M45 could be made out easily. Late in the day our moon stood out brightly against the deep blue sky. As sunset approached, Venus stood out brightly to the west. On the evening of the 13<sup>th</sup>, Venus was positioned directly over the Crescent Moon viewed above the ocean from Waikiki Beach. When darkness fell, Sagittarius and Scorpius hung over the ocean with Scorpius between 30-40 degrees above the horizon. Jupiter would rise at around 9:30PM in the southeast and my small binoculars had enough power to watch its moon-dance from night to night.

I had the opportunity one evening while walking to a late dinner to take in the view of the moon through a 6-inch SCT. A fellow amateur astronomer had set up in the crowded streets and was treating all those interested close-up glimpses of the moon high above. It's not often one can be provided with this sight in the busy streets of a city. I had read an article on a previous trip about a gentleman that provided Astro-Tours from his home observatory close to Honolulu. I was unable to visit him on that trip, but was determined to meet him during my stay this time.

I contacted Ray Young at [astrotourshawaii@hotmail.com](mailto:astrotourshawaii@hotmail.com) first by e-mail and then by telephone, and made arrangements to meet the evening of August 14<sup>th</sup> at 8:00PM. Ray asked for my phone number and indicated he would contact me at 6:00PM and provide a "Good to Go" or "No Go" based on weather reports. He called with a "Good to Go", so we made our way to Ray's home for an evening of stargazing. Ray lives on top of Makakilo Mountain in the town of Kapolei, around 30 miles west of Honolulu. Ray's home and observatory is located at the end of a cul-de-sac at the very top of a residential area. The observatory is a 12' x12' Roll-Off Roof style with a porch of the same size that provides the entranceway. It is located downhill in his backyard behind his home. This position shields his observatory from the home and street lighting in the area. Ray met us in front of his home, along with a family of five who had also arranged for a tour that evening.



We followed Ray to his observatory where he proceeded to identify the constellations viewable in the sky above. He informed us of the Hawaiian names for the stars, folklore, and how the stars were used for their navigation of the ocean. He also pointed out the galactic center of the Milky Way which showed nicely stretching across the sky overhead. We then moved into his observatory equipped with a 12-inch Maksutov Cassegrain on a Losmandy mount, a pair of 100's binoculars with inter-changeable eyepieces, a smaller pair of handheld binoculars, and a nice sound system playing in the background. Ray really knew his stuff and provided a great tour of

the night sky. The skies were clear when we began looking thru his equipment. The moon was setting so we started there before it slipped away. Clarity was very good, so the views were crisp ... very nice. The tour included a number of staples overhead: M13 and M57, and then on to M4 and M7 in the constellation of Sagittarius, followed by M20 and NGC6530 in Scorpius. The clouds began to roll in and we had to call it a night. It's really too bad. I could have spent all night taking in the dark skies at Ray's home. Really nice. I would highly recommend to anyone whose travels bring them to Oahu, to contact Ray and arrange for their own Astro-Tour. Ray's website <http://astrotourshawaii.com/> provides more information on Ray and the offerings of a fellow amateur astronomer.

My trip turned out to be a real pleasure, even with work occupying a majority of time during the daylight hours. I would urge all to take advantage, regardless of whether your travels are for work or with your families, to take advantage of the Astronomical Pleasures those locations have to offer.

Written by Tom Thibault