

Catching the Northern Lights from space

Have you ever wondered what the routine of the International Space Shuttle (ISS) crew is? One of the "to dos" that may not be on the official agenda is watching the Northern Lights detonate right under their ship. According to www.spaceweather.com, no one has a better view of its effect on Earth than these folks. During a geomagnetic storm of Sept. 17, 2011, astronauts recorded a must-see movie of auroras dancing underfoot and can be watched at <http://spaceweather.com/swpod2011/22sep11/media.mp4?PHPSESSID=3ragmbkjbrcq4kgbqm8vofqg47>. The storm, which registered a moderate 6 on the 0-to-9 K-index scale of geomagnetic disturbances, was caused by a coronal mass ejection (CME) hitting Earth's magnetic field. It was just a glancing blow, but with CMEs that is often enough to spark bright auroras over both ends of Earth. The space station was flying over the southern hemisphere at the time of the display. Observers in



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The Sky's the Limit

the northern hemisphere saw the same thing. The sun has been very active this year and is forecasted to be even more vigorous well into 2013. Some doom and gloomers predict this may wreak havoc on our power grid, however for Aurora Borealis seekers, it has been a treat much anticipated. While most of us may not have the same opportunity as the ISS crew to watch it under us, the good news is that now we will not have travel to the North Pole to see the Northern Lights, as they have been recently seen as far south as California!

Sky watch for the next month

Right after supper on Sunday, Sept. 30, at 7:05 p.m. in the northeast-east watch the legendary harvest

(full) moon. In the days before electricity, farmers counted on the lamp of the harvest moon to gather their crops.

On Saturday, Sept. 1 after 7 p.m., there are four planets Mars, Saturn (southwest-west), Uranus (east) and Neptune (southeast-east) with the moon in the east. You'll need a scope for Uranus and Neptune, but the others are observable with the naked eye. If you have a good scope, try and catch the rings of Saturn in daylight. A truly unique experience!

The fall equinox officially arrives Saturday, Sept. 22 at 7:49 a.m.

The Zodiacal Light is a faint, roughly triangular, whitish glow seen in the night sky extended up from the vicinity of the sun along the ecliptic or zodiac. Discovered by the astronomer Giovanni Domenico Cassini in 1683 and later explained by Nicolas Fatio de Duillier in 1684, it's trying to find. The best chance of seeing it is during a two-week period starting Sunday, Sept.

14, before dawn, in the northeast.

Public events for the next month

Alberta Star Party is being hosted by the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada-Calgary in the Starland Recreation Area Campground near Drumheller from Friday, Sept. 14 to Sunday, Sept. 16. The camping fee is \$15 per night. All are welcome. For further information, contact David Brown at 403-274-6723 or AlbertaStarParty@shaw.ca.

Join us Friday, Sept. 14 at 19:30 for our monthly public stargazing at the Trek Station. A short indoor presentation is followed by outside observing. Treats and refreshments are provided free of charge, and all are welcome. For further information, contact Vulcan Tourism at 403-485-2994 and go to the website www.vulcantourism.com.

Neel welcomes your questions and comments at 403-485-2683 and Neel_Roberts@ptccanada.com.