

Mission: Dayton Air Show

I work for InDyne, Inc., at the NASA Glenn Research Center as an outreach specialist for the Biological and Physical Research Program Office. This summer I was sent to the Dayton Air Show (July 16-18) to work at one of our exhibits that we call the “Picture Yourself in Space” photobooth. At the photobooth, we take pictures of people using a digital camera and a software package called, “Photo Fantasy” to make it look like our visitors have taken a trip into space. Lately, we have been sending people to Mars. Through the photobooth, I have taken pictures of thousands of people over the last four years.

Traveling with one of my co-workers, Kathy Schubert, and her son, Michael, I was able to enjoy a number of activities that I felt would be of interest to members of the USS Jurassic crew. We traveled to Dayton on Thursday, July 15 but our first shift didn’t start until Friday late afternoon. We took advantage of the extra time to visit the USAF Museum at Wright Air Force Base.

The USAF Museum is the largest military museum in the world. The exhibits are arranged in four hangars, in chronological order (roughly). It starts with the early years of flight and moves through the world wars and into the cold war era. The museum features a very impressive World War II memorial that chronicles the death and pain of the Nazi regime as well as the hopes and valor shown by many during that tragic era.

There is also an area devoted to space flight. Not surprisingly, this was my favorite area.

Here is my picture standing by the early space craft, Mercury and Gemini capsules. These are flight-rated vessels that never flew. What really impressed me was the exhibit devoted to space flight experiments that were carried out in the late 1950’s. I had no previous knowledge of these experiments despite the fact that I have long been a “space nut” and I have also spent many long years as an amateur astronomer. Balloons were used to carry men and equipment up into the sky to make



atmospheric and stellar observations. The information they gathered helped to develop pressure suits and the space suits that were used in the Mercury and Gemini programs.

There were three similar programs, Manhigh, Excelsior (Latin for “ever higher”) and Star Gazer. Humans traveled in capsules called, “gondolas” and were launched attached to hot air balloons. Here’s my picture standing near the Star Gazer gondola. This vessel (or one just like it, they didn’t say how they actually got this one, if it’s the real hardware or if it’s a replica.) traveled 82,000 feet over the Earth and took measurements with telescopes as well as testing the special suits that they were for space-worthiness.



Doing research on the web later, I was absolutely amazed to discover that some Excelsior flights were taken by a fellow named Joe Kittinger. On November 16, 1959, Joe leaped from the Excelsior gondola at an altitude of 76,400 feet and almost didn't survive. A chute intended to stabilize him tangled, causing him to spin uncontrollably, until he lost consciousness. Fortunately, the main chute automatically deployed at 12,000 ft. and Joe was saved. These experiments were necessary since they

didn't have hardware needed to test aircraft ejections from that high. (They certainly weren't willing to give up any of the aircraft they had at the time.)

If this wasn't enough, Excelsior III was launched on Aug. 16, 1960 from White Sands Proving Ground (now White Sands Missile Range.) Kittinger dove again, this time at 102,800 ft., the highest altitude yet reached by a manned balloon. The air temperature was -100 deg. F. when Joe Kittinger jumped from the edge of the gondola, to the New Mexico desert 20 miles below him. Kittinger was in freefall over four minutes, dropping nearly seventeen miles, reaching a speed of 714 miles per hour, he became the first man to break the sound barrier without the aid of any kind of vehicle. His parachute opened automatically at 12,000 ft. In October 1960, President Eisenhower awarded Joe Kittinger the Harmon Trophy for outstanding achievements in aeronautics.

I found information for this article about this "Space Cowboy" on a website:

<http://groups.msn.com/SpaceCowboySaloon/intothevoidprojectmanhighstargazerampexcelsior.msnw>

In all, I thought that those of you who had not seen the museum might consider a trip there or make it a stop if you go the Dayton "Hamvention" usually held in May. I've also found that the Air Force museum has many pages on the web that describe their exhibits. URL: <http://www.wpafb.af.mil/museum/index.htm>

Friday evening, we began our "tour of duty" at the NASA exhibit. I got my picture taken at the photobooth, as I usually do. Here I am in the latest Moon/Mars photo. This image was developed by my colleagues at NASA Glenn Research Center to signify our current vision, the Moon and the planet Mars. Back at Glenn, we work in a Division that is developing a space station module and working on Advanced Life



Support, along with many other exciting projects. Our work is dedicated to improving life on Earth, developing science and technology that will take us out to the solar system and basic science research. These are the things we try to communicate when we interact with the public during special events. Over the weekend, we took over 1,200 pictures of people and gave them a photo just like the one you see here.

I have also included a picture of myself at the photobooth. Our equipment consists of a computer, digital camera (for this setup we had a camcorder) on a tripod and a special light for illuminating people when the sun is hiding somewhere or the room is just too dark. It is a special photography light and is represented in this picture by the white umbrella that is to the right of where I am sitting. We rarely used the light in Dayton, but sometimes it is impossible for us to run the photobooth without it. I am wearing the typical garb that you will find me at the exhibit, a white shirt with a NASA meatball and, in this case, shorts, but usually a pair of dark trousers. This image was taken on Friday night before the crowd came in. Usually, the photobooth is one of the more popular exhibits and a line forms on both sides of the camera. The square box below the umbrella is the printer that we use. It utilizes a dye-sublimation process and the photographs come out in about 30 seconds, completely dry to the touch.



Because we had to keep the photobooth operating, I am generally not able to leave the booth for long. This year, I had to check out the Robosaurus show. I had heard about Robosaurus, in fact, I had seen him perform on Friday night, bellowing out fire and smoke after the REO Speedwagon concert. My fellow exhibitors and I stayed for the performance. On Saturday, I discovered that Robosaurus was not on stage for a very long time and became determined that I wanted to see his show on Sunday. My co-workers agreed to keep the booth running while I checked out “Robo’s” act and took pictures.

Half dinosaur, half robot, Robosaurus is a traveling exhibit that has appeared at air shows, races and on television. He is a main player in the two-hour TV movie, “Steel Justice.” He’s even been on the “Tonight Show” with Jay Leno. He is capable of lifting 4,000 pounds and can breathe 20-foot fingers of flame with his propane-powered burners. I got this information from the Robosaurus web site: <http://www.robosaurus.com/>



The airshow announcer informed us that Robosaurus wakes up hungry. His favorite breakfast is the human automobile, but I understand that he also has a taste for aircraft. During his performance, we were treated to many bad robosaurus puns, describing the activities of this terrifying car-nivore. Now, many people seemed to think that this huge mechanical monster was there to scare the kiddies, but everybody seemed to love his one-dinosaur act. Roaring and belching fire and smoke, Robo picked up two vehicles and totally destroyed them. I kept snapping his picture, and as a result, I was able to prepare this “home movie”, chronicling his exploits.



After the show, Robosaurus stepped over to show off for us. The first image in this frame, captures the tail end of the enormous beast. The middle frame gives a good idea of what this monster really looks like. The third frame depicts Robo “showing off”, letting loose his flame and flashing his hungry eyes while in the background the local fire department takes care of his handiwork.

The act is a riot, despite the puns. It made Dayton Air Show weekend to see this feat of modern engineering and whimsical theatrics.

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