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# Blog

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Playing tour guide at the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum

Posted 01-29-2010 by [Karri Ferron](#)

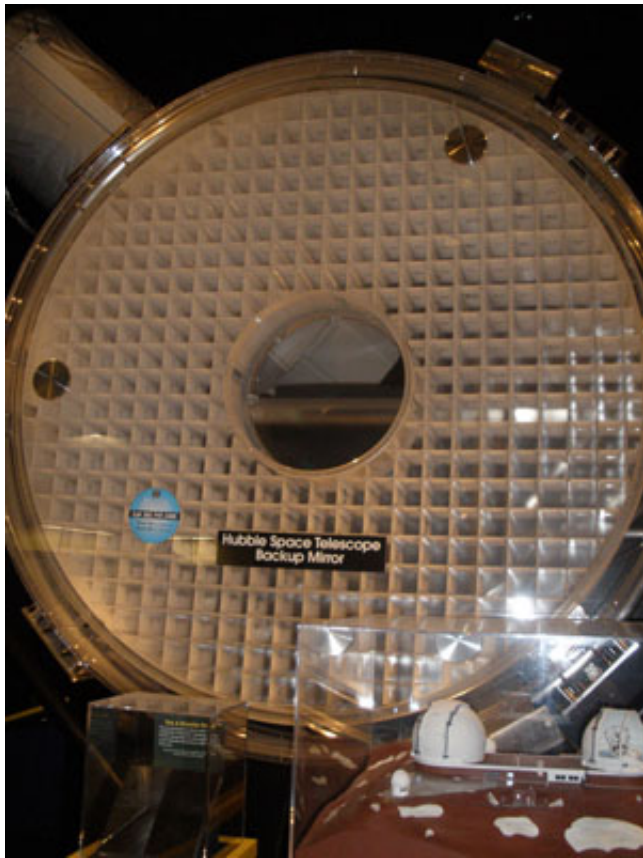


The Hubble test telescope *Karri Ferron photo*

Last week, I took a little vacation to Washington, D.C., figuring I'd leave life at *Astronomy* behind for a few days. I have some friends who live in or near the district who I hadn't seen in awhile. They couldn't believe upon my arrival that I had actually never stepped foot in D.C. before. ("You shouldn't be allowed to live outside the country before you visit our nation's capital." Oops!) So some sightseeing was in order.

It was a rainy day, so we started with the National Archives. My friends played tour guides, adding anecdotes here and there that weren't on any placards (they're history and/or American government buffs). But after that we decided to explore the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum. So much for leaving work behind for a few days — it was my turn to play tour guide.

Let me just say I am a big fan of this museum. If you've never been there, definitely put it on your bucket list of places to visit. Right upon entrance from the National Mall, you can touch a Moon rock and see the Apollo 11 command module Columbia from the first lunar landing mission. So I told my friends about the latest unmanned moon missions, LRO and LCROSS, including how LRO was able to capture images of the Apollo landing sites.



The Hubble Space Telescope backup mirror *Karri Ferron photo*

We hit all of the space-related exhibitions first because my friends and I agreed that museums can be more fun when there's someone with you who can add detail to the exhibits. So we talked about Hubble's success as we eyed the Hubble test telescope, and I told them about its future plans as we passed the space telescope's backup mirror and other Hubble parts now housed at the Smithsonian. I explained the power of spectroscopy in the "Explore the Universe" exhibition (my favorite), and we laughed as we posed in front of an infrared camera (with one of my friends making handprints on my head ... yup, we're that mature). They lamented Pluto's fate and analyzed the IAU's decision after we explored the latest discoveries on Mars and the moons of Saturn. And we discussed the merits of future manned space missions as we explored the "Apollo to the Moon" and "Moving Beyond Earth" exhibitions (where, despite urging, I did not play the trivia game to test my "space smarts" ... I would have been competing with 10 year olds).



The F-1 engine used with the Saturn 5 rocket (and my friend Allison) *Karri Ferron photo*

Overall, I think my friends were surprised at how much I've learned at *Astronomy* in the past year and a half. The high school and college friend they knew was more of an English and math buff than anything, but the person who explored the museum with them had plenty to say about astronomy. I admit, I just had fun learning even more about the subject I have become so fond of.

Do you enjoy taking your friends and family to places where they can share in your enthusiasm for astronomy? Where is your favorite place to go? If you've been to the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, which exhibition is your favorite?

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## About Karri Ferron



[Karri Ferron](#) is a copy editor with *Astronomy* magazine.

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