



HURRICANE ELLEN OVER ATLANTIC LAST MONTH AS SEEN FROM SKYLAB



Time
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Readjusting to Gravity

The prime objective of the Skylab 2 mission was to test how well humans can live and work in space. But Astronauts Al Bean, Jack Lousma and Owen Garriott also had another important goal: observing the earth. Last week, as scientists began assessing the results of the record-breaking journey (during which Skylab 2 circled the earth 859 times in more than 59 days), NASA released some of the astronauts' photographic handiwork. The stunning earth pictures ranged from such geological phenomena as craters on snow-capped volcanoes to sweeping views of Hurricane Ellen to

an unusual formation of swirling clouds known as the Von Kármán vortex (after the aeronautical pioneer) over the Mexican island of Guadalupe off Baja California.

Only a week after splashdown, the astronauts were already settling back into a full workaday routine in Houston: Lousma and Garriott, both physical fitness buffs, had resumed jogging. Doctors reported that all three crew members were recovering their strength at a faster pace than the first Skylab team, perhaps because of a stepped-up conditioning program.

In contrast to the astronauts, other passengers aboard Skylab did not do so well on their return to earth. The tiny minnows that were born aboard the space station died after their arrival in Houston: Arabella, the surviving spider who had quickly mastered the art of weaving her web in zero-G, was found dead in her vial by NASA doctors.

Still, the readjustment to gravity was not always easy. Lousma, for example, accidentally let a bottle of aftershave lotion smash on the bathroom floor when he momentarily forgot that he

could no longer let the bottle hang in mid-air, as he could in the zero gravity aboard Skylab. Garriott had an even more unusual experience; he lost his balance on his first evening back home when his wife turned off the lights as they were going upstairs to bed. "I can't stand up unless I have a visual reference," he complained. Helen Garriott flicked the lights back on and his balance was restored.

There were other reactions to the return to terrestrial gravity. "I feel a little bit like the ad says—'tired blood,'" Bean told a press conference a week after his homecoming. In part, the weakness was caused by a loss of muscle tone, which deprived the astronauts of about 20% of their strength after their two months of weightlessness. But NASA doctors also blamed a reduction in the production of red blood cells, which fell off by about 12%. Although "space anemia" was first noticed during early Gemini flights, it is still a puzzle to doctors.

Low Point. The astronauts admitted that there had been mental strains in space. Bean reported that the "low point" in morale came early in the mission when problems with the Apollo command ship's rocket-control system raised fears that the flight might have to be prematurely ended, perhaps with the help of a rescue mission. But there were also lesser tensions. "We tended to get a little short with one another," Bean explained. "It would kind of build up over three or four days. [Then] it would always reach a little climax where we would kind of fuss with each other a little bit, and that would be the end of it. It was almost like a family arrangement with your wife, where things work in cycles."

As an antidote for the strain as well as the boredom, restlessness and loneliness of long space journeys, the astronauts recommended a heavy load of useful work on future flights. That activity may be even more important to the Skylab 3 crew. At week's end, NASA was considering extending Skylab 3's mission—scheduled for launch Nov. 11—from the 56 days originally planned to 70. That would give the astronauts more time to observe the newly discovered Comet Kohoutek—perhaps the brightest of the century—as it makes its fiery pass around the sun in December and January.

SPIDER ARABELLA AT WORK



UNUSUAL CLOUD VORTICES OVER MEXICAN ISLAND OF GUADALUPE NEAR BAJA CALIFORNIA

