

THE ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY OF CANADA
1991 SOLAR ECLIPSE EXPEDITION

JULY 1990 REPORT TO EXPEDITION PARTICIPANTS

Dear Registrant(s) No. 110 :

I am writing to give you an update on the progress of our plans and arrangements for next July's solar eclipse expedition to Baja California. The Solar Eclipse Committee, consisting of me as chairperson, J. Randy Atwood and Steve Dodson has been busy over the past year making preparations for the trip.

As you are probably aware, Sunquest Travel Incentive Limited of Toronto, which is a Toronto travel agent with extensive experience in running trips to Baja California, is acting for our expedition. Our air carrier is Worldways Airlines Limited of Toronto, which is a large charter airline having DC-8, Boeing 727 and Lockheed L-1011 aircraft in its fleet.

I am enclosing a copy of an Information Circular that has been prepared not only for current registrants but also for those who are seeking information about our expedition. The Circular sets out the important details of the expedition, including details of the itinerary.

Last July 1989 Randy Atwood and I undertook a 4-day site preview trip to Baja California. At that time we drove the entire circle route between La Paz, the capital of Baja California Sur and Los Cabos, searching for and finding several suitable observing sites. We settled upon the soccer stadium in the town of Santiago, approximately 5 kilometres south of the centre line, near the east coast of Baja California, as the best observing site. We also spoke to numerous hotel managers, and met with Mexican government officials, in order to begin the process of obtaining approvals for various aspects of our expedition. The trip and the meetings were highly successful.

In early September of last year a further meeting was held in Toronto among the President of Sunquest (our travel agent), a representative of Worldways Airlines, a representative of the Baja California Department of Tourism, and me on behalf of the Society. At that meeting further precise details of the expedition were discussed, and we were assured that all approvals necessary from the Mexican government would be obtained. Worldways Airlines indicated at that time that, as was standard practice with all charter airline companies, it could not make a final commitment as to the availability of an aircraft until the spring of 1991. Nonetheless, I was assured that Worldways foresaw no difficulty in providing an aircraft to us. Because of certain requirements respecting "pilot down time" (or rest periods) contained in the contract between the airlines and the Pilots' Association, the precise timing of our departure from Baja California for the return trip to Toronto has not yet been determined. We will be holding further meetings with Worldways and Sunquest shortly.

I spent a further 4 days in Baja California this past June, and at that time met with numerous government officials in La Paz. The Mexican government is sufficiently concerned about the magnitude of the eclipse enterprise that it has appointed a private company to oversee all aspects of the eclipse logistics for Baja California. The meetings in La Paz were extremely profitable and very encouraging, and I am happy to report that the Mexican government is treating our expedition as seriously as all other official expeditions. In particular, we will be receiving approval to land our aircraft at the Los Cabos airport on eclipse morning, to travel freely to our observing site (in spite of the severe restrictions on traffic flow that the Mexican government will be imposing), and to use our preferred site in Santiago. We have been assured of full and complete cooperation in all aspects of our expedition. I had a further meeting with the Baja California representative of a large Mexican bus company, and expect shortly to be signing a contract for the provision of eight air-conditioned buses to be used for transportation on eclipse day to and from the observing site.

As of the beginning of July 1990, we have approximately 130 registrants for the Expedition. The recent article in Astronomy magazine has prompted a flood of telephone calls and letters of inquiry from potential participants both in Canada and the United States, and we anticipate receiving a number of further registrations shortly. We have no doubt that, by early to mid-autumn, the expedition will be fully booked.

Details of the financial arrangements are referred to in the Information Circular. The \$100 deposit that you have paid previously is refundable until 31 August 1990. The balance of the cost of the expedition will be payable in two instalments, the first in January 1991 and the second in March 1991. As is explained in the Circular, while we are quite confident that the Expedition will proceed smoothly and without difficulty, we have no control over the final availability of the aircraft. Further, of course, there is always a possibility that some logistical difficulty may arise in the future, that might alter our plans significantly or even result in cancellation of the entire Expedition. While we do not anticipate any such occurrence, all registrants must understand that this remains a possibility. As a result, all members of the Expedition are required to sign a comprehensive release in favour of the Society, its members, and the Solar Eclipse Committee. Two copies of this release are enclosed with the letter. One copy must be dated and signed and returned to the undersigned by the end of August 1990. The other copy is for your file. For any expedition member who is under 18 years of age, the release must be signed by his or her parent or legal guardian.

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We are very excited about the progress of our expedition, and will be in touch with you further in due course as matters develop.

Yours very truly,

Michael S.F. Watson
Expedition Leader
RASC 1991 Solar Eclipse
Expedition

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