

A SUPERJUMBO
FAREWELL TO THE
AIRBUS A380

AIR & SPACE

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Smithsonian

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BOUND FOR MARS

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Up to Speed

IN THE SKY
IN SPACE
IN THE NEWS

BY PAUL GLENSHAW



Hello, Down There

Oceanographer-turned-astronaut Megan McArthur has taken some pretty stunning pictures of Earth from the International Space Station, which she then posts on her @Astro_Megan Twitter feed. Her many photographic subjects include Craters of the Moon National Monument in Idaho and the astonishing red fingers of the Betsiboka River estuary in Madagascar, colored that way because of over-logging and erosion.

In October, near the end of a six-month stay on the station, McArthur spied something she'd never seen—an airplane in flight, its contrails showing clearly against the umber and ochre ground below. “[I]t made me laugh out loud to realize I was spotting an airplane in flight while taking photos over Alberta, Canada today,” she tweeted. “I guess it was nice to see evidence of other humans moving around Planet Earth.”

“Where ya headed, friends?” she asked.

After she identified the time and place of the shot, her astute Twitter followers quickly identified the aircraft: an Atlas Air 747 cargo airplane en route from Anchorage to Miami. McArthur, selected by NASA as an astronaut in 2000, flew aboard space shuttle mission STS-125 in 2009 and spent much of this year in orbit as a member of ISS Expedition 65/66.

From their unique vantage point 250 miles up, astronauts on the space station often photograph cities, farms, and the effects of human activity, such as deforestation and wildfires. The Crew Earth Observations team at the Johnson Space Center has collected more than four million of these images, according to principal investigator Kenton Fisher, and a number of the pictures show vehicles on the move. “Often boats are caught in our images of ports as their wakes can ripple in the sun glint, making them easy to pick out,” he says. All are available on the Gateway to Astronaut Photography of Earth portal: eol.jsc.nasa.gov/.

MEGAN MCARTHUR/NASA