

SKYNEWS



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The Milky Way over the Painted Pony Resort near Rodeo New Mexico

by John McDonald

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APRIL MEETING

Wednesday 11th, 2012
University of Victoria
A104 Bob Wright Bldg.
3800 Finnerty Rd.

www.victoria.rasc.ca

On the Cover

The Milky Way over the Painted Pony resort near Rodeo New Mexico by John McDonald.

March Speaker

March 14, 2012

PLEASE NOTE: NEW MEETING TIME IS 8:45PM

The Search for Life in the Universe Dr. Stephen Kane, Caltech

One of the most profound questions that has faced humanity is: How common is life in the universe? The discovery of planets outside of our Solar System has provided additional motivation to answer this question and advances in biochemistry enable us to better understand the development of life on our own planet. In this talk I will outline some of the basic questions we are trying to answer which have implications for the way we view astrobiology and the frequency of life.

The Presidents Report

by *Lauri Roche*



I hope everybody has been looking up recently. What a show our skies are giving us (if and when the rains cease)! It's too bad that the skies have not been clearer to see the aurora just lately from the increased solar activity but this spring's dance of the planets has been good enough to make up for it. Jupiter and

Venus are closing in to each other in the south west each night. Mars is shining red in the east. If you were quick enough or lucky enough to have a good western horizon you were even able to see Mercury for a while. No wonder it's named after the fleet-footed winged messenger. And, of course, the wonderful views of Saturn are just beginning, if you can keep awake long enough to see it rise around midnight. People are fascinated by what is going on and if you happen to be out with friends in the evenings, take time to point out the planets and tell them a little bit about them. It's an easy way to do sidewalk astronomy.

Please keep **Saturday April 28th** free so that you can join us, either as a volunteer or just to drop by for **International Astronomy Day**, being held this year in the Bob Wright building at UVIC. During the day from

10am to 3 pm we will have display tables, solar viewing and day time viewing with the big telescope on the roof, hands-on demonstrations, Astrokids crafts, short lectures and Café Scientifique discussion groups.

Don't forget our lottery draw for the 12 inch Dobsonian telescope as well, so make sure you have your ticket. And then... drum roll please....we are very excited to welcome **Mr. Bob McDonald of CBC's Quirks and Quarks** as our guest speaker in the evening from 7:30 to 8:30 pm.

His presentation entitled "Vacations In Space: The Hottest Holiday Spots in the Solar System" will be an entertaining travelogue of what we might look forward to in the future when we will go into space for fun and not just for science. Count me in for that trip! Night time viewing will begin on both the big telescope and on RASC members' telescopes after the presentation.

So come out and help us to bring our fascination with Astronomy to the public.

Get in touch with Sherry Buttner for more information or Sid Sidhu to volunteer. See you there.

And remember...keep your eyes on the skies this spring.

Education and Public Outreach

by *Sid Sidhu*

February has been the busiest month for the Victoria Centre's EPO (Education and Public Outreach) volunteers. Since September 9th 2011 we have been able to share the excitement of Astronomy and wonders of the night sky with **3533** adults and school children. Very many thanks to all the volunteers.

Financial Report

by *Li-Ann Skibo*

Balances as of Mar 3, 2012
Member Acct: \$7140.05
BC Gaming Acct: \$89.37

Membership / HIA Liaison

by *Sherry Buttner*

Our membership is currently at 164 and there are no scheduled imaging nights on the Plaskett Telescope for the foreseeable future as the Telescope Operator is recuperating with medical issues. We wish Dave a full recovery.

The Sky is falling...The sky is falling!

Astronomy and the Media

by *Lauri Roche*

Astronomy has been front and center in the news recently. The latest videos of the prominent solar storms are all over the TV and internet and reported on in the newspapers, but, unfortunately, the copy has often been peppered with dire predictions about looming electrical network shortages and airline disruptions instead of focusing on how awesome the auroras will be. Sometimes it has been hard to find the true factual information among the hype. Here in Victoria, we have been lucky enough to have Sherry Buttner, our second Vice-President, faithfully tracking the real data and keeping us up to date over the last few days. Hers has been a calming voice amidst the media excitement.

As our council has worked over the last couple of months preparing for Astronomy Day in April there has been discussion of the importance of media coverage and publicity for astronomy events. This got me wondering in a more global sense of how astronomy as a science was portrayed in the media. Is there newsworthy and accurate reporting of scientific events or is it more biased toward quirky or sensational incidences? I set out to do some investigation into the matter.

I randomly picked one week in January of this year, Saturday, January 21st to Saturday, January 28th to collect as many different stories from the various types of media as I could about astronomy or space science. I chose to check out the regular major Canadian and American TV broadcasters, CBC radio, the Victoria Times Colonist and the Globe and Mail newspapers, plus some related internet news sites but I did not connect to specific astronomy sites such as RASC or NASA as I did not think that most people would use these websites to get their regular news.

My hypothesis was that I wouldn't actually find very much and that most of the posts would be about new discoveries that the public would easily be able to relate to such as exo-planets and comet sightings, or some news from the International Space Station. What I found was, in fact, a little of this type of reporting but also a whole lot more.

This particular week actually turned out to be amazingly full of Astronomical news. It began with the great two page article in the Globe and Mail of the National RASC publication of David Levy's astronomical notebooks. I said to myself that this was a pretty good start! In the same newspaper there was a travel article on visiting the Northern Lights in Yellowknife and a large two page

advertisement for the North West Territories waxing eloquently about the pristine skies and aurora to draw people north. There even was a small advertisement for a solar eclipse cruise set for next November to the South Seas. Astronomy was showing up all over the place.

The next day, in a preposterous announcement during the Florida Primaries, Newt Gingrich said that if he were elected he would have another Moon base set up by the end of the decade. The story had "legs" that lasted the whole week, culminating in pejorative editorial cartoons in various newspapers and loud guffawing on political and scientific internet blogs. And then came the Canuck Lego Space Man. Two young high school students from Toronto sent a little Lego Astronaut with a Canadian flag up into low space with a balloon and U-Tubed its progress and the eventual crash landing. They had their fifteen minutes of fame extended over several days, and, in fact, the story was picked up by media the world over. Lego Man became an instant space hit.

In the meantime other stories emerged. There were some early reports of solar storms skimming past earth (again with dire consequences), several articles on the discovery of new exo-planets with the usual "Is their life out there?" add-ons, comic strips poking fun at the number of Mars probes crashing into the surface of the planet, and some serious columns on the effects of light pollution in Vancouver. There was even a spot on "As it Happens" on CBC radio about a new wine that was being made with moon rocks. It was reported, with tongue firmly in cheek, that the wine went very well with a certain Moon green cheese. By the end of the week I had accumulated at least one story or item per day that was related in some way to astronomy and on some days, many more.

I sifted through the information and came up with four over-all conclusions.

1. In terms of quantity of reporting, astronomy was very well represented in the media. Compared to articles related to other physical sciences such as geology, physics or chemistry, it won hands down. Only biological and environmental sciences, mostly connected to climate change, were more prevalent that week.
2. There was a wide range of astronomical topics covered in the media, from cosmology and deep space science to solar systems and space weather. Various aspects of space technology were included as was land-based light pollution commentary. Some areas were never touched on, however. I did not see anything on telescopes or on regular knowledge of the night sky, such as constellations,

for example. But, for the most part, the investigation revealed some of the depth that the field of astronomy has.

3. Many different types of media were represented. I found items not just in the regular news columns but mentioned in editorials, letters to the editor and in editorial cartoons. They found their way into comic strips, humour columns, radio broadcasts, travel advertisements, and in opinion pieces. Stories were on Facebook and made into U-Tube videos. I was surprised at just how much astronomical information permeated throughout the many genres.
4. Although there was quite a lot of content, and in various forms, I found that the majority of reporting remained at a fairly simplistic level of scientific knowledge. Content was usually of general interest, relatively easy to understand, and rarely gave in-depth explanations or dealt with scientific processes or analysis of data. And, as you can surmise from the examples cited, many of the stories were more often tilted toward the unusual, humorous or sensationalist, rather than more ordinary matters that take up most scientists' days. I am aware, however, that this is the usual pattern for most news stories and it is the sensationalist reporting that sells papers.

I stopped accumulating articles after the one week but the investigation has made me more aware of what is in the news and how astronomical topics are represented. There are some good results to take away from this but the latest reporting of the solar storms just confirmed again that it often takes an extraordinary event to make the front page or the leading story and that the coverage may not be as balanced as we would like. But, as amateur and professional astronomers, we all know that astronomy is pretty extraordinary all the time anyway, so we celebrate the good media exposure that we do get and forgive the hyped stories that occasionally come along.

Oh, and by the way, did you pick up the clip on CBC the other night about recreating the popular "Angry Birds" app on the International Space Station....to demonstrate the physics, of course.

I rest my case.

Science Works

1889 Oak Bay Avenue
 Victoria. B.C.
 Tel: 250 595 6033
 Tues - Sat 9am - 5pm

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A Very Special Star Party

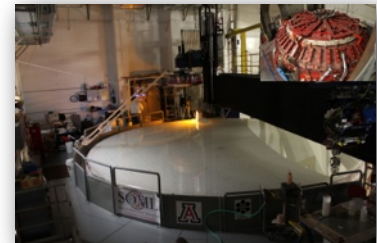
by John McDonald



I have just returned from the second annual All-Star Alberta Party held at the Painted Pony Resort near Rodeo New Mexico and what a party it was. Wendy accompanied me this year and if anything,

this year's party was even better than the one Bruno Quenneville and I attended in 2011. What made it so special?

First of all, the site is wonderful with 3 buildings for guests and room for RVs as well. The observing area is separated from the living quarters and plenty of trees in between render the house lights completely invisible. Next of course are the pristine skies. The site is 4973 ft above sea level on the desert so the air is very clear and dry resulting in excellent visibility. Finally the people attending were a lot of fun to be with. Ken and Bev From did a great job of organizing the event and arranged for catered dinners that were all we could ask for. Breakfasts and lunches were our responsibility with good kitchen facilities to make it easy. Those guests like Wendy were not keen to spend the whole night out with the stars (I know that is strange but it happens) hung around together and had some pretty wild games of Mexican Train. It sounded like so much fun I joined them a couple of evenings before going out to the telescopes.



Following the star party Wendy and I visited Garry and Lynette Sedun at their new house in the Dagoon Mountains. Gary has assembled 2 large telescopes which we tried out while we were there. He has done a fine job of tuning them up and building a rail system that makes it easy to wheel them out of the garage for viewing.

Finally, Wendy and I spent a few days in rural east Tuscon and visited the University of Arizona before returning. A highlight was touring the mirror lab. They are currently making 7 – 28 ft diameter mirrors for the Giant Magellan Telescope. Imagine if you can a huge furnace operating at 2130 deg F and large enough to hold the mould and glass for one of the mirrors. Then,

think of it spinning at 7 RPM to get a parabolic surface for the glass. It is something to see.
A visit to the Arizona Sonora Desert Museum was another highlight that we did not want to miss. It had wonderful desert and mountain scenery with lots of interesting creatures to see.

For anyone wishing to try out the New Mexico Skies, keep an eye on the following site for an announcement of the 2013 All-Star Alberta Party.

<http://www.all-startelescope.com>

A JOURNEY WITH CHARLES MESSIER

by Dianne Bell



IT ALL STARTED on a hot summer evening in August of 2010. My resolution for that year was to be more involved in Astronomy and to re-visit a hobby that my father and I shared throughout my life. He passed away in August of 2008 and I wanted to honour Dad's good memory by becoming acquainted with these night skies again....

So, I packed a tent, a cooler full of food and snacks, my star charts and my 12x50 Tasco binoculars - and showed up at the RASCals Star Party in Metchosin. I wanted to grab a good campsite and to meet some of the astronomers behind their telescopes. My main goal for the weekend? To see M13 through a good-sized 'scope and to look at some of its individual stars....

It was a fabulous weekend and the weather was perfect. I saw the showpiece globular cluster in Hercules through a range of telescopes, large and small. I saw other treasures that Messier had filed away in his "Non, that is not a comet!" list, as he observed from his small observatory in France, more than 200 years ago. The search had begun, using my new star atlas from Astronomy Magazine and honing some skills in star-hopping - with the help of the astronomers and my newly-purchased red dimmer light.

I had a Labour Day weekend commitment on Thetis Island a couple of weeks later. Good weather was in the forecast and I was eager to try out my new 20x80 binoculars. The skies were dark, lovely and moonless, and as I searched for (and found) M31 and her satellite galaxies, I vowed to do the whole of Messier's list.

Months went by and as the days lengthened in 2011, I applied to be an active observer up at the Victoria Centre Observatory. A few lessons on the 12" Antares Dob telescope were gratefully received. After years of

observing through binoculars, I learned to navigate in the other direction with the scope! That spring and summer, I explored through Virgo and the surrounding constellations before moving onto the southern area of Scorpius, Sagittarius and Ophiuchus. The Milky Way revealed its treasure trove of beautiful nebulae and star clusters, of all sizes and magnitudes....

The portability and cost of a good-sized reflector telescope was prohibitive for this city-dwelling amateur so I searched for (and found) a demo tripod and some 25x100 bins. That summer and fall - between the VCO site, the dark sky site near my home and the Cowichan Valley Star Party site in August, I had checked off dozens of Messier objects on my list.

The first few weeks in 2012 were challenging. Between bright moon phases, the rare clear sky conditions - and the availability of the VCO - I spent as much time as I could through the winter constellations. A small "handful" of Messiers were left and these were of challenging magnitudes or low latitudes. Hydra, Leo and Coma Berenices awaited - but I would have to wait until later in the winter - or to set an early alarm and to sacrifice a few hours of sleep.

Hydra was reluctant - M68 and M83 were below 25 degrees South and it took more than one try to spot these toughies! Now I could almost see the finish line. Three Messiers left !!

On Saturday, Feb. 25th, I joined Sherry Buttner and Malcolm Scrimger for some observing up at the VCO. The sky was clear and seeing was good, with no wind. As Leo and Coma Berenices rose in the East, I centered the 12" Dob on Leo's M105 and gave a thumbs-up. I noted the date and time, and waited. Waited for the last two in Coma, as the clock ticked away and it got colder....

M88 and M98 finally rose from behind the trees and although these faint fuzzies (some of the faintest on Messier's list) were a bit elusive, they didn't disappoint. S U C C E S S !! Fueled by the surfeit of chocolate cookies I consumed in those hours and my excitement spilling over, I embraced my mountaintop moment. The list was now complete.

This was not the end but a beginning for me. There are Messier Marathons to train for - and later on I want to re-visit Virgo and the galaxy neighbourhood in that area of the sky. And oh, the NGCs !! Time to get the VCO's 20" Dob out for some exercise.



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H alpha enhanced Orion Region by John McDonald. Orion region with a 28 mm lens at the 2012 Alberta All Star Party. This is an H alpha enhanced color image formed by combining a normal color one with an H alpha filtered one.

Details: 2012-02-21 and 22.
 Conditions - clear and 4 deg C.
 28mm f/2.8 lens on Canon T3i camera on an Astrotrac mount. Exposure 23 x 120s at f/3.5 and ISO 800 with 9 darks and 4 flats.

Exposure 9 x 600s at f/3.5 and ISO 1600 plus 15 x 300s at f/3.5 and 3200.

Both images were processed in Images Plus and Photoshop and combined using Registar.

ASTRONOMY CAFE



Fairfield Community Centre

1330 Fairfield Rd. Victoria,
 7:30pm - 10pm

Call Malcolm at (778) 430-4136 for directions and information.

New comers are especially encouraged.



New Observers Group

Hosted by Sid Sidhu
 1642 Davies Road, Highlands. Call (250).391-0540 for information and directions.



Email Lists

Observer / CU Volunteers / Members

Contact Joe Carr to subscribe
web@victoria.rasc.ca

NEXT REGULAR MEETING

Wednesday April - 11th 7:30pm - A104 Bob Wright Bldg, University of Victoria, 3800 Finnerty Rd.

RASC Victoria Council for 2010 / 2011

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