

# SKYNEWS



January 15th snowfall in Victoria, by Li-Ann Skibo

## Dinner's On!

It's going to be our first dinner meeting since 2018 and you were all invited! Seriously, with over 200 members in our Centre, you'd think we'd have more than the just under 60 plates expected for our annual general meeting. To say things hit a bit of a snag for the AGM planning is a bit of an understatement. After a late start to organizing the dinner, the Council was informed that the place we had booked for the event –the Cedar Hill Golf Course Clubhouse - had been damaged by flooding and wouldn't be usable for the next six months!

Deborah Crawford, our treasurer, took over the planning and found us a new place: the Ambrosia Centre. Given the time constraints and the fact that many people had already ordered their meals, everything possible was done to ensure the menu closely resembled the formerly tendered food choices. It's a shame though, given that the Ambrosia Centre's caterers are capable of an amazing variety of menu choices; something we might consider for future dinners.

So here we are, having dinner and a meeting in 2020. New voices are stepping up for positions on Council, but before the presses ran, no one has yet stepped up to become our next vice-president. Given that our current president has made it very clear that he will step down if we don't have someone fill that post, we could end having to fill both positions if someone doesn't come forward. Unlike larger organizations, we don't have the spare shekels to hire someone to do all our work for us, so Council positions are held by people like you. Please consider that when you're tucking into your steak or salmon.

*Bruce Lane*

## Editorial Remarks



After the heavy clouds of December, we fared even worse in January, with clouds, rain, and even snow getting between us and observing the night sky. This might not be the worst winter for amateur astronomy in the last ten years, but it might very well be the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> worst. To commemorate the weather, the photos in this issue of *SkyNews* will be of a more terrestrial nature, commemorating the snowstorm that fell on Greater Victoria in the middle of the month.

In this issue of *SkyNews*, we'll have more recaps from our Centre's activities, as well as all the photos and articles you've come to expect from the *Victoria Centre SkyNews*.

More historical articles are in the works and I've also been developing a web comic series for *SkyNews*. The story has been plotted out and writing completed, but I'm still doing preliminary sketches for the panels to finalize the drawing style for the series. Just don't expect any Kawaii anime.

*Bruce Lane: SkyNews Editor*

## President's Message for February

The 50th Anniversary of the Apollo Moon Landing received the lion's share of astronomical attention in 2019. There was another RASC worthy milestone, however, that was overshadowed by this event. In October 2019 the Canada France Hawaii Telescope celebrated its 40th Birthday! In order to celebrate this momentous occasion, the Victoria Centre has invited Mary Beth Laychak to deliver a presentation on the CHFT at our AGM banquet. Mary Beth is the author of the CHFT Chronicles, a very interesting column which appears in the RASC Journal. As the Director of Strategic Communications for the CFHT she is the ideal person to share stories of the science, staff, instrumentation, and adventure from this remarkable observatory that is brimming with Canadian content.



It should be noted that **all Victoria Centre RASCals are welcome to attend this presentation**. It will begin at **7:30PM on Saturday February 22nd at the Ambrosia Centre, located at 638 Fisgard Street**. Participation in the banquet is not required but I encourage you to consider this savoury opportunity. The AGM was originally booked at the Cedar Hill Golf

Course but in January a plumbing failure closed that venue for 6 months. In response to this crisis our intrepid Treasurer, Deb Crawford, went into overdrive and secured the Ambrosia Centre, which enjoys an outstanding culinary reputation. Since easy parking is available across the street, we hope that you will join us for delicious cuisine, sparkling conversation, an interesting presentation, and recognition of remarkable RASCals. There will also be a streamlined business meeting that will be so short that it will be painless. If you plan to attend please email Deb Crawford [treasurer@victoria.rasc.ca](mailto:treasurer@victoria.rasc.ca) by February 15th with your choice of entree.

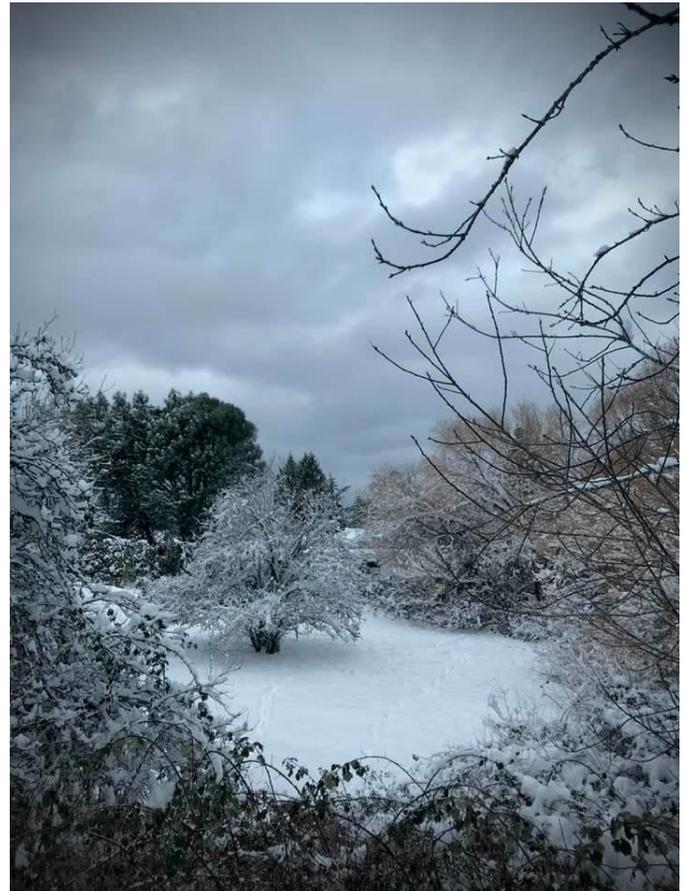
Snow and fierce winds forced us to reschedule our Victoria Centre Council Meeting to January 22nd. Council focused on upcoming events.

- Astronomy Day will occur on Saturday April 25th at the Royal BC Museum. David Lee has once again kindly volunteered to organize this event. It serves as the kickoff of our ambitious 2020 outreach season. The first of 21 scheduled Saturday Night Star Parties at the DAO commence that evening and will continue until September 12th.
- From April 15th to May 2nd Langham Court Theatre will be performing *Silent Sky*, a wonderful play featuring the life of Henrietta Leavitt, who discovered the luminosity-period relationship of Cepheid variables. Potential outreach possibilities are being explored.
- The 2020 RASC General Assembly in Metro Vancouver June 5th to 7th. Early bird registration discount ends February 15th.
- Fort Rodd Hill Stargazing event on Friday, August 7th.
- The 25th Annual Island Star Party at Bright Angel Park on August 22nd and 23rd.
- Saanich Fair Epic Outreach Event September 5th to 7th.

You might notice that no Victoria Centre RASCAL Star Party is planned for 2020. During a lengthy discussion, it was noted that in order to select a star party date that did not conflict with the Island Star Party, Saturday Night at the DAO and the Saanich Fair, the Victoria Centre event would have to be held in late September. Both star parties held in September at St Stephens Church were rained out and demonstrated the unreliable nature of September weather. A significant majority of council felt that it was not worth the time, energy and expense to organize a star party when the likelihood of success was marginal. The idea of a “downsized” event that would provide both social benefits and encourage communal stargazing had a certain appeal. The option of a casual “Picnic at Pearson” might fit the bill and a late summer pot luck event at Pearson College is actively being explored. We may also hold a couple of casual observing sessions at Cattle Point during a favourable weather window. We will see how this works this year and revisit the Star Party option next year. When you remember that we also have the weekly events at the Victoria Centre Observatory we have plenty of activities for a busy season ahead.

*Useable Skies*

*Reg Dunkley*



## Astro Café: Monday Nights, 7:30-9:00pm



After taking the first Monday off for New Year's Day, Astro Café began the decade with an evening where Joe Carr did a photographic review of the December 26th Annular Eclipse (visible from the Middle East and SE Asia); John McDonald gave a presentation titled: "The Perils and Possibilities of photometry with a DSLR"; Randy gave a sneak peek at his upcoming presentation on the dimming of Betelgeuse; and Chris Purse continued with Handbook 101, reviewing the amassed data and articles in the Observer's Handbook published annually by RASC. The following week, Joe Carr gave tips for buying binoculars and there was another session of Handbook 101 by Chris. Randy Eaken closed out the month with his lecture on Betelgeuse.

Astro Café is a weekly astronomy gathering for both RASC members and the public alike. It runs on Monday nights, finishing up at the end of May and returning in September. Astro Café is primarily a social gathering, with presentations of recent observing sessions, astronomy gear show and tell, discussions about astronomy, and of course coffee and cookies (please remember to bring a reusable mug...perhaps even a Astro Café mug). It's located at the Fairfield-Gonzales Community Association, in one of the portable classrooms tucked in behind the main administration building, at 1330 Fairfield Road. Astro Café is a nice introduction to the amateur astronomy community of Victoria. The lights will be on and a sandwich board out front to let you know where we are.

*Bruce Lane*

## Monthly Meeting Speaker: Mary Beth Laychak The Canada France Hawaii Telescope... the First 40 Years

7:30 PM, Saturday, February 22<sup>nd</sup>; 2020 at Cedar Hill Golf Course, 1400 Derby Road; Victoria



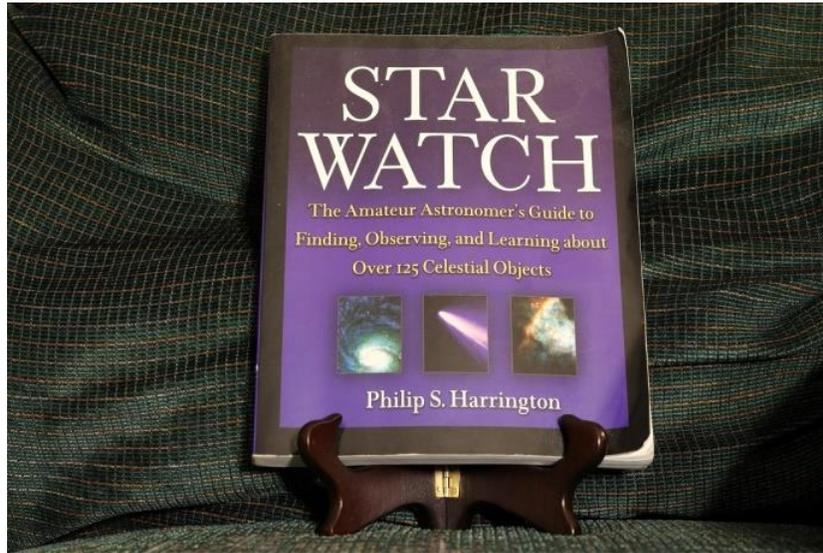
**The Canada-France-Hawaii Telescope** celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2019. Mary Beth Laychak, CFHT's Director of Strategic Communications will share stories of the science, staff, instrumentation, and adventure from CFHT.

**Mary Beth Laychak** is the Director of Strategic Communications at the Canada-France-Hawaii Telescope on the Big Island of Hawaii. She also runs the Maunakea Scholars program, an innovative astronomy outreach program for Hawaii public high school students. Mary Beth has an undergraduate degree in astronomy and astrophysics from Penn State University and a master's degree in educational technology from San Diego State. Her passions include

astronomy, sharing astronomy with the public, astronomy based crafts, and running. She lives in Waimea, Hawaii with her husband and cat.

## From the Library

After our monthly meeting, feel free to join your fellow RASCals socializing up in the astronomy faculty lounge on the 4th floor of the Elliott Building, where we have coffee, juice, and cookies. It's also where the RASC Victoria Library is housed, with over 500 titles, curated by Diane Bell, our RASC Victoria Librarian.. Our library covers many aspects of astronomy: observing, astrophotography, telescope construction, space exploration, astrophysics, and much more. Every month, *SkyNews* will be featuring a new selection from our Centre's library, complete with a brief book review.



This month we're taking a closer look at *Star Watch*, by Philip S. Harrington. *Star Watch* is one of the best books available for beginning amateur astronomers. While Dickenson's *NightWatch* is often suggested as the best book amateur astronomers need to get started, I disagree. Whereas Dickenson's *NightWatch* is a very good general overview, Harrington's *Star Watch* is completely focused with giving you the information you need to observe the night sky. Personally, I'd recommend getting both of them. *Star Watch* goes through a lengthy list of solar system and deep space targets, with details about how to find them and what you'll see through different sized telescopes and binoculars when you do. It's as valuable resource for when you're starting out as it is years later; especially after a long break from observing due to bad weather. Whether you're planning to go out into the backyard with your binoculars, attending a weekly observing session at the Victoria Centre Observatory, a Messier Marathon, or going to a star party for the weekend, *Star Watch* is an excellent resource and it's available at our Victoria Centre Library.

*Bruce Lane*

### 2020 Annual General Meeting Schedule

**6:00 p.m.** Doors Open. No Host Bar Open

**6:30 p.m.** Buffet Style Banquet

**7:30 p.m.** Presentation: The Canada France Hawaii Telescope...the First 40 Years by Mary Beth Laychak

**8:30 p.m.** Annual General Meeting and Awards

**Note:** Members who do not want the buffet are welcome to join us at 7:30 PM for the presentation and AGM at no charge

## Hill and Dale (Observing on the Island)

In a month dominated by clouds and rain, one of the best nights for stargazing was on the same night a storm hammered the Greater Victoria region. The power going out in the neighbourhood around 11pm gave me some of the darkest skies I've seen in quite some time. While it was too windy to set up a telescope, I had my binoculars out and probably did more observing of the night sky that night than I had in the last two months combined. There were also a couple nights at the very end of the month, with some brief breaks in the clouds, allowing members to have a look at some planetary conjunctions with the Moon. Bill Weir took the opportunity to test the new TEC 140 out at Pearson College and do some comet hunting (C/2107 T2), as well as taking the rare opportunity this month to observe deep space objects in the night sky. Hopefully, with all the new shiny toys at the Pearson College observatory, more people take the opportunity to join Bill to make use of them and enjoy one of the better views of the southern horizon in the area.

At the VCO, the Ritchey-Chretien telescope continues to be plagued by astigmatism or collimation problems that make it unsuitable for astrophotography. It's still fine for observing though and there's also the 20" Obsession Dobsonian reflector telescope available for our use. With clear skies on the horizon, it should allow the Technical Committee the opportunity to do some fine tuning on the RCT, so it's ready for some serious astrophotography sessions.

A reminder that although the VCO belongs to and is for the use of the members of the RASC Victoria Centre, with both weekly scheduled and unscheduled sessions run by our MiCs (Members in Charge). The VCO is located on National Research Council property. This means that all visitors to our observatory must be on our observer list and registered with the NRC. To get on the list, just contact Chris Purse (Membership Coordinator) [membership@rasc.victoria.ca](mailto:membership@rasc.victoria.ca) and we'll see you up there on the Hill some night soon.

*Bruce Lane*



## Astronomical Term of the Month: Barlow

Invented by Peter Barlow in 1833, the Barlow lens is one of the most used and misunderstood astronomy accessories. The common 2X Barlow is believed by most people to be doubling the magnification of your eyepiece, but they don't actually magnify at all. What they do is divide the focal length of your telescope by half, effectively doubling the magnification when that new focal length value is divided by the millimetre focal length value of the eyepiece. The way Barlow divisions are referred to by an "X" value, the same used for binocular magnification, only adds to this misunderstanding. It's possible that someone tried to label them as focal length/2 Barlows, but it didn't test well with the marketing department. While most Barlow lenses are 2X, there are also 3X and other focal length divisions available.

Why use a Barlow? You can put a Barlow in front of any of your eyepiece to give you more options for viewing objects in the night sky than your current collection of eyepieces allows. A lot of telescopes come with a 10mm Plossl eyepiece, but maybe it's a smaller refractor or reflector, so a 5mm eyepiece would get you the right high power magnification. The eye lens, on the eyepiece, gets smaller the more powerful the Plossl eyepiece is, so at a certain point you're squinting through a pinhole. I would prefer using a Barlow with the 10mm eyepiece to get the same view, but with a more generous eye lens to look through. Barlows also increase your eye relief, which is a good thing, especially if you wear glasses. When you're already using your high power eyepiece, but you want a bit more power to see that red spot on Jupiter or some tiny detail on the Moon, then a Barlow is handy to have in your tool kit. Your resolution will break down when you surpass your maximum useful magnification, mostly because of atmospheric conditions, but it might be the only way to see those details.

If they're so good, why doesn't everyone use them? Barlows don't always work as well on lower power/ longer focal length eyepieces, especially a 32 or 40mm ones, because you can get vignetting from the excessive eye relief. If you're using a Barlow with an eyepiece, it also means there's more glass between you and what you're looking at. If you're using entry level eyepieces it's not a big deal, but if you've got an expensive set of eyepieces that you're partial too, you're probably going to prefer not using a Barlow and might prefer instead having an eyepiece to cover those needs for more power, especially for the demands of splitting binary stars. In either case, it's worth it to spend a little more to get a higher quality Barlow than to use an entry level one.

*Bruce Lane*



## In Closing



This time of year is usually when members of the Centre's amateur astronomer community start making their early plans for the coming spring and summer. Sadly, our Council voted 7 to 3 vote against holding a star party this year. It might have been more encouraging if a motion was put to Council to see who was interested in having a star party instead of a motion about who was in favour of cancelling it. Discarding an event that's been held since 2000 is not a particularly auspicious way to kick off the decade. We've seen a dramatic reduction in both our participation and organization of public outreach events in recent years. Our annual star party was one of the few things to survive. Star parties represent the very essence of the amateur astronomer experience. There are lectures and the event is open

to the public, but this is the one time of the year that we can just show up on a field with our telescopes and spend the weekend together as amateur astronomers. There are also fellow amateur astronomers who come from outside the Greater Victoria area and while it's often the only time I see them, once we're out on the observing field it's like no time has passed at all since the last time we talked. This might be a good year to make the trip out to the BC interior, to take in one of their star parties, either at Merritt or Mount Kobau.

The decision about cancelling our star party came at the same time as the announcement to the RASC Victoria Council that the Friends of the Dominion Astrophysics Observatory were adding an additional Saturday of public outreach in September, at the Plaskett Telescope. It's an unfortunate coincidence, but I completely understand the reasoning of the FDAO. They do a lot of advertising for their Summer Saturdays during the Saanich Fair, but without any scheduled events after the Labour Day weekend, the efforts of volunteers promoting the event sees diminished returns when they lose connectivity over the next 7 months. I wouldn't have a problem with having a couple more Summer Saturdays in September if a couple more were trimmed off from the springtime.

*Bruce Lane: SkyNews Editor*

## Photography Credits

Cover: Snow fall in Victoria, Jan 15, 2020; by Li-Ann Skibo

Page 2: Crop of Bruce Lane (SkyNews Editor) at 2013 RASCAL Star Party in Metchosin, by Chris Gainor

Page 2: Crop of Reg Dunkley (RASC Victoria President) at 2018 AGM, by Joe Carr

Page 3: Snow fall in Victoria, Elk Lake Lane, near Commonwealth Centre, Jan 15, 2020; by Malcolm Scrimger

Page 4: Photograph and Design of Astro Cafe Mug, by Joe Carr

Page 4: Canada France Hawaii Telescope, December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2007; by Vadim Kurland (licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic license)

Page 5: Posed Book, "Star Watch", taken at Editor's home on Feb 20, 2020, by Bruce Lane

Page 6: Snow fall on Balcony, Jan 15, 2020; by Diane Bell

Page 7: Snow fall in Victoria, Jan 15, 2020; by Joe Carr

Page 8: Ameraucana chicken "Haw k", Feb 8, 2020; by Bruce Lane

Page 9: A Pair of SkyNews Editors, Jan 8, 2020; by Joe Carr

**Call for Article and Photo Submissions for March Issue**

SkyNews is looking for submissions of astronomy photos and articles for the March issue of our Victoria Centre's magazine. Send your submissions to [editor@victoria.rasc.ca](mailto:editor@victoria.rasc.ca)

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