

# NOVA

NEWSLETTER OF THE VANCOUVER CENTRE RASC | VOLUME 2007 ISSUE 4 | JULY/AUGUST 2007



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## Looking Ahead

Remember, you are always welcome to attend meetings of Council, held on the first Thursday of every month at 7:30pm in the GMSO.

**Jul. 7:** Ray Villard of the Space Telescope Science Institute on the latest from Hubble. Meeting to be held at SFU.

**Aug. 9:** Eric Dunn on the "new" Solar System.

## Next Issue Deadline

Material for the September Nova should be submitted by Monday, Sept. 3, 2007. Please send submissions to:

Gordon Farrell (gfarrell@shaw.ca)

Title image: Jason Rickerby

## CGRT Update

by Craig Breckenridge

There has been much work behind the scenes on the Chris Graham Robotic Telescope project over the last month or so. Some of these were hinted at during the June members' meeting where we outlined the changes that are on the horizon.

First and foremost of these is the addition of a 250mm Takahashi Baker-Ritchey-Chrétien Astrograph to the program. This scope will be mounted on a Paramount MME in a roll-off roof facility at Pingelly Heights Observatory, 100 km southeast of Perth, Australia. Yes, you read that right, Australia; southern skies will now be part of the territory we can look for interesting objects in. We will be using the SBIG 6303 camera and the same software set up as we are currently using in New Mexico Skies on the 20" RCOS. We expect this facility to be operational this fall.

The second big thing that has been going on is the relocation of the CGRT Control Room from the GMSO to an office at SFU. While at the time of this writing the move hasn't happened yet, it is imminent and will most likely happen early in July. SFU has kindly lent us secure space and two internet connec-

tions. One of these connections will be used for the CGRT Control computer and the second will be for our own FTP server. Being on the '.ca' net will allow for easier access for the Canadian Astronomical Data Centre and is one of the main reasons for moving. Another reason for moving is to involve the students at SFU who are enrolled in the Physics programs and the Introduction-to-Astronomy courses access to the exceptional observing tools in the CGRT program.

Thirdly, Chris has worked out a deal with NMS that will allow him to keep the 20" RCOS in New Mexico. While Chris and I both complain that the dome has given us the most trouble, we feel we can overcome those with a bit of perseverance. Chris has purchased a Finger Lakes filter wheel to replace the troublesome one currently installed and this should clear up some of the issues we've had with that.

Fourth on the list (see, I told you we've been doing a lot) is the implementation of the web interface for the project. Chris has registered [www.cgrrt.net](http://www.cgrrt.net) and we have placed the initial presentation to National on the site for now. Future plans

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Rain, rain, rain, cloud rain. At least that's what it seems like. Anyway, despite the usual setbacks we have been busy at the CAROP observatory.

The drive belts for the dome were replaced and, after having a look at the operation, I feel we could make a few improvements to relieve some stress on the system. I am looking for help from the CAROP group on this project.

Although not all the equipment is currently operational, for the month of July I am designating Tuesday evenings to training and maintenance at the observatory. With the late summer evenings, maybe we can take advantage of

some clear weather to do some cleanup and maintenance work. It will be very beneficial to have a presence at the observatory on a weekly basis.

Observing projects can be submitted by any members that have been qualified in the operation of the observatory. With space in the observatory being limited, three to four people at an observing session is ideal.

### June 23 CAROP Picnic:

Although attendance could have been better, the picnic and observatory tour did go off well. The observatory is really not a great place for a large group. Any RASC members in good standing are wel-

come to make arrangements to have a tour of the observatory by contacting myself.

### CAROP/SFU Progress:

Craig Breckenridge has been in contact with SFU and is helping out with plans for an observatory on Burnaby Mountain and the relocation of our CAROP telescope. I did talk with Howard Trottier from the SFU Department of Physics at our last general meeting and we would like to work on some RASC/SFU Sidewalk Astronomy observing sessions this Fall. ★

Wayne Lyons,  
Chairperson, CAROP  
Tel: (604) 467-2956

## Summertime Astronomy

by Wayne Lyons

Well, the kids are out of school and we're heading into the warm evenings of summer. Although the weatherman kept sunshine and clear skies just two days away from us all Spring, I'm sure we will get some good observing soon.

At any rate I just wanted to pass on a little information about what the astronomical community of our province has lined up for this summer. If you happen to be in the area of one of these Star Parties I'm sure your welcome to attend. It is good to know that there are so many local people involved in putting on these events to help promote astronomy.

**Cowichan Valley StarFinders** – 12th Annual Island Star Party. Dates: July 13th, 14th, 15th, 2007. Location: Victoria Fish and Game Association, Holker Place, Malahat.

Our own RASC – **Vancouver Centre** will be helping out with the **Fraser Valley Astronomers** and the GVRD with the Perseid Meteor Shower Watch at Aldergrove Lake Regional Park on Saturday, August 11 between 7:30 and 11 p.m.

The **Sunshine Coast Astronomy Club** is hosting their third annual Astronomy-in-the-Park festival at Porpoise Bay Provincial Park on August 11<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

**Mount Kobau Star Party.** The 24th annual Mt. Kobau Star Party runs from dusk August 11th until dawn August 19th, 2007.

The Kobau access point is about 400 km (250 miles) east of Vancouver, on Highway 3. The gate is always open and is marked by a sign labelled "Kobau Lookout Forest Road." Look for the turnoff on the north side of the highway at the

crest of a hill about 35 km (22 miles) east of Keremeos, or 11 km (7 miles) west of Osoyoos [see map on p. 4].

**RASC – Victoria Centre.** RASCALS Star Party. Dates: August 24-26, 2007.

Location: Victoria Fish and Game Association, Holker Place, Malahat.

Our Fall astronomical highlight is hosted by the **Merritt Astronomical Society** at the Merritt Star Quest.

Dates: September 8-16, 2007. Location: Loon Lake Gravel Pit off Coquihalla Highway, Merritt – Kelowna.

Thanks again to the members from all the different Astronomical Associations throughout our province that devote their time to putting on these Star Parties for the enjoyment of all. ★

## President's Message

The Vancouver skies have once again been thwarting our plans for sidewalk astronomy events! Our planned public astronomy event for May 26<sup>th</sup> was rained out, but we did at least get a chance to check out David Lam Park in Yaletown. The southern horizon is pretty good for viewing the moon and planets, so we will try to organize something in that area once again later in the summer.

At our June members meeting, we were pleased to have Mel Bartels from Oregon speak to us about the latest trends in amateur telescope making. Mel described how telescopes have evolved over the last many years and how simplicity and elegance are features of the best telescopes. String truss type tubes and string spiders were just a couple of the innovative features that Mel discussed. Mel was kind enough to join us for a workshop the following morning to discuss ideas for re-purposing the donated Global TV camera lenses into functional telescopes. The consensus of the workshop, led by Craig Breckinridge, suggests that the group will make a couple of pilot telescopes that will include a "twin" scope and a fork-mounted scope. If you would like to participate in this project, please contact Craig.

I am happy to report some exciting news on the Chris Graham Robotic Telescope (CGRT) project. Our benefactor, Chris Graham has entered into an agreement to establish a new robotic telescope in Pingelly, on the Indian Ocean side of Australia, near Perth. The new

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## 2007 Vancouver Centre Officers

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## About RASC

The Vancouver Centre, RASC meets at 7:30 PM in the auditorium of the H.R. MacMillan Space Centre at 1100 Chestnut St., Vancouver, on the second Thursday of every month. Guests are always welcome. In addition, the Centre has an observing site where star parties are regularly scheduled.

Membership is currently \$58.00 per year (\$34.25 for persons under 21 years of age) and can be obtained by writing to the Treasurer at the address on page 5. Annual membership includes the invaluable Observer's Handbook, six issues of the RASC Journal, and, of course, access to all of the club events and projects.

For more information regarding the Centre and its activities, please contact our P.R. Director.

NOVA, the newsletter of the Vancouver Centre, RASC, is published on odd numbered months. Opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the Vancouver Centre.

Material on any aspect of astronomy should be e-mailed to the editor or mailed to the address on page 5.

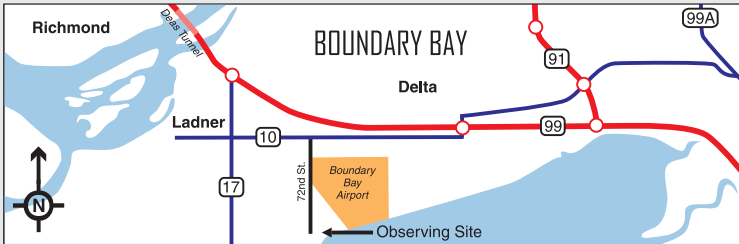
## Advertising

Nova encourages free use of its classified ads for members with items for sale or swap. Notify the editor if you wish your ad to run in more than one issue.

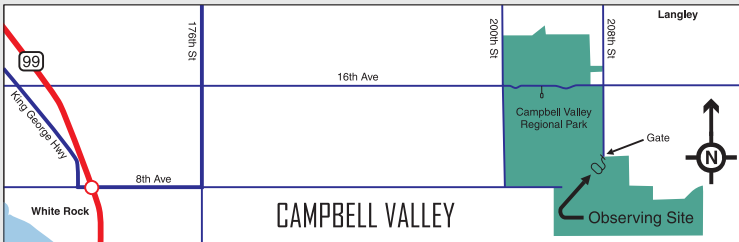
## Commerical Rates

1/4 Page: \$15.00 per issue  
1/2 Page: \$25.00 per issue  
Full Page: \$40.00 per issue  
Rates are for electronic or camera-ready files. Payment, by cheque, must accompany ad material. Make cheque payable to:  
RASC Vancouver Centre.

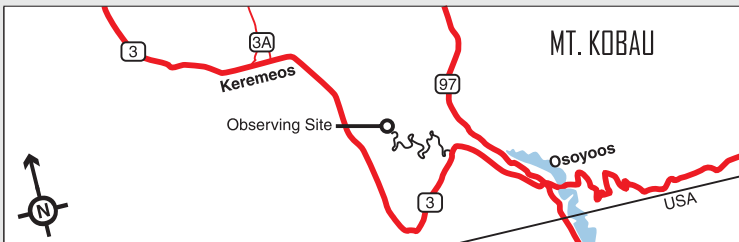
# OBSERVING SITES



Site of the regular Saturday night star party. On the dike at the foot of 72nd St.



Our alternate observing site. Contact Bruce MacDonald (604-882-3820) to see if this site is in use.



Site of the annual Mt. Kobau Star Party organized by the Mount Kobau Astronomical Society

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telescope will be hosted by the Pingelly Heights Observatory in partnership with Mike and Lynn Rice who operate New Mexico Skies, where our current robotic scope resides. Chris has generously increased his donations to Vancouver Centre to make it possible for our Centre to participate in this new location as well as the New Mexico location. The Pingelly project is targeted to be up and running around October of this year. **In an effort to increase productive use of these robotic facilities, Vancouver Cen-**

**tre has extended an invitation to all RASC Centres to participate in defining projects for image acquisition and processing.** We hope that by inviting greater participation, we can expand skill development and image collection for some interesting new projects. Please let me know if you are interested in helping out as well. Our CGRT Operations Room will be moving to SFU in Burnaby over the next month to create a more central location for many of our members.

As you hopefully know by now, our July 12<sup>th</sup> meeting is can-

celled and Vancouver Centre and SFU are hosting Ray Villard—PR director for the Hubble Telescope—on Saturday, July 7, 2007 at SFU in Burnaby. This lecture is dedicated to the first Paul Sykes Annual Memorial Lecture. Over the next few months, you will be hearing more from Council regarding recommendations related to the generous donation that Paul Sykes gifted Vancouver Centre. Presently our charitable status is managed via the national RASC and while our Centre is a registered Society, we are in the

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process of registering for independent charitable status so that we can have more options for engaging our donations.

National RASC is currently working on bringing in a new administrative system to manage our memberships and subscriptions. You should be seeing something in time for September, when many renewals are processed. Suzanna Nagy, our Director of Membership, will be tracking developments in this area so please ask her if you have any questions when the new system comes on-line.

Here's hoping for some clear skies this summer!

– Pomponia ✱

## Change to Sky & Telescope Renewal Procedures

Members are now able to renew their discounted subscriptions directly by mail or by phone. It is no longer necessary to go through the Vancouver Centre treasurer to renew your subscription.

If you are currently receiving the Astronomy Club discount on your *Sky and Telescope* subscription, you can renew by telephone at 1-800-253-0245. To renew by mail, follow the instructions on your renewal notice. Payment at the time of renewal is required in both cases. Members will now have the option of renewing for two years.

If you are a current subscriber NOT receiving the club discount, or if you are a NEW subscriber, it is still necessary to go through the Vancouver Centre treasurer. ✱

## LIBRARY

The centre has a large library of books, magazines and old NOVAS for your enjoyment at the GSO. Please take advantage of this club service and visit often to check out the new purchases. Suggestions for future library acquisitions are appreciated.

### RASC-VC on the Internet

<http://www.pcis.com/rascvan/> or

<http://www.rasc.ca/vancouver>

## H.R. MACMILLAN SPACE CENTRE

The Pacific Space Centre Society is a non-profit organization which operates the H.R. MacMillan Space Centre and Gordon M. Southam Observatory. Annual Membership (\$30 Individual, \$80 Family) includes a newsletter, discounts on Space Camps, special programs and lectures, Vancouver Museum discounts, and free admission to the Space Centre. Admission to the Space Centre includes: Astronomy shows, Motion Simulator rides, multimedia shows in GroundStation Canada, and access to the Cosmic Courtyard Exhibit Gallery. For Membership information, call Mahi Jordao at 604-738-7827, local 237 for information. You can also reach them on the Internet at <http://www.hrmacmillanspacecentre.com/>

## MEMBERSHIP HAS ITS PRIVILEGES!

New members, did you know? The Vancouver Centre has 8 telescopes available for loan free of charge! We have telescopes ranging from 60mm to 10" diameter. For more information see Bob Parry, Director of Telescopes in the meeting room of the GSO after the members meeting. All telescopes are to be picked up and returned at the GSO. The loaner period is for one month, to be returned after the next meeting. Telescopes are not allowed to circulate outside of these meetings. You can now reserve two different telescopes per year and use what is left at the end of the meeting anytime. Bob can be reached at 604-215-8844.

Your greatest opportunity as a member of the R.A.S.C. is to take advantage of the company of other enthusiasts to increase your knowledge, enjoyment and skill in astronomy.

The best thing you can do to gain the most from your membership is to get active! Take in the club meetings; engage other members with questions; come out to observing sessions (also known as "star parties"), and, by all means, volunteer to take part in our many public events.

Observing takes place at Boundary Bay on the dike at the south end of 72nd St. in Delta (see map on p. 4). We are there most clear Friday/Saturday nights. Contact Jason Rickerby at 604-502-8158.

### RASC

1100 Chestnut Street  
Vancouver, B.C.

V6J 3J9

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## August

11 – Perseid meteor shower  
11-19 – Mt. Kobau Star Party

## September

15 – Sidewalk Astronomy at the  
Inukshuk at Sunset Beach

## December

13 – AGM

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include a wiki, our own forum and links to a gallery of images. We'll be setting these up over the summer and if anyone is interested in helping out on these they should contact Pomponia or myself. We'll also be setting up the web control panel for the telescopes and this will simplify operation of the scopes for members. While this will entail going over the operational routines again, there won't be many changes from the procedures as they now stand. This interface will allow for trained members (with proper security clearance) to operate the telescopes from any location with internet access.

We have decided that since we are not getting enough volunteer effort from Vancouver Centre, that we will open the project up to RASC members across the country. Ron Jerome will have delivered that invitation during the Paper Sessions at the GA prior to this going to print.

All control of the project will remain with Vancouver Centre and Chris but there are many maintenance duties we hope people will volunteer to perform. These duties are being outlined by a sub-committee, (Chris, Pomponia and myself), that will serve as the basis for our future planning meetings. Planning meetings will be held once a month on the third Tuesday of each month and all members are encouraged to attend.

The last thing I want to mention is that there have been a number of images taken with the same equipment we have at our disposal making some pretty big press. On page 90 of the August 2007 issue of *Sky and Telescope* there is an image by R. Jay GaBany of the edge-on spiral galaxy NGC 4013. This image was taken with an SBIG STL-11000M CCD through a RCOS 20" Ritchey Cretien from Blackbird Observatory, Mayhill, New Mexico, just down the road a bit from New

Mexico Skies. Astronomy Picture of the Day for June 30, 2007 featured an image of Centaurus A by Robert Gendler (<http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/ap070630.html>). Robert has his 20" RCOS Ritchey Chrétien mounted on a Paramount MME in a 15' Technical Innovations dome at New Mexico Skies and he uses a SBIG STL-11000M CCD. More information and images by Robert are available on his web site: <http://www.robgendlerastropics.com/>. Looking at his set up for New Mexico is like looking at the CGRT project equipment. A little practice and work by RASCVC members could produce similar results—the equipment is there to be used!

Anyone interested in the CGRT project can contact Pomponia Martinez (RASCVC President) or Craig Breckenridge (CGRT Chair). We're willing to train anyone who is willing to learn! ★

## On Lance

by Lee Johnson

Lance Olkovich was born on May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1952, and died near the summer solstice, June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2007. He was 55 years old. He will be cherished in many contexts, perhaps chiefly for his gift of friendship—his extraordinary sensitivity to every individual he knew.

In the context of astronomy in this province, his contributions are simply outstanding. He helped build the 25" community astronomy telescope that has gone around to the province's parks in the summer. He

also built many other magnificent telescopes, including, in several cases, fabricating the mirrors, for amateur astronomers throughout B.C. and Washington State. One year at the Mount Kobau Star Party, there were at least nine large-aperture telescopes on the mountain, all made by Lance. His telescopes dominated the scene, and at least one of his 16" creations is in the hands of the Vancouver Centre of the RASC. His telescopes are distinguished for their strength, light

weight, and ease of operation. They keep their optical alignment under changing temperatures and positions in altitude and azimuth because Lance would not tolerate flexure. He gave unstinting help to amateur telescope makers across the province, advising them on materials and meticulous techniques of mirror-making and telescope design. He most recently was experimenting with a mirror under a finely calculated stress so that when its

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In this issue, I will be reviewing one of our older books, *The Year-Round Messier Marathon Field Guide*. Now, many would be asking why I would want to talk about a Messier Marathon book in July when the marathon is usually in March? I bring it up because the weather is usually better in summer, here in Vancouver. And there are still almost 100 objects on the Messier list that can be seen in summer. Not to mention that the summer constellations in the south are highest at this time of year.

The book starts with an introduction to what a Messier Marathon is and discusses the various types of marathons—Ordinary, Maxi and Messier.

The next section covers Charles Messier and his list of objects that he catalogued as objects that could be mistaken as comets by other comet hunters. Then the chapter fast-forwards to the 20<sup>th</sup> century and covers the rise of the Messier Marathon amongst amateur astronomers in North America at first and later around the world.

The next section covers doing Messier Marathons all year long. It goes into how many Messiers can be seen by month so that you can do some of the Messier list when the weather cooperates. The best months are February through April and October and November. But from our latitude, almost 100 of

Messier's objects can be seen in July and August.

The next section covers tips on how to conduct a marathon and what you need to do in advance to prepare to do a marathon.

The next section covers the importance of knowing your way around the sky. Because you are searching for Messier's objects, you need to know where to find them, or be able to star-hop using signpost constellations to locate what you are looking for. A set of six Signpost Maps are provided to help you locate constellations and objects in the sky.

The next section covers calibrating your telescope.

The next section covers in detail the star-hopping method of finding Messier objects once you find the constellation it is in.

The next section is an overview of just what objects are on the Messier list. Items such as Galaxies, Clusters and Nebulae are covered here.

The next section describes the Messier charts and how to use them to find these objects during your marathon.

The next section provides the charts to find the objects on the Messier List. First is a pair of views through a finder (depending on your type of finder), then a sketch of the object as seen through a telescope. Then comes a half-page of material

on the object being observed, as well as anything that should be noteworthy, and tips on how to observe the object. The second page is a constellation map showing the location of the object being sought. The third page is a chart to use for starhopping to the object. The fourth page is only useful if you are really doing a springtime Messier Marathon, as it shows where the object is in the sky relative to the horizon (whether it is rising or setting), for those objects that need to be seen during twilight.

The book closes with an appendix which lists all of the objects on the Messier List by number, right ascension, declination, NGC number, object classification, visual magnitude, constellation and map number. Also included is a simple recording log of when you saw each messier item. I would really recommend that if you want the RASC's Messier Certificate that your logbook should also include telescope type and magnification as well as a written description or perhaps a sketch of the object, so that RASC National can verify that you have seen all 110 objects and award you your certificate of achievement.

I have this book in my library and if you are moving beyond the beginner's level, you may want to start here for your next step. ★

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spheroidal surface was released from the stress it was under, it immediately formed a paraboloidal surface of outstanding accuracy.

His brilliant mind was not con-

finned to telescope-building but extended to philosophy, art, music, and poetry. He was the kindest of hosts and enjoyed regaling his friends with his latest finds in pastries and ports. His friends basked

in his intelligence, wit, and sensitivity—and were, not surprisingly, completely devoted to him in turn. He was one of those people who “is too good to be true.” ★

Proud To Serve Vancouver's Astronomical Community



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