

NOVA

NEWSLETTER OF THE VANCOUVER CENTRE RASC | VOLUME 2009 ISSUE 4 | JULY/AUGUST 2009



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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. 9: Dr. Chris Purton of the DRAO (ret'd): Looking at the Milky Way and Seeing our Galaxy.

Aug. 13: Vancouver Centre member Harvey Dueck: How High is the Sky?

Sept. 10: RASC-VC member Ken Harman recounts his visit to astronomical/space-related sites in Germany.

Next Issue Deadline

Material for the September Nova should be submitted by Monday, Aug. 31, 2009. Please send submissions to: Gordon Farrell (gfarrell@shaw.ca)
Title image: Jason Rickerby

IYA 2009 Diary

by Wayne Lyons

On May the first I received an invitation to an astronomy presentation at the Blue Heron Wildlife Sanctuary in Chilliwack. It was a gorgeous evening and my wife and I headed up the Valley to check out the site. When we arrived, the parking lot was full and we had to park some distance from the Park. Ken Hewitt-White's presentation on the life of Galileo was held just outside the sanctuary's interpretive centre and with a good turnout of members from the Fraser Valley Astronomical Society an observing session was held for a group of well over 200 people. Although I couldn't stay for the observing session, I did manage to get a glimpse of Mercury about 2 degrees southeast of the Pleiades just before it set behind Sumas Mountain with my 16 x 70 binoculars. The planet was almost as bright as Aldebaran.

Although the RASC does have over 4,000 members nationwide, it is good to know that we are not alone in our interest in astronomy. In British Columbia alone, the five RASC Centres (Okanagan, Prince George, Sunshine Coast, Vancouver, and Victoria) are accompanied by the Cowichan Valley Star Find-

ers, the Fraser Valley Astronomical Society, the Nanaimo Astronomy Society, and the SFU Undergraduate Astronomy Club. Together we are getting the message to our fellow Canadians about the International Year of Astronomy 2009.

After the beautiful evening the day before, Vancouver Centre held our annual Astronomy Day Event at the H.R. MacMillan Space Centre on May 2nd. You guessed it. The weather changed again and for the third year in a row there was no observing. The annual series of talks on Astronomy by our members were followed by a presentation from our keynote speaker, Dr. Aksel L. Hallin, on "The Stuff the Universe is Made Of: Dark Matter, Neutrinos, and Astroparticle Physics." We were also fortunate to have Simon James present two episodes of the animated series *Raven Tales* which dealt with traditional First Nations views of astronomy (a hit with the kids).

Cindy Ingram and her son were the winners of a pair of Bushnell binoculars and the winner of our Junior membership was Thorun

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An Innovative Idea for Meteor Detection

by Ron Jerome

Last year your Council formalized plans for an award that would honour one of our major benefactors—Martha Ellen Pearse. Working through the Science Fair foundation of British Columbia, Vancouver Centre contributed a \$500.00 prize to the province-wide science fair competition. The Science Fair Foundation supports science education through the science fair program and works in partnership with the BC Innovation Council. This gives students from kindergarten to Grade 12 an opportunity to participate in the exploration of science. It brings together industry, educators and students and endeavours to build positive attitudes toward science, learning and creativity. Winners in

British Columbia have the opportunity to compete in the Canada-Wide Science Fair.

Our instructions were that the money was to be awarded for the best astronomy or physics project that demonstrated creativity, innovation and contributed to a greater public understanding of science.

We are pleased to announce that a young lady from College Heights Elementary in Prince George—Johanne Jensen-LeBlanc—was this year's recipient. Her project was devoted to meteor detection and she described it as follows:

I took an old FM radio and programmed it to 97.5 in Fargo, North Dakota. The signal from

Fargo attempts to get to Prince George but, because the Earth is round, the signal will not reach Prince George. When a meteor passes, the tail acts like a mirror and reflects the signal to my antenna and I get a reading.

We think you will agree that this was quite clever.

We have contacted the Prince George Centre of the RASC to advise them of Johanne's accomplishment and we expect they will invite her to a centre meeting to give her additional recognition and, perhaps, invite her to become a member.

Your Council intends that this become an annual award. ★

Astronomer Needed!

by David Dodge

I'm looking for an astronomer or two who would like to join a white water rafting company (Hyak) on an overnight adventure. The astronomer should be comfortable with talking to groups of people and know their way around the sky. A 12" Dobsonian telescope will be waiting for them on "Fantasy

Island," a small island upstream from Spences Bridge. There is no compensation for the trip but the trip itself is free for the astronomer. The adventure starts in Lytton at 9:00 am on Saturday and ends at Lytton around 5pm Sunday. I have two weekends that need help; July 18/19 and August 15/16.

Anyone interested in doing these trips should contact me at:
mr_astro@telus.net
for more information.

– David Dodge ★

President's Message

Anne accosted me while I was sitting quietly at the kitchen table, reading my latest issue of *Sky and Tel*. That's it; I want this place cleaned up now! We're having people staying here next week and I need both guest rooms cleaned out. You are going to have to move your telescope equipment... What we need is a bigger house where I get some space too."

It is hard for me to believe that there are actually things more important than telescope equipment. It seems not that long ago when I acquired my initial 5" Newtonian. Anne was actually very supportive of my new hobby and she must have thought, at least for a time, it would get me out from under foot. Alas, as some of you may know, there is a condition called aperture creep which develops as the pastime takes hold. This can be identified by a gradual loss of closet space, which may be a good thing as it provides the impetus for a garage sale in order to eliminate stuff that wasn't really being used anyway.

Often aperture creep is accompanied by a reluctance to part with the telescope that may have been deemed inadequate. Then closets become too small. There is also the problem that different observing targets (planetary or deep sky) require their own special viewing instruments. In conjunction, there is a growing need for better eyepieces and aids, including star charts, books and magazines, cam-

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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 \$70.00 per year (\$41.00 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

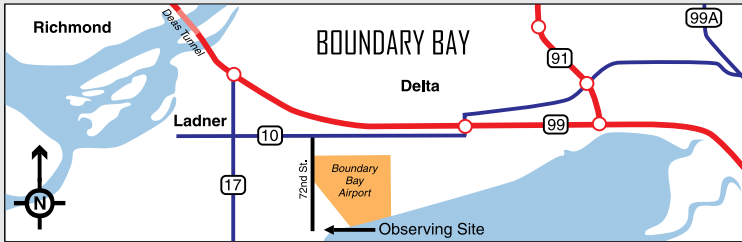
1/4 Page: \$15.00 per issue

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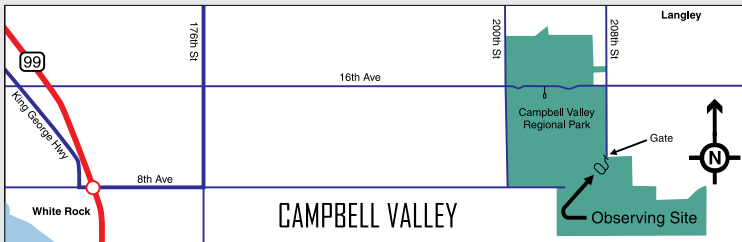
Full Page: \$40.00 per issue

Rates are for electronic or camera-ready files. Payment, by cheque, must accompany ad material. Make cheque payable to:
RASC Vancouver Centre.

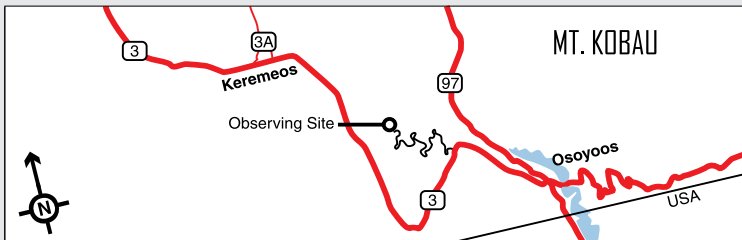
OBSERVING SITES



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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era gear, computers, software... At that point whole rooms become dedicated to astronomy equipment. This would be fine if you were living by yourself because the issue of sharing would never come up.

I am fortunate that our house has a basement. After Anne's admonitions, I gathered the *few* errant pieces of equipment that had crept into three different rooms and the reading material that occupied *less than half* the dining room table (I

was trying to share) and relocated them downstairs to various vacant corners. That should have been the end of it. In the basement, however, are a number of supporting items already occupying space, such as the solar panels needed to charge my power supplies in remote locations (think Kobau). Then there are tarps and tables and other necessities for extended night viewing. The big problem is trying to group things together so that an evening's excursion into the dark is not brought to an

early end by a forgotten truss tube, eyepiece case or counter weight.

...and that is only my stuff. Having participated in various RASC public events, I have displays stored downstairs along with materials to make more. Recently, as part of our IYA activities, the Centre purchased twenty 60mm refractors to give away to educational groups as part of our outreach program. I generously offered to store them at our house (I didn't tell Anne beforehand). They arrived four to

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For Sale

Two eyepieces for sale:

Williams Optics Swan 9mm - \$70.00

Tele Vue Panoptic 41mm - \$500.00

Call Ron: 604-298-3292

5" F8 Sky Watcher Achromatic Refractor

CG-3 Manual Mount Slow Motion Controls (No Motors)

25mm, 10mm eyepieces and Star Diagonal

\$550 Or Best Offer

Contact Bob Parry 604-612-1931

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a box and now occupy roughly a cubic meter of space in the middle of a room in the basement. That is the size of a small impact crater. Of course I had to reorganize other things to make this happen but it was for astronomy equipment after all.

As I survey my growing astronomical footprint, I am reminded that this *is* the International Year of Astronomy and the 400th anniversary of Galileo Galilei opening a window on the night sky. Although he began with a simple tube and a couple of less than perfect lenses, I have no doubt he would heartily embrace the bounty of tools available today that would allow him to gain even more insight into the universe around him.

My conclusion on this whole issue? Blame it on Galileo! ★

– Ron Jerome, Acting President

LIBRARY

The centre has a large library of books, magazines and old NOVAs for your enjoyment at the GMSO. 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://rasc-vancouver/> or

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

Details of upcoming meetings and events can be found at our Meetup group at:

<http://astronomy.meetup.com/131/>

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 GMSO after the members meeting. All telescopes are to be picked up and returned at the GMSO. 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
604-738-2855

July

12 – Observing at VSO concert
in Deer Lake Park
17-19 – Island Star Party

August

8 & 11 – Perseid meteor shower
13-16 – GA 2009 in Cypress
Hills, Saskatchewan

15-23 – Mt. Kobau Star Party
29 – Sunshine Coast Astronomy
in the Park at Porpoise Bay
Provincial Park

September

12 – Paul Sykes Memorial Lecture
12-15 – Merritt Star Quest
26 – Another Starry Heron Night

October

9-23 – Great World-Wide Star
Count
23 – Roundhouse Presentation
24 – Silk Purse Presentation

December

10 – AGM

AOMO Report

by Wayne Lyons

On June 13, an Open House was held at RASC–Vancouver Centre’s observatory. There was a small group of our regular supporters along with invited guests. After a BBQ lunch and a short presentation on the observatory—along with a Light Pollution pitch by Mark Eburn—the group headed to AOMO for a tour of our facility. We also made a brief stop at the UBC Liquid Mirror Project.

The observatory has been fortunate to receive a used computer with a Pentium 4 processor and Windows XP operating System from Leigh Cummings. With an upgrade to 1Gb RAM and the donation of a complete servicing from

LabTop Computers in Burnaby, the computer will be used to control the telescope and CCD imaging. The Dome and Office Computers are now networked

the computer software, we have been working at checking all the operations of the telescope from the keypad through to the computer operation programs.

With the late evening sunsets, we do take advantage to continue to clear brush from around the observatory site. Regular cleanup does make it easier to keep vegetation manageable around the observatory.

At our last training session, there were four members and a guest and, thanks to the long weekend, we were all at the observatory until sunrise. James Black brought his equipment to the site and imaged from the telescope pad outside of the observatory. ✪



Photo by Bob Parry

by a wireless router. Any laptop computer can be easily connected to the network.

The installation of this computer did mean that our programs had to be reinstalled and the settings entered for the equipment. Along with reinstalling



NGC 4594 - the Sombrero Galaxy (M104)

CGRT · RASC Van

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Finberg.

At the end of the month (May 29th), about forty interested people attended a talk by Dr. Howard Trotter on Galileo Galilei's role in the development of the telescope. After the presentation, the group headed over to David Lam Park in downtown Vancouver for an observing session with RASC-Vancouver Centre's volunteer Sidewalk Astronomy Group. There were line ups at the telescopes with well over 200 people given an opportunity to observe a 5-day-old waxing crescent Moon and the planet Saturn.

Howard had a replica of Galileo's telescope available to observe through and compare four hundred years of development. Later in the evening, we were able to observe the globular clusters M5 and M13, the Ring planetary nebula (M57), and even a faint patch of light from Bode's Galaxy (M81).

The following evening, the SFU Astronomy Club and Starry Nights held an evening of astronomy on Burnaby Mountain. The "Lunar Soirée" featured a presentation on the Moon, its origin and the affect it has had on the development of life on earth by Eric Dunn. A group

of seventy-three interested young astronomers had many questions for him afterward and then the group went outside to observe the Moon and Saturn. There were at least six telescopes present, and everyone had a chance to look at both celestial objects. The sky was a little hazy, but it was fine for the purposes of seeing the Moon and Saturn.

On June 13, an Open House was held at RASC-Vancouver Centre's observatory. Please check the AOMO Report for details. ✨

Proud To Serve Vancouver's Astronomical Community



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