

NOVA

NEWSLETTER OF THE VANCOUVER CENTRE RASC | VOLUME 2009 ISSUE 1 | JANUARY/FEBRUARY 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.

Jan. 10: Jaymie Matthews: If Galileo has a Space Telescope.

Feb. 12: Dr. John MacDonald: The Radarsat-2 Project.

Next Issue Deadline

Material for the March Nova should be submitted by Monday, Mar. 2, 2009. Please send submissions to:

Gordon Farrell (gfarrell@shaw.ca)

Title image: Jason Rickerby

International Year of Astronomy

by Ron Jerome, RASC Vancouver Centre IYA Coordinator

Welcome to 2009, declared by UNESCO as the International Year of Astronomy (IYA). It is a global celebration of astronomy and its

especially among young people, in astronomy and science under the central theme, "The Universe, Yours to Discover." More than 130 coun-



THE UNIVERSE
YOURS TO DISCOVER

INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF
ASTRONOMY
2009

contributions to society and culture, highlighted by the 400th anniversary of the first use of an astronomical telescope by Galileo Galilei. The aim of the Year is to stimulate worldwide interest,

tries are already involved. In Canada, the Canadian Astronomical Society, the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada and the Federation des Astronomes Amateur du Quebec have worked to-

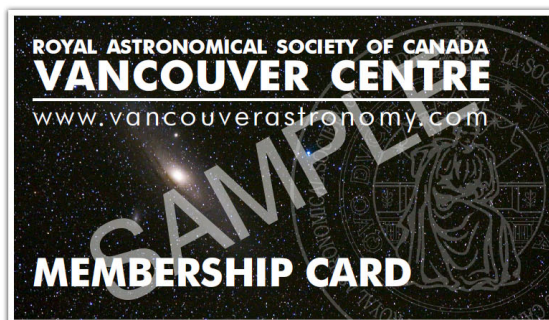
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Vancouver Centre is pleased to announce that as of January 2009, we will be issuing membership cards to all our members. These new cards will not be coming from National but are being

you forget it.

Also, your membership card will be updated annually. Just like when you renew your car insurance annually and you update your license plate with a new

with credit card, or mail in your renewal form with your cheque. If you renew directly with me, I will update your membership card immediately. If you renew online or by mail, I receive a member-



Front of card



Back of card

created and distributed by your council for the benefit of Vancouver Centre only. The cards will be available for pick-up at our January member's meeting on Saturday, January 10, 2009 (*note special event date*).

As you can see, on the back will be a space for your name, website password, RASC membership number and your date of joining. You will receive the membership card fully completed except for your website password which you can fill in should

sticker, your membership card will have a sticker on it indicating the year your membership dues are to expire. For example, if you renewed October, 2008, you will receive a 2009 sticker. When you renew in October 2009, your membership card will be updated with a 2010 sticker. Updates to your membership card will only be done in person at a members meeting.

As always, you can either renew directly with me at our members meetings, online

ship list every month from National with renewals noted thereon so I can update your membership card when you bring it to me to do so.

Also, your council is currently negotiating with various astronomy, photography, and science-related service providers and exhibitions so that showing your card will entitle you to receive a discount on entry fees and/or products. At this time, we are pleased to announce that, upon presentation of your

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President's Message

On behalf of council, I would like to wish you all the best for the New Year and welcome to 2009—the International Year of Astronomy!

I have to say that taking on the position of President of Vancouver Centre at this time feels like stepping onto a fast moving escalator—there is so much going on! We now have new GOTO telescope mounts in the loaner program; a new CCD camera at AOMO; the new website (www.rasc-vancouver.com); our opportunities as a charitable organization; and of course a great deal of ideas, plans and expectations for IYA activities and events.

We are fortunate to have the charismatic Jaymie Matthews kicking off our local International Year of Astronomy events with his presentation at the H.R. MacMillan Space Centre on January 10th, 2009, “What if Galileo had a space telescope?” Jamie is a great speaker, and as IYA is orientated towards public outreach, this is an ideal opportunity to bring a guest out

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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.

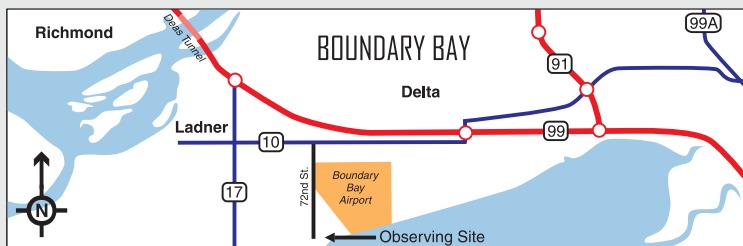
Advertising

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.

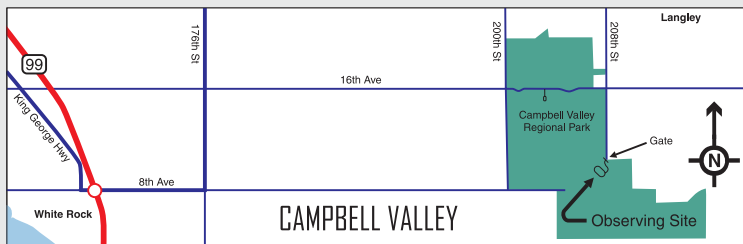
Commerical Rates

1/4 Page: \$15.00 per issue
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.

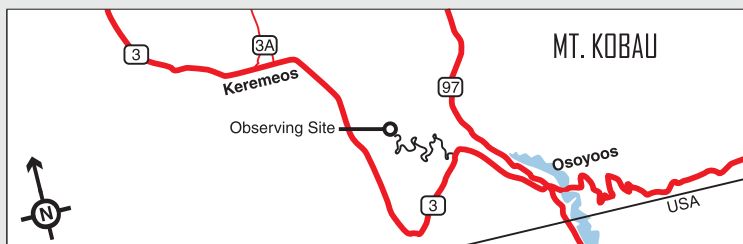
OBSERVING SITES



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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to an RASC event! Don't forget to regularly check the website or sign up at meetup.com (<http://astronomy.meetup.com/131/> for Vancouver Centre events) to stay informed of upcoming events.

Something that many of us have been eagerly anticipating is one of the ESO's IYA cor-

nerstone projects, the Galileoscope; an economically priced 50mm telescope kit intended to introduce students to the optics pioneered by Galileo and the wonders of the night sky. Unfortunately, the project has had a hurdle or two and appears to be a bit behind schedule, with availability currently projected to be late Spring

2009. We hope that the development team is on track with production and we remain optimistic that these kits may find a place in outreach activities organized and sponsored by our Centre.

Hopefully, many of you will remember 2003 as being a great year for RASC Vancou-

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ver Centre and a great year for astronomy awareness in Vancouver. Many of you volunteered as we hosted the General Assembly for the RASC's Centennial year in June. We also collectively pulled out all the stops, night after night, to provide thousands of the public with a view of Mars during the opposition in August. Since that Mars opposition in 2003, it has been challenging to capture the public's attention with things astronomical; as we head into 2009, the International Year of Astronomy, let's see if we can change that!

Thanks for reading,

— Jason ★

LIBRARY

The centre has a large library of books, magazines and old NOVA's 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**

January

30 – Exploring the Night Sky @ the Roundhouse

March

28 – Messier Marathon I at Aldergrove Lake

April

27-May 3 – International Astronomy Week

May

2 – Astronomy Day

August

13-16 – GA 2009 in Cypress Hills, Saskatchewan

13-14 – Perseid meteor shower

15-23 – Mt. Kobau Star Party

September

12 – Paul Sykes Memorial Lecture

December

10 – AGM

continued from page 1

gether to develop activities. There is also participation from the National Research Council of Canada and the Canadian Space Agency as well as representatives of the planetarium and science centre communities. In addition, given the long-standing importance of the night skies to Aboriginal peoples, their participation is being encouraged as well. (The Canadian site has more details at <http://www.astronomy2009.ca/>)

Some of the major goals of IYA 2009 are to:

- Increase scientific awareness
- Promote widespread access to new knowledge and observing experiences
- Support and improve formal and informal science education

- Provide a modern image of science and scientists
- Facilitate new networks and strengthen existing ones
- Facilitate the preservation and protection of the world's cultural and natural heritage of dark skies in places such as urban oases, national parks and astronomical sites

Early in 2008, the RASC national organization requested ideas from its members for projects that would facilitate the outreach programs planned for the year. By summer, six projects had been selected and funded and distribution of the materials to centres and partners began in December (visit <http://www.rasc.ca/education/iya/> for details). The handouts that have been

developed are intended as tools to encourage astronomy activities and as a means of tracking the participation in public events. A small, instructional telescope was also envisioned to replicate the Galileo experience but that now appears unlikely. Vancouver Centre is exploring alternatives.

The over-arching theme is for all Canadians to enjoy a **Galileo Moment** sometime during 2009. This includes:

- Looking through a telescope or binoculars at an event such as sidewalk astronomy, a star party, at a science centre or an observatory
- Daytime solar viewing
- Visiting a planetarium
- Visiting an IYA event, show or display at a sci-

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ence centre

- Attending an astronomy lecture
- Receiving visits from an amateur and professional astronomers at schools and youth groups
- Attending a concert or art exhibit or public display that both entertains and educates around a theme inspired by astronomy

Further, all participants in IYA activities will be encouraged to register on the IYA web site, to get their names on a CD that will be launched into space.

Activities are now commencing around the world. For Vancouver Centre, the January kick-off event is a talk by UBC Astronomy Professor Dr. Jaymie Matthews at the H.R. Macmillan Space Centre. His presentation is entitled, *'If Galileo had a Space Telescope.'*

At this point, the RASC Vancouver Centre has the following activities confirmed:

- In February, members will be working with Simon Fraser University

as they begin delivering their "Science in Action" program. We will assist in the astronomy workshop activities planned for Grade 5-12 students.

- March 28th – A Messier Marathon in partnership with Metro Vancouver Regional Parks. This is a public event hosted by the Parks Department at Aldergrove Lake Park. Park interpreters will narrate constellation walks and the RASC will provide telescopes and commentary.
- August 7th and 8th – A Perseid Meteor Shower watch with Metro Vancouver Regional Parks. While this precedes the actual event peak, the weekend was selected in an effort to draw a bigger public audience and explain about the shower. Astronomical talks will also be presented and supported by viewing activities.

We have a commitment from a local camera store to allow us to set up telescopes on their premises and explain

the art of astrophotography to customers. We will also be displaying our equipment and talking about astronomy in a local book store. Both are opportunities to reach new audiences.

We are designing a pilot for a web-based astronomy program, which has the potential for multiple applications.

There are a number of other projects in the development stage which we will share with you as they become firm commitments. Visit our new website for details about upcoming activities: <http://rasc-vancouver.com/>.

As we advised members at our AGM in December 2008, our newly granted charitable status obligates us to support an increased number of activities which will help achieve our mandate—namely, to advance education in astronomy and related sciences. One of the opportunities available to members is to apply for a grant under our Legacy Funds Program to develop a project that would augment our public outreach activities. As the International Year of As-

After reading Ken Hewitt-White's article, "Rethinking the Remote Dark Sky Site" (*SkyNews*, Sep/Oct, 2008) I felt a little more assured about my own observing practices. It was good to know that really serious observers are also concerned about pressures we put on our environment when we do the activities we enjoy so much.

I do enjoy observing the night sky. Backyard astronomy is a great place to begin learning astronomy. From an urban observing site, only the brightest stars are visible and identifying many of the constellation patterns is easy.

My back yard is my usual observatory and I attempt to learn something new each session. Hunting down those familiar celestial objects that may be seen with an unaided eye or my 16×70 binoculars helps hone my observing skills to make better use of the times I will be able to get to really dark skies.

Last year I began searching for Mira, (omicron Ceti) on the limited occasions that our

winter weather allowed. This famous variable star makes itself visible approximately once a year (every 332 days) as it rises in brightness from magnitude 9.5 to a magnitude of 3.5 or more. I finally spotted it this winter with an unaided eye. It was easy to pick out in Cetus by locating Gamma Ceti and Alrescha (Alpha Piscium), both stars with a magnitude about 3.5. Mira was as bright as either of these two stars. Time spent unsuccessfully searching for this star was also helpful in picking it out in the night sky.

If I do want a darker site, and our infamous winter weather gives us a break during a New Moon, I will head to the Pitt-Addington Marsh. This reasonably short trip of about 20 minutes allows me to get to a site with a LVM of about 5.2 on a clear night.

There are a number of observing sites within a short distance of our local amateur astronomers. They provide reasonably good observing and a chance to meet up with fellow star gazers.

A few of the more publicized dark sky sites fre-

quented by local amateur astronomers are Boundary Bay, Campbell Valley Regional Park, Pitt-Addington Marsh, Aldergrove Lake Regional Park and McDonald Park.

We, as amateur astronomers, have no problem complaining about the loss of our night sky due to light pollution. We need to recognize our contribution to this problem when we get into our vehicles and travel two to three hours to find that really dark observing site. It is misdirected light reflecting off our own vehicle's exhaust emissions that is contributing to the loss of our night sky.

On an evening when I will be assured of clear skies, I can justify travelling out to a close, local observing site where I am able to enjoy my hobby.

Getting to one of those locations where you find the Milky Way stretching from horizon to horizon has to be treated as a special event. I can justify travelling a great distance to attend a star party for the camaraderie and the fact that I will probably

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WANTED!

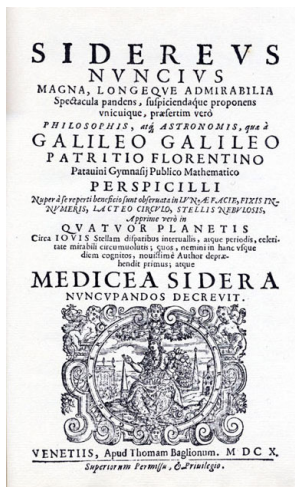
Ideas for Public Outreach Activities

Council has initiated an opportunity for members and allied collaborators to apply for project grants using our Legacy Funds. Members are encouraged to submit ideas that will enhance our activities as an astronomical society and assist in our outreach program. Applicants would need to be guided by the following:

1. Grants made available from these funds must enhance the ability of the RASC Vancouver Centre to carry out its mandate as an educational organization.
2. Applications must be compatible with the mandate and objectives of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada and be consistent with the requirements of the CRA Charities Directorate.
3. All Ideas must have a public outreach focus. Funds cannot be used to benefit members other than from knowledge or skill they might acquire and share as a result of the specific project.
4. All proposals must be for activities that can be delivered to the general public within 12 months of initial funding. Exceptions will be considered for unique circumstances.
5. All applications must include a written proposal and a budget.

Proposals should be submitted to any Council or Legacy Funds Committee member for consideration.

Those requirements are not especially onerous and the funds might provide the means to convert an idea into an initiative. Any member is invited to apply. One of our *International Year of Astronomy* projects was proposed by Tyler Gamsby who will oversee the development of a web based astronomy program.



Galileo's sketches of the Moon, first published in March, 1610 in his short treatise, *Sidereus Nuncius* (Starry Messenger).



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CGRT - RASC Van

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tronomy will see Vancouver Centre involved in more events than normal, it would be an especially opportune time to put forward a pro-

posal. The guidelines will be posted on our website and are detailed elsewhere in this issue of NOVA.

The Vancouver Centre will need volunteers to contribute

time and energy to help make this year a success. We encourage to you to lend a hand. ★

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membership card, Vancouver Telescope will offer a 5% discount to RASC members.

If, at any time, anyone has any questions regarding membership, please speak with me at our members

meetings or email me at snagy@slatervecchio.com. ★

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spend a week at the site and use my vehicle only when

necessary.

I would like to make the same pledge that Ken made

in his article and “make every observing run count.” Will you? ★

Proud To Serve Vancouver's Astronomical Community



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