

Saskatoon Skies

The Newsletter of the Saskatoon Centre of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada

Vol. 36, No. 3

March 2005

The Presidents



The three presidents of the Saskatoon Centre of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada at the February monthly meeting: Rick Huziak, Past President; Garry Stone, Vice President; Ron Waldron, President.

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Membership? It's never too late to join!

Regular: \$58.00/year Youth: \$31.25/year Lifetime: \$1000

The Saskatoon Centre operates on a one-year revolving membership. You will be a member for the next 12 months no matter when in the year you join. If you do not want to join at this time, ask to get onto our FREE 3-month Temporary Membership list. You will receive regular mailings of our *Saskatoon Skies* newsletter and will be invited to participate in Centre activities. Members are encouraged to renew early to avoid disruption in publications. Renew through the membership coordinator, Mike Clancy, or renew through the National Office and let Mike know that you did!

Benefits of Membership in the Saskatoon Centre

- knowledgeable & friendly amateur astronomers
- use of the Sleaford Observatory
- use of the U of S Observatory (after training)
- *Saskatoon Skies* Newsletter
- **Observer's Handbook**
- **The Journal of the RASC** (bimonthly)
- **SkyNews Magazine** (bimonthly)
- use of the Centre library
- discounts to **Sky & Telescope Magazine**
- free, no-cost, no-obligation, 3-month temporary membership if you don't want to join right now!

Saskatoon Centre's main officers:

President – Ron Waldron

Vice-President – Garry Stone

Secretary – Al Hartridge

Treasurer – Norma Jensen



Light Pollution Abatement website at:
<http://www.ras.sk.ca/lpc/lpc.htm>

U OF S OBSERVATORY

The U of S Observatory is open to the general public every Saturday of the year. Admission is free. The observatory is located on campus, one block north of the Wiggins Avenue and College Drive entrance. On clear nights, visitors may look through the vintage 6-inch and tour several displays. Current events are recorded on the Astronomy Information Line at 966-6429.

Observatory Hours:

January-February	7:30-9:30 pm
March	8:30-10:30 pm
April	9:30-11:30 pm
May-July	10:00-11:30 pm
August	9:30-11:30 pm
September	8:30-10:30 pm
October-December	7:30-9:30 pm

About this Newsletter...

Newsletter Editors – *Tenho Tuomi, Linda Janzen*

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Saskatoon Skies is published monthly by the Saskatoon Centre of the RASC. Distribution is approximately 100 copies per issue. *Saskatoon Skies* welcomes unsolicited articles, sketches, photographs, cartoons, and other astronomy or space science articles. Articles can be sent by mail in any format to the Centre's mailbox. Submitted materials can be returned upon request. Submissions may also be sent by e-mail – preferred as plain unformatted ASCII text files without line breaks. Images sent by e-mail should be attached .JPGs (.GIFs also accepted). Send e-mail submissions to the editor at <tuomi@sasktel.net>. Please send articles in "generic" formats with simple formatting – one tab at the beginning of paragraphs, one space after commas and periods. A separate by-mail subscription to *Saskatoon Skies* is available for \$15.00 per year. *Saskatoon Skies* is also posted on our Saskatoon Centre homepage as a .pdf file and can be downloaded free-of-charge. Members may choose to receive the newsletter by regular mail or via the Internet. Articles may be reprinted from *Saskatoon Skies* without expressed permission (unless otherwise stated), but source credit is requested. **DEADLINE for submissions is the 26th of each month.** *Saskatoon Skies* accepts commercial advertising. Please call the editor for rates. Members can advertise non-commercial items free of charge.



Bottle Drive & Canadian Tire \$

by Darrell Chatfield

Canadian Tire Money donations of \$13.00 from Ellen D. and \$2.25 from Barb added to our fund raising efforts. Thanks to all contributors. Please bring your bottles and Canadian Tire Money to the General meetings. I will collect them after the meeting concludes. If you cannot make it to the meeting but would like to contribute, please call me at 374-9278.

2005 RASC Calendar of Events			
DATE	EVENT	CONTACT	TELEPHONE
Mar. 11-12	Messier Marathon – Sleaford Observatory	Bill Hydomako	384-4781
Mar. 21	Executive Meeting – 6:30 p.m., 175 Physics, U of S	Ron Waldron	382-9428
Mar. 21	General Meeting – 7:30 p.m., 175 Physics, U of S – Presentations by Ron Waldron & Paul Campbell	Ron Waldron	382-9428
Mar. 28	Zodiacal Light – next two weeks		
Apr. 8-9	Messier Marathon – Sleaford Observatory	Bill Hydomako	384-4781
Apr. 16	International Astronomy Day – Lawson Heights Mall/Beaver Creek	Jeff Swick	373-3902
Apr. 18	Executive Meeting – 6:30 p.m., 175 Physics, U of S	Ron Waldron	382-9428
Apr. 18	General Meeting – 7:30 p.m., 175 Physics, U of S – program TBA	Ron Waldron	382-9428
May 4	Aquarid meteors peak		
May 6	Observers Group – Sleaford Observatory	Bill Hydomako	384-4781
May 16	Executive Meeting – 6:30 p.m., 175 Physics, U of S	Ron Waldron	382-9428
May 16	General Meeting – 7:30 p.m., 175 Physics, U of S – program TBA	Ron Waldron	382-9428
May 20-23	RASC General Assembly – Kelowna, BC – http://www.rasc.ca:8080/rasc	Jim Failes	(250) 763-6962
June 20	Executive Meeting – 6:30 p.m., 175 Physics, U of S	Ron Waldron	382-9428
June 20	General Meeting – 7:30 p.m., 175 Physics, U of S – program TBA	Ron Waldron	382-9428
July 7-10	Alberta Star B-Q – Eccles Ranch Obs. Caroline, AB – http://www.syz.com/rasc/starbq2005.htm	Roland Dechesne	(403) 246-4498
July 30-Aug. 7	Mt. Kobau Star Party – Osoyoos, BC	Jim Failes	(250) 763-6962
Aug. 4-7	Saskatchewan Summer Star Party (SSSP'05) – Cypress Hills Inter-provincial Park, http://duke.usask.ca/~ges125/rasc/starparty.html	Les Dickson	249-1091
Sept. 1-4	Alberta Star Party – Eccles Ranch Obs. Caroline, AB – http://www.syz.com/rasc/asp2005.htm	Roland Dechesne	(403) 246-4498



Monday, March 21, 7:30 PM — Room 175 Physics, U of S

Presenting:

Final Goals for the Saskatoon Centre & Their Implications by Ron Waldron

AAVSO's Sudden Ionospheric Disturbance Program by Paul Campbell

SKY BUYS & MIRROR CELLS

THE SASKATOON CENTRE'S SWAP AND SALE PAGE!

For Loan to Members: Slide set for talks on general astronomy and light pollution. You can borrow this set any time you want to give a talk to your favourite group. Contact Rick Huziak at 665-3392.

For Sale: RASC Royal Centenary coffee mugs. Pick yours up at the next General Meeting – \$9 each

For Sale: Meade Starfinder 8" Dobsonian, 2" eyepiece holder, 6 x 30 finder, Meade 26mm Super-Plossl, Meade 9.7mm Super-Plossl, Antares 1.25" - 2x Barlow Lens. 5 years old. Provides crisp images of the night sky. Mount needs a bit of tightening, but otherwise in very good condition. Asking \$600, but trades for guitars, amplifiers, cameras, lenses, accessories, >1 GB laptop RAM stick, digital video camera, external USB drive or ??? will be considered. A young enthusiast buying their first scope will get a better price.

Contact Gene Huebner <gdh165@mail.usask.ca> or tel: 260-6963 after 6 pm or before 8 am.



BOOKS FOR SALE

by Bruce Brandell, Sales Coordinator

The following items are left from the Star Party and will be available at our next meeting on March 21/05. Call 249-1119, or email <bruce_brandell@yahoo.com>

Title	Author	No. Avail.	Price Cdn\$
Calendar, RASC 2005	Rajiv Gupta, Editor	1	\$ 5.00
Beginners Observer's Guide	Leo Enright	1	\$15.00
Messier Poster, colored	Sky Publishing	2	\$20.00
Milkyway Poster	Sky Publishing	2	\$25.00
Touring the Universe through Binoculars	Philip S. Harrington	1	\$45.00
A Short History of Nearly Everything	Bill Bryson	1	\$17.00
The Moon Map	Sky Publishing	1	\$15.00
The Mars Map	Sky Publishing	1	\$15.00
Pins SSSP 2004			\$ 5.00
Pins SSSP, other years			\$ 4.00

Most items are reduced in price from last month!

Minutes of the EXECUTIVE MEETING

Feb 21, 2005, 6:30pm – Rm 175 Physics, U of S

1. Meeting called to order at 6:30 p.m.
2. Approval of Minutes of the previous meeting – moved by Norma Jensen, seconded by Rick Huziak and carried.
3. **Treasurer's Report:** The club's money has been moved to a new account at the Broadway branch of the Saskatoon Credit Union. Norma suggested that \$15,000.00 be put in a term deposit at 2.75%. A motion was made by Tenho that we take out three term deposits of \$5000.00 each, seconded by Jeff and carried.
The year-end financial report has been submitted by Barb Young.
4. **Status of Sleaford Insurance Policy:** Rick stated that we have been grossly underinsured. Correcting this could push our premium up another \$200.00 per year. A motion was made that the decision on the insurance upgrade be made by Rick, Ron and Norma. This motion was seconded and carried.
5. **Suggested Goals for the Saskatoon Centre and Their Implications:** Ron Waldron gave a summary of all the ideas presented:
 - i. Complete the 16" telescope.
 - ii. Astronomy outreach to public and teachers.
 - iii. Expansion and improvements to Sleaford.
 - iv. Astronomical project mentoring and recognition of achievements for members.
6. **Astronomy Day:** Saturday, April 16th. Jeff will try for the Lawson Heights Mall for the display and will notify Beaver Creek immediately as well regarding the public starnight.
7. **Events Committee:** Jeff Swick stated that the Yahoo Group is really intended for the Saskatoon Centre group only but mentioned that several other people from elsewhere have shown some interest.
8. **Sleaford Site and Observing:** Bill Hydomako mentioned that the snow has been cleared by the RM. Eight members attended the last observer's group. A Messier Marathon will be held in March. A motion was made, seconded and carried that Bill be allowed \$40.00 from the treasury to help in providing a potluck lunch.
9. **Sask. Light Abatement Committee:** Rick will spend \$35.00 to join the Eco network. A motion was made by Garry Stone and seconded by Bruce and carried to allow Rick to spend this money.
10. **Newsletter:** this month's deadline will be Feb. 26 for articles.
11. Meeting adjourned at 7:29 p.m.

Minutes of the GENERAL MEETING

Feb 21, 2005, 7:30pm – Rm 175 Physics, U of S

1. Meeting called to order at 7:30 p.m.
2. Approval of previous minutes: moved, seconded and carried.
3. Highlights from the Executive Meeting – see minutes of executive meeting.
4. Suggested Goals for the Saskatoon Centre and their Implications – discussed by Ron Waldron. See minutes of the executive meeting.
5. Presentations:
 - An Introduction to the electric universe – Tyrone Klassen
 - A Digital Photography Challenge – Tenho Tuomi
6. Next General Meeting will be on March 21st, 2005.
7. The proposed casino lighting. Laser beams directed towards the sky. Discussed by Rick Huziak.
8. Meeting adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED for Jobs that need to be done across the RASC

From <http://www.rasc.ca/volunteer/> and Kim Hay, kimhay@kingston.net

"Volunteer" – from the Webster's New Dictionary: **One who offers service of his/her own free will.**

- If you have some spare time • Some expertise in the field that require jobs to be done
- You do not have to be on the committee to help out • It gives you a chance to understand the RASC better
 - YOU can help build the RASC!

Please do not hesitate to come forward and help out.

Please visit www.rasc.ca and press the **Volunteer** button or go to <http://www.rasc.ca/volunteer/>

Help build the RASC!!



Editor's Corner

by Tenho Tuomi

As the weather gets warmer I am hearing less complaints about not finding clear skies for observing, or being too cold when the sky is clear. I hear that even the Observer's group finally had a good night at Sleaford. The next big push will be for the Messier Marathon which Bill Hydomako will be organizing for Sleaford in both March and April this year, and Astronomy Day which Jeff Swick is working on for April 16.

A number of people have been building small telescopes thanks to Bill Hydomako who found a supply of 60 mm refractor kits from Ganymede Optics, which he ordered for those who were interested. The fast F5.7 optics look good. Here is my first picture of a star with it taken at the February Executive meeting. As with almost all astronomical telescopes the view is upside down.



Garry Stone is continuing with his tradition of building a new telescope each winter. Turning aside from fiberglass and wooden refractors, this winter he is working on a Newtonian built out of a surplus three-inch mirror.



Thanks to Garry Stone for alerting me, on the morning of March 3 I was able to witness the occultation of the double star Antares by the moon. The neatest thing was seeing the fifth magnitude hot dwarf appear first followed five seconds later by the first magnitude cool supergiant. It was worth getting up at 4:00 a.m. for that. Garry was not so lucky himself and caught only the appearance of the brighter star due to clouds. With a separation of 2.4" and a big magnitude difference the two stars are hard to split in a telescope. Apparently the companion was first found in 1819 as a result of a lunar occultation such as this.

If you want to know the merits of your astronomical project, try displaying it to others or give a talk on it. I have been taking astrophotographs of Messier objects with my digital camera this winter and at the February meeting I had an opportunity to display them. I was shocked at how overexposed they looked. On investigating I found that my computer monitor was faulty and I had over-enhanced the pictures to see them on my own computer.

Activities Coordinator Report

by Jeff Swick

Well after a nice winter break in the Dominican Republic its back to business. It was nice to get back out to Sleaford for Bill Hydomako's Observers Group and visit with everyone. I took my 'scope but spent almost the entire evening with my new binoculars and really enjoyed getting back to the basics.

March of course brings Messier Marathon. Rumour is there may even be a midnight potluck supper. This will be my second marathon but actually the first I will be actively participating in as during the first one I was just getting to know my 'scope. Details are generally provided on the Saskatoon Centre's Yahoo-group email list. You can join by going to the following link: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/rascstoon/>. As the list is only for paid members of our Centre please provide your name so I can approve membership immediately as I probably won't recognize your alias.

Coming in April of course is Astronomy Day on the 16th. So far in Saskatoon we have our space at the Mall in Lawson Heights followed by (tentative) a gastronomy event. After the culinary delights we are off to Beaver Creek where we will have 'scopes set up for public viewing. Brad at Audio

Warehouse has generously agreed to loan us a television for the mall display to run some astronomy DVDs and Jeff Rogstad from CFQC has offered us a spot at either the news at noon or a Sky Rover spot on the evening news. Other publicity is still being worked on at this time. Erin Gallaher from Astronomy Magazine also tells me the magazine will be sending us approx 250 Astronomy Day packages for distribution at no charge so *Thank You very much to Erin*. Ken Maher who is one of our distance members residing in Prince Albert, along with Kathleen Houston, is looking at hosting an Astronomy Day event in his city and would welcome both 'scopes and bodies to assist. He should have more details at the March meeting.

With the weather getting warmer I'm looking forward personally to trying my hand at astrophotography. Anyone else that is learning is welcome to give me a call and perhaps we can learn together. Misery loves company they say...or is that trial and error.

Clear Skies

Jeff Swick, Events Coordinator for Saskatoon Centre



Tonite's Light Pollution Fight!

by Richard Huziak, Saskatchewan Light Pollution Abatement Committee

Last month, I gave a basic rundown of why fighting light pollution is important. To address the whole issue of light pollution, we have found it necessary to work at several levels of government and on several projects at the same time. All government levels have intertwined policies and addressing municipal government and their city lighting without worrying about the provincial government that supplies the actual power assures that we cannot win. For example, streetlights in Saskatoon can belong to the City, SaskPower, the Department of Highways or private companies; sometimes they are all mixed up on the same block. These are the Saskatchewan LPA Committee projects that are currently active, or will become active in the next year.

Cypress Hills Inter-provincial Dark Sky Park – This DSP was declared on Sept. 28, 2004, by government decree through a hard year of lobbying and government department wrangling, much by CHIPP's Brad Mason and Rick Goett, and the work of Regina's Vance Petriew, Darcy Kozoriz, Calgary's Bob King and me. The CHIPP DSP is likely the largest Dark Sky Park in the world, incorporating almost 100,000 acres. However, it doesn't stop there. We are now meeting monthly in Regina with CHIPP staff and the provincial government departments to formulate Rules of Operation, including park lighting guidelines and funding opportunities for a retrofit program. A generic **Saskatchewan Parks Dark Sky Park Guideline** has been developed with the hope that *all* Saskatchewan Provincial Parks will begin declarations to become DSPs themselves. The same is likely to occur in Alberta beginning later this year. The Parks system sees this as a very public Centennial Project that will raise environmental awareness.

Dakota Dunes Casino – On February 11th, the Saskatoon Star Phoenix published plans for the new casino to be located at Whitecap Dakota First Nations, 26 km south of Saskatoon on the highway to Outlook. The outdoor lighting is planned to feature a tepee of light, using 7 high-powered spotlights or lasers shining upward to represent the poles of the teepee. Another lighting feature will be a light wall simulating the Northern Lights! (*Why not just turn the lights off and look at the real ones?*) The light will shine unimpeded to space. I have written a Letter to the Editor expressing my concern over the taking of our "Land of Living Skies", and have contacted the architect. The letter appeared on Feb. 19th. We will also be requesting a meeting with SIGA and presenting an alternate top-down lighting plan). Brightwater Nature Camp, Pike Lake Provincial Park, Hamlet of Beaver Creek and Beaver Creek Conservation area all will see the tepee, as will all residents of Saskatoon and area. Dakota Dunes is just one of at least

5 casinos that will possibly begin construction across Saskatchewan this spring, in Yorkton and Swift Current. Each has concept drawings showing million-watt spotlights shining upward, very similar to the spotlights used at the North Battleford casino that will shine most of the night.

City of Saskatoon Hampton Village – This new westside neighborhood is scheduled for development in the spring. City council has agreed to light the neighborhood using pollution-free full-cut-off flat-lens high-pressure sodium fixtures, very similar to how Calgary neighborhoods are now lit. It is a pilot project to evaluate the new technology and is critical to the success of future light pollution projects locally. We also intend to work with the developer to assure he doesn't compensate for the less scattering streetlights by putting up terrible household lighting. We will need many positive comments for this concept to be adopted. We've been doing presentations to Council for this project since 1992! Sometimes worthy causes take a long time to get rolling.

City of Saskatoon South Downtown Project – The bare space between Idylwyld Drive and 3rd Avenue, from 20th Street and all the way down to the river, has begun development of some sort of semi-defined business and social center. The concept drawings call for "historical period lighting" which consists of hundreds of unshielded globe or acorn lights, which put half of their light up in the sky. The project has two customers – the City and the Meewasin Valley Authority. The MVA tends to be environmentally responsible, if the City doesn't overrule them. Our hope is to provide guidance to the MVA and City so that lighting has minimal affect on the riverbank and the sky.

Griffiths Stadium Lighting – The City and University have won the bid to host the 2006 Vanier Cup College Football Championship. One requirement of the bid is to install stadium lighting at Griffiths. If you have ever seen the Gordie Howe Bowl ball field on the westside, you'd understand what type of environmental nightmare this could become. This much light in the vicinity of the U of S Physics building would put the astronomy labs held on the Physics roof out of business, plus the added glow would easily be visible from Sleaford. Luckily, we found out that St. Mary's University in Halifax just went through the same issue and installed proper lighting for stadiums using light pollution friendly fixtures, saving their on-campus astronomy program. We are lucky in that we can get in on the ground floor of this project, since the design has not been started. Dave Lane of the Halifax Centre has provided us with detailed plans and contacts from their very successful lighting project.

Continued next page

Tonite's Light Pollution Fight! continued

City of Yorkton – My brother, an ex-Saskatoon Centre member, is beginning a campaign to curb the use of light-polluting acorn lights; we have the same issue in Saskatoon. These lights are also becoming popular in Regina and Swift Current. The antiquish lighting was chosen to look good in the daytime, with no concern for the night! It seems that the cities may have chosen acorn lights, but did not choose to buy available “dark sky optional shields” available from the manufacturer.

With these and many more projects on the way (more local, provincial and even national initiatives), we need your help. We need support from our members and anyone else who is concerned about the environment. If you want to participate on the Light Pollution Abatement Committee, help is always appreciated. Give me a call. (The current committee consists of myself, Gord Sarty and ex-member Dan Neves. We also have a provincial joint committee that includes Regina Centre members).

You can also help with education. **Promote awareness** – show your neighbors the night sky with your telescope. Or just point out the constellations or the passage of the Space Station to them. Talk to them about their lights that affect your backyard observing, and ask them to shade or repoint them to light up only their yard. And make sure you get your own lighting in order! Shade your own lights, reduce the wattages or use motion detectors. Also, alert the LPA Committee of offensive lighting projects you see or hear about in the media, so that we have a chance to respond early. Talk to the politicians you know, and who's salaries you pay, and write letters to them or the newspaper when you see issues. We cannot fight all the battles, but maybe we can eventually change lighting misconceptions and become a more light-responsible society.



Light Pollution Abatement website at:
<http://www.ras.sk.ca/lpc/lpc.htm>

News From Away

by Mike Clancy

Well, I'm back from the Dominican Republic with tales of adventure and tanlines, and pictures to boot! Unfortunately, none of that has much to do with astronomy. We spent two glorious weeks as solar sacrifices (photons: from the speed of light to zero in two dermal layers) near Puerto Plata (20°N, 71°W) and have all the necessary burns to prove it. Although the skies did clear most evenings, the humidity seemed to concentrate the waste light from the resort to the point where I lost most of the horizon up to about 30° or so. The palm trees that looked so exotic by day were a source of frustration by night as they took away part of my horizon to west and south. One final strike against me was the waxing moon that played so prettily among the palms for the first few days; I did my best observing later in my stay. I tried to make arrangements to travel outside the resort to higher (darker) ground but the security staff at Superclubs Breezes (our resort) strongly recommended against it as the nearest high ground (about an hour or so away) becomes unsafe after dark. A nice shiny toy like a telescope is too much of a temptation, apparently; I decided discretion was the better part of astronomy.

So, what did I see? Well, the views of Orion almost directly overhead were stunning, and the nebula has rarely shone so clearly. Sirius was striking as was the open cluster M41, and the Jupiter/Io dance was a constant friend. The Pleides and Hyades were easily found and Antares showed the heart of the Scorpion, M4. I did manage to see the Hercules globular cluster (M13) albeit low at 0330 hrs one morning, and I did get

to see Alpha and Beta Centauri as well as the Southern Cross. The views were low in the horizon (just above the trees) and not overly spectacular. The views of the Greater and Lesser Magellanic clouds were washed out as well although I'm pretty certain I was looking in the correct place.

One interesting note is that the best observation area was the beach directly in front of the all-night bar. Setting up to observe on one of the beach chairs sometimes involved picking an unoccupied one (ah, romance – the air was full of it!) or dragging one away from the roisterers. There was only one beach party the entire two weeks of our stay, so I didn't usually have that concern. I did manage some “sea-side star parties” – there were no curbs – which generated some interest among the late-night rum enthusiasts. The problem is one of explaining to the inebriates just WHY Orion isn't where it's supposed to be. Ultimately it wouldn't really matter as they doubtless didn't remember it when they regained their faculties in the afternoon anyway!

Humidity, moonlight, light pollution (not as big a problem but apparently magnified by the humidity) and occluded horizon (remember the palms) all combined to hide or wash out much of the observation list I'd made. Still, I enjoyed looking up during my visit to the Dominican, and I saw many old friends in new positions for my efforts. Some of them were stars, too! Bottom line? Don't bother fighting a telescope to the Caribbean, a good pair of binoculars will do. Just bring along your Cambridge Star Atlas; I forgot mine!

SSSP 2005 Update

by Les Dickson



At the Meadows, SSSP 2004 — PHOTO BY GEORGE CHARPENTIER

This is the second in a series of articles on the Saskatchewan Summer Star Party, to be held August 4-7 at the Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park and Dark Sky Preserve.

We are not yet ready to announce our Guest of Honour for this year, but I can tell you that we are negotiating with a well-known Canadian astronomy writer and TV producer to be our Keynote Speaker. Once we have a commitment, we will be making an announcement.

As you can see, we have a terrific new shirt logo for this year, designed by Darcy Kozoriz of Regina. The logo features the Prairie Lily, the provincial flower, as befits the Centennial of the province. This year, we will be taking orders for T-shirts, golf shirts, and short-sleeved button-down-the-front shirts, available with a dark green background colour. Prices are listed on our website.

The **Canadian Geographic** magazine, on the stands now, has published an article in their Spring/Summer edition of their Travel and Adventure insert booklet on Canadian dark sky preserves. Our star party figures prominently in the section on

the Cypress Hills Dark-Sky Preserve. On the subject of dark sky preserves, there may be a major announcement on dark sky initiatives in Saskatchewan and Alberta at SSSP this year. We will keep you posted.

Our accommodations at the Cypress Hills Resort are going fast. We have 3 one-bedroom cabins, 1 standard condo, 3 deluxe condos, and 11 hotel rooms available for the weekend. If you are intending to attend and stay in the Resort, we recommend that you book as soon as possible. Remember to tell them that you want a room in our room block, as all other accommodations are already gone. You can, of course, camp in the Park. Join us in the Meadows and enjoy our newly electrified sites!

Our current priorities for the next month or so will be to finish negotiations for our Guest of Honour, and prepare the brochure, which will be sent out to RASC Centres, other astronomy groups and previous attendees.

Our next meeting is tentatively scheduled for March 20 at Barb Wright's place. If you want to find out what we do or you want to volunteer, you are welcome to join us. Call Les Dickson at 249-1091 for times and other details.

Newsletters from Other Centres... Hello all. Here are the newsletters that have been received for the past month by your Central Mailer. *Darrell Chatfield* is now the librarian and he can arrange a time to go to the library. This is to let you know what is available and what other Centres have been doing. — Ellen Dickson, Central Mailer

Feb/05 • Saskatoon Skies (Saskatoon Centre) — "Lowest Object", "Seeing the Light in Light Pollution"
• The StarSeeker Classic (Calgary Centre) — "New CSC Observing Deck Coordinator Needed"
• Stardust (Edmonton Centre) — "In Search of Darkness", "Canadians on the Moon"

Jan-Feb/05 • Nova (Vancouver Centre) — "The Night Sky"

Jan/05 • Stardust (Edmonton Centre) — "A Crisp, Cool Reappearance", "Making Celestial Diagrams with a Typewriter"

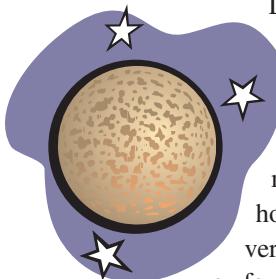
Dec/04 • Orbit (Hamilton Centre) — "16" R-C Scope Installed!", "M.A.S.P. 2004: Breathtaking!"
• The StarSeeker (Calgary Centre) — "New Members' Night 2004", "Venus Transit Pt 3"

Returned Items:

- Scope (Toronto Centre) — "GA 2002 in Montreal", "The E.C. Carr Astronomical Observatory"

The Planets This Month, March 2005

by Murray D. Paulson, Edmonton Centre



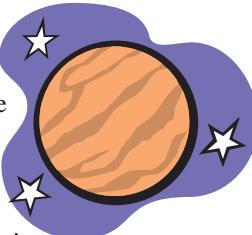
Last month I noted that **Mercury** would be at elongation on March 11th. This is a greatest eastern elongation where Mercury will be 18 degrees above the setting sun. Its 7.2" half disk shines at magnitude -0.3 and sets just short of 2 hours after the sun. The ecliptic is almost vertical at this time of year, so this will be a favorable evening apparition. A neat coincidence is that on the night of March 11, a two day old moon will join it in the evening sky. Look for the moon about 5 degrees south of Mercury and up a degree. This will make a nice pairing. Mercury then dashes down from its short evening appearance on the stage, and is in inferior conjunction with the sun on March 29. This is not your big window of opportunity! Back in January, Venus and Mercury were together in the morning sky on the far side of the sun. On March 29th, they pair up again, but on opposite sides of the sun. This time they pass with the sun in between. It would be quite the sight, but no one will bear witness!

Venus starts off the month, 7 degrees ahead of the sun, only 4 weeks from its superior conjunction. It rises after the sun due to its position below the ecliptic, so if you want to search it down, it is a daytime task with the attendant care of observing near the sun!

It shines at magnitude -3.9 and shows a 9.8" disk in the eyepiece. Last year as it passed in front of the sun, it was 57.7", 6 times bigger and totally black against the sun's photosphere. On March 30th, Venus will pass one degree below the sun, a brilliant white jewel lost in the sun's glare. It is a contrast of blacks and whites, this time, no eyes will witness her passing, whereas last conjunction, countless astronomers witnessed the spectacular transit.



Last week NASA announced that they had found signs of life on **Mars**, a discarded TV set. From this evidence they have discounted that Mars ever held intelligent life. Oh, sorry, this isn't the April issue is it. By now the planet Mars is starting to take its place in the morning sky. It will spend the month moving from Sagittarius to Capricorn. It shines at magnitude 0.9 and will show an interested observer its 5.5" disk in the eyepiece. It still is very low, but you may be able to distinguish the polar cap.



Jupiter is sidling down the back of Virgo and shines at magnitude -2.4. I have stayed up late to see the gas giant in the scope, and I am struck by how far south it has ventured since last year. At the beginning of the month, Jupiter rises just after 9 p.m. and it will show you a 43" disk in the eyepiece. Remember last year, it culminated at 44 degrees above the southern horizon. This year Jupiter culminates at an altitude of 32 degrees above the horizon. In a month's time, on April 3rd, Jupiter sits at opposition and its disk has grown slightly to 44.2", and shines at magnitude -2.5. If the maximum size for Jupiter sounds a bit on the low side, there is a reason. This year marks Jupiter's aphelion, farthest distance from the sun, almost coinciding with the opposition. Aphelion occurs on April 9th when Jupiter will sit at 5.54 AU away from the Earth. On a year at perihelion, like 1999, Jupiter was only 4.95 AU distant and showed a 49.68" disk.

Saturn is well placed for evening viewing at magnitude 0.0 with a 19.25" disk. I have enjoyed it on many occasions over the last month. I have caught a few of the moons at their extremes of position, and I finally managed to catch Enceladus with my 5" scope. Yes, it was at one of the extremes at the time. I think cleaning my diagonal had a lot to do with that. It was one of those lazy Kobau afternoons when a friend of mine wanted to clean his diagonal, so it was as easy to clean two or three as it is to do one, once you are set up. Now to figure out how to get the grunge off my eyepieces! Meanwhile back at Saturn, on the good nights I noted that you can see a temperate latitude belt on either side of Saturn's equator as well as a darkish center to the darker polar hood. The shadow of the planet on the rings creates a distinct disconnect, kinda cool. Under really good seeing I glimpse a bit of an impression that the B ring inner edge looks like it is made of strands. And to round it out the ghostly C ring is usually there, albeit faint. It seems that there is a division between the B ring and the C ring, the Maxwell division. I recently saw an amateur image of it. I don't recall of hearing a visual report of anyone seeing it, but it may be way too subtle. (Go for it, Larry!)



Astronomy days will be great this year with the Gas giants entertaining the masses. See you there!

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Not very much activity in February, but updates were received from Les Dickson, Tenho Tuomi and Darrell Chatfield. Darrell would like to point out that he is ahead of Rick – for the first time in a long time. Way to go, Darrell!

The Messier & Finest NGC lists can be found in the *Observer's Handbook*. The Explore the Universe list is available on the National web site. The Herschel 400 list is available at the web site listed below. The Binocular List will be available at each general meeting or can be mailed out on request to distant members.



On-line Messier List – For those who'd like an electronic Messier list (with DSS images), check out:

<http://www.seds.org/billa/dssm/messier.html>

On-line Finest NGC List – For those who'd like an electronic FNGC list, check out the Edmonton Centre's version at:

<http://www.edmontonrasc.com/catalog.html>

On-line Herschel 400 List – For those who'd like an electronic Herschel 400 list, check out the official site at:

<http://www.astroleague.org/al/obsclubs/herschel/hers400.html>



RASC Observing Group Notes

 by Bill Hydomako, Observing Group Coordinator

We got out on the February Observer's Group night! It was the only good viewing night for the two or three weeks before and two weeks after that night. The skies were marginal at the beginning of the evening but got better as the evening progressed. Eight members came out. We toured around the skies identifying constellations for the first half hour. We then went inside the warm up shelter and I had a short session on star naming, the different methods of identifying stars and a short talk on double stars. We then proceeded back outside and toured around a few double stars. After that the members went off to do their own thing and the group broke up around 1:00 a.m.

March. "Messier Marathon"!!! Come one come all. I would like to see everybody that possible can come out. We are planning to hold the first official club event on Friday, March 11 with Saturday March 12 as a backup date. To get a good shot at it you must be at Sleaford and set up before Dusk. Or you'll miss the first five objects as they set at or shortly after dusk. Then we settle down for an all nighter :o).

I plan to take the clubs C-8 out of the dome and set it up on the portable pier. I'll have a table there for charts and I will make myself available as a resource for those that need help. I'll have copies of Bill's Messier list available for you to use. Also note that everyone who has started or wants to start their Messier Observing list for their Messier certificate. This is a great opportunity to get going on it or for those who have started their Messier lists to catch those stray Messier objects that they have missed. We will also have a lunch later on around or after midnight. Sort of a potluck lunch. If you are planning to come please let me know so that I have an idea as to how many will be there and if you are planning to bring some food let me know that as well. The club has authorized me some funds for food that I can use to fill in the gaps from what everybody else plans to bring. If we get washed out due to poor skies in March or you are unable to make it, don't despair. I plan to run the marathon again on the April Observer's Group session that will be Friday, April 8 and/or Saturday April 9.