

Saskatoon

Skies

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

Volume 29, Number 2
February 1998



Nelson and Gloria Rystrom hold a photograph presented to them during the appreciation dinner the Centre gave in their honour last month. The photo shows the Rystrom Observatory domes silhouetted against an evening sky, with Comet Hale-Bopp blazing in the background. The Rystrom's generosity made the Rystrom Observatory a reality for more than 21 years. Thirty Centre members attended the dinner. More inside.

RASC Calendar Happenings

Date (1998)	Event	Contact	Telephone
Feb. 13	Youth Group Meeting 7:30 p.m. Sandy's Place. Topic: "Astrophotography" (with Dr. Al Hartridge) & "Astronomy Day Preparation".	Sandy Ferguson	931-3184
Feb. 16	General Meeting - Nat. Hydrology Building	Erich Keser	374-4262
Feb. 26	Caribbean Total Solar Eclipse - Don's Going! Junior Astronomer Amy Stephens will be nearby!	Don MacKinnon	477-2892
Feb. 27 or 28	Observing Session at Sleaford Observ'y - 8:00 p.m.	Darrell Chatfield	374-9278
Mar. 16	General Meeting - Nat. Hydrology Building	Erich Keser	374-4262
Mar. 20	Junior Astronomers Meeting, - 8:00 p.m., Sandy's Place - "Spring Constellations"	Sandy Ferguson	931-3184
Mar. 27	Youth Group Meeting - 8:00 p.m., Sandy's Place - "Spring Constellations"	Sandy Ferguson	931-3184
Mar. 27 or 28	Observing Session at Sleaford Observ'y - 8:30 p.m.	Darrell Chatfield	374-9278
Apr. 25	Junior Astronomers/Youth Group - "Kick Off Astronomy Week" - TENTATIVE - Possible BBQ (if balmy) and OBSERVING NIGHT at the Sleaford Observatory (near Colonsay)	Sandy Ferguson	931-3184
Jun. 18 - 22	1998 General Assembly - Victoria	Rick Huziak	665-3392
Jul. 23 - 26	Sask. Summer Star Party at Cypress Hills	Erich Keser	374-4262

Erratum: From: Susan Frances Yeo <rodan@agt.net>, 21 Jan 1998

I am already looking very forward to the SSSP '98. We had a GREAT time last year and it has been added to our list of "must attend" events. You guys did an outstanding job!

Except for one thing ...

In your newsletter [Saskatoon Skies, Aug. - Sep. 97] - the one with the SSSP '97 report, you showed a picture of myself and Shirley on duty at the meadows. Her name is Shirley Conway, not Patricia somebody or other! She will be getting on your case a little about that this summer.

[The previous editor has asked the current editor to apologize profusely for the mistake, which, of course, we do!]

Renewed:

MEMBERSHIP UPDATES

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Kirt Headley, 227 Meilicke Rd., Saskatoon, SK, S7H 1L2, tel. (306) 683-0251

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Welcome New Member:

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 Collating and Stuffing - Sandy Ferguson



IN THIS ISSUE

	page
RASC Calendar Happenings, Erratum, Membership Updates	2
The Nelson and Gloria Rystrom "Honest" Gastronomy Dinner <i>by Rick Huziak</i>	4
Ed Kennedy Visits the Kingston Centre <i>by Leo Enright, Kingston Centre</i>	6
Notice of the March General Meeting	6
Telescopes in Review - Fixing the Celestron Firstscope 76 <i>by Rick Huziak</i>	7
Junior Astronomer and Youth Group January Meetings <i>by Sandy Ferguson</i>	8
Executive Member Reprimanded	8
A Call for Photos - The 1999 RASC Calendar <i>by Rajiv Gupta, Vancouver Centre</i>	9
A Facelift for the Centre C-8 <i>by Rick Huziak and Terry Nelson</i>	9
The Zenith Auroral Convergence - <i>by Fr. Lucian Kemble, Calgary Centre</i>	10
The Observer's Group (Almost) of Jan. 31 <i>by Darrell Chatfield</i>	11
Patrick Moore Doesn't Feel He's in Kansas Anymore! <i>source - London Times</i>	12
Update on the Moon Hoax <i>by Ed Kennedy and Rick Huziak</i>	12
OBSERVING - The Challenge of M83 <i>by Dale Jeffrey and Rick Huziak</i>	13
President's Message - SSSP'98 - Time to Get Moving <i>by Erich Keser</i>	15
Messier Club, Dues, U of S Observatory Hours	15
The Sleaford Page - Mice and Heritage - <i>by Rick Huziak & Erich Keser</i>	16

Saskatoon Skies is published monthly by the Saskatoon Centre of the RASC. Distribution is approximately 135 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. 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 UUEncoded or as attached .GIFs. Send e-mail submissions to the editor at huziak@SEDSsystems.ca. Submitted materials can be returned upon request. A separate subscription to *Saskatoon Skies* is available for \$12.50 per year. Articles may be reprinted from *Saskatoon Skies* without expressed permission (except where otherwise stated), but source credit is requested. DEADLINE for submissions is the 1st of each month. *Saskatoon Skies* accepts commercial advertising. Please call the editor for rates. Members can advertise non-commercial items free of charge.

The Nelson and Gloria Rystrom "Honest" Gastronomy Dinner

by Rick Huziak

The gastronomy dinner to honour Nelson and Gloria Rystrom was held on January 23rd at the Station Place Restaurant. Nelson and Gloria were exceptional hosts for the last two decades, generously allowing the Centre's continued use of their farm for the Rystrom Observatory after the passing of Nelson's father several years ago, with whom the original agreement for the observatory land use was held. About 30 people attended the celebration; about a dozen members and their families. Master of ceremonies for the evening was Centre President Erich Keser. Long time members, Jim Young and I, gave a slide presentation which detailed the history and construction of the observatory, from it's initial year as a snow fort shelter (1976) from which we photographed a star atlas for a GA competition, to the day we began disassembly for the move to the new Sleaford location.

In it's 22-year history, the Rystrom Observatory received 1133 visits by 342 different people. A total of 2276 signatures appeared in the guest register. Visitors came to see the observatory from as far away as Alert, NWT, Phoenix, AZ, England, New Zealand and Japan. Many well-known names in the RASC appeared in register, such as Peter Jedicke, Chris Rutkowski, Raymond Auclair, Guy Wescott, and Fr. Lucian Kemble, to name just a few.

Although this was to be a celebration of the observatory, I could not help but feel a little sad that such a long standing Centre tradition had now come to an end. I don't think there is a completely fitting way to thank the Rystroms for all that they have contributed to the Saskatoon Centre over the last two decades. This dinner went only a little way. Nelson and Gloria - we thank you from the bottom of our hearts!



Centre President Erich Keser presents the souvenir photograph to Nelson and Gloria in appreciation of their contribution of providing a home for the Rystrom Observatory for the last 22 years. Photo by Rick Huziak.



Left: Jim Young has been with the Centre for almost 30 years and was one of the founders and builders of the Rystrom Observatory. **Right:** Rick Huziak has been a Centre member for 22 years and participated in the construction of the observatory. Jim and Rick gave a slide show history of the observatory at the dinner. Photos by Rick Huziak and Erich Keser.



About 30 people attended the Rystrom dinner. Members, seen here, who enjoyed the slide show included Terry Nelson, his wife Connie and their kids, Sharon Hartridge (wife of Al), Les and Ellen Dickson, Darrell Chatfield (his wife is hiding!), Brian Friesen and Amy Huziak (Rick's daughter). Photo by Rick Huziak

Ed Kennedy Visits the Kingston Centre

by Leo Enright, Kingston Centre

On the evening of Sunday October 19th a group of Kingston Centre members had a very interesting meeting at the home of Terry and Ruth Hicks. Professor Ed Kennedy was the special guest and the gathering of a dozen members of the Centre was an opportunity to hear from a Saskatoon Centre member who has a special fondness for Queen's University which was the site of this year's RASC General Assembly at which Professor Kennedy had been one of the speakers during the Paper Session - all of which had occurred just three and a half months before.

This time the distinguished guest from Saskatchewan was in Kingston for Homecoming Weekend at Queen's and for his class (Arts '37); its 60th reunion. For us the gathering was a chance to hear about a proposed project and a concern of his. During his informal presentation, he noted that recent Canadian contributions to the IAU Commission on the history of astronomy have been greatly diminished. There continues, however, to be a great need for the documentation of the works of a number of outstanding Canadian astronomers who are no longer with us. We particularly need to have a book on the contribution to the science by Dr. A. Vibert Douglas, the founder of the Kingston Centre, Dr. Helen Hogg, and Dr. Carlyle Smith Beals.

Professor Kennedy expressed the sincere wish that someone would undertake the effort of recording the achievements of these 3 great Canadians and those who heard his presentation heartily agreed with him. We all left with the hope that this could be initiated before too long. ☽

Notice of the General Meeting of the Saskatoon Centre of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada

Conference Room, the National Hydrology Research Institute
Innovation Place
Monday, February 16, 1998 8:00 p.m.

The programs will be:

"The RASC in the News" by Rick Huziak
"Easy Astronomy for the Beginner" by Sandy Ferguson
and much MORE!

Members and friends are welcome. There is no admission.

Telescopes in Review - Fixing the Celestron Firstscope 76

by Richard Huziak

The Firstscope 76, Model 31031, is a 70 mm (2.75") f/8 reflecting telescope on the low end of the Celestron cost and performance scale. The telescope comes with an adjustable wooden tripod, accessory tray and a reasonable equatorial head complete with slow motion extenders on both axes. The telescope also comes with .965" 12.5- and 8-mm eyepieces, a 2x barlow and a 5x25 straight through spotter with that inevitable stop-down washer to compensate for the poor, plastic optics. All in all the telescope seemed to be of reasonable quality and sells for somewhere around \$400 Can in local stores.

I recently had the opportunity to work on one of these telescopes after receiving a call from a desperate consumer who had purchased the telescope for his 12-year old son for Christmas. He said that they could see *nothing* at all through the telescope - *nothing*. My first thoughts was that the spotter was not aligned with the main scope, the most common beginner mistake, or that the telescope is out of collimation.

I asked him to bring it by and soon discovered that I was right on both accounts. The excessively thin, almost transparent, manual that came with the telescope was totally insufficient and would not provide any hope of helping the first time user with the telescope set-up basics that you just need to know. The owner simply did not know that you have to align the spotter, but the bigger problem was the main mirror collimation. The mirror was so far out of collimation that the secondary was only half visible in the main mirror using the eyepiece collimator test. I explained the collimation procedure to the gentleman and then proceeded to recollimate the main mirror.

Now the problems began. This telescope had 6 screws on the back plate, and I found it necessary to entirely remove the rear cell to find out what was going on. Here I learned the secret of the Firstscope. The main mirror is glued to the back plate, and not too straight at that. The entire back plate is adjusted using a 3-point system with push-pull screws, thus accounting for the 6 back plate. The screws are standard Philips heads, so the adjustment has to be done with a screwdriver. However, there were no springs on any of the screws, so the moment anything was adjusted, gravity took over to resettle the position. I have collimated thousands of times, but I've never struggled with anything like this! I have no idea how a novice user would ever have aligned this scope.

The solution was simple. I went to my handy hardware drawer and found 3 small springs. I replaced the cell with the springs in place on the adjuster screws, and within 30 seconds had the telescope in perfect collimation. However, in doing so, I noticed another problem. The end of the tube was cut about 1/4" out of square. With the mirror plate completely screwed in tight as it was brought to me, the mirror was horribly askew. When I did the collimation, one end of the plate ended up tight against one side of the tube and the other end was a full 1/4" extended! In fact, the screws provided were too short to take up this amount of adjustment, and needed to be replaced with longer screws. The other 3 screws, meant to lock the cell into place also were too short to reach the stop plates, and also needed to be lengthened! As it turns out, the 1/4" gap in the end is probably beneficial, as it will reduce tube currents and air circulation problems in an otherwise closed tube..

It was pretty obvious that this telescope had NEVER been collimated, neither in the factory nor at the retail store that sold the telescope in the first place! These types of problems annoy me to no end. I was able to fix the telescope to working condition, and I'm sure it will perform fine, but it would only have cost the factory an additional 15 cents for springs and 30 seconds of labour to make a world of difference in the quality of this telescope model. ☺

JUNIOR ASTRONOMERS & YOUTH GROUP JANUARY MEETINGS

by Sandy Ferguson

JR. ASTRONOMERS (Ages 7-10) JANUARY 16th:

Three new members joined: Brendan Flaherty and Anna-Naura and Nyla Kuhlman. We had a short slide presentation on Orion, the Hunter, and his Hunting Dogs, Canis Major and Canis Minor. The Greek legend of Orion and his battle with the Scorpion (Scorpius) was told. We covered the star maps for January, so that the group could check out Orion on clear nights. We had hoped everyone would get to try his/her hand at astrophotography outdoors, but the night was cloudy. We did, however, demonstrate camera set-up.

YOUTH GROUP (Ages 11-14) JANUARY 23rd:

We encountered yet another cloudy night, which ruined our planned evening of astrophotography. The group was introduced to Charles Messier, the 18th century French astronomer, whose best known contribution to astronomy is his "Messier Catalogue". We also covered Orion, Canis Major and Canis Minor and studied some slides of naked-eye and binocular Messier objects in that area. Everyone was encouraged to start noting down the Messiers as he or she observed them, so that an application could be made for a Messier Certificate sometime in the future.

IN FEBRUARY: MORE ASTROPHOTOGRAPHY with guest astronomer Dr. Al Hartridge and PREPARATIONS FOR UPCOMING ASTRONOMY DAY.

Executive Member Leaves Members Wondering

Vice-president Darrell Chatfield recently confused and shocked the logical minds of the Executive after he allegedly "diddled" at a recent meeting. Although no one could immediately define what "diddle" really meant, it was unanimously agreed that it sounded rather rude. The immediate effect on women and children present at the meeting could not be assessed, mostly because the executive was so unsure of whatever it was that Mr. Chatfield actually did! One executive member later told press that he had trouble sleeping for several days afterward, stating "*How one can diddle as well as Darrell diddled is defying deepest thoughts!*". Others agreed. Extensive research into the word's origin by the Executive's Committee to Impeach found that The New Webster's Dictionary defines "diddle" as "to deceive or delude, originally perhaps by rapid movements or sleight of hand; to cheat or trick, especially in money matters; to dangle". The question we're all asking is: *diddle he, or didn't he?*

CALL FOR PHOTOS - 1999 RASC CALENDAR

by Rajiv Gupta, Editor, RASC Calendar, Vancouver Centre RASC (from the RASCLIST)

Photos for the 1999 RASC Calendar will be selected in early May 1998, in anticipation of a late May press run. The Calendar will be printed earlier this year than in the past, in order to attempt a wider distribution to retailers.

All members of the RASC are encouraged to submit astronomical photos for consideration. Images can be of any type - deep-sky or solar system; prime-focus, piggyback, or fixed-tripod; emulsion- or CCD-based. Lunar/planetary submissions are particularly welcome, as recent editions have been lacking these.

In order to preserve the highest quality possible, film-based images should be submitted as 8 x 10 inch prints. Preliminary electronic versions of these images are also welcome. CCD images may be sent in any standard electronic image format.

Prints and disks should be sent to **Rajiv Gupta, 2478 W. 1st. Avenue, Vancouver, BC, V6K 1G6** so as to arrive by April 30, 1998. Electronic images (under 1 megabyte please) may instead be sent by E-mail to gupta@interchange.ubc.ca. For further information about submissions, please contact me by e-mail or by phone at (604) 733-0682.

The success of the RASC Calendar depends largely on the quality of images submitted. I look forward to receiving for consideration images of the same high quality as those that have made recent editions successful. ☺

A Facelift for the Centre C-8

by Rick Huziak & Terry Nelson

The Centre's C-8 has just completed a revitalization. The scope had been performing fairly well in the old Rystrom Observatory, but not without some nagging problems. In late January, we took it out of use, did a complete inspection, and began the a major refurbishment. The telescope was sticking in the declination axis, so the telescope was unmounted from the fork and the bushings completely cleaned and regreased. Missing hardware on the spotter bracket was replaced. The spotter draw tube was cleaned, regreased, and the tension on the rack adjusted. The micro-focus knob on the C-8 was disassembled, cleaned, and a worn setscrew reseated into a newly drilled hole. As a result, the slop that had been noticed at the focus should be completely eliminated. The corrector plate and the diagonal were cleaned from years of built-up dust. We also cleaned and unstuck sticky gears on the declination drive.

At this point, we stopped, though another round of servicing has been identified. The scope is somewhat out of collimation, and at a later date we will disassemble the corrector plate, replace misplaced gaskets, clean the inside and laser collimate. In addition, all electrical wiring needs to be replaced, including the wires to the declination motor drive, setting circle lights and spotter reticule, though the motor and setting circle lights were tested and work fine. This set of upgrades will occur in the spring.
☺

The Zenith Auroral Convergence - Observations Wanted!

by Fr. Lucian Kemble <luckem@sk.sympatico.ca> (from the RASCLIST)

With the increasing frequency of good auroral displays, I invite you to keep your eyes open for zenith displays, what I call the "Zenith Auroral Convergence (ZAC)". Due to effects of perspective, the rippling curtains of the aurora seem to converge to a point overhead where they almost seem to explode. Having noticed this on numerous occasions, some years ago I decided to investigate the location of this convergence, since it did not seem to be at one's real zenith, as one would suppose, but displaced to the south by a considerable distance.

From photographs and actual observations, I began to plot the ZAC point, noting time, location, stellar background, meridian, etc. It turns out that the ZAC is fairly constant, with a margin of error due to the shifting shafts of light, etc. It is roughly as far south of the true zenith of one's observing location as the North Magnetic Pole is south of the true Geographic North Pole, which stands to reason since the aurora is a magnetic phenomenon. The ZAC also seemed, from my observations from Cochrane, AB and Lumsden, SK, to be displaced to the west of the Meridian by an amount that is equal to my geographic location west of the Meridian of the North Magnetic Pole. For the same reason, the auroral arcs that begin near the horizon are centered, not on true north, but on magnetic north (in my case to the ENE). The Magnetic North Pole displaces annually by slight amounts but it is roughly at $100^{\circ} 54' W.$ longitude, $+76^{\circ} 10' N.$ latitude.

For those of you who have access to old RASC bulletins, I wrote a lengthy article on ZAC observations in the Calgary Centre's *STARSEEKER*, of November, 1990. Also included in some of my observations were reports from observers whose photos I had seen in *Sky & Telescope* and *Astronomy*, from Alaska, eastern Canada and North Dakota.

I would appreciate further submissions by other observers. All I would need, from your photos or actual observations, are:

- exact time in UT
- your latitude and longitude
- hour line, meridian or sidereal time
- your zenith in RA and declination
- your ZAC in RA and declination

Contact me for further information. ☺

How About a Few Articles and Meeting Speakers?

Well, the editor can't do it all himself! The story and picture bin is getting mighty low, and March's issue may be sooooooo thin that you might mistake it for a Department of Highways Fix-it-up the Roads grant! Send in your observing results, photographs, drawings, stories, cartoons, insults, editorials, money or anything else! I'm so desperate, I'll publish *almost* anything! Something related to astronomy would be nice too! Any format is fine. I could also use some suggestions for General Meeting speakers. That bin is running PAST empty. Any help will be appreciated. Call Rick at 665-3392.

The Observers Group (Almost) of January 31

by Darrell Chatfield

The evening showed great promise as I gazed up at the sky earlier on in the day. The skies were clear as a bell. Of course, as you know what this means to amateur astronomers...great viewing, right? However, this was not to be the case tonight. I was able to call quite a few of you the evening before, just to remind you of the OG meeting. So, some of you said tonight was free and that we would be ~~out~~ at Sleaford together. You know how I enjoy observing with a group of astronauts!!

Bob Christie, Les and Ellen Dickson and myself gathered at the FasGas station on Highway 5 around 7:30 p.m. We started our 40-minute journey to the site with great anticipation, having remarked how good Orion and the Big Dipper looked before departing. By the time we passed St. Denis, something went terribly wrong. I looked to the north to see the handle of the Dipper, and it wasn't there! I quickly looked to the south to see Orion, and it was gone too! What had happened? I thought at first that it was fog, but that wasn't the case. Then I thought that I had fogged my windows through heavy breathing, caused by the thought of anticipated great viewing, but rerouting my hot air supply dissipated that idea. Something was still wrong. (Of course, you realize all these antics have to be performed with great care, because I was still driving the car). By this time, we had arrived at Sleaford, only to find Scott Alexander looking quite forlorn, sitting on the hood of his truck. I wondered if this was some kind of new viewing position he had discovered. No, it wasn't. It was the cold, hard fact that the sky had completely clouded over in under 10 minutes! Scott had just finished setting up his 4" Schmidt Cassegrain when the clouds rolled over. So, there we were, the five of us, wondering what to do next. Well...the logical thing was to fire up the warm-up shelter, which we did. We huddled in there for a few minutes, with all of us signing the guest register. My entry was "Great party...couldn't see anything, clouded over". Erich and his neighbour, new member Professor Kuhlmann, came a few minutes later. It was Prof. Kuhlmann's first time to the site.

So now there were seven of us grumbling about the clouds. We all know how that can change the weather patterns, right? Fortunately, Erich got the idea to show Mrs. Kuhlmann the old schoolhouse. That gave us another place to continue our grumbling session. Later on, we made our way outside to be greeted by temporary members Rob and Lianne. They too were disappointed. However, all was not lost. While waiting for Scott to pack up his telescope, Ellen got quite a chuckle out of seeing how far her flashlight could show up in the cloud layer. (Her flashlight won!)

While Erich and Mrs. Kuhlmann were driving home, they met up with Terry Nelson. He had stopped by the roadside to observe the terrible sky. They all went home, with the rest of us going to Tim Horton's on 33rd.

Even though things went bad for observing, I tried to glean something positive from the evening. I was quite taken by the orange glow I saw rising above the city while driving back. It spread over quite a distance. This, of course, was caused by streetlights, etc., reflecting off the clouds. Well, I hope the OG can meet under clear skies in February. Mark the dates on your calendar. See you there!

Patrick Moore Doesn't Feel He's in Kansas Anymore!

Source: The Times, London, UK (condensed)

It appears that Canadians and Americans on the Eastern shores of the Atlantic aren't the only ones suffering from the ill effects of the (dare I repeat it) El-Nino. Well known British popularizer of astronomy, Patrick Moore has had the misfortune of having his backyard observatory blown apart by a tornado. While his 8-1/2 inch reflector was undamaged, a 15-1/2 inch telescope in a separate shed was bent out of shape. As he surveyed the wreckage of his garden observatory, Mr. Moore had an extra regret. His next-door neighbour's sycamore tree was still standing. The tree partly blocks the astronomer's views of the sky. He said: "I look at this damage and then find that damn tree is still standing. It really is too much".

Update on The Moon Hoax

by Ed Kennedy, Honorary President, and Richard Huziak

In astronomy, exciting discoveries are made while observing the skies with binoculars or a telescope; a somewhat different discovery recently came about while one of our members was browsing through a book on astronomy. In Gould's treatise: "The Stargazer Talks", there is a chapter entitled *Seven Famous Hoaxes*; one of these seven is *The Moon Hoax*, a fantastical fabrication of life on the Moon which gained an international readership. The unearthing of Gould's account caused Ed noticeable excitement which he soon conveyed to me by telephone.

For a number of years, Ed has been interested in *The Moon Hoax*. In fact, a Guide to the papers of John Edward Kennedy is housed in the University of Saskatchewan Archives, and Section IX of this Finding Aid, MG 102, provides a summary of the numerous items available in his collection on *The Moon Hoax*. Professor Kennedy has added to this list with a significant paper which appeared in the 1996 Yearbook of Astronomy, edited by Patrick Moore. Ed also is currently translating 90 pages of various 19th century *Moon Hoax* editions published in French; these came to his attention during the past two years.

For members of the Saskatoon Centre not familiar with *The Moon Hoax*, the following extract from Gould's book may stimulate your interest and encourage you to take a closer look at this topic. You may be surprised at what you find - keep in mind that a telescope of the size and power described by Locke (the original author of *The Moon Hoax*) if installed at the Sleaford Observatory, would increase markedly our visitations to this new facility. ☺

The "Moon Hoax" of 1835 was of quite a different kind. It didn't inconvenience anybody—but it deceived hundreds of thousands of people for a long time, and it more than tripled the circulation of the *New York Sun*, the newspaper in which it appeared.

In 1834 the famous British astronomer, Sir John Herschel, son of the discoverer of Uranus, had taken his father's 20-foot reflecting telescope out to the Cape, where he was engaged in doing for the Southern Heavens what he'd already done for the Northern. The result of his work, published in 1847, was a complete survey (the first ever made) of the whole of the visible sky—the work of one man, using the same telescope throughout. But as soon as it was known that Herschel had begun work at the Cape, it occurred to one, Richard Adams Locke, then a reporter on the *Sun*, that here was a splendid chance of a "scoop" going begging. Everybody wanted to know how Herschel's work was getting on—and, the *Sun* would be perfectly safe, for some months, in saying exactly what it liked, since it would take at least that time for Herschel to hear of it and contradict it.

So on 25th August 1835, there appeared in the *Sun* a series of amazing daily articles, with illustrations, which ran for a week. The paper sold like wildfire—and well it might, for while Locke's "story" contained enough scientific blunders to make an astronomer's hair stand right on end, it was quite convincing to the average reader. The public gravely swallowed details of Herschel's new telescope—which, assisted by a "transfusion of artificial light through the focal object of vision," was able to bring the Moon's surface to within an apparent distance of no more than a couple of hundred yards or so! And, in consequence, they made no bones about absorbing the marvellous lunar details which this miraculous and perfectly impossible instrument revealed. Day after day they pored over accounts of amethystine mountains and valleys of emerald grass, dotted with innumerable poppies—huge flocks of bison, single-horned goats and sheep—clouds of pelicans and other birds—and, most interesting of all, numbers of flying creatures, half-human, half-monkey, with bat-like wings. So much interest was aroused, that as soon as the series of *Sun* articles ended, these were at once republished in pamphlet form, sixty thousand copies being sold in a few days. It was good fun—while it lasted.

OBSERVING - The Challenge of M83

by Dale Jeffrey and Rick Huziak (via e-mail)

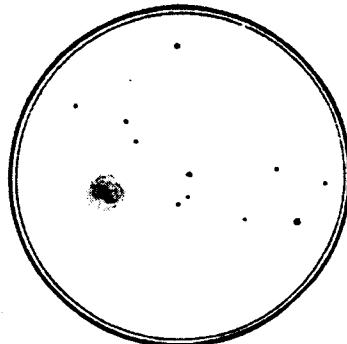
Dale asks: "Technically, M83 is visible now, but is it really? I've been out three times at what, according to the planisphere and the Redshift 2 program, should be its time of highest elevation (in the wee hours), but as yet have come up empty. I've observed from north of Shell Lake (no light pollution at all), and from a little ways away from Laird, in order to escape light utterly, but still nothing. Thoughts or suggestions?"

Rick replies: "M83 has made the list of being one of the top 25 brightest galaxies in the sky, yet most observers have a great deal of difficulty in reeling this one in. It's often the last object found in one's Messier search; it was Dale's, Darrell's and my last challenge. There are two reasons, the first is its southerly latitude as seen from this area. It can only be seen well for a short period of a few months, and it is never higher than 10 degrees off the south horizon, so it's luck of the draw as to whether it can be seen clearly. Secondly, even though it is listed at 8th magnitude, the 8th magnitude is an *integral* magnitude, and the true magnitude of any square arc-second of the galaxy cannot be more than 12th or 13th, probably less. M83 is a large, diffuse face-on spiral, in exactly the same category as M33 and M101 which are notoriously difficult to see for many people simply because they try to use too much power! These are all large galaxies that normally fill a low or medium eyepiece field. Indeed it's easy to look completely through the galaxy. In order to see the galaxy at all, you need to have some contrast; thus need to see some nearby black background sky for comparison. You must therefore attempt to find these objects using extremely low power, say 25x to 50x, or even with binoculars! The power has to be low enough to see dark sky completely around the object; then the task becomes pretty easy! That's the trick! You can also try 'raster scanning' the scope across the area, and looking for changes in the local 'sky condition' - dark sky will be dark, then the field becomes 'milky'. The 'milk' is the faint galaxy."

Much encourage, Dale soon writes back:

"Reasonably clear morning skies, a "spike to Spica", a reaffirmation of M68 and help from Uranometria allowed a view of M83 from my backyard, at approx. 6:45 a.m. on Tuesday, Jan. 27th. I have now completed Messier requirements. Thanks for your suggestions, especially the recommendation for low power. I caught it at 50X with the C8, but it's really pretty diffuse, and although it's stated magnitude is 10.1, and easily within theoretical limits, I still had to "pan" over it several times to assure myself that I really had it!" ☺

A view of M83 from Rick's observation made on March 24, 1996. The notes accompanying the drawing read "My last Messier object!! Found while only 3° off the horizon. About 8th magnitude, condensed to the center with 'large' fuzz all around. There may be a condensation north following the nucleus." At the scale of the drawing, it is clear that only the nuclear region was seen: the 'condensation' being most likely a star cloud. But at this scale, the galaxy should fill half the field! With it's low surface brightness however, the outer regions would never be visible, especially since it was only 3° off the horizon! The view is through the 12.5", using 2X. North is down, east is to the right.



President's Message - Saskatchewan Summer Star Party '98: Time to Get Moving by Erich Keser

It's time to really focus our energies on one of our biggest and most successful activities. Although everyone whom we talked to at SSSP '97 wanted to come back, it is important not to coast on last year's success. Every year will be different, and SSSP'98 will present new challenges and opportunities. There'll be an evening of informal talks you will be welcome to participate in on Friday. We'll have to skip the breakfast this year (won't have the hall in the morning), but there will be a full afternoon of talks and activities it, including some for children. The dinner will be even better (with less effort!) and a childrens' presentation will follow. Then will come Allan Dyer's keynote presentation. If you've never experienced one of his shows, you're in for a great time! Moreover, there will be some of the best seeing in Canada, a chance to try a wide variety of scopes and an opportunity to talk to fellow enthusiasts from diverse places. So do put SSSP'98 on your calendar, even if you can come for part of it (and if you can come earlier or stay longer, let us know - we're already going to be starting viewing on the night of July 23, by popular demand!)

The Messier Club

Rick Huziak (Certified!)	110
Gord Sarty (Certified!)	110
Scott Alexander (Certified!)	110
Sandy Ferguson (hasn't applied yet)	110
Dale Jeffrey (is applying)	110
Darrell Chatfield	106
Bob Christie	63
Erich Keser	30
Stan Noble (new in the M.Club)	28
Brian Friesen	15
Les & Ellen Dickson	more than some!
Terry Nelson	4 and holding!

Join the Messier Club!

Observe all 110 Messier objects and earn your
CERTIFICATE!

Each month I'll be posting updates. E-mail in your new numbers! If your name is not on this list and your observing the Messiers, let me know & I'll add you!

CONGRATULATIONS

to
Dale Jeffrey
for completing his list this month! Well done! Dale
will be applying for his certificate at the February
General Meeting!

***** *Saskatoon Centre Dues* *****

Membership runs from Oct. 1 to Sept. 30. Please send payment to the Centre mailbox.

Regular - \$40.00 Youth - \$22.50 Life - \$720.00

The University of Saskatchewan Observatory Hours

During February, the U of S Observatory will be open to the public on Saturday evenings from 7:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. The observatory is located on campus one block north of the Wiggins Avenue entrance off of College Drive. Visitors may view the rings of Saturn through the telescope. Admission is free. Group tours of the observatory can be booked for Friday evenings. For further information, phone the recorded Astronomy Information Line at 966-6429. ☎

The Sleaford Page

Light Mice Mine Towers

by Rick Huziak

A good visitation schedule continues to bless the new observatory. However, one visitor that was not welcomed was the mouse, or more accurately, the *Carnivorous Mickymus Rex*. To rid the warm-up shelter of these unpleasant visitors, I set a conventional spring trap, and was rewarded by the first RASC kill at the site! It was, however, difficult to determine exactly what I had caught, because the dead mouse had been *eaten* by something else while in the trap! Setting the trap again, I caught the carnivorous pest - another mouse! Boy - he must have been hungry! With the fur tats swept up, I set the trap a third time, and a few days later, Erich threw out a dead, but whole mouse for a change. We had at last caught the *Cannimouse*. I set the trap again just to make sure, but haven't checked it yet. The problem with the mice is that they chew up everything - coffee filters, books, plastic can lids, and the like.

Off of the gross stuff, the site has now been plowed, allowing paper-thin clearance cars like mine to get in unstuck - a happy change! In addition, two potentially troublesome new Image Cable TV transmission towers nearby, one at Elstow, and one about 10 kilometers east of Meacham have now had their night time sensors installed, so they strobe at an acceptably dim level - no longer throwing shadows on the site. It's great having a brother working at Image Cable who can watchdog for us. Image Cable, from Yorkton, knew that our observatory was going in at Sleaford, and decided on their own to move the east tower an additional 10 kilometers further away from where it was initially going, just so they wouldn't stroke us out of business. It's nice to know good corporate citizens exist! However, Les Dickson informs me that the Colonsay Potash Mine has just received approval to expand. Member Terry Nelson consults there, so I'll ask him to set up a meeting and I'll do a light pollution presentation for them.

Remember to drive carefully. Don't get lost! And bring your own water for coffee. All else is supplied. Other good news is that we've been told that the lady who helps run the farm one mile west is a *first responder*, so we'll contact her this month to see if we can work a deal in case of emergency at the site or on the way. ☺

The Sleaford Schoolhouse May Head Heritage

by Erich Keser

As *SASKATOON SKIES* was going to press, an important meeting took place at the home of one of our new neighbours in Colonsay. The recently formed *Friends of Sleaford School* met Mic Phelps of the *Saskatchewan Architectural Heritage Society* (Regina), Stan Shadick and Yannis Pahatouraglou from the University and Rick and myself to discuss their effort to have the schoolhouse declared a heritage building as well as their effort to raise money to preserve it. Many misunderstandings were cleared up. It once again became clear that this building is rather special to the community, and perhaps historically, since it appears to have been ordered from a 1916 Eaton's catalog! It also appears that there *may* be some real possibilities of, and usefulness in, restoring it.

These possibilities will be explored over the next 18 months. In the meantime, it is important that we show respect for a site that has so many memories for our new neighbours, and that we get to know them. One good way might be to go down to the Colonsay Cafe or Pub the next time we get clouded out. Another is to always welcome any of them that come by to have a look! (Among many other things, the RM cleared the snow for our Jan 31st (cloud) Observing Session on very short notice...too bad they don't have a cloud-blower!) ☺

