

# Saskatoon Skies

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

Vol. 39  
No. 3  
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2008

## THE NIGHT THE SKY LIT UP

On January 5 a fireball lit up the sky near Saskatoon. Gordon Sarty captured the event on his camera, which he built in his garage and operates on the roof of the Physics building. The video of the event is on the Saskatoon RASC website on the activities page. Read more inside on eyewitness accounts from Sleaford.

*Photo by Gordon Sarty*



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Saskatoon Centre  
The Royal Astronomical Society of Canada  
P.O. Box 317, RPO University  
Saskatoon, SK S7N 4J8

#### WEBSITE:

[www.usask.ca/psychology/sarty/rasc](http://www.usask.ca/psychology/sarty/rasc)

E-MAIL: [stonesw7@sasktel.net](mailto:stonesw7@sasktel.net)

TELEPHONE: (306) 857-4707

## SKIES ALIGHT & MOON IN SHADOW!

# MEMBERSHIP? IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO JOIN!

**Regular: \$69.00 /year   Youth: \$36.75 /year   Lifetime: \$2100**

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, electronic format)
- SkyNews Magazine (bimonthly)
- use of the Centre library

- rent the Centre's Telescopes  
*<http://www.usask.ca/psychology/sarty/rasc/telescopes.html>*
- discounts to Sky & Telescope Magazine\*
- free, no-cost, no-obligation, 3-month temporary membership if you don't want to join right now!

*\* New subscription or renewal of Sky & Telescope? Send new info or renewal notice, plus credit card # to Norma Jensen, 128 - 4th Street East, Saskatoon, SK S7H 1H8, or email her at [njensen@scs.sk.ca](mailto:njensen@scs.sk.ca).*

## 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   |

## SASKATOON CENTRE'S MAIN OFFICERS:

**President** – Garry Stone, 857-4707  
**Secretary** – Al Hartridge, 373-0034  
**Vice-President** – Barb Wright, 249-1990  
**Treasurer** – Norma Jensen, 244-7360

## BOTTLE DRIVE & CANADIAN TIRE \$

by Darrell Chatfield



If you cannot make it to a meeting but would like to contribute, your Canadian Tire money please call me at 374-9278.

LIGHT POLLUTION  
ABATEMENT  
WEBSITE AT:

[www.ras.sk.ca/lpc/lpc.htm](http://www.ras.sk.ca/lpc/lpc.htm)

**Newsletter Editors** – Tenho Tuomi, Ken Maher **Copy & Collate**– Les & Ellen Dickson **Labels & Temps** – Mike Clancy **Web Posting** – Gord Sarty

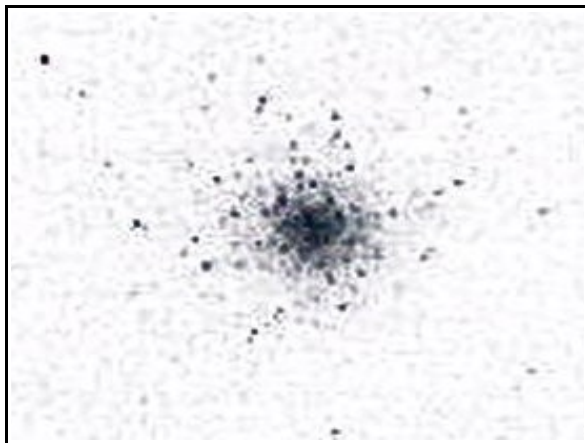
Saskatoon Skies is published monthly by the Saskatoon Centre of the RASC. Distribution is approximately 100 copies per issue. Saskatoon Skies welcomes unsolicited articles, sketches, photographs, cartoons, and other astronomy or space science articles. Articles can be sent by mail in any format to the 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](mailto: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.

# RASC CALENDAR OF EVENTS

|        |   |             |          |
|--------|---|-------------|----------|
| Mar 17 | RASC Executive Meeting - 6:30 pm., 175 Physics, U of S. | Garry Stone | 857-4707 |
| Mar 17 | RASC General Meeting - 7:30 pm., 175 Physics, U of S.   | Garry Stone | 857-4707 |
| Mar 29 | Messier Marathon Warm-Up, Sleaford Observatory          |             |          |
| Apr 5  | Messier Marathon, Sleaford Observatory                  | Larry Scott | 934-5801 |
| Apr 21 | RASC Executive Meeting - 6:30 pm., 175 Physics, U of S. | Garry Stone | 857-4707 |
| Apr 21 | RASC General Meeting - 7:30 pm., 175 Physics, U of S.   | Garry Stone | 857-4707 |
| Apr 25 | Observers Group – 8:30 pm., Sleaford Observatory        | Larry Scott | 934-5801 |
| May 9  | Astronomy Day, Lakeview Civic Centre                    | Jeff Swick  | 373-3902 |
| May 10 | Astronomy Day, Farmer's Market & Beaver Creek           | Jeff Swick  | 373-3902 |
| May 12 | RASC Executive Meeting - 6:30 pm., 175 Physics, U of S. | Garry Stone | 857-4707 |
| May 12 | RASC General Meeting - 7:30 pm., 175 Physics, U of S.   | Garry Stone | 857-4707 |
| May 30 | Observers Group – 9:30 pm., Sleaford Observatory        | Larry Scott | 934-5801 |
| Jun 16 | RASC Executive Meeting - 6:30 pm., 175 Physics, U of S. | Garry Stone | 857-4707 |
| Jun 16 | RASC General Meeting - 7:30 pm., 175 Physics, U of S.   | Garry Stone | 857-4707 |

## Minutes of the Executive Meeting, February 11, 2008 by Al Hartridge

1. Meeting called to order at 6:30 pm.
2. Approval of Minutes. Moved by Tenho Tuomi and seconded by Al Hartridge and carried.
3. Slogan: Barb Wright proposed a contest to choose a slogan for the upcoming GA in 2009.
4. Bylaws: Rick Huziak raised several questions to be clarified regarding youth and associate members. Jim Gorkoff suggested that only five officers should be named( President, Vice Pres., Secretary, Treasurer and National Rep. The others can be chosen by the centre. Officers may or may not be directors. Vice Pres. does not automatically become President after two years. Fifteen days written notice to members is required for meetings to be considered legal.
5. Meeting adjourned at 7:30 pm.



Picture of M13 taken by Garry Stone November 26, 2007.

## Minutes of the General Meeting, February 11, 2008 by Al Hartridge

1. Meeting called to order at 7:46 pm.
2. Approval of Minutes. Motion made by Mike Clancy, seconded by Ellen Dickson and carried.
3. Observatory building project funding. A list of people has been drawn up to contact regarding funding.
4. Events: Ron Waldron is currently giving a course at the QE Community Centre on Wednesday evenings.
5. Light Pollution: Rick Huziak mentioned that the first complaints have been received from Swift Current regarding Casino Lighting. He has advised on how to proceed. Rick will be meeting the Sask. Advisory Committee on Thursday regarding neighborhood lighting, and also flat lenses on arterial roads.
6. Newsletter: deadline is two weeks from today.
7. Messier Marathon will be held at Sleaford on April 5th. Lunar eclipse Feb. 20th. Someone also needed to give a short talk at Beaver Creek on Astronomy Day if observing conditions are not favorable.
8. Slogan for the upcoming GA in Cypress Hills is needed. Barb Wright suggests a contest to choose one.
9. Membership: 86 regular members at present.
10. Sleaford star night: for Colonsay School. Please sign up to help.
11. Meeting adjourned at 9:30 pm.

# MONDAY, MARCH 17 7:30 PM ROOM 175, U OF S

*There will be an Executive Meeting at 6:30 pm.*

## St. Patrick's Day Astronomy by Mike Clancy

- **Beautiful Skibereen**, Agnes Mary Clereke, noted mid-18th century astronomical author and for whom a lunar crater is named, and
- **Newgrange**, Ireland, a neolithic site in East-Central often referred to as Ireland's Stonehenge

## IMPORTANT NOTICES TO ALL MEMBERS

The March meeting will have a vote on bylaw amendments to bring us up to date, and for effective running of your RASC centre. It is important that you come to this meeting for we need a quorum to pass those amendments.

## Horizon Effect Project

Kathleen Houston is looking for stories about your Horizon Effect experience. These stories create insight into how our hearts, minds and bodies experience the experience of the land. I think that a great deal of information is encoded in the energy generated by our perceptions and that each of us holds a piece of the puzzle. The collection of stories can become part of the Blogg site I plan to create in the future, so that the horizon effect is a shared experience.

You can contact Kathleen by email:

**[e.b.a@sasktel.net](mailto:e.b.a@sasktel.net)**

Please see January and February 2008 issues of the newsletter.

## BOOKS FOR SALE

All items will be available at our next meeting or call 249-1119,  
or email [breeves@sasktel.net](mailto:breeves@sasktel.net)

| <i>Title</i>                                | <i>Author</i>        | <i>#Avail</i> | <i>Price</i> | <i>Title</i>                              | <i>Author</i>          | <i>#Avail</i> | <i>Price</i> |
|---|----------------------|---------------|--------------|---|------------------------|---------------|--------------|
|   |                      |               |              |   | <b>Books</b>           |               |              |
| RASC 2008                                   | RASC                 | 1             | \$14.00      | Field Map of the Moon                     | Sky & Telescope        | 8             | \$17.00      |
| RASC 2007                                   | RASC                 | 3             | \$5.00       | Lunar 100 Card                            | Sky & Telescope        | 1             | \$10.00      |
| Skywatcher's 08                             | S. Shadick           | 3             | \$18.00      | Mars Observer's Guide                     | N. Bone                | 2             | \$14.00      |
| Skywatcher's 07                             | S. Shadick           | 6             | \$5.00       | Deep Sky Observer's Guide                 | N. Bone                | 1             | \$14.00      |
| Skywatcher's 06                             | S. Shadick           | 1             | \$2.00       | Stars                                     | Zim, Baker & Chartrand | 1             | \$10.00      |
|   | <b>Books</b>         |               |              | Exploring the Night Sky                   | T. Dickinson           | 11            | \$9.50       |
| The Backyard Astronomer's Guide             | Dickinson & Dyer     | 2             | \$40.00      | Exploring the Sky by Day                  | T. Dickinson           | 10            | \$9.50       |
| The Beginner's Observer's Guide             | L. Enright           | 4             | \$19.00      | Patterns in the Sky                       | K. Hewitt-White        | 3             | \$19.50      |
| Observer's Handbook 2006                    | RASC                 | 5             | \$5.00       | Pocket Sky Atlas                          | R. Sinnott             | 3             | \$27.00      |
| Observer's Handbook 2005                    | RASC                 | 1             | \$2.00       | Binocular Highlights                      | G. Seronik             | 3             | \$28.00      |
| Practical Astronomy                         | S. Dunlop            | 4             | \$14.00      | Night Sky Star Wheel                      | Sky Publishing         | 1             | \$19.00      |
| Summer Stargazing                           | T. Dickinson         | 5             | \$18.00      | S&T Star Wheel                            | Sky & Telescope        | 1             | \$22.00      |
| Celestial Sampler                           | S. French            | 2             | \$28.00      | Messier Card (not laminated)              | Sky & Telescope        | 9             | \$5.00       |
| Firefly Astronomy Dictionary                | Firefly              | 2             | \$14.00      | Deep-Sky Wonders                          | W. Houston             | 2             | \$24.50      |
| Firefly Planisphere                         | Firefly              | 1             | \$19.00      | The Messier Objects                       | S.J. O'Meara           | 1             | \$39.00      |
| Night Sky Atlas                             | R. Scagell           | 3             | \$27.00      | Scientific American Book of the Cosmos    | D.H. Levy              | 1             | \$48.00      |
| Stargazing with a Telescope                 | R. Scagell           | 2             | \$14.00      | Skyways – Astronomy Handbook for Teachers | M.L. Whitehorne        | 1             | \$16.00      |
| Beautiful Universe                          | Sky & Telescope      | 2             | \$13.00      | Saskatoon's Stone                         | Mysyk & Kulyk          | 10            | \$3.00       |
| There Once was a Sky Full of Stars          | B. Crelin & A. Ziner | 10            | \$22.00      | On the Moon                               | P. Moore               | 2             | \$29.00      |
| Space 50 Years and Counting                 | Sky & Telescope      | 1             | \$13.00      |   | <b>Miscellaneous</b>   |               |              |
| The Moon Observer's Guide                   | P. Grego             | 4             | \$14.00      | RASC Centennial Mug                       |                        | 2             | \$5.00       |
| Isabelle Williamson Lunar Observing Program | RASC                 | 7             | \$10.00      | RASC Stickers, blue or white              |                        | lots          | \$1.00       |
| The Sun Observer's Guide                    | T. Spence            | 3             | \$14.00      | SSSP 2001 Pin (Summer Triangle)           |                        | 13            | \$2.00       |
| Moon Map (laminated)                        | Sky & Telescope      | 7             | \$10.00      | SSSP 2002 Pin (Comet)                     |                        | 24            | \$2.00       |
|   |                      |               |              | SSSP 2006 Pin (10)                        |                        | 46            | \$4.00       |
|   |                      |               |              | SSSP 2007 Pin (DSP)                       |                        | 35            | \$5.00       |

# The Night the Sky Lit Up, January 5, 2008

## Report by Ron Waldron:

As avid observers of the night sky, we have become accustomed to expecting the unexpected. Sometimes it's an appearance of the northern lights, a satellite crossing through your field of view or the flash from an Iridium satellite.

Nothing, however, could prepare me for what happened on Saturday evening, January 5th at approximately 21:09 PM local time. Norma Jensen, myself and a newer amateur whose first name was Shirley were outside at the Sleaford dark site doing what we always do - observing with our telescopes. Skies were dark and clear and the weather was "warm".

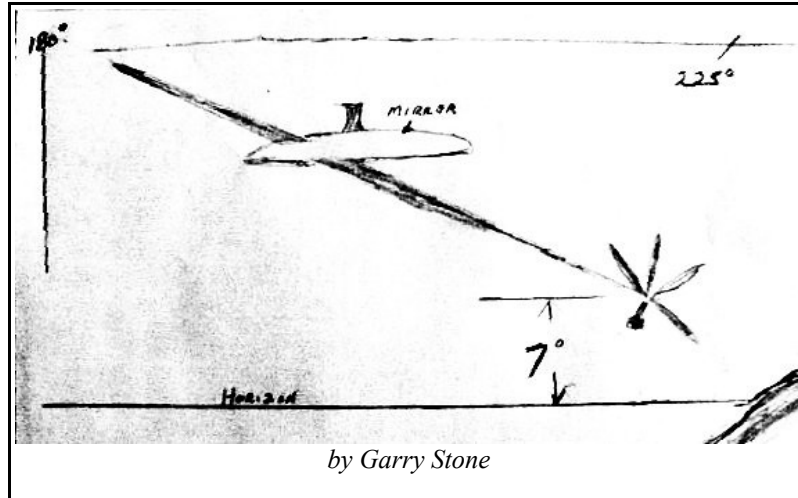
Rick Huziak and Kathleen Houston had just entered the warm up shelter when the unexpected happened. Using my 80mm refractor telescope, I had just finished looking at the Pleiades star cluster when a slow moving meteor appeared in the northeast about 30 degrees above the horizon. It appeared between the constellation of Ursa Major and Gemini.

## Report by Norma Jensen:

It was the first beautiful viewing night since I can't remember when - mid November? - the Milky Way stretched across the sky - Orion blazing - Capella and others joined suit - crisp and clear - enough wind to keep the humidity down - in the usual state of wonder exploring the night sky - Pinwheel galaxy - Holmes and Tuttle and other sights that came to mind - suddenly as I am gazing towards Pegasus the whole site behind me lit up with a warm bright glow that enveloped me from behind - I looked up and directly above me a ball of electric green shot through the sky towards the west - I felt as if I needed to duck below it - no sound - its passage rapid - blink and gone - the experience stayed with me for some time - its size, colour, and speed, the energy it created in me - how it turned night into day for only a moment - amazing! Time Jan 5th 2008 21:09, place Sleaford observatory.

## Report by Kathleen Houston:

I had a great observing new year's session out at Sleaford, on balmy January 5. My observation of M77 was a nice find that brings my total up to 85. I believe my first Messier addition for some months. I brought out my friend Shirley (who won the binoculars at SSSP!) and Rick of course. Ron and Norma were out there too...expected more RASC members, but hey we had a blast! The fireball was quite an event...unfortunately Rick and I were in the warm up shelter when it happened!



## ... And Again, January 21, 2008

by Garry Stone

We were traveling straight south on 219 highway, about 3 miles north of the correction line [Hanley Grid #764] when the fireball showed up about three inches below the top of the windshield at about 190 degrees azimuth. It went behind the left edge of the rear-view mirror and brightened and widened considerably and then faded somewhat and then burst into several fragments. Myrna recalls that one of the fragments was a lot larger than the others. I estimated that the burst happened about 7 degrees above the horizon at an azimuth of 230 degrees approx. It is fairly level land there, although the trees about a quarter of a mile away may give a slightly elevated horizon. That is basically what we saw at 10:40 pm. Jan 21/08.

*[Velma and I were traveling home from the Centre meeting in Saskatoon, about 2 km behind Garry and Myrna, and we saw it too. I barely caught a glimpse of it as it emerged from behind the rear-view mirror, but Velma had a good view, though she says she did not see the breakup into fragments. It must have been bright for it was full moon that night.] - Editor*

# Eclipse, a Hit at U of S Observatory

by Ron Waldron

Over 200 people visited the U of S Observatory on Wednesday evening, February 20th the night of the Lunar Eclipse. Several members Barb Wright, Bill Hydomako, myself and others set up our telescopes in the parking lot area adjacent to the observatory. At around 8:00 PM the crowds really started to arrive.



*Start of Eclipse*

It was so busy during totality that none of us could leave our scopes to go inside and warm our feet. Those of us who dressed properly managed okay, others were heard to suffer considerably (did I mention bus driver Chris Martin?)

Overall it was a great experience for those in attendance and for those of us hosting the views. Our only regret was that none of us had pamphlets promoting the RASC to handout - a missed opportunity.

Totality came as anticipated and skies remained clear much to the delight of all in attendance. Many people stood in line for over 40 minutes to view through

*Photos by Bob Johnson Taken with my Olympus digital camera and 12" Orion Intelliscope. Took about 200 shots of the Eclipse but only found a couple with the nice blue/turquoise tint caused by the Earth's ozone layer, which scatters or blocks the reds which makes the light getting through to the Moon's surface bluer, very cool. [quoted from <http://www.skyandtelescope.com> where Bob submitted one of his pictures]*



*Almost Totality*

binoculars were also being used.

Almost without exception the public were heard to say that we had the shortest lines and the best views. My best explanation was that the combination of wide field and low power always gives the best views of a lunar eclipse.

the 6" refractor telescope. On the way out they stopped at the RASC telescopes where tripod mounted



*Photo: By Tenho Tuomi A picture every 30 minutes.*



*Total Lunar Eclipse*

## To Make a Charitable donation to RASC Saskatoon Centre

write a cheque out to RASC and place on the bottom that the donation is to the Saskatoon centre - a tax receipt will be issued in December of that year. Mail or give to the current treasurer.

# Observatory Visitors

by Garry Stone

In November of 07 while having my dental checkup and cleaning [between scraping, suctioning and polishing and x-rays] I mentioned that I had an observatory and would be glad to have Janine, the hygienist come out and view the sky. Later, January 12/08 she phoned and asked to come as her sister Brittany was visiting--luckily it was clear so they came around 7:30 p.m.

I was able to show several objects; the Ring nebula M57, M81 and M82 galaxies, Mars and a four day old moon, the Orion nebula M42, the Pleiades M45, etc. Comet Holmes was barely visible to the naked eye but we saw it as well.

All in all, and in spite of the cold [Brittany's feet were the only victims] we had fun and it was a pleasure for me -- the girls were so enthusiastic and interested in it all. I will see that the dental clinic gets a copy of our newsletter from now on, and I promise to keep on flossing!!

Report by Janine:

Garry had told me a little bit about the observatory he built himself on his farm. I knew that it was something my younger sister Brittany [2nd year environmental engineering student at U of R] would love to see. So when she came to Outlook for a weekend visit I knew I wanted to take Garry up on his invitation to come out to his place and see his setup. We didn't really know what to expect, but I can say we were very impressed and enjoyed our time there very much. The actual observatory itself was impressive; the detailed workings and the precision of it and his telescope. We were able to see things that we had only seen in pictures or didn't even know existed! It was impossible not to get excited about the things Garry was showing us because his excitement and passion was contagious. But the one thing that really struck me was how little I really knew about our galaxy! I left more knowledgeable and with a greater appreciation for everything overhead! Thanks Garry!

# Beautiful Meissa

by Mike Clancy

While wandering around the acreage over the Family Day holiday, I happened to think what a fine sight the Betelgeuse-Bellatrix pairing were in Orion; the two form the "shoulders" of the celestial giant. Of course we know about the "belt" stars and the Orion Nebula in Orion's Scabbard, but what of his head? This is formed by the grouping of stars anchored by the blue spectral type O giant Meissa; it has an apparent magnitude of ~ 3.4 and is one of the most luminous stars known, as taken from Wikipedia's on-line list of most luminous stars. It gets its name from the Arabic word "Al-Maisan", meaning "The Shining One" but you'll find it in the star charts as Lambda Orionis.

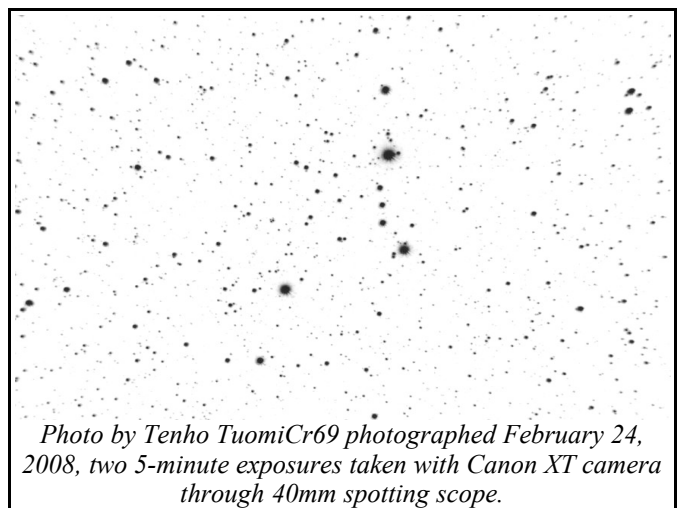
It is part of the Collinder 69 (Cr69) open cluster which forms a chain of 4 prominent stars that for all intents and purposes looks like a lawn chair facing Betelgeuse. The three brighter stars of Cr69 can be seen naked-eye between Orion's shoulders and slightly above it. In my binoculars it looks quite pretty but I can't distinguish the binary nature of Meissa. It is paired with a magnitude 6 blue-white dwarf approximately 4.4 arc-seconds away from the brighter star. I also could not distinguish the gaseous ring. In fact, I didn't know the ring existed until I began researching this article and found a picture,

[www.daviddarling.info/encyclopedia/M/Meissa.html](http://www.daviddarling.info/encyclopedia/M/Meissa.html)

on the net! Apparently Meissa is most-famed for this

huge surrounding ring of gas (an amazing 150 light years across) that is ionized by the star. As this star is one of the more luminous in the heavens and is illuminating such a large cloud, it shows the immense power of these rare hot class O stars. This picture shows Betelgeuse to the lower left and Bellatrix to the lower right; you can just make out NGC 2022 as a faint annular ring about midway between Betelgeuse and Meissa.

So, when next you're gazing at all the celestial wonders surrounding our hunter giant, spare a thought for the stars that form his head and bend your wandering eye to beautiful Meissa; I know I'm glad I did!



*Photo by Tenho Tuomi Cr69 photographed February 24, 2008, two 5-minute exposures taken with Canon XT camera through 40mm spotting scope.*

# National News - March 2008

by Les Dickson, National Council Representative

The next National Council Meeting will be held in Mississauga on Sunday, March 30.

The most pressing problem to be considered at the meeting is the RASC's response to recent changes in the Canadian Income Tax Act as it applies to registered charities and donations. These changes were made in response to the September 11 and the Air India attacks. It's intention is to crack down on those registered charities that raise money for apparently legitimate purposes then transfer those monies to terrorist organizations. The changes to the Income Tax Act came into effect in 2004, but now the Canadian Revenue Agency has started to crack down on those organizations that have continued to work under the old rules. The National RASC has been caught up in these changes. The changes in the act affect any transfers of monies from National's bank accounts to the Centres.

Below is a summary of the issues regarding these changes in the Act as they pertain to the RASC:

- \* The law no longer permits registered charities to transfer money to organizations that are not also registered charities (most Centres), except under certain conditions.

- \* There is the expectation that National Society-controlled funds transferred to Centres that are also registered charities will be used for charitable purposes.

- \* National cannot receive donations directed to a Centre that is not also a registered charity, issue receipts

for income tax purposes, and forward that donation to the Centre. Donations directed to a Centre must be made directly to a Centre and that Centre must issue its own tax receipts.

- \* Annual Life Member transfers to Centres are affected by these changes; for now, National is withholding these transfers to Centres until a long-term fix can be developed.

- \* Centre Project Fund Grants have to be put on hold until a suitable method can be found to transfer monies to non-registered Centres.

- \* For now, these changes do not affect transfers of the Centre's portion of membership and surcharge fees that National collects on behalf of the Centres, however National has been advised to establish legal agreements between itself and each Centre to clearly document that the National Society is acting as an agent for the Centres when collecting and transferring Centre membership fees and surcharges.

National has received expert legal advice on these changes and has been advised to make changes in how it operates to protect the National Society's charitable status. National also advises all Centres to review these recent changes in the act to ensure that they are also operating within the requirements of the law.

These changes and the response of the National Executive have generated a great deal of heated debate in the Centres and Council e-mail lists. We can only hope that cooler heads prevail at the Council meeting March 30.

## Observer's Group Notes

by Larry Scott

Foiled again. Observers Group for February 1st was cancelled due to weather conditions. Back up date of February 2nd cancelled due to weather conditions.

Out of sheer desperation Norma and I went out to Sleaford on Tuesday, February 5th just to check out the site. Conditions were average with the forecast calling for increasing cloud near midnight. More on that later. We got to Sleaford about 19:30 to find the yard completely socked in with snow about two feet deep with the occasional concrete drift. As we couldn't drive in and didn't want to carry our scopes through the snowbanks, we decided to open the U. of S. roll-off and use the club's 16". After about an hour of chipping out the ice around the west end of the roof we finally got some observing in. Had a quick look at the Orion Nebula and Flame Nebula before the clouds rolled in about three hours ahead of schedule. Just one of those nights.

Undaunted, I'm looking forward to dark skies from about March 24th till April 6th. This will include a Messier Marathon Warm-Up on March 29th and The Messier Marathon on April 5th. We'll have lists for those of you who want to take a run at the Marathon. (Sorry, couldn't stop myself.) Don't forget to wear all of your clothes, boots, mitts, hats, etc. If you're not interested in the Marathon it's still a great time to get out and look through some scopes. If the weather is good we should have more than a dozen scopes set up.

And what do we do on all those "cancelled due to weather conditions" nights. We go to:

<http://www.cloudynights.com>

of course. This site has equipment reviews, how to's, tips, free star charts, articles, forums, classifieds, etc., etc. These guys will keep you going on those long, cold starless nights.

See you at Sleaford.



# The Planets This Month, March 2008

by Murray D. Paulson, Edmonton Centre

March starts off with **Mercury** in greatest western elongation on March 3rd, but it sits very close to the southeast horizon due to the shallow ecliptic of spring's morning sky. Unless you have a very good eastern horizon, you probably will not see either Mercury at magnitude 0.1 or Venus at magnitude -3.9 in the sunrise glare. When the sun rises just after 7 am, these planets are only 5 degrees off the horizon despite the near maximum 27 degrees of elongation for Mercury. In the eyepiece, Mercury will show you a 7.1" half disk. Mercury brightens slowly over the month and by month's end will be at magnitude -0.6 and will show you a very gibbous 5.2" disk. At this time it will also sit much higher in our sky, so your chances of finding it in a day time scope is much improved.

**Venus** starts off the month chasing Mercury and at Magnitude -3.9 is much more visible as it cruises along the morning horizon. In the eyepiece, it is a 11.2" very gibbous disk. It is a nice comparison to check out Mercury and Venus in a telescope when they are on the far side of the sun. Try it later on in March when Mercury is brighter and the pair is higher. Venus will shrink slightly to 11.0" by then.

**Mars** is starting to get small in the eyepiece. You can still see major features and the polar cap/hood, but it takes a session with steady seeing. At the beginning of March, Mars shines at magnitude 0.2 and has an 8.9" gibbous disk. It sits in the horns of the bull. As the month progresses, it will fade from prominence and join Betelgeuse and Aldebaran as another red ember in the night sky. At this time, it will shine at magnitude 0.8 and shows a 6.9" gibbous disk in the eyepiece. It now has moved back into Gemini. On March 14 you can watch a first quarter moon pass 56 minutes of arc above Mars. If you miss it, in one month's time, Lunar month that is, you can watch a closer repeat performance when a first quarter moon passes only 8

minutes of arc above Mars. This happens on April 11 with closest approach at 10:51 p.m. local time. Get the camera gear out!

I finally have spotted **Jupiter** low in the south in the morning sky. At the beginning of March Jupiter sits in eastern Sagittarius. It shines at magnitude -1.8 and will show a 34" disk in the eyepiece. At the beginning of the month, it rises at 5 am, and by month's end it will rise just after 3 am. Jupiter southerly location will make it hard to get over the next while, but it will be favourably placed by the summer star parties. Stay tuned.

**Saturn** is the big show now, and it is striking in the eyepiece. The low angle of the rings really catches your attention the first time you see it this apparition. At magnitude 0.2 it is the brightest thing in Leo and is located just below and roughly 4 degrees east of Regulus. It was a delight watching the lunar eclipse and seeing the very symmetric isosceles triangle it made with Regulus and the moon. In the eyepiece you will see a 20.1" disk with a sprinkling of tiny moons. Saturn is well placed for viewing over most of the night and crests out at 48 degrees altitude when it transits the meridian. In my last observing session, I could note the darkening of the "C" ring on the ball of the planet, which give the impression of a shadow

just above the rings, [Newtonian view]. The shallower angle of the rings makes the "C" ring more obvious in the ansae of the rings. If you haven't seen the "C" ring before, this is a good apparition to see it. Use lots of magnification, and look for the ghostly ring just inside the ansae of the rings. It is not obvious at all! By the beginning of April, Saturn will fade slightly to magnitude 0.3 and in the eyepiece it will show a disk of 19.5". The Handbook has a locator chart to find the rings on any particular night, or check out your favourite software to identify them.



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| <u>Sandy Ferguson</u>     | <u>23</u>  |
| <u>Mike Oosterlaken</u>   | <u>20</u>  |
| <u>George Charpentier</u> | <u>13</u>  |
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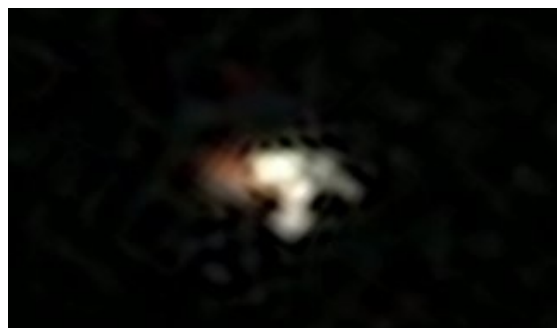
The Messier & Finest NGC lists can be found in the Observer's Handbook. The Explore the Universe list is available on the National web site. The Herschel 400 list is available at the web site listed below. The Binocular List will be available at each general meeting or can be mailed out on request to distant members.

On-line Messier and Finest NGC lists, charts and logbooks - check out:

<http://www.rasc.ca/observe.htm>

On-line Herschel 400 List - check out the official site at:

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



*Picture of ISS with Atlantis shuttle docked - taken Feb 9, 2008 at 7:53 p.m. CST. Konica Minolta camera afocal with 25mm eyepiece on Celestron C-8 telescope. Hand guided using Telrad finder. 1/800 sec at f/2.8. Temperature minus 29 C.*

*Photo: By Garry Stone*

## Contest for the 2009 GA/SSSP

**by Barb Wright**

Saskatoon Centre has begun planning for the August 2009 GA/SSSP. We are in need of a slogan to promote this event.

This is the first time a General Assembly is being held in coordination with a star party, plus it is happening in International Year of Astronomy. We need a phrase to convey all this. The central theme of IYA is "The Universe, Yours to Discover".

Please submit your ideas to Barb Wright [wrightb@sasktel.net](mailto:wrightb@sasktel.net) or by the next meeting. If the planning committee chooses your idea, I will sew an observing hood, custom made just for you!