

Saskatoon Skies

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



FINEST NGC OBJECT

The Finest NGC list includes many fine objects. One of them is NGC 891, a large edge-on spiral galaxy in Andromeda with a faint dust lane along its equator. It was discovered by William Herschel in 1784. Al Hartridge imaged this galaxy last autumn and has shown this remarkable picture of it to us at some of our meetings. His details were, "Luminance 10x8 min, Red 5x8min, Green 5x8 min and Blue 5x8 min. Had to flip camera and use a brighter guide star to do color frames. Should have repeated Luminance in this position but ran out of time. After combining barely enough sky left to crop photo".

Photo by Al Hartridge



Saskatoon Centre

The Royal Astronomical Society of Canada

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ASTRONOMY WITH AN AUDIENCE

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://homepage.usask.ca/ges125/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.*

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

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 <ttuomi@yourlink.ca>.** **Please send articles in “generic” formats with simple formatting.** 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

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
June 6	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
Jun 27 - Jul 1	RASC General Assembly (Toronto)	http://www.rasc.ca/ga2008/index.shtml	
July 4-6	RASC Star-B-Q, Eccles Ranch Observatory, Caroline, AB	http://calgary.rasc.ca/starbq2008.htm	
Aug 2-10	Mt. Kobau Star Party, Osoyoos, BC	http://www.mksp.ca/index.html	
Aug 28-31	Saskatchewan Summer Star Party, Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park	Barb Wright	249-1990
Sep 2-7	Northern Prairie Starfest, Black Nugget Lake, Toffield, AB	http://www.edmontonrasc.com/nps.html	
Sep 25-28	Alberta Star Party, Starland Recreation Area Campground, Drumheller, AB	http://www.calgary.rasc.ca/asp2008.htm	

Minutes of the Executive Meeting, March 17, 2008 by Al Hartridge

1. Meeting called to order at 6:30 p.m.
2. Approval of the minutes of the previous meeting. Moved by Les Dickson, seconded by Jim Young and carried.
3. Financial report: the numbers were distributed by Norma Jensen. She suggests we get busy and start spending on the proposed changes at Sleaford before costs increase too much. Adoption of the financial report was moved by Norma Jensen, seconded by Ellen Dickson and carried.
4. National Report: Individual centres are not charitable organizations and cannot receive tax free donations from National or other organizations and cannot issue tax receipts to people or organizations. National will no longer be allowed to subsidize members by sales of products, e.g. The Observer's Handbook. This means members will likely have to pay more for fees.
5. Display board: Sharon Hartridge was given permission to use the centre's display board for a weekend to support Seniors Fitness and Badminton. Moved by Ellen Dickson, seconded by Norma Jensen and carried.
6. Meeting adjourned at 6:30 p.m.

Minutes of the General Meeting, March 17, 2008 by Al Hartridge

1. Meeting called to order at 7:38 p.m.
2. Approval of the minutes of the previous meeting. Moved by Mike Clancy, seconded by Jim Young and carried.
3. Observers group: Larry was out at the site on March 9th and the area had been plowed and was in good shape. March 29 will be the warm up and April 5th will be the night of the Messier Marathon.
4. Light Pollution: Rick says his committee is making excellent progress with their efforts.
5. Newsletter: this month's deadline will be March 31
6. National report: Les Dickson says that income tax changes will effect charitable organization's functions. The RASC centres will not be able to issue tax receipts. This is likely to affect fundraising efforts and donations to centres. This will also affect fee subsidization by National and our fees will increase.
7. Bylaw Amendments: a list of bylaw changes was handed out by Jim Gorkoff for approval. A motion was made by Jim Gorkoff that the amended bylaws pursuant to changes discussed and proposed be adopted. This was seconded by Mike Clancy and carried.
8. Sleaford: the possibility of taking the Patterson dome down and erecting a new observatory in its place was discussed.
9. SSSP: Barb Wright is requesting ideas for a slogan for the upcoming GA in Cypress Hills in 2008. Barb says a speaker for the Father Lucien lecture has been lined up.
10. Membership: there are 84 members at present.
11. Meeting adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

MONDAY, APRIL 21 7:30 PM ROOM 175, U OF S

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

Seeing in the Dark by Timothy Ferris 50 minute DVD presented by Ron Waldron. It explores the delights and rewards of amateur astronomy and chronicles the contributions that amateurs are making to the science and art of astronomy.



BOOKS FOR SALE

All items will be available at our next meeting or call 249-1119, or email breeves@sasktel.net
Prices in bold indicate a new, reduced price!

Title	Author	#Avail	Price
RASC 2007	RASC	3	\$5.00
Skywatcher's 08	S. Shadick	3	\$12.00
Skywatcher's 07	S. Shadick	6	\$5.00
Skywatcher's 06	S. Shadick	1	\$2.00
Books			
The Backyard Astronomer's Guide	Dickinson & Dyer	2	\$40.00
The Beginner's Observer's Guide	L. Enright	3	\$19.00
Observer's Handbook 2006	RASC	5	\$5.00
Observer's Handbook 2005	RASC	1	\$2.00
Practical Astronomy	S. Dunlop	3	\$14.00
Summer Stargazing	T. Dickinson	5	\$18.00
Celestial Sampler	S. French	2	\$26.00
Firefly Astronomy Dictionary	Firefly	3	\$14.00
Firefly Planisphere	Firefly	1	\$19.00
Night Sky Atlas	R. Scagell	3	\$24.00
Stargazing with a Telescope	R. Scagell	2	\$14.00
Beautiful Universe	Sky & Telescope	1	\$12.00
There Once was a Sky Full of Stars	B. Crelin & A. Ziner	9	\$10.00
Space 50 Years and Counting	Sky & Telescope	2	\$13.00
The Moon Observer's Guide	P. Grego	4	\$14.00
Isabelle Williamson Lunar Observing Program	RASC	7	\$10.00
The Sun Observer's Guide	T. Spence	3	\$14.00
Moon Map (laminated)	Sky & Telescope	7	\$6.50
Field Map of the Moon	Sky & Telescope	8	\$12.50

Title	Author	#Avail	Price
Books			
Lunar 100 Card	Sky & Telescope	1	\$10.00
Mars Observer's Guide	N. Bone	2	\$14.00
Deep Sky Observer's Guide	N. Bone	1	\$14.00
Stars	Zim, Baker & Chartrand	1	\$10.00
Exploring the Night Sky	T. Dickinson	11	\$9.50
Exploring the Sky by Day	T. Dickinson	10	\$9.50
Patterns in the Sky	K. Hewitt-White	4	\$16.00
Pocket Sky Atlas	R. Sinnott	2	\$24.50
Binocular Highlights	G. Seronik	2	\$20.00
Night Sky Star Wheel	Sky Publishing	1	\$15.00
S&T Star Wheel	Sky & Telescope	1	\$19.00
Messier Card (not laminated)	Sky & Telescope	9	\$5.00
Deep-Sky Wonders	W. Houston	2	\$24.50
The Messier Objects	S.J. O'Meara	1	\$39.00
Scientific American Book of the Cosmos	D.H. Levy	1	\$48.00
Skyways – Astronomy Handbook for Teachers	M.L. Whitehorne	1	\$16.00
Saskatoon's Stone	Mysyk & Kulyk	10	\$3.00
On the Moon	P. Moore	2	\$27.00
On Mars	P. Moore	1	\$25.00

Miscellaneous

RASC Centennial Mug		2	\$5.00
RASC Stickers, blue or white		lots	\$1.00
SSSP 2001 Pin (Summer Triangle)		13	\$2.00
SSSP 2002 Pin (Comet)		24	\$2.00
SSSP 2006 Pin (10)		46	\$4.00
SSSP 2007 Pin (DSP)		35	\$5.00



Photo by Bob Johnson (also on Sky and Telescope website) Taken with Canon 40D, February 19, 2008. When I was outside I noticed a solar halo starting to form, by the time I got my camera ready and set up just outside the city, 30 mins, it had formed into a 360 halo with beautiful colors.

Astronomy Night in Canada

By Katrina Ince-Lum

The 2008 General Assembly of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada will be held in Toronto at York University, Keele Campus, from June 27 to July 1, 2008.

This year's General Assembly (GA) will be co-hosted by the Hamilton, Mississauga and Toronto Centres along with the Department of Physics and Astronomy at York University. These Centres would like to invite members from across the country to join them for the GA, and to help them celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Hamilton Centre, the 140th anniversary of the Toronto Centre and the 2nd anniversary of the Mississauga Centre. The GA will also serve as a launchpad and forum for the exciting events and programs that will highlight astronomy in Canada and around the world in 2009 during the **International Year of Astronomy**. The theme of this year's GA is "Astronomy Night in Canada" and the schedule will feature many entertaining mash-ups between hockey and astronomy!"

We are very fortunate to have an excellent line up for the GA. Speakers so far include:

- **Dr. Phil Plait** an internationally renowned astronomer, author, and lecturer. His numerous appearances on radio, television, podcasts, and in front of audiences have made him a celebrity in science circles, and put him in demand as an expert on astronomical matters. Dr. Plait will be giving the Helen Sawyer Hogg lecture this year, as well as talking to the Society about dealing with the public about the International Year of Astronomy.
- **Dr. James Hesser** Director of the Dominion Astrophysical Observatory in Victoria, BC. His research applies ground and space-based facilities, like the Canada-France-Hawaii Telescope and the Hubble Space Telescope, to questions concerning the history of how the Milky Way and other galaxies formed and have evolved, with particular emphasis on the oldest stars and on clusters of stars. He joins us at the 2008 General Assembly in his role as Canada's national representative for the International Year of Astronomy.
- **Terence Dickinson** editor of SkyNews since the magazine's first issue in 1995. He has been involved in astronomy full-time since 1967 as a writer, an editor, a teacher and a broadcaster and will celebrate his 50th anniversary as a member of the Society at the 2008 General Assembly.
- **Scott Young** the Society's National President. An accomplished science educator, Director of the Planetarium at the Manitoba Museum and speaker. Scott will be speaking at the closing banquet of the 2008 General Assembly setting forth his vision for the Society as we enter the International Year of Astronomy.

Friday is tour day at the GA. In the afternoon, we plan to visit MacDonald, Dettwiler and Associates Ltd. (MDA) Plan to arrive

early for the General Assembly and get a firsthand look at Canada's role in space exploration. The creators of Canadarm I and II, components for the Mars Phoenix Lander and other space hardware, along with the Dextre Manipulator System launched aboard STS-123 and transferred to the International Space Station in March 2008. The Space Missions division of MDA hosts a special tour of their facilities for RASC delegates.

Later that day, will be the **Toronto Telescope Tour**. Transportation will be provided to dinner at a deli situated between two of Toronto's telescope stores, Efston Science and Kahnscope Centre. There will be time to eat (members from Montreal can critique Toronto smoked meat sandwiches!), and shop.

These tours have limited capacity, so book early.

There will be two banquets during the GA. On Sunday June 29, the Hamilton Centre will be celebrating its centenary at the Ontario Science Centre, with an early arrival planned to view the exciting new exhibit "Facing Mars". On Monday, the Toronto Centre hosts the closing banquet following the Helen Sawyer Hogg lecture.

GA's are not usually renowned for the observing, especially in an urban environment. However, the Department of Physics and Astronomy's observatory will be accessible during the evenings at the GA, weather permitting. If on vacation, there is much to do in Toronto during the summer months for members and their families. There is a TTC (Toronto Transit Commission) bus stop within short walking distance of the Vanier residence building, which provides public transportation to Downsview subway station, and to downtown Toronto and all its attractions.

There will be many opportunities to talk about how to best celebrate the International Year of Astronomy in 2009, including a panel session on Saturday morning, lead by Dr. Hesser.

After the official ceremonies have ended, plan to stay in Toronto for an extra day or two and spend Canada Day at the Toronto Centre's E.C. Carr Astronomical Observatory (CAO), one of the best amateur observatories in Canada, located on the beautiful Niagara Escarpment overlooking Georgian Bay. Come and see it for yourself.

Mark your calendars and make your plans to attend, to renew friendships, and meet members from all Centres across the country.

Registration is now open and early bird registration ends April 30. Please visit www.rasc.ca/ga2008 for more information, to register and to apply to present a paper session. Check back regularly for updates as more information becomes available.

Come and join us for the opening face-off on 2008 June 28!

Public Star Nights, What to Show and Not to Show

[With permission, from recent RASCALs lists]

It is my opinion that public star parties should only show people the Moon, Jupiter and/or Saturn and NO OTHER OBJECTS. First impressions count for a lot, and those are the only three objects in the sky which have a chance to live up to expectations. There will be folks who want more, but unless you have a *really* big scope and a dark sky, you're doing a disservice to show them M31 or M51. It's better to give everyone a good first experience and then "reel in" those who want to see more.

Scott's Top Ten ways to turn young people off astronomy: (There were more than 10, actually, but tradition dictates a top ten list. You'll have to imagine it being read by Letterman.)

10. Show them a deep-sky object in a small or medium-sized scope as their first look.

9. Bash the Tasco they already own as not worth using.

8. Lapse into jargon and spew technical details and costs of your gear, and how you need to have perfect gear and perfect conditions or it's not worth observing.

7. Rant about light pollution without a good idea of what to say. (This can make astronomers sound like fringe environmentalists.)

6. Spend time talking with the inner circle at a Centre meeting and ignore the newbies.

5. Explain how using a computer-aided telescope isn't "real" astronomy.

4. Assume that the newbie at the public star night will see the same level of detail that your 35-years-of-experience-eyes can see.

3. Show them Venus, Mercury, an asteroid, an outer planet or dwarf planet, a double star, a variable star, a planetary nebula, a galaxy, a star cluster, or about any northern-hemisphere deep-sky object other than the

Orion Nebula.

2. Show them Mars, EXCEPT at a favourable opposition in a big scope with good seeing and a red filter. (Probably not even then.)

1. Mock their misconceptions or beliefs about the universe the first time you meet them (and they meet you).

Scott Young

Don't overlook Venus when it is favorably placed in the evening sky and less than 50% illuminated. Unfortunately that window is open only one month out of eighteen and won't happen this year, but last year I enjoyed one of my best public star nights in June from within the city of Prince Albert with Venus as the star attraction. It was easy to pick out even before the sun set and pleased the crowd until it got dark enough to see Saturn, and Jupiter arose.

Tenho Tuomi



Photo by Bob Johnson (also on Sky and Telescope website) Taken with Canon 40D, February 12, 2008. Was outside with my camera when I happened to notice Sundogs and then a Solar halo starting to form, had lots of Cirrus clouds and -25c temperature, ideal conditions for the formation of these phenomenon.

An excellent list, Scott, should be required reading for one and all who are involved in public education in astronomy. As one who has been doing public outreach from a light-polluted Observatory site for over 20 years, I have long maintained that even one of the "Big Three" in the sky is all we need for a successful evening. However, I disagree that these are the only objects worth showing, and submit the following top ten list of my own (not including temporary delights like comets,

eclipses, aurorae, conjunctions, "objects in the news", perihelic oppositions of Mars, etc.):

cont.

Bruce's Top Ten telescopic targets for public star parties:

10. Albireo; or any easily resolved double star of two bright components, the more colourful the better (Izar, Ras Algethi, Almach, Algieba, Mizar, Castor, etc.)

9. Epsilon Lyrae, the "Double Double"; kids particularly are delighted when they suddenly split the "two" stars into two pairs. Tim Horton's jokes are unnecessary, the public will provide them.

8. M13, the Great Hercules Star Cluster; requires nautical twilight and as large optics as you got, but this beauty frequently draws an involuntary gasp of wonder. I always advise "Take your time, the longer you look the more you'll see ..."

7. M57, the Ring Nebula; same requirements, needs to be introduced as "challenging but worth it". People love its smoke ring appearance, its status as a "dying star" and the connection to the fate of the Sun.

6. M42, the Great Orion Nebula; two for the price of one, a bright(ish) nebula and a multiple star system. I will often have two eyepieces at the ready, one with an O III and one unfiltered for comparison

5. Venus in daytime; always a pleasant surprise. I agree with Tenho that crescent Venus draws a much more favourable reaction than gibbous, whether in the evening or (more accessible) day time sky. Near elongation kids enjoy the naked-eye challenge; let them use the scope as a guide where to look.

4. Jupiter and the Galilean moons; requires civil twilight

for the public to easily see the moons, with which they are frequently fascinated. A shadow transit is always a bonus, the Great Red Spot on the other hand is only for keeners unless it's particularly prominent.

3. The Moon; the closest and most detailed object in sky is fascinating to the first-time viewer, esp. the area near the terminator. A set of neutral density filters or a variable polarizer is a must past first quarter.

2. The Sun in hydrogen alpha; a white-light view is a distant second best, while a combination of the two is a sure-fire winner. For h-alpha a dark cloth is a very useful accessory and people don't mind as long as you tell them it's coming and why.

1. Saturn; but you knew that already. Its "impossibly" perfect form frequently elicits a humorous accusation that people are seeing a photograph or some sort of fake. More frequently still, it elicits a gasp of pure delight.

... and I never even mentioned M45, the Pleiades, a showpiece open cluster which is great in mounted binoculars or, in a pinch, a good finder. On the other hand, unless your event is at a dark site, galaxies are likely to disappoint, even and especially our own glorious Milky Way. But when people ask, that's the ideal time to unleash the light pollution rant. :)

Bruce McCurdy

[McCurdy didn't mention the Perseus Double Cluster, a favorite of some of us, and visible mostly any time of the year] Ed.

Why We Do What We Do

by Jeff Swick (reprinted from the rascstoon list)

So last night I'm sitting comfortably in the house watching the overtime in the hockey game and I noticed it was time to head out to meet my commitment with Ron who was teaching a course at Queen Elizabeth. I grumbled to myself about missing the hockey game and was getting set up in the parking lot when I heard a herd of children running full tilt for my scope.

A high cloud and a very bright moon meant that our viewing choices would be limitedand damn I was missing the game.

As soon as the first child climbed the step to my scope and saw Saturn for the first time and let out a gasp all of my misgivings and grumbling about the hockey game disappeared.....child after child gasped in astonishment

and when I pointed out Titan and explained that a spacecraft from earth had landed on that little point of light the questions came fast and furious, even the adults in the groups were delighted.

I spend all day talking with people so sometimes I'm a little jaded with people by the end of a day and like to spend time by myself but man.....when you get that exclamation of wonderment and delight from a child.....it is SO all worth the small effort.

Thanks Ron for getting me out with your class, there is more to astronomy than sitting in the dark sailing the skies by yourself.

The Night the Sky Lit Up, January 5, 2008 (Correction)

[Our apologies to Ron Waldron for omitting most of his fireball report in the March newsletter. Here is Ron's full story for you to enjoy.]

As avid observers of the night sky, we have become accustomed to expecting the unexpected. Sometimes its 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.

Now I have witnessed well over 500 meteors in my lifetime but nothing could prepare me for this one. As it moved it began to glow an iridescent green color and was gaining brightness very rapidly. It became so bright that I found myself having to look away at the snow on the ground. The snow had brightened to the point that all three of our shadows were clearly visible and the entire landscape appeared lit as if by a full moon. I still

had time to look back where I watched it fade into the darkness in the southwest near Pegasus.

I estimated its magnitude to be at least -15 and its duration approximately 4 seconds.

After it disappeared I felt the urge to yell and scream (not something I normally do) and you would have to check with the others what I might have said although I'm relatively certain it did not include any expletives.

I do remember saying - "I can go home now" as nothing could possibly top what we just saw. Gaining my composure I looked at my watch and made note of the time.

I have since learned that the "fireball" was caught on video by an all sky camera mounted on the roof of the Physics building at the U of S. The camera was built by and is operated by our own Gord Sarty. This video can be seen on our Yahoo site.

Looking back on the event, I would say that this meteor easily ranks in the top three of anything I have ever seen. The only one that may have been better was when I was a teen and it lit the summer sky and left a smoke trail hanging in the sky for about 30 seconds following the event.

As an amateur astronomer it feels like we were rewarded that night for our steadfast devotion to watching the night skies. I only hope that there will be more to come in future observing sessions.

Observer's Group Notes

by Larry Scott

Let me know if you've heard this one before... "Observers group for March 1st was cancelled due to weather conditions." On the other hand I did get out to Sleaford on March 5, 9, 26 and 30. A quick review of my logbook revealed: a close conjunction of M35 and Mars, tried out Norma's new eyepieces, a visit by some new members (welcome to Sleaford), congratulations to Brent B. on finishing his Messier list, wind, clouds, and some awesome views of Saturn in exceptionally steady skies. Not a bad month after all.

April's dark sky period starts around the 22nd, with the Observers Group scheduled for the 25th, or the first clear night after that. I highly recommend getting out and

looking at Saturn this spring. You don't have to wait for dark skies and it will be many years before Saturn is this high in the sky again for us.

I know most of you will have been to this website, but just in case you haven't, you've got to check out <http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/astropix.html> every day. Very cool pictures and you could spend a week going through their archives.

See you at Sleaford.

The Planets This Month, April 2008

by Murray D. Paulson, Edmonton Centre

The month of April starts off with the "big thaw". The ice, snow and the dark of the night are all swept up in this spring thaw. The dark of the night is not gone yet!

Mercury will soon be in the arms of the sun, coming to conjunction on April 16th. It passes behind the sun and 23 minutes of arc directly below at 2:24 am on that morning. From this date onward it moves into the evening sky, culminating at greatest eastern elongation on May 13th. It may be placed well enough for International Astronomy days. Let's hope! On the 13th of May, Mercury will shine at magnitude 0.4, and subtend 8". It is at dichotomy on May 9th with a 7.4" half disk and shines at magnitude 0.1. This will be a good time to hunt for Mercury in the daytime. It will sit 21 degrees away from the sun.

Venus sits 16 degrees from the sun at the beginning of the month in the morning sky and shines at magnitude -3.8. The ecliptic sets things up so that Venus rises only 13 minutes prior to the sun, so you may be able to find it in the twilight glare just prior to sunrise, but it may be easier to find it in the daytime with coordinates or a computer! As the month progresses, Venus falls slowly toward the sun. By the first week of May, it will sit only 8.8 degrees from the sun. In the eyepiece, it will show you a 9.8" very gibbous disk and it shines at magnitude -3.8. This will be another good daytime object for International Astronomy days, but watch that the scope cannot be bumped to the sun!

I have looked at **Mars** recently, and even though it has just a 6.7" gibbous disk, when the seeing is good, you can see the polar cap and some dark markings. But the seeing must be very good! I got a few nights at the end of March that were very good indeed. Mars starts out the month in the midst of Gemini shining at magnitude 0.9. It moves into Cancer in early May and now has dimmed to magnitude 1.2 and shows a 5.6" disk.

Jupiter sits in eastern Sagittarius and shines brightly in the morning sky to the south. At the beginning of the month, Jupiter shows a magnitude -2.1, 38" disk in the eyepiece. It rises 3 hours before the sun, and sits only 11 degrees above the horizon in the hour before sunrise. By early May, the twilight problem has chased Jupiter up the ecliptic. Jupiter rises 2:00 am, but still only 3.5 hours before the sun. Jupiter will show you a 43" disk and shines at magnitude -2.4 at this time. The early hour plus the closeness to the horizon will make it a hard

choice to observe.

Saturn is the darling of the evening, showing its splendid rings and a lovely array of moons. I keep hunting for Enceladus and Mimas when we have favorable elongations. The rest of the moons are easy! (except Hyperion) Mimas has eluded me in my 10" cassegrain, but Enceladus has shown up as an almost imperceptible speck of light just off the ring tip. I have found that I need my 15 or 24 Panoptic to see it. [200 X, 125X] Much higher power and the moon just does not appear. In early April, Saturn shines at magnitude 0.4 and will show you a 19.4" disk in the eyepiece. Over the month, we move away from Saturn, and it will shrink slightly in size, and by the first week of next month, Saturn will show you an 18.5" disk in the eyepiece and will shine at magnitude 0.5. Saturn will be well positioned on Astronomy days.



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site.

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>



Garry's Telescope Photo By Tenho Tuomi

Garry Stone rebuilt his 3-inch truss rod Newtonian telescope into a more stable wooden telescope. Note the focuser that moves the primary mirror in the style of big brother C8.

Boneheaded Moments in Astronomy

by Rick Huziak

I braved glare-ice roads to drive out to our Centre observatory last night, about 60 km E of Saskatoon. I was busy observing some cool stuff with our excellent 16" scope when the phone rang. Note that the Wee Voice was a person who spoke English. This was not an ESL problem:

Wee voice: "Is this Obsetroy Slefirt?"

Me: "What?"

Wee voice: "May I speak to Obsetroy Slefirt, please?"

Me: "What? Who is this?"

Wee voice: "I would like to talk to Obsetroy Slefirt.

This is Capital One calling. I'd like to offer...."

Me: "Capital One? This is the Sleaford Observatory!!"

Wee voice: "Slefirt Obsetroy?!?!"

Me: "The Sleaford OBSERVATORY - you know - with telescopes and stuff? You know what that is, don't you?"

Wee voice: " Ummm... no."

Me: "Well, then you're an idiot!" <SLAM>