

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Les Nagy

I had a bit of a rest from astronomy during the 80's and getting back into things has been a whole bunch of fun. During this time over the past decade or so I have come to realize something. Astronomy seems to involve almost every scientific discipline and engineering discipline that exist.

To really get involved with things other than just looking into the sky and enjoying the wonder of it all, one must start to learn very specific and interesting things. Astro-photography makes you learn about optics, electronics, mechanics, maybe even about film, all the while you learn about the sky and about the objects of interest. Learning about and observing variable stars leads the observer to physics, stellar dynamics and evolution. If one wants to build their own telescope, practical experience in using one's hands and learning all about materials and fabrication come

into play. And we all know about having to learn about finances to be able to pay for our hobby! The best place to learn these things is in a club.

The role of astronomy in bringing together many things in life really hit me when I was out with a long time friend, Bob Botts, doing something other than astronomy. He invited me out to photograph a somewhat rare gathering of owls near Orillia. Without the want to do some astro-photography, I would not have had the equipment to do it. Without the experience of using equipment in less than ideal conditions, I would have probably not got the good results I did. Perhaps I over state the role of astronomy in my learning some of these things, but one thing is irrefutable. Without belonging to a club, namely the R.A.S.C. Hamilton Centre, I would not have met all the wonderful people I have, and I probably would not have had the opportunity to go see these owls had I not met Bob through our wonderful club.

So for me astronomy has meant a life of learning, and the R.A.S.C. Hamilton Centre has meant a lifetime of opportunities. I guess it really does pay to belong to a club!

[president\(at\)hamiltonrasc\(dot\)ca](mailto:president(at)hamiltonrasc(dot)ca)

FROM THE EDITOR

Ev Rilett

Virgo – With Jupiter rapidly becoming a main focal point in the sky, Virgo is also a strong constellation with much to tell. Spica is a brilliant “helium” type star, about 2300 times more luminous than our Sun. It is also a massive spectroscopic binary star, first detected by H C Vogel in 1890.

SPICA - the alpha star represents the Ear of Wheat held in the left hand of the goddess Astraea, the personification of Justice, daughter of Zeus and Themis, and the last of the deities to abandon the Earth at the end of the Golden Age. In another legend she is Persephone, daughter of the goddess of the harvest, Ceres and consequently associated with agricultural matters. Aratus offers her his admiring praise; “Her Lovely tresses glow with a starry light; Stars ornament the bracelet on her hand; Her robe in ample fold, glitters with stars; Beneath her snowy feet they shine; her eyes Lighten, all glorious, with the heavenly rays, But first the star which crowns the golden sheaf.”

To some writers of classical time the proximity of Virgo to the Leo the Lion suggest an identification with the mother-goddess Cybele, in her lion-

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<u>SCHEDULE OF EVENTS</u>
<i>Hamilton Steam Museum hosts our General Meeting on the 1st Thursday of each month</i>
<u>APRIL</u>
<i>07 – General Meeting – Winter Star Party – Les, Kevin, Steve & Rob</i>
<i>09 – messier Marathon &/or Movie night</i>
<i>14 – Board Meeting @ Observatory</i>
<i>16 – Astronomy Day @ Limeridge Mall 10:00 – 4:00 – Held at the Community Booth</i>
<i>16 - Workshop - Glenn Kukola – Scope Colimation & converting your eq. newt reflector or maksutov to a grab-and-go dob @ Observatory 8.00pm</i>
<i>Apr 30 & May 1 – MAINTENANCE DAYS @ Observatory</i>
<u>MAY</u>
<i>05 – General Meeting</i>
<i>12 – Board Meeting @ Observatory</i>

Mercury - Part 2

Carl Roussell



The best apparition of the year for mercury passed last month, and it was a thrill to see as it always is. Some interest was expressed by a couple of members of the Hamilton Center. Carlos Felix came over to my home to for an observing session, but we managed only to see clouds as the weather

From the Editor

drawn carriage; she was also honoured as *Diana, Minerva, Athena*, and occasionally as *Urania*, Muse of Astronomy.

"Virgin August! Come in thy regal state, With soft majestic grace and brow serene Though the fierce Lion's reign is overpast, The summer's heat is all thy own as yet; And all untouched thy robe of living green..."

The Virgo Cluster – of galaxies is mind inspiring to the us. It takes us to places only our imaginations can visit. A Japanese Sage wrote, "One must be open to the experience of the AH! Of things..."

Thomas Carlyle wrote, "...but is it not reckoned still a merit, proof of what we call a 'poetic nature', that we recognize how every object has a divine beauty in it; how every object still verily is 'a window through which we may look into Infinitude itself'?"

(From Burham's Celestial Handbook)

worsened shortly after we started our search. I was able to see Mercury seven times over the course of the apparition, and completed three drawings as shown below.

Suspected Dark Features - Solitudo Aphrodites was seen as a dark patch along the terminator mid-way between the equator and north polar region. Solitudo Alarum is the dark patch along the terminator mid-point between the equator and south polar region. Solitudo Criophoriwas seen as a slightly light extension of S. Alarum arcing northwards near the west limb.

Suspected Light Features - A prominent bright patch near the north pole appeared to rotate with changing central meridians and I think this may be Borea. On March 08 was seen west of the S. Alarum/ S. Phonicus region. Approxmate latitude and longitude suggest this may be the southern extent of Liguria. A third bright patch noted on March 10 could not be identified. This might be an artifact of Mercury nearing the horizon, and the related seeing conditions when an object has a low azimuth.

Since some of the features were seen at different times, one can be fairly certain of the existance of these. Those features that are seen only once are questionable. Trying to get as much information from a disk only 5" to 8" arc diameter is a challenge to both equipment and observer. Added to this is the diffuculty in even finding Mercury. Taken together, this is why each observation is so important to the study of this planet, and why I think this is the most captivating aspect of our hobby.



Observing Opportunities

Ken Lemke

New moon this month is on April 8 and for those who may be planning ahead for some new deep sky observing, May's new moon falls on the 8th also. On April 9th, we will be holding a Messier Marathon at the Observatory, starting at dusk.

April 11 - early in the evening a thin crescent moon will be about 1 degree south of the Pleiades. Should be a nice view in binoculars.

April 13 - in the SE before sunrise locate Mars and using binoculars, 7.9 magnitude Neptune will be seen in the same binocular field.

April 22 - the Lyrid meteor shower will peak early in the morning. In the evening sky, in the SE a Gibbous moon will be 7 degrees to the lower left of Jupiter.

April 24-- Full Moon, and this is a great opportunity to examine the ray structures radiating from craters such as Copernicus Tycho and Kepler to name a few.

Saturn and Jupiter are well placed for viewing on any clear night. With the milder weather upon us, it's a great time to view Jupiter and watch the "dance of the moons", catch a shadow transit or a glimpse of the Red Spot. The April issue of Sky and Telescope has tables (pages 68 - 69) with times of the various events. If you've never observed Jupiter for an extended period of time in one session, I would recommend it. Wait for those exceptional moments of clear air and you'll be treated to seeing extra surface details.

If you enjoy an observing challenge, the asteroid Pallas is passing through Virgo this month. Finder charts can be found in Astronomy (page 57) and Sky and Tel (page 75).

If you're not certain whether you have located the asteroid, draw the star field and go back the next night and draw the star field again. The one that has moved is the asteroid.

This should be a fun asteroid to track down since in the process you should

see some of the myriad of galaxies in Virgo.

Another nice binocular object (naked eye in dark skies) at this time of the year is the Coma Cluster. To locate the cluster, draw an imaginary line from Denebola (in Leo) to Cor Caroli (in Canes Venatici). The cluster is at the mid point of this imaginary line. While you're in the area, examine Cor Caroli - a nice double of magnitudes 3.2 and 5.6 with a separation of 20". Some report the colours as blue and yellow while others say the secondary is greenish. What do you see ?

The constellation Leo is high overhead and if you enjoy doubles check out Gamma Leonis, a pair of yellow stars (magnitudes of 2.2 and 3.5) with a separation of about 4". Another is Zeta (36 Leonis) which forms an optical pair with 35 Leonis. Separation of the pair is about 320" with magnitudes of 3.5 and 5.8.

I'll leave you this month with a definition that some authors use when talking about binary stars. They'll refer to the "comes" which means the fainter of the stars in a binary system.

Enjoy the Night Sky



Photo by Steve Barnes on the Trillium Scope

QUIZ YOUR KNOWLEDGE

The Answers to Last Month's Quiz

- In 1543 a Polish astronomer published a book in which he claimed that the Earth moves around the Sun. Who was he?

(Nicolaus Copernicus)

- Name the odd one out: Hubble, Ryle, Hale, Shapley, Curtis.

(Ryle who was English – the others were all American)

- T/F – Minor Planet No. 518 is named after a cake.

(?False – but only just! Minor Planet no 518 was discovered by R S Dugan, who named it Halawe after an Arabian Sweet of which he was particularly fond.)

Here are the questions for this Month. We'll look at Jupiter:

- Name the four largest satellites of Jupiter.

- T/F – the first spacecraft to pass Jupiter was Pioneer 10, in 1973

- T/F – Europa, the second large satellite of Jupiter, has a red surface and active volcanoes.

Check next month for the answers.

(all questions taken from Patrick Moore's Astronomy Quiz Book)

PUBLIC EDUCATION

Public Education is very important at the Observatory. Among other events, our Centre is involved with Girl Guides, Scouts, and other groups interested in a guided tour of the night sky. We generally give a brief discussion, a slide show or other visuals, and then a tour outside with two or three different scopes. This gives the guests a chance to decide for themselves which type of telescope they like best.

If you are interested in helping out on these special nights, please contact me at the number listed below. It is wonderful to see the look on a child's face the first time they look through a telescope. Also, if you know of a group that may be interested in an evening under the stars, please call me for details and a booking. Clear Skies!

Patricia Marsh, Public Education Director, Hamilton Centre, RASC
905-573-8808

[gassmann\(at\)mountaincable\(dot\)net](mailto:gassmann(at)mountaincable(dot)net)

Limeridge Mall Display

Come out and join us on Saturday, April 16th, 2005 as we celebrate "Astronomy Day" in Hamilton. From 10:00 am to 4:00 pm, the Hamilton Centre of the Royal Astronomical Society will have several telescopes and equipment on display at the Community Booth in Limeridge Mall. We will be distributing handouts sent to us from Astronomy Magazine and Sky Publishing, along with a few Sky News magazines. We will be collecting ballots for a free annual subscription to Astronomy Magazine. If you have time, please support our club at the mall. Hope to see you there!

If you have any questions or suggestions, please feel free to contact Patricia Marsh, Public Education Director at [gassmann\(at\)mountaincable\(dot\)net](mailto:gassmann(at)mountaincable(dot)net) or 905-573-8808.

Keep Looking Up!

THE HAMILTON CENTRE OBSERVATORY:

From Highway 6 North of Hamilton.

Take Concession 7 East eastbound, cross Centre Road.

Continue on 7E, keep going past railroad tracks, to near end.

Observatory driveway is on the right just before the stop sign.

From Mississauga or Milton.

Britannia Road past Highway 25, Guelph Line, Cedar Springs Road to End.

South 1 Block on Milborough Townline to Concession 7 East.

Our gate is on the south side of the last lot (south west).

The observatory phone number is (905) 689-0266.

YOUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Observatory – 905 689 0266

LOANER EQUIPMENT

Thinking of buying your first telescope but wondering what kind to get? Try a beginner's night at the Observatory or ask Mike Spicer about his "loaner" 5" telescope which is easy to set up and very easy to use. Mike is offering newer members of the club one of these scopes to try out for a month or so. Mike also has an electronic eyepiece for video astronomy. Contact him at Mike Spicer – 905-388-0602

[DeBeneEsse2001\(at\)AOL\(dot\)com](mailto:DeBeneEsse2001(at)AOL(dot)com)

The Great Manitou Star Party

Roger Hill

I have attended Starfest in Mount Forest for 12 of the past 14 years. Starfest is by far the biggest star party in Canada.

Typically 1,000 amateurs and families descend on a large open field, set up tents and trailers, observe, listen to talks, socialize, buy equipment, check out other peoples 'scopes, and generally have a good time. The days can be blazingly hot, and the nights can get down to almost the [freezing](#) mark. When I first went, in 1991, it was possible to get a decent camping site even if you went up on the Friday night. In fact, I was wven able to get a picnic table! In 1992, I went up on the Thursday, and survived the tail end of hurricane Andrew. I was virtually alone that night. Each year since though, has been a different story. As the years passed, I had to go up earlier and earlier to get a good camping site and a picnic table. Now, there are plenty of people who spend the entire week there. Come the Friday night, and the place is wall-to-wall tents, and you can barely move. Still, I've had some wonderful times at The River Place. Ask me or Les about observing all 9 planets in less than 24 hours, for instance. One of the real high points was 1999, when I was asked to give a talk there.

Still, for the last couple of years, I have wanted something different from a star party. I wanted a star party that was smaller, darker, and offered something a little different. For years I've been hearing about Manitoulin Island. Former Hamilton Centre President Harry Pulley waxed lyrically about its extremely dark skies. I've always wanted to visit Manitoulin, and each year for the last few, I've returned from StarFest, determined that "Next year, I'll try Manitoulin". Well, in 2004, I actually did.

The principal reason I never made it before was my perception that it was a heckuva long way away. If you don't take the ferry, then you have to drive all the way around, past Parry Sound and Sudbury! Well, we have some friends who moved to Sudbury in 2003, and we went to visit them at the end of August, 2003. I was astonished to find it took just over 4 hours to drive to

Sudbury from Milton, when I'd expected it to take 7 hours or more. Furthermore, our friends live just outside Sudbury, to the south, and the skies were incredibly dark. I also had a good time with my kids, particularly at Science North (where I gave them a hand with the crowds at their Mars Opposition event).

So...It wasn't really as far as I thought it was. True, it was considerably further than StarFest is, but a 6-hour drive isn't too bad. So, I checked the Web, and found out that there were TWO star parties on Manitoulin Island, running at the same time. One was being run at a place called Gordons Park, and the other was at a native reserve called Aundeck Omni Kaning (AOK, for short). Not being sure which one to go to, I got in touch with an old friend and former Hamilton Centre Member Mike Ricks. He was going to the event at AOK. Then that settled it...so was I.

My 13 years old son, Jonathan, and I packed up the trailer with telescopes (my 12" LX200GPS and my ETX90 RA), tents, sleeping bags, computers, coolers, tables, charts, chairs, clothes and all sorts of other things we were going to need (and some we wouldn't). It took just over 6 hours to get to AOK, and 5 minutes to find Mike. We set up next to him, made sure we had power, and then the fun started...The Star Party got under way with a "mini Pow-Wow".

Ojibway dancers, drummers and singers treated us to a wonderful exhibition of native culture, along with an explanation of what we were seeing. This differed from normal Pow-Wows, as here the audience was non-native, and there was no sacred fire. I'd been to a Pow-Wow before, but had not really understood what I was seeing, so an explanation was most welcome. The audience was invited to join in the dancing, which Jonathan did, while I went back to our campsite and made supper.

Wednesday night was cloudy, but there was no lack of things to do. I introduced myself to Mark Oldfield and the other organizers, and asked if there was anything I could help out. They had things well in hand, and I got to know Mark and the others quite well. After dark, a fire was lit in an open-walled shelter on the Pow-Wow grounds, and all were invited. It was a great idea. I stayed up until after 1 am talking to all sorts of people who'd wander by. In particular, I got to know two of the local guys who were looking after security (!) quite well. Matt and Darren are in their mid-twenties, and two of the nicest guys you could wish to meet. Over the following few nights, I came to treasure the time around the fire. I learned so much about the Ojibwe, their culture and I admired their attachment to the land. For an immigrant like myself, who was thousands of miles from where I was born, I was fascinated with the glimpse I got of a culture centuries old.

It rained the next day...off and on, so Jonathan and I took a boat ride, organized by the AOK band office, through the islands in the area. Captain Fred took us all over the place, but the pounding of the waves (it was windy, too) took it's toll on our bladders, and the dozen people who'd signed up were most grateful for the pit stop at an eco-cabin the band rents out.

Jonathan and I checked out Little Current, too. This is the small (4,000 people) town where a swing bridge connects the Island to the mainland. It's the largest town on the Island, too, and where

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Manitou Star Party con'd

Jonathan and I did our grocery chopping. It's about ten minutes away from AOK, and is a great place to watch large pleasure boats pass through on their way to or from the Trent-Severn waterway. They also have a great ice cream store there called Three Cows and a Cone. If you like ice cream, this place is a MUST visit. I fell in love with a flavour called Hawberry (an Island specialty), but Jonathan assured me that the chocolate was exceptional.

Thursday night was cloudy, with the occasional crack in the clouds, just to tantalize us. It was really dark. Once again, I spent the evening chatting with people who dropped by the fire.

Friday dawned clear. Someone said that it had cleared up about an hour before dawn. In high hopes of actually getting some observing done, I set up my big scope, and covered it with the largest barbecue cover that Zellers sells. It is black vinyl on one side and a white fleece materials on the inside. I turned it inside out and secured it with a bungee cord. This worked out very nicely. Well, until it started raining again. I turned it right way round again just before this happened, as I could see the rain approaching across the North Channel. It was partly cloudy all day, until the evening, when it clouded up again. A local Science Educator, Pierre Harrison, ran a great program for the kids who attended, and the local kids got involved too. He had some Lego robot vehicles, and some simulated lunar and Martian terrain. Jonathan had a huge amount of fun with that, and made friends with several of local kids. He and I did some solar observing with the ETX90, much to the delight of several of his new friends. One in particular, a delightful 10 year old girl called Mariah, was full of really good questions. After I'd answer a question, she'd always answer with "Meegwetch", which is Ojibwe, for "Thank you".

Friday evening, though, saw a Great Manitou tradition...a concert by a local folksinger called Kevin Closs. This was a very enjoyable way to spend an evening, and would have been a great prelude to a great night of observing...if it had been clear. Which it wasn't. By this time, though, we were getting reports

that Hurricane Charley was pounding the heck out of Florida, and had come ashore not far from where Mike Ricks and his wife spend their winters: Port Charlotte. Mike was desperate for information, and went in to Little Current to an Internet Café there looking for any information he could get. He decided that he had to head down to Florida as soon as he could, and would leave early on Saturday morning. Unfortunately, with Friday being cloudy, too, Mike didn't get a chance to use the scope he'd brought up. He was also really looking forward to seeing what my 12" could do.

Saturday morning came, and Mike was packed up and gone by 10 am. The Sun was shining, and it looked like it was going to be a great day, and the weather forecast was saying it would be clear that night, too. At the local community Centre, a mini-trade fair was set up. Some of the Islands local businesses were displaying their wares, as was an Ojibwe cultural centre. I got a good chance to chat with these people, too. The woman from the Cultural Centre was a goldmine of information, and as Jonathan and I were going back to Manitoulin for a weeks vacation at the end of August, I got tips on some great places to go and visit. I thanked her by saying "Meegwetch", which really put a smile on her face. Pierre Harrison was putting on a show on the lawn beside the Community Centre, teaching kids about inertia, gravity, momentum, balance, and having a whale of a time doing it. The kids were having a great time, too

Supper was incredible. It was a fish fry. The whitefish had been caught, cleaned and prepared by our hosts, the Ojibwe of AOK. It was spectacular. Some of the finest fish I've ever eaten. There were door prizes and speeches, but we had one eye on the clear skies outside the community hall.

That evening saw another concert...this time by a band called Tyme Well Wasted. The drummer was one of the guys I'd been hanging out with each evening. They were a hard rocking outfit, and quite good. The first stars were coming out as the concert finished. My LX200 was ready to go, the alignment had gone well. It was attached to my ThinkPad, and ECU was quite happy, pushing it around the sky.

Wow. Words fail me, when I think of that night. I had some of the finest view of some old favourites that I've ever had. But before I got around to that, I had some business to attend to. Mariah got her chance to look through my scope. She was almost incoherent with joy when I showed her the Ring Nebula and M13, M51 and M17. She ran and got several of her friends, and while they were not quite as enthusiastic as Mariah, they had a good look as well. I only wished that Saturn was visible, because I LOVE showing people Saturn for the first time.

As the kids vanished into the night, other people dropped by. Word had got around that someone was more than happy to show off the night sky! My 'scope was the center of activity for the next few hours. As one group of people left, others arrived. Several people had come from Sudbury for the night, as the event was talked about on their local radio. There were several people who thought it might be fun to go camping on a summer weekend and look at the stars. So, if you're not sure where to go to look through a telescope, you go towards the noise. And the noise was around my scope as people gasped in delight, and had to tell me, or the people they were with,

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Something to Do When You Can't Fall Asleep in the Daytime

Paul Tarvydas

Something that you and I – astronomers – appreciate, more than the average person, is nighttime. We wait for it to arrive. We willingly stand outside in the dark for hours. Through repeated experience, we've become familiar with night and many of its sights and sounds. We're so familiar with night, that we take night for granted. Surely, it would never have crossed my mind to write a book on the broad subject of "night". So, I was somewhat surprised to discover that someone had written such a book. I was even more surprised to find out that there were many aspects of night that I had not considered nor known about.

Christopher Dewdney is a writer in residence at Toronto's York University. His recent book is entitled "Acquainted With The Night – Excursions Through the World After Dark". A quick fanning of the pages and a cursory look at the chapter headings gave me the impression that the book would be focused primarily on myths and legends.

Only a few pages into reading it, though, I was pleased to realize that the book was much more than that. The book contains a smorgasbord of topics, ranging from hard sciences to linguistics, history, mythology, entomology, psychology to disciplines I wouldn't even know the names of.

Dewdney's writing is interesting and seamless. Considering the wide range of topics that he covers, I didn't notice any abrupt transitions from one topic to another. In fact, the opposite is true. I distinctly remember looking up from its pages and wondering "Hey, wait a minute, how did he

MONTHLY SWAP MEET

Feel free to bring in any astronomical items you no longer need in your collection. It might be just what someone else is looking for. A table will be set up each month for items to be swapped that evening. So, clear out that closet space and make room for some new, slightly used astro ware.

LIST SERVERS

There are two list servers available for members to receive and contribute with informative conversation. Our local centre list. Get in touch with Mark Kaye (see Board of Directors List) and he will sign you up.

There is also the national list. Members must go the national web page to sign up for. <http://www.rasc.ca/computer/rasclist.htm>

lead me into a discussion of nuclear submarines when just a few pages ago he was describing stalactites?". Dewdney begins the book with a definition of night – the linguistic origins of the word, the "first" night 4.5 billion years ago and various religious versions of the creation of night and day. The book invents a "typical" night – 6pm through 6am – and dissects it into chapters, each one hour long.

The first hour-based chapter – "The Gardens of the Hesperides: Sunset – 6pm" – begins with the U.S. Naval Observatory's official definition of the three stages of twilight. Dewdney discusses sunset. The top ten places for great sunsets. The Eastern shores of Lakes Huron and Superior are listed as #4. He discusses the physics of sunset colouration. The green and blue flashes – including a place where green flashes are so common that the lucky regulars have devised an informal rating system. Dewdney discusses the art of turning your back to the sunset and watching night-rise. He interviews Harold Hosein (a Toronto-media weatherman) about the change in weather at night. He discusses the size and speed of night. The international dateline. Dewdney closes this chapter with a discussion of Olber's Paradox – why night is dark.

The rest of the book progresses in a similar manner. Each chapter contains a wide array of topics, all related in some way to night. Some of the topics include: sleep clinics, insomnia (including a fatal form of insomnia, FFI, which is related to CJD – mad cow disease), the origins of the book *Frankenstein*, the fact that Edison was an insomniac, the advent of street lighting, light pollution, circadian rhythm, dream analysis, the harvest moon, the physics of dawn, and of course, astronomy.

"Acquainted With The Night" is well-written, well-researched and is especially interesting reading for people who have formed a strong relationship with the night. "Acquainted With The Night – Excursions Through The World After Dark" Christopher Dewdney, 2004 HarperCollins Publishers Ltd.

A NEW LOOK FOR OUR WEB SITE – ANY IDEAS. A NEW FRESH LOOK IS IN THE AIR AND OUR WEBMASTER, SCOTT BARRIE IS LOOKING FOR IDEAS. THIS SITE IS FOR EVERYONE. LET'S MAKE IT SOMETHING SPECIAL. Contact Scott at [scottbarrie\(at\)homerroom\(dot\)ca](mailto:scottbarrie(at)homerroom(dot)ca) or call him at (905) 693-1469.

Manitoulin Star Party cont'd

what they were looking at. Those people who have done some of the sidewalk astronomy events at Spencer Smith Park know exactly the sort of scene.

Several of the organizers dropped by to see what the fuss was about, and stayed for a while, too. Mark Oldfield, who runs the Star Party had not brought a 'scope with him. "Too busy, he said. "And besides, I get a chance to look through all sorts of scopes!" Mark dropped by twice, and the second time he brought the after-dinner speaker with him. This guy loved planetary nebulae, and I gather he studied them. He knew quite a few by their NGC numbers, and as my 'scope visited each one, he'd tell the dozen or so people all about them. It was a perfect astronomy lecture.

Somewhere around 1 am, the crowds had dissipated, and only the true aficionados were still awake. A guy dropped by who had his own telescope, but said that he'd heard several people discussing my 'scope, and he came to see what the fuss was about. He and I spent almost an hour putting my Meade through its paces. Towards the end, he said he never knew Meade optics could be that good, and the pointing accuracy, too. He'd heard all the tales of how bad they were, and was very much surprised to find that was not the case with all of them. We agreed they could be a bit on the noisy side. He was convinced enough that he told me he had been thinking of getting the 14" LX200, and having seen how good a 12" could be, he thought he'd get one.

We looked at a lot of things during that hour, but one sight will stay with me for a long time – M31.

I must have looked at M31 hundreds of times before, through all sorts of instruments, but this was the finest view of them all. The dust lanes were spectacular and dark. This was not the washed out view I've had all the other times, this was a full, glorious sight. The dust lanes looked inky black by comparison with the spiral arms. I was lost in their depths, awed and overcome by the beauty I could see.

I looked at many things that night, certainly lots of planetaries, and old familiar objects like M13 and M51, M57, and, well, so many more that I lost track of them all. But M31...that was special.

It was just shy of 4 am when I finally collapsed into my sleeping bag, exhausted and exhilarated.

Jonathan and I packed up slowly the following day, taking our time to say farewell to some new and valued friends. Before we left, we had a final swim in the lake. The water was cool and refreshing...just the ticket before heading back on the long drive home.

Will we go again? Absolutely. Manitoulin is a wonderful, magical place. This year, we'll be going up several days before the next star party officially starts on Wednesday, August 10th. I hope to get a couple of nights in before anyone else arrives. It's also a great place for a vacation, and the entire family is looking forward to spending time on the Island again.

Is the Great Manitou Star Party everything I had hoped for? Yes it was, and far more besides. With somewhere between 50 and 100 people attending, it was a more intimate event than StarFest. Certainly, the door prizes are not as grandiose! Will I go back to Starfest in future years? Possibly, if I get enough vacation time, I might, but if I have to choose between the two, I'll be choosing the black nights and the unique blend of culture and astronomy at The Great Manitou Star Party.

If you are interested in attending the 2005 8th Annual Great Manitou Star Party, you can find more information at <http://manitouлиндarksky.com/gmsp.html>. See you there.