

Volume 25 #2
March/April 2004

NIAGARA WHIRLPOOL



The Viewlex-Apollo projector unit at A.N. Myer.
The RASC Niagara has begun repairing and using it for beginners classes.
This section of the projector measures about one meter.
Photo courtesy Glen Pidsadnick.

www.rasc.ca/niagara

NIAGARA WHIRLPOOL

The Newsletter of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada Niagara Centre

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Newsletter Info

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Original articles on astronomy and related subjects, observation reports, book reviews, letters, images and other items are needed. Please submit them at the meetings, mail them to RASC Niagara Centre, P.O. Box 4040, St. Catharines, Ontario, L2R 7S3, or e-mail them to the editor at niagarawhirlpool@yahoo.ca

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Opinions expressed are those of the author's, and do not necessarily reflect those of the RASC or the RASC, Niagara Centre.

General Meetings Coming Up:

Niagara Falls Public Library

at 7:30 pm

March 18

April 15

May 20

Niagara Centre Website:

E-mail Discussion List & Member's Only Area

The Niagara Centre has an e-mail discussion list and a member's area on the website. By subscribing to the e-mail list you will be able to post messages and carry on discussions about astronomy and activities with other Niagara Centre members. This is a great way to interact and get to know other members, or enhance your knowledge of astronomy. Please note that a log-in procedure is required to initially join the Discussion List. Complete instructions are available on the discussion list page on the website.

A member's only area of the website is also available. This area contains Niagara Centre information for the use of its members only. The member's area contains astrophotography by Niagara members, the Niagara library book list, and lots of other Centre related info of interest to members.

To receive the log-ins and passwords for the e-mail discussion list and member's area, contact John VanderBrugge or Ron Gasbarini and they will send you the needed information by e-mail.

President's Report

By Glen Pidsadnick

It looks like we might get a break in the weather. It was nice to have a full week of warmer temperatures, sunshine, and clear nights in February, especially after a frigid January. Many members, including myself, took advantage of the clear skies and did some observing. Venus and the crescent Moon looked beautiful together in the early evening sky. I hope all of you got a peek.

Les Marczi was out too, he had some spectacular images of Jupiter and Saturn, and one of which was featured on the SkyNews website.



A successful starnight at
Fireman's Park.
Photo by Les Welgan.

For the first time in a year, we had a successful public starnight at Fireman's Park. We had about 11 member scopes set up, and 100 people showed up to view the moon, the planets, and some deep sky objects.

I'd like to thank Stan Sammy and his group for the work they are doing on the planetarium at A.N. Myer school. Starting this month it will be used for our club's beginner classes. The schedule is listed elsewhere in this issue.

The club's Meade CCD camera is once again back from repair. I hope we will have some images to show at the next meeting.

The new observatory construction should be starting soon. Les Marczi has volunteered to take over the construction. I am sure he will do a fabulous job. If you would like to help, please contact him.

See you all at the Banquet! Don't forget, dress is semi-formal.

Local Coordinates

CCCA Observatory	Lat. 43 0' N	Long. 79 30' W
Fireman's Park	Lat. 43 9' N	Long. 79 7' W
St. Catharines	Lat. 43 11' N	Long. 79 14' W
Thorold	Lat. 43 7' N	Long. 79 18' W
Niagara Falls	Lat. 43 6' N	Long. 79 5' W
Niagara on the Lake	Lat. 43 15' N	Long. 79 4' W
Welland	Lat. 43 0' N	Long. 79 16' W
Fonthill	Lat. 43 2' N	Long. 79 17' W
Fenwick	Lat. 43 1' N	Long. 79 22' W
Port Colborne	Lat. 42 53' N	Long. 79 14' W
Beamsville	Lat. 43 10' N	Long. 79 28' W
Grimsby	Lat. 43 12' N	Long. 79 34' W
Vineland	Lat. 43 9' N	Long. 79 23' W

Secretary's Report

by John VanderBrugge

Welcome to the late winter edition of the Whirlpool. The observing weather has been much improved the last while, as I'm sure most of you have noticed. Hopefully these clear skies will continue. Many members have been taking advantage of the clear skies to start off the 2004 observing season in style. Saturn and Jupiter are at their best. We also have the March Messier marathon period coming up on the weekend of the 20th. This is a yearly opportunity to view all the Messier objects in one evening.

The observatory site will shortly be rid of its snow cover and all the more accessible for member use. Les Marczi has been doing an excellent job over the winter keeping the access road clear of snow, so the observatory has remained open for business. The mirror for the observatory telescope has been taken out for recoating, as well as other needed upgrades to its secondary mirror, spider, etc. So bring your own scope if you're venturing out there to do some observing. This will be the year to start our second observatory at the CCCA site as well. Stay tuned for details on this and requests for volunteers to help with its building.

We have had seven new members join the Centre since the last Whirlpool. They are Jim Boccabella, Kevin Foster, Rob MacLeod, Deanna Orr, Roger Poirier, Bruno Frattaroli, and Lloyd Kresic. Welcome one and all to the Niagara Centre. Please take advantage of the beginner's workshops to ease yourselves into the world of astronomy, and help you meet other members of the club.

A new, more extensive schedule for beginner's workshops has been set. Look for details elsewhere in this issue for dates, times and locations.

Public Observing Coordinator's Report

By Darlene Marano

I am proud to say that we have finally had a successful public starnight. I was starting to wonder if the sky fairies had put a curse on us and we were never again to see another twinkling light in the sky. The skies were not awesome but they did provide us and our guests with some great views of the Moon, Orion and our favourite planets. We had approximately 100 people from the general public show up to do some viewing with long-awaited anticipation. I once again thank our members who attended for braving the cold and offering their services in support of our Centre.

The next few months will prove to be quite exciting and since I totally believe that our streak of bad luck (weather-wise) has gone away, I'm sure that we will continue to be successful. Our next public night is booked for March 27th at Fireman's Park. This is just in time for the five-planet lineup. Following this, we will be celebrating Astronomy Day on April 24th at Fireman's Park. We hope to plan an exciting night for this special event to make it more than the average starnight. As always, I wish you clear skies and hope to see everyone at our upcoming banquet on April 3rd.

Observatory Director's Report

By Les Marczy

As winter slowly loosens its grip on us, more of us will start to venture outdoors again. Though January and most of February were less than perfect for observing, there were a couple opportunities, none of which fell on scheduled Members' Nights, unfortunately. January's Members' Night was very clear but extremely cold. A few members did show up, but the night was cut short due to the cold.

This time of the year is planetary observing at its finest. Saturn and Jupiter can be observed for most of the night, while Venus and Mars must be viewed earlier in the evening, as they set around 11 p.m.

Lately I have been concentrating most of my time (observing/imaging) on Jupiter, my personal favourite. I am still amazed at the detail that can be seen on this gas giant. March will bring some very rare and interesting moon and shadow transits across Jupiter's surface. On the 5th at 2:22 a.m. until 2:55 a.m., Io and Europa as well as their shadows can be observed transiting. Again on the 29th this will take place between 9:16 p.m. and 10:40 p.m. However,

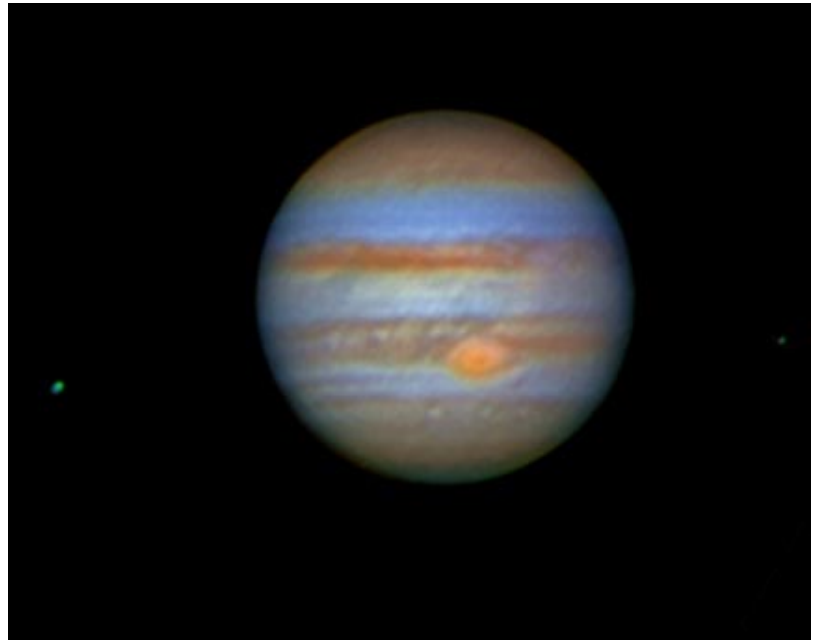


Photo by Les Marczy.

the one that I look forward to is the event that falls on the 28th. This one will yield a triple shadow and double moon transit, which is a very rare observing and photographic opportunity. It takes place a little later in the evening or should I say earlier in the morning. It doesn't last long, so be ready. Start to look for them all around 3:00 a.m., it will only last for about 19 minutes.

The next Members' Night will be held on the 20th of March, which is also the best weekend for a Messier Marathon. In April, Members' Night is on the 17th. I look forward to seeing more of you out, now that weather is starting to get more reasonable.

Khan Scope Centre

Ray Khan
3243 Dufferin Street
Toronto, Ontario M6A 2T2
416-783-4140
416-783-7697 (fax)
www.khanscope.com

Sky Optics

Steve Barnes
4031 Fairview Street, Unit 216B
Burlington, ON L7L 2A4
905-631-9944
905-633-8293 (fax)
www.skyoptics.net

FEATURES

Outreach Adventure in Thorold

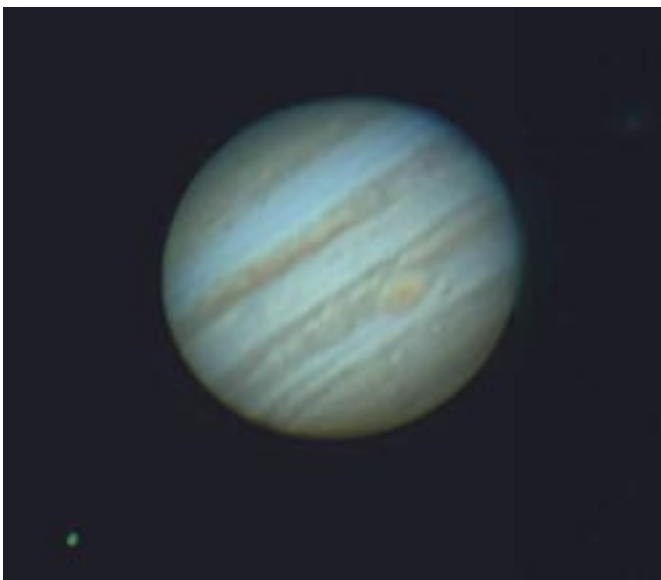
By Dave Stremlaw

On February 5th, Ken Crowther and I gave a slideshow and talk to a large group of Grade Six students at Msgr. Clancy school in Thorold. To our surprise their A/V students took videos of parts of our presentation along with pictures for their records. There were about 90 students and eight staff in the auditorium watching our show. Ken brought his reflecting scope and demonstrated and discussed it with the children.

The questions were hot and heavy at the end of our presentation with a few of the students even staying during their recess period to talk to us. Maybe we will get a few Youth members from the group.

An enjoyable time for us and I think the students had fun as well.

In February Les Marczi was busily imaging the two largest planets in our solar system. He took pictures of Jupiter and its Great Red Spot, and Saturn, with its lovely rings.



His picture of Jupiter was chosen as SkyNews magazine's Photo of the Week.

FEATURES

A.N. Myer Planetarium Repairs Begin

by Stan Sammy

The RASC Niagara was asked by the teachers at A.N. Myer secondary school in Niagara Falls to assist in evaluating and possibly repairing an old Viewlex-Apollo planetarium at their school that was badly in need of some TLC.

In January, Brian Pihack, John VanderBrugge and I visited the school and met with the school's science teachers. After examining the equipment we realized that our club has members who would love to take on the challenge of repairing this unit. Dave Wilson and Mike Panucci,



Dave Wilson working on the projector
Photos courtesy Glen Pidsadnick.

who are both electricians, stepped forward.

They have made some headway but the electrical schematics that would enable them to speed through the repairs have been lost. We have made contact with a planetarium enthusiast in the U.S. who will be sending us blueprints and manuals.

We are slowly putting the pieces together and think our chances of restoring it to working order are good. So far we have the starglobe and a few other accessories running.

The school is looking forward to working with the Niagara Centre in furthering the education of their students and the community in the field of astronomy. As compensation for making this unit usable, our club will have use of the planetarium, classroom space and all astronomy-related paraphernalia.

Therefore, beginners' sessions will no longer be held before our monthly meetings, but will instead be held at Myer. Sessions will last from 7 to 9 p.m. on the following dates: March 4th and 11th, April 1st and 8th, May 6th and 13th, and June 3rd and 10th. Upcoming sessions include "Learning the Northern Constellations", "Constellations as Celestial Pointers", "An Introduction to the A.N. Myer Planetarium" on March 11, "Objects in the Solar System", "Learning to Starhop", "Constellations in the Eastern Sky" and "Terms and Defi-



nitions Used in Astronomy." Other sessions will include more astronomical definitions; spotting meteors, auroras, sundogs and glories; using telescopes and binoculars; more on constellations, and visits to the Planetarium.

Thanks to Carol Riddle and Pierre Blanchard of A.N. Myer, and club members Mike Panucci and Dave Wilson, who have made this project possible.

FEATURES

Houston...*We're GO for launch!*

by Deloris Welgan

We're going back to the moon!

It's been thirty-one years since the end of the Apollo missions. I've often wondered when we'd be going back.

Remember the excitement? From Apollo 11's Neil Armstrong taking the first step on July 20, 1969 to Apollo 17's Eugene Cernan taking the last on December 14, 1972. Although the transmissions back to earth were grey and grainy, we stuck like glue to the TV to watch in awe as the astronauts worked and played on the surface of the moon.

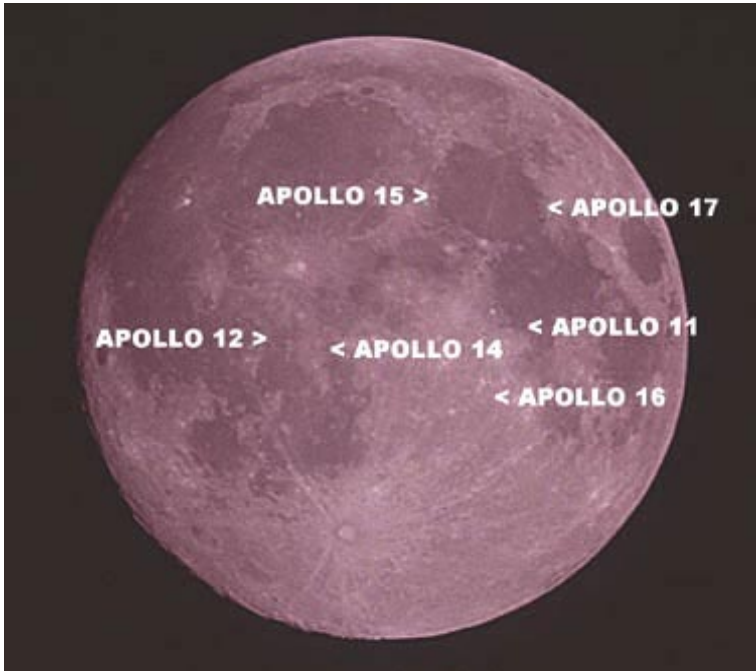


Image created by Les Welgan

Twenty-four astronauts had assignments that would take them from the Earth to the Moon. Tragically, three died in a fire on the launch pad during testing aboard Apollo 1. Of the remaining twenty-one men who ventured to the moon, twelve walked on the surface. Unfortunately, public opinion was that it was a waste of taxpayer's money and Apollo was scrapped for the commercial and military missions of the Shuttle program. Now, the interest in manned missions to explore our Solar System and to discover new worlds has been rekindled.

Technology has changed so much since the Seventies. Look at the spectacular pictures we're getting from the Rovers on Mars. The Hubble and other

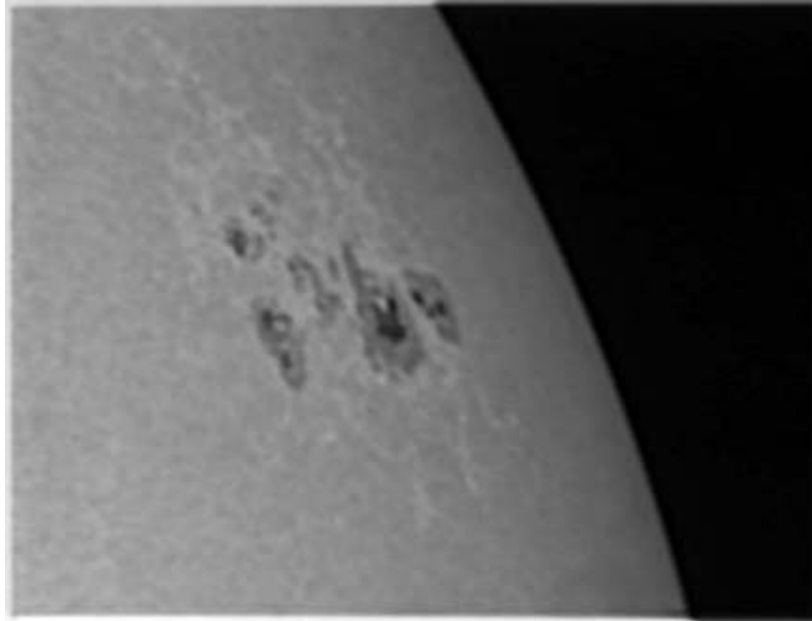
large telescopes have given us so much information and insight into the universe and continue to dazzle us with colour photos that are "out of this world". Les Marczi has kept us in a state of awe with the results of his planetary photography. Les Welgan, Rob Lenz and other astrophotographers in the club continue to bring the deep sky images to us in amazing colour.

Landing on the moon. What new data will we get this time? Will we be able to sustain life there and build a launching point to other worlds? What lies on and beneath the surface that we can use to accomplish that goal? What about a permanent telescope taking us further into the universe than we can even fathom now?

This will be an exciting time for everyone on earth especially those of us who have a passion for astronomy and the courage to ...

IMAGINE

FEATURES



Rick Eller imaged the sun with a PlanetCam video camera to produce this picture of a large sunspot complex. He stacked 120 images with Registax and finished off the image with Photoshop.

Beginners' Sessions New Dates and Locations

Beginners' sessions will no longer be held before the club's monthly meetings. All future beginners' meetings will be held at A.N. Myer secondary school in Niagara Falls, to make use of the planetarium and proper classroom space. The school is on O'Neil Street between Portage and Dorchester Roads.

Sessions will last from 7 to 9 p.m. on the following dates: April 1 and 8, May 6 and 13, and June 3 and 10. Upcoming classes include "Learning the Constellations", "Objects in the Solar System", "Learning To Starhop" and "Terms and Definitions Used in Astronomy." Contact Stan Sammy for more information.

Annual Banquet, April 03, 2004

Get your tickets now for our Annual Banquet featuring guest speaker Eric Dunn, the producer of the Cosmic Odyssey and Cosmic Highway television series, on Saturday, April 3. Tickets are \$45 and will be sold by Joyce Sims at the March 18 general meeting. If you cannot make the meeting and would like to order tickets you can send a cheque to our P.O. Box address and your tickets will be held at the door for you. You can also call Joyce at 905-262-5276 to make other arrangements.

The title of Eric's talk is "Cosmic Highway: A Traveller's Guide." He says, "This talk will be partly a reminiscence of the old TV show and partly a reflection on travelling from the astronomical point of view." His talk will be aimed at all levels of astronomical expertise. Beginners need not fear a complex talk.

Further details can be found on our website at:
www.vaxxine.com/rascniag/banq2004.htm

A reminder, dress is semi-formal.

Telescope For Sale

15 inch Obsession-style truss tube Dobsonian

1. Primary mirror f/5-2inch thick with enhanced coatings (96%), Nova Optical Systems (Ronchi test provided), coated by Spectrum Coatings
2. Secondary mirror 2.6 inch with Dielectric coatings (98%), Nova Optical Systems (Ronchi test provided)
3. Protostar spider and secondary holder with internal dew heater
4. Kendrick dew controller and heaters, Telrad with internal heater
5. Sky Commander digital setting circles and encoders (9000 object database, Go-To)
6. Remote electric collimation system (allows user to collimate from eyepiece unassisted)
7. JMI DX-1 two-speed focuser (coarse and fine focus)
8. Astrosystems telescope cover for star parties, etc.
9. Onboard power consisting of 2 x 7 amp rechargeable batteries (14 amps, 12 volts)
10. Cast aluminum altitude bearings
11. Counterweight balance system to allow use of cameras, etc.
12. Quality construction with Baltic Birch hardwood, maple, stainless, aluminum, etc.

This is a complete large aperture telescope ready for serious observing. Price: \$7000.

Contact John VanderBrugge at 935-9355.

Niagara Centre Store

RASC 2004 Calenders	\$13.00
Beginner's Observer's Guide	\$15.00
RASC 2004 Observer's Handbook	\$16.00
Planispheres	\$15.00
RASC Lapel Pins	\$ 6.00
Centre Crest	\$ 5.00
Bumper sticker	\$ 3.00
RASC Cloth Crest	\$13.00
Niagara Centre T-shirts are available. See Dave Stremlaw for above items.	

Magazines

Sky & Telescope, Astronomy Group rate available.

Anyone who is interested in getting the club discount for subscriptions to Astronomy or Sky & Telescope magazines should contact Dave Stremlaw. With a group subscription plan you also receive 10% discounts on Sky & Telescope's wide selection of astronomy books. Sign up with Dave at the next General Meeting, or call him at 892-2767 to get these great discounts.

Niagara Centre turtleneck sweaters are now available for order. The turtlenecks are black with 'RASC Niagara' stitched into the neck in red and white. They look very sharp and are perfect for cool weather observing. The turtlenecks come in small, medium, large and extra-large. To place your order please call Joanne at (905) 295-0972 or talk to her at the next meeting.

Thinking of selling something?

Free ad space for *members*.

Contact Philip Downey - see contact information in this issue.

For Sale

Supercircuits PC-23C monochrome low lux video camera (unmodified). Asking \$100.00. Call Rick Eller at 519-426-2471.

For Sale

Antares 2x, FMC, 3-element barlow. Barely used. (It's only a few weeks old.) Asking \$100.00 or best offer. Call Brian Blais at 905-682-0257.

For Sale

Finished but uncoated 8-inch f/3.8 mirror, 1 3/8" thick Pyrex. Comes with proper plywood shipping crate. Suitable for a fast Newtonian or it is cored if you want to make a Cassegrain. If you would like to pick it up I will also include the tube and mirror cell that were built for this as well as a polished but unfigured Cassegrain secondary. Mirror was completed a year-and-a-half ago. It looks ugly as I started with a rough looking blank, but this will have negligible effect on the image. Asking \$100 or best offer. Call Joe Iannandrea at 905-991-0781.

For Sale

Meade 8-inch Schmidt-Cassegrain MTS (Modular Telescope System). Excellent condition. Comes with: Fork Equatorial on Pier Mount, LX3 Quartz Drive RA, Dec Motor, Hand Controller (RA & Dec), MotoFocus, Orion Sliding Counterweight, 1.25" diagonal, Meade 26 mm and 15 mm Plossl eyepieces, Bob's Knobs on secondary mirror, metal storage case. Price: \$1000.00. Call Les Welgan at 905-934-4647.

Slide/Negative Scanning

For anyone wanting to have their slides/negatives converted to digital files, I can scan them at high resolution, 2800 dpi, and save them onto a CD-R. Cost: \$1.00 per file, \$5.00 for CD-R. Contact Les Welgan at astro_nuts@cogeco.ca

Sell your item here !!!

Event Horizon

- March 18 General meeting, Niagara Falls Public Library, 7:30 p.m.
Speaker: James Drummond, University of Toronto, "Canada, Space and the Environment"
- March 20 Members' starnight. CCCA Observatory. Best weekend for a Messier marathon! Spring equinox.
- March 22 - April 5 All five naked-eye planets are visible in the evening skies.
- March 24 Venus and Moon make close pair.
- March 25 Mars and Moon are almost touching in the evening.
- March 27 Public starnight, Fireman's Park. 7-10 p.m.
- March 28 Triple satellite transit on Jupiter. Three moons and two moonshadows will be on Jupiter's face around 2 a.m.
- April 1 Beginners' session at A.N. Myer. 7-9 p.m.
- April 2 Venus is almost in the Pleiades.
- April 3 Annual banquet featuring guest speaker Eric Dunn. Delphi Hall, Niagara Falls. 5:30 p.m. Daylight Savings Time begins.
- April 8 Beginners' session at A.N. Myer. 7-9 p.m.
- April 15 General meeting, Niagara Falls Public Library, 7:30 p.m.
Speaker: John Percy, University of Toronto. "Variable Stars and How Amateurs and Students are Involved."
- April 17 Members' starnight. CCCA Observatory.
- April 19 New moon. Unofficial Niagara Centre Frozen Banana Star Party in Powassan, Ontario.
- April 23 Venus and Mars are close to the Moon.
- April 24 International Astronomy Day. Public starnight at Firemen's Park begins at sun down.
- May 6 Beginners' session at A.N. Myer. 7-9 p.m.
- May 13 Beginners' session at A.N. Myer. 7-9 p.m.
- May 19 New moon.
- May 20 General meeting, Niagara Falls Public Library, 7:30 p.m.
Speaker: Geoffrey Waters, "What's for Dinner on Mars: Closed Cycle Life Support Systems."
- May 21 Venus and Moon close together in morning.
- May 22 Members' starnight. CCCA Observatory. Frozen Banana Star Party in Powassan, Ontario.
- May 24 Mars and Saturn close together.
- May 29 Public Starnight, Walker's Creek Park, St. Catharines. Sundown.
- June 8 Transit of Venus, 5 a.m. First since 1882. ***Don't miss this!***