

Volume 25 #3
May/June 2004

NIAGARA WHIRLPOOL



Image of Comet NEAT (C/2001 Q4) taken with Canon 10-D and Celestron Comet Catcher(f/3.63), no guiding. Shot 18/20 second images at 400 ISO, then combined them with ImagesPlus. Final tweaking done in Photoshop. This comet is moving very fast, about 75 arc secs. every 5 mins. You can just make out the tail with binoculars.

by Les Marczy

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

Classified advertising is free for Niagara Centre members.

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General Meetings Coming Up:

Niagara Falls Public Library at **7:30 pm**

May 20

June 24 (4th Thursday)

September 16

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 Message

By Glen Pidsadnick

With winter finally behind us, the spring and summer observing season can begin. There are a host of star parties, as well as Niagara Centre events planned. Many of the Niagara events are public starnights. These public nights are great for introducing astronomy as a hobby to a wide range of people, from children to seniors. Many will be looking through a telescope for the first time.

Promoting our club this way attracts many new members. It is quite amazing how our club has grown in the past few years because of these events. Without the support of a small group of club members who show up at every public gathering, this club wouldn't be flourishing as well as it is. We need to get more members out to these events. We have a vibrant and exciting club with a lot of benefits but it can only be as strong and vital as its members and its members' participation.

I believe if you want to use these benefits, like a private dark sky observing area with an existing observatory and a fine, newly refurbished 16" scope (thanks Les & Denis) with many new, expensive upgrades, a new observatory with GoTo scope and CCD camera in the works, a well stocked library, and fine loaner scopes, attending a few public star nights isn't a lot to ask.

A club can only be as strong as its members. It would be nice to see some fresh faces and opinions at these events. We have many public starnights planned for the summer, please try to attend one of them. They are fun and rewarding. When someone sees the moon or planet for the first time through a telescope, their excitement can be priceless. You don't even need to bring a scope or be an expert observer, just spending time with people telling them about your hobby is all we need.

Our 2004 banquet was a great success. Sixty-eight tickets were sold. We had out-of-town guests from Hamilton, Toronto and Thunder Bay. There were so many fine door prizes it took an hour to hand them all out. Thanks to Meade Instruments, Edmund Scientific, Astronomy magazine, Sky Optics, Khan Scope, Kendricks Astro systems, John Dean and Joe Otonicar for your support.

Guest speaker Eric Dunn's talk was enjoyed by all. He had us in stitches numerous times, he was a lot of fun. We must have him back. Chris Rigas and the staff at the Delphi Room provided a fabulous dinner, as usual. Finally, I would like to thank Brian Pihack for putting this whole thing together once again. He did a great job.

Thanks, and clear summer skies.



Brian Pihack's Astronomy Day slide presentation at Firemen's Park



Chris Duller introducing youngster to Venus at Firemen's Park

Secretary's Report

by John VanderBrugge

Once again we have had a "stellar" period for new members joining the Niagara Centre. Since my last report we've had twelve new members join. Welcome to the club, Philip Crouch, Glenn Sloggett, Jeremy Squires, Scott Barnes, Bonnie Currell, Shirley MacKenzie, Pat McDermott, Tony Ogilive, Carol Riddle, Dan Sawyer, Vitomir Rajic and Mark Roberts. This puts our current membership at 137.

The summer star party season is fast approaching. You'll find the dates for the various star parties in the Event Horizon at the end of the Whirlpool. The largest of the star parties is Starfest, held near Mount Forest every August. This year it falls on August 19-22. Normally there is a large contingent of at least 20 Niagara Centre members attending the event. If you are a new member and haven't had the chance to enjoy the many day- and nighttime activities and observing at Starfest, consider joining us this year for a good time. I will have brochures for Starfest at the June general meeting, or you can go to the Starfest website now at: <http://www.nyaa-Starfest.com/Starfest/index.htm>

On Tuesday, June 8th, we will be fortunate enough to experience a transit of Venus in Niagara. This is truly a rare event and not to be missed. Nobody alive has ever seen one. Prime viewing for the entire transit will be from Europe and Asia. But we will still get a good look at the last quarter of the five-hour transit. The transit will be in progress when the sun rises at 5:40 a.m., and will last until 7:15 a.m. when Venus exits the limb of the Sun. While we won't see the entire transit, we will see more than enough of it to make it a memorable experience.

Transits come in sets of two with eight years in between them, with a period of 120 years between sets. The last transit of Venus took place in 1882. The next transit will take place on June 6, 2012, when even more of the transit will be visible from our location. This assumes of course that the skies will be clear. If not, the coming June 8 transit might be the only chance in our lifetimes to observe this rare event. The Niagara Centre will be organizing an early morning public and club viewing for the transit at a local location. The location will be posted on the website when decided upon.

Public Observing Coordinator's Report

By Darlene Marano

While the skies were not totally co-operative, Astronomy Day was a great success. Many thanks to Les and Deloris Welgan, Stan and Pat Sammy, Phil Downey, Dave Stremlaw, Jim Holiko and Joanne Olsen for doing an afternoon of solar observing at Chapters in St. Catharines. The afternoon observing session took place from 11:30 a.m. until 2:30 p.m., where our club members hosted 70 to 80 people. After a little gentle coaxing from Les, Chapters and Starbucks were nice enough to announce who we were, what our club was doing, and invite their patrons to go outside and join our group. Chapters has proven to be a great location to touch a lot of people.

At 5 p.m. we held the evening portion of our celebration of Astronomy Day at Firemen's Park. It was apparent that our 100 or so guests were quite impressed with the view of the Moon, Jupiter, Venus and Saturn, the pamphlets, posters and stickers supplied by Astronomy Magazine courtesy of

John Dean, and a wonderful slide show performed by Brian Pihack, in addition to the hotdogs, coffee and pop served by the Stamford Volunteer Fireman's Association.

It looks like we will have several new potential members as a result of these events, which will add to our growing numbers. I would like to extend my gratitude and thank our members that were able to support our celebration of Astronomy Day. The continued support of these events aids in the existence of our club and its financial future.

I thank all involved, once again, and look forward to seeing everyone at our next public night at Walker's Creek on May 29th. On June 26th we'll be back at Firemen's Park and the Chippawa Creek Conservation Area, the same night. Please take note of the list of summer starnights at the CCCA and Rock Point. CCCA starnights are our "rent" for observatory space and it is essential we have a good turnout of members. Remember, even a partly cloudy night satisfies the public, as Astronomy Day showed.

Niagara Centre's Astronomy Day



Daytime images
by Deloris Welgan



Evening images
by Les Welgan



Member's Observing Coordinator's Report

By Les Marczi

Comets, comets and more comets. May will be a great month for anyone wanting to venture out in the early evening and catch a glimpse of one of these bright visitors.

Comet Bradfield (C/2004 F4) is now fading into the Sun but produced a nice show for some of us. Although not that bright, the tail was very long and quite visible in small binoculars. I made my way out to the southern shores of Lake Ontario early in the morning of April 28. There I could get a clear unobstructed view of the horizon to the northeast. Travelling light, I only brought a pair of binoculars and my camera with me (had to work that morning). After a little scanning around Andromeda, I picked up Bradfield easily. Its tail was very long and dim, and pointed straight up, a little reminiscent of Ikeya-Zhang but not as bright.

I also tried to pick up LINEAR (C/2002 T7), but it was washed out by the Sun. When it moves into the evening sky on the 26th of May it may be a naked eye object. Look for it very low in Southwest shining at magnitude 3.5 or brighter. It will not climb very high, so plan on getting out early or you'll miss it.

NEAT (C/2001 Q4) should be a better comet for us northern observers. During the two weeks after May 5th this comet could reach magnitude 3 or 4, making it a naked eye target also. On this date (after sunset) look south (left) of Sirius – there you should spot Q4 with its tail pointing southwards. It rises fairly rapidly eastward against the sunset time, placing it in darker skies by the 15th. At this time you will find the comet just north of the Beehive cluster (M44) in Cancer.

Finder charts for these can be found at <http://www.skyhound.com/sh/comets.html>

I hope to see many of you out at the observatory early in the evening to catch these celestial spectacles. Our next Members' Night will be held on May 22, June 19, July 17 and August 21. Don't forget your bug spray, especially in June and July.

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



Comet Bradfield visited the inner solar system briefly in April and May. Early risers were treated to a 10° tail that was easily seen in binoculars.

Les Marczi took this picture early on the morning of April 28



Just a little practicing for June 8. Taken about 2 p.m. May 11. Hot work in the sun!

by Phil Downey

Beginners Committee Report

By Stan Sammy

Our beginners' class is proceeding nicely. I would like to thank Joanne Olsen for her presentations to the class. Also, a thank you to Carol Riddle and A.N. Myer for the use of their computers and projectors.

On April 29th I put on a presentation for a Grade 4 Class. The teacher had introduced the students to astronomy during the previous week so that made my presentation much easier. They were excellent students and loved being in the Planetarium. I would like to thank my wife Pat for assisting during these presentations and the beginner's classes.

Our next beginners' classes are May 6th and 13th, and June 3rd and 10th. All sessions begin at 7 p.m. and any Niagara Centre members are welcome.

The dates for the fall classes are not yet approved. I will keep you informed. The fall schedule will appear in the next Whirlpool.

Observatory News

By Les Marczi

Well, we have finally come to a consensus on the construction of a new observatory, or should I say observatories. Yes, two smaller observatories instead of one large one. This was decided for various reasons, primarily to get around building permits and inspectors. Also, the original plans had multiple scopes in a single larger building – this has its obvious problems and drawbacks. Another bonus is the cost; it will be much less than previously budgeted, freeing up some extra cash for equipment.

The two buildings will be built in the same design as the well-known SkySheds <http://www.skyshed.com/> with their roll-off roofs.

The first and main observatory will house a fork-mounted 12" Schmidt-Cassegrain GOTO telescope. It will be a fully automated setup, all controlled via computer. This will give our CCD imager a permanent home and a solid platform. Also, this gives the club a true scientific facility. I'm sure this will easily serve the needs of our more advanced amateur. Its dimensions will be 10x10 or 8x12 feet.

The second building, to be built next year, will be a bit smaller, but not by much. We are still undecided about the type of scope we will buy. I would like to have this one as a dual-purpose observatory for daytime solar and nighttime deepsky observing all in one. I believe that a Schmidt-Cassegrain or a Maksutov-Cassegrain would be in order here because they take up very little room. Please share your opinions with me or any member of the executive.

These two buildings will eventually replace our existing observatory, which has suffered serious water damage over the past few years. This damage has led to an invasion of ants which are destroying the wooden supports and accelerating the observatory's decay. It is unlikely the current observatory will last another five years.

I have asked Denis Maheu to be my Assistant Observatory Director (he was the previous Director before I took over). Denis said he would be happy to help me out, as he has built a few observatories already, including our existing one. This project needs more than one person to put it all together, so I will be calling on you all for contributions (work parties) in the next few months.

The 16" should be reinstalled and ready to go very soon. The tube has had minor repairs done and the primary mirror is ready to go back in. We have bought a new diagonal mirror and spider vanes. We will also have a dew heater system built into it that will prevent dew on the diagonal, Telrad and eyepieces. Glen Pidsadnick donated the controller for it.

I have also purchased collimating tools for this scope. The eyepieces and laser will be at your disposal for collimating your own Newtonian-style telescopes once the club scope is installed (but please do not attempt collimating the 16" scope if you're unsure or unfamiliar with the procedure). The tools cannot be taken from the observatory. See John VanderBrugge's article in the November/December 2003 issue of the Whirlpool for an introduction to their use.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me any time at lmarczi@cogeco.ca (905) 734-3447 or Denis at maheu@vaxxine.com (905) 935-1999. Hopefully this month the 16" will come together and begin producing beautiful views again.

Clear skies!

FEATURES

Another Successful Banquet

By Philip Downey



Eric Dunn



President Glen Pidsadnick



Eric Dunn, after his talk, with Les and Deloris Welgan and Philip Downey.

The Niagara Centre welcomed writer and television producer Eric Dunn as its guest speaker for our Annual Banquet on April 3. Eric gave a great talk recounting his astronomical experiences, which have taken him around the globe. Almost 70 members attended for a wonderful meal, a great talk, plenty of door prizes and a chance to socialize with club members, their families and friends. Big thanks go out to our sponsors: Khan Scope Centre, Sky Optics, Kendrick Astro Instruments, Edmund Scientific and Meade Telescopes for their door-prize donations.

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www.kendrick-ai.com

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www.meade.com

FEATURES

New Privacy Policy

In January, 2004, Canada adopted new federal privacy laws and regulations. As a result of this, the RASC developed new privacy guidelines that the Niagara Centre Executive adopted in March 2004. The new regulations are summarized below and on our website.

As a member of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada (RASC) – Niagara Centre, please be aware of the following regarding your privacy and personal information.

1. Your name, address, telephone number, and if available, email address, are stored on the RASC Niagara Centre Membership List and are available to all RASC Niagara Centre members. The Membership List is not available to anyone else.
2. The Membership List is available for download to RASC – Niagara Centre members who are registered with a unique username and password on this site.
3. If you do not wish to have any of your contact information published on the Membership List, please contact our secretary for assistance. (Contact information can be found under “Club Contacts” off the main page on this web site or on the masthead of the Whirlpool.)
4. The purpose of the Membership List is to assist local centre members with contacting each other and coordinating their astronomy-related activities. The Membership List has no other purpose.

The RASC – Niagara Centre receives your contact information and any membership status updates from the RASC National Office. If you wish to review or change either your contact information or membership status, please contact the National Office for assistance. (Contact information is available at <http://www.rasc.ca/aboutus.htm>)



Rick Eller took this picture of M42, the Orion Nebula, with a PlanetCam video camera and Celestron 9.25" SCT

FEATURES

International Astronomy Day

By Philip Downey

The Niagara Centre celebrated International Astronomy Day with two viewing sessions on April 24. The first happened 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at Fairview Mall. Eight members used a variety of filters to show the sun to about 75 people. At night 11 telescopes were set up at Firemen's Park in Niagara Falls to show 100 children and adults the Moon, Venus, Jupiter and Saturn as they poked through the cloudy skies. Hot dogs, hot chocolate and pop were sold by the Firemen's Association and Brian Pihack gave a great slide show to 60 people.



Children and adults enjoyed views of the sun at Fairview Mall.



Little girl, big scope!



Enjoying the view of the moon.



Glen Pidsadnick showing off the planets.

Philip Downey photographed the waxing crescent moon on February 25 with an 85mm Stellarvue refractor and a Nikon digital camera.



Les Marczi took this picture of the moon with his Canon digital camera and 10" Meade Schmidt-Cassegrain

For Sale *Reduced*

15 inch Obsession-style truss tube Dobsonian telescope

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. Kendricks 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

A complete large aperture telescope ready for deep sky observing. Price: \$6400. Contact John VanderBrugge at 935-9355.

Niagara Centre Store

RASC 2004 Calenders	\$13.00
Beginner's Observer's Guide	\$13.00
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

Group rates available for ***Sky & Telescope*** and ***Astronomy***.

Anyone interested in getting the club discount for subscriptions to these 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 905-892-2767 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.

Astronomy stuff for sale?

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. Contact 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. Contact 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. Contact Joe Iannandrea at 905-991-0781.

For Sale UPDATED

Meade 8-inch Schmidt-Cassegrain MTS (Modular Telescope System), Comes with: Fork Equatorial on Pier Mount, LX3 Quartz Drive RA, Dec Motor, Hand Controller (RA & Dec), MotoFocus, JMI Zero Shift Focuser, Orion Sliding Counterweight, 1.25" diagonal, Meade 26 mm and 15 mm Plossl eyepieces, Thousand Oaks Solar Filter, Lumicon 1.5 anc. HA filter, Metal storage case. Price: \$1000.00. Contact: 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 905-934-4647, astro_nuts@cogeco.ca

Sell your item here !!!

Event Horizon

May 19	New moon.
May 20	General meeting, Niagara Falls Public Library, 7:30 p.m.
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
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June 3	Beginners' session at A.N. Myer. 7-9 p.m.
June 8	Transit of Venus, 5 a.m. First since 1882. Don't miss this!
June 10	Beginners' session at A.N. Myer. 7-9 p.m.
June 17	New moon
June 19	Members' starnight. CCCA Observatory
June 24	General meeting, Niagara Falls Public Library, 7:30 p.m. <i>NOTE: 4th Thursday!</i>
June 26	Public Starnight, Firemen's Park, Niagara Falls. Sundown
June 26	Public Starnight, Chippawa Creek Conservation Area. Sundown
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July 17	New moon. Members' starnight. CCCA Observatory
July 17-19	Gateway to the Universe Star Party. Powassan, Ontario
July 24	Public Starnight, Chippawa Creek Conservation Area. Sundown
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August 7	Rock Point Provincial Park Public Starnight. Sundown
August 11	Perseid meteor shower peaks
August 16	New moon.
August 19 – 22	Starfest! Mount Forest, Ontario
August 21	Members' starnight. CCCA Observatory
August 28	Public Starnight, Chippawa Creek Conservation Area. Sundown
August 31	Venus near Saturn
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September 9	Mercury almost on top of Regulus.
September 11	Members' starnight. CCCA Observatory
September 14	New moon
September 16	General meeting, Niagara Falls Public Library, 7:30 p.m.
September 18	Public Starnight, Firemen's Park, Niagara Falls. Sundown