



NIAGARA

Volume 25 #4
September/October 2004

WHIRLPOOL

Les Marczi took this picture of M8, M20 and M21 the night of the StarBQ, July 10, at the CCCA.

It was featured as a Picture of the Week on SkyNews magazine's website.

The Andromeda galaxy and its two companions, M32 and M110, also taken this summer by LesMarczi



www.rasc.ca/niagara

NIAGARA WHIRLPOOL

The Newsletter of the
Royal Astronomical Society of Canada
Niagara Centre

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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**

September 16

October 21

November 18

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

We will be holding elections at this October's Meeting. I am stepping down as president, and will not seek reelection. It has been an honour being the president of such a great organization, with some of the finest people I have ever met. For anyone considering running for president, I highly recommend it. What a rewarding challenge it was!

We once again will be on hand at Stonechurch Vineyards Saturday, September 25, during The Niagara Grape and Wine Festival, with another Stargaze Craze. Brian will be inside the theater putting on his excellent slide show, while other members will be outside showing the public the many sights of the night sky. And don't forget the wine tasting.

We hope to have Ray Khan visit our October meeting with his presentation of the Melin Cam astro camera. In November we host the traveling meteor show.

And don't forget the Frozen Banana Star Party in October. We hope to get a big Niagara RASC group going up to Powassan. The skies are quite dark.



The Gang at Starfest 2004

Starfest 2004 saw the largest Niagara Centre group ever, with more than 30 of us, including members, family and friends. If this keeps up, we'll need a bigger campsite. Stan and Pat Sammy started things off early by arriving on Monday to claim our spot in the field. By Wednesday our camp was quite full, and by Friday we were 31 strong. Also RASC members from Thunder Bay, Winnipeg and Toronto joined us.

The weather wasn't too bad. Monday and Saturday the night skies were clear, and Thursday evening offered clear skies until midnight. Other than that the rest of the time we had comfortable temps, and partial sunshine. It did get quite cool on Saturday evening, with a low of 3C.

There were many vendors competing for our \$\$\$ this year. Some great deals were there and many of us found them. The best deal was on the \$3000 Swarovski binoculars — but no one took them home. I think the best new product on display was the Coronado PST solar scope. For \$800 the views of the sun were amazing.

The swap table this year was lousy. I couldn't find any deals at all. There was someone selling fur pelts — what were they thinking? The speakers they had this year were quite diverse. From Rob Gendler's amazing astrophotography and Mars rovers, to Cassini orbiting Saturn, there was some-

thing for everyone. And don't forget the banquet dinner. We occupied one and a half tables. The food was good as always.

Some of us did manage to get in some astrophotography and observing. We saw some very bright Iridium satellites. I managed to get a shot of one. Overall the attendance at Starfest was quite high this year, with an abundance of scopes of many types and sizes scattering the landscape next to tents and trailers. The Niagara RASC members who attended all had fun. We all had a little bit to drink, and a lot to eat. We also had a lot of laughs. I can't wait till next year.

Secretary's Report

by John VanderBrugge

Hope everyone enjoyed a good summer. For those that like it hot it was not the ideal summer. Also observing has not been the best with lots of cloudy nights. Most of us managed to make it a full summer of astro events and fun regardless of the weather.



Mike Panucci's projection system gave a safe, unfiltered view of Venus transiting the Sun on June 8.

The summer began with a significant event on June 8, the Transit of Venus. Our members/public viewing event on the morning of the transit was attended by more than 25 members who were set up and ready to go before sunrise. The Sun rose through the hazy horizon with Venus appearing naked-eye on its face due to the natural filtering of the haze. This naked-eye view was unexpected and enjoyed by all. The humidity worked in our favour for a change.

As the Sun rose higher the filters went in front of the eyes, telescopes and binoculars for the remainder of the transit. The viewing of this rare event was a treat and relief was felt by all that it wasn't clouded out for a change. With this transit under our belt the remaining transit for our lifetime in 2012 will be a bonus.

Our Niagara Centre elections for the next executive will be held at the General Meeting on October 21. Every two years we pick a new board of members to run the club. The nine elected positions available are President, Vice-President, Treasurer, Secretary, National Council Representative, and four positions for Board of Directors. I will be stepping aside after six enjoyable years as Secretary. My wife Donna and I will be adopting a little girl, and I have a hunch my time will be spoken for in the next couple years. So the post of secretary will be one of the positions open.

If you feel inclined to run for any of the executive positions you won't be sorry. I've learned a great deal and made many good friends through helping to run the club. I'm glad I made the effort years back to join in.

If you would like to run for a position you will need a member to nominate you. You can nominate members for any of the positions listed with the nomination form as well. You will need their signature on the form confirming they accept the nomination. Get the form to me either in person, or to the club P.O. Box. I will have nomination forms available at the September and October General Meetings, or you may email me and I will send you a Word file of the form.



Photos by Les Welgan

*Above: Venus Transit at 6:17 AM. No filter.
Taken thru C5 SCT.*

*Above Right: 6.56 AM. Taken thru
Coronado Maxscope 40, afocal with 28mm
Scopetronics eyepiece.*

*Right: Venus Transit at 7:12 AM. Baader
filter. Taken thru C5 SCT.*



Observatory Director's Report

by Les Marczi

Well I hope everyone had a safe and enjoyable summer. The weather wasn't the greatest, although there were a few good nights to be out under the stars. Let's hope this trend changes soon!

Now, enough about the weather, let's talk about the observatory progress. We have purchased a new/used Meade f/10 12" LX-200 GOTO Schmidt Cassegrain telescope. This came with a modified Meade Superwedge, which is needed for long exposure astrophotography. We also have a Meade 416-XTE CCD imager, with a computer to control both camera and scope. Once set up properly, this will be a very powerful scientific tool. Who knows what great contributions the Niagara Centre can make to the astronomical community? Variable star studies, spectroscopy, occultations and maybe hunting for exo-planets (it is possible). The list is endless with today's modern electronics, computers, imagers/cameras (CCDs) and of course, optics.

Getting this all up and running properly will take some time, but I think the challenges are what I like most about this hobby.

Glen was kind enough have a couple dew remover controllers made for both observatories (and saved us a few bucks), a must-have on those damp nights.

The gravel for the observatory base and extra for the shed and roadway was brought in last week. So work parties will be scheduled very soon. I will notify everyone as to when and what time, well beforehand.



The shed was assembled and completed on the weekend of August 28.

The existing observatory is as good as it's ever been, the 16" still has a lot of life left in her. I did a little observing on August 22, and as always, was very delighted with the views.

I'd like to take this time to acknowledge one of our contributors. Alan Ward of Moon Ward Vacuum Coatings has been taking care of our optics (16" mirror) free of charge. He has been doing this for the past 10 years, which has saved the club a lot of money. I feel Alan is one of those unsung heroes, who really does it for the love of the hobby, Thanks Alan!

Members' Observing Coordinator's Report

by Les Marczy

Fall is just around the corner, bringing with it clear, cooler skies. This is my favourite time of the year for imaging and observing, because of the slight temperature changes from daytime to nighttime. The skies stay very stable, atmospheric scintillation is minimal, and optics are less susceptible to drastic temperature changes. It's also that way in the spring, but you have more moisture to deal with.

Over the summer we had a couple good nights of nice clear skies out at the C.C.C.A. observatory. Considering the weather this year, I think we did all right on Members' Nights. Our last one was held the same weekend as Starfest, so we didn't have a good turnout. However, it proved to be a great evening, with the sky full of the Milky Way.

As predicted, the Perseid meteor shower on August 12 shower was a great one. We were still seeing the odd one here and there at the last Members' Night.

We have another total lunar eclipse to look forward to this fall, on October 27. I hope the weather is as good as it was for last year's.

I look forward to seeing you all this fall at our upcoming Members' Nights, which are scheduled for September 11, October 16, November 13 and December 11.

The July 10 StarBQ was a big success, with 41 people at the CCCA.



BUDS Committee Report

by Mike Panucci

This is my debut *Whirlpool* letter. I hope members have enjoyed the cool and wet summer.

I was asked by our president in the spring to coordinate a new program for beginners, which involves bringing together new, beginner members and our dark site at the Chippawa Creek Conservation Area. The program name is "Beginners Under Dark Skies." (B.U.D.S.)

BUDS will provide a way for new and existing members to share astronomy and telescope knowledge. Our membership has a lot of experience and this program is a great way to channel this resource to beginners.

Also, dark sky observing benefits are dramatic and a beginner must witness the difference between the CCCA and the cities. The glow of the Milky Way is easily visible to enjoy, and hunting down a Messier or NGC object is much more rewarding. My message to beginners is that it is very appropriate for you to drive out to our dark site.

These BUDS nights will be scheduled on member or public nights at CCCA. Each BUDS night has a theme. The first was "Lawn Chair Astronomy." It attracted a dozen members who shared and learned together under real stars. It was friendly and casual. The instrument of choice was binoculars, which are an excellent astronomy instrument. We observed many deep sky objects with telescopes but Comet NEAT looked best with our binoculars.

Together we learned how to use a star chart, reviewed some of the mechanics of the sky, referred to the Observers Handbook and, most importantly, we looked up and observed! A lot may come easy to experienced observers but learning means starting with the basics. Heck, we are always learning.

Unfortunately, two other planned summer BUDS nights were rained out. The themes were "Star Hopping" and "Telescope Designs".

I will continue BUDS into the fall season. The next planned night is September 11, at 7:30 p.m., a Members' Night. I will carry over "Star Hopping" and "Telescope Designs." I hope Mother Nature cooperates.

I am looking forward to future BUDS nights. Don't be shy, come and join us!

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Edmund Scientifics

www.scientificsonline.com

**Kendrick Astro
Instruments**
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Phone 416 762 7946
Fax 416 762 2765
www.kendrick-ai.com

Dark Sky Coordinator's Report

by Wayne Liebau

Spring was a busy time for dark-sky work. The Regional Municipality of Niagara invited public comments on proposed new environmental policies for the Regional Policy Plan. The lengthy amendment dealt with a wide range of environmental issues, but not surprisingly, light pollution wasn't mentioned. Policy plans can be pretty dry things, but Philip Downey and I decided this offered an opportunity to put light pollution on Niagara's agenda. We thought it important to get the issue officially on the record; a presentation at a public hearing might also make others aware.

On behalf of the Niagara Centre, Phil wrote a submission (also posted on our website) outlining the nature of the light pollution problem and offering to work together with Regional planners to find solutions. He and I attended the public meeting held at Regional Headquarters on May 19, where Phil presented his submission verbally and later in writing. The reaction was highly interesting: the presiding municipal politician, Bruce Timms, seemed to show pleased surprise at Phil's introduction, as though a light had suddenly switched on. The audience was rather sparse and the presentations varied; Phil was the *only* one to get any substantial reaction, and that was a round of spontaneous applause! We expect to find out this fall whether light pollution will be a new facet of the Regional Policy Plan.

In order to demonstrate wider support for control of light pollution, Phil then garnered more than 30 signatures at the next RASC monthly meeting.

Over the past few months I've been speaking with a Regional planner who promised to try to connect us with a Regional official to discuss light pollution solutions. We'll follow up again after summer vacation time.

In anticipation of such a meeting, we want to ensure that we've done our homework. To get advice from experienced people elsewhere, I've corresponded with the chair of the National Light Pollution Abatement Committee, who spearheaded the Ottawa Centre's dark-sky work, and with the leaders of successful light pollution abatement initiatives in Calgary and Oshawa.

Another planner visited Phil's cottage in August, bringing with him a Globe & Mail story on light pollution activism in the Muskoka region. He remembered the presentation clearly from the public night.

We have also been invited to meet in Mississauga with a sales representative of a major lighting company, a person who is a "starry night advocate." This will be a chance to learn many more details about dark-sky-friendly fixtures and technical issues. It too is a fall/winter project.

Lately, we've spotted occasional articles in local and national newspapers about light pollution, many coinciding with the first anniversary of the major blackout of 2003 throughout Ontario and the surrounding states. Since there may be opportunities for the Centre to educate the public and even influence lighting decisions for some local situations, please let Phil and I know if you see or hear anything relevant in local news media.

FEATURES

New Shed at the Observatory

By Les & Deloris Welgan

Back in the Spring, the Niagara Centre executive decided to erect an 8' x 10' no-maintenance shed next to the Observatory. The shed will serve several purposes.

There have been many ideas regarding bathroom facilities at the site. Most of them were either too expensive or not practical. However, the idea of erecting a shed with a small platform inside one corner for anyone wishing to bring their own port-a-potty, met with everyone's approval. Les Marzci will have a place to store his lawn mower and other tools he uses at the Observatory. Members will have a warm room for those cold, clear nights of observing and photographing.

We have a spectacular, dark site that doesn't get used nearly enough. Hopefully, the new shed and the conveniences it provides will entice more members to make the trek to our Observatory to enjoy the wonderful view.

Ed Archambault and Stan Sammy arrived for the public starnight and were able to help us install the roof panels and hang the doors. We really appreciated the help!



The shed under construction on August 28.

FEATURES

The Cosmodome

By Philip Downey

In August I had a chance to visit the Cosmodome in Laval, Quebec. The Cosmodome is a museum devoted to planetary science and space exploration, and a little astronomy.

The showpiece is a hybrid IMAX/flight simulator movie about the history of solar system science. In a theater that seats about 100 under a high, domed ceiling, the entire floor rotates and tilts to move you between different set-pieces, featuring partly holographic movies projected behind doors that open in the walls. Once, I was tipped so far forward I thought I might slide out of my seat.

The narration and the actors' voices are piped in through headphones attached to the back of your seat, in your choice of English or French. The movie covers the history of theories about the solar system, beginning with ancient pagan and occult beliefs, before moving on to the Greeks and Egyptians, then through Kepler, Galileo, Newton, and finally to today's spacecraft explorers. Notably, it's the only science museum I have ever attended that says religion set science back more than 1000 years, in a scene demonstrating when the Egyptians chose Ptolemy's religiously-inspired system over a more science-based view.

There are other exhibits, featuring lifesize and miniature replicas of satellites, rockets and other spacecraft. They rightly make a big deal of Canada's early lead in satellite technology. Our country was third – after the U.S. and Soviet Union – to get a satellite into orbit. We were also leaders in communications technology, and a life-size replica of the Anik is suspended from the ceiling.

There is also a good section on the planets, with properly scaled models strung out in a large room. The accompanying descriptions were concise and up to date. Occasionally, a translation from the French didn't quite make it properly into English.

Kids can also be enrolled in a multi-day spacecamp, which involves activities set inside a replica of the International Space Station.

I recommend that any astronomers visiting, or passing through, Montreal, make a detour north to the Cosmodome. It's easy to get to and worth visiting.



Phil Downey took this picture of the moon on July 28, 2004, with an 85mm refractor

MORE SUMMER PICS



StarBQ



Relaxing and trading observing stories.

Brian and Erin manning the BBQ. Mmmmmm!



Rockpoint



Interesting stories around the campfire.

Cloud or sun? Waiting for the sky to clear.

Sky Optics

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

Meade Telescopes

www.meade.com

Niagara Centre Store

RASC 2005 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. Calendars available in September...won't last long, first come/first served.

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.

Astonomy 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.

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

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.

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, etcA complete large aperture telescope ready for deep sky observing. Price: \$5700. Contact John VanderBrugge at 935-9355.

Event Horizon

- September 11 Members' starnight. CCCA Observatory. BUDS program begins at 7:30 p.m.
 - September 13 Start watching for zodiacal light before dawn.
 - 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.
 - September 22 Equinox, fall begins.
 - September 25 Stargaze Craze at Stonechurch Vineyards. Setup begins at 6 p.m.
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- October 12 Start watching for zodiacal light before dawn.
 - October 16 Members' starnight. CCCA Observatory.
 - October 20 Orionid meteors peak.
 - October 21 General meeting, Niagara Falls Public Library, 7:30 p.m.
Guest Speaker: Ray Kahn, Topic: Video Astro Imaging
 - October 23 Public starnight, Firemen's Park, Niagara Falls. Sundown.
 - October 28 Total lunar eclipse.
 - October 31 Daylight Savings Time ends. Change those clocks.
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- November 9 The Moon occults Jupiter at noon.
- November 12 New moon.
- November 13 Members' starnight. CCCA Observatory.
- November 17 Leonid meteors peak.
- November 18 General meeting, Niagara Falls Public Library, 7:30 p.m.
- November 20 Public starnight, Firemen's Park, Niagara Falls. Sundown