



Volume 27 #1  
JAN / FEB 2006

# The Niagara WHIRLPOOL

## MEET

**TERENCE DICKINSON**

pg 5

**Whistler Astronomers  
Lead Egypt Eclipse Tour**

pg 13

**A Spanish Gold Ring**

pg 10

**Ian Brewster  
will be our guest  
speaker for the  
January General  
Meeting.**

pg 5



# The Niagara WHIRLPOOL

## The Newsletter of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada Niagara Centre

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## From the Editor...

by DELORIS WELGAN



Happy New Year everyone! I hope your holidays were fun and relaxing.

With the new year comes a new look for the Whirlpool. As well as the redesign of the introductory pages, I've added photos to the reports written by our Executive and Special Committee Coordinators. I thought it would be helpful for our new members to put a face to a name.

I'd like to send an apology out to John Dean. In the last issue, I credited a couple of photos taken at Starfest (How many RASC members does it take to put up a tent?) to John Fishleigh when in fact, John Dean sent them to me. You'll be happy to know he didn't hold it against me and sent me a couple of fantastic pictures which are in this issue.

Congratulations to Jim and Erin Holiko! Would you like to see what they got for Christmas? Stay tuned...

We have two Christmas parties every December. The Ex-

ecutive gets together for an evening of relaxation and comradeship and then we have the Members' party after the General Meeting held at Chatters. We have some marvelous photos of the Executive get-together but the Members Party?...well, that tale is good for a laugh and saved for another page.

Brian Pihack forwarded an article to me about Steve Arnold who is a professional meteorite hunter. His story was written by Kevin Murphy and originally printed in *The Kansas City Star*. I found it interesting and thought you might too. I wrote to Kevin and received permission to share it with you.

*West Coast Watch* and *Bad Bob's Perspective* have returned to this year's lineup of great articles to look forward to.

I look forward to hearing from you so put pen to paper or your fingers on the keyboard and let me know what you would like to see in your newsletter. Your letters, articles and photos are greatly appreciated!

## Upcoming General Meetings

January 19	Niagara Falls Public Library at 7:30 pm
February 16	Niagara Falls Public Library at 7:30 pm
March 16	Niagara Falls Public Library at 7:30 pm

## About the Cover

Cover photo was taken by Jim Holiko at Starfest 2005.

It is the background photo used on our new website.



## In This Issue...

### Features

- 13** Whistler Astronomers Lead Egypt Eclipse Tour
- 5** Meet Terence Dickinson
- 10** A Spanish Gold Ring
- 8** Finder of big meteorite says he's only scratched the surface
- 16** Executive Christmas Dinner



### Correspondence from your Executive Council

- 4** President's Message
- 5** Secretary's Report



### Regular Columns

- 14** Bad Bob's Perspective
- 13** Librarian's Corner
- 22** Event Horizon
- 6** West Coast Watch
- 17** Public Observing Coordinator's Report
- 7** Members Observing and Observatory Director's Report
- 21** Niagara Centre Ads



## President's Message...

by BRIAN PIHACK



I trust that everyone had a good Christmas and a fine start to the New Year.

Speaking of which Jim [our vice president] and Erin [Public Nights co-Chair] are the proud parents of a happy, healthy baby boy. My congratulations to the both of them. Ryan James Holiko was born 5:22 pm on December 23rd 2005. He weighed 8.85lbs and 19 inches long!



Ryan James Holiko

Despite the weather, our last meeting was well attended. After a short program we headed off to "Chatters" where Chris hosted our Christmas party. As usual, we took over the lower room and enjoyed the camaraderie and, as always, Chris outdid himself. The food was fantastic. Our thanks go out to Chris and his staff.

This month we, once again, have an extraordinary speaker lined

up. Ian Brewster specializes in cosmology and physics and has written several papers on the subject for science journals and magazines. He is the co-author of "The Simple Universe", whose by-line reads "*If you have an interest in understanding the universe, The Simple Universe is a good place to start because it takes a complex subject and makes it completely understandable*". Kind of reminds me of Einstein...the universe is not complicated...just the explanation!

Now it is my understanding from Joe Otonicar that there were a lot of people who missed the opportunity to purchase books from Robert Godwin [Apogee books], our guest speaker in November. Well, it looks like you may get another chance. As for myself, the book that was sold out before I could get a copy was in fact the "Simple Universe". Joe assures me that a shipment of books will accompany Ian this month.

I look forward to seeing all of you at the next meeting.

You don't want to miss  
the opportunity to

hear

**TERENCE DICKINSON**

at the

**RASC NIAGARA CENTRE'S**

**12<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL BANQUET**

**SATURDAY, APRIL 8, 2006**

Place: Delphi Hall  
Portage Road (beside Chatters)  
Niagara Falls, On

Time: 5:30 pm – cocktails  
6:30 pm – dinner  
8:00 pm – speaker

Cost: \$45.00/pp before April 1  
\$50.00/pp after April 1

**For tickets, contact:**

Joyce Sims (*ticket sales coordinator*)

905-262-5276

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*The Moon and  
Venus in  
November 2005  
by John Dean*



### Terence Dickinson

is a leading amateur astronomer and science writer who lives near the rural town of Yarker, Ontario.

He has written approximately fourteen books including *Nightwatch: A Practical Guide to Viewing the Universe* and *The Backyard Astronomer's Guide*, and his works have been credited as some of the best resources available for beginners in astronomy.

He teaches part-time at St. Lawrence College and the asteroid 5272 Dickinson is named after him.

-Astronomer columnist/expert for the "Toronto Star"

-Resident expert on Astronomy for the Discovery channel

-New York Academy of Science Book of the Year Award

-Astronomy Society of the Pacific Award recipient

-Order of Canada Award

-Editor of "SkyNews"

### Secretary's Report...

by LES WELGAN



Another two months have passed since our last newsletter and we are into a brand new year.

Our last executive meeting was held at the home of Glen and Darlene Sloggett, Monday, 7th November. Thank you to Darlene and Glen for hosting this meeting and for a superb array of food and desserts. By the way, these executive meetings which are held monthly are open to the general membership. If you are interested in attending, please contact the president or me with your intentions and we will inform you of the date, time and location.

Three new members have joined our centre: Ray Kahn who holds a dual membership (Toronto and Niagara), Daniel Fisher (youth) and Joel Ingram (youth). Welcome to the club! Please ask questions if you are unsure of something. We all look forward to meeting you and helping you as you participate in our club activities. You'll find the Niagara Centre to be a great group of people who are willing to share their expertise and experiences with those new (and old) to astronomy.

At the November general meeting, Robert Godwin of Apogee Books gave a presentation called: *Our perceptions of Mars as shaped by science fiction and how it compares to what we are finding out from the current Mars missions*. He was very enlightening and enjoyable to listen to. His slide presentation made it easy to follow and understand. He also brought along his collection of pub-

lished books and DVD's on the space program. Those who brought along some extra cash got some great bargains. All material was heavily discounted. Deloris and I being avid 'Space Mission' buffs purchased some excellent books and DVD's on the Apollo missions.

The December meeting was kept short and was followed by the Members annual Christmas party at Chatters Bar and Grill. Deloris and I were unable to attend due to weather concerns that evening but from all accounts it was well attended and fun was had by all.

The weather gods have not been very cooperative these past months and consequently, not much observing has been carried out by our members. Hopefully, 2006 will change all that. Having said that, our first scheduled public star night held Saturday, 7 January 2006 was clouded out yet again. Oh well.... let's hope this will change soon.

Until next time, clear skies. 

## January 2006

### General Meeting Guest Speaker

**Ian Brewster,**  
co-author of  
"The Simple Universe"

*Don't forget...you will have an opportunity to purchase Apogee books from Ian during this visit.*

## WestCoastWatch...

by JOHN NEMY and CAROL LEGATE



Images on this page are of the Gemini North telescope on Maui Kai, Hawaii. The Very Large Peoples Telescope would be similar. Images courtesy Gemini Telescope

## The VLPT & World Eco-Centre

World's largest visual telescope proposed for Whistler, British Columbia & Canada.

So let's think big: really, really big. Imagine a place in nature that recognizes our existence in the natural world everyday. The VLPT & World Eco-Centre is the place. This centre, comprised of two components, will be a continuous international attraction for Whistler, British Columbia.

The Very Large People's Telescope (VLPT) will be the world's largest visual telescope and will be located in Whistler, B.C. The VLPT will show the night sky to people like no other telescope on the planet. Starlight gathered by the telescope's massive three-metre mirror will be seen directly by the human eye. Adaptive optics will produce a view only seen by electronic imaging cameras used by professional astronomers in the past until now.

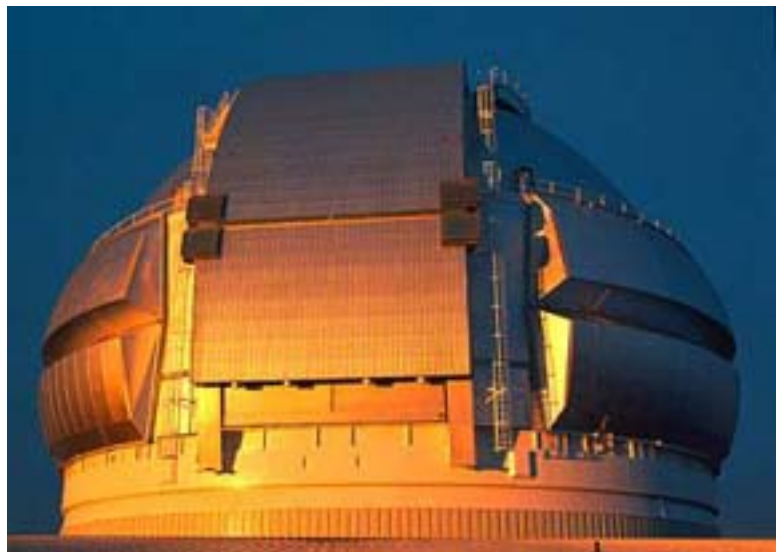
Adaptive optics, which is

used today by all the major telescopes around the world, is a technology developed by Canada. This type of optical system is a manipulation of the telescope mirror to compensate for fluctuations in the Earth's atmosphere. Since these fluctuations degrade the clarity of our view of the stars, a visual telescope with adaptive optics will

show objects in the sky like never before. The powerful light-gathering ability of the huge segmented mirror will show the night sky in unprecedented detail, bringing people back again and again to treat their eyes to deep sky wonders. Once the VLPT is up and running it will be a self-sustaining, year-round operation. The stars are always there.

The World Eco-Centre is the facility that embraces the concept of recognizing our celestial and terrestrial worlds. The centre is a place for all people of the world to meet, learn and promote a positive outlook about our coexistence on planet Earth. A place where words like "humility" and "humanity" are used with positive connotations as we try to understand and appreciate the universe and ourselves, not to mention Canada's beautiful nature. Glaciology, volcanism, forestry, geology, cosmology and astronomy will be some of the activities people will be exposed to at the centre. The current Whistler visitor demographic and the local communities are searching for a west coast nature experience that is real and not some kind of artificial exposure to our surroundings.

*cont. on pg 7*



Niagara Whirlpool

Visitors to the resort today are side-tracked by what Whistler is not. Whistler is a community set in stunning nature. Under all the glitz of our modern resort in the Coast Mountains, the world expects a place like Whistler to build the World Eco-Centre and people will come to experience it again and again. The VLPT & World Eco-Centre is the sustainable, world-class attraction that will benefit the community, the resort, Canada and the world. Whistler welcomes the world every day, this cutting edge mountain town should be the world centre recognizing our amazing planet.



Aurora in May 2005  
by John Dean

For more information contact us at John Nemy & Carol Legate at The Pacific Observatory at

tel. 604-938-8090

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web <http://www.nemy.com>



Thank you  
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**Khan Scope Centre**  
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**NASA TRIVIA**

It's a small world.

More than 1,000 Earths would fit into Jupiter's vast sphere.

**Dave still has a few left.**

**Get your 2006 Observer's calendar now!**

**contact Dave Stremlaw.**

Members' Observing and Observatory Director's Report...

by LES MARCZI



Happy New Year! I hope your holidays were enjoyable.

There isn't anything to report on members' nights or observatory construction. The weather has been the worst I've seen in a while. I haven't done any deepsky imaging since September. Let's hope the new year brings us more favourable weather.

- Upcoming Members Nights:**
- January 28
  - February 25
  - March **OPEN** (Egypt march 26)
  - April 29
  - May 27
  - June 24
  - July 22
  - August 26



## Finder of big meteorite says he's only scratched the surface

By KEVIN MURPHY  
The Kansas City Star

"It's from out there on the other side of Mars. How cool is that?"  
Steve Arnold, professional meteorite hunter

GREENSBURG, Kan. — Bouncing over the dirt rows of the newly planted wheat field, Steve Arnold's contraption of plastic pipes mounted on four lawnmower wheels looks mighty strange. Then there is Arnold — pulling the rig behind him while a plastic bucket containing a metal detector hangs around his neck.

Odd as he looks out there in the field, Arnold has brought a new and lucrative form of farming to south-central

acres to look for meteorites. He pays them up front for hunting rights, and each gets a share of his sales.

"I've never heard of anyone doing that before," said Jeffrey Grossman, a geochemist and secretary of the Meteoritical Society, an international planetary science organization.

Arnold's partner and lawyer, Phil Mani of San Antonio, set up the recent contracts and paid expenses for Arnold's prospecting in Kansas. Mani

said that the contracts are a first and are necessary because without them the meteorites would be the property of the persons on whose land they fell.

"We are going to cover all the land where we think meteorites can be found," Mani said.

Arnold, a Wichita native, makes his living trading and selling meteorites, which are sought after by museums and universities and by collectors tantalized by the otherworldly nature of such rocks. Meteorites

come from the asteroid belt formed at the dawn of the solar system about 4.3 billion years ago.

"It's from out there on the other side of Mars. How cool is that?" Arnold said. "You can own something that has not changed since the beginning of the solar system."

Meteorites, most of them smaller than grapefruits, are sold over the Internet and at shows. Arnold's is being kept in Texas and will be displayed at a major gem and mineral show next month in Tucson, Ariz.

News of his discovery spread

fast, landing Arnold on several national news shows and stirring envy in the meteorite community.

"Its overwhelming size and shape make it truly unique," Allan Lang, a well-known meteorite dealer in upstate New York, said of Arnold's discovery.

Meanwhile, Arnold is back in the field looking for more. His high-powered metal detector can pick up signals 20 feet below, he said.

"There may be something bigger, but I doubt there is something better," Arnold said.

Arnold's meteorite is dark orange to bronze in color, measures about 36-by-30 inches and has a rare bulletlike shape and smooth surface. Pallasite meteorites such as Arnold's are made of iron nickel and olivine crystals and account for less than 1 percent of all discovered meteorites, which are rare in the first place.

### A bounty of meteorites

Kansas is a leading source of meteorite discoveries in the United States, authorities said. The state is extensively farmed, has relatively little foliage and few indigenous rocks that meteorites would get confused with, said Geoffrey Notkin, an Arizona meteorite hunter who sometimes helps Arnold search in Kansas.

Another reason is that 1,000 to 2,000 years ago, the Greensburg area was pelted with meteorites from what later was named the Brenham meteorite. It was named after the township where some pieces landed.

Prehistoric Indians gathered the fragments as religious symbols, and the first documented collections occurred in the 1880s. In the 1920s, famed meteorite collector Harvey Nininger found a crater from one point of impact, and he encouraged residents to look for meteorites.

The Brenham meteorites are in collections worldwide, including ones at Harvard and Yale universities, the



*The meteorite that Arnold (above) found on Allen Binford's farm is the largest of its kind ever found in the United States.*

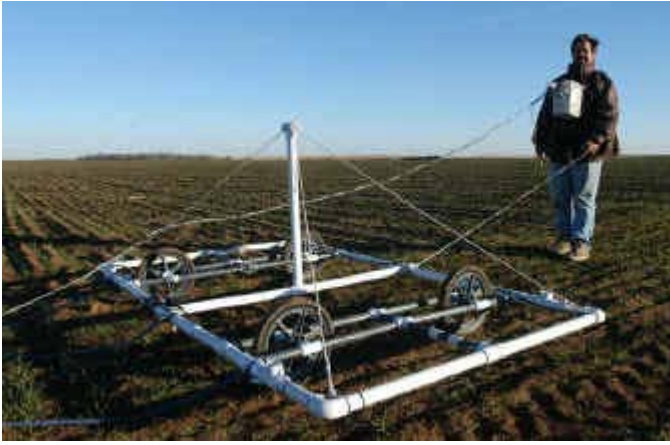
Kansas: He harvests meteorites — with the cooperation of landowners. "A cash crop," Arnold, the professional meteorite hunter, said, beaming. It certainly can be.

Last month, Arnold announced that he had dug up near Greensburg a 1,400-pound pallasite meteorite, the largest of its type ever found in the United States. It could be worth up to \$3 million, experts said.

The owner of the land where Arnold found his prize will get a nice cut of the sale price. Arnold has signed leases with the owners of nearly 3,000



## Niagara Whirlpool



*“There’s an element of a good old-fashioned treasure hunt to it, complete with a treasure map,” Steve Arnold said of his search for meteorites. His high-powered metal detector can pick up signals 20 feet below.*

Smithsonian Institution in Washington and in an exhibit at the American Museum of Natural History in New York.

The previous largest meteorite was found in 1949 and is on display at a Greensburg museum that also is home to the world’s largest hand-dug well. Greensburg, a town of 1,500 residents, is about 110 miles west of Wichita.

Meteorite hunting tapered off in the Greensburg area in recent decades as people assumed that the fields had been tapped out. But Arnold did some research that showed otherwise, though he declined to be specific.

“There’s an element of a good old-fashioned treasure hunt to it, complete with a treasure map,” said Arnold, who lives in northern Arkansas but bought a house in Greensburg to serve as a base for his search.

Arnold’s German-made device can find metal much deeper than most detectors.

The coil of the detector is mounted on the flat trailerlike rig that Arnold pulls behind an all-terrain vehicle.

A cable connects the coil to the detector control box in the bucket around Arnold’s neck. When the detector squeals, signaling a find, he slowly pulls the rig by hand to pinpoint the location.

While Arnold has found a few meteorites, he also has collected a tub of rusted metal items from bygone days of farming — including a buckle from a horse-drawn plow, horseshoes, a ring from a bull’s nose and steel wagon wheels.

Most items are near the surface, but the big meteorite was much deeper. Arnold dug 2 feet by hand and then got a backhoe. Seven feet below, he unearthed the meteorite of a lifetime.

### A unique specimen

The significance of Arnold’s meteorite lies in its size and shape because many

specimens have been studied from the same meteor breakup, authorities said.

“Unless this one has some very unusual internal structure, it probably will not advance the science significantly,” said Randy Van Schmus, a geology professor at the University of Kansas and meteorite expert.

“As a collector’s item, it would have extremely high value. It’s a very significant find and a very good museum specimen.”

Denton Ebel, assistant curator of earth and planetary sciences at the

American Museum of Natural History, said the meteorite probably would bring at least \$1 million.

Small pieces of pallasite meteorites from Kansas have sold for about \$4 to \$5 a gram, collector Lang said, which would make Arnold’s meteorite worth from \$2.5 million to more than \$3 million if it were cut up and every piece were sold.

However, Mani and Arnold said they think that the meteorite, because of its size and shape, may be valuable in one piece. They would like to see it on display in a museum.

“That’s my hope, and everything is negotiable,” Arnold said. “If someone is willing to offer significantly more than someone else, it is theirs and they can do what they want with it.”

### First glance

\*\*Measuring about 36-by-30 inches and weighing 1,400 pounds, the pallasite meteorite that Steve Arnold found recently near Greensburg, Kan., is the largest meteorite of its kind ever found in the United States.

\*\*Arnold owns the meteorite thanks to a contract he signed with the owner of the land on which it was found.

*(Thank you to Kevin Murphy and The Kansas City Star for allowing this reprint.)*



*Steve Arnold drives an all-terrain vehicle pulling a homemade rig that hunts for meteorites in the farmland of south-central Kansas.*

## A Spanish Gold Ring

By Les Marczy

I guess it must have been toward the end of 2004, when good friend and fellow club member Denis Maheu and I started a discussion about the upcoming eclipses. I knew I wanted to go to the 2006 total solar eclipse in North Africa but Denis suggested we venture to Europe in 2005 for the annular solar eclipse in Spain also. Well it didn't take much coaxing for me to say yes. So the planning began for our quest of the Spanish Gold Ring. (Annulus means ring in Latin)

This eclipse was taking place in October on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and Spain was our destination. We had lots of options on



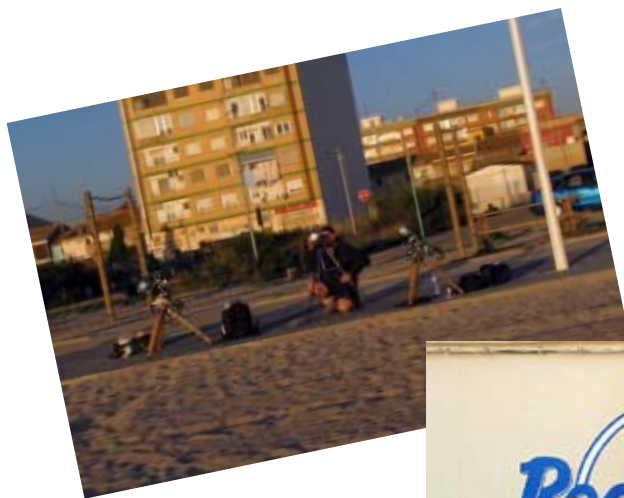
where we could observe and photograph the event. Madrid was right on the center line path, a good place to be. But this wasn't the only place we had to choose from.

At our last spring banquet, I had a chance to speak to Jay Anderson. He writes the weather reports for eclipses in the Observers Handbook. I figured I could pick his brains about this annular. Denis and I asked him several questions and from that we drew our conclusions. We did not want to be directly on the center line. Off to one side or the other is what we were looking for. Our reasoning being that we wanted to get more of the moon limb rolling along the sun limb. We were hoping that we would see more activity for a longer period of time.

Now it was time to pick our location and set up some flights.

A good friend of ours Franz Kufer, who lives in Germany, was here last spring visiting. We

*cont. on pg 11*



*A few shots of Denis setting up his stuff on the walkway along the beach.... with our equipment next to him.*



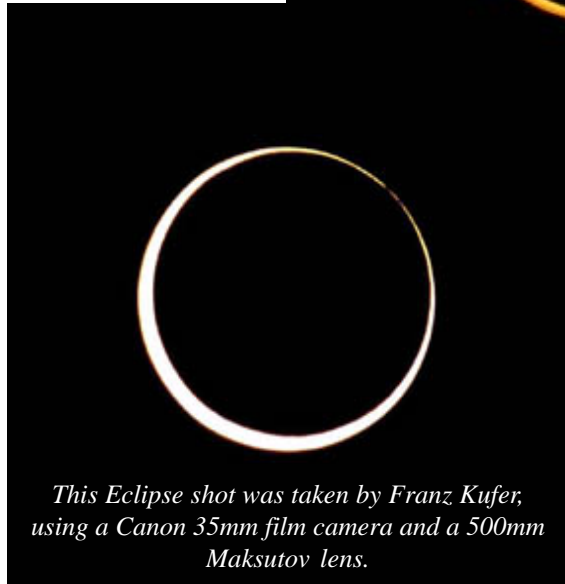
## Niagara Whirlpool

had the same discussion with him and we didn't have to ask him twice... he was in. This proved to be very beneficial to us. Denis and I would fly to Germany first where we would spend a few days visiting in Munich. Also Oktoberfest was in full swing, so we couldn't miss the opportunity. I have to add that Germany is a beautiful country and Munich is storybook like. The city is quaint and full of history I highly recommend a visit there.

Franz had arranged the flights from Germany to Spain months ahead of time. We had our rooms booked and would have a car waiting for us when we landed. The car was a must, as we needed a way to run for it if the weather didn't cooperate. We all made the choice that Valencia would be our destination. This was just inside the northern limit of the path.... Perfect!

All the flights went well and were uneventful, although we did get some strange looks from a few of the custom officers. They wanted to know what the heck we had in our luggage. Luckily I was prepared and had a photo of my set up in my wallet. After showing them the picture and explaining what we were going to do with it, they let us through. However the look on there faces never changed.

After landing in Valencia and picking up the car, we were off to Alfafar. This is where we would stay for the next few days. It's a small town just outside of Valencia. Our hotel was situated less than 10 minutes away



are well maintained and spotless. Looks like a nice place to take a vacation. This was anything but, there was very little time to kick back and relax.

Upon returning to the hotel, I asked the receptionist to give us all wake up calls for 6:00am. Then I started checking weather reports, they

from the Mediterranean Sea. Soon after settling in, we were back in the car and on our way to the shores of Port of Valencia. This looked like a great place to catch the eclipse. We took in some of the sites and sampled some of the local cuisine. The beaches there

we're calling for partly cloudy periods in the morning. It was suppose to clear later on, but how much later? First contact would begin at 9:42am, should we take the chance and stay put? We agreed to make that call when morning arrived. Many of the other eclipse chasers we met there fled to Madrid in the middle of the night. They weren't about to roll the dice like us.

With equipment ready at the door, I waited for my morning wake up call. Well that was not needed as I slept very little and was awake long

*cont. on pg 12*



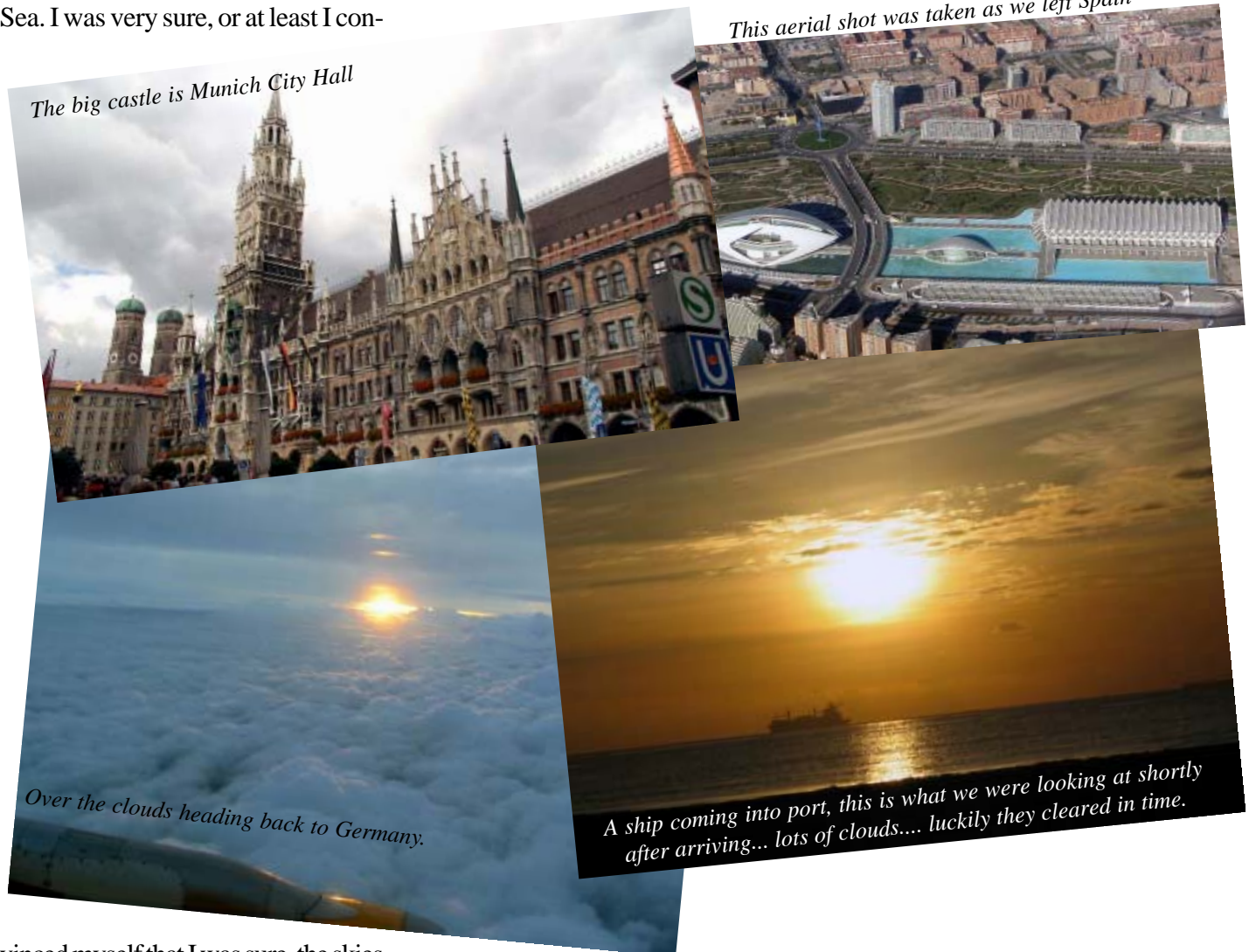
Niagara Whirlpool

before 6:00am. I got up, dressed and gathered up my cameras.

Soon after that came a knock at my door. Denis was ready and raring to get going too. As the three of us stepped outside to load our equipment, we noticed the cloud cover. After much debating on whether to go to our predetermined site or to run for Madrid, we decided to head to the Sea. I was very sure, or at least I con-

eclipse. Trying to locate Polaris through the clouds was difficult, but Denis finally spotted it. Franz would shoot and observe the eclipse with a video cam and a 35mm film camera on a fixed tripod. Denis had his video camera on the Super Polaris mount and a digital camera on a tripod. I decided to bring a 90mm Maksutov-Cassegrain telescope and shoot prime focus with my

tact you could see the sun light dancing along the limb of the moon. This was one of the occurrences we had counted on lasting a little longer, because of our off center line location. At maximum eclipse I looked around at our surroundings, everything had a dull gold/bronze hue to it. It had got considerably darker also; more then I thought it would. We observed dou-



The big castle is Munich City Hall

This aerial shot was taken as we left Spain

Over the clouds heading back to Germany.

A ship coming into port, this is what we were looking at shortly after arriving... lots of clouds.... luckily they cleared in time.

vinced myself that I was sure, the skies would clear on time. On arriving at the beautiful shores of the Bay of Valencia the clouds seemed to be breaking up a bit. Denis and I had brought our German equatorial mounts with us, so we wanted to set up before sunrise, this was for precise polar alignment. As the mounts tracked the sun and moon we would have to correct them very little during the entire

Canon DSLR camera.

All that was left to do now was wait and be optimistic. The sun rose through the clouds, and by first contact it was in clear skies. Tension ran high up until that point.

It was a spectacular site to see, second only to a total solar eclipse. Moments before second con-

table shadows cast by our tripods. Then third contact started, and again we had a wonderful dance of light peaking through the terrain of the moons limb. What a fantastic show, it was my first annular eclipse. But I'm sure it will not be my last.

After returning to Munich, Franz was nice enough to give Denis

and I a tour of the Bayer Volkssternwarte Munchen (Roughly translated The Bavarian Peoples/Public Observatory Munich). He is a member with full access to all the equipment so our guided tour was a private one, and we got to meet several other members as well...but this is a story for another time.

I'm now in the planning stage for the next adventure to Egypt in March. There will be a bunch of us from our center that will going on this tour.

It will be led by our British Columbia members John Nemy and Carol Legate. <http://www.nemy.com/welcome.html>

Here's a link to the tour as well

<http://www.vacations-internationale.ca/Egypt%20Solar%20Eclipse/solareclipse2006.html>

## Librarian's Corner...

by DARLENE SLOGGETT



I look forward to getting book reviews like the one here. It is a great way to let the membership know what books, in our wonderful library, have been checked out and reviewed.

Here is a book report submitted to me this month. It was written by Wendy's son, Kris Kuhn.

*"The World Treasury of Physics, Astronomy, and Mathematics is the sine qua non of science literature for the layman. A yawn for the technofile, the Treasury is a goldmine of chapters written for the first day of courses in nearly every physical science for anyone with an imagination, an ability to understand English and the curiosity to understand more of the universe of which we're apart. A journey of scientific knowledge begins with the first step of reading a paragraph from this wonderful compendium"...Kris Kuhn*

Thank you  
for supporting our Club!

Meade Telescopes  
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## 2006 Solar Eclipse

**"Only during a total solar eclipse can you view the true spectacle of our local star, the sun."**



Travel with John Nemy & Carol Legate on an incredible tour to Egypt to view this historic solar eclipse.

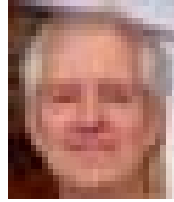
Carol & John of The Pacific Observatory are very excited to work with Vacations Internationale. Combining this quality tour package and experience in the Egyptian travel industry with John Nemy and Carol Legate's solar eclipse expertise, this tour to the 2006 event will be one you won't want to miss.

This specifically designed 7 night, 8 day tour offers a unique opportunity to combine your passion for astronomy with the unforgettable experiences you will encounter in the mystical land of the Pharaohs.

To find out how you can take part in this tour visit [SolarEclipse2006.ca](http://SolarEclipse2006.ca) or e-mail John or Carol at [stars@nemy.com](mailto:stars@nemy.com)

## BadBob's Perspective...

by BOB WINDER



During the last few years I have purchased some observing equipment that I thought many of my astronomy colleagues might be interested in hearing about. I will not be giving comprehensive test reports, but mainly my impressions as to the quality and usefulness of the equipment.

The first item is my pair of Apogee 20X88 right-angle binoculars which I bought just over a year ago. These are large and heavy and, to adequately support them, I went to The Camera Place in Niagara Falls and bought a Manfrotto camera tripod. This is so steady that I can actually lean against the tripod top, with just enough pressure to steady myself while looking through the binoculars, without introducing any noticeable vibration into the image. This tripod is solid enough to safely support the heavy load but aiming the binoculars is a bit stiff and jerky. Perhaps a fluid head would be helpful. For my purposes, I can aim the binoculars, if I am patient and the object stays in the wide field-of-view long enough that I can have a good, long look. Also, it is quite a job to put the binoculars onto the tripod without dropping them, even with the tripod's very nice quick-release shoe. It seems to be a little easier to carefully and slowly shorten the legs a bit and then carry the tripod and binoculars back into my house as a unit at the end of the observing session, rather than trying to remove the binoculars from the tripod. I would recommend Apogee's smaller, lighter 16X70 RA binoculars for those who wish to avoid having a heart attack!

The binoculars give very good

images. They seem to be sharp and well-baffled against stray, unwanted light. The objective lenses have extendable glare shields which are a bit loose but they work! The bright star Vega was a tiny blue jewel with no flare and very black sky all around it. Observing objects high up in the sky with the right-angle eyepieces was VASTLY more comfortable than trying to look straight up with ordinary binoculars. I was very fortunate in another way: my ancient Celestron nebula filters were a perfect slip-in fit to the rubber eyecups of the 20X88's. On a very clear night in September in my back yard in Niagara Falls, I used them to view the Veil Nebula, which was very easy to see. I then removed the filters and the brightest parts of the Veil were still visible! This is a tribute to the excellent optics and coatings on the binoculars.

There were a few minor problems with these binoculars. A double image resulted when I turned the small wheel to adjust the interpupillary separation. I found that if, after the adjustment, I rotated the wheel very slightly in the opposite direction, the collimation would pop back enough to remove the double image. The collimation was not absolutely perfect but close enough that I would not want to risk trying to take apart the prisms to adjust them! I discussed this with Apogee on the telephone; they told me they would send me instructions for adjusting the collimation of the prisms but they never did. Actually I don't really need the instructions as long as the collimation stays reasonably good.

As part of the purchase deal,

Apogee included a nice pair of 32 power eyepieces, which I can use by simply removing the 20 power eyepieces and inserting the 32 power eyepieces, similar to a telescope. However, at 32 power the slight collimation error became too large and the image through the left side of the binocular became slightly soft. I decided that what I had really wanted was a satisfactory, inexpensive pair of 20X88 right-angle binoculars and that is what I got. They are extremely good for that purpose. Spending ten times as much money on a better pair would not make a significant difference! I should mention that observing faint objects with both eyes is a very nice experience!

With this in mind I recently bought a Burgess binoviewer, for \$200 from Astronomics, for use on my new 20-inch Gregorian telescope, which should be finished soon. The purchase price included two very nice 17 mm wide-angle eyepieces for use in the binoviewer. I tried it out briefly in my 12-inch reflector last summer (before I dismantled the 12-inch tube assembly to make way for the 20-inch), and I was shocked when the binoviewer gave a double image! I have enough astronomical experience to know not to give up too quickly on new equipment. A bit later, I carefully tried out the binoviewer inside my house on my 70 mm refractor. I soon discovered that the binoviewer has rotating collars that hold the eyepieces, which you can rotate to adjust the individual focus of each eyepiece; this rotation also shifted the images slightly, enough so that I was able to blend the two images satisfactorily (I was looking at some objects in the room about 20 feet away). Actually, the final result was a very sharp, clear binocular view with the 17 mm eyepieces. This seems often

cont. on pg 15

## Niagara Whirlpool

to be the case with low-cost equipment: the final results can be excellent, but it might require some creative adjustments that more expensive equipment wouldn't need. By the way, the relative focus of the eyepieces was slightly off after I adjusted the collimation. I fixed this problem by simply loosening the set screw holding one of the eyepieces in place, sliding the eyepiece up very slightly, and tightening the set screw! I am looking forward to the binocular views through my 20-inch!

About five years ago, for \$220 Canadian, I bought, from EfstonScience in Toronto, their 70 mm "beginner's" refractor. Many of you have probably looked through this little alt-azimuth telescope when I brought it to our Fireman's Park star nights. It is light-weight, very portable, easy to use and has very sharp optics (they are now on sale for \$150!). A few years ago, during the Martian dust storm, it showed me two markings on Mars that were invisible in my 12-inch! It gives sharp views of the moon at 140 power and I used it, with a Baader solar filter, to view and photograph the recent transit of Venus.

A few days ago I was in Wal-Mart in Niagara Falls and saw what seemed to be a very nice 4.5-inch equatorial reflecting telescope with a 1.25-inch eyepiece holder, for only \$200! Could this be the next great bargain in small, portable telescopes?

By the way, it was so hot in Niagara Falls last summer that the only thing in the entire city that was still cool was me! I told this joke to several friends and relatives who know me very well and they all experienced a vast degree of mirth. This is likely because the concept of me being cool is not consistent with reality as we know it!



*These photos show the eyepiece ring for my new 20-inch telescope, whose construction is almost complete. This large ring rotates within the telescope tube in order to allow the eyepiece to achieve a comfortable position for the observer (similar in function to the rotating tube on a typical Newtonian reflector). The small red plastic glue top was used to mark the centre of the plywood piece so that I could line it up with the spider structure when I glued it on (this plywood piece will support the 4-inch Coude diagonal mirror). The four spider vanes are constructed of wood, which has better thermal properties than metal, and will likely cause less image-degrading air turbulence inside the telescope tube. Believe-it-or-not, I cut these narrow spider vanes out of a spruce 2X4 with a hand-held circular saw! The 2X4 was particularly nice, with very little warp and almost no knots in the region of the saw cuts, and the grain of the wood was very uniform and parallel to the length of the board; this makes the thin spider vanes much stronger than if they were cut from an inferior 2X4. The ring is composed of a composite of four layers of plywood, which were glued together while clamped against a large, flat piece of plate glass; thus, the ring tuned out to be quite accurately flat and round, which should allow adjustment of the eyepiece position without seriously altering the telescope's overall collimation accuracy. In addition to the diagonal mirror, this spider structure will also have to support a lightweight, cardboard, three-foot-long light baffle; the baffle structure for my Gregorian telescope will considerably improve the "signal-to-noise ratio", allowing me to achieve beautifully dark fields-of-view on clear nights at high power, even from my relatively light-polluted back yard in the middle of Niagara Falls.*

# Executive Christmas Party 2005



*Glen and Darlene*



*Jim, Les and Brian showing off their Christmas ties*



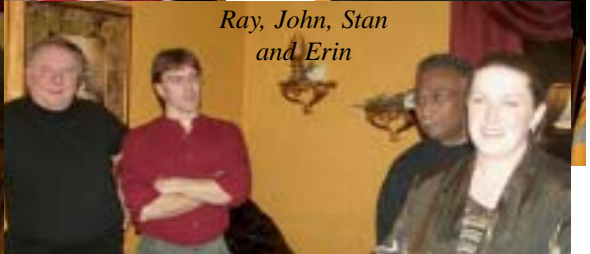
*Kris and Wendy*



*Darlene and Tony*



*Pat and Ivana*



*Ray, John, Stan and Erin*



*Ray and Stan*



*Deloris*





Thank you  
for supporting our Club

Sky Optics  
www.skyoptics.net

## NASA TRIVIA

Saturn, the "Ringed Planet," is so far away from the Sun that it receives only about 1/80th the amount of sunlight that we receive here on Earth.

Yes, the Sun appears much smaller from there.

Thank you  
for supporting our Club

Edmund Scientifics  
www.scientificsonline.com

## Public Observing Coordinator's Report...

by WENDY KUHN



Like a kid the week before Christmas, behaving well in case Santa is watching, I'm busy being grateful to Mother Nature the week before January 7 Public Star Night...in case SHE's watching me.

After having October and November Star Nights clouded out, I'm willing to do "almost" anything to guarantee clear skies for January 7. Certainly, it's always a crap shoot whether or not the weather will co-operate when we schedule a Public Starnight, but our average the past year must be only 30%.

So, please Mother Nature, open up those skies for us on January 7 so that my report in the March-April Whirlpool is a report on the amazing heavenly sights we observed!

### Upcoming Public Observing Nights:

January 7	Firemans Park
February 4	Firemans Park
March 4	Firemans Park
April 1	Firemans Park
May 6	Firemans Park
June 3	Chippewa Park
July 8	Chippewa Park
August 4-6	Rockpoint
August 12 or 19	Chippewa Park
August 25-27	Starfest
September 16	Firemans Park
October 28	Firemans Park
November 11	Firemans Park




The Royal Astronomical Society of Canada  
NIAGARA CENTRE  
proudly presents  
**TERENCE DICKINSON**  
**SATURDAY, APRIL 8, 2006**  
**12<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL BANQUET**

PLACE: DELPHI HALL  
PORTAGE ROAD (BESIDE CHARTERS)  
NIAGARA FALLS, ON

TIME: 5:30 PM - COCKTAILS  
6:30 PM - DINNER  
8:00 PM - SPEAKER

COST: \$45.00/PERSON BEFORE APRIL 1  
\$59.00/PERSON AFTER APRIL 1



**Terence Dickinson**  
is a leading amateur astronomer and science writer who lives near the rural town of Yorkton, Ontario.  
He has written approximately fourteen books including *Nightwatch: A Practical Guide to Viewing the Universe* and *The Backyard Astronomer's Guide*, and his works have been credited as some of the best resources available for beginners in astronomy.  
He teaches part-time at St. Lawrence College and the asteroid 5272 Dickinson is named after him.

- Astronomer columnist/expert for the "Toronto Star"
- Resident expert on Astronomy for the Discovery channel
- New York Academy of Science Book of the Year Award
- Astronomy Society of the Pacific Award recipient
- Order of Canada Award
- Editor of "SkyNews"

For tickets, contact:  
Joyce Sims (nickel rules coordinator) 905-262-5276  
Darlene Sloggett 905-354-6612  
Brian Filack 905-356-1212

The club has a wide variety of T-shirts and sweatshirts in different sizes and styles for sale.

Contact **Glen Pidsadnick** if you are interested in purchasing any of these items.

- Black Hooded sweatshirts = \$35.00
- Black Regular sweatshirts = \$30.00
- Black & Natural T shirts = \$20.00
- Black & Natural Longsleeve T-shirts = \$23.00

# Executive Christmas Party 2005



Dan's eying the deserts...



Look at all the beautiful deserts to choose from



Hey, Jim, what are you doing at the desert table? We haven't had dinner yet!



Darlene, Tony and Joe



John and Brian



Del magic act...poof Brian's gone!



What's up Stan?



Surprise for Erin and Jim!



Brian's retaliation



A little something for the expectant parents



Ray, Stan, Erin and Jim

## Members' Christmas Party at Chatters

### Note from the Editor:

Unfortunately, Les and I were unable to attend this year's Members' Christmas Party at Chatters. We usually take a lot of photos for prosperity and, of course, the Whirlpool. I emailed our President for pics someone else might have taken and here was his response, "This is a funny one. I packed my stuff for the meeting, I forgot my camera. Once there, I thought oh, well Del will have hers. Also forgot about your e-mail of regrets. Ok, Glen P. has his. When he got home, he found out that he had put his alkaline batteries in the charger by mistake...which of course fried them. He has no pictures either! See what happens when you don't show up!!!!!"

What a comedy of errors! I understand everyone had a fantastic time and Chris outdid himself again with food and hospitality.

In lieu of this year's pictures, let's recap last year reprinted from Jan/Feb 2004 Whirlpool.



### Newsletter Info

The Niagara Whirlpool is an official publication of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada, Niagara Centre. It is published bimonthly, except for July and August and is distributed free to all Centre members. The subscription rate for non-members is \$12 per annum.

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 [astro\\_nuts@cogeco.ca](mailto:astro_nuts@cogeco.ca).

Classified advertising is free for Niagara Centre members.

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### NASA TRIVIA

Snoopy, the Peanuts Comic Strip character is the astronauts' personal safety mascot.

## Annual Banquet April 8, 2006

*Come see and hear*

## TERENCE DICKINSON

PLACE: DELPHI HALL  
PORTAGE ROAD  
(BESIDE CHATTERS)  
NIAGARA FALLS, ON

TIME: 5:30 PM – COCKTAILS  
6:30 PM – DINNER  
8:00 PM – SPEAKER

COST: \$45.00/PP BEFORE APRIL 1  
\$50.00/PP AFTER APRIL 1

### For tickets, contact:

Joyce Sims  
(ticket sales coordinator)  
905-262-5276

Darlene Sloggett  
905-354-6612

Brian Pihack  
905-356-1212

### 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 Les Welgan and he will send you the needed information by e-mail.

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Kendrick Astro Instruments  
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Are you looking to buy or sell some ASTRONOMY equipment?

Free ad space for **members**.

Contact the Editor at [astro\\_nuts@cogeco.ca](mailto:astro_nuts@cogeco.ca)

### **For Sale**

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

### **NEW**

Looking for 1-1/4 inch, 2X Barlow and 2 Eyepieces 8mm and lower. I have a 10mm and 25mm for my 4-1/2 F8 scope. Also seeking lower profile Focuser 1-1/4 inch. Call BILL COULL 905-682 3550

### **For Sale Reduced Price**

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 \$50 or best offer. Contact Joe Iannandrea at 905-991-0781.

### **Niagara Centre Store**

RASC 2006 Calenders	\$14.00
Beginner's Observer's Guide	\$15.00
RASC 2005 Observer's Handbook	\$16.00
Planispheres	\$15.00
RASC Lapel Pins	\$ 6.00
Centre Crest	\$ 5.00
RASC Cloth Crest	\$13.00
Bucket Style Hat (Tilley shape)	\$13.00
Stainless RASC Mug	\$16.00
RASC stickers	\$ 2.50
Key Chains	\$ 2.50

*Contact 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.



# EVENT HORIZON

**January 7** Public Observing Night at Firemans Park 7:00 pm

**January 14** **Full Moon**

**January 19** General Meeting Beginner's Workshop 6:45 – 7:30 pm  
General Meeting 7:30 – 9:30 pm

**January 28** Members Observing Night at Observatory

**January 29** **New Moon**

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**February 2** A.N.Myer Beginner's Workshop 7:00 pm

**February 4** Public Observing Night at Firemans Park 7:00 pm

**February 13** **Full Moon**

**February 16** General Meeting Beginner's Workshop 6:45 – 7:30 pm  
General Meeting 7:30 – 9:30 pm

**February 25** Members Observing Night at Observatory

**February 28** **New Moon**

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**March 2** A.N.Myer Beginner's Workshop 7:00 pm

**March 4** Public Observing Night at Firemans Park 7:00 pm

**March 14** **Full Moon** (Penumbral Eclipse)

**March 16** General Meeting Beginner's Workshop 6:45 – 7:30 pm  
General Meeting 7:30 – 9:30 pm

**March** Members Observing Night at Observatory (Les Marczi is in  
Egypt so date is not scheduled)

**March 29** **New Moon** (Total Solar Eclipse)