

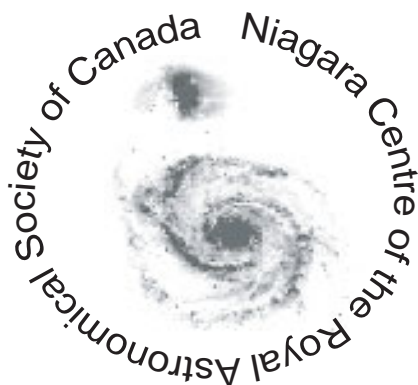
Volume 24 #3

Niagara Whirlpool

May/June/Summer 2003

Niagara Centre Member Places In SkyNews Contest

Congratulations to Les Marczi, who was a runner-up in the SkyNews astrophotography competition. Out of 500 pictures, Les placed in the top four for his shot of the Moon's craters. You can see Les' photo and other winners at www.skynewsmagazine.com/pages/contest.html and in the May/June issue.



A reminder that information booklets for Starfest 2003 will be available at the June 19 General Meeting for those interested in attending. Starfest this year will take place on August 21 - 24.

www.rasc.ca/niagara

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Niagara Centre Store

RASC 2003 Calenders.....\$13.00

Beginner's Observer's Guide.....\$13.00

RASC 2003 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.

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 \$12.00 per annum.

Original articles on astronomy and related subjects, observation reports, book reviews, letters, and other items are welcome. Please submit them at General Meetings, mail them to the Editor at his email address, or c/o the Niagara Centre, RASC mailing address.

Classified advertising is free for Niagara Centre members (space permitting). Commercial advertising rates are available on request.

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Niagara Centre Website: E-mail Discussion List & Member's Area

The Niagara Centre has an email 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 have discussions about astronomy and activities with other Niagara Centre members. This is a great way to interact and get to know members, or enhance your knowledge of astronomy. A login procedure is required to join the Discussion List. Complete instructions are 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 logins and passwords for the email discussion list and member's area, contact John VanderBrugge or Ron Gasbarini. They will send you the needed information by e-mail.

Our 2003 annual banquet was a success once again. I have many people to thank: Chris Rigas, for providing such a fabulous dinner and a new permanent venue; Brian Pihack for arranging the banquet details with Chris; Philip Downey for acquiring our guest speaker Ivan Semeniuk; Tony and Darlene Marano, who donated the accommodations for Ivan and his wife; again Brian, and Stan Sammy, who provided equipment used during the night; Donna Williams and her friend Brenda Lew for their enchanting East Indian belly dancing performance, which was enjoyed by all; the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory, John Dean, Steve Barnes (Sky Optics) and Ray Khan (Khan Scope) for the many excellent door prizes. And of course, all the Niagara Centre executive, who put a lot of time into the planning and preparation. Finally, thanks and greetings to all the members and guests from Niagara, Hamilton, London, Western New York and Kingston who attended.

Our May general meeting will be a little different, I hope. After a short meeting, we will be heading over to Fireman's Park to observe the total lunar eclipse. Weather permitting, of course. So bring along your binoculars, scopes, digital cameras, and lawn chairs. This will be lots of fun. It will not be a public event.

Frozen Banana Star Party

by Glen Pidsadnick

For the past few years, in the early spring and late fall, the Sudbury Astronomy Club has put on a star party at Munro Park, near Powassan, Ontario. At this time of year it can still be pretty cold in northern Ontario, but along with the cold you also get clear, crisp, and BLACK night skies. In my case these are the darkest skies I've had my telescope under.

Wow, did I see a lot! I viewed every Messier object visible between 11 p.m. and 3:00 a.m. And they weren't just fuzzy blobs, they had plenty of detail and resolution. What a difference a truly dark sky can make. I saw the zodiacal light for the first time – it stretched clear overhead and rivaled the brightness of the Milky Way.

The Niagara RASC had a good showing of twelve members of the 80 that showed. There were at least 40 scopes set up in the clearing around the tents, vans and trailers. Steve Dodson gave a tour of the sky at dusk with his green laser on Friday and Saturday. For dinner on Saturday evening 67 of us hungry people went to the Moose Lodge for a fabulous German buffet (FEAST), and there were even door prizes.

Harold Heady, Allan Ward and the Sudbury Club really make everyone welcome. They personally visited everyone. Congratulations on a successful weekend.

As for the bananas, they were definitely frozen. The temperature went to -4° in the evening, even though it was 18° the next day. Some of us even got a sunburn. I highly recommend attending their next FBST, on September 18 - 21. For the dark skies and great hospitality, you won't regret it.

Niagara Centre Annual Banquet: April 12, 2003

Our club had an extremely successful banquet this year. Seventy people from all over Ontario and Western New York attended the event at our new location, the Delphi Hall in Niagara Falls. The food, dancing and Ivan's talk were all enjoyed by everyone I have talked to. The belly dancing performance, and dancing for us regular folk, both of which were new this year, were a great addition the club will probably continue with.

by Philip Downey



Niagara Centre Overlord Glen Pidsadnick, basking in the adulation of his admirers.



Guest speaker Ivan Semeniuk, delivering his talk 'Aristotle's Forest: Exploring The New Cosmology'.



Brenda Lew, dancing up a storm.

Hungry Niagara Centre members, soon to be fed wonderful food



Photos by Brian Pihack

Hello fellow members, I hope you are all enjoying the beautiful springtime weather. The March and April members' nights were anything but favourable. However I have received some reports from members getting out on the odd clear night. Six members were out well past midnight on April 26 at the observatory for a fun night.

We had a great turnout at the observatory on May 3. The skies were not the best, however it was nice to get together with everyone. We had a guest show up from SkyNews Magazine, Todd Carlson (website assistant editor) and his wife. He was nice enough to hand out a couple of the latest issues of SkyNews. I introduced him to a few members, and he got to peek though a number of scopes. I think he liked our dark sky site a lot.

It was nice to see you all Saturday....Rick, Tim, Phil, Ryan, Zoran, Joe, Greg, Ed, Carl and Tom.... I may have forgot a few.

Our Messier Marathon didn't go well – the weekends were cloudy and rainy with ice storms... etc. Hopefully the summer months will bring clearer skies and much deserved, all-around nicer weather.

From what I've been hearing, many more members than last year will be attending star parties being held across Ontario this summer. Talk to other members to find out who's going where. I hope you all have safe and exciting experiences.

We have a number of member and public nights at various venues over the next few months, and I look forward to seeing you all there. They are all listed in the Event Horizon section of this issue. As usual, I will keep you posted on all future members' nights. Any changes or additions will also be posted on the website. Have a great summer, and clear skies!

More than 15 members made it out to the observatory for Members' Night on May 3rd.

Photo by Philip Downey



If you've ever had trouble explaining to friends and family why you're an amateur astronomer, this book will help. If you want to read about today's most famous amateurs, read this book. If you need reassurance that astronomy is a cool and amazing hobby, this book will confirm it.

Timothy Ferris is a lifelong amateur astronomer and one of the world's best science writers. Here, he recounts his hobby in detail, from his early days growing up on Key Biscayne in the fifties to his new observatory in Californian wine country, while profiling some of today's greatest observers and photographers, like Stephen O'Meara, Jack Newton, Patrick Moore, David Levy, and others.

The book alternates chapters – one is a profile of an amateur, and the next is Ferris's own experiences at observing the same objects the amateur is known for spotting, plus a history of observing those objects. For instance, the profile of David Levy is matched with a history of comet hunting, and the profile of John Dobson is matched with the history of amateur telescope making.

Dobson is easily one of the most fascinating profiles. A California hippie who had a stint as a monk before getting kicked out of the monastery, he was always building his own telescopes and doing demonstrations on the streets of San Francisco. If somebody really seemed to be into astronomy, he'd give them his telescope, and make another one. He's still doing it today. Due to his budget constraints as a monk, he invented the cheap Dobsonian mount, which is now used worldwide with Newtonian reflectors.

The other profiles are equally interesting, ranging from a CCD imager in a Miami suburb producing shots of Jupiter and the Hubble Deep Field that nearly equal those of the Hubble Space Telescope, to Stephen O'Meara nearly failing college astronomy until one night, he found Andromeda for the graduate student instructor, and predicted a satellite's fade into Earth's shadow. The results these people get with 'obsolete' equipment will amaze you. Many of them are observing and photographing with scopes and equipment twenty and thirty years old.

Every niche of amateur observing is covered, from planetary and deep-sky observing, to comet, supernova and asteroid hunting, as well as photography on film and CCD.

The book is nearly free of technical jargon – a friend or spouse who doesn't understand our hobby might just get it after reading this book. They can even start off with some observing tips and tricks at the book's end.

It's the best astronomy book I have read in years. The New York Times said it was one of the best five non-fiction books of 2002, and they review hundreds in a year. I recommend it to all of you.

Astronomy Quiz

1. A comet's tail points:
a) behind the head along its orbit. b) out ahead of the head along the orbit.
c) away from the sun d) toward the Sun.
2. To measure a star's distance using parallax, we need to know:
a) its Doppler shift. b) apparent brightness and angular size.
c) apparent and absolute magnitudes.
d) position as seen from opposite sides of the Earth's orbit
3. Most minor planets (or asteroids) are located:
a) beyond the orbit of Neptune. b) between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter
c) between the orbits of Earth and Mars.
d) in orbits with simple ratios to Jupiter's (such as 1/2, 2/3 its period).
4. Compared to the stars in the night sky, the Sun is:
a) the largest and most luminous. b) much smaller than most other stars.
c) a pretty representative example d) a completely different kind of object.
5. Compared to the planets, the distances of other stars from the sun are greater by:
a) dozens of times. c) thousands of times.
b) hundreds of times. d) millions of times
6. To locate a star in the Hertzsprung-Russell diagram, we need to know:
a) its brightness and celestial coordinates. b) its luminosity and temperature
c) its parallax and proper motion. d) its distance.
7. The telltale signs that a moon has always been inactive are:
a) a surface completely covered with craters b) a lava-covered surface.
c) an iron-rich core. d) a nonspherical shape.
8. Tracing their orbits shows that there is a connection between:
a) moons and comets. b) comet tails and asteroids.
c) comet tails and meteor showers d) asteroid collisions and comets.
9. We see the coolest stars as: a) blue. b) white. c) yellow. d) red
10. The different composition of asteroids indicates that:
a) some were once parts of larger objects b) they have slowly grown over time.
c) they are all of identical makeup. d) their population is unchanged since their formation.

Answers: 1) c, 2) d, 3) b, 4) c, 5) d, 6) b, 7) a, 8) c, 9) d, 10) a

The Niagara Centre has two new members since my last report. They are Jean Biller and Gord Sanderson. Welcome to the club, ask questions if you are unsure of something, and feel free to join us in any of our club activities over the summer months.

On Saturday, May 24 we will be installing four new additional concrete observing pads at our observatory site at Chippawa Creek Conservation Area. We will dig four holes of the appropriate size, prepare the base, build some simple forms and pour concrete into them. We have had many requests for additional observing pads to place telescopes on, especially when the ground is wet and soft. So consequently we will need volunteers to come out and help with our first construction project of the season at the observatory site. Bring a shovel, any concrete tools you may have, wheelbarrow, etc.. We will be meeting out at the site around 1:00 pm to begin work.

We had a great turnout at the Frozen Banana Star Party in Powassan (near North Bay) on the May 3 weekend. Once again the Niagara Centre had the largest turnout of any club in attendance with twelve Niagara members enjoying a weekend of observing under nice dark skies. The next Frozen Banana will take place in September for those interested.

We will be pursuing other projects out at the observatory this summer. First we will do some reworking of the leaky roof in the present observatory, and then install new roofing and possibly siding. After this we will start looking at the new observatory to be built at the site. The new observatory will house a LX-200 of good size and will also be the home for the CCD camera, and possibly a warm room as well. I'll keep you informed by email over the summer of future dates we will need work crews for these coming projects. Thanks and have a good summer all.

New "Niagara Whirlpool" Publisher Needed

The Niagara Centre is in search of a member with some computer savvy who would like to become our new Publisher for the Niagara Whirlpool. The Publishers job is to take the articles and pictures organized by our Editor Philip Downey, and put together the newsletter using a computer. A desktop publishing program or word processor can be used for this. The Whirlpool is mailed to 40 members as a printed version, and emailed to the other 80 members of the club as an email version. The Publisher creates these 2 versions and sends them out. There are 5 issues each year of the Whirlpool.

Our current publisher, John VanderBrugge, will assist in helping the new Publisher get started and answer any questions they have. This is a good opportunity for a member who would like to learn how to create a newsletter, and become better trained in using a computer and software. Contact John for information if you would like to help out the club and volunteer for this position. Thanks.

Niagara Centre Shirts

Niagara Centre turtleneck sweaters and t-shirts are 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 June meeting. Another light coloured Niagara shirt with a different design is also in the works for those preferring a light coloured shirt.

Let's face it, some nights this summer will be less than ideal for stargazing. So why not do something else besides watching the weather channel? Why not build a satellite or a launch vehicle?

Through the Internet you can download over a hundred different free paper model kits. Satellites like Cassini, NEAR, Compton Gamma Ray Observatory, Hubble Space Telescope, SOHO, Pioneer 10 and more are all available. So are rockets like the American Redstone, Titan and Saturn launch vehicles, and the Russian Soyuz. All you will need is an X-Acto knife, a metal ruler, white glue and some 60-110 lb. card stock to print them on.

www.peterjvisser.demon.nl is a Dutch site. Choose language 'English' then click on 'links'. At www.freepapertoys.com, choose 'Spacecraft'. It has well over a hundred links, many offering more than one kit. Both sites also offer sci-fi models like the Cavorite Sphere, Fireball X15, Thunderbird 1, and more.

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

Sky Optics
905-631-9944
Burlington ON
www.skyoptics.net

Khan Scope Centre
416-783-4140
Toronto ON
www.khanscope.com

Niagara Centre Ads

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 905-934-4680, or astro_nuts@cogeco.ca

Niagara Centre Event Horizon

- May 24 Telescope pad construction at CCCA observatory. Bring your shovel. 1 p.m.
- June 1-3 Canadian Astronomical Society annual meeting, University of Waterloo.
- May 28 Venus, Mercury and the Moon make a tight pairing.
- May 29 Venus and Moon only 0.1 degrees apart.
- May 30 Members' Night, CCCA Observatory.

.....continued on next page

Niagara Centre Event Horizon

- June 19 General Meeting, 7 p.m., Niagara Falls Public Library'
Guest speaker Vincent Chan: "Build Your Own \$15 Laser Collimator"
- June 21 Summer solstice.
- June 27-July 1 RASC General Assembly, Vancouver, BC.
- June 27-July 3 Stargazing Manitoulin Star Party, <http://www.gordonspark.com/astronomy.html>
- June 28 Members' Night, CCCA Observatory. Public starnight at CCCA.
- June 29 New moon.
- July 16 Mars and Moon only 0.3 degrees apart.
- July 25-27 Gateway to the Universe Star Party, Munro Park, Powassan ON
<http://www.gateway-to-the-universe.org/main.html>
- July 26 Members' Night, CCCA Observatory. Public starnight at CCCA.
- July 26-Aug. 3 Mount Kobau Star Party, Osoyoos, BC, www.mksp.ca
- July 29 New moon.
- August 2 Public star night, Rock Point Provincial Park, Dunnville. 9:00 p.m, free camping for members!
- August 12 Perseid meteors peak. Mars close to Moon.
- August 21-24 Starfest, River Place Campground, Mount Forest ON,
www.nyaa-starfest.com/starfest/index
- August 27 New moon. Mars' closest approach to Earth in 100,000 years!
- August 27-31 Great Manitou Star Party, <http://www.manitoulin-link.com/starparty/>
- August 28 Mars at opposition.
- August 30 Members' Night, CCCA Observatory, Public starnight at CCCA.
- Sept. 9 Moon near Mars.
- Sept. 18 General Meeting, 7 p.m., Niagara Falls Public Library.
- Sept. 18-21 Frozen Banana Star Party, Munro Park, Powassan ON, www.sudburyastronomy.com.
- Sept. 24-28 Huronia Star party, Camp Saulaine, Thornton ON, www.cois.on.ca/~ssaa/
- Sept. 27 Members' Night, CCCA Observatory.