

SKYNEWS



The Blue Moon

by
Charles Banville

IN THIS ISSUE

On The Cover
September Speaker
President's Report
Various Centre Reports
Sidewalk Astronomy in Australia



SEPTEMBER MEETING

Wednesday 12th, 2012

University of Victoria
A104 Bob Wright Bldg.
3800 Finnerty Rd.

www.victoria.rasc.ca

On the Cover

The so-called Blue Moon, the second full Moon of the month, rises above Fisgard Lighthouse. The lighthouse, located at the mouth of Esquimalt Harbour, is the first lighthouse built on the west coast of Canada.

Date: August 31, 2012

Location: Esquimalt Lagoon, Victoria, BC

Optics: Borg 77EDII at f/4.3 on Tripod

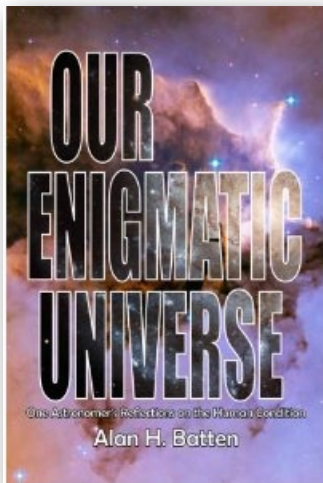
Camera: Canon EOS 5D Mark III

Exposure: 1/3200 second, ISO 3200

September Speaker

**Sept 12, 2012 - "Why is there a Universe?"
by Alan Batten**

The question 'Why is there a Universe?' is not, strictly speaking, a scientific one but it is a question that those of us who have studied the physical universe inevitably sometimes ponder. Traditionally, scientific questions tend to be 'how' questions, whereas 'why' questions are thought of as being in the realm of philosophy and religion. Science and religion are currently the two most important elements in our culture and the relation between them is much more complex than is often supposed. The speaker will explore that complexity.



As part of his presentation, Alan will be talking about his book, [Our Enigmatic Universe - One Astronomer's Reflections on the Human Condition](#)

Bio: Alan is retired from his position at the Dominion Astrophysical Observatory. He joined that Victoria Centre in 1961, was president of the national RASC

organization in 1976, has been editor of the RASC

Journal, and has contributed numerous articles to the RASC Handbook. He has been vice-president of the International Astronomical Union, and [Asteroid \(3931\) Batten](#) is named in his honour. He was a recipient of the RASC Service Award in 1988 [Citation](#).



Presidents Report by Lauri Roche

Welcome back from a busy summer for the RASC in Victoria.

Starting back in June with the spectacular Transit of Venus through

to the three warm, sunny days at the end of August at the Saanich Fair, our volunteers were kept hopping from one event to the other up and down Vancouver Island. We were at the Esquimalt Buccaneer Days, the Saanich Strawberry Festival, attended four Provincial Park programs from Goldstream to Miracle Beach, and presented other sessions with the Victoria Libraries and city parks programs. Some of our members were able to enjoy the camaraderie and a few brief sucker holes up at the Island Star Party in July but we capped it all off with our wonderful RASCals Star Party in Metchosin in the middle of August. We kept up our presence on the "Hill" at the CU on Saturday evenings during the summer and our active members had some great skies on view at our own VCO. Thanks to everyone who supported our public programs. We couldn't keep up our mission of bringing Astronomy to everyone without you.

Also thanks to those members who worked diligently over the summer to get our observatory in fine shape. (I think Matt Watson and Dan Posey have sleeping bags and air mattresses permanently housed there!) But our active members did not use the VCO as much as we would have hoped in the past few months and we would like to take a look at how we can get more people using the facility the way it should be. If you would like to

weigh in on this discussion please do.
Contact myself, or any of the tech committee or other council members for comments and suggestions.

We are pleased to have Glenn Hawley, the new president of the National RASC coming to visit us on Saturday, September the 29th. He is on a western "tour" of the RASC centres. We are hoping to have him do some visiting of the VCO and possibly the UVIC facilities and taking him out for dinner. We would be happy to have as many people come to join us as possible to talk with him about some of the new happenings at the National level. He is a keen observer, as well, with lots of stories to tell. Chris Gainor will be hosting Glenn so please contact him to get the latest information. Here's to warm evenings and clear skies for the rest of the fall.

Education and Public Outreach Report 2011-2012

by Sid Sidhu

The EPO being one of the core values of RASC, the Victoria Centre has been very active in the past year fulfilling this mandate. The members were out for **87** events engaging with the public either formal presentation and public viewing sessions during the astronomical events or displays and solar viewing at local community events. In total the volunteers contributed more than **1,100** hours of their time to provide **10,247** Galileo Moments.

This would not have been possible without volunteers and their commitment to our EPO program.

Here is a summary of the Centre's EPO activities.

21 - Classroom presentations
16 - Astronomical Events

13 - Community Groups
10 - Community events
9 - Public viewing at CU
6 - Girl Guides/Sparks/Cubs
5 - Side-walk Astronomy
4 - Provincial Parks
3 - Greater Victoria Public Libraries

Thanks again to all our volunteers.

Various Reports

by Sherry Buttner

Hi RASCals, here are your stats and reports from me for September 2012.

Membership:

Dropped: 1
New/Returning: 3
Reinstate/Grace Period: 1
Renewed: 16
Net Change: +19.
Our current Membership List shows a total of **166** members.

Upcoming Expiries: **22!** Please check your membership status and renew promptly!

Plaskett Liasons: Nothing to report. No scheduled imaging nights for the upcoming quarter.

Transport Canada: Nothing new. My contact there (Grant Youngson) appreciates our keeping in touch with him regarding GLP usage at organized RASC events.

CU/HIA: No reply from Eric (CU), Clyde (HIA) has nothing for us for September, but please remember the recent bear and cougar sightings on the Hill, and act appropriately.

NGCs, MESSIERS – AND MOSQUITOS !!

Sidewalk astronomy adventures in Australia

by Dianne Bell

AN OPPORTUNITY like this comes around once in a lifetime. At the end of 2010, I received an invitation from good friends in Southern Queensland to come for an overdue visit – and to see more of the beautiful Australian countryside, from coast to coast.....

So, it was off to my travel agent to plan the flights, city stays, two small tours and a 20-day adventure tour through Western Australia and part of the Northern Territory. Some of the darkest skies in the world are found in these parts of Australia – and my excitement was building....

The packing list was light. I found my 36-litre backpack and filled it with the basic essentials for the 7-week visit. The 20x80 binoculars were too large and heavy to pack away so I had to be content with the 12x50 Tasco binos I purchased over 20 years ago. I took the last 10 pages of my **Atlas of the Stars** - featuring the southern sky; also lists of southern NGCs and star clusters that I had carefully removed from my 2011 RASC Observers Handbook. Into my day pack went the white/red Petzl LED headlamp, my journal and pen – and that very necessary mosquito repellent!

I boarded QANTAS in Los Angeles for the 14-hour flight to Brisbane before midnight on March 18th. The night sky was beautiful at 37,000 feet and I was able to recognize some NGC and Messier objects through my window on the left side of the cabin. The Milky Way was spectacular.

After visits in Brisbane and Melbourne, I joined a small 3-day tour to Adelaide, in South Australia. We travelled along the coast from Melbourne to our first night's stay in Port Campbell, a small coastal community in Victoria State. The next morning at 4:30 am, I grabbed the binos and headed out the door to view the moonless sky. It

was jaw-droppingly beautiful. As I star-hopped through the Southern Milky Way; Crux, the Large and Small Magellanic Clouds, 47 Tucanae and that "southern belle" of all globular clusters, Omega Centauri, revealed themselves in all their glory. Scorpius and Sagittarius were beginning their climb high overhead and the feeling of dizziness turned to exhilaration - at this latitude of 38 1/2 degrees South.

Days later, I flew from Adelaide to Alice Springs, deep in the centre of Australia. From there I connected with a 4-day hiking tour to Uluru (Ayers Rock), the Olgas range and Kings Canyon. Our first night near Uluru was spent in a permanent tented site but I "adopted" a swag (an Australian bedroll complete with small mattress and heavy canvas envelope) and staked out some ground near the community firepit. As the gibbous moon set, the sky burst open with the glorious Southern Milky Way, with the surrounding starfields and southern Messier objects. Needless to say, my sleep was minimal that night....

I had several views of that sky for the few short hours after moonset. With averted vision through the binos I was able to resolve some of Omega Centauri's brighter stars, although tiny. And – early that morning, I was introduced to a figure in the sky – important in Aboriginal culture for thousands of years – the Emu. The Coalsack in Crux formed the head of this large Australian bird and the dark nebulae forming the neck, body and legs flowed out along the Milky Way, through to Scorpius and Sagittarius.

After a few days in the "Red Centre", it was on to Western Australia – and the start of a long 20-day adventure trip from Perth to Darwin. There were lots of young Europeans travelling on our tour – and other tours as well, as we explored Australia's coastline and hiked through the National Parks. There was little or no moon interference in these weeks. I took out my binos and star charts on our overnight stops and as I sought out some dark places near the hotels and campsites, I had company. The dream of most of these young

people was to see these rich skies and the treasures therein. "Can you show us the South Cross, please?" was the # 1 request. The sidewalk star-gazing had begun and before long, I was dubbed the astronomer of the group....

Two young Danish sisters travelled with us. The oldest, Brigitta, had taken astronomy in high school and she was very keen on spotting Scorpius and Sagittarius high overhead, not to mention the centre of the Milky Way. As we camped under some of the darkest skies in the world, I brought out my charts and after we spotted the Scorpion later in the night, I showed her how to "star-hop" to Omega Centauri and some other rich open clusters near Crux.

Our young tour-guide, Nick, was also very keen on a star-hunt through his skies. His enthusiasm was infectious. He was a quarter Aboriginal and heard the oral story-telling of his ancestors' history and culture at his grandfather's knee. His life-long wish was to see some of the constellations and celestial treasures connected to the stories, especially the Seven Sisters....

As we moved north of the Tropic of Capricorn, I took advantage of the swiftly-darkening skies after dinnertime to check off some of the brighter NGCs in my lists. In the coastal town of Exmouth, I completed a list of the "20 Brightest Globular Clusters" from Astronomy Magazine's star atlas. The Big Dipper, upside down, was low but bright on the northern horizon.

Further inland in Karajini National Park, Sigma Octantis (Polaris Australis) was spotted after a challenging hunt through the sparse heavens near the celestial South Pole. The Zodiacal Light was visible before dawn broke and I was also fortunate to spot bright Mercury at a great angle and height in the sky. And - after we set up camp at Cape Leveque on the top of the Dampier Peninsula, I took a stool to the edge of the small resort and for almost three hours, checked off three dozen southern NGCs from Alan Whitman's **Observers Guide** list - some I have never seen

before! I "star-hopped" to the many clusters, dark nebulae and other treasures which were listed in the atlas. I marveled at the beauty of the "False Comet" that flowed away from Zeta, in the Scorpion's tail. However, my joy was tempered by the fact that every mosquito in the area was looking for "dinner." I had to stop more than once to apply my DEET-laden repellent to keep the "mozzies" at bay!

We journeyed further north, camping along the way. We assisted in the gathering of wood for the campfires and the preparation of the meals, after setting up our tents and swags. I guided Nick and the other travellers through the southern sky from the Emu to the Magellanic Clouds, but we kept missing the swiftly-setting Pleiades over these nights....

We four-wheeled through some of the roughest terrain in the country. As we approached the end of April, we camped in the bush and on the edges of beautiful gorges. In one of the last days of the trip, a computer part in the passenger truck which controlled the speed and performance of the engine, malfunctioned. We had to pull over into a remote bush area and set up in the spaces between the tall grass and termite mounds. A call on the SAT phone was made to the tour company and arrangements had to be made for a courier to fly the replacement part into the nearest town for delivery....

After our campfire dinner that night, I handed over my binoculars to Brigitta. Later on, I spotted her - and her laughing sister in the bush. Her sister was leaning on Brigitta's shoulders, with the binos resting on top of her head !! "We found Omega Centauri - now we're looking for the little Jewel Box and the Coalsack !!" Ah, the joy of sidewalk astronomy indeed....

Most adventures have happy endings. Ours certainly did. The part for the truck arrived safely and as we journeyed onward, we were blessed with clear skies. As we pulled into El Questro Resort near the border of the Northern Territory,

Nick mentioned the Seven Sisters again. At this latitude of 16 degrees South, the sun set swiftly and the darkness quickened. "Come on, we have to go and find a horizon NOW, if we want to spot the Sisters!" I said.

After a chart check, our hunt was rewarded. In the northwest, the Pleiades twinkled one or two degrees above the trees. I handed the binoculars over to Nick and for the next few minutes, he was silent as he took in the beauty of this lovely cluster, featured in oral and written stories for millennia. To say he was grateful for that moment is an understatement.....

An opportunity of a lifetime indeed!. It was a privilege to re-discover these beautiful skies and to share my passion for astronomy. It was a joy to share it with travellers from around the world, and to encourage them to "Look up – way up."

**ASTRONOMY
CAFÉ**



Fairfield Community Centre

1330 Fairfield Rd. Victoria,

7:30pm - 10pm

Call Malcolm at (778) 430-4136 for directions and information.

New comers are especially encouraged.



New Observers Group

Hosted by Sid Sidhu

1642 Davies Road, Highlands. Call (250).391-0540 for information and directions.



Email Lists

Observer / CU Volunteers / Members

Contact Joe Carr to subscribe

web@victoria.rasc.ca

NEXT MONTHLY MEETING

Wednesday, October - 10th 7:30pm - A104 Bob Wright Bldg, University of Victoria, 3800 Finnerty Rd.

RASC Victoria Council for 2011 / 2012

Past President John McDonald pastpres@victoria.rasc.ca	Secretary / Recorder Mark Bohlman secretary@victoria.rasc.ca	National Representative Chris Gainor nationalrep@victoria.rasc.ca
President Lauri Roche president@victoria.rasc.ca	Librarian Michel Michaud librarian@victoria.rasc.ca	Light Pollution Abatement Mark Bohlman lpa@victoria.rasc.ca
First Vice President Nelson Walker vp@victoria.rasc.ca	Website / E mail lists Joe Carr web@victoria.rasc.ca	New Member Liaison Sherry Buttnor NewMembers@victoria.rasc.ca
Second Vice President Sherry Buttnor vp2@victoria.rasc.ca	Skynews Editor Malcolm Scrimger editor@victoria.rasc.ca	Membership Coordinator Sherry Buttnor Membership@victoria.rasc.ca
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