

# SKYNEWS



## **Comet Lovejoy – C/2013 R1** **By Charles Banville**

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### **DECEMBER MEETING**

Weds. December 11, 2013  
University of Victoria  
B150, Bob Wright Bldg.  
3800 Finnerty Road

## **December Speakers**

Miles and Dorothy Paul will speak on their recent trip South – “A Short Trip to Chile” at the Wednesday meeting. **Please note:** There is a room change to B-150 for this month only.

## **Cover Page**

### **Comet Lovejoy – C/2013 R1**

Date: December 4, 2013

Constellation: Bootes

Location: King George Terrace, Victoria BC

Camera: Canon EOS 5D Mark III

Exposure: Eight light frames, 45 seconds, ISO 1250

## **President's Report**

The long-awaited meeting of November 23, organized by Lana Popham, MLA (and her assistant, Samuel Godfrey, whom she has committed will stay on to help the "stakeholders"), occurred as scheduled. I suppose that one does not want to be overly optimistic, but it seemed to me to have been a success.

In attendance from RASC Victoria Centre were Chris, Lauri, Sid, Roy, Malcolm, Jim and Betty Hesser, and me. In a nutshell, we early-on stated our position, as understood had been decided by counsel, to be that we would continue to provide volunteers for Saturday night viewing, with the understanding that (1) we could not provide security, and (2) only if the Plaskett was open for tours by the public, given that the large telescope is what draws most people up the Hill.

The NRC VP from Ottawa also stated his position early on, and clarified and reiterated it a number of times; it being this: NRC has "no appetite" for spending new money on the CU, but neither does it have any plans to "decommission" the CU building, nor turn off the heat, nor empty it, nor stop providing security for it. This led everyone to conclude that the CU could be used by any of the parties there, subject to terms being negotiated, so long as NRC did not have to spend anything on it - a conclusion with which he did not disagree. He seemed to say specifically that NRC providing security on the Hill and for the CU building itself, was the same as providing security for our Saturday night endeavors. How the Plaskett would be tended to on Saturday nights was left for discussion with local NRC staff.

Each of us from Victoria Centre had something to say. Insurance, advertising, and other issues were all discussed. I felt our participation was much appreciated. We seem in the driver's seat insofar as what has been our traditional role is concerned, no matter who or what it is that may have something to offer beyond night-sky viewing, and a tour of the mighty Plaskett.

Everyone seemed to think that night-sky viewing could resume next spring. Both long and short-term committees were set up to make sure that our momentum is not lost: Lauri and Chris are on the short-term committee, and I am on the long-term committee. A meeting of the short-term committee is in the offing, and I'm sure the long-term group will be meeting after the holidays.

....*Nelson Walker*

## **Membership Report – December, 2013**

### **Membership Activity**

Upcoming Expiries/Grace: None!

Total Membership: 164

### **Liaisons**

**HIA:** nothing in particular from Clyde, except a reminder of winter driving conditions on the Hill...watch for black ice and drive with due caution.

**Transport Canada:** None. A friendly reminder that **all** RASC-Victoria Centre-sanctioned outreach or other events using GLPs (Guided Laser Pointers) **must** communicate it to Transport Canada. You may do that through me.

**Telescopes:** Plaskett – N/A. U-Vic – Pending.

....*Sherry Buttner*

### **Your Editor's Musings**

Time for Comet-hunting! The sky was full of them; from naked-eye “barely-there” beauties to the faintest of fuzzies - and the promise of the “Big One” loomed large. I was getting excited....

So – for three consecutive mornings, I set my alarm for 5:30 AM, grabbed my 12x50 binoculars and headed up the short flight of stairs, from my front entrance to the condo’s upper parking lot. My mission: to follow – in hot pursuit – the “Comet of the Century,” days before ISON’s perihelion around the sun. I mapped out the comet’s position on my star maps and carefully stepped over the frosted pavement. I waved to the construction guy on his way to work – he understood my need to get out to star-gaze on these clear mornings....

Alas, I came up empty on the first two mornings. Low cloud and haze obscured any chances of spotting ISON. The third morning wasn’t much better. As I cruised through the brightening skies near Libra, I used averted vision to attempt a sighting before the comet’s loop around the sun. I tried hard but no luck. Sad to say, we now know the end of ISON’s story....

December 4<sup>th</sup> – A clear morning! I put on my winter parka and made my way up the stairs. My neighbour waves as he heads to his truck. I targeted the area north of Bootes and within seconds, I spot it! Another little comet named Lovejoy – with a small fuzzy halo and a delicate tail. Overjoyed, I observed for a few minutes before the sub-zero temperatures penetrated my gloves. Ah - success....

A wee comet that was worth getting up for! If you want to check out more information on star-gazing on these cold nights, check out Bruce Lane’s article. Lots of tips and it’s a good read.

Clear Skies !!

....*Diane*

## **Staying Warm under the Stars**

With winter upon us, the days are much shorter. For amateur astronomers this means that you won't have to stay up until after midnight to get dark skies for observing. On the downside, it also means that it's going to be a lot colder out at night. An important factor to consider, when dressing up for astronomy, is that you won't be moving around a lot when you're stargazing. It's dark and you'll be looking up a lot. Because you'll be observing on nights with clear skies, it will also be much colder than if it was cloudy.

Whether you're a night photographer, amateur astronomer, or both, often the difference between an enjoyable and miserable experience will be how comfortable you are in your environment. Something to cover your head is a good start. While it's a myth that most of your body heat in the cold is lost through your head, any uncovered area of your body results in faster heat loss and your head is often uncovered. You should be careful when considering a hat though, because you could easily find your hat brim pecking at your carefully targeted telescope when you lean in for a look through your eyepiece. A toque is a better choice. A balaclava might seem the ideal headwear, right up until your neighbours start putting 911 on speed dial every time you go out into the backyard. Similarly, operating in the dark of a city park, wearing a ski mask, could result in unwanted consequences with the police. So unless you're at a star party or very remote location, leave the balaclava at home.

Wear thermal long underwear when you're observing at night. I'd recommend even wearing them observing in the summer. It's an easy thing to throw on an extra upper body layer, but once you've left home, it's too late to change into your long johns. You'll want to stay away from useless cotton long underwear and stick to wool or high tech materials, like polypropylene. The best thermal long underwear I've ever owned were military issue and you can buy new ones at most military surplus stores. They're about ten times better than the best civilian grade long johns for about one third of the cost. I had a lot of time to compare the merits of different types of thermal wear when I worked in a warehouse freezer, while operating heavy equipment for hours at a time.

Even during the summer, when I'm out at night, I keep a pair of light gloves on hand, because uncovered skin gets cold fast. I use what are sometimes called "minute" gloves, probably because when performing hard labour they'll only be good for a few minutes. They often have tiny rubber beads on either one or both sides, for better grip, and are very inexpensive cloth gloves that you can find in any hardware store. You won't want heavy gloves when you're observing because you will lose too much sense of touch to use your equipment when you're wearing them. You also want a good pair of wool socks or two. If you're spending a lot of time on a concrete or hard pack surface, a nice pair of lined boots is a good idea.

Make sure you don't wear any clothes that are too constricting, because cutting off your circulation isn't going to help you stay warm. That goes for your footwear too. Dress in layers and stay away from cotton. High tech fibers and wool are better. You'll want a hard shell jacket as your outside layer, to keep the wind from robbing you of your warmth. I tend to get most of the clothes I use for astronomy from outdoor adventure or military surplus stores. Keep at least one more layer of clothing on hand than you think you're going to use, but don't leave unworn clothes exposed to the elements or they might be soaked by dew by the time you need it. Keep clothes in a sealed bag until needed.

Eating and drinking also become important factors to determine if you'll stay warm outside at night. You'll want to eat a good meal before you go out, but try not to eat a big meal minutes before leaving or in the short term you'll be even colder than if you hadn't eaten, as your body diverts energy from keeping you warm to digest your food. Hydration is a tricky issue for amateur astronomers. While you're bundled up against the winter night, there might not be washrooms available or you might not be in a place where you feel comfortable abandoning your expensive equipment. You want to drink enough that you're not dehydrated, but not so much that you're running to the bathroom all night instead of observing. In cold weather, our sense of thirst is dulled, so just because you're not thirsty doesn't mean you're not dehydrated. Also, make sure to go to the bathroom before you leave, because your body will divert energy to keeping human waste products warm that could be better used keeping you warm.



Some amateur astronomers use chemical hot packets for heating and while they're nice for short term use, they create a lot of garbage and the money you spend on them over the long haul can be better put to use buying a new eyepiece. I like pocket charcoal hand warmers. They consist of a felt covered metal case that you burn inexpensive sticks of charcoal inside of. You can either put the case in your chest pocket, to warm your body core, or use it to warm your hands. I've used these charcoal burners for wilderness winter camping and they can really take the edge off the cold weather. There are amateur astronomers who choose to escape the cold by operating their telescopes remotely with a laptop, from within the confines of their own home, but for the rest of us it's time to bundle up against the cold.

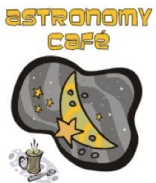
With the onset of winter, there are a lot of things you can do to make sure you're warm outside doing astronomy or photography; even on the coldest of nights.

....Bruce Lane

## Council for 2013 / 2014

Past President: Lauri Roche [pastpres@victoria.rasc.ca](mailto:pastpres@victoria.rasc.ca)  
President: Nelson Walker [president@victoria.rasc.ca](mailto:president@victoria.rasc.ca)  
First Vice President: Charles Banville [vp@victoria.rasc.ca](mailto:vp@victoria.rasc.ca)  
Second Vice President: Sherry Buttner [vp2@victoria.rasc.ca](mailto:vp2@victoria.rasc.ca)  
Treasurer: Bruce Lane [treasurer@victoria.rasc.ca](mailto:treasurer@victoria.rasc.ca)  
Secretary / Recorder: Deb Crawford [secretary@victoria.rasc.ca](mailto:secretary@victoria.rasc.ca)  
Librarian: Michel Michaud [librarian@victoria.rasc.ca](mailto:librarian@victoria.rasc.ca)  
Website: Joe Carr [web@victoria.rasc.ca](mailto:web@victoria.rasc.ca)  
E-Mail Coordinator: Matt Watson [admin@victoria.rasc.ca](mailto:admin@victoria.rasc.ca)  
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Telescopes / School Programs: Sid Sidhu [telescopes@victoria.rasc.ca](mailto:telescopes@victoria.rasc.ca)  
National Representative: Mark Bohlman [nationalrep@victoria.rasc.ca](mailto:nationalrep@victoria.rasc.ca)  
Light Pollution Abatement: Mark Bohlman [lpa@victoria.rasc.ca](mailto:lpa@victoria.rasc.ca)  
New Member Liaison: Sherry Buttner [NewMembers@victoria.rasc.ca](mailto:NewMembers@victoria.rasc.ca)  
Membership Coordinator: Sherry Buttner [Membership@victoria.rasc.ca](mailto:Membership@victoria.rasc.ca)  
Observing Chairperson: Bill Weir [obschair@victoria.rasc.ca](mailto:obschair@victoria.rasc.ca)

**Members at Large:** Bill Almond, Jim Hesser, Alex Schmid, David Lee, Li-Ann Skibo, Paul Schumacher, Matt Watson



**Astronomy Cafe:** Held every Monday at Fairfield Community Centre - 1330 Fairfield Rd, Victoria, at 7:30pm to 10pm. Call Malcolm at (778) 430-4136 for directions and information. Newcomers are especially encouraged.



**New Observers Group:** Hosted by Sid Sidhu, 1642 Davies Road, Highlands. Please call (250) 391-0540 for information and directions.



**Email Lists Observer / CU Volunteers / Members**  
Contact Matt Watson to subscribe. <mailto:admin@victoria.rasc.ca>

**Next month's meeting is Wednesday, January 8, 2014, at 7:30 PM.**