

SKYNEWS



Picture of the 2008 VCO Construction, with (L to R) Bill Almond, Charles Banville, and Bruno Quenville, hard at work

The Other Anniversary

With so many astronomy anniversaries occurring during the last few years, the one that seems to have largely overlooked was the ten year anniversary of our Victoria Centre Observatory. After over ninety years without a permanent home, the National Research Council granted us a land use agreement, allowing us to build an observatory of our very own on Little Saanich Mountain. Prior to this, the closest thing to a regular spot for RASC Victoria observers was Cattle Point, now registered as an urban star park. The construction of the Victoria Centre Observatory was only made possible by a lot of fundraising and many volunteer hours of work by Centre members.



Another picture from the 2008 VCO Construction, featuring (L to R) Charles Banville, Nelson Walker, Bruno Quenville, and Geoff Jones (we all miss you, Geoff)

Ten years later and this facility continues to be maintained and operated, thanks to the hours of volunteer work by fellow RASCals. We've also seen some recent improvements, like the 16" Ritchey-Chretien telescope that was purchased to replace our aging 14" Schmidt-Cassegrain telescope. This year we received the generous donation of a 20" Obsession Dobsonian reflector that will soon have a home at our observatory. The VCO belongs to and is for the use of the members of the RASC Victoria Centre, with both weekly scheduled and unscheduled sessions run by our MiCs (Members in Charge). Because it is located on NRC property, all visitors to our observatory must be on our observer list. To get on the list, just contact Chris Purse (Membership Coordinator) membership@rasc.victoria.ca and we'll see you up there on the Hill some night soon.

Editorial Remarks

After six years as treasurer, I've stepped down from the executive in favour of becoming the SkyNews editor. I note that it's a bit of a paradox for such a strong sense of community to exist amongst a group of people, doing a hobby that is usually practiced alone at night, but that strong sense of community among RASCals is evident in everything we do. RASC Victoria Centre's membership exists as collection of loosely connected solitudes, with no single vision of what astronomy is. If you ask ten RASCals about astronomy you'll get fifteen different answers, something we're going to explore with our interview series: *Better Know a RASCAl*. In this and in the following issues we're going to take a closer look at the Victoria Centre, who we are, what we do, and the resources available to our members.

Bruce Lane: SkyNews Editor





President's Message for December

When I returned to Victoria 6 years ago I had no idea that I would become so deeply involved in the local astronomical community. My bulging shelves of Astronomy books reflect my long term interest in the topic. I was briefly a member of the Vancouver Centre of RASC but due to the time, energy and expense to attend their widespread gatherings I remained on the periphery of that group.

In contrast the ideal scale of Victoria makes it much easier to get out and participate. When I attended my first Victoria Centre meeting at UVic I was struck by the high level of energy and enthusiasm in the room. I was also amazed by the many Astronomical activities that the Centre was supporting. Shortly after when I attended my first Astro Cafe I was made to feel so welcome that I kept coming back and that deepened my engagement. I have learned and enjoyed so much in the process. And now that I find myself President of this great Centre I am humbled, excited and a bit overwhelmed. I will give it my best shot but may not reach the high bar established by my predecessors like Chris Purse. The Centre made great strides while Chris was at the helm..

Recently, I delivered a presentation on Astronomy to a local organization. I attempted to explain the **activities and appeal of Astronomy** for the amateur community. I grouped our activities into three main categories:

1) Observing:

At the core we are, as David Lee so aptly describes, *tourists of the night sky*. The act of stepping outdoors on a crisp, clear evening instantly rewards us as we escape the clatter of civilization. Most amateurs usually chose to extend their vision with binoculars and telescopes. Some have turned observing into a sport, star hopping and honing their vision to locate a host of faint celestial objects. On page 8 of the [November SkyNews](#) Bill Weir has described several observing lists that encourage us to expand our hunt for more targets and greatly increase our knowledge of the night sky. The process of sketching celestial objects can further engage the visual observer.

For some, glimpsing faint fuzzies serves as an appetizer and they embrace the technical challenge of mastering astrophotography. The collection of Victoria Centre astro-photos on [zenfolio](#) is amazing and inspiring. But why bother photographing a celestial object when a beautiful Hubble image is only a click away? To me the difference between *looking* at an image and *capturing and processing* an image is similar to music. One can enjoy music just by *listening* but a much deeper involvement occurs when one masters an instrument and *plays* the music. Some observers are also devoted to taking measurements and analyzing the data. For example [Michel Michaud \(p6\)](#) has spent years discovering double stars in the Pleiades and his observations are published in the professional double star scientific database.

2) Learning:

We are on a quest to improve our understanding of the Universe. Amateurs find ourselves in a golden age as Astronomy makes headline news weekly. Knowledge is accumulating faster that we can digest it. The miracle of the internet makes it much more feasible for amateurs to keep abreast of developments as we attempt to answer the following:

- What do we know?
- How do can we say that? (Scientific Method and History of Discovery)
- Why does it behave that way? (Laws of Physics and Allied Sciences)
- What don't we know? (The Ongoing Mystery)

3) Sharing:

Amateurs are very active in sharing our knowledge, expertise and enthusiasm:

- Within our amateur community: **In-Reach**
- With the Public and the Next Generation: **Out-Reach**

I am both proud and a little concerned about the energy we devote to sharing. I think it is important to aim for a better balance between In-Reach and Out-Reach activities. If we fail to nourish ourselves with in-reach activities we will deplete our capacity to deliver out-reach. It could resemble a stellar “core collapse.” So as we go forward let’s give ourselves permission to ease off a bit. We don’t want the Victoria Centre to go Supernova!

Cloudless Nights!

Reg Dunkley

Monthly Meeting Speaker: Dr. Chris Gainor, President of RASC History of the Hubble Space Telescope

7:30 PM, Wednesday, December 12th; 2018

Room 116, Engineering and Computer Science Building, UVic (Please Note Room Change)

The Hubble Space Telescope was launched 28 years ago in 1990. After overcoming problems caused by a defective main mirror, Hubble has made discoveries that have revolutionized our view of the universe we live in. This talk will cover the history of HST based on a history book the speaker is writing for NASA.

Dr. Chris Gainor is an historian specializing in the history of space flight and aeronautics. He has five published books. He is also President of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada, and editor of Quest: The History of Spaceflight Quarterly



By Reg Dunkley

Upcoming Speakers for RASC Monthly Meetings

- Wednesday January 9th 2019 Dr. Ruobing Dong
- Wednesday February 13th 2019 To be determined
- Wednesday March 13th 2019 Dr. JJ Kavelaars
New Horizon’s Rendezvous with MU69
- Wednesday April 13th 2019 Dr. Karun Thanjuvar
Machine Learning and the Big Data Tsunami
- Wednesday May 8th 2019 Michel Michaud
Pleiades Update

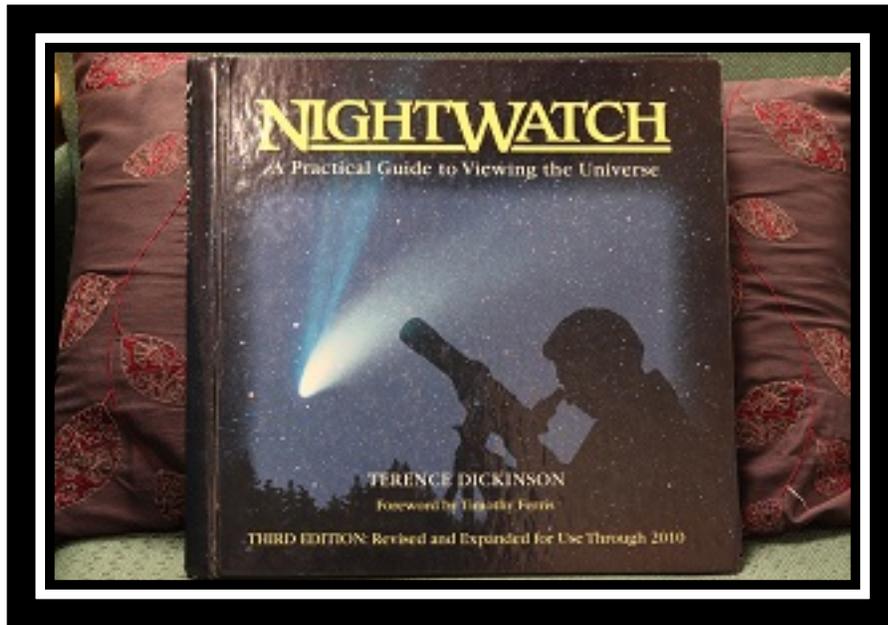
Hill and Dale (Observing on the Island)

We had a really nice first week of clear skies in December, but the current weather forecast for the rest of the month ahead looks less than favourable for astronomy I was out on Little Saanich Mountain, along with Diane, Pedro, and Jennifer, for a special comet hunting session at the VCO. We tried for several vantage points around the outside of the Plaskett telescope for a view of Comet 46P Wirtanen, but the trees were in the way. In the end we repositioned down to the lower level parking lot, where it’s noticeably less sheltered from the wind, but you can get a less obstructed view. After looking through our binoculars for a while we found a very faint comet through the muck of Victoria’s light pollution. I have the feeling Bill Weir, who was out that evening at Pearson College, had a much nicer view than we did. Bill also got a quick glance at the comet on December 11th, through binoculars while in Metchosin, during a brief break between the clouds and rain.

This week or so is supposed to be the ideal time to view Comet 46P Wirtanen, but sadly the weather doesn’t look like it will be very cooperative. It looks as though members of RASC Victoria will be looking at pictures of this comet taken from other places. The Geminid meteor shower, peaking on the night of December 13th until the dawn, will also likely be missed out on due to the weather. Hopefully, we get some clear skies for the lunar eclipse on January 20th.

From the Library

In addition to holding our after meeting socials and council meetings in the teacher's lounge on the 4th floor of the Elliott Building, the library of RASC Victoria is also housed there. Our Centre's library is currently curated by Diane Bell, our new librarian. After our monthly meetings at UVic, the library is open for business and with the weather for the remainder of the month looking a bit bleak for observing it's a great time to curl up with a good book. Our library covers many aspects of astronomy: observing, astrophotography, space exploration, and much more. Every month, SkyNews will be featuring a new selection from our Centre's library, complete with a brief book review



This month we're going to have a look at **Nightwatch, by Terence Dickinson**, widely regarded as the best choice for beginners to start out reading about amateur astronomy. This book covers a lot of information. If you retain even half of what you read you'll be ahead of where most amateur astronomers are. There are a lot of books that do a better job of covering a particular facet of amateur astronomy, but I haven't come across one that gives a general overview for beginners quite as well as this book does. It simplifies a lot of observing terms and techniques, showing you how to estimate degrees in the night with your hand or how to get the most out of your night vision. Different types of observing are talked about in length and there is even a small section on astrophotography. I really liked the charts in this book and find myself still looking at them today.

Astronomy Term of the Month: Focal Ratio (f/number)

The Focal Ratio, often represented by an f/ number, is a number value reached by dividing the telescope's primary lens or mirror's focal length by its aperture. The focal length being the distance, in millimetres, from the telescope's primary mirror or lens to the point where light is focused. The number value for the focal length of a telescope is often written somewhere on the telescope or can be found in written descriptions about them. The aperture for the telescope is the diameter of the primary lens or mirror, also in millimeters, although I know it's very common to hear that number talked about in inches. This term is a bit of a three in one explanation, since you need to know about all three to understand what is referred to as a telescope's focal ratio. Unlike how cameras can adjust their F/stop for a lens, the focal ratio of a telescope is fixed, so if you use the telescope as a camera lens your F/Stop is also fixed. Some catadioptric telescopes (like larger Schmidt-Cassegrains) are designed to allow you to manually shift the focal ratio to make it "faster" for quicker shutter speeds when doing astrophotography.

Better Know a RASCAl

This is a series of short interviews done with members of the RASC Victoria Centre, to give you a better idea of the different experiences that other amateur astronomers are having. Based on our current membership numbers I'll only be able to do this segment 277 times. Our first interview is with Sherry Buttnor, who does a bit of everything. Sherry is an avid astrophotographer with experience building some of her own telescopes and equipment. She can often be found volunteering her time doing astronomy public outreach in the community.



SkyNews: How long have you been a member of RASC?

Sherry: 11 years.

SkyNews: What is your first memory of doing astronomy? (with intent)

Sherry: Observing the Moon, with my first telescope (see question 3) and a basic Moon map, followed by the Sun. I was riveted by my first look at sunspots.

SkyNews: What was your first telescope?

Sherry: 50mm Sears-brand refractor, given to me by my parents, after my first visit to the Plaskett around 1970.

SkyNews: What's your primary interest these days in astronomy? (public outreach, observing, astrophotography, reading SkyNews, etc)

Sherry: Public outreach, mostly, and some astrophotography. And reading SkyNews, of course! :))

SkyNews: What's your favourite RASC public outreach-"inreach" event and why?

Sherry: Outreach: Summer "star parties" at the DAO. It's awesome to get to bring astronomy to so many visitors to our telescopes, but it also takes me way (way!) back to my own beginnings in astronomy (also see question 3) Inreach: our monthly meetings at UVic. We have such an amazing group of speakers from which to draw. Every meeting is a new adventure in learning.

SkyNews: What is your favourite book on astronomy?

Sherry: COSMOS, by the late Carl Sagan. The book and series were what really kicked my hobby into orbit in the early 1980s.

SkyNews: What's your current telescope(s) and what do you think about it?

Sherry: I have a room full: vintage and modern, refractors, reflectors, SCTs -they each have their uses- and the trusty 8" Dob-style reflector I built around 1984. We've spent many hundreds of wondrous nights together exploring the night sky. She ain't pretty, but she's still my favourite and I still use her regularly.

SkyNews: How does technology figure into your experience as an amateur astronomer, beyond the telescope itself?

Sherry: I built up a remote-controlled GOTO mount/autoguider/laptop system a few years ago. I must admit, as much as I like the simplicity of grassroots "push-to" astronomy, the capabilities of modern systems are pretty neat. I can put the rig out in the cold, and take images nice and warm inside. A definite plus at my age and state of decrepitude!

SkyNews: What is the next thing you want to do as an amateur astronomer (complete an observing list, familiarize yourself with something, observe an object, astrophotography project, etc)

Sherry: My goals are modest: continuing with public outreach, and occasional astrophotography, as work, weather, and energy allow.

SkyNews: How has being an amateur astronomer made your life better?

Sherry: It has expanded my knowledge of science in general, and astronomy in particular. It has taught me about the many amazing ways other cultures viewed the cosmos and our collective place within it, and that we are all truly One People, One Planet. And that bad coffee can taste pretty good at 3:30 in the morning. And it also led to a now-30-year+ career as a dispensing optician and optical lab tech!

SkyNews: With a couple vacancies yet to be filled on the Victoria Centre Council, I wanted to ask a couple follow up questions. What are all the Council positions you've held over the years and what's your favourite accomplishment while on Council?

Sherry: I don't really have a personal accomplishment favourite. I'm pleased with the way some of my events turned out, especially during IYA2009 (*Ed. International Year of Astronomy*). I'm happy to have been the lead for the RASC Metchosin Star Party and the success it became. I'm absolutely thrilled that RASC-Victoria was able to get the DAO opened to the public again. But most of these successes were a team effort of Council and participating Victoria Centre members, and not only me. I guess if I had to choose a favourite, it's that I didn't run the organization into the ground while I was president!

SkyNews: Thanks for being a great sport, Sherry. Having been treasurer during your tenure as president I can attest that you did a great job.

Online Resources

Magazines

[SkyNews](#) Our National RASC Magazine

[Sky & Telescope](#) Magazine

[Astronomy](#) Magazine

[Astronomy Now](#) Astronomy in the UK

[Amateur Astronomy](#) Magazine

[Astrophotography](#) Magazine

Borrowing Telescopes

The RASC Victoria Centre has telescopes for new and seasoned observers that members can use. For more information contact Sid Sidhu at telescopes@victoria.rasc.ca



UVic 32 Inch Telescope

RASC Victoria Centre Sessions will resume in **November**.

ASTRONOMY CAFE



Our weekly **Astronomy Cafe** is an excellent, informal, way to meet us. New comers are especially encouraged. Click the link for location:.

<http://victoria.rasc.ca/events/astro-cafe/>

Fairfield
Community Centre - 1330 Fairfield Rd. Victoria. **Every Monday at 7:30pm.**

Contact Reg for further details:



**Victoria Centre Observatory:
Saturday Evenings**
Open to those on the **Active Observers list only**
Weather permitting.



Email Lists

Observer / CU Volunteers / Members

Contact Chris Purse to subscribe
membership@victoria.rasc.ca

New Observers Group

Hosted by Sid Sidhu - 1642 Davies Road, Highlands. Call 250.391-0540 for information and directions.



RASC Victoria Centre Council 2018 / 2019

There was a fair amount of turnover on the RASC Victoria Centre Council, during our Annual General Meeting, as a number of members completed their terms and in some cases multiple terms at their positions. Chris Purse has finished his term as president and is being replaced by Reg Dunkley. Bruce Lane (hey that's me!) retired from the executive after six years as treasurer and is now the SkyNews editor. Deborah Crawford is taking over as treasurer. Joe Carr is stepping down as Secretary and Barb Lane has stepped up to take on that role for our Centre. Michel Michaud is leaving his role as librarian and Diane Bell is now assuming those responsibilities. Ken Mallory has stepped down as head of Public Outreach and it's looking a lot like this overwhelming job will now be done by committee.

There are still two positions on Council that need to be filled. If you're thinking about being more involved in the goings on the RASC Victoria Centre now is the time to do so.

Position	Name	Email
Past President	Chris Purse	pastpres@victoria.rasc.ca
President	Reg Dunkley	president@victoria.rasc.ca
First Vice President	This could be you	vp@victoria.rasc.ca
Second Vice President	This could be you	vp2@victoria.rasc.ca
Treasurer	Deborah Crawford	treasurer@victoria.rasc.ca
Secretary	Barb Lane	secretary@victoria.rasc.ca
Librarian	Diane Bell	librarian@victoria.rasc.ca
Technical Comm Chair/Sys Admin	Matt Watson	admin@victoria.rasc.ca
Skynews Editor	Bruce Lane	editor@victoria.rasc.ca
Public Outreach	By Committee	outreach@victoria.rasc.ca
School Outreach	Laurie Roche / Sid Sidhu	
Telescopes	Sid Sidhu	telescopes@victoria.rasc.ca
National Representative	Nelson Walker	nationalrep@victoria.rasc.ca
Light Pollution Abatement	Dave Robinson	lighting@victoria.rasc.ca
Membership Coordinator	Chris Purse	membership@victoria.rasc.ca
Observing Chairperson	Jim Stillburn	obschair@victoria.rasc.ca
Website Content	Joe Carr	web@victoria.rasc.ca
Members at Large		
NRC Liaison	James di Francesco	
Nat RASC Anniversary Wrkg Group	Dr. James Hesser	james.Hesser@nrc-cnrc.gc.ca
FDAO Liaison	Laurie Roche	
UVic Liaison	Alex Schmid	
Observing	David Lee	Li-Anne Skibo
	Dan Posey	John McDonald

In Closing

The weather right now is more suited to regular buckets than light buckets, but hopefully we'll see a bit of clear skies again before long. A lot of us really want a look at that comet. Wishing everyone a happy holiday season and we'll pick up again in the New Year!

