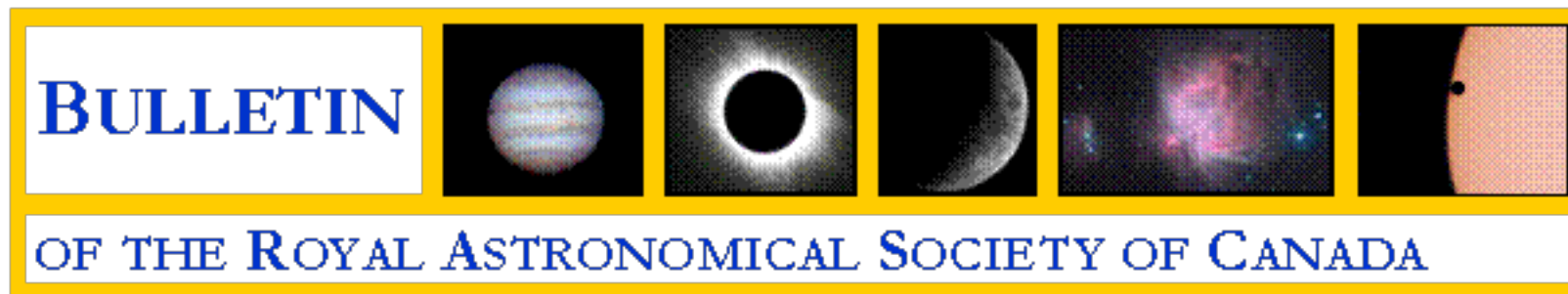


2007-01



January 2007 - Volume 2, Number 1

Andrew Oakes, Editor

[▶ News @ RASC.ca](#)

Web Team Announced

The following RASC members have joined the National Web Team: **David Lee** (Victoria), **Colin Haig** (Hamilton) and **Glenn Becker** (Unattached). Along with the current Information Technology Committee (ITC) Chair **David Lane** (Halifax) and **Denis Grey** (Toronto), the reconstituted five-member web team will be responsible for maintaining the Society's national website. "Thanks to all of these members for volunteering their time and talent to keep our site up to date," said the ITC Chair.

Additions to www.rasc.ca

In the past few weeks the following website pages have been revised or added to the National website:

- www.rasc.ca/history [1] - updated essay on the Society's history
- www.rasc.ca/programs/webring.shtml [2] - information on the Society's webring service (courtesy **Kim Hay**).
- www.rasc.ca/honorary/ [3] - our list of Honorary Members now features mini-biographies of all 15 honorary members of the Society.

Sky in January 2007

Gary Boyle (Ottawa) offers his monthly heads-up on what can be viewed on a clear Canadian winter's night. Our January nights offer some brilliant suns and a stellar nursery that provide an overall magical appearance on a moonless night. For details see www.rasc.ca/news/The_Sky_This_Month_-_January_2007.shtml [4]

► Across the RASC

Calgary to Meet, Greet & Eat

Each year the members of the Calgary Centre put on their finery and indulge in a good meal, good conversation and good fun as they gather to honor and be honored at their Annual Banquet. It's a chance to socialize with fellow amateur astronomers indoors, and with white lights on!

This year's banquet takes place on Saturday, February 3, 2007. The evening typically begins at 5:30 p.m. For more information, click on calgary.rasc.ca/banquet2007.htm [5].

SETI Rankings

RASC has now surpassed Boinc@canada to take over the #2 position on the Canadian SETI@home project rankings. Only Team Quebec stands between RASC and the #1 position. We need just over 3,100 more credits per day to enter the lead position. If you have some spare computing capacity, consider joining the RASC team. Full details are at www.rasc.ca/programs/seti-at-home [6].



Saskatoon Aims High

The Saskatoon Centre has a new 16" Meade scope. To house it properly, members have launched a raffle to raise funds. One of the top prizes is a large quilt (85" x 101") that features a star. The other two are a Viewsonic 19" flat screen monitor and a Weitzel scratch art "Owl" print. Go Saskatoon! Build that home for the new scope! (See www.usask.ca/psychology/sarty/rasc/raffle.html [7] .)



Saskatoon "Star" Quilt

Information Due January 31, 2007

The 2006 RASC Annual Report is being drafted this month. Centres are required to submit a summary of their 2006 activities, a list of their 2007 Executive, and their 2006 year-end financial statement by January 31, 2007. Any questions about the Annual Report, contact **Bonnie Bird** at National Office: nationaloffice@rasc.ca [8].

What's your SQM?

This odd phrase is a question you just might hear at future astro



gatherings, writes **Dan Taylor** in *Aurora*, the Windsor Centre's newsletter. SQM is short for Sky Quality Meter that measures night-sky brightness. For more details, see Dan's article at home.cogeco.ca/~mmastello/Oct2006.pdf [9] (150 kb).

The 18.66 SQM reading shown here records slightly more than mid-point – above 18.0 (which approximates good urban skies, poor suburban skies, full moon) but below 19.0 (fairly good suburban skies).

Solar System Milestone

The Regina Centre's newsletter, *Stargazer*, recently paid tribute to Voyager 1 voyager.jpl.nasa.gov [10]. It reported that on August 15, 2006, Voyager reached the 100-astronomical-unit (AU) mark, a milestone in the exploration of the Solar System. On that date, the spacecraft found itself 100 times farther from the Sun than Earth - some 15 billion kilometres away, travelling through a gassy membrane called the heliosheath, which divides the Solar System from interstellar space. For a view of the heliosheath boundary click on

www.spacedaily.com/reports/Voyager_1_Hits_100_AU_Marker_Nearly_14_Hours_Out_999.html [11].

Voyager radios Earth almost every day. The message takes 14 hours to arrive at the speed of light. See the *Stargazer* article at www.regina.rasc.ca/NewsEvents/Newsletters/2006/Stargazer_Sep-Oct_2006-F.pdf [12] (630 kb).



Artist's conception of Voyager 1 launched from Florida, U.S.A., some 30 years ago

As **Kevin Fetter**, a RASCals Discussion List member wrote: "Congrats to the builders and operators of it; it's the Energizer spacecraft. It keeps going and going. Smart idea to use radioisotope thermoelectric generators."

Eclipse Expedition to China in 2008

The Calgary Centre, which has been organizing expeditions to view Total Solar Eclipses since the 1960's, is already planning its next trip, this time to China from July 23, 2008 to August 8, 2008. To date, Calgary's expeditions have seen every eclipse attempted. See calgary.rasc.ca/eclipse2008.htm [13] should you be interested in hopping aboard. FYI – the next total eclipse of the Sun visible from a "reasonable" location in North America will occur on August 21, 2017 from Oregon through to South Carolina in the U.S.A.

Newfoundland Moon

St. John's Centre member **Tim Caruk** took this photo on the right of the Moon from St. John's, NFLD, on November 27, 2006 using his 4 inch f7.7 refractor with a 2X Barlow and a Sony digital camera set to ISO 100. The image shows an interesting "shallow valley" that he says "I have never seen before." The shadows were just right to expose this unusual feature. It can be seen just left of center. For a larger view, visit www.sji.ca/rasc/ [14] and see Other, Photos by Members.



© and Credit Tim Caruk

2006 Tax Receipts

Tax Receipts for any donations made to RASC in 2006 through the National Office will be mailed in January 2007. More information on donation options and a current list of donors for 2006 can be found at

► RASCals Highlights

The Moon and Meteor Showers - some topics on the RASCals List

Lunar X ~ "Get Ready"

Dave Chapman (Halifax) says there is an upcoming opportunity to view the infamous Lunar X near the crater Werner on January 25, 2007. The whole appearance of the X and the merging with the surroundings takes place over a 4-hour interval, so you have to be at the right longitude at the right time to see it "just so". Mark your RASC calendars!

Jewel of Meteor Year

The Geminids, the highlight of the meteor year for many observers, were the subject of some discussion on the RASCals List early last month. **Cathy Hall** (Ottawa) shared with List members some first-class information that appeared in the December 2006 *NAMN Notes*, a monthly newsletter produced by the North American Meteor Network www.namnmeteors.org [16]. A writer for NAMN, Cathy spreads the word about meteor activity to as many people as possible. The newsletter features some good links such as to an observing guide for information on what to record, www.namnmeteors.org/guide.html [17].

The RASCals e-mail list is the RASC's town hall where members from across the country gather to chat about astronomy in general. To subscribe to this member-focused forum, visit www.rasc.ca/discussion [18].

► Canadian Astronomy

Coalition for Canadian Astronomy (CCA) Newsletter

A new newsletter is now available from the CCA highlighting progress with the Square Kilometre Array (SKA), the Thirty-Metre Telescope and the Atacama Large Millimeter Array (ALMA). For more information see www.rasc.ca/news/CCAFall2006.shtml [19].

Tribute to Canadian Titan

Canadian astronomer **Donald Alexander MacRae** died on December 6, 2006 at age 90. Halifax born (February 19, 1916) and Harvard educated – he received his Harvard Ph.D. in 1943 – MacRae spearheaded the development of the University of Toronto's Department of Astronomy (now Astronomy and Astrophysics) into a

diversified and internationally recognized institution. For a memorial tribute by Professor Emeritus **E.R. Seaquist**, Department of Astronomy and Astrophysics, see www.casca.ca/ecass/issues/2006-ws/features/mcrae/mcrae.htm [20].



Donald Alexander MacRae
B.A., A.M., Ph.D., F.R.S.C.
(1916-2006)

MacRae, who completed his undergraduate studies at the U of T, appeared in the Academy Award-nominated National Film Board documentary *Universe* (1960) as the astronomer. The film is a short black-and-white dramatization of the nightly work of an astronomer at the David Dunlap Observatory in Richmond Hill, ON. MacRae's Harvard Ph.D. thesis advisor in the early 1940's was Professor **Bart J. Bok**, an Honorary member of RASC at the time. (See *RASC Journal* V.78:1, NO.586, P. 3, 1984

articles.adsabs.harvard.edu//full/seri/JRASC/0078//0000004.000.html [21].)

► Editor's Notebook

by Ian Levstein

Most Valuable of Things

While sailing on his historic multi-year journey of discovery from December 27, 1831 to October 2, 1836, **Charles Darwin** would continually write home to his sisters from the *HMS Beagle* asking them to buy him new books from Treuttle, Wurtz & Richter, a specialist bookshop at 30 Soho Square, London. Darwin viewed books as "those most valuable of all valuable things." His writings indeed proved to be most valuable in their own right, just as three hundred years before his *On The Origins of Species by Natural Selection* appeared, an earlier book shook the world. This one became a classic of the Scientific Revolution – **Nicholaus Copernicus'** intellectually breathtaking, *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium libri sex* (*Six Books on the Revolutions of Heavenly Spheres*), which was first printed in 1543.



Now, Professor **Owen Gingerich**, an Honorary Member of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada www.rasc.ca/honorary/index.shtml [22], has produced his own tome titled *An Annotated Census of Copernicus' De revolutionibus* (Nuremberg, 1543 and Basel, 1566), a 400-page reference work on Copernicus' 16th Century masterpiece, articles.adsabs.harvard.edu//full/seri/JHA../0034//0000097.000.html [23]. The scholarly book was published in February 2002 with a first edition of only 400 copies, just matching, as Gingerich said, the lower estimate of the first edition of *De revolutionibus*. And the pressrun was grossly underestimated as the title was expected to take 20 years to sell out, approximately matching the timeframe of Copernicus' own first edition.

Arthur Koestler (1905-1983), an Hungarian-born British novelist, journalist, and critic, claimed in his 1959 bestseller *The Sleepwalkers: A History of Man's Changing Vision of the Universe* www.kirjasto.sci.fi/koestler.htm [24] that Copernicus' book had very little influence on the other astronomers of his era because it was little-read, declaring that it "was and is an all-time worst seller."

Gingerich took up the challenge of that claim and has proven Koestler dead wrong. Copernicus' book was indeed well read with personal copies being annotated by some of the most respected astronomers, scholars and others who studied his work. Gingerich spent three decades researching the subject, during which time he "personally examined nearly every surviving example of Copernicus' first edition, some 260 copies, and also the second edition of 1566, nearly 300 copies." Gingerich's *Census* is an awesome reference book.

To read about the three-decade, globe-trotting, intellectual quest for the truth about *De revolutionibus*, see Gingerich's *The Book that Nobody Read – Chasing the Revolutions of Nicolaus Copernicus*, www.aaa.org/aaaeye0406art8.htm [26], which author **Nicholas A. Basbanes** has declared "is sure to be ranked as one of the great books-about-books of the twenty-first century." Both *Census* and *The Book Nobody Read* are truly "valuable" things.

(Drop me a line with any suggestions or thoughts at bulletin@rasc.ca [27].)

► Dates to Remember

- **January 25** - View Lunar X near crater Werner
- **January 31** - Annual Reports due from Centres
- **February 3** - RASC Calgary Centre's Annual Banquet
- **March 10** - National Council Meeting (Toronto)
- **April 21** - Saskatoon Centre's Raffle Draw
- **April 22** - International Astronomy Day 2007
- **June 28 - July 1** - General Assembly (Calgary)
- **September 11** - Partial Solar Eclipse



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Links:

[1] <https://www.rasc.ca/history>

- [2] <http://www.rasc.ca/programs/webring.shtml>
- [3] <https://www.rasc.ca/honorary-members>
- [4] <https://www.rasc.ca/news/sky-month-january-2007>
- [5] <http://calgary.rasc.ca/banquet2007.htm>
- [6] <http://www.rasc.ca/programs/seti-at-home>
- [7] <http://www.usask.ca/psychology/sarty/rasc/raffle.html>
- [8] <mailto:nationaloffice@rasc.ca>
- [9] <http://home.cogeco.ca/~mmastello/Oct2006.pdf>
- [10] <http://voyager.jpl.nasa.gov/>
- [11] http://www.spacedaily.com/reports/Voyager_1_Hits_100_AU_Marker_Nearly_14_Hours_Out_999.html
- [12] http://www.regina.rasc.ca/NewsEvents/Newsletters/2006/Stargazer_Sep-Oct_2006-F.pdf
- [13] <http://calgary.rasc.ca/eclipse2008.htm>
- [14] <http://www.stjohnsrasc.ca>
- [15] <https://www.rasc.ca/donate>
- [16] <http://www.namnmeteors.org/>
- [17] <http://www.namnmeteors.org/guide.html>
- [18] <https://www.rasc.ca/on-line-communities>
- [19] <https://www.rasc.ca/news/coalition-canadian-astronomy-newsletter>
- [20] <http://www.casca.ca/ecass/issues/2006-ws/features/mcrae/mcrae.htm>
- [21] <http://articles.adsabs.harvard.edu//full/seri/JRASC/0078//0000004.000.html>
- [22] <https://www.rasc.ca/content/members-note>
- [23] <http://articles.adsabs.harvard.edu//full/seri/JHA../0034//0000097.000.html>
- [24] <http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/koestler.htm>
- [25] <http://harvardmagazine.com/1997/05/scholars.html>
- [26] <http://www.aaa.org/aaaeye0406art8.htm>
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